

A MATTER OF HISTORICITY

MATERIAL PRACTICES IN AUDIOVISUAL ART

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ABOUT

The material body of audiovisual artworks seems an apt site for exploring art's currently much discussed potential as a public agent, touching upon social and political issues. Theoretical developments in art theory, film and media studies and feminist/queer theory point towards a 'material turn,' which calls for a critical exploration of the material bases of artifacts as significant and potentially agential in political and cultural dynamics. However, current critical assessments of politically engaged audiovisual artworks often continue to privilege structural and content-based readings, and to neglect the material aspects of the works in question: their formal, technological, and spatial dimensions, as well as their haptic, tactile, and sonic aspects.

Aligning art and film theory with an address of technological and formal aspects, our project will develop a material criticism for contemporary, politically engaged audiovisual artworks. Our focus is on recent works pursuing questions of *historicity*: they concern themselves with the narration or representation of historical events. Due to their critical stance towards historical representation, these works have to date predominantly stimulated content-based readings, while our project will explore their material aspects as agents of criticality in their own right. Their emphasis on spatial arrangements, their careful assignment of specific bodily modes of perception and participation to audiences, as well as their insistent presentations of 'obsolete' styles, formats and technologies call for an examination of how these material dimensions transport critical impulses towards their own historicity; how, in short, historicity can be described as an active, material practice.

Our project asks for the specific material conditions that shape the interaction with the artworks in question. With our analysis of the technological and material bases of the historicity emerging from the artworks described above, we will engage with the ‘material turn’ from a new, media-critical, art- and film theoretical point of view: How can material and technological aspects shape aesthetic experiences? What exactly does an artwork’s materiality ‘do,’ if it is considered agential? We will work through complex questions of the potential politics of material approaches in the age of digital production and dissemination and question how a critical turn to materiality can develop – and maintain – an edge of political critique. We will look at how materiality, in dialogue with the questions of historicity posed by the artworks chosen for this project, can point to the ‘unevenness’ of a new, global postmodern public. Following these interconnections, our project takes materiality seriously as a substantial part in the critical register of contemporary audiovisual art.

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di: **angewandte**

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