

Visegrad Fellowship

Final Report

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The research fellowship was conducted between the 15th January and 15th March 2015.

Background

The original fellowship proposal included the following objectives:

My personal research is primarily concerned with the production of a collaborative film essay that addresses the ways in which institutions mediate the absence of images: the invisibility. Through an exploratory process of identifying secretive recording and clandestine surveillance materials the collaborative project will seek to visualize the multi-faceted process of 'covering-up' information gathering activities and how such 'hidden strategies' were partially evidenced through the use of instructive and technical training methods.

In addition to 'uncovering' internal surveillance techniques, I am also interested in identifying ways in which invisible censorship strategies penetrated the production of private images/home movies. For instance, what was the synchronic relationship between instructive and propaganda films and the production of home movies?

Thus, through combining excerpts of film, sound recordings and instructional directives from the Open Society Archives (OSA) a critical approach will 'uncover' what Hans Belting describes as: 'the politics of images relies on their mediality, as mediality usually is controlled by institutions and serves the interests of political power.' (Belting, 2005).

Artistic Methodology

The two-month fellowship was essentially an immersive (in-situ) research-based visual arts methodological strategy that created a symbiotic relationship between both the OSA Archivium and contemporary Budapest itself; notably the Visegrad Fellowship vis-à-vis Visregradi Utca.

Ultimately, the applied research framework and embedded artistic methodologies culminated in the production of a new short experimental film: General Mood.

During both the conceptualization and production of the film the aesthetic methodology combined elements of reconstruction, re-enactment and cinema verite; structurally embedded with text-based images sourced from the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Research Institute.

The re-enactment strategy was employed to question how 'invisible narratives' deducted or quoted from the RFE/RL archive, can be visualized now. My research methodology therefore questioned

different information gathering approaches through studying the relationship between different genres of documentation and how propaganda impacted upon socio-cultural processes in Romania.

Ultimately, this research methodology reflects my interest in re-visiting, re-activating and re-discussing the process of accumulating historical 'evidences' as well as the visualization of invisible narratives.

General Mood Film

General Mood is a film that embodies a performative archive through exploring the process of categorization and anecdotal information gathering that constitutes much of the Radio Free Europe archive. Filmed on location in Budapest, fragments of original text create a fractured narrative of meta-archival sources that are materialized through the process of following the trail of Radio Free Europe, an institution sponsored by the CIA until 1971. The category of 'General Mood' is explored through questioning the structure and content of research methodologies designed to create 'national pictures'.

The film, as well as the entire research process, is the result of a creative collaboration with my colleague Jon Dean. The outcomes of this research and the production of the 'essay film' General Mood will be presented at the Tranzit.ro gallery in Bucharest during March 2015.

Essentially, the methodological purpose of the film is to contribute to an analysis of the meta-narrative discourse around archives, information gathering, and public perception/reception of archives in general and the RFE/RL archives in particular.

The film is designed to present the viewer with de-contextualized fragments taken from the RFE/RL archive's 'General Mood' category. Moreover, it includes direct quotations from the 'Romanian Unit' reports in various forms: scanned and printed documents, re-typed documents, fragments as spoken text and fragments used as subtitles.

We have intentionally looked at and questioned:

- How do fragments of an archive perform?
- What task or function do they perform?

Consequently, we filmed 'performing words and utterances' against a blurry backdrop of Budapest, the current location of the RFE/RL archive. During our two month residency period we discovered various 'surveillance routes and contexts' including: a second-hand market, Nygati Train Station, Ferenc's Bar, Arany Janos Metro/Utca, OSA Archivium reception desk, Gyorgy Lukacs statue and St Istvan Park.

Similar to Alexei Yurchak's (Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More) proposition of looking into the shift in performativity of authoritative language; General Mood proposes the direct observation of the performativity of RFE/RL reports.

APPENDIX

Timeline and Project Outcomes

- Introduction to the OSA archive: January 2015
- Detailed research of the archive: January-February
- Filming and editing of material to be used in the production of the artworks: January-February
- Post-production and installation phase: 1st March -16th March
- OSA research presentation and pre-screening: 12th March
- Live Romanian national radio (dimineata cross-over) round table presentation: 18th March
- Exhibition opening and symposium at Tranzit gallery, Bucharest: 18th March 2015
- Exhibition dates: 18th March – 2nd April 2015
- Final report for OSA: 31st March 2015

Sources Used:

- Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute
- Romanian Unit (HU-OSA-300) 1946-1995
- Records of the Black Box Foundation 1988-2008
- Hungarian Workers Militia Films 1958-1989
- Documentary and Propaganda Films 1958-1989
- Records of the Film Studio of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior 1955-1989
- Propaganda and Educational Films 1955-1989
- Hungarian Home Movies (amateur films shot on 8, super 8 and 9.5 mm), collected by Péter Forgács.

Research Categories (Romanian Unit: HU-OSA-300) Include:

- General Mood (2000)
- Cosmic Flights (302/A)
- Jokes and Anecdotes (2001)
- Foreign Visitors (1501)
- Propaganda (2600)
- Radio (2605)
- Music (0806)
- Standard of Living (3200)
- Housing (3202)
- Luxuries (3203)
- Wages (3206)
- Editing (0802)
- Film (0803)
- Labor (1900)

- Youth (3500)
- Prices (3204)
- Patriotic Labor (1926)
- Railways (0505)
- Working Conditions (1910)
- RFE (2605)
- Restaurants (2003)
- Clothing (3208)
- Food (3201)
- Consumer Goods (3207)
- Hooliganism (3506)
- Spies and Agents (2305)
- Methods of Investigation (2307)
- Social Structure (3000)
- Artists (0809)
- Farmers (2003)
- Unemployment (1919)
- Doctors (1605)
- Lawyers (1805)
- Moral and Political Pressure (2205)
- Persecution (2200)
- Deviation (0607)
- Health and Recreation (1600)
- Education (1000)
- Class Discrimination (3002)
- Culture (0800)
- Women (1911)
- Recreation (1906)
- Resistance (2900)
- Press (2603)
- Sports (3100)
- Entertainment (2003)
- Ethnic Minorities (1100)

Note: The above categories were identified, researched and then embodied within the General Mood experimental film.