

**Senta Siewert**

## **BORN TO BE ALIVE**

It was carrying out research in the Arsenal archive that led to the idea of shooting a documentary entitled BORN TO BE ALIVE about several experimental filmmakers. Alongside the various filmmakers having their say, the additional interview partners include the programmers who offer them a platform, including several participants of the Living Archive project. The documentary discusses current revival screenings of experimental films from the 1960s and 1970s as well as the ways in which filmmakers work together with programmers and those responsible for programming at cinematheques, festivals, archives and museums. The film is linked to the DFG research project "Programming, Curation and Reconstruction as Elements of a Performative Film Historiographical Practice", in which the Living Archive project and Forum Expanded play a key role. Expanding the horizons of previous film theoretical reflections, the project works on the assumption that screening practice plays just an important role in aesthetically determining the subject of film as is the case for a particular performance of a musical piece for example. In light of this assumption, the project draws on significant case studies to examine three key areas with regard carrying out archive work and portraying archive holdings: experimental film/expanded cinema, film and video installations and curated film programs. The period of investigation extends from the 1970s to the present. Methodologically speaking, the project closes the traditional gap between analysis and theoretical modeling in film theory on the one hand and the reconstruction of the reception experience on the other via the creation of a documentary that draws on historical reconstruction combined with an participatory accompanying analysis of curatorial and programming work. As film archives are gradually gaining in significance under the banner of the reflexive historicization of media culture, a process in which the circulation of film images in digital networks also plays a decisive role, the project pays particular attention to the relationship between memory and remembrance functions and film aesthetics at the place where film archives and exhibition practice come together. The starting point

is formed by the concept of the curated program as constituting a medium of representation and film historiography, a concept thus far largely neglected in previous research. The project raises the question of the extent to which the practice of film programming can be understood as a mode of historiography and/or film archeology using aesthetic means. It answers these questions based on an examination of concrete curatorial concepts from selected film and video art institutions, whose archives and collections and their respective preservation and reconstruction practices are analyzed from a comparative perspective. This method, which can be termed as a “pragmatic poetics of the archive work of international institutions”, includes both an analysis of the politics of archives as well as the aesthetics of the films and programs selected.

Arsenal occupies a special position internationally, as it is both a prestigious cinema and part of a major film festival as well as having built up a considerable collection that includes an online database. The different forms of expertise united in one institution form fertile ground for research and innovation projects, such as the Living Archive project, whose unique conception and implementation is leading the way for other institutions.