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## Lights Out

### The Light of Reason and the Light of Vision: A Conversation on the Slide Projector

Ruti Direktor: The question hovering over our exhibition is whether we are concerned with nostalgia. Because the motivation for the exhibition is a process now taking place before our very eyes: one technology becomes extinct – the analog technology of the slide projector, and another is replacing it. Hence the quandary: whether art involving slides is nostalgic, and whether the use of the projector in itself necessarily contains a clinging to the past.

Danny Yahav-Brown: It is a question that has preoccupied me recently as well. What I am curious about is the projector's relevancy today. I, for one, consider the projector to be relevant for contemporary artistic practice. I see the sculptural aspect of the slide projector: its physicality, its available portability. The digital Barko projector is mounted to the ceiling and operated by remote control. With the slide projector – you move it, you press it, and you create sculptural settings with it. As far as I am concerned, the exhibition strives to present the projector not as the end of the line, but as an apparatus with a future.

Assaf Evron: The only time I ever used a slide projector in an art work was when I was short of funds for a Barko. I stretched a bed sheet over the window at

home and projected a slide on it from the window; I got a work for 50 shekels. It was a convenient and available solution. As for nostalgia, the exhibition as I see it addresses the qualities of the projector, including its cultural, social, and artistic implications: childhood memories, vacation slide presentations, art history lessons, university – phases of initiation that we all go through, that's why it takes us back to nostalgia. Will the exhibition be nostalgic? This we will know in another ten years...

Jossef Krispel To me it is necessarily a nostalgic exhibition, but the presence of the projector must be understood in two ways: first, its presence as an extra-artistic medium, a tool capable of showing, a projection apparatus, and in this sense – it is certainly nostalgic; second, its medial use as an aid, within painting, for example, and in this respect it is also a part of a deeper, more stratified question. The projector has a nostalgic presence because of the glow of the past that it brings with it. The element of initiation no longer exists today. A young lecturer is not likely to use slides, and in this respect, it is an extinct teaching aid. When you project art works via slides, you are well aware that you are introducing the past into the classroom, namely – the slowness of the advancing slides, the noise, and the inability to enlarge or shrink or quickly cross-reference various images.

Danny I think it is more than that, because it exposes a profound cultural element, perhaps our genealogy. For young people who come to see the exhibition, the projectors may look like archaeology. To us it is nostalgia.

Ruti In other words, the nostalgia effect defines the spectator. That which is nostalgic to someone who associates the projector with what Assaf called "phases of initiation," will elicit no response whatsoever in the digital generation. To young people, the slide projector, and all the odd

rituals accompanying it, may appear peculiar, redundant, awkward, decidedly low tech...

Danny Or totally cool...

Assaf Like the Polaroid which, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, was all of a sudden rediscovered by photographers: the return to the one-off original – the return to the organic quality of the photograph, even to the magic of the photograph, taking shape on the paper before our very eyes.

Jossef Or like the photographers who nowadays work with a Holga camera. It is not that the projector itself is nostalgic, but it certainly carries nostalgia with it. Once you present an image through the filter of the projector, you introduce another time with it. The projector is not a total UFO for students; it still has not become entirely extinct. Perhaps when they stop making it...

Danny Kodak stopped manufacturing it in 2003.

Jossef So the projector will become extinct for economic reasons.

Ruti We are already witnessing it. See how hard it is to obtain slide projectors for the exhibition. Schools and universities have already shifted to digital technology, and slide projectors have become those obsolete objects stored away, unneeded, and soon they will be junked. In this sense, the projector is a quintessential product of the Capitalist system: use and discard; the system that develops a technology which immediately makes its predecessor redundant.

- Assaf It's a classical process of redundification and extinction. As a photographer I now experience this with film. It is increasingly harder to get film; it is hard to develop it in Israel. It raises questions about the dynamics and dialectics of technology, because in fact, it keeps developing until it brings about its own collapse.
- Ruti It is built into the inner logic of progress: each technology has limited time. Each technology is meant to sacrifice itself for the sake of the coming technology. Progress essentially and necessarily generates nostalgia for its extinct, abandoned products, which are principally less-efficient than the ones to follow.
- Assaf But like slides, it is still more enjoyable to listen to music on records. And it is not a matter of nostalgia, but a matter of quality. Regardless of how advanced digital quality becomes, it will always be inferior to analog. The volume of sound in a record cannot be duplicated. And there is still no substitute for the silver print... And there is another thing that distinguishes the slide projector from video: video is always in resolution; in the slide projector, on the other hand, the line is smooth. It is not only a matter of image quality; it is a basic feature of the medium. The slide image is perfectly smooth.
- Danny I often wonder about redundification, extinction, things that are thrown into history's junkspace at such speed. I have, for example, a dispute with photography students: why take pictures in black-and-white; ultimately, there is bound to be a substitute that will furnish the same qualities.
- Jossef Only without the nostalgic dimension...
- Assaf At the moment I work with two cameras. In my photojournalistic work I use a state-of-the-art digital camera, the most advanced there is on the

market, every photographer's dream. I shoot my art with a Hasselblad, a camera whose technology has barely changed since the 1970s. It is an entirely mechanical technology. I shoot with slide film, and I think that even the most advanced digital camera won't be able to produce such qualities. This is how I feel about the slide projector – a mechanical, slightly awkward apparatus that produces a delay, a suspension which has its advantages. For the exhibition, I photographed precisely the delay time.

Danny     When I think of a slide projector, I think of theater versus cinema. In comparison to cinema, there is an element of suspension in theater as well, nevertheless it is still relevant.

Jossef     Perhaps a better comparison would be between cinema and video. For our discussion is about the digital schism: what happened once the image was converted to something intangible. It may have started with Impressionism, when the image was deconstructed; ever since, we have been thirstily consuming every whole experience, because in our everyday everything is fragmented, down to the pixel. We see through deconstructed screens, while driving along, through flickering lights. Every experience that momentarily blocks the deconstruction and fragmentation, which comes coated in temporal layers of sorts, is something to cling to. Slide-based photography still contains the magical experience of the unknown – between the moment the picture is taken and the moment it is developed.

Assaf     The slides are, on the one hand, a collection of fragments; on the other – they are linearly linked in the slide cartridge. Then, via editing, a narrative is created, one that cannot be reached by synchronous emergence of parallel photographs. The projector contains both fragment and narrative.

- Ruti This narrative is interrupted in the painter's studio: there the painter isolates one slide for projection, enlarging, processing, working for hours, even days, on a single image; detaching it from the sequence, from the linear context in which we are accustomed to seeing slides.
- Jossef In this respect my painterly act is indeed opposed to the projector's operation. My painting a-priori addresses excess; it is saturated in the generic, even the metaphorical sense. Therefore it operates as a dam blocking the flux of images that may potentially be projected on the canvas; it a-priori operates against the projector. The farthest layer will drip on the one in front. In fact, when I'm in the studio, the act of painting opposite a projector becomes an act of painting within a projector. Being in a dark room as an image is projected on the canvas corresponds with an act of exposure, of raising a blind. Some beautiful things can happen in the studio then. You become the consumer of the image; the image is projected on your back; your neck becomes the photograph's back. This is the blindness. You paint something that you don't see, although you see it perfectly well.
- Danny You are describing a situation where concealment, blindness, and seeing occur simultaneously. The eternal evasiveness, the quest for the very image which you yourself conceal; you will forever stretch your arm to paint, and it will hide that which you want to depict. Is painting reflexive in relation to the projector?
- Jossef Today I feel it isn't. At the outset of my artistic career it was different. Earlier I mentioned being in the arrested space of the camera, where the image is projected on one's back, in the darkness; painting without seeing the colors. A situation in which you cannot see whether red is red or green or brown, and the enriching occurrences that may evolve therefrom. To me, two paintings by Luc Tuymans (*Slide #1* and *Slide #2*, both from 2002)

are works where the slide is the theme; only the light of the projector remains, and the painterly space becomes a reflector of the apparatus presenting it. It is a radical piece in terms of the projector's presence. As far as my painting is concerned – today the projector is a part of it on the practical level. I refer to it as I do to issues such as the size of the canvas or the thickness of the brush.

Ruti It sounds like something entirely instrumental. If you think about the process associated with the historical struggle between painting and photography, when painters went out into the streets in the 19th century, upon the advent of photography, and declared "painting is dead," it may be regarded as painting's sweet revenge on photography... You vanquish photography entirely in favor of painting, you use it; you owe it nothing.

Jossef I owe it nothing. But you can hardly say I leave no trace of the photograph in the painting, because the presence of photography cannot be ignored. In the 1980s photography caused painting a profound crisis, largely due to Richter's painting. Richter is a projector painter, and he paralyzed painting, at least on the visual level, precisely due to the high level of virtuosity to which he led painting.

Ruti There is a fair share of curiosity, even mystery, invoked by the act of painting based on a projected slide. Do art schools actually teach it?

Danny God forbid...

Jossef It is not a taboo in art school, but they don't really teach it. It's not something that is bequeathed, and yet it is a known thing. I can recall classes which discussed the use of a projector, as a Popish exercise, as some kind of fascination with the possibility. And of course, many

artists have used projection ever since the advent of the projector, since the 1960s, from Warhol to Richter. But many artists tend to repress the presence of the projector, perhaps because it involves a certain measure of shame. As if there is something about it that rejects the myth of the virtuous hand. But this is obviously bullshit. If you can't paint, you can't paint, even if you have a projected image before you. It is interesting to consider this in relation to the old study method of master and apprentice. Leonardo in Verrocchio's studio; a student that can peek at, imitate, and copy from the great master. The slide similarly teaches you how to paint via copying.

Ruti This is the didacticism inherent to the slide projector: the authority of knowledge practically embodied within this apparatus which emits information via light. Here lies the projector's duality: the information reflected through the beam of light, the light of Enlightenment, and on the other hand – the darkness, and all of a sudden there is an image on the wall – magic.

Assaf The Enlightenment indeed speaks about the "light of logic" or "the light of reason" and we are talking about the "light of vision." And here Enlightenment has collapsed in terms of the blindness it created for itself, or to which it led itself.

Danny The analog projector is also an inexhaustible ground for accidents and glitches – blindness, confusion, inversion, getting stuck. I think of it as a human body, in the context of breathing, of the warmth emanating from it, of how I used to fall asleep in lectures or in the army due to its monotone.

Assaf You refer to the mechanical projector in the most organic way possible. It's incredible, because when the projector emerged, it was entirely



mechanical, but once it gave way to the electronic, the mechanical acquired the romanticism of an organic body: warmth, noise, spirit. This is the nostalgia we discussed earlier. Still, there are the unique qualities of the projector – a series of photographs that generate a whole greater than the parts. And the ritual – you sit in the dark, the projector flickers behind, and the sound of advancing slides. The sound is very important. It has an authoritative significance. It carries a dimension of a command that may not be refused, like heartbeats. There is something about the private-collective experience accompanied by sound that dictates order, regulation, rhythm.

Ruti     Indeed, the slide ritual usually involves a public experience: community sing-along, lectures, slide shows. It brings to mind comments about cinema made by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s. Trying to crack the secret of the popular medium he distinguished between the experience of collective viewing and the individual experience of viewing art. The slide projector is, indeed, a medium whose viewing experience is collective, but it has a strong dimension of didacticism. The experience of community sing-along is likewise disciplined, even regimented: sitting arrangement reminiscent of a classroom, the uniform recitation of the lyrics screened on the wall. Perhaps the authoritativeness of an omniscient medium.

Danny     At the same time, there is a type of spectacle about it. It is not the spectacularity created by the light beams projected at Ground Zero in homage to the Twin Towers, nor the type generated by Wodiczko's monumental images projected on urban buildings. The spectacle of the projector stems from its portability: you bring it closer to the wall, and the image becomes smaller, you move it away – and it grows bigger. This movement back and forth with the projector activates the viewer. It contains a certain measure of manipulation. On the other hand, there are all the other qualities of the digital projector: infinite data, the ability to

cross-reference, to shift to the Internet. In this sense, the slide projector is primitive. It causes problems, and there is all that fuss about it. It is present, an overlapping excess. I tend to think that I understand the projector better than I do the digital technology. When slides get stuck, I know what to do.

Assaf The joke is that in Africa you can fix everything with an electric wire and a pocketknife. The machines are old and simple, and may be fixed with basic means. In this context I think of the works created by Michael Druks in the 1970s with a slide projector. Obviously, he fully understood the mechanics of the projector, and used it in a most sophisticated, efficient manner.

Jossef Think of the moment in a dark hall, when the projector is turned on. The image is transparent; transparent like the slide. There is order and silence. My eyes start working, I no longer hear the world, I only look. It is a powerful moment. Even in the studio, when I turn off the light and project the slide on the canvas, it is an exciting moment: lights out and let the show begin.