

Archive Fever. Archives of Contemporary History and Art in Poland After 1989 (Warsaw, 13-14 Nov 09)

Sylvia Serafinowicz

in Poland After 1989 (Warsaw, 13-14 Nov 09)

Institute of Art History, Warsaw University, Archaeology of Photography Foundation, Ars Auro Prior Foundation, and History Meeting House

have the pleasure to invite you to the seminar/workshop:

"Archive Fever. Archives of Contemporary History and Art in Poland After 1989."

which will take place on the 13th and 14th of November 2009 in Warsaw at the Dom Spotkan z Historia [History Meeting House] (13.11) and Warsaw University, ballroom of the Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, (14.11).

During the interdisciplinary seminar/workshop Archive Fever. Archives of Contemporary History and Art in Poland After 1989. We would like to reflect on the issue of archive research in the historical, artistic and cultural context, as well as its significance for theory and practice. The invitation has been extended to historians, art historians, philologists, cultural anthropologists, archivists, curators and artists. We aim to address the following issues: what are the key archives in Central Europe? How to analyze the archive material amassed by institutions of an oppressive power apparatus? What is the relationship between archives and memory? What is the role of archives in research on the Holocaust within the context of non-memory, repressed memory, and exclusion? How can a research practice combine archive research with research based on "oral history"? Can artistic practices foster a new understanding of the notion of an archive?

Seminar Program

Friday, 13 November, 2009

Venue: Dom Spotkan z Historia [History Meeting House],
ul. Karowa 20

9.00-9.30

Introduction:

Dr Luiza Nader (Institute of Art History, Warsaw University),
Karolina Lewandowska (Archaeology of Photography Foundation,
Warsaw)

9.30-10.15: Lecture by Professor Daria Nalecz (Lazarski School of
Commerce and Law, Warsaw)

10.15-11.45

Panel Discussion 1

Archives of Contemporary History (and Art)

Professor Marcin Kula (Institute of History, Warsaw University),
Dr Blazej Brzostek (Institute of History, Warsaw University), Dr
Magdalena Radomska (Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz
University, Poznan), Zbigniew Gluza (Karta Center Warsaw)

Moderated by: Dr Marcin Zaremba (Institute of History, Warsaw
University)

Documents created by archive databases that are incessantly established, or made accessible, offer scholars new historical sources and open up new fields of research. In the last 20 years, in Poland as well as in other post-communist countries, the archive became an object of both fascination as well as of ideologization and politicization and a site for interpretation of the work of the unconscious and desire in social space. However, the distinctive feature of Central and Eastern European countries in relation to archives of history and contemporary art is the power of both negative and positive transference invested in archive structures, 'the archive fever', as well as the gradual downgrading of the discourse of memory in historical research. The inaugural debate of the workshops will address the key archives of history and art in Central Europe, including Poland, Hungary and Romania, as well as methods of linking archive research with oral history. We will also address the issue of employing the historical materials of an oppressive power apparatus and the ethical questions connected to the 'lustration process' (topics such as collaboration) in selected countries of Central Europe. Other topics include the influence in Poland of both the archives as well as archive discourse, on the shaping of historical memory, identity and the foundations of Polish society.

Discussion

Break

12.00-13.30

Panel Discussion 2

From Collection to Archive

Karolina Lewandowska (Archaeology of Photography Foundation, Warsaw),
Joanna Mytkowska (Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw), Agnieszka Szewczyk
(Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, Warsaw), professor Andrzej
Turowski (Université de Bourgogne, Dijon)

Moderated by: professor Maria Poprzecka (Institute of Art History,
Warsaw University)

Since 1989 the question of archives of contemporary art has undergone an exceptionally dynamic transformation: on the one hand, collections of artworks and documents were dispersed and destroyed, on the other, they were constructed anew and made accessible. Artistic collections of documents as well as the need for archiving these met with interest on the part of newly established art institutions. The constructed archives of contemporary art serve to disrupt the existent historical tracks and point to phenomena hitherto excluded from art historical discourse, creating opportunities for establishing alternative historical narratives. However, it is exclusion that forms the structural characteristic of an archive. Therefore, one should ask which histories can possibly be developed and which ones will be obscured? What kind of future is produced by the archives and what, in turn, is forgotten? This panel discussion will be devoted to both the process of transformation of collections into archives and the (historical) passageway leading from collections to archives. The discussion will focus on currently established and researched archives of such artists and art critics as Zbigniew Dlubak, Ryszard Stanislawski, Henryk Tomaszewski, Andrzej Partum or Grzegorz Kowalski. The panel will also shed light on the issue of the 'Living Archive' [Zywe Archiwum] of 1971 - the first Polish critical proposition (put forward by Andrzej Turowski and Wieslaw Borowski, critics then connected with Foksal Gallery) that revealed and challenged the structures of an archive. We will also reflect on a peculiar discursive transposition, from the questions of archive to collection, embedded in the history of Foksal Gallery. The discussion will address both the positive aspects as well as doubts concerning the process of archiving, institutionalization, and making accessible the archive collections of history and art.

Discussion

Break

15.45-17.15

Panel Discussion 3

KwieKulik Archive

Zofia Kulik, Dr Łukasz Ronduda (Center for Contemporary Art, Warsaw), Maryla Sitkowska (Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, Warsaw)

Moderated by: Dr hab. Agata Jakubowska (Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan)

The emerging archives of contemporary art, particularly those of the neo-avant-garde, possess not only a potential for developing 'inadequate histories' (which diverge from the dominant historical narrative as well as from the positivist vision of the past), but also for criticizing the very idea of an archive. In the artistic field in Poland, up until 1989, the major issue was related to the lack of interest, on the part of official institutions, in documenting and archiving art that rejected traditional media. The endeavor of documenting their own ephemeral actions, as well as immediate surroundings, was above all undertaken by galleries and artists - nonetheless this activity rarely untied the structure of an archive itself. The discussion will focus on the exceptional phenomenon of Atelier for Activities, Documentation and Popularization [Pracownia Działan, Dokumentacji i Upowszechniania] established by a neo-avant-garde artist duo in a private apartment on the 1970s. Since its inception the Atelier for Activities, Documentation and Popularization has described the specific idea of protecting, making accessible, producing and distributing knowledge on artistic phenomena situated beyond the boundaries of the interest of art history of the time. The discussion will address the specific character of the KwieKulik archive, highlighting attempts at institutionalization of the Atelier and its current role in establishing alternative narratives of art history of the 1970s.

Saturday 14. 11. 2009

Venue: Warsaw University, ballroom of the Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, Krakowskie Przedmieście 32

9.30-12.00

The Archontic Power of the Archive. Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practices.

Panel Discussion 1

'Archive of Constructivism', 'Working Title: Archive',
'Central Archive'

Wojciech Nowicki (Imago Mundi Foundation, Krakow), Dr Andrzej
Lesniak (Institute of Culture, Jagiellonian University, Kraków),
Magdalena Ziolkowska (Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz)

Moderated by: Dr Adam Mazur (Center for Contemporary Art, Warsaw)

Since the 1970s the archive and its alluring aesthetics, exclusive structure, immensity of stored data, approach to memory and forgetting, possibilities of expression and discourse-making, have occupied both historians and philosophers as well as curators and artists. What could be seen as the contribution of curatorial practices in the field of archive exploration, including their role and function in the writing of history and art history in Poland? These as well as other issues and problems will be addressed during a meeting devoted to curatorial practices with focus on such exhibitions as 'Archive of Constructivism' and 'Central Archive', publications from the 'Working Title: Archive' series and the curatorial practice of Arlette Farge.

Panel Discussion 2

'Place' by Rafal Jakubowicz

Dr Piotr Bernatowicz (Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz
University, Poznań), Rafal Jakubowicz (Academy of Fine Arts, Poznan),
Dr Ewa Mikina

Moderated by: Karol Sienkiewicz

Archive theory develops incessantly, offering new research perspectives for both historians, art historians and artists. However, how can artistic practices be seen in terms of their contribution to reflection on archives? What areas of archives, hitherto not addressed, do they shed light on? The discussion will focus on Rafal Jakubowicz's 'Place' [Miejsce], work referring to the archive of Foksal gallery, including empty spaces and traumatic points of the archive.

Discussion

Break

12.15-13.45

Discussion 2

Memory and the Archive in Research on the Holocaust

Dr Elzbieta Janicka (L. Schiller Film School [PWSFTViT], Lodz),
Dr Jacek Leociak (Polish Center for Holocaust Research, Institute
of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences,
Warsaw), Alina Skibinska (Polish Center for Holocaust Research,
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of
Sciences, Warsaw)

Moderated by: Professor Ewa Hauser (American Studies Center,
Warsaw University)

Memory constitutes the structural break of an archive, wrote
Jacques Derrida, pointing to affinities between the archive,
forgetting and death. This merciless logic of the archive
(cataloguing, classifying, enumerating, etc.) served as the
principle of concentration camps, claims Ernst van Alphen,
indicating the ambiguous nature of archive aesthetics in various
artistic works devoted to the Holocaust issue. The Holocaust
consisted not only in the total annihilation of human individuals,
but also that of witnesses - of memory, an attempt at the complete
effacing of all traces and, at the same time, the unimaginable
dimension of the testimony, claims Georges Didi-Huberman. In order
to know and remember however, one needs to imagine. Archive
material devoted to the Holocaust are images 'in spite of all'.
What are the relationships between memory, imagination and archive
In research on the Holocaust? What is the role of archive material
in the face of non-memory, repressed memory and exclusion? How do
the archives reconstruct memory of the Holocaust? How do archive
practices teach us to both remember and un-remember? These, and
other issues will be addressed in the context of the book 'Warsaw
Ghetto. A Guidebook To a Non-Existent City' [Getto warszawskie.
Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście] by Barbara Engelking and
Jacek Leociak, Elzbieta Janicka's work "Festung Warschau", as
well as the archive of the Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Discussion

Break

15.45-17.15

Discussion 3

The Archive: Theories and Practices

Professor Ewa Domanska (Institute of History, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan; Stanford University), Professor Piotr Juszkiewicz (Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan), Professor Andrzej Paczkowski (Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw),

Professor Piotr Piotrowski (Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan; National Museum, Warsaw)

Moderated by: Professor Waldemar Baraniewski (Institute of Art History, Warsaw University)

'Archive fever', as Derrida claims, is both the need of the archive as well as the phenomenon of feverous searching for the roots, the unquestionable principles, the nostalgia behind truth, which is hidden in the archive storage. While neither the archive structures nor the attitudes of scholars remain neutral. Likewise, the discourse of memory should not be seen as antithetical to that of the archive. How then should one analyze the issue of transference in historical research? What procedures and criteria are required by historical disciplines both in reference to the archives of most recent history as well as to memory (oral history)? What is the role of empathy in historical research? And what consequences for archive research result from critical theory, as found in texts by Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Hayden White, Jacques Derrida, Dominick LaCapra, which rejects the notion of truth, source and the 'objective total truth'?

Conclusion

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ArtHist.net

Archaeology of Photography Foundation

Ars Auro Prior Foundation

History Meeting House

Co-organizers:

Institute of History, Warsaw University

With kind financial support of :

Faculty of History, Warsaw University

The seminar was organized as a part of the 6th edition of 'Art Days' at the Warsaw University.

Reference:

CONF: Archive Fever. Archives of Contemporary History and Art in Poland After 1989 (Warsaw, 13-14 Nov 09). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 10, 2009 (accessed Jun 4, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/31985>>.