

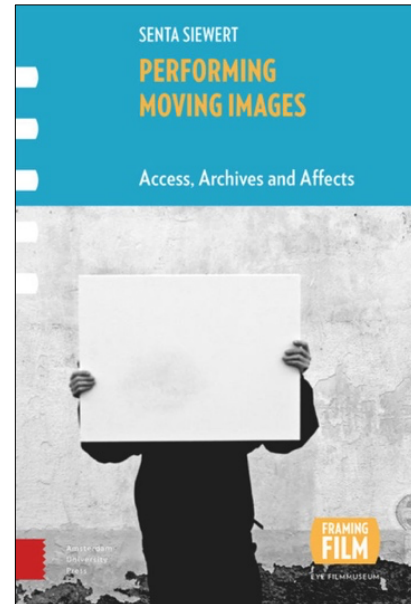
Senta Siewert, **Performing Moving Images: Access, Archives and Affects**, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press / EYE Filmmuseum, 2020, 190 pp., \$121.00 (hardcover).

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The responsibilities of the archive and its keepers have fundamentally transformed since the digital turn. As access—as opposed to storage—increasingly becomes the main objective of modern-day preservation, author Senta Siewert argues, contemporary archivists should be thought of less as the preventative gatekeepers of audio-visual culture and more as its curators.

In **Performing Moving Images: Access, Archives and Affects**, Siewert examines these vocational shifts by engaging theoretical discourses on archiving, programming, and curation alongside a participatory analysis consisting of interviews with the very institutions and cultural agents that make such concepts tangible. Notably, the text’s mixed-methods approach includes the author’s multimodal position as a scholar, filmmaker, and curator who enlists a “pragmatic poetics” that accounts for economic matters alongside aesthetic discourses. Siewert specifically attends to these dual aspects of exhibition and remembrance practices by focusing on experimental film and the Expanded Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. As much of this transnational corpus was in various ways (re)shown throughout festivals, events, and museums between 2007 and 2016, the included case studies ultimately concretize Siewert’s call to consider what she terms “expanded heritage,” which seeks to account for the diffusion of audio-visual archives across national borders and sociocultural communities (p. 131).

This first requires recognizing that while the archive discursively posits as the storehouse of history, it is above all an institution helmed by individuals—cultural agents who change over time—navigating particular programming and economic objectives. This means that its potential avenues for meaning-making are also constantly in flux. Consequently, in the first chapter, Siewert aligns herself with Giovanna Fossati and other scholars who similarly see archiving as an inherently social and creative practice regulated not by the past but by the “cultural here-and-now-ness” (p. 33). In other words, the current wave of archival and exhibition practices are fundamentally responsible for determining which films (re)enter, (re)construct, and remain in today’s collective memory; these socially constructed practices anticipate the present and future that will one day become past. Importantly, though, these practices are beholden to (trans)national and infrastructural cycles of relevance, which are themselves ever-changing in the digital age. As films become more available to varied formats and *dispositifs*, the vocabulary around such practices are also subject to change, and film historiography must vigilantly attend to these shifts.



Though experimental film collections are central to the legacies of moving image archives, as preservation and digitization practices become more unwieldy, those from the 1960s and 1970s become harder to locate and feasibly access; the space and visibility afforded to one film are, after all, all too often achieved at the expense of another. Siewert thus offers her experience with Arsenal Berlin's Living Archive Project as a case study of socially constructed archiving that has enabled the (re)emergence of these films.

Established in 2011 by the Berlin Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art, this initiative granted three years of archival access to a preselected group of forty interdisciplinary artists and scholars. Its participants were invited to explore the Arsenal's film collection, organize monthly screenings and workshops, and (re)use these materials in their own works. Siewert presented her own research as part of the 2013 Living Archive festival. Throughout her "Pragmatic Poetics of Archive" program, Siewert moderated an array of experimental film screenings and discussions between archivists from Arsenal and Amsterdam's Eye Film Museum. By poetically reengaging these once "hidden" experimental films in conjunction with pragmatically focused institutional discourse, Siewert's program encouraged its participants to intrinsically draw connections between archival and programming decisions, exhibition spaces, and the viewer's aesthetic experience.

The following chapter moves from the inner workings of the archive to the theatrical spaces seeking to affectively engage audiences with archival collections and materials. What happens as exhibition practice relocates from the traditional cinematic apparatus—a projector, screen, and central audience contained within a darkened room—and into both the "white cube" of the museum and other digital modes? As Francesco Casetti, John Belton, and other film scholars have emphasized, though the number of "black box" cinemagoers has undoubtedly receded in recent years, the significance of cinema as a cultural form continues to endure. Moreover, Siewert suggests that the expansion of cinematic forms into different kinds of screening venues and platforms encourages archivists and artists alike to reconceptualize how the "structural, aesthetic, and conceptual expansion of filmic and cinematographic work is understood" (p. 58).

The case studies that follow foreground some of the cultural agents and events tangibly exploring these areas. The Los Angeles Filmforum and Germany's LaborBerlin, for instance, represent two key spaces where experimental film and Expanded Cinema—a term Siewert specifically reserves for works made by artists rather than filmmakers—are presented and discussed. And while the Light Cone in Paris curates experimental film programs that may be adopted and reworked by other institutions, Amsterdam's Eye Film Museum is considering the ways that nontraditional works may be preserved for future Expanded Cinema presentations and reenactments. When the Eye Film Museum invited Guy Sherwin and Malcolm Le Grice to reenact their 1970s Expanded Cinema works in the early 2010s, the artists intrinsically connected the aesthetic experience to the interplay of time not only through their respective performances—the inevitable aging of the artist actualizes the evolution between past and present—but also through their willingness to engage self-reflective practices conducive to the present cultural context. Siewert argues that the sonic and visual facets of these experiences evoke a unique kind of "sensual pleasure" for each respective audience, and this in turn produces an assortment of communities, memories, and unforeseen meanings.

The third and final chapter theoretically attends to the meanings that derive from the connections between aesthetic reconstruction—such as (re)enactments, sampling, and *found footage*—and cultural processes of memory. Whereas former iterations of memory studies likened the concept of memory to an archive, current discourses delineate memory as a multidirectional network mediated and extended—as opposed to contained—by artistic forms. Taking up Johan Huizinga’s notion of the “historical sensation,” Siewert suggests that similar to other bygone objects or art, reenactments and other (re)mediations have the potential to evoke an affective and “mystical experience of immediate contact with the past” for even those audiences who lack an embodied memory of the original event (p. 108).

Importantly, Siewert stresses that this sensation of recognition is a joyful one that usually derives from the same combination of visual and sonic elements that constitute the kind of bodily transference pertinent to the notion of sensual pleasure. This is, among other reasons, why discourses on sound and music are intermittently woven throughout the text. Though it remains somewhat discursively neglected throughout film studies, sound is a crucial element in compiling, recycling, and exhibiting various forms of archival materials. Music inherently prompts the spectator to connect not to the characters on screen but rather to one’s own emotions and temporality. The latest increase in the use of experimental music videos throughout museums and art galleries therefore warrants just as much scholarly attention and research as other filmic genres.

Ultimately, *Performing Moving Images* offers an open-ended inquiry into the ins and outs of the audio-visual archive and its relationship to moving-image historiography. Through an array of discursive threads and complimentary case studies from around the globe, Siewert poses several methodological and philosophical questions that scholars and practitioners alike may take up and further pursue. Above all else, the text presents as the foremost example of the praxis that it imparts on its readers: it is a performative practice of film history grounded in calls for creative processes of (re)discovery and interdisciplinary collaboration.