

Rhythm of the Interval. Projection, Circulation and Fragmentation of Images and Words in Tris Vonna-Michell's Art practice

Lilian Haberer

The conquest of darkness by the increased light of photography conjures a link of fidelity between the photograph and the photographed. Advances in the photographic apparatus (...) seem to make possible a coincidence between the moment of the act of recording and the moment of the referent.
Eduardo Cadava¹

Mary Anne Doane's study of instantaneity in photography focuses on the experience of real time, as well as movement, as seen in chronophotography. She feels that there is a contradiction in the immediate process of movement on the one hand and the fixation of this movement on the other.² This raises the question of the representation of instantaneity for – what appears to be – the medium of photography that has become obsolete in an age of moving-image media that can be recorded and played back simultaneously. However, she also invokes the photographic image's claim to being a temporal instance for the historical event registered in it.

Photographs of slide projections appear to override the contrast between remaining still and the experience of real time through temporal sequencing as stated by Mary Anne Doane: This is because – in the slides' appearance and circulation – the immaterial, luminous projections suggest an image movement that visualizes the historical event through the temporality of the slide projection. This oscillates between the fixation of the image and the immediacy of the photographic moment. As Darsie Alexander stated, slides document a past temporality in the still image while slide projection develops in a sequence of image and interval.³ In his cinematic theory, Gilles Deleuze described the latter as a component of the action image between affect and perception that, according to Marie-Luise Angerer, enters into a spatio-temporal relationship.⁴ To achieve this, the forerunner of the apparatus, the magic lantern, with its glass slides, which had been coloured or had test objects inserted into them, served both entertainment and science in its illustration of movement.⁵ This focuses on the role of showing, of making comparisons, and the development of a narrative as was a main aspect in art history where the photograph established itself as the filter of a comparative way of seeing through the use of slide projectors.⁶ My hypothesis is that there is a fundamental connection between this procedure and the artistic practice of Tris Vonna-Michell.⁷ Donald Preziosi's

1. Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light. Theses on the Photography of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997, 14. Passages from this paper with analyses of the work of Tris Vonna-Michell are dealt with in: Lilian Haberer, 'Acting Without Breath. Tris Vonna-Michells Zirkulieren und Fragmentieren von Bildern, Worten und Objekten', in: Ilka Becker, Bettina Lockemann, Astrid Köhler et al. (eds.), *Fotografisches Handeln*, Marburg: Jonas Verlag 2015.

2. Mary Ann Doane, 'Real Time: Instantaneity and the Photographic Imaginary', in: David Green/Joanna Lowry (eds.), *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, Manchester: Photoworks 2006, 23–38, see 24, 26, 35.

3. Darsie Alexander, 'Slideshow', in: Alexander, *Slide Show*, exhibition catalogue, Baltimore, University Park 2005, 3–32, see 5–8.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1977, 65. See: Marie-Luise Angerer, 'Affektiv: Zur produktiven Differenz des Intervalls', in: Pirkko Rathgeber/Nina Steinmüller (eds.), *BildBewegungen. ImageMovements*, Munich: Fink 2013, 55–72, who deals with Gilles Deleuze, Henri Bergson, Brian Massumi and others in her investigation into the relationship between affect and interval.

5. Stafford and Terpak depicted how Christiaan Huygens developed the magic lantern in 1656 as an object for entertainment and later animated a depiction of the Dance of Death by Holbein with a series of glass slides. They also describe how Johann Zahn explained the objects placed between plates of glass to be projected for study in his Treatise on Optics (1685–86) and how Etienne Gaspard Robertson enthralled the masses in Paris with his magical Phantasmagoria in 1797. Barbara Maria Stafford/Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder. From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications 2001, 297–306, see 297, 305.

6. See Silke Wenk's illuminating contribution on the relationship between slide projection and the discipline of art history. She emphasises the function of photography and moving pictures for taxonomy, genealogy and historical updating. Silke Wenk, 'Zeigen und Schweigen. Der kunsthistorische Diskurs und die Diaprojektion', in: Sigrid Schade/Georg Christoph Tholen (eds.), *Konfigurationen. Zwischen Kunst und Medien*, Munich: Fink 1999, 292–305, see 294.



Figure 1
 Philipp Goldbach
Sturm/Iconoclasm, 2013
 Small-image format slides from the former
 slide archives of Cologne University's
 Institute of Art History, Exhibition View,
 Museum Wiesbaden, Project Space, 2013
 Photo: Wolfgang Günzel, Offenbach.
 Copyright: The artist and
 VG-Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

analysis of Art History with its practice of reproduction that reunites the historical framework and varying perspectivalities, takes the discussion further. These methods of reproduction articulate themselves virtually in a cinematographic space through the panoptical view and anamorphic archive.⁸

Preziosi elucidates that the objects dealt with in art history through the reproduction methods mentioned above, as well as through the dispositifs visualized in historical spatial models, are set in motion, as well as subjected to a permanent repositioning and dislocation, under technical and cinematic conditions.⁹ A similar technique can be recognised in Tris Vonna-Michell's way of dealing with his finds, photographs and slides – with the addition of fragmentation and recombination. The extent to which slide projection plays a role in the circulation, fragmentation and projection of the images in his work and – although the photographic image is the source material – integrates relics, language performances and actions, becomes the subject in this case. At the same time, my attention focuses on the photographic recording as the bearer of history and narration. In addition, I deal with the question of the extent to which the circulating slide, the distributed print, the collected photocopy and the way they are presented in the sequence of projection and Vonna-Michell's linguistic acts create a distributed agency and freely fluctuating narrative.

On the dehierarchisation of the archive and the emergence of the image as a mediator

Philip Goldbach's 2013 installation *Sturm/Iconoclasm* – consisting of around 200,000 35mm slides from the Institute of Art History in Cologne (fig. 1) – on the floor of the project room of the Wiesbaden Museum showed quite clearly that new projection technologies, such as

7. Tris Vonna-Michell is born in Southend-on-Sea, lives and works in Sweden and was nominee for the Turner Prize in 2014.

8. "[...]circulating through various anamorphic sites—the lecture auditorium, the collection of artworks, the archive of slides, photographs, and other reproductions, the library of texts – assembled in a single architectural space. This is a fluid focus, which institutes an endless search." Donald Preziosi,

Rethinking Art History: Mediations on a Coy Science, New Haven/London: Yale University Press 1989; especially chap. 3, 55 and 79.

9. Preziosi 1989 (reference 8), 78. The historical spatial models are from Bentham's Panopticon and later on he refers to the memory theatre and what these concepts have to do with cinema. He deals with the 'mise-en-scène' as the result of the 'mise-en-séquence'.



Figure 2
Hans Namuth Pollock Painting, 1950
b/w-Photograph
In: Barbara Rose (ed.), *Pollock Painting*.
Photographs by Hans Namuth, Agrinde
Publications: New York 1980,
without page reference.

beamers and software programmes,¹⁰ had made the technique of projecting slides obsolete in the field of art history. This gesture of dumping out educational materials that had previously been organised in a taxonomy of comparative observation by epochs, locations, artists and genres, is responsible for this impression of an image archive which has been made unrecognizable and whose function has been destroyed. By extension, and in keeping with new theories, this is an iconoclastic act – not only performed on those individual glass slides that were shattered when they were emptied out of the cases but – first and foremost – on the archive itself. Peter Weibel characterised the reaction of the art of the twentieth century to the crisis in painting and representation with forms of its negation as “anti-art” and regarded this self-critical moment as a form of iconoclasm that, however, also acted as a driving force for new artistic production.¹¹ Dario Gamboni provided evidence of forms of “aesthetic iconoclasm” that inspired an idea of artistic progress in the painting of the middle of the 19th century. Gamboni identified iconoclastic acts going hand in hand with various techniques, such as vandalism, negation, destruction and disguising, in the 20th century – and, here, especially in the 1960s. This virtually provided the basis for new artistic production as documented in the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) that was held in London in 1966.¹² As Philipp Goldbach’s work shows, reproductions of artworks in a non-hierarchical juxtaposition now form the base of a minimalistic black-and-white all-over; a post-medial, fragmented installation that, however, also represents a symbol and commentary on the subject of the anachronistic medium of the slide. A previous act of such radicalism was Jackson Pollock’s dehierarchisation of the panel painting with his drippings as shown when he appeared in action in the photographic images of Hans Namuth (fig. 2). As Goldbach states, in this case, not only the individual slide¹³ is exposed through the archive becoming obsolete as a storage place for knowledge and images. Much more, the gesture of fragmenting the image archives and negation makes “becoming visible” clear: The reproduction of the individual work of art is revealed in its multi-facetedness. In this way, Goldbach’s staged iconoclasm creates an impression of the function of the archive that first absorbs the object within a structural order and then makes it disappear. Now that the analogue image archive has become useless, the question of storing and representing has shifted to another medium that simply makes the coded image information of the original object accessible. With the emergence of these medial differences, attention becomes

10. Cf. Jennifer F. Eisenhauer, ‘Next Slide Please’, in: *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Spring, 2006), 198–214, see 207.

11. Peter Weibel, ‘Der Ikonoklasmus als Motor der modernen Kunst. Von der Repräsentation zur Partizipation’, in: Christoph Wulf/Jörg Zirfas (eds.), *Ikonologie des Performativen*, Munich: Fink 2005, 365–389, see 376.

12. Dario Gamboni, *Zerstörte Kunst. Bildersturm und Vandalismus im 20. Jahrhundert*, Cologne: DuMont 1998, see 265, 274, 278.

13. “In an iconoclastic move the slides are put into historical play, referencing the Bildersturm of the Reformation period. While the slides remain physically

intact, the act of dumping the archive shelves onto the floor signifies an irreversible encroachment of the integrity of the one-time image library, now become fully un-useable. In turn the archive’s contents become visible in their entirety.” Philipp Goldbach, ‘Sturm/Iconoclasm’, in: *Read Only Memory. Philipp Goldbach*, exhibition catalogue, Wiesbaden 2013, 12. See also the contributions by Jörg Daur on the reflection on the acquisition of knowledge and historical amnesia in Goldbach’s work, as well as Steffen Siegel on the work *Sturm/Iconoclasm* in respect to the role of images and reproductions for art history in the same volume.

focused on the materiality of information in slide projection that become effective in the circulation of small-format image bearers as “mediants”¹⁴ (Arjun Appadurai), as mediators, in the complex process of understanding history, its artefacts and representational media.

Particularly in the 1970s, artistic practice utilized slide projection as a hybrid in happenings, in concept art, theatrical tableaux vivants,¹⁵ and elsewhere. The spatial and temporal display and the interval between the still images made the integration of heterogeneous materials and various techniques such as fade-overs, montages and the integration of text, as well as performances by live artists, possible.¹⁶ In her investigation of cinematographic installation aesthetic, Annette Urban draws attention to the de-framing, release and duplication of the film image. Together with a narrative and simultaneous projection, this achieves a deconstruction, multi-perspectivity and spatialization in slide projection.¹⁷ She also stresses the diverseness of the creation of cinematic aesthetics, such as in land and concept art, as well as the equality of the used media, going beyond any media specificity.¹⁸ In doing so, she suggests what Georg Christoph Tholen described in 1999 as an expanded concept of mediality with the development of a medial practice of transition.¹⁹ He underlines the variety and accessibility of multimedia applications – theatre, film, video, photography – in which the narratives also reciprocally fragment each other and are exposed in the digital as an organization and combination of symbols.²⁰

The projective practice of the interval

Eduardo Cadava explores the coincidence of fixed objects in photographic images through exposure, mentioned in the quotation at the beginning of this essay, in line with Walter Benjamin’s conception of photography and history. On account of the long exposure times required for photographic plates, Benjamin analysed reproductions in early photography and described what had been photographed as follows: “The procedure itself caused the models to live, not *out of* the instant, but *into* it; during the long exposure they grew, as it were, into the

14. Media, as etymologically conceived by Alice Lagaay and David Lauer, describes the “spatial imparting of elements” and their “milieu” on the one hand and their role as “mediator” in the functional, transmitting sense on the other. Alice Lagaay/David Lauer, ‘Einleitung – Medientheorien aus philosophischer Sicht’, in: Lagaay/Lauer (eds.), *Medientheorien. Eine philosophische Einführung*, Frankfurt/New York: Campus 2004, 7–29, see 9–10. The materiality debate that Arjun Appadurai based on Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) also forms the background of this discussion. In Latour’s theory, mediants have agency and are entities that give life to objects and people and also includes animate material. However, Appadurai emphasises the relational between the various mediators and their media; see the lecture: ‘Humans, Materiality and the Future of Shared Agency’, within the framework of the workshop on the *Global South*, Cologne University, June 2015.

15. Robert Storr, ‘Next slide, please...’, in: Alexander 2005 (reference 3), 51–69, see 54–58.

16. Alexander, in Alexander 2005 (reference 3), 5.

17. Annette Urban, ‘Dia-Projektionen in der Kunst der 1970er-Jahre’, in: Ursula Frohne/Lilian Haberer (eds.), *Kinematographische Räume. Installationsästhetik in Film und Kunst*, Munich 2012, 541–572, see 543.

18. Urban 2012 (reference 17), 548–549.

19. See the separation and characteristics of the techniques going beyond those ascertained by Clement Greenberg for the 1960s. Described by Rosalind Krauss in 1999 taking, as an example, the art of Marcel Broodthaers describing cinematic art using a combination of media as a ‘post-medium condition’. Clement Greenberg, ‘Towards a Newer Laocöon’ (1940), in: Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press 1955, 23–38, see 31. Rosalind Krauss, ‘A Voyage on the North Sea’. *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London: Thames & Hudson 1999, 25.

20. For further information on a cultural, media-historical and aesthetic debate, see: Georg Christoph Tholen, ‘Überschneidungen. Konturen einer Theorie der Medialität’, in: Schade, Tholen 1999 (reference 6), 16. The question of slide projection as a combination of various medial practices has already been focused on in the editorial of this journal. See also: Kinsey, ‘From Post-Media to Post-Medium: Rethinking Ontology in Art and Technology’, in: Clemens Apprich et al. (eds.), *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*, London: Mute 2013, 69–83, see 75.



Figure 3
 Tris Vonna-Michell
The Artist and the Gravedigger: after D.O. Hill
 Source material, 2013
 Courtesy the artist.

image”.²¹ He sees the light that – in a manner of speaking – wrests the object from the darkness as a quality in view of more recent photographic reproduction techniques.²² According to Cadava,²³ Benjamin considers creative processes as the beginning of their downfall through which the aura of the photographic portrait makes way for the principle of likeness.²⁴ As with Benjamin, he stresses the deviation from the mimetic principle of the photographic recording as “un-similar” as an “impossible memory”.²⁵ Cadava’s text on photography inspired Tris Vonna-Michell to a seven-minute sound piece. Created for the Edinburgh Art Festival as one of the so-called Observers’ Walks, the artist blends his spoken Cadava quotations with the original recording of a guided tour through Calton Hill, to Hill’s activity in Rock House and St. Andrew’s House as the building of the Scottish Parliament; locations that the visitors to the Art Festival now take in when they listen to the audio walk. *The Artist and the Gravedigger: after D.O. Hill* (2014) (fig. 3) makes use of the technique of sampling various sound tracks: Benjamin’s description of Hill’s portraits and the historic homes in the pictures of Edinburgh become, in keeping with the genius loci of the reflected sites, graphic memories through the powers of the imagination. The soundscapes are organized through intervals so that the resulting mentally-projected images develop a temporality similar to that of the timed sequence of a slide projection. In a fragmentation – as not only the language, but also the fragmented images in the projection would suggest – temporality plays a central role. Dieter Mersch considers that the performative develops in a gap between the events²⁶ that expresses itself structurally in the interval of the slide projection, as well as in language. Tris Vonna-Michell’s “Audio Walk” also unfolds the performative by reviving the different historical locations through the artist’s language and also by creating an experience of dislocation between Edinburgh’s real and imaginary topography.

Projection, circulation and fragmentation of photographic images and narratives

The duration of Vonna-Michell’s performances, whose narratives are characterised by rhythmic language and loops, is limited by a ticking egg timer that alters the speed and flow of the narration as appropriate. In the audio piece, they structure Cadava’s sentences through rhythm, interval and language loop. Accompanying this, Vonna-Michell has props, photographs and slides circulated haptically or projectively and frequently uses slide projection as

21. Walter Benjamin, ‘Short History of Photography’, trans. by Phil Patton, in: *Artforum* 15, 6 (February, 1977), 46–51, see 48.

22. Benjamin 1991 (reference 21), 48. For information on Benjamin’s concept of similarity; see also: Michael Opitz, ‘Ähnlichkeit’, in: Michael Opitz/Erdmut Wizisla (eds.), *Benjamins Begriffe*, Frankfurt a. M.: 2000, 15–31.

23. Benjamin 1991 (reference 21), 48.

24. Cadava 1997 (reference 1), 13–15. All the same, the author does not mention that Benjamin had portrayed this development in regard to portrait painting and paid tribute to these physiognomic portrait studies (in August Sander’s

work) as scientific investigations in respect to the Russian cinema of the period (Eisenstein and Pudovkin). In this way, he created a connection between ‘uniqueness’ and ‘permanence’ as well as ‘fugitiveness’ and ‘reproducibility’: “The removal of the object from its shell, the fragmentation of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose sensitivity for similarity has so grown that by means of reproduction [sic! reproduction, L.H.] it defeats even the unique.” Benjamin 1991 (reference 2), 49.

25. Cadava 1997 (reference 1), 15.



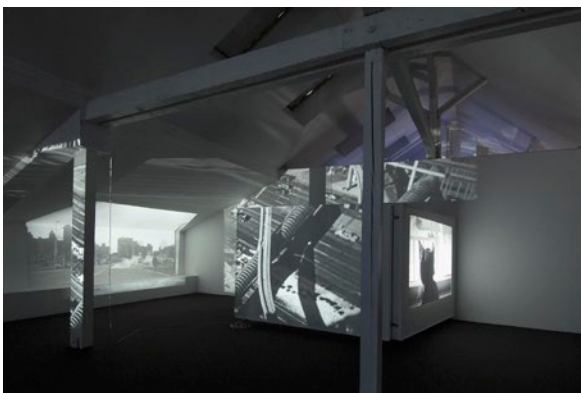
Figure 5

Tris Vonna-Michell
Tall Tales and Short Stories, 2007
 Exhibition View at Cubitt, London
 October 26 – November 22, 2014
 Photo by Andy Keate
 Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.



Figure 6

Tris Vonna-Michell
Studio A, 2008
 Exhibition View at 5th Berlin Biennial
 for Contemporary Art, KW Institute for
 Contemporary Art, Berlin
 5 April – 15 June, 2008
 Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.



part of his installation works. This can be as an autonomous object with an integrated screen – with him often sitting next to it at a table interacting in a direct confrontation with the audience, as in *Finding Chopin* and *Tall tales and Short Stories* (figs. 4 & 5), or as room-filling fade-overs offering a – more or less – panoptical view of the city of Detroit, in *Studio A* (fig. 6). In Tris Vonna-Michell's arrangements, the apparatuses set the rhythmic pace and the projected photographs become luminous, changing settings, frequently arranged out of tables, wall displays and archived objects, for the venues of his speech acts.

His collection with slides of objects, details of everyday situations, performative actions and locations he has visited, serve to provide Tris Vonna-Michell with the narrative strands necessary for orientation within his long-term projects. In 2007, he developed his exhibition *Tall Tales and*

Short Stories, which was shown in the Cubitt Gallery in London, around three performances and work complexes. They referred to the narrative *hahn/huhn* [cock/hen] (2003–on-going), *Down the Rabbit-Hole* (2006–07) and *Leipzig Calendar works* (2005–on-going). All of the performances and works have specific starting and reference points: the first is connected with the Anhalter Train Station in Berlin and the city's underground tunnel system during the Cold War, as well as Vonna-Michell's chance encounters with historic places, with the latter linked to an office of the Stasi records bureau in Leipzig where the project of the manual reconstruction of shredded Stasi documents by “making a puzzle” began. *Down the Rabbit-Hole* is the original story about the search for Henri Chopin and has its beginning in Tris Vonna-Michell's birthplace of Southend-on-Sea. With each performance, not only locations and narrations, but also his own, growing archive of images, are linked with archival material and circulated in the slide projectors. The last mentioned were original collected and stored in discarded sports shoe boxes. In the course of Vonna-Michell's international exhibitions, these have been replaced by well-padded packing crates.²⁷

As is most often the case, the initial situation in the Cubitt Gallery consisted of a desk that – here – was equipped with two slide carrousels. From there, the artist sometimes acted in his performances and his shadow, as well as the action on the objects, overlapped with the pictures from his slide projections, with the wall objects, projections of locations and details. To this was added a 35mm slide projector with a screen, a hand shredder, pages of a calendar – both parts of his *Leipzig Calendar Works* – as well as freely scattered photo prints that he had let fall onto the floor, one after the other, while he spoke (figs. 7 & 8). The objects, documents,

26. Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura: Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen*: Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 2002, on the archaeology of the performative, 251–298, see 291.

27. Catrin Lorch: 'Two Houses', in: *Ars Viva 08/09. Inszenierung/Mise en Scène*, exhibition catalogue, Würzburg: 2008, 153–157, see 155. See also Andrew Hunt: 'Fragmented Narratives. Tris Vonna-Michell interviewed by Andrew Hunt', in: *Untitled 45*, Spring 2008, [4].



Figure 7
Tris Vonna-Michell
Leipzig Calendar Works (2005–2006)
Performance and Exhibition View, Gallery of
the Arts Academy, Hamburg, Oktober 30, 2006
Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.

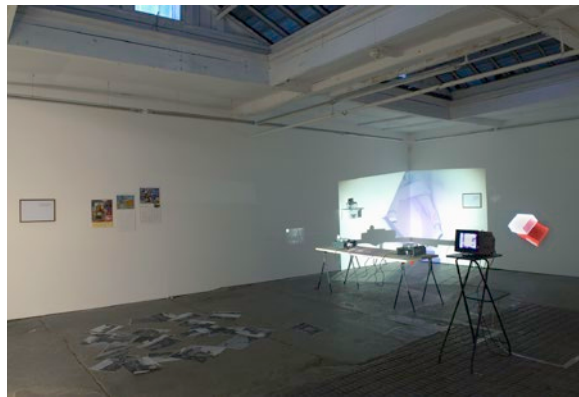


Figure 8
Tris Vonna-Michell
Tall Tales and Short Stories, 2007
Exhibition View at Cubitt, London
October 26 – November 22, 2014
Photo by Andy Keate
Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.

photographs of various places, set pieces and details are both documents and relics that illustrate his story. In addition, they are archival materials on various levels: within the mise-en-scène, as part of the individual work complexes and in the artist's archives. However – as Derrida stressed – the last mentioned is determined by a paradoxical movement: the archive takes

place [*a lieu*], at the place of [*au lieu*] originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.” On the one hand, it requires both a place of attestation and a structure of repetition. On the other hand – as Derrida argues with Freud’s analogy of the urge for repetition and the death wish – its destruction and being forgotten is integrated into the archive.²⁸ In particular, this counter-rotating movement of an iconoclastic and archival gesture can be reconstructed in Vonna-Michell’s action of shredding, cutting and gluing together of his archive of pictures of his childhood in a block of prefabricated housing in Leipzig. Among the objects he took with him when he moved in were a photo and negative archive, a hand paper shredder and scissors after he had read an article on Stasi files in Leipzig-Zirndorf and on the activity of the “puzzlers” in March 2005.²⁹ However, the fragmenting and sampling only recalls the reconstruction of the GDR documents seeing that, at best, he had only undertaken a re-enactment of the “puzzlers” activity with his photographic archive. Biographical photographs and not papers acted as documents. His photographic images and slides do not immediately reconstruct the act of destruction and reconstruction but draw attention to these processes and become actors themselves.

Re-enactment of iconoclasm and recombination of the images

The diffusion of his projects is characteristic of Vonna-Michell’s practice: He identified 80 slides as part of his performance and around 30 of them belong to “puzzlers” tale. His performative stories are placed side by side with an additional narrative in the form of his artist’s-book-like catalogue that – in addition to the transcripts of the performance, loose photo prints, illustrations and inserts – includes descriptions and information on the individual projects, which, once again, flank the materials (photographs and objects) (figs. 9 & 10). In this respect, Vonna-Michell states that most of the slides will be employed parallel to his language acts as will empty slide frames. On the other hand, the role of the images he uses

28. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression (Religion & Postmodernism)*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996, 11. The French expressions in brackets are the expression from the French original, translated also in the German version of the text, see: Derrida, *Dem Archiv verschrieben. Eine Freudische Impression*, Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 1997, 25.

29. Tris Vonna-Michell, *Tris Vonna-Michell*, exhibition catalogue, Zurich 2011, 21. The manual reconstruction has since been complemented by a virtual one, <http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Archive/RekonstruktionUnterlagen/_node.html> (30.06.2015). See also: Christophe Gallois, ‘A Constellation of Narratives. Interview with Tris Vonna-Michell’, in: *The Space of Words*, exhibition catalogue, Luxemburg 2010, 282–287, see 283.



Figure 9
Tris Vonna-Michell, *Tris Vonna-Michell*,
Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach
Stiftung Nr. 117, Artist Book, published as
exhibition catalogue Kunsthalle Zurich et al.,
Zurich 2011, 38-39. Photo by Lilian Haberer.



Figure 10
Tris Vonna-Michell
Finding Chopin, 2010
Exhibition View at Frankfurter Kunstverein,
Frankfurt am Main,
December 11, 2010 – February 13, 2011
Photo by Norbert Miguletz
Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.

has changed after five years of performative practice: the objects assume more weight and activate other images and concepts that take the place of the customary forms. In this way, some of the slides once again find their way into his performances as souvenir images of a partial re-enactment³⁰ and – as must be added – as revenants of the process on the picture. In this, the iconoclastic moment of making something unrecognizable is only one part of a cycle, a logic of utilization, that once again puts itself in the service of creating a new image. In Vonna-Michell's œuvre, the exemplary reconstruction of the painstaking work of this jigsaw-like puzzle of reconstructing historically relevant documents, becomes a gesture of fragmentation. This is transmitted through the image and its narrative power. The way in which the slides unfold in the room and how he separates the words in the harsh slang of the repetition in order to assemble them anew and allow them to recirculate, either materially or mentally, demands that the listeners themselves perform a recombination.

Performance, medially and materiality

Photographs and slides are omnipresent in his works: as documentary material scattered loosely on the table or strewn on the floor (figs. 4, 8, 9, 10 & 11), projected in various sizes in the impression of a bright slide or haptically tangible in the form of black-and-white photographs as inserts that can be seen when the catalogue is opened up. The image reproductions not only appear medially and materially in a variety of forms and moments; as newspaper or magazine cuttings, as posters or slides, as a photocopy mounted on a wall display or as carelessly scattered photo-prints. It is much more the case that the functions and roles they are invested within the framework of the works and narrations, are much more decisive: they are components of the artistic investigation, documents of the approach to a location, archival materials, as well as details that were invested with a specific memory within the story, as well as illustrative material, circulated in the artist's hand or in the apparatus he has set up during his language performances, as revealed in his gesture of the falling photo-prints (fig. 7). As Lorenz Engell articulated for the film image, these visual media and articulated reflections



Figure 11
Tris Vonna-Michell
Puzzlers, 2008
Exhibition View, Kunsthalle, Zurich,
April 12 – May 18, 2008
Photo by Stefan Altenburger
Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.

30. Sam Thorne, 'Tris Vonna-Michell. Spinning tall tales: Autobiography and Politics in Connected Histories', in: *Frieze* vol. 110/10 (2007), <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/tris_vonna_michell/> [30.06.2015].

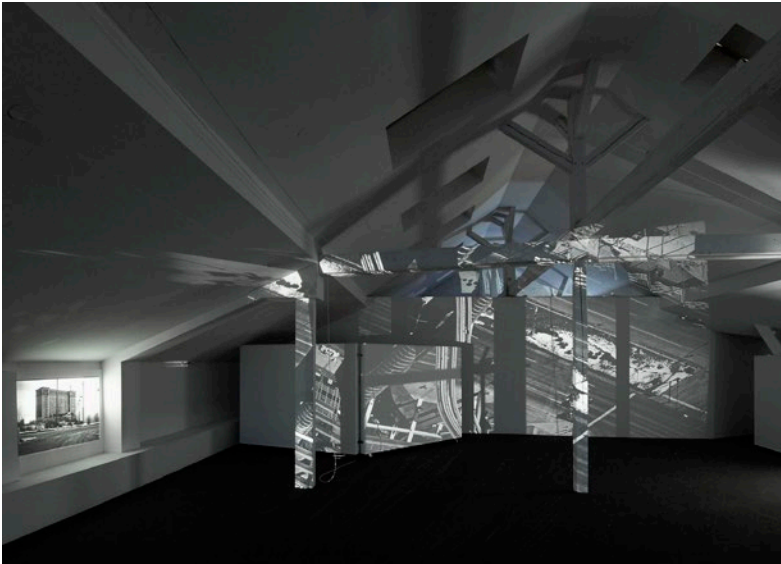


Figure 12
Tris Vonna-Michell
Studio A, 2008
Exhibition View at 5th Berlin Biennial
for Contemporary Art, KW Institute for
Contemporary Art, Berlin
April 5 – June 15, 2008
Courtesy the Artist and T293, Naples/Rome.

are agents, agencies, that – in their mediality and materiality – themselves actively affect Vonna-Michell's projects that develop progressively over a lengthy span of time at various sites.³¹ These sites are also mediators (and “mediants”) in which the agents have a varying degree of influence. During the period of the exhibition, the agents play a role in changing the elements and rooms regardless of whether Tris Vonna-Michell uses them as a work room, studio or place of residence as he did in the *Schnittraum* in Cologne in 2006, in the rooms of the Cabinet Gallery in London or in *Studio A* on the city of Detroit under the roof of the Kunst-Werke during the 5th Berlin Biennale in 2008 (fig. 12). As a result, the displacements and –first and foremost – the dislocations going beyond the locations and rooms, play a role in the spatial, historical sense.³² His work in the exhibition *The day will come – when photography revises* curated by Bettina Steinbrügge and Amelie Zadeh in the Kunstverein in Hamburg (19 June–13 September 2015) makes this clear (fig. 13). For chapter VI on the subject of “Historicity”,³³ Tris Vonna-Michell inserted a 16mm rear projection, which had been transferred into HD – *Postscript V (Berlin)* from 2015 – into a wall. As its subject, this shows a single slide projection with two image fields placed on top of each other and the apparatuses in the foreground in a dark room. In the voiceover, which could be listened to over headphones, one mainly hears – along with the voice of the artist – the clacking sound of the image change and its shown details of the city, specific streets in Berlin, architecture and close-ups. Vonna-Michell develops the narration of *hahn/huhn* as an autobiographical, elliptical story about his parents' relationship to Berlin and the search he undertook along the traces of his personal history and that of the city. His search for evidence in Berlin ultimately led the artist back to his own work with the photographs and slides that he had rearranged and performed since 2003. In retrospect, Vonna-Michell expressed that it was time to leave the story behind while the projector was blocked and only a red projection beam remained visible. The slide projection became a narrative – similar to his *hahn/huhn* performance – itself. They provide an insight into Vonna-Michell's circular and fragmenting process of revealing a story and a reflection on it. In the demonstrated medium of the rotating projection and the parallel speech act, it becomes elevated to a meta-reflective level by the artist narrativizing his own image and media practice here.

31. Lorenz Engell, 'Kinematographische Agenturen', in: Engell et al. (eds.), *Medien denken. Von der Bewegung des Begriffs zu bewegten Bildern*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2010, 137–156, see 139. In his lecture and research, Appadurai had a substantial influence on the fields of mediality and materiality in respect to Latour's actor-network-theory and the material-culture debate (reference 14).

For information on the agents and agency, shared action power and actional media, see Haberer 2015 (reference 1).

32. Gallois 2010 (reference 29), 286.

33. See the reader to the parallel exhibitions in Hamburg and the Landesgalerie Linz, Bettina Steinbrügge/Amelie Zadeh (eds.), *VI x VI. Positions on the Future of Photography*, exhibition catalogue, Vienna 2015, 171–172.



Figure 13

Tris Vonna-Michell,
POSTSCRIPT V (BERLIN), 2015,
 Installation, Backlit video projection with
 sound (16mm transferred to HD),
 8.:31 min, exhibition view, *The Day Will Come*
 - *When Photography Revises*, Kunstverein in
 Hamburg, June 19 – September 13, 2015.
 Photo by Fred Dott. Courtesy of Jan Mot,
 Brussels; Metro Pictures, New York;
 Overduin & Co, Los Angeles;
 T293, Naples/Rome.

The performance and plasticity of Vonna-Michell's staccato-like speech acts demands that the question on virtual or immaterial agency be expanded.³⁴ This always inscribes itself differently into the understanding and history of an archive of images and their objects, overwrites and changes the perception of them. Thus, this requires concentrating on the interaction with the actors; meaning, a process of action *on the* images as carried out by the artist through their circulation in the slide projector, shredding and selecting, rearranging and joining together. Manfred Faßler's definition of various levels of observation in respect to media in their topological function as "mediators" over spatio-temporal constitutions provides further clarification in this instance. He also defines their actional effect as transformable, media formations that are mutually usable and the "fields of reality"³⁵ associated with them in such a way as the artist works with these anachronistic media and operates across the historical and topographical spaces.

Tris Vonna-Michell's archives continue to fill themselves and the mental images evoked in the recipients – that the artist sets free, linguistically, in parallel – take on shape plastically and through the force of sound. His process of the acts described here is reproduced in an acoustical space and through the sounds of the slide projectors and encroaches on the audience. In Vonna-Michell's works, not only the performance, but also the historical and narrative threads, is determined by a gap, an interval in the language and performance. Much more – as Georges Didi-Huberman articulated with his concept of the image – the images themselves and the dialectic inherent in them also include a negative force³⁶ as revealed in Philipp Goldbach's *Sturm/Iconoclasm*. Didi-Hubermann sees this force as a cleft torn into the image, as "fabric", and argues – image-theoretically and psychoanalytically – that this cleft simultaneously ruptures and opens the image, transverses representation and presentation and transforms this into a "dream image" and "event of the gaze".³⁷

In Tris Vonna-Michell's work, this cleft and opening is also created through the historical levels and the narrative he develops. His technique of shredding his image archive and fragmenting of language reproduces this process in the material. New affective image and memory sequences are created in the materiality, as well as in the circulation of the acting images and the intervals between the images and language that the artist uses productively. This gesture of image creation and montage, as well as the fragmentation and re-combination *on the* photographs themselves, stresses the dialectic of the images and consummate the cleft towards reality.

34. At an early stage in their introduction to *Agency/Power of Action*, Becker/Cuntz/Kusser also question the role of narration and, with a view on multiplicity and multitude, focus on the aspect of situational separation, as well as the simultaneous and coincidental coincidence of objects of different kinds and the form of their development. Ilka Becker et al., 'In der Unmenge', in: Becker et al. (eds.), *Unmenge – Wie verteilt sich Handlungsmacht?*, Munich: Fink 2008, 7–34, see 7–8.

35. Manfred Faßler, *Netzwerke. Einführung in die Netzstrukturen, Netzkulturen und verteilte Gesellschaftlichkeit*, Munich: Fink 2001, 66–67.

36. Didi-Huberman' expression is: "the power of the negative". Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images Questioning the Ends of a Certain History*, Place: Penn Staate University Press, 2004, 142.

37. Didi-Huberman 2000 (reference 36), 143–148, 156–157.