

CTM 2012 - SPECTRAL

Ghosts Off The Shelf

an exhibition curated by Thibaut de Ruyter

January 30th — February 5th, 2012

How many ghost movies does Hollywood produce every year? How many books with mystical apparitions become summer bestsellers? How many people try to communicate with the beyond by using old techniques or new technologies? But if we really want to search for ghosts nowadays, we could simply look inside some small black plastic boxes that sit quietly on our shelves.

The economy of technology is based on quick obsolescence. The dead battery in the digital camera that we had ten years ago can't be charged or replaced, and so the machine is definitely unusable. Software we used every day hasn't worked ever since we updated our computer OS. A VHS tape we used to record images from the TV has lost its content for no apparent reason. Even finding a simple cable to connect two machines can become a problem.

The exhibition *Ghosts Off The Shelf* is about the slow disappearance of VHS, S-VHS, VHS-C, Video 8, Hi-8, Betamax, Betacam and other lesser-known analog video formats that use magnetic tape. We all still possess a few of those objects, and because we no longer have the relevant equipment, we can't see (or even know) what's on those tapes.

The artists in the exhibition are not new media artists who have for years confronted the question of digitization and preservation of their works. Instead, they are visual artists who produced, in the last decades, some forgotten (i.e. invisible and perhaps never-seen) video pieces. For whatever reasons, they produced analog video, then decided to leave the work behind, moving on to another medium or technique. They share in common a critical point of view with regard to the use of tools, an inventive relationship to their media, or a strong connection with the uncanny in art. Each of the invited artists will deliver a tape, we will digitize it and create an 'archive' of about 30 videos. Having a slight memory of these things that they did years ago -- and probably haven't seen for a while -- we ask them to give us 'ghosts', pieces that exist only in their memories but which will find a new existence through our exhibition. The participants will receive, in exchange for their contribution, high-quality digitized versions of the works.

This project is not about technological nostalgia, but about the aesthetic that can be found in certain techniques -- the grain of Ilford HP5 photographic film, the blurred and saturated colors of VHS, the compression of MP3 files -- and how these aesthetics will be loved, forgotten, and then once again become fashionable again. It is also about the disappearance of our own memories and data, things that we wanted to keep forever but which will, because of technological progress, the aging of a technique, or the self-destruction of a supporting system, soon no longer exist.

Description

Room 1 - Lab.

Several machines are collected and exhibited in a 'laboratory' setting (a few tables with chairs and desk lamps). During the Club Transmediale, the technician that will work on the project will give lectures on the question of preservation and digitization of analog magnetic tape. A workshop could be also held involving professional training for a small number of participants.

Room 2 - TV-Room.

The artworks that have been digitized are displayed on several monitors. To fit with the time and aesthetic we are dealing with, we will, if possible, use a few Hantarex. The public is invited to look at the material in no special order, with no special hierarchy.

Room 3 - Projection.

A small cinema is built where a few selected videos will be projected at the largest size possible. Here, it's the aesthetic of analog video tape recordings that will be revealed -- the blurring, the lack of contrast, the color saturation. The projector will be a hi-end system in order to present all of the distortions, the 'grain', the beautiful imperfections of the original recordings. Or, if the new technology doesn't allow us to recreate this aesthetic, an old projection system should be 'restored' to suit our research.

A few selected art works will also occupy the in-between spaces of the Kunstraum Kreuzberg (i.e. corridor, entrance).

Catalog.

It is pointless for such a project to imagine a paper catalog, since the internet provides us with a simple way to present the different videos online. (Several platforms are available for uploading the files.) A web site (following the model of *Network Awesome*) will offer the public the ability to consult the archive after the exhibition closes. Therefore, the exhibition doesn't end; it continues as a web archive until even this technique becomes obsolete and disappears.

Opening concert.

For the opening, a concert by the band HTRK (to be confirmed) will be accompanied by a reenactment of a VJ set from the 1990s using vintage material and technique.

List of artists

- yokna patofa
- graf haufen (videodrom)
- joep van liefland
- anne-mie van kerckhoven
- barbara breitenfellner
- christian vialard
- valerie favre
- jorge queiroz
- carl michael von hausswolff
- ingrid luche
- alan vega
- jean-luc verna
- gilles berquet
- martin dammann
- jason forrest
- monica ross
- danny devos
- mirka lugosi
- richard grayson
- eric rondepierre
- archive of the transmediale
- ...

