

Julia Leyda; Chris Tedjasukmana

## Film studies, feminism, and film curating in Germany: An interview with Heide Schlüpmann and Karola Gramann

2020-07-06

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14323>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Leyda, Julia; Tedjasukmana, Chris: Film studies, feminism, and film curating in Germany: An interview with Heide Schlüpmann and Karola Gramann. In: *NECSUS\_European Journal of Media Studies*. #intelligence, Jg. 9 (2020-07-06), Nr. 1, S. 53–68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/14323>.

### Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://necsus-ejms.org/film-studies-feminism-and-film-curating-in-germany-an-interview-with-heide-schlupmann-and-karola-gramann/>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0/ Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0/ License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

## Film studies, feminism, and film curating in Germany: An interview with Heide Schlüpmann and Karola Gramann

Julia Leyda & Chris Tedjasukmana

NECSUS 9 (1), Spring 2020: 53–68

URL: <https://necsus-ejms.org/film-studies-feminism-and-film-curating-in-germany-an-interview-with-heide-schlupmann-and-karola-gramann/>

**Keywords:** feminism, film curating, film studies, interview

This interview arose out of a shared desire to document some of the unwritten, anecdotal history of film studies and the cultures of cinema more broadly. In a conversation with Karola Gramann and Heide Schlüpmann, film and media scholars Julia Leyda and Chris Tedjasukmana encouraged them to narrate some of their individual and intertwined personal, political, and professional experiences surrounding the development of the discipline in Europe, knowing that this was enmeshed with other fertile intellectual movements like critical theory and feminism.

Karola Gramann is a film curator and author who has been working as a programmer in an international context since the early 1980s. She was director of Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (1985–89) and co-organiser of the Frankfurter Filmschau (1990–93). Together with Heide Schlüpmann she has written on Asta Nielsen, feminist cinema, and erotic cinema. Heide Schlüpmann is an author and retired professor of film studies at the University of Frankfurt am Main (1991–2008). She is the author of *The Uncanny Gaze: The Drama of Early German Cinema* (2010 [orig. in 1990]) and other books (in German) on feminism, film philosophy, Siegfried Kracauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Together they are the co-founders of the Kinothek Asta Nielsen in Frankfurt am Main, an association supporting and documenting the film work of women. They also co-founded the *Remake: Frankfurter Frauen Film Tage* (Frankfurt Women's Film Days) and have been editors of the journal *Frauen und Film*.

Both have received numerous awards for their continuous efforts in documenting and promoting cinema culture.

## Education at the movies

**Julia Leyda:** What brought you to film? Was it connected with your experiences in education or in politics or feminism?

**Karola Gramann:** Film was not part of my upbringing. I come from a more working-class background. In my family, then, culture, in a rather petty bourgeois way, had to be high culture. Film, of course, did not belong to it. It wasn't until I moved to Frankfurt in 1970 that I was able to go to the movies. This was at the beginning of a film movement, which eventually led to the founding of the Kommunale Kinos [municipally funded cinemas.] It was an incredible experience just to 'live in the cinema'. I realised that if I ever went to university, which was not before 1976, I'd like to do something with a connection to film. This is how it started, because at that time the first seminars were held in Frankfurt and Heide started to teach.

**Heide Schlüpmann:** I come from a bourgeois background. Cinema was not very highly valued, but sometimes my father took me to the movies. He chose literary adaptations and afterwards he always said that the film couldn't live up to the novel. My mother had a special experience of cinema during the Nazi period – the men having been conscripted, it was mostly the women who went to the movies together. As a young girl she had been impressed by Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* (1924).

After having been at the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen, I moved to Frankfurt to study philosophy with Theodor W. Adorno, and here I first saw the early films of Alexander Kluge, and it was as if he was telling my story. But cinema did not play a central role. That came only when I experienced a major crisis in my life as a philosophy student. There was the student movement and I was very much attracted by what was happening. In 1969, Adorno died, but even before that, I had stopped working on my thesis. I didn't know which direction to take, and so I went to the cinema, during the day, at night – to all the cinemas I could find in Frankfurt. And in winter 1970-71, one event had a big effect on me: a screening of underground movies at the university, in the same rooms where the teach-ins were before and where Adorno had held his lectures. Now in all these rooms they screened films, underground films – that was great. After that, the Independent Film

Center (later: Kommunales Kino) was founded in Frankfurt in the Theater am Turm where Rainer Werner Fassbinder worked with his company. I saw Soviet cinema which impressed me very much, and I saw Freaks in a late night program of horror movies. Whenever I could I went there and to other cinemas: in those days, you could see films by Kluge, Pier Paolo Pasolini, or Jean-Marie Straub in the city center in an average cinema.

**Gramann:** What made the biggest impact on me was the experience of being with so many people and sharing the films. I remember, when the Kommunales Kino opened, they held a Buster Keaton retrospective. There were hundreds and hundreds of people there! It was a new experience. It brought me out of my isolation, I felt. I was in the closet and living with somebody. But to go to the movies was a totally different group encounter. It was really wonderful!

**Schlüpmann:** I didn't have this shared group experience the first time. For me it was the anonymity in a crowd of people. And strangely, it didn't scare me, I enjoyed it.



**Chris Tedjasukmana:** When did you two meet?

**Gramann:** I knew about Heide because she was around at the university. A lot of people talked about her: she was the great enigma, suspected to be moving the Hegel books from one side of her desk to the other and back again. At least that's what people said, that she was always there, studying Hegel.

**Tedjasukmana:** Sexy.

**Gramann:** And she was the fancy of a lot of women, so I thought: I would like to meet this person, too!

## Film studies before film studies

**Leyda:** At which point did you connect your interest in cinema with your academic research and philosophical questions?

**Schlüpmann:** I started to give seminars at the University of Frankfurt in 1977. I think I was the first person explicitly teaching feminist approaches towards film, so all the women who had built a strong group at the university, discussing and taking action in feminist politics, attended. We also met outside of the seminars and had other discussion groups. My first two seminars dealt with women in Nazi cinema. But then I started a course on feminist film theory and practice, and there came a person with a glittery tie, very chic, a little bit punky. She told me she knew Laura Mulvey and that she was just about to translate 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.

**Gramann:** It was rather daring!

**Schlüpmann:** I thought she was quite ahead of me in feminist film studies. And it was clear to me that she was a lesbian, so I got interested.

**Gramann:** My first trip abroad was to England in 1965, in the midst of Beatlemania. London to me, coming from the north Bavarian provinces, was just a revelation. When I decided to go to university many years later, I studied English literature, because at that time the BAföG [student financial assistance] would pay for one year in an English-speaking country, so I went to London for one year. I had been to the BFI summer schools twice, with teachers like Christine Gledhill, Angela Martin, Jim Cook, and others, and the biggest influence on me – apart from Heide, of course – was Richard Dyer. I took evening classes with him, and that was such an eye-opener, even apart from his way of teaching. In 1977 he edited a booklet for the BFI titled *Gays and Film*, with articles by Caroline Sheldon, amongst others, and which was

the first to my knowledge. That was when I also became acquainted with Helke Sander, the editor of *Frauen und Film*, who published a book with Gisliind Nabakowski and Peter Gorsen, *Frauen in der Kunst* [Women in the Arts]. I met Helke, and she said: 'Don't you live in England? Maybe you could translate this article.' I knew Caroline and I'd been in this whole lesbian circle in London and I knew the films. In fact, I'd done two classes reading Laura's article at the BFI summer school, so I thought, why not? Obviously I was rather fearless!

**Schlüpmann:** And in 1978, when I held my seminar on feminist film theory, we went together to London for a big avant-garde event at the National Film Theatre. The year after, we decided to go to the Edinburgh Film Festival, where a feminist event took place. There were film screenings and a panel discussion by people like Christine Gledhill and Claire Johnston, also Helke Heberle from *Frauen und Film*. We were familiar with the journal, but I was not involved in it at that time. Afterwards, *Frauen und Film* asked us to write an article about the feminist event. This was the first time we started to work together and write together.

**Gramann:** And it was very nice, because we wrote every sentence together. We just took our time, and it was wonderful. We gave it a very nice title: 'Raus aus den Prokrustesbetten' [Up out of the Procrustean Beds]. It is a quotation from Ruby Rich; she used that expression in her 1978 Jump Cut article, 'The Crisis of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism'. Ruby argued: 'As long as we go unnamed, we go without power.' So we wrote this article, which was the beginning of our work for *Frauen und Film*.

**Tedjasukmana:** I hear from film historians and theorists that Frankfurt was the cultural capital of postwar West Germany, that the major intellectual debates were taking place there. How would you describe the atmosphere in Frankfurt of the 1970s and early 1980s?

**Gramann:** Well I can only say what happened in film and cinema. I was not so involved in the women's movement, more so in the gay and lesbian scene, but the intellectual atmosphere was palpable. Weeks before Alexander Kluge held his famous Frankfurter Vorlesungen [Frankfurt lectures] everybody was excited; everybody went to listen to Kluge.

**Schlüpmann:** But for me, Frankfurt did really represent what had existed before Nazi Germany and what had happened in exile: the atmosphere was very much defined by these two contexts. This was different from Heidelberg and Tübingen, where I had been before, small towns with a touch of romanticism. In Tübingen, Ernst Bloch and his revolutionary utopian philosophy

was an exception. In Frankfurt, you could still sense the *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity], the intellectual political debates of the 1920s, the Institut für Sozialforschung had returned [The Institute for Social Research, home of the Frankfurt School], and it was the city of Kracauer, the critic of Weimar Cinema. I really got involved with Kracauer's thinking here in Frankfurt. And there was film with Alexander Kluge and music with Darmstadt's *Tage der Neuen Musik* [New Music Days]. The Hessischer Rundfunk [regional public broadcasting agency] was also an important element in building the intellectual atmosphere here, and newspapers like the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, which had a very good *Feuilleton* [culture section] that was interested in cinema with Wolfram Schütte, Gertrud Koch, and Karsten Witte as authors.

And then there was the student movement, many demonstrations – anti-Vietnam War, anti-Notstandsgesetze [anti-emergency acts] – took place here. I remember the founding of the Sozialistisches Büro [Socialist office] in the early seventies. The tension between the presence of the headquarters of the US Army on the one hand and Black Panther solidarity committees on the other contributed to a very lively, very political intellectual atmosphere. And the big public event, when the SDS [Socialist German student union] distanced themselves from RAF [Red Army Faction], it took place at the Opernplatz. I remember this decisive moment very well, because I had mixed feelings about it.

**Gramann:** I hope it doesn't sound too nostalgic, but in the 1970s there was a totally different, very strong presence of the university in the city. The professors from different departments would be present at discussions and would speak. One of my absolute favorite teachers, apart from Richard, was Alfred Lorenzer [professor of sociology and social psychology.] There were hundreds of people in his seminars. When there was some big public event at the university, people would be there and engage in the discussions. It created a very strong atmosphere of participation. Also, Fassbinder: he always went to the movies. I would go to the Turm-Palast and I remember one occasion when I sat in one of the back rows during the screening of *Death in Venice*, and after the film he stood up and said, 'So eine Scheiße!' [What a piece of shit].

**Tedjasukmana:** Frankfurt seemed to be the place for both the public and politically engaged intellectual. This was also the time of the second wave of feminism and its intersections with film culture, and you already mentioned *Frauen und Film*, the journal founded by Helke Sander and others. Her film *Der subjektive Faktor* (1980) is still an interesting source for understanding

how at least the West Berlin branch of the women's movement emerged from groups like the SDS. What would be your version of the story? How did you get involved with the Frauen und Film collective?

**Gramann:** It was in 1978 or 1979. With Helke Sander, in her work at Frauen und Film and in her film work, you have two major contributions. When they founded the journal in 1974, it was very clearly meant as an instrument to improve working conditions and have a platform where women could communicate. From my point of view, it is extremely important that they brought together women directors, editors, and critics, also on an international level. I think it was in 1973 that they did the first women's film seminar in Berlin and Frankfurt. There was the very pragmatic aspect of criticising the working conditions of women here. And then, there is Helke's very pointed analysis of the situation of women in that macho political context of the SDS, for example. So you have these two strands, I think. Her texts from that time still speak to us now. There is the more recent initiative now by a younger generation of women working in cinema, called Pro Quote Film, that demand their fair share. You look at Helke's article from 1974, 'Sexismus in den Massenmedien', and it is all there! And very little has changed. It's amazing.

**Schlüpmann:** I was not involved in the women's movement when it started in the 1960s. I had my experiences at the university and also learned from a friend how macho the SDS colleagues were, so I didn't want to join them. But politically I was very much, well, not involved, but on the side of the whole political movement and its connections with the anti-colonialist and anti-apartheid struggles. My path to feminist film and film critique and analysis did not start with the women's movement, but with a discussion group on Nazi cinema. This discussion came up in the early 1970s, when there was a committee formed in Wiesbaden at the Filmprüfungsstelle [film review body] to reevaluate banned films. After the committee had finished their work, Friedrich Kahlenberg (director of the federal film archive), Karsten Witte, two of his students, and I formed a group dedicated to the study of the German entertainment films from the 1930s and 40s. We watched them together in the catacombs of the archive on the Ehrenbreitstein, a former castle near Koblenz, and discussed them. We knew that these films had exerted a big influence on the population, and we thought this was a way to lead a confrontation with the past. We were two women in the group, and we both concentrated on the women's roles. I think that was a starting

point for me. Through my seminar ‘The Image of Women in National Socialist Film’, I approached feminist film critique and filmmaking – besides going to the movies every day. At some point I thought, I have to think about what I am doing, so I went to the library and I found Siegfried Kracauer’s *Theory of Film* on the shelf.

**Gramann:** Yes, but in the second half of the 1970s you couldn’t avoid getting interested in feminist film writing, and most of the interesting stuff, as far as I remember, came from the US and UK: *Jump Cut*, *Camera Obscura*, *Screen*, and all the British writings. In the work of people like Stuart Hall, or Richard of course, there would always be a feminist angle also, because that was the thinking at that time. You couldn’t avoid it, and it was exciting! I mean, Laura’s articles, for example.

**Schlüpmann:** But you got more in touch with it than I did because you had been in England, whereas I started with Kracauer, Béla Balázs, and others. I really came to feminism through the German scene, with *Frauen und Film* and through you. Let’s not forget that *Frauen und Film* – and I think it was Gertrud Koch who edited it – published an issue on film theory [no. 11, 1977], including the German translation of Claire Johnston’s ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema’.

**Gramann:** I think the international exchange introduced so much.

**Tedjasukmana:** At the Critical Theory and Media conference in Frankfurt in 2014, Marc Siegel gave his introduction to the panel he organised, titled ‘Queer Theory and Film’ by claiming that in West Germany, film studies was founded by four women and a gay man. [He referred to Miriam Hansen (who later taught in Chicago), Gertrud Koch (Berlin), Christine Noll Brinckmann (Zürich), Karsten Witte (Berlin), and Schlüpmann.] So it wasn’t the hegemonic white male subject that one might imagine. It seemed like an apt – and witty, as Marc usually is – description of the founding years of film studies here, not just feminist film studies.

**Gramann:** Yes, of course! Noll Brinckmann started to teach film with Ulrich Keller in the English department, and I did my first seminars with her. We did two terms on *The Birth of a Nation*, that was my introduction to cinema studies. And my first paper was a feminist perspective on the women in *The Birth of a Nation*. So Noll was very important. And there was also Lorenzer. He was not really a feminist. But what I am trying to say is that there were people in different departments who started to teach and study film. Lorenzer gave seminars in psychoanalysis and film: I did all my Freud reading there, and Buñuel. So it all came together from different directions. In

American studies they also discussed film, American documentaries, things like that. Suddenly there was an interest and it all came together.

**Schlüpmann:** At that time, Miriam Hansen worked at the University of Frankfurt. And before I taught there, I gave two seminars on film with Miriam at the Volkshochschule [community college]. One was entitled 'Realism in Feature Films' and the other dealt with 'Die Halbstarken-Filme' [The Half-Stout films]. That was fun. In the 1980s, Karola and I also organised seminars at the Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain (near Frankfurt) together with Klaus Kreimeier and Dietrich Kuhlbrodt.

Karsten Witte was very important: he worked at the university, but also as a journalist. He wrote regularly for the Frankfurter Rundschau. I always saw Karsten when I went to screenings at the Independent Film Center. At that time, we didn't know each other very well but shared cinema-going. I was very impressed by his dedication to film, and we were both studying Nazi cinema. I remember we went to the Turm-Palast cinema every Thursday at noon, when films were shown under the title 'Das gab's nur einmal, das kommt jetzt wieder' ['Just once in all time – it'll happen again' in reference to the popular song from the film *Congress Dances*, 1931.] Karsten and I would sit amidst an audience of people who had lived in the 1930s and 1940s and had seen these movies at the time and now really wanted to see them again. Karsten also watched those films on television and wrote harsh critiques of the fact that the public broadcasting service aired them.

**Leyda:** What was your relationship to film studies in the international context?

**Schlüpmann:** In the 1980s, the international context became particularly important to me. Because in Germany, nothing really happened in film studies. It had started with some seminars, but film studies as a discipline had not been established yet. In the 1980s we had strong ties to film studies in the US and Great Britain. Scholars like Eric Rentschler, Anton Kaes, Thomas Elsaesser, and Miriam Hansen, who had moved to the States, supported us a lot. Teresa de Lauretis, Mary Ann Doane, and Linda Williams were also important partners. As to France, the writings of theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean-Louis Comolli were important. I think the first time I went to the US was in 1985 for the Society of Cinema Studies conference. And what did I talk about? Kracauer! It was a panel on the Frankfurt film traditions: Benjamin, Kracauer, Lukács. A lively exchange with US-American and British colleagues started. And Miriam for sure built a bridge for Frankfurt and for me.

## Lines of conflict: Politics and aesthetics

**Leyda:** What kinds of conflicts and/or connections have you seen between political activist, academic approaches, or practices in the film world that you have worked in?

**Gramann:** Well, there was always a very strong conflict between well, it sounds very banal – between form and content. In my experience in England, there was an interesting debate around the political impact of form. When we did a retrospective of the work of Margaret Raspé in 2014, we showed an at the time extremely controversial and influential documentary film, *Night-cleaners* by the Berwick Street Collective, depicting the world of cleaning women working at night in London. It was shot in the 1970s, at night, with available light only, so it was very grainy, and it was four hours long! And the people who made it thought it would be an eye-opener, a political means to reach the working class. And, of course, it was the contrary; that was not a film working people wanted to see. But there was an ongoing conflict about filmmaking apart from the supposedly repressive forms that attempted, in a different way, to reach their audience.

Here in Germany it was rather dull. The conflict broke out repeatedly at *Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen*, which I followed until the mid-1970s, where the boring DKP [German Communist Party] male filmmaker scene resisted what they thought were useless, apolitical formal experiments. People I am very friendly with today – we had the most incredible fights. The first time I spoke publicly, I was really shaking. One of the documentary filmmakers had replied to a feminist argument: 'If you think you can fight, and you're only feminists and you don't include men and the Marxist fight, it is all built on sand.' I was so upset that I walked up to the microphone in this big auditorium and said something. This controversy particularly affected women's films, because on the one hand these people did not understand experimental or avantgarde filmmaking, but also they did not understand feminist films and why women made those films.

**Schlüpmann:** In the academic field there were fights or discussions between sociologists who analysed films as ideological texts, often Nazi films, especially in Frankfurt. And film critics like Karsten Witte and our group, who thought the critics of ideology were leaving out the responses of the audience. You have to look at movies as a kind of interaction between text and audience. I think that was a major controversy. And in film criticism they had

a conflict between the 'critical critique' and 'Neue Sensibilität' [new sensibility].

**Gramann:** Yes, and the split, at least our split with the Frauen und Film collective was partly based on that. I have to say, though, the way we wrote sometimes was really rough and rude [Heide agrees, laughs]. If we didn't like a film ... boom!

**Schlüpmann:** True, but with arguments!

**Gramann:** I remember one review we wrote on *Weggehen um anzukommen* [Leaving to arrive], a lesbian film by Alexandra von Grote, and we called it a Benetton advertisement. [1] Really rude, you know! And so the women of the Berlin Frauen und Film collective didn't like our take on that at all. And also *Die bleierne Zeit* [Marianne and Juliane, 1981, Margarethe von Trotta] was a target of ours.

**Tedjasukmana:** Who were the female protagonists in the West German conflict between the so-called political and the aesthetic left, both in filmmaking and film theory? Film scholars today usually know about the basic lines of conflict, but one hears much less about the feminists involved.

**Schlüpmann:** In feminist film criticism, the *Neue Sensibilität* was supported by Claudia Lenssen, Uta Berg-Ganschow, maybe Helke Heberle. And in filmmaking Alexandra von Grote for example. But we saw it more in films by men who tried to...

**Gramann:** ...make 'women's films'?

**Schlüpmann:** Yes, but we saw also Agnès Varda's films going in this direction. We rejected very much *Le bonheur* (1965). Today, I see this film differently.

**Tedjasukmana:** I remember the Claire Johnston essay you were mentioning, were she harshly criticises Varda for reproducing the bourgeois myth of women.

**Gramann:** Or films like *La dentellière* [The Lacemaker, 1977, Claude Goretta]. They were received with great warmth, because they were so sensitive, and I, for a long time, I didn't watch films with Isabelle Huppert, who, I think, is a great actress, but I just could not. I always saw her face from that movie. Or a devastating film like that Bild newspaper film [Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum, 1975, Volker Schlöndorff and Margarete von Trotta]. But you know, I'd really be interested, for example, to watch these early films by von Trotta again? Maybe I'd still...

**Schlüpmann:** No, no, no...

## Film curating and the history of film material

**Leyda:** We would like to talk a bit about your film curating work and the mission of the Kinotek Asta Nielsen. Karola, you studied in England, which helped you build an international network?

**Gramann:** I think as early as the 1980s I started moving into festivals and curating, making film programs. That always interested me the most. My international connections more and more turned in this direction, because I started to work for Oberhausen maybe in 1982, doing programs for them. And then I travelled a lot to see films, when I was on the selection committee. I met people like Isaac Julien, Derek Jarman, and since the early 1980s I've been in connection with Ruby Rich. That is a different level and area. But, you know, I was in those circles, again in England, also in Switzerland; I remember the first works of Pipilotti Rist. It was very challenging and satisfying, dealing with new and exciting works. It was gratifying to be able to bring a film like *Territories* by Isaac Julien and the Black Audio Film Collective to Oberhausen in '84. And it was not without conflict to show these films. But programming and curating is a very exciting, very privileged position. I always liked that.

**Leyda:** It also seems like, then and now, it was a very face-to-face experience. We are talking about international networking, which today is so much done on Facebook and through other forms of digital communication. And at that time, it was primarily traveling and talking to people in person.

**Gramann:** Yes, I also did a lot of traveling and teaching seminars for the Goethe Institute, which was absolutely wonderful. I did extensive tours through Southeast Asia and the Eastern European socialist countries with a package of West German short documentaries, which I had put together, titled *Seeking, Finding, Remembering*. I remember being in Manila with Nick Deocampo, who, at that time, had made the first underground gay movie. Being in the position of a curator, you had access to films that you would otherwise not so easily get or see.

**Schlüpmann:** On the one hand, we had film scholars, but on the other there was the international archival world. In 1986, I went to the Pordenone festival for silent film and early cinema for the first time. I had started research on early German cinema and visited the federal archives in Koblenz, as well as in Berlin and Amsterdam. I became involved in the initial phase of Domitor, the International Society for the Study of Early Cinema. In the 1990s, I joined the Archimedia group, an association of archives, universities,

and labs. That was really an interesting undertaking. Today, this kind of collaboration is much more common, but in the 1990s it was rare.

**Leyda:** The filmmakers you mentioned are well-known now, but curators and programmers don't have as public a profile as the filmmakers. It's partly the personal or the ephemeral nature of that experience that makes it hard to document, and this is one thing we were interested in. Can you talk a bit more about the role of curators and about when and why you started the Kinothek Asta Nielsen?

**Schlüpmann:** When I became a professor at the university in 1991, I thought it was my duty and the duty of film studies to support cinemas and support showing films. Because at that time it was clear that the cinema movement that had started in the 1960s was declining. And I tried to support cinema culture in the context of teaching. Alongside my seminars I organised film programs together with cinemas. I had worked for Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen and had been a bit involved in Karola's work of curating film programs. And when she started to think about the Kinothek I thought: well, this is a very good project. In the beginning, it was situated at the university. And the university, not least my seminars, profited from Karola's skills in film curating.

**Gramann:** I actually prefer the notion of being a programmer rather than being a curator. 'Curating' has become a very fashionable thing. This, in a way, goes hand in hand with the dominance that the curator has over the works and the filmmakers. When you are a curator, you are in a position of power. What is really exciting about programming, however, is that you set in motion a lot of things in your head, but then you see the films materialise again in projection. Sometimes it works out so that you see the first film and then you either realise that the third film you have programmed will work or it won't. You can't change it. And you don't know how it will work with the audience. Because films can cancel each other out, so it is an exciting process to bring them together in a way that you hope they will work together. The most important thing for a programmer, I think, is to arrange the films for oneself and not have an abstract audience in mind. Forget about it. I think you always have to show what you would want to see and then you can try to convince the others. It is very gratifying when it works. The other thing is, even more importantly, that you should never underestimate your audience. Because in my experience it is much better to leave people with a question, to make them think about something, and it keeps turning in their heads,

rather than to have them think at the end that they have understood everything. That is not very exciting.

**Tedjasukmana:** In the beginning, you emphasised the experience of watching films with others both as an anonymous and a shared experience. One might also add the act of projection and the experience of a film's materiality. I remember at several of your programs that as soon as you switch on the projector or you have to do the changeover, the screening becomes a performance and even a ritual, and that makes it a public event in a way. It is, obviously, a whole different thing than watching films on YouTube with the autoplay function on. It is a very specific form of experience that I always felt was really powerful.

**Schlüpmann:** With celluloid projection, there is always somebody there who presents the film to you, and this is also part of programming. Karola is very good at doing the projection, at least for 16mm films. I think a good projectionist is so important, somebody who shows you the film, it is not only a machine with somebody pushing the buttons. And the materiality matters as well – that fact that you can look at the film and take the filmstrip and look at every single frame. You may detect what is written on the celluloid before the film starts or in between the perforation holes. It tells you something of the film's origin, where it comes from, and so on.

**Tedjasukmana:** I also remember you were always including these aspects in your introduction: where you got the copy from, what the quality is. You would apologise if it had deteriorated and turned reddish or something.

**Schlüpmann:** Yes, it has a history, the material also has a history. It is a disaster that many films can't be screened the way they have been made. For us at the Kinotek, it is a big problem. Because we don't want to end up only showing content and disregard the material. But I don't know how to solve this problem. We are also interested in content, but there is so much more to see.

**Gramann:** The loss of print availability is a big problem. What you mentioned, Chris, is part of taking care of what you are showing in order to project it in an appropriate way. I would still always try to show the film in the format in which it was made. It is becoming more and more difficult. And then, there is the risk that the distributor would destroy a beautiful 35mm print. The other thing is that less and less you find expertise with projectionists. People don't know any longer how to project a 35mm print. I was always very generous with sharing 16mm prints from the Kinotek archive – but I

will not lend them anymore or only if I know that the people who show the films know how to handle them properly.

**Schlüpmann:** The Kinothek collaborates with skilled projectionists like Fritz Mettal or Gunther Deller.

**Tedjasukmana:** This seems to point at a limited understanding of film that solely focuses on content or aesthetic form and ignores the historic materiality of films.

**Gramann:** The whole digitising business will narrow film cultures. A major part of the existing body of lesser-known and smaller films will eventually disappear.

**Schlüpmann:** Also, the film networks are changing: Usually people think of the networks of filmmakers, film critics, curators, and academics. But for us, networking also means technicians and archivists, and people in the labs, who are equally important. I think this often falls out of the picture.

**Leyda:** If you were to send a message in a bottle to future film scholars, what would it include?

**Schlüpmann:** Read Kracauer, go to the movie theatre, fight for celluloid and cinema projection – and get the deepest possible insights from the history of cinema: look back to the past and from there to the challenges of the present.



Kinothek Asta Nielsen

## Authors

Julia Leyda is Professor of Film Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

Chris Tedjasukmana is Principal Investigator of the research project on 'Attention Strategies of Video Activism on the Social Web' at the University of Bonn, Germany.

## Acknowledgments

The interviewers would like to thank Raphael Flechtner for transcribing the interview.

## Notes

- [1] Alexandra von Grote (\*1944) is a German filmmaker, screenwriter, poet, and crime novelist. Her other feature films are *Novembermond* (1985) and *Reise ohne Wiederkehr* (1989).