Activating Obsolete Technologies & Media Heritage (Bern, 24–26 Feb 27)

Lichtspiel / Kinemathek Bern, Bern, Schweiz, Feb 24–26, 2027
Deadline: Dec 15, 2026

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Activating Obsolete Technologies and Media Heritage: Strategies of Re-Use and Preservation

The significance of the apparatus for cinema and film studies has been emphasized and confirmed by research in recent years, contributing significantly to the comprehension and interpretation of film history. Nonetheless, their preservation and especially valorization is often not in the foreground at an institutional level, compared to the attention that film, paper, and photo collections receive. In contrast, numerous private collectors and amateur museums are dedicated to preserving devices with their “acquisitive urge” (Herrmann 1972). However, since it is especially those collections that are at risk of disappearing, we intend to foster a dialogue around the issues and questions around the preservation of film devices and the knowledge they contain. For instance, while digitization is considered often the best solution, it leads to a loss of tacit knowledge contained in the apparatus, but also the collections themselves. Based on this layout, we want to open the discussion to a broader field of past technologies and cultural history. We invite doctoral researchers to join the debate on the preservation and re-use of media heritage within artistic research practices and film studies. We are looking for contributions reflecting on and exploring historical and obsolete technologies and artefacts such as photographs, films, sound recordings and other media-related materials through practices of collecting, preservation, archiving, appropriation, adaptation and reactivation. Contributors may draw on professional, amateur or artistic practices as well as empirical approaches, while understanding the cultural practice of collecting, adapting and exhibiting as ways in which individual actors understand the relation between things, history, and the world both within and beyond the institutional context (e.g. history or science museum) (Jannelli 2012:36).

We welcome proposals on, but not limited to, the following topics, be it through theoretical or practical exploration, case studies or methodological papers:
- Adaptation, reactivation and reinterpretation of media heritage as a means of generating new perspectives and knowledge.
- Artistic engagements with archives and collections, exploring how historical materials can be recontextualized, transformed or brought into dialogue with contemporary social, cultural, political and ecological questions and challenges.
- exploring the significance of materiality and infrastructure in the context of collections, acting as sites for a broad spectrum of economic activities and processes, such as recycling, competition, circulation, indexing, cultivation, presentation, consumption, evaluation, mediation, and disposal (see Güttler & Heumann 2016:14–17).

- critical reflections on preservation practices of (film) technology, archiving knowledge transfer, the role of the digital in the preservation, etc.
- explorations of the re-appropriation of film devices and the knowledge exchange outside of market regulations such as film collectives, infrastructural aspects such as DIY-communities, film laboratories etc., or similar phenomena in other fields than film;
- discussions of re-use of old devices facilitated through digital circulation and dissemination of historical, technical, and operational information, unconventional methods of tinkering and repair etc.;
- explorations of the practical knowledge that can be found in apparatus collections (Fossati & van den Oever, 2025), in the expertise of private collectors, in the re-use of devices, in peripheral objects, in unstable web-based knowledge produced by amateurs and professional practitioners, etc.;
- studies on the provenance of the objects in collections and their potential relation to a colonial past;
- hands-on approaches applying methods such as the experimental media archaeology and others that focus on materiality and apparatuses within the field of media history and media culture; studies of devices adapted by practitioners and artists;
- researching and teaching (with) historical media collections;
- ways of integrating paratexts into the studies of historical devices;
- transmedial approaches

We are open to various forms of contributions, such as presentations, lecture performances, presentation of artistic works, film screenings (with discussion), etc.

Submission Guidelines
The primary language of this conference is English to facilitate discussion among participants. Proposals for the 15- to 20-minute presentations (on-site) should be 300–500 words and include a short biographical note and a selective bibliography. The applications should be sent to phd.arts@hslu.ch by December 15, 2026. The organizing team will review all submissions and select contributions based on their relevance to the conference theme. Notification of acceptance: until January 22, 2027. Presenters who lack institutional support or are facing financial constraints are kindly asked to indicate this when submitting their proposal, or to contact us. If there are no funds to finance your travel, we can look into it together to see if we can find a solution.

This pre-conference for PhD students is part of the international conference “Re-use as Preservation: Historical Film Equipment, Private Collections, and Today’s Practices” (February 24–26, 2027, Lichtspiel / Kinemathek Bern). Participants are warmly invited to attend both events. Both conferences are organized by the SNSF-project “Research with and on analog film equipment from private Swiss collections”. The doctoral conference is an initiative by the research group Visual Narrative of the Lucerne School of Design Film and Art in collaboration with LUCA School of Arts. Further details about the research project can be found at https://www.hslu.ch/fafss/, where the program will be published.

Reference:

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