

Filip Anneessens

Brad Feuerhelm

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Archive projects are imposing. They are imposing in the sense that what we make of their content, subjects and general aims from the distance of a position in the future are often veiled in layers of subjectivity, projection and hypothesis. If the archive presented is not directly linked to the observer, a system of challenges presents itself quickly. First and most important is the personal experiences of the interpreter of an archive to continue or discontinue his or her own experiences and systems of information gained over their own lifetime to not project onto the thing itself. This seems like a very easy solution for interpretive analysis, but as time goes by, this is not so easy a task and one no matter how aware of the act of projection cannot but impose his or herself in order to explicate the possible truths within the images, if not the subjects themselves.

In looking backwards at the archive of Philippe Heymans presented to me by Vincen Beeckman, we made a pact that the deciphering of the material should be without the force of precluded information leaving the archive of work available to me as an open-ended pursuit and that the subject of my analysis would be based solely on what I could interpret from the images themselves. After I had accepted the challenge upon seeing the images, I was allowed three questions regarding the material and I quickly found out that they reflected more about my own interests in my own proclivities of time than they did about the true nature of the archive itself. It is this particular phenomenon in which archives become the illusory time capsules of contemporary projection in which we begin to untie more about the times the author lives in than perhaps the era in which the images were made.

In regarding the archive of Mon. Heymans it was inescapable that I found myself pondering the value we place in nostalgia. The pages of the PDF that I was paging through looked as though life had presented the subjects of Heymans photographs a certain honey-induced past in which times were simpler, less manic and less anxiety-prone. The images of the young men within the pdf with their differing nationalities and backgrounds, from my assertion Moroccan and possibly Italian/French subjects living in Belgium all befuddled in leisurely pursuits of sport, notably Karate or Kung Fu and swimming in short shorts raised some amount of suspicion that what I was looking at could be interpreted in any number of ways outside of the carefree and pleasant. With little information given, I had no choice but to ponder what I knew of Belgium now, which was not a small amount having visited quite a bit over the past years. I could not distill my experience of these early 80's photographs from my own experience in time, but with the aforementioned knowledge of the country in the images, I could ponder and project possible interpretations, many of which came back bordering on anxious.

At first what appears to be a rather joyous series of events in the photographs from beachside comeraderie to a healthy penchant for manual work, quickly dissolves into concern for the subjects within and who they could possibly be or have been. Could it be that this was some sort of community club in which boys of immigrant and poor families found solace in positive activities such as Kung Fu and swimming or did there exist something more sinister under the surface? Half-naked young boys in a large catalogue of images such as this surely point to something inappropriate, don't they? Further, who did these young men become and to what extent did this archive become information that could presage nascent political discourse in the future. Perhaps the man with the camera himself had secrets all manner of innuendo possible to the darker corners of Belgian crime specific histories regarding youth. The point

here is that it was almost impossible to fathom that this archive could simply be as sweet and graceful as it appeared at the outset-a veritable trove of images culled from warm summer breezes and sweat stained gym rooms. Could it be that what I was looking at was actually positive? Where was the hook in this I had asked myself. To what point would there be if this archive of images did not have a twist, a signature in which it was defined by nullity and negativity? Why do I desire traumatic turns when considering interpretive analysis of images from the future?

The cautious tale that I am trying to weave here throughout the sun-stained images of boys at play is that we are so accustomed to looking for red herrings, signs of struggle and clues of negativity that we begin to in-build a dark corner within ourselves exposing their possibility and our imaginative complacency in the fabrication of external negativity that even a simple and sweet set of photographic moments has been conditioned to lie to us from the past. It allows confirmation bias to develop and it blatantly extorts inner musings of inappropriate conjecture whether based on race or even the examination of the photographer's intent. When we cannot accept that these documents are banal and what they appear to be, we begin to manufacture their opposing ends. It is endemic of the times we live in and the way in which we have been conditioned to look for outliers that represent negativity, evil etc. within images presented as an archive as what point is an archive if it simply exists without hook, punchline or sensation in which the sleuths of photography can muster clues to our assertions about humankind and its frailties? How would I assess my own life and the lives of my friends presented back to me in say thirty years from a shoe-box of deletable files?

In closing, I want to argue for the continuation of projects such as Beeckman's in which the quotidian image or the image of tales told less sensationally become championed. We live in a world in which our fake need for exceptionalism or drama begins to drain our collective interest "the normal". We instead spend our time manufacturing trauma, potential tragedy and nullity within the archive. If there is anything to be learned, it is that life continues and for most it continues without these dramatic impacts and for most it continues without the need for the over financing of mythologies. In turn, as observers we should re-calibrate and discuss how we examine the past and its images before we decide on its histories unless we are given over to the fictionalization of unintended consequence.