

The Enthusiastic Archive

Jacques Derrida, in a lecture entitled, *The concept of the Archive: a Freudian impression*, delivered in London in 1994 as part of the international symposium *Memory: The Question of Archives*, spoke of the archive as a structural fault related to the exercise of memory, on the basis that the spur of death in itself represents the threat and the motor that moves desire through the register of reality. When the lecture was published, Derrida decided to change the title to *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*¹.

Taking the artistic practice of Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska as a starting point, particularly their latest production, *Enthusiasm*, we want to examine some of the conceptual implications that have been extracted from the archive as an artistic model. The following analysis centres on the influence established between this structural format, with previous expressions taken from conceptual art, and what is known as Institutional Critique². The idea of the archive that is defended here refers both to the physical device and method and to the Derridian use of the *archive drive*.

Enthusiasm, by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, is part of a body of work that has been created out of research into the amateur movie movement and the network of film clubs set up in Poland during the communist era. The exhibition includes an exact reconstruction of the inside of a club-house and a recreation of three screening rooms acting as a frozen stage capable of transporting us to another scenario: the changing political landscape of socialist Poland from the 1950s to the 1980s. In conceptual terms, the project is based on the reproduction of a film club and its activities, like some sort of *ready-made*. Cummings and Lewandowska's artistic involvement consists of designing this recreation; selecting a series of films grouped in three programmes entitled love, desire and work; arranging an "archive lounge" where visitors can create their own programmes and registering this material under the *Creative Commons* licence.

Enthusiasm's emphasis on the archive and documentary confirms the continuation of previous projects by Cummings and Lewandowska such as *Not Hansard: the Common Wealth* (2000), where they presented a compilation of graphic documents produced by local clubs, groups of enthusiasts, collectors and associations - as exercises in self-representation and *Free Trade* (2003), where they examined the links between art and capital through the Manchester Art Gallery's collections. In this format, the artists recognise the possibility of building territories rather than individual narratives, or the capacity to promote interpretation as an unending process of analysis of the everyday³.

Title: *Sisybus 1971*
Author: T. Wudzki
88mm, 5'30, B&W
Courtesy: AKF Wiedza, Warszawa

Enthusiasm operates both as an exhibition device and as an effective archive of amateur cinema. Indeed, it began as a project of investigation into all the film material that was not catalogued in other state collections in Poland. Speaking about the technical structure of this format, Derrida noted that archiving not only records, but also *produces* the event⁴. He thus established a link between the emergence of the document in itself and its relationship with the future. This is an interesting idea, if we see how Cummings and Lewandowska's project has led to two well differentiated moments. On the one hand, there was the opening of the exhibition under the title of *Enthusiasts* in the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, which reinforced the subjectivity of the amateur film-maker with regard to his or her cultural and social context. And on the other, the presentation of *Enthusiasm* at the Whitechapel gallery in London, the KW in Berlin and the Fundació Tàpies in Barcelona, where it was based more on the force of enthusiastic collective impulse as a trigger for counterculture in the socialist system. In this second phase, the value of re-interpretation exercised from other contemporary social and cultural perspectives reinforces the problem of representation between socialism and late capitalism.

The film clubs created during the days of the People's Republic of Poland were associated with the factories, where workers could avail of the materials they needed to film everyday life. In this way, the authors had autonomous and collective access to the means of production. The material selected by the artists for this project includes a possible genealogy of the everyday as a subversive tool. The focus is on the figure of the amateur enthusiast per se, faced with the object of production. Driven by personal passions their activity appears to form part of a marked temporal duality between spare time and work. Under these conditions, their motivation is guided by a desire to represent the everyday without influencing it; a commitment to the construction of an autonomous critical space of self-representation, and the urgency to control the record of social life in the face of the traps of historical action.

Camera Buff by Krzysztof Kiéskowski, made in 1979, offers us a fictional perspective on the activities of these organisations during the 1970s. The film begins when Filip Mosz buys a movie camera to film his new-born son. The manager of the factory then suggests that he could make films about the workers, and puts him in charge of organising a film club.



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Filip gradually becomes aware of the power that his filming has to intrude upon the real, and its negative repercussions on the utopia of the common and he ends up turning the camera on himself, replacing the social portrait with a personal one of himself. The première of this film is included in the archive lounge of *Enthusiasm*, and during the presentation at the Whitechapel Gallery it was projected in parallel in the lecture hall. The cross-referencing between amateur and professional production, and even between document and fiction, allows the visitor to recover the sense of moral tangle of the activities of these film clubs: the dialectic force of the filming (objective /subjective) is instrumentalised or threatened by the brittle logic of the socialist system.

In the post-industrial context, the division between leisure and work is more blurred, preventing us from clearly defining the current value of enthusiasm in the social sphere.

The creative capacity of the amateur film-maker in socialist Poland, fulfilled in his spare time, produced a cultural counterpoint. Today, that same motivation can create a clear substitution for labour, becoming a new resource for contemporary capital. In a free market society, the new amateur has to constantly analyse the informal way in which the social is approached.

Archive material under the rules of the *Creative Commons*

Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, together with the authors of the films, have decided to register the material in *Enthusiasm* under the *Creative Commons* licence. Their intention is to situate the collection in a new space of opposition and contrast to the old state-held amateur film archives, which have been now privatised and charge a large sum of money for access to the material and screening rights. What *Enthusiasm* seeks to do is to establish itself as an open source, i.e., a set of loaned films which are going to be digitised and will be accessible *online*, not only for viewing, but so that future film-makers can use them as resource material⁵.

The *open source* movement and the *Creative Commons* is emerging as an arena of strong confrontation to the dominant discourse of copyright, offering an alternative system for producing and distributing knowledge⁶. Under the rules of the *Creative Commons*, the *Enthusiastic Archive* puts back the collaborative motivation that inspired this material. It also offers its authors the chance to participate actively in decision-making on future uses, alterations and distribution of the films. ❧

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NOTES & REFERENCES

1 DERRIDA, J. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

2 Under this idea, the archive operates as a discursive terrain facilitating a critical analysis of the structures with which art is produced, distributed and consumed. This conception adds a new approach to the "framework of material culture", and offers an open reflection on the art object and its relationship with the institution and with other sojourns of reality.

3 CUMMINGS, N. and LEWANDOWSKA M., *Enthusiasm*, London : Whitechapel; Berlin : KW Institute for Contemporary Art; Barcelona : Fundació Tàpies, 2005.

4 DERRIDA, J. Op. cit. p. 17.

5 CUMMINGS, N. and LEWANDOWSKA, M. Op. cit. p. 27.

6 LIANG, L. *Guide to open content licences*, Rotterdam : Piet Zwart Institute, 2004.