

RESET THE APPARATUS!

A Survey of the Photographic and the Filmic in Contemporary Art

Abstract

RESET THE APPARATUS! *A Survey of the Photographic and the Filmic in Contemporary Art* gathered together film and photography artists and theorists in the hope that together we might come up with a different take on contemporary photographic and filmic practices based on opto-mechanics and/or photo-chemistry—that is, supposedly “obsolete” analog film and photography. Photography and film have more in common than what is frequently cited as what differentiates them, namely, the difference between stillness and movement. Both, for example, were regarded as “new” technologies during the nineteenth century and—at their respective beginnings—were greeted with suspicion as artistic media. Moreover, photography and film shared the same technological base. At the present moment their very existence is under threat due to the proliferation of digital technologies and media convergence. Not to forget, analog photography and film are technological singularities that allow for immediate intelligibility by the user (whereas the digital requires transcoding). This has far-reaching consequences, such as the impact of technological change on the human body and its modes of sensation.

Our enquiry focused on artistic methods and processes that make clear reference to the material and technological conditions of the photographic and/or filmic and, at the same time, open to an “expanded field” of practice. The terms “photographic” (instead of “photography”) and “filmic” (instead of “film”) no longer adhere to the respective mediums’ technological implementations as we know them, rather they appeal to the concept underlying photographic and filmic practices. As the project’s emphasis is placed on deviant uses of media, photography and film are not only addressed as media but also as apparatuses or dispositifs, a perspective that broadens the scope and facilitates examination in terms of their operational use. Equally important was to foreground the process of production, as opposed to that of reception alone, which is the main issue in traditional apparatus theory. In order to understand the working procedures underlying a respective artwork, a renewed focus on the history of technics and technology also became necessary.

Far from romanticizing the pre-digital/analog past, RESET THE APPARATUS! asserts a critical engagement with the conventional apparatus, and reflects the rich potential that can result from artistic practices that modify, repurpose, or even dismantle their own apparatus. The photographic and filmic, as the site of innumerable productive contaminations, not only expand our common notion of photography and film; they also generate insights into the contingent nature of their apparatuses and provoke new forms of artistic production. In the light of today’s indulgence in digital media, the return to allegedly outdated media and their apparatuses manifests as a resolute resistance to the norm, thereby fulfilling a critical function, too.

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