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The Archive

Paul Allain

Archives of You

What would an archive of you look like? What would it hold? Every birthday card, email, shopping list, scraps of writing? Where would you draw the line if you had to decide what was of value for the future and what was not? Some reading this might have performed a partial 'archiving' of themselves in autobiographical performances. What did they select to present? How do we edit our lives?

Our digital age is awash with text and image, with the past stored, with selfies, a representational ebb and flow. As Evan Spiegel, the CEO of Snapchat, recently described it: 'you are the sum of your published experience. Otherwise known as: pics or it didn't happen'.¹ An irony here is that with Snapchat an image self-destructs after a maximum of ten seconds. It happened, but eleven seconds later, can we be sure? Records proliferate, ephemera multiply. What should remain, what disappear? How do we edit such excess?

Many reading this may well be, like me, academics in the UK. Those who are don't need to be told that we face a related issue regarding our research, which now has to have, and, more importantly, be able to evidence having impact. This is according to the criteria of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, a peer assessment of published research and, in the new iteration, also its impact, which takes place across the UK every six years or so. We need to be experts at retrospective archiving, able to look back even to 1993 to see how the genesis of our earlier research has since 2008 had an 'effect on, change or benefit'² to others, in the main to justify to the government how well spent research funding is. From now on we need to anticipate such change, shaping our personal archives by determining what vital evidence they should contain to corroborate some potential impact. Here there's no ten-second time limit.

¹ Evan Spiegel, '2014 AXS Partner Summit Keynote', *Snapchat*, 25 January 2014 <<http://blog.snapchat.com>> [accessed 3 March 2014].

² *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions*, REF 2014, (HEFCE, 2011) p.45

How can we know what the effects of our research might be? Is it just a guessing game? And will we start to shape the research to predetermine the impact as we have to account for the public reception of what seems for many of us almost a private passion? We need to become expert editors, preserving and shaping the past, conjecturing how it might be read or experienced in the future.

Arch(L)ives of Others

When we start to consider how we ourselves might be archived and have to archive, we perhaps can feel more keenly just how ideological this process is and archives as entities can be. We appreciate how the archive constructs identities as it is edited. My formative academic years as a PhD researcher from 1989-93 were complex in terms of my witnessing other societies being dismantled, history being rewritten, and a general disorientation, socially and politically. My PhD reflected this and lacked – inevitably as my examiners reassured me – a throughline argument. Most of my research then and since has been done in Eastern Europe and Poland especially, where distrust of archives has manifested itself in many ways, at a most basic level in the neglect of public collections and the assiduous maintenance of private ones. In rural Bulgaria I wandered through dark museums where they reluctantly turned on the lights room by room for me to see the exhibits. At Tadeusz Kantor’s Cricoteka Archive in the summer of 2013, on a Friday morning the still drunk manager switched the lights on in a Krakow cellar to reveal a rather shabby disappointing audio-visual celebration of one of the world’s leading theatre and performance artists.

Such niggles seem petty though when compared with the Poles’ broader experience. Their Office for the Preservation and Dissemination of the Archival Records of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN in Polish) has stirred up serious rancor. This institution ‘collects, keeps, secures, elaborates on, records and makes documents available [...] of the State Security Service created between 22 July 1944 and 31 July 1990 and also the documents of the Security

Service of the German Third Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'.³ Quite an editorial responsibility! Problems with the IPN's role lie not just in illustration, the process of monitoring politicians and civil servants for their past involvements and affiliation ahead of any selection, but also in how politicians have used the archive and its publications for picking fights, attacking opponents, and stirring up racial hatred. An archive is never neutral or passive, especially not in Eastern Europe. This has become especially evident since 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, as once private materials have become public property.

The IPN's formerly secret function was turned upside down by Polish group Theatre of the Eighth Day (Teatr Ósmego Dnia) in their performance *Teczki* (The Files, 2007). I first encountered their work in 1985 at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. They had originally been invited to perform their piece *Wormwood* but because only half the company were granted visas by the Polish authorities, a new piece, *Auto Da Fé* was devised and performed in its place. *Auto Da Fé* won a Fringe First Award, an achievement denounced by the Polish government because, according to them, the group 'did not exist'. *Teczki*, discussed in more detail by Murray Edmond in this journal's pages,⁴ involved the company quietly sitting and reading aloud extracts from their own secret police files from the 1970s and 1980s, held now by IPN.

The most interesting of these for the company were not the minutiae of their lives, already lived of course, but the previously unknown 'reviews' of their performances. The existence of a whole parallel ideologically-driven body of a bastard form of 'theatre criticism' is surely something that merits further study – though most theatre reviews of the 1970s in Poland were of course equally ideologically motivated. What counts more in this example is that the archive is

³ Institute of National Remembrance, 'Office for the Preservation and Dissemination of Archival Records', *About the Institute of National Remembrance* <<http://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-institute/structure/offices/office-for-the-preservation-and-dissemination-of-archival-re>> [accessed 3 March 2014].

⁴ Murray Edmond, 'Signs of Reading: The Theatre of the Eight Day's *Teczki* and *Czas Matek*', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18.4 (November 2008), 442-56.

repossessed as the performers take back into their hands the annotated substance of their own edited lives, previously invisible to them. They reclaim it as they, crucially, bring it into the public sphere. Theatre reconstructs the constructed; but, in an entirely other frame, everything operates and reads quite differently.

Editing is about control of a kind that can be highly cynical or destructive, as witnessed across multiple IPN documents. But equally, editing can construct in positive ways, shaping materials for others, giving snapshots (not Snapchat) of a larger whole, putting things together that have been dispersed or invisible, thereby opening up new insights.

Film is perhaps the field (certainly more than publishing) where the job of editing is most widely recognised. *Lives of Others* (2006), directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmack, shows some quite different implications of when the private becomes public. Made in Germany in 2006, at a time when in Poland the IPN was under the severest scrutiny for its political game-playing, the film shows what happens when a personal history has been carefully edited, in this case by a sympathetic Stasi spy in Eastern Germany. He becomes fond of the object of his espionage, playwright Georg Dreyman, touched by Dreyman's and his girlfriend's affection for each other. Whilst 'Eighth Day' remind us through theatre of how alternative lives can be built by the State, in this film Stasi officer Wiesler's archival recordings protect and save the writer from persecution and imprisonment. At the end of the film when the archive opens up to public scrutiny, Dreyman reads Wiesler's notes and is unable to recognise his life therein. It then slowly dawns on him how this archival lie has in fact saved him: the irony of the playwright being rescued by another's fiction makes the film all the more poignant.

The editing of academic publications should always aim to be enlightening and enriching, should always try to help, though it rarely has such life or death implications as depicted in the *Lives of Others*.

Archives of Me

Apart from the 'life of myself' that I erratically record, sometimes in publications such as these, my only active archival experience in terms of constructing one was improvised: incidentally building the British Grotowski Archive. This was gathered during the 2006-09 Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded British Grotowski Project, whose website is itself now archived.⁵ As we researched, our team collected audio-visual materials and texts but also photographs that we had commissioned for our final exhibitions. Some were of the rural forest base of Brzezinka that Grotowski had set up for paratheatre, outside Wrocław.⁶ Many of these materials were hard to acquire or simply didn't exist, vindicating the project's central aim of putting more and better materials on or by Grotowski into the public domain. After 2009, the gathered papers, photographs, DVDs, and posters sat idle again in my office. Needing space, I had a list of them drawn up, loosely categorised, and catalogued in a 16-page document. The materials were then relocated to the Templeman Library Special Collections room at the University of Kent. I cannot advertise or announce the archive formally, as this would require copyright clearance of every piece. I probably should not even be mentioning it here. Such logistics and legalities aside, though I know how vital these are to any official collection, the library, and thus the archive, is open to all visitors.

Is this archive of any note? Of course serious Grotowski scholars should head to Wrocław in Poland where the Grotowski Institute has a vast range of materials, though most not yet catalogued online. But for many that is a step too far for a temporary or fleeting interest, perhaps an article or student dissertation rather than a book. For some, Poland still seems quite remote, as evidenced at our 2009 British Grotowski conference where international visitors professed that they would come to Canterbury more readily than travel to Wrocław. Some

⁵ See *The British Grotowski Project* <www.britishgrotowski.co.uk> [accessed 16 April 2014].

⁶ For a reproduction of one of these see Virginie Magnat, *Grotowski, Women and Contemporary Performance: Meetings with Remarkable Women* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 154.

were nervous about the language, even though this is hardly an issue. And cases like the scandal around IPN understandably make people cautious.

My small distorting (because very partial) 'mirror' archive has now been used numerous times by others and extensively by me and the research team for several British Grotowski project books.¹ We had initially intended to publish a critical edition of works by Grotowski but, as this proved impossible, the alternative of several edited collections by Grotowski's collaborators emerged.⁸ The act of collecting materials, a kind of editorial process in itself, which also involved the translation of many texts previously unknown into English, revealed more and more riches. These manifested themselves, amongst others, in Ludwik Flaszen's *Grotowski and Company*,⁹ a collection of interviews called *Voices from Within: Grotowski's Polish Collaborators*,¹⁰ Zygmunt Molik's book and DVD,¹¹ and the more recent co-edited collection of Zbigniew Cynkutis's texts.¹² We have combined primary sources with multiple images and even films where possible, the better to present some sense of Grotowski's theatre's bodies, sets, and spaces that had been so lacking. Cynkutis's book includes 68 sketches of actor training and 45 illustrations or photographs, many from his own personal archive. These edited books share some properties of the archive, products, I like to believe, of the text and archive operating in constructive harmony.

Good or bad, archives are always partial but even that partiality needs careful editing and curating. We should approach them with caution and always

⁸ See Peter Brook, *With Jerzy Grotowski: Theatre is Just a Form*, ed. by Paul Allain, Grzegorz Ziółkowski, and George Banu (Wrocław: Grotowski Institute, 2009).

⁹ Ludwik Flaszen, *Grotowski and Company*, ed. by Paul Allain (London: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁰ *Voices from Within: Jerzy Grotowski's Polish Collaborators*, ed. by Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski (London: PTP, 2014).

¹¹ Zygmunt Molik and Giuliano Campo, *Zygmunt Molik's Voice and Bodywork: The Legacy of Jerzy Grotowski* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹² Zbigniew Cynkutis, *Acting With Grotowski*, ed. by Paul Allain and Khalid Tyabji (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

be prepared, for an archive is to some extent only as good as what it is used for, ultimately reflecting the abilities of its explorer.

What would an archive of you look like? What would it hold? Think carefully as you upload that picture...