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Curating Access to Audiovisual Heritage: Cultural Memory and Diversity in European Film Archives

Dagmar Brunow

Abstract

Archives, just like museums or libraries, are agents which contribute to the creation of our cultural memory. Inextricably linked to the notion of cultural heritage, they highlight some narratives, while sidelining or excluding others. Therefore it is important to critically reflect on the question “whose heritage” (Stuart Hall) is created in the process of archiving. This article looks at the politics of creating access to audiovisual heritage in European film archives via online video streaming opportunities. Examining audiovisual archives as agents in the construction of transnational memories, my research aims to provide new ways of reflecting on diversity practices in archival selection. As case study, this article examines the archival politics of the national film archives in Sweden, especially the way archivists are curating the site Filmarkivet.se.

Keywords

Film archives; heritage; diversity; access; archive; memory

Résumé

Les archives, tout comme les musées ou les bibliothèques, sont des agents qui contribuent à la création de notre mémoire culturelle. Inextricablement liées à la notion de patrimoine culturel, elles mettent en évidence certains récits tout en marginalisant ou en excluant d’autres récits. Il importe donc de réfléchir à la question posée par Stuart Hall « à qui appartient cet héritage ? » dans le processus d’archivage lui-même. Cet article traite à propos des archives cinématographiques européennes la politique de la création d’accès au patrimoine audiovisuel par la mise en place des dispositifs de diffusion en flux. En examinant les archives audiovisuelles comme agents dans la construction des mémoires transnationales, cet article vise à fournir de nouvelles façons de réfléchir sur la sélection des archives et l’utilisation de celles-ci dans le monde entier. L’article examine, comme étude de cas, la politique archivistique des archives cinématographiques nationales en Suède, en se focalisant sur la manière dont les archivistes organisent le site filmarkivet.se.

Mots clés

Archives cinématographiques; patrimoine; diversité; accès; archives; mémoire
Moving images have proven to be highly influential for our understanding of the world, our societies and our identities. Through creating audiovisual memory, film archives play a fundamental role in shaping our view of the past. Meanwhile, the archivist has become a curator in the process of selection, exhibition and recontextualisation of film heritage, even more so in the digital era. Memories, however, are not inherent in the archival stock, but are created in the context of reception, through processes of remediation and recontextualisation. As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney remind us, memory is always mediated: “Just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation, there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics” (Erll/Rigney 2009, 4). Inspired by the theorizations put forward by memory scholars such as Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Erll/Rigney 2009, Erll 2011, Rigney 2012) and Michael Rothberg (2009), this article is based on an understanding of cultural memory as inherently transnational and multidirectional, as media specific and as an ongoing process, constantly reworked through processes of remediation. Remediation creates the audiovisual memory, which I have defined as “the sum of images, sounds and narratives circulating in a specific society at a specific historical moment” (Brunow 2015, 6-7). Therefore, it can be useful to revisit Aleida Assmann’s (2011) distinction between what it stored on the shelves (storage) and what circulates (functional memory or working memory). Assmann reminds us that the archival practice of storage is also an act of forgetting. Drawing on Assmann’s distinction, I claim that remediation and renewed circulation, the opposite of storage, are acts of remembering. Allowing films to circulate again can transform storage into working memory. Just like archiving, cultural memory is “an activity that is productive of stories and new social relations rather than merely preservative of legacies” (De Cesari/Rigney 2014, 8). The article will examine how archival practice and the remediation and recontextualisation of footage contribute to the circulation of audiovisual memory. I will use the concept of ‘remediation’ to describe processes related to the digitisation of analogue film gauge, while ‘recontextualisation’ is used to describe how digitised footage is presented to new audiences in new historical and discursive contexts.

European film archives have been collecting and safeguarding films since the 1930s. The digital turn has changed the role of national film archives as heritage institutions in Europe. “Where it used to be the size and selection of the holdings, access has become the pride of the contemporary archive”, Trond Lundemo (2011, 193) notes. Above all, digitisation has enabled film archives to present and exhibit audiovisual material to an unprecedented extent. Meanwhile, valuable work has been undertaken in film studies on issues of archiving and preservation, including Giovanna Fossati’s seminal book on the digitisation of film archival context (Fossati 2009, see also Noordegraaf 2011). My aim is to move beyond questions of preservation towards the political impact of archival practice and the role of the archivist as a curator in this process. As digitisation is time-consuming, most archives will only be able to digitise a small part of their holdings (Brunow 2012), or they need to create an order of priority, as has been established by the archivists at the Swedish Film Institute for their digitisation procedures (Svenska Filminstitutet 2014/2016). For this reason, research needs to highlight the role of the archivist as “the principal actor in defining, choosing, and constructing the archive” (Cook 2011, 614). The archivist-curator becomes a memory agent whose work feeds into the audiovisual memory

1 In my earlier research on cultural memory and remediation I developed the term “audiovisual archive” to describe the images and sounds circulating in a specific society at a given historical moment (Brunow 2015). To avoid confusion with the ‘archive’ as a concept and the ‘archives’ as institutions I tend to prefer the term ‘audiovisual memory’.  
2 Assmann (2016) also describes this as “storage forgetting” (“Verwahrensvergessen”) as opposed to her earlier conceptualisation of “storage memory” (Assmann 2011). I would like to thank Astrid Erll for bringing this terminological shift to my attention.
that constitutes our way of perceiving the world.

For film and media historians, the archive has been more often a repository for research than an object of study in itself. The archive, however, is a process in which knowledge and facts are continuously recreated and transformed. Foucault’s (1972) and Derrida’s (1998) influential theorizations have initiated a paradigmatic turn from the storage of knowledge to its production, thus challenging the alleged neutrality and objectivity of the archive. As “active sites of agency and power” (Cook 2011, 601), archives regulate what kind of information is available to whom. Therefore, the archivist has traditionally been conceptualised as a gatekeeper – as someone safeguarding the archival stock, preventing access. At the same time, though, archivists are enablers. They provide access to the archive, or rather they construct the archive and its archival content through categorisation, cataloguing and classification – metadata. Metadata, such as bibliographical entries, key-words or tags, is used to identify content and to improve ways of searching – and finding – material. The archivist, therefore, performs a crucial role in describing and categorizing the archival stock. Studying the role of the film archivist as a curator is only at its beginning (Cherchi Usai 2008, Bosma 2015). Yet, if we regard archives as sites of knowledge production, the curatorial practice involved in the process of archiving deserves further examination.

Like other heritage institutions film archives are sites for the negotiation of power, democracy, citizenship and belonging. While strategies of diversifying cultural heritage have hitherto been found in museums’ exhibition practice, my research turns the focus onto film archives, examining how film heritage can be “diversified” in order to account for the multicultural reality of today’s societies and the multiple modes of belonging that define our identities. Both heritage industries and archival politics contribute to the self-fashioning of the nation, and have repercussions on both the self-understanding of its citizens and their sense of belonging. National film archives in Europe have to follow specific guidelines regarding archival practices such as preservation, restoration, collection, and creating access. Unlike media archaeology (e.g. Ernst 2013), which has offered useful insights into the non-anthropocentric modes of transmission in digital archives, my ambition is to look at the impact of archivists and curators on the creation of audiovisual memory. In my current research project, “The Cultural Heritage of Moving Images” (financed by the Swedish Research Council, 2016-2018) I look at the notion of diversity in European national film archives, using the British Film Institute and the Swedish Film Institute as my central examples of best practice. This article, though, will focus on the Swedish national film archives. Drawing on the insights of film studies and (media) memory studies as well as interviews with curators, its aim is to outline some of the challenges currently faced by European film archives when it comes to exhibiting online content from the perspective of diversity. Its purpose is not to provide a detailed mapping of archival practices, but to provide useful examples for thinking further about the relation between curatorial

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3 The notion of the archive is a discursive concept, in analogy to Michel Foucault’s distinction of ‘archive’ (in an abstract sense) and ‘archives’ (concretely). However, the division is merely heuristic, as discourse and materiality overlap and are inextricably related.

4 However, as Deb Verhoeven (2016) reminds us, metadata is not descriptive, but performative, even forward looking: “Rather than limit our practices to ‘discovering’ or ‘finding’ or ‘collecting’ an a priori reality, producing knowledge infrastructures such as digital archives gives us a glimpse of a break in the clouds, a place where we can dream differently the contexts, controversies, complexities, and conversations that go into our sense-making.” Metadata have a utopian dimension to the extent that they involve carving out discursive spaces for different subject positions.

5 See, for example, Svenska Filminstitutet 2014/2016.

6 Despite being aware of the epistemological problems associated with the concept of “diversity”, I will use this term as an English translation of the Swedish word “mångfald” [which could also be translated as multiplicity]. See also Brunow (2015), where I discuss the relation between minorities and the archive in more detail.
practice in European film archives, multiple belongings and transnational, audiovisual memory.

The challenges of how to exhibit and contextualise films online are illustrated by two examples from one of the pioneering film archival projects in Europe: the video-sharing platform Filmarkivet.se run by the Swedish Film Institute and the Swedish National Library. The Swedish national film archives, which are based in these two institutions, use this platform to make parts of the nation’s audiovisual heritage freely accessible on a global scale (see also Jönsson/Snickars 2012). The films uploaded for streaming via Filmarkivet.se construct versions of regional, national and transnational cultural memory of Sweden and Swedishness. While Snickars (2015) has critically examined Filmarkivet.se’s potential for academic research, I will look at the way Filmarkivet.se tries to create access for the general public. Apart from selecting the footage for digitisation and subsequent online publication, the curatorial impact also occurs within two other areas: the paratextual information provided through metadata and the contextualisation of the film clip on the website through descriptive texts or suggestions of related videos. My aim is to examine how the films’ paratexts try to contextualise the uploaded footage for contemporary audiences. As an example of best practice for curating film heritage in Europe, Filmarkivet.se allows us to not only study the challenges of exhibiting audiovisual content from European film archives, but also to improve our theoretical understanding of the relations between national and transnational memories. While European collaborations between film heritage institutions have centred on questions such as the interoperability of metadata, copyrights laws or technical questions of digitisation, this article takes the issue of access in a different direction: towards the notion of diversity.

1. European Film Archives in the Digital Era: Curating Access to Audiovisual Heritage

Digitisation has implied both challenges and possibilities for film archives (Fossati 2009, Wengström 2013a). Films are digitised for a number of reasons. First, digitisation is used to restore film, although the sustainability of digital preservation remains questionable. Second, as analogue projection is gradually disappearing from European cinemas, digitisation is a means to create digital versions of analogue films, such as 35mm or 16mm film gauge, which can be screened in today’s cinemas. And third, digitisation allows films to be remediated and recontextualised after not having circulated for a while, for instance, because they are not available on VHS or DVD. As part of this development, national film archives in European countries are working on ways to make audiovisual material available across different online platforms. For this reason, they have been cooperating in various projects, such as the European Film Gateway (EFG) or Filmarchives online as well as EU Screen and its successor EU ScreenXL for European television history. As the interoperability of metadata is one of the challenges for the archives, aggregation systems were developed, such as the European Film Gateway which is linked to the online portal Europeana. Although access can be restricted, for instance by geo-blocking due to copyright laws, exhibiting films via digital video-sharing websites helps to re-circulate films which have been confined to the shelves for a long time. While these issues are continuously discussed between the contributing archives, questions of diversity have been sidelined (European Commission 2014).

Archives, just like other heritage institutions, can provide multiple modes of belonging. In the construction of memory and heritage, some narratives are highlighted, while others are neglected and excluded. Criticising

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See, for example, European Commission 2014.

For the most recent overview, see European Commission 2014.

(in this case British) heritage politics for targeting mostly the white middle-class, Stuart Hall suggests a more inclusive approach: “It follows that those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly ‘belong’” (Hall 2002, 75). Fatima El-Tayeb (2005, 1) sums up: “For [minorities], archives are sites of exclusion, a manifestation of the minority’s irrelevance to their nation’s history, rather than taken-for-granted containers of established history.” As a result, immigrants, LGBT persons or other groups are often excluded from the nation’s shared cultural memory and its idea of a common heritage. From this perspective, archives or museums seem to be places ‘about’, but not ‘for’ minorities, and a visit to an archive can reinforce a sense of ‘unbelonging’. Filmmaking is inextricably linked to notions of power, deriving from the industrial context of production, distribution and exhibition. Therefore, not all individuals or social groups are represented on equal terms. The histories of LGBT persons can be hidden in the archives, or are obscured by medical or juridical discourses. The same goes for disabled persons, representations of whom are often guided by paternalistic discourses. Documentary films about ethnic or immigrant minorities can be dominated by an ethnographic gaze and by racist or orientalist discourses. The impact of women in filmmaking has been marginalised as a result of patriarchal film criticism and historiography (Stigsdotter 2016). Since archives are instruments of power and determine the discursive space of what can be articulated, as Michel Foucault (1972) famously stated, national film archives are facing the challenge of how to incorporate diversity into their work.

Creating access to culture and cultural life is part of the Swedish national strategy for the digitisation of cultural heritage (Kulturdepartementet 2011). Heritage is not regarded as a stable concept but as being in flux, an ongoing dialogue with Swedish citizens who continuously negotiate and interpret its meaning. For Swedish heritage institutions, “creativity, diversity and artistic quality” are guidelines for the national digitisation strategy (Kulturdepartementet 2011). Diversity encompasses notions of ‘race’, class and gender, but also of sexuality and functionality. Ensuring diversity has become one of the main tasks for national archives, given Sweden’s liberal conviction that archives, or museums, should mirror today’s multicultural realities.

2. Film Archival Practice in Sweden After the Digital Turn

How could film archives possibly reflect on the role of the archivist as a curator? On its website the Swedish Film Institute offers information about archival policies and provides PDF-documents of their regulations (e.g. Svenska Filminstitutet 2014/2016) as well as articles by archivists (Wengström 2013a) for free download. These documents outline the framework of archival decision-making, though they do not go into detail about the specific film titles selected – or discarded. On its home page, Filmarkivet.se offers a link to a project presenting film archival research in the wake of the digital turn. Most of the material uploaded on filmarkivforskning.se is published under a Creative Commons license and thus freely accessible, such as early cinema literature, historic catalogues for cameras and film equipment, censorship cards (to name but a few examples of the rich material made available), but contemporary research publications on film archives and conference documentations can also be found. By 2014 the vast majority of Swedish cinemas had completed their transition from analogue to digital projection, so the Swedish Film Institute set out to digitise the entire archival holdings of analogue film gauge. The focus is not on digitisation at the expense of analogue preservation, though. On the contrary: analogue preservation goes hand in hand with digitisation (Wengström 2013a). Currently the national archives
at the Swedish Film Institute comprise 2,600 feature films, both fiction and non-fiction, and 6,700 short films. Archival policy for the Swedish film heritage encompasses films funded by the Swedish Film Institute as well as films released in Swedish cinemas, or films which were submitted to the Swedish censorship authorities prior to cinema distribution. In contrast, digitisation focuses on films produced in Sweden. During the period 2014-2018, the aim is to digitise 500 films, or 100 films per year.

In their work, archivists prefer not to speak about selection, but rather about creating an order of priority. Films are selected for digitisation not by the archivists alone, but by an editorial committee which consists of curators and archivists at the Swedish Film Institute as well as a reference group comprised of film scholars from Stockholm University, representatives of the National Library of Sweden, and other film organizations, such as the Swedish Federation of Film Societies and the Swedish Federation of Film Critics (Svenska Filminstitutet 2014/2016). Criteria are: films for children and young adults, a focus on diversity and “widened” representation, variety in terms of decades, film categories and different rights holders, films in demand, films of which no copies for loan have existed, films with unclear rights. The ambition is to make the films accessible “to the Swedish public” (Svenska Filminstitutet 2014/2016, 6). If wide-ranging access cannot be granted for some films, their digitisation will be suspended. For the Swedish national archives, digitisation processes range from digitally adjusting Swedish films digitised by foreign archives for cinema exhibition in Sweden, to creating digital copies of analogue film stock, to working on different levels of digital restoration (Swedish Film Institute 2016, 4). However, not all the digitised films can be exhibited online. Since national film archives usually do not hold the rights to the films in their collections, public exhibition is limited due to the current legal situation in copyright law. Moreover, related rights, such as music rights and personal rights or ethical reasons can prevent free online access.

Having to deal with different modes of access for their online content is common practice for audiovisual archives. While the Swedish website Filmarkivet.se is freely accessible online on a worldwide scale, the video-on-demand streaming service “Restaurerad” (“Restored”), launched in 2017, is only available in Sweden due to geo-blocking. Collaborating with the Swedish film distributor TriArt, the SFI distributes a selection of its newly restored films online – both canonised film classics and films which have not been available on VHS or DVD, such as the works by many Swedish female filmmakers from the 1970s and 1980s. Addressing the gender inequality in the film business and in film historiography alike is the ambition of “Nordic Women in Film”, a Scandinavian project initiated by the Swedish Film Institute (nordicwomeninfilm.com). Launched in 2016, the website nordicwomeninfilm.com highlights the professional contribution of women behind the camera, including filmmakers, scriptwriters, editors, producers or cinematographers: “Our ambition is to try to set the record straight by re-writing the history of moving pictures in the Nordic region from a feminist point of view, beginning in Sweden. We want to enrich film history, fill in gaps and allow more people to take

11 For exceptions, see Svenska Filminstitutet 2014/2016. The handling of foreign film in the archives is also discussed by Wengström 2013b.
12 To illustrate, the British Film Institute provides different sorts of access, depending on the current legal situation in copyright law. The BFI YouTube channel allows the widest access; it is free and – in theory – globally available. However, because YouTube is not an archive with the ambition to systematically collect and preserve audiovisual content, access to the content depends on the policies of the video-sharing website and its commercial interests. Other BFI online content is geo-blocked, such as most films made available via the BFI player. Film clips on older BFI websites, such as Screenonline, launched in 2003, are only accessible within UK schools, colleges, universities or public libraries.
13 “Nordic Women in Film” was inspired by the “Women Film Pioneers Project” (WFPP), initiated by Jane Gaines at Columbia University in 1993, launched as an online resource in 2013.
part in creating that history in the future” (Ibid.) While the website is not (yet) used to provide access to films by Scandinavian “women in film”, it gathers articles and essays on individual women or film historiography. The project also reaches out via social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as via its own Vimeo channel which does not exhibit archival footage, but provides short film clips, such as oral history interviews with contemporary (so far mainly Swedish) “women in film” about their female role models. “Nordic Women in Film” can therefore be understood as a multimodal complement to the official archival policy of digitizing films by female filmmakers. The website creates “plurimedia constellations” (Erll 2009) to promote the impact of women in filmmaking. However, let us now take a look at the way digital content is made accessible online, how issues of diversity affect the modes of exhibition and how the tension between national and transnational memories are played out.

3. Exhibiting Film Heritage Online: The Swedish Filmarkivet.se

Filmarkivet.se is a good example of how the digital turn has impacted the formation of audiovisual memory. Launched in 2011, the website provides free global access to a selection of archival film collections from the Swedish Film Institute and the National Library’s Division of Audiovisual Media, as well as to selected material provided by Sweden’s public service broadcasting corporation Sveriges Television. The 1,500 films exhibited via Filmarkivet.se are mainly documentary films, such as industrial films, election films or city films, as well as animation films, experimental and avant-garde films. Filmarkivet.se allows users worldwide to explore a steadily growing collection of hitherto rarely accessed footage reflecting “the transformation of Swedish society over the last century“ (www.filmarkivet.se). Filmarkivet.se helps to create transnational memories by presenting special collections of films by specific filmmakers, for example by Peter Weiss, who lived in Swedish exile, but also a series of documentaries on the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden in Congo, or selections of films from other archives, such as the art film & video archive Filmform or the Face of Aids Film Archive. In analogue archival times, most of the films now exhibited on Filmarkivet.se went unnoticed once they had entered the archives. Only a few academic researchers showed an interest in these films, while their existence was more or less unknown to the general public. It seems as if these films had been waiting for a site like Filmarkivet.se, as Jon Wengström (2013a, 41) puts it. Only now, through their remediation and recontextualisation, can many of these films become part of transnational audiovisual memory. Without the website these films would not have been made accessible, since they would not have been considered exploitable for cinema or DVD distribution and would have been of only limited interest for Cinemathèque or festival screenings. Filmarkivet.se became an immediate public success and registered half a million visitors in the first year alone (Jönsson/Snickars, 2012, 14) – an impressive number for a country with less than 10 million inhabitants.

The renewed circulation of archival footage contributes to the creation of transcultural memories (Brunow 2015)14. Since its inception, Filmarkivet.se has also gained interest among filmmakers and television producers alike who have asked for permission to reuse the footage for their film projects or TV programmes.15 The films

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14 I have suggested we distinguish between ‘transnational’ and ‘transcultural’ memory and to conceptualise transcultural memory not merely in terms of ethnicity and national identity, but rather in terms of cultural practice. The concept of ‘transcultural memory’ acknowledges the complexities of cultural practices even within a specific region and can help to understand how memories are adapted into new discursive frameworks. (See Brunow 2015.)

15 Filmarkivet establishes contact between filmmakers, producers and copyright holders, and once usage rights are cleared, Fil-
on Filmarkivet.se are re-circulating on the website and can be shared (though not downloaded) via social media such as Facebook or Twitter. While interactive tagging is not possible, users are encouraged to send additional information on each film directly via the website or comment on recent uploads via Filmarkivet’s Facebook page. Apart from providing film production credits and a short synopsis, the website contextualises several films with a longer piece of editorial work. This text is crucial for the full text search and search engine optimization of the film. The clips are searchable according to flexible time frames or different categories, such as “animation”, “geographical sites”, “society and politics” and others. Moreover, the films are searchable via “person”, film title, keywords or city. Searchable “themes” are newsreels, election films, Ingmar Bergman’s commercials, football films, radio, Olof Palme, and films about the World War One (divided into “Sweden” and “the world”). The source for the films’ contextual information, at least if no new texts have been written, is the Swedish Film Database, available online. It provides not only information about the production context, but usually also a short description of the film’s content. While Filmarkivet.se offers free global access not prevented by geo-blocking, not all users can benefit from the website’s worldwide accessibility. First, navigating the website requires Swedish language skills. Not only do the films lack subtitles in other languages, such as English, but the film descriptions on the website are only available in Swedish, and so are the metadata and the website’s search engine. Second, the films’ lack of Swedish caption subtitles or audio descriptions limits access for Swedish-speaking users who would require these.

The role of the archivist as curator who contextualises films for contemporary audiences will be illustrated by two examples from Filmarkivet.se. One of the most popular films on Filmarkivet.se is the documentary Födelsen (Birth, dirs. Gudrun Schyman, Lars Westman, 1979), which will be the first example. It documents the preparations for a birth and the actual process of giving birth. Originally filmed and distributed on 16mm, the film was circulated for educational purposes at maternity clinics throughout Sweden during the 1980s. Compared to the brief description in the Swedish Film Database, the text on Filmarkivet.se is much more detailed, reflecting the viewpoint of contemporary audiences, given that today the woman giving birth is a well-known person in Sweden. After the footage was made available on Filmarkivet.se and on the corresponding Facebook page, it gained new prominence, since the woman giving birth is none other than Gudrun Schyman, the former leader of the Left party (Vänsterpartiet, 1993-2003) and the leader of the Feminist Party (Feministiskt Initiativ) since 2013. Especially the publication on Facebook has engaged users to comment on the film (or on Schyman’s politics). This example shows how remediation implies a recontextualisation. The archival footage travels through different temporalities and discursive contexts, thus contributing to the creation of transcultural memories (see also Brunow 2015).

My second example addresses the representation of diasporic experience in a national context, using the example of the national minority of the Roma, one of the five officially acknowledged ethnic minorities in Sweden. It involves a scene in the nine-minute short film Uppbrott (1948) by acclaimed documentary filmmaker Arne Sucksdorff, where Roma women are shown dancing at a Romani camp to the music of a group of musicians. One of the women, highlighted through close-ups, is Katarina Taikon, later to become a Swedish human rights activist, also known as “the Swedish Martin Luther King”. Like the other women, Taikon is wearing what looks like traditional Romani costume. Some of the archival footage from this documentary

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markivet provides mpeg-2 files for a handling cost of 1000 Swedish krona (SEK) per film.
16 The other four officially acknowledged ethnic minorities are Sami, Jews, Tornedal Finns and Swedish Finns.
has also been remediated in the recent feature-length documentary Taikon (dirs. Lawen Mohtadi and Gellert Tamas, 2015). In the case of Uppbrott, the archivists have contextualised the footage with an additional text, which was written at the time of the upload and differs from the description provided in the Swedish Film Database. The paratext explains the production context and offers a critical perspective on the exoticizing tendency of the material. It highlights Katarina Taikon’s contemporary importance and informs the reader that the scene was choreographed by Birgit Cullberg, founder of the legendary dance company Cullberg Ballet in 1967. This information indicates that this is not an “authentic” scene, but rather a performance.

Comparing the newly written paratexts to less recent descriptions of the film, such as in the Swedish Film Database, indicates a discursive shift. While the Swedish Film Database describes Sucksdorff’s Uppbrott as “Song, dance and play and evening pastime at a gipsy [sic!] camp at Stockholm’s Årsta bridge”, the text on Filmarkivet.se contextualises the footage from a contemporary perspective. Moreover, instead of homogenizing an ethnic group, the text highlights the individual, Katarina Taikon, whose children’s books became part of Swedish literary history, and thus part of the national heritage. Drawing on Lawen Mohtadi’s recently published biography of Katarina Taikon (Mohtadi 2012), which quickly became a popular success in Sweden, the text explains how her participation in the film Uppbrott encouraged Taikon, then sixteen years old, to leave the husband to whom she had been married against her will two years earlier. Instead of reducing the representation of Taikon in the film to a mere stereotype, the newly written film description actually gives agency to Taikon. Exhibiting archival footage, such as Sucksdorff’s Uppbrott, implies a number of challenges for archivists. On the one hand, archivists as curators will have to deal with footage in which a Eurocentric, orientalist, racist or exoticizing perspective can be observed. To what extent can the contextualisation provide historical information at all? Should it address the representation of Romani people in Uppbrott as the ‘other’ of the national collective, which was the predominant way Romani were represented in Swedish cinema at the time (Wright 1998)? Should it analyse how the film ties into contemporary discourses of eugenics, prevalent in Sweden since the 1920s, as well as how it relates to today’s discourses of governmentality and issues of policing Swedish Romani (for instance by establishing a police register)? On the other hand, as this example has shown, film images can function as traces of the past and show that the existence of Romani people in Sweden is not a recent phenomenon, as today’s media coverage would often imply. Seen from a transnational perspective, the clip creates diasporic memories which can resonate with Romani memories in Europe and worldwide. Both examples have illustrated how curatorial practice can contribute towards a more diverse cultural memory in Europe and across the world.

4. Conclusion: Audiovisual Memory and Diversity in a European Context

As the construction of cultural heritage both includes and excludes groups and individuals, this article has set out to examine how film archival and curatorial practice can enable or counter a sense of belonging. If we

17 It can, however, be discussed as to what extent individualizing one group member runs the risk of homogenizing the rest of the group.
18 An analytical focus on stereotypes is not unproblematic, as it entails the risk of being reductive, a-historic and homogenizing. See also Shohat/Stam (1994).
19 It is important to keep in mind, though, that while film images can function as traces into the past, they are more than mere “visible evidence”: film images are the result of entangled discourses, iconographic traditions, narrative formulas and specific media technologies and their dispositifs.
understand the archive as the foundation from which history is written, then cultural memory can only create multiple modes of belonging if the archive creates diverse narratives and images. Heritage institutions, such as film archives, need to be careful not to turn the attempt towards more diverse representations of the past into a mere additive project as this can entail the risk of essentialism. In their seminal book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam pose the important question of how to avoid essentialist approaches to minorities and their identities: “How can scholarly, curatorial, artistic, and pedagogical work ‘deal’ with multiculturalism without defining it simplistically as a space where only Latinos would speak about Latinos, African-Americans about African-Americans and so forth, with every group a prisoner of its own reified difference?” (Shohat/Stam 1994, 343). Exhibition practice in times of diversity politics needs to keep this question in mind. Just like other heritage institutions, film archives across Europe need to reflect upon how such an essentialist notion of identity can be avoided in their handling of archival footage. The example of the Taikon-footage illustrates the archival challenge to avoid an “othering” of ethnic and social minorities, which dissociates them from the imagined community of the nation by marking them as bearers of a “different culture”. It therefore provides a good opportunity for curators to actually reflect on the notion of the archive as an agent in its own right and on their own role as the archive’s “executives”. In the process of creating audiovisual memory, archivists are one group that can contribute to renegotiating it – they do not determine, but they can influence whether it will be perpetuated or subverted.

The article has shown how curatorial decisions, such as the use of paratexts, can carve out discursive spaces for minorities within the remediation of cultural memory. Since the web offers the advantage of allowing different media to be published at the same time, at least if the usage rights are cleared, film archives could in future further exploit the possibilities of the web to contextualise films in an unprecedented manner. However, this would require more funding for the editorial work provided by in-house staff or outsourced writers and researchers. At the same time, more research is needed on what Terry Cook describes as “designs, changes, and biases of records classification systems, from records management file manuals to computer metadata” (Cook 2011, 619). Moreover, researchers would also have to track how records migrate from one system to another.

From the perspective of memory studies, this article has shown how European film archives can become more than a place of discovery and recovery, and can actually contribute to the creation of cultural memory. Through remediation and recontextualisation, audiovisual footage travels through a variety of contexts and discursive formations, while transnational and national frameworks constantly intersect (DeCesari/Rigney 2014, Brunow 2015). Ann Rigney has been suggesting a “shift from ‘sites’ to ‘dynamics’ within memory studies [...] , from a focus on cultural artefacts to an interest in the way those artefacts circulate and influence their environment“ (Rigney 2008a, 346). Online archival collections are both ‘dynamic’ and ‘sites’, aimed at transnational or global audiences, but often localised by various means: the language(s) in which the site can be navigated, the (lack of) sub-titles within the footage, geo-blocking, funding through national institutions, the current legal situation in copyright law or the national legislation of related rights, such as music rights. Therefore, digital archives create memories that can be guided by transnational and national frameworks at the same time. Although the archival footage on *Filmarkivet.se* has the theoretical capacity to move across different soundtrack versions, or remixes.

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20 For a more detailed discussion of these questions, see Brunow (2015).
21 For example, film or video clips, production notes, censorship cards, production stills, protocols, photographs, unedited footage, different soundtrack versions, or remixes.
and beyond national borders, other barriers and boundaries are imposed due to limited funding and legal restrictions. No doubt more funding would be necessary to increase the possibilities of accessing the website – even within Sweden. Even though memory is constantly “on the move” (Rigney 2012), national boundaries can prevent narratives and images from “travelling” (Erll 2011). As Ien Ang (2017, 4) has argued in the context of museum studies: “genuinely transnational, multilocal, and mobile representations of heritage and identity that transcend the structures of national particularity, often informed by deterritorializing notions of ‘diaspora’ are very rare indeed.” Despite promising transnational projects, such as Europeana, film archives in Europe are still bound by their national contexts to a surprisingly large extent.

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**Filmography**


*Uppbrott.* Dir. Arne Sucksdorff, 1948.
Dagmar Brunow is a senior lecturer in Film Studies at Linnaeus University, Sweden. She is the author of *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (de Gruyter, 2015) and the editor of *Stuart Hall: Aktivismus, Pop und Politik* (Ventil, 2015). Her research project “The Cultural Heritage of Moving Images” (2016-2018) has been financed by the Swedish Research Council.

Email: dagmar.brunow@lnu.se