

Arnolfini Performing The Archive Wiki

Home

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA: THEATRE, FILM, TELEVISION

MAY 1st, 5.15pm, LECTURE ROOM

ARCHIVE, ARCHIVE, ARCHIVE II JULIE BACON A PERFORMING THE ARCHIVE EVENT

I will discuss the 'Archival Impulse' in culture at large, and suggest that the current forms in which it is manifesting, and expanding, are related, at least in part if not wholly, to conditions and values in this mass society: notably the materialism, determinism and literalism of the technocratic spirit.

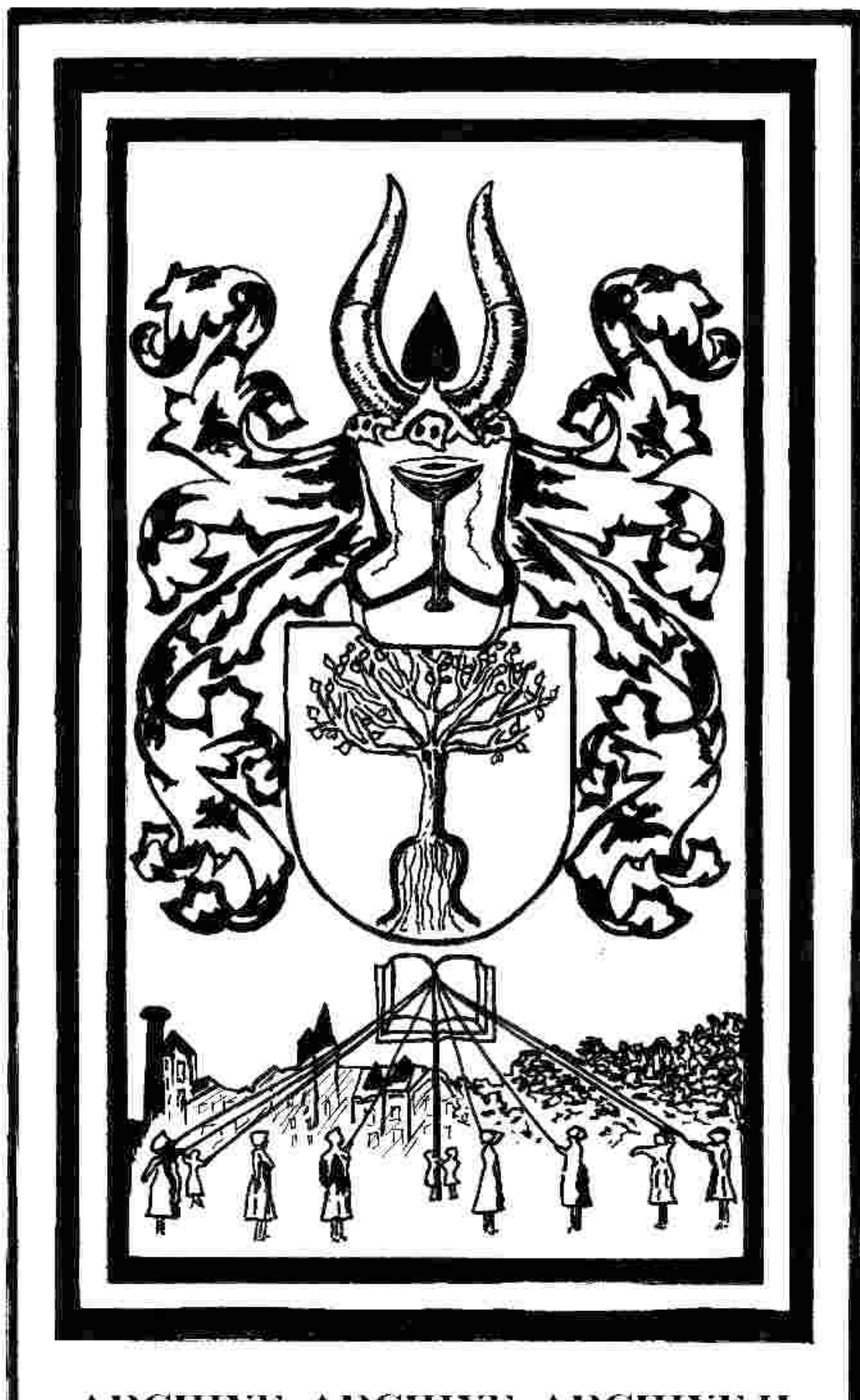
In contrast to the view that agency arises through forms of representation and the proliferation of appearances (say, documenting and self-imaging), a view that holds sway in liberal democratic politics of the day and some of its attendant academic discourse, I propose that an understanding of the relationship between presence and absence in archives is powerful. This leads us away from the path of reforming or improving 'the system', say by including more stuff (where 'the system' adds up to the process of history making) to an appreciation of archiving as ritual practice (of which, indeed, all systems are products). Thus the archival impulse involves sacrifice -whether avowed or disavowed, whether a matter of sacrificing or being sacrificed- within the greater ritual enactment of history and culture itself. There is no gain without loss, and in the shadow of all landfill sites, lies the archive!

I will give examples of powerful artworks that enact the relationship between appearing and disappearing- the playing out of presence and absence in art, archives and life - artworks that are in this way transformative (rather than claiming reform or improvement). There can be no greater contrast than that of the compulsion to become manifest -the ritual chant of 'show yourself, show yourselves, let us show ourselves!' - and to speak of this compulsion I will necessarily have to conjure up the matter of technology, a great driving force of modernity, that 'gigantic process...of psychic entropy...a movement towards a lowest point, triggered by a form of unwinding that is made possible by the discharging of energy through technology' (Peter Sloterdijk).

This is a new version of the paper 'Archive, Archive, Archive', previously presented at Tate Britain's *The Archival Impulse* study day.

JULIE BACON is an artist, curator and writer. From 2005-08 she was Research Associate in 'Art in Context' at Interface Centre for Art, Design and Technologies, in Belfast, where she completed a practice-based PhD in museum studies and contemporary art. She is a graduate in Drama, and holds an MA in Fine Art. Recently she exhibited *Hi Ho!2 Or A Homage to Kurt Vonnegut* with the artist Peter Butcher, at the Governors' Room of the Linen Hall Library, Belfast (25 Feb.-8 March 2008).

A University of Bristol, Department of Drama Research Event and one of a series of talks presented by Performing the Archive: the Future of the Past. This Great Western Research project is hosted by the University of Bristol Theatre Collection's Live Art Archives and Arnolfini Live's archives, and partnered with Exeter University Department of Drama. The project aims to develop the interrelationship and interactivity between the archives and communities of practitioners, scholars and audiences.



ARCHIVIA ARCHIVIA ARCHIVIA