



It's a film club, and **everyone's** invited

Recent artists' projects have made the assumption that film and video – unlike other media – are somehow public property, says Ian White. Giving power to the people to watch (and even make their own) art films could prove genuinely iconoclastic

If you're not yet receiving the daily batch of emails fired from the New York-based 'information bureau' e-flux, then you will be soon. An ever-growing and imminently all-pervasive daily email digest service established in 1999, it helpfully delivers news of exhibition openings, publications, art fairs and biennales (most of which you will not ever get the chance to actually see) on behalf of some of the world's leading institutions, straight to your inbox.

But if you'd scanned the subject lines closely over the past few months you might have read about an even more generous public service being provided in the name of artists' film and video: e-flux video rental (EVR). A project by e-flux's founders, the artists Anton Vidokle and Julieta Aranda, and inspired by the take-away aesthetic of Felix Gonzalez-Torres' candy works (where viewers are encouraged to help themselves to the boiled sweets that constitute the sculptures), EVR is unprecedented. Drawing on a video library of over 400 artists' moving-image works selected by a list of international art impresarios, the project has made previously inaccessible works by the likes of Cerith Wyn Evans, Yang Fudong, Yoko Ono, Lawrence Weiner and even Jonas Mekas available to view in EVR's public spaces and to take home – free of charge – to watch in your living room, assuming of course you live in the right town. And that's increasingly likely, because in addition to the New York original, stores have now been opened in Berlin, Amsterdam and Miami.

Is EVR an archive or an artwork? It intends to be both. Does it signify a tidal shift for a medium plagued by an irresolute relationship to museum display and by the inadequacies of its historical mode of dissemination, traditional film distribution? Maybe. But what is clearer – and more critical – is how EVR and a number of other recent artists' projects reveal underlying assumptions about the art form.

Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings' 'Enthusiasm' at London's Whitechapel Gallery (where I curate the contextual film programme) presented amateur films (transferred onto economical DVD) made in Communist Poland from the 1950s to the mid-1980s as a rigorous and dedicated research-based artwork. Its theatrical, architect-designed installation was an astute solution to the provision of three 'cinema' spaces and a recreated

amateur film clubhouse, although the floor-to-ceiling velvet curtains, period furniture and trophy cabinets inadvertently glossed the production and the context of the films themselves. But then celebration was the key to this show: the artists' genuine love of and desire to collate (or curate) this extraordinary archive encouraged the viewer to imagine the benign, leisure-based activity of the once-aspiring, state-supported directors, none of whom were represented at the show's opening. A web-based archive is proposed as the legacy of this project, facilitating access following the Prelinger Archives model – the collection of vintage American ephemera that provides endless material for artists' found footage work.

assume vivid astro focus's 'Butch Queen Realness with a Twist in Pastel Colors' at Tate Liverpool takes the celebratory impetus of 'Enthusiasm' to decadent excess. It's an ever-growing, subjective and gluttonous

'Eli Sudbrack's video programme is not an artwork in its own right but a social service'

video programme that does not claim to be an artwork in its own right, but more a social service to audiences previously deprived of the work it includes. Experimental film, contemporary video, Harlem's underground vogue balls, Eighties New York nightlife, high camp pop videos and so much more, pulled together by the artist Eli Sudbrack and his collaborators into an 'extended climax' of potentially indefinite duration, are projected in a room of psychedelic intensity and combined with a programme of live performances. For its UK additions I contributed some tapes I edited of the genius queer performer The Divine David at the Vauxhall Tavern in 1998. Sudbrack's enthusiasm for work he classifies as 'rarely shown' determined that not everything included came with permission attached.

While clearly different in content, the shared assumption of these projects is that film and video, by some factor mysteriously inherent to the medium, is unconditionally publicly owned. This may be one of the virtues of art made in reproducible formats, the video tape replacing the coffee-table

monograph, but if only these models extended to canonical works of art in other media then we might experience the kind of radical disintegration of art history to which they allude: any art object shown anywhere, the subjectification of ownership rights, the museum in ruins. They don't, of course; but the promise of revolution might be found in a similar though starkly contrasting new project by Bernadette Corporation.

In turn (and often simultaneously) video makers, fashion designers, artists, gallerists and novelists, Bernadette Corporation is a collective originating from New York and now spreading its wings in Europe. 'Pedestrian Cinema' is a new, year-long venture located in Berlin that combines the open and immediate production and exhibition of videos in a way reminiscent of the energy and possibility with which Super8 fuelled the weekly screenings at the New Cinema on St Mark's Place in New York's East Village in 1979. Like a corner shop without walls, the project intends to edify the everyday, dismantle cinema's precedents and replace them with a spontaneous, inclusive activity driven up from the streets rather than down from the screen.

There are other near-precedents for such work. The British artist Emma Hedditch, for example, when invited to make a screening at a particular venue, would issue shot lists to local residents and the venue's mailing list rather than showing pre-made work, compiling the acquired footage in situ and in collaboration with those who had contributed it. Nevertheless, 'Pedestrian Cinema' is a genuine attempt at an iconoclastic archive in the making, rather than one waiting to be discovered, re-branded or re-authored. It's difficult to know quite what this cinema will look like, but with the Corporation's plan to extend their process to audiences themselves as potential participants – from actors to producers – is it an invitation we can afford to turn down?

'Enthusiasm', to 11 Sept, Kunst-Werke, Berlin (+49 30 24 34 59 0, kw-berlin.de). assume vivid astro focus, to 23 Oct, Tate Liverpool (+44 (0)151 702 7400, tate.org.uk/liverpool). 'Pedestrian Cinema', to July 2006, Berlin (bernadettecorporation.com). For more information on e-flux and the video rental project, visit e-flux.com

Left: Ladytron performing in the assume vivid astro focus installation at Tate Liverpool, 18 May 2005