

## *CALL FOR PAPERS - Conference UNDER THE RADAR 2023*

### **Rethinking Technology, Reframing the Machine:**

### **Moving Image Art as Technical System, Material Object and Socio-cultural Practice**

April 20-22, 2023 University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria

The conference will bring together international scholars and artists critically engaging with the roles and effects of technology in the field of moving-image art. Against the background of contemporary art practices, we will investigate the moving image as a techno-cultural form, a material object and a socio-cultural practice.

The ancient Greek term “technikos” – the etymological root of “technique” – situates the technical between art and hardware (Annie van den Oever 2014). Accordingly, we understand technology as a locus where hardware, software (the flexible and changeable parts of the machine) and human agents (artists/spectators) meet. It is in this sense that we approach a work of art as a “machine.” This conference will also emphasize the physical properties of film and animation technology, the materiality and operational logic involved in producing and exhibiting moving images. Another focus will lie on the sociocultural contexts that surround technological changes, such as the (relatively) recent transition from the analog to the digital. “If we are to grasp what is at stake in this shift to digital, we need to understand and identify with accuracy the specificities of each machine and the viewing conditions it produces, and more generally expand this research to the history of dispositives of moving and animated images [...]” (Benoît Turquety, 2015)

Please submit a proposal for a presentation of 20 minutes,

with an abstract of 200-400 and a bio of 200-400 words.

The last day to submit your proposal is December 15, 2022.

The selection will be completed by approx. January 16, 2023,

it will be carried out by Holger Lang - Under the Radar Festival,

Gabriele Jutz -University of Applied Arts Vienna, Department of Media Theory

Ruth Lingford - Harvard University, Department of Art, Film and Visual Studies.

You will then be informed if your abstract was selected for presentation

and should confirm your attendance in Vienna by late January 2023.

**Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:**

### **1. Technology and Aesthetics**

Each optical and electronic machine produces a specific mode of perception, but it also changes how artists operate. Technical features contribute to the aesthetics of moving image works, but can we still identify the concrete uses and the conditions of perception produced explicitly by the network of hardware, software and human agents? How can we describe and discuss each device's conceptual and historical singularities - if there are any? Specific apparatuses and devices are related to aesthetic issues, so how can technical features that affect the signification of images - in creation, perception and interpretation - be classified in a theoretical dialogue? What is the role of the physical world in relation to digital media? Are technologies disconnecting practitioners from the tangible, external, bodily, opaque and erratic potentials in applied work?

### **2. Analog Filmmaking in the Digital Age**

Photochemical filmmaking continues to play a key role in the evolution of experimental film aesthetics. The return to “obsolete” techniques and media is not a rejection of the contemporary or a nostalgic turn to the past, but instead fulfills a critical function, because it mobilizes a wide range of practical and theoretical perspectives reaching from media archaeology to new materialism and ecocriticism. Does the impact of a technological change mark a substantial change in the nature of the medium, or can the digital be inscribed in a continuum with the analog? How do those changes affect the modes of production, exhibition and distribution of moving images? Is there a way to mediate between a digital tradition and a cinematic tradition, or should we simply accept instead a radical break from the conventions of experimental filmmaking? And what about the digital's ability to “create” emulsion, film grain, scratches, flicker or distressed celluloid in order to achieve a “vintage look”?

### **3. Embodied Practice in the Digital Age**

What is the role of the artist/practitioner's body, and how does this role change with changes in technology? Digital tools often make particular demands on the body of the practitioner. Is there still space for tactility in such an environment? Can we still think with our hands? What is our relationship with the requirements, rhythms, and needs of our animal selves? How important is the variety and diversity in our own movements, gestures and postures in our practice? The

experience and self-awareness of living creatures remain in a relationship with nature, but it also changes through the use of technology. Is the normative aspect of such used technologies creating a confining environment in which flaws, accidents, chance, and coincidence can no longer play a significant role? How can atypical approaches or appearances be represented and expressed? How can perspectives on and from bodies that diverge from mediated norms in looks, shapes, function and identity be modified and modulated through contemporary devices, tools and technologies?

#### **4. Appropriation**

Appropriation in the field of experimental film is commonly associated with the use of found footage film, or the reinterpretation and transformation of other filmmakers' images and sounds. The various ways in which found footage is used are diverse and potentially also raise certain ethical, and even legal, problems. In a larger sense, appropriation in art means to use, adopt, borrow, recycle or sample aspects, or even the entire form, of human-made artifacts. This practice has never been limited to artistic expression, but has also moved to the center of attention thanks to the rise of the digital. Although the term may still stand in an exemplary manner for artistic and cultural freedom, it also sometimes is negatively associated with an abuse of copyrights and privacy and even colonialism. This raises the question of whether the appropriation of moving images on the part of filmmakers is to be regarded as a form of exploitation or a dynamic process that allows the free flow of ideas.

#### **5. Authenticity**

Authenticity has an ambivalent status: On the one hand it may promise a potential escape from the leveling of experiences and rationalized existence; on the other it can also be allied with a reactionary return to an apparent purity of origins. Today, the photochemical image is more likely to be aligned with a tangible world – with humanity, memory and validity – while the digital image is described as being disconnected from reality, as somewhat “inhuman” – the exemplary inauthentic image. Such discourses are not new, but can be regarded as persistent echoes of a long-standing unease surrounding new forms of reproduction, just as film was more than one hundred years ago. This situation clearly demonstrates that our understanding of media is historically and culturally determined rather than dictated by ontological characteristics.

Can we develop a critical concept of authenticity? How can we use this concept to unsettle a narrative of historical progress and refute the capitalist logic of incessant novelty?

(Erika Balsom, 2017)

## **6. Integrating Sustainability**

Sustainability expresses the recognition of one's responsibility for the integrity of an existing system. While it is commonly described along the lines of three pillars – environmental, economic and social –it may also be understood in relation to the history of techniques and technologies. Media convergence, for example, with its tendency to merge all media into one flexible form and to turn the computer into a universal device, promises on the one hand to replace film's mechanical clunkiness by digital's automaticity, efficiency and instantaneity; on the other, it also leads to a loss of particular artisanal skills and potentially thus to an impoverishment of artistic practices. Another case in point is the ecological assessment: We know that the energy usage and carbon footprint of streaming is considerable; but we also know that film processing is never wholly environmentally friendly. Is the integration of a conscious consideration of sustainability a demand of the moment, or may it also be an important step in the development of new artistic practices in film and media?

## **7. Mis-Use and Under-Use of Existing Technology**

As Peter Wollen (1980) has pointed out, “avant-garde film has had other technological implications [than industrial film];” most prominently it figures in what Wollen calls a “mis-use of existing technology,” that is “its use to transgress the norms implicit in it”. This mis-use can be regarded as a negative act, as a violation of legitimate codes and practices or – positively – as an exploration of overlooked possibilities. A wide range of creative mis-uses and/or deliberate under-uses of existing technology await discovery. Often combined with low-tech, hands-on devices, these artistic strategies have gained new relevance in the digital age.

## **8. Why teach anything about working with media when we can do everything with our phones?**

The university is a key player in introducing, sharing and imparting knowledge, skills and practices in the arts and media. The development of multiple technologies has introduced a

large number of supporting devices that allow the untrained user to create agreeable outcomes. Understandably, questions regarding the justification of teaching media-related tools in educational and academic environments have become the focus of arguments concerning curricula and syllabi. Comprehending the intrinsic qualities of various types of audio-visual media cannot be underestimated enough when it comes to any serious occupation with them. Playing with tools and with media, experimenting with their potentials and exploring their possibilities in theory and in practice will lead to a more intimate knowledge of their built-in mechanics and peculiarities. The "nuts and bolts" of appliances are not always apparent; nor does one immediately recognize it when the machine starts to take over according to its preset algorithms. Is this an outdated approach, or a necessary against a dominant commercialized form of image-based communication via social-media?

*Please fill out the online-form to submit your proposal.*

*[www.under-radar.com/call-for-papers-2023](http://www.under-radar.com/call-for-papers-2023)*