Helsinki/KAVA 4.10.2012
Baltic Audiovisual Archival Council
Annual Conference 2012
 "From digitization to access and research"

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Music Archives in the Face of Memory Industries

During the past ten years, digitization has been on of the main activities in Finnish sound and audiovisual archives – and actually in other sort of archives as well. And not only in Finnish archives but everywhere in the maps of European archives. Digitization has been seen as a best available solution for preserving such a material that would have otherwise faced the dangers of corruption and even become finally lost.

In Finland, the golden days of digitization took place between 2008 and 2011 when the government threw vast amount of money to the archives and other memory organizations and quite often also to those who happened to stand next to them. This was the time of the National Digital Library project which still continues yet without much effort to maintain the digitization processes. Although digitization remains valuable everyday practice in archives, it is clear that the trendiest phase is now over. Digitization is no longer a catchword that would raise exciting echoes, say, in the corridors of culture policy makers.

I don't want to spend my presentation time for laming the golden days of digitization. The work still continues. Materials need to be saved. But as the title of this conference implies, the next big thing is access.

Often when we archive people talk about access we talk about how users should have better access to our materials. That's good. We must keep on discussing as well as propose new ideas. We really need ideas. I mean, when I look around it appears that we are coming light years behind the rest of the world. The gap is perhaps not as wide as it used to be – in this conference, we have heard wonderful examples of new kind of accesses in memory organisations. But still: we may be experts on digitization and preserving but there are many other who look like they are much more experts on matters of access than we are. Maybe the idea of access should be turned upside down. It is important that users have access to our materials. But it is as important that we, the archive people,

have access to these new experts and their ideas. I'll come back to this in few minutes. But, first, who are these new experts?

Memory Industries of Music

Using the case of music, these new experts gather around the idea that I have called the memory industries of music. What does this term stand for: the memory industries of music? First of all, the term industry is often associated with mechanical money-making machinery. It has a bad connotation. The term industries, however, does not so much refer to the industrial work but to the various fields of operation and activities, including record companies, distributors, retail market, live music sector, interest groups, associations and information offices. The term memory industries here explicates that many activities in these fields seem to be in the connection with the fact that history is one of the main themes/leitmotifs in production and marketing of today's music.

Here are some examples of the presence of the past in popular music culture. They are in no particular order.

* Retro styles dominate new music and trends
* Often dealing with past struggles for the legitimisation of pop and rock, memoirs and biographies together with other written accounts on the history of popular music are flooding the markets
* Semi-fictitious films on rock no longer scan contemporary youth issues but concentrate on past events only
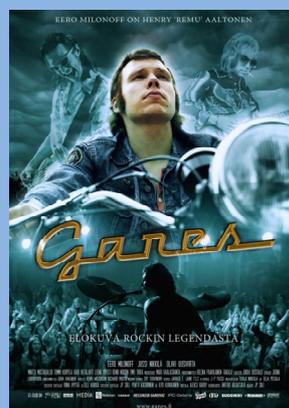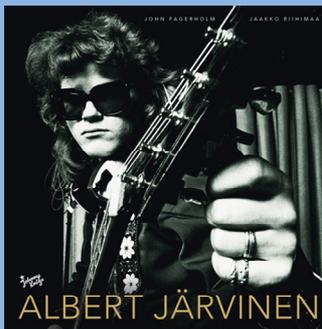
* Monthly rock magazines such as *Mojo* (UK) and *Rytmi* (Finland) constantly reinvent glorious days of rock

* The number of format radio stations and single radio programmes orienting towards 'golden days' of music is increasing

* Grand cd boxes of the past stars still do well

* Reunions of past music groups are standardly announced

* Comeback tours or otherwise historicised acts such as tribute concerts are everywhere

Re-releases, cd boxes
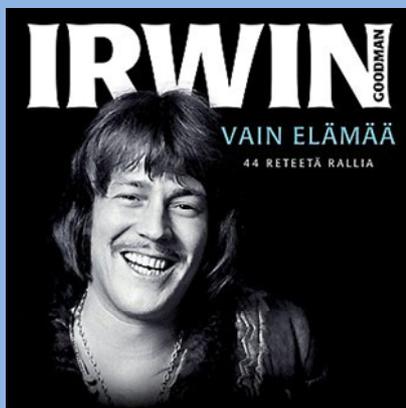
Reunions, comebacks

* Older stars fill the stadiums and make best revenues

* New guitar amplifiers and sound players are built to look old or to imitate old design

* Modeling amplifiers simulate the sound of legendary players, classic guitar amps, cabinets, and effects

Retro technology

* Old music styles and music heroes are used in producing and marketing music instruments and music video games (with Guitar Hero, the third main title of the series *Legends of Rock* is claimed to be the first single video game title to exceed $1 billion in sales)
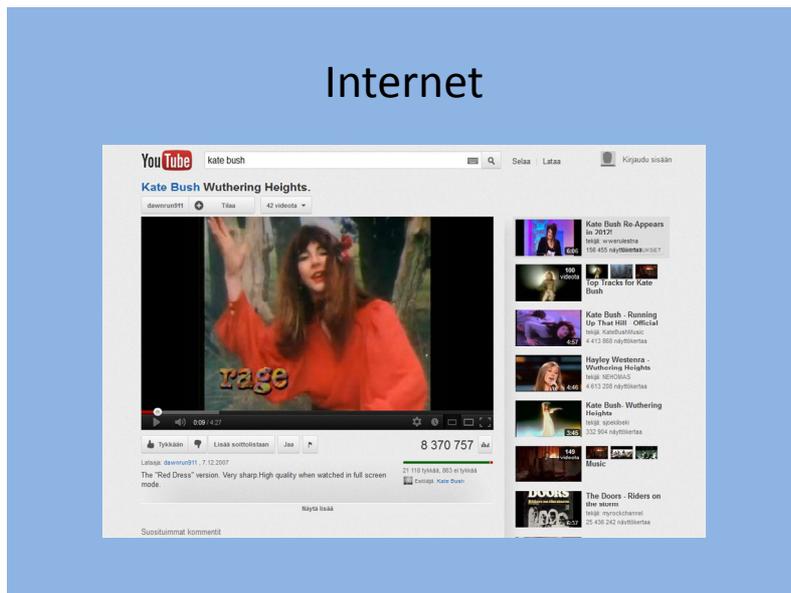* Collecting old records, instruments, and pop memorabilia is big business

Collecting

*Museums, archives and tourist attractions are established around local and national music histories

* YouTube and other internet services are filled with re-presentations of old music material.

* In online market older 'catalogue' albums have for years accounted for two-thirds of sales (Anderson 2006, 130)

* The contents of software samplers look like complete list of sounds and genres of past popular music

Commercial memory industries

In popular music, there is a great interest in the past glorious days. There are of course many reasons for that interest: modern pop and rock have reached the age when they are open to nostalgic memorialising. Thanks to the digital technology, we don't have to struggle to reach the access to the past. The present of the past has increased immeasurably. And this is where the memory industries step in.

The term memory industries here refers to commercial enterprises yet also to non-profit activities catering to the history-oriented markets and activities. What is common to the activities associated with the memory industries is the *explicit sense of history and the instrumentalisation of the past for the purposes of the present*.

**Memory Industries
of Popular Music**

- Commercial and non-profit enterprises catering to the history-oriented markets
- explicit sense of history, the instrumentalisation of the past for the purposes of the present

With commercial memory industries we can do some rough categorizing. The core of the music industries has traditionally been formed by recording companies, publishing companies and live performance organisations. We may perhaps add the fourth player to the list: agencies of digital distribution, e.g. music streaming services (e.g. Spotify) and mobile phone companies. These constitute the main sites of commercial institutions in the memory industries.

Let's take a look at one sector, the recording companies. Music has been, still is and continues – these days very tellingly – to be risky business for record companies. The major way to minimise the danger of misses is formatting cultural products. In music business, two major devices of formatting are the star system and the use of genre labels. I think that also the past can nowadays seen as a device that operates much in the same way as the star system and genres.

Depending on the size of the company, recording firms may have separate departments that dedicate themselves to the re-production of back catalogues and management of copyright issues. Today, these tasks are often conducted by partner companies. It is quite common that independent production houses (Provisual, Musicall) provide services for the music companies. Typically, they obtain recordings, videos, and photographs and the related licenses from different sources and produce compilation albums, cd boxes or different kinds of campaigns for the record companies. These materials may be previously unreleased but usually the project simply means re-packing and re-organising the old stuff. The package and liner notes may be new but the basic practice is that these houses are not involved in creating new core texts.

Commercial institutions

- Core industries of music
  - recording companies
  - publishing companies
  - live performance organisations
  - new agencies: digital distribution
- E.g. recording companies:
  - Risky business needs minimising of dangers through formatting such as star system, genre labels – and the uses of the past!
  - Cooperation with independent service houses and freelancers

Non-profit memory industries

Perhaps more interesting, from our point of view, is the field of non-profit memory industries. That field includes a wide range of activities. In fact, The Finnish Jazz & Pop Archive and many other music archives belong to this field. The three big groups of non-profit memory industries are voluntary groups (the so called third sector), public institutions (such as state music archives, municipal activities such as local museums and tourism, music activities in Lutheran church and in Finnish Defence Forces), and collecting societies and workers' organizations.

If we understand the memory industries of popular music as sites that are involved in producing and circulating texts, then most of the non-profit organisations have traditonally been rather peripheral. We may, of course, ask whether this is the case any more. In the age of social media and army of volunteers and crowd sourcers, the borderline between the commercial and the non-commercial is blurred. They overlap. Fans, for example, may still be kept out of the creative process of music making but they may have access for other arenas such as marketing, promoting and distributing the music of their favourite artist. Music associations and state archives may cooperate with music companies or with commercial dgitization services. Everybody can be in the music business. Everybody can act as curator. Or as archivist.

Non-profit institutions

- Voluntary groups: associations, fan clubs etc.
- Public institutions: state, municipality, Lutheran Church, Defence Forces
- Collecting societies and workers' organisations
- Commercial and non-profit overlap
  - fans have access to music marketing
  - archives cooperate with music companies
  - everybody can be curator or archivist

To finish my presentation, I'd like to spend couple of minutes for thinking the special case, the roles of professional and non-professional archivists. Nowadays there are lots of sites or, rather, loose groups and active individuals that seem to fall outside the categories of memory industries but somehow are part of the larger picture. Elaborating the term *anarchive* coined by the writer Simon Reynolds in his book *Retromania*, they can be called anarchivists: people who are frenzied by the archival impulse but are not interested in maintaining integrity of their activities.

Case: *anarchivst* & archivist

- anarchivists: frenzied by the archival impulse but not interested in maintaining archival integrity
- vast amount of music materials fill the digital spaces such as YouTube

Digital technology has enabled anarchivists to reproduce vast amount of music materials that now fill the digital spaces such as YouTube. For Reynolds, YouTube is like a messy public library or more like a jumbled attic than an archive. The whole world is there but the world is in disorder. Of course, elsewhere on the Web, all kinds of non-profit memory organisations and amateur associations are assembling well-managed cultural and open databases. Take, for example, Discogs, the online database. In 2004, they had already almost 16000 volunteer contributors. Today, Discogs has documented 3,4 million music releases. Interestengily, Discogs no longer tell the number of contributors. In fact, Discogs is nowadays as much a marketplace of music as a database.

Professionals and amateurs

YouTube gives me a lots of pleasure but as an archivist I see lots of problems in it (some of them have already been said):
* There is no order.
* There is no reliability.
* There is a lack of metadata and other information: Anarchvists are busy to fill site with sounds and images and have no patience to add the necessary information let alone to track the lost data.
* There is no guarantee of long-term preservation: Few years ago we tried to track the first music sites in Finland. We were left with only few kilobytes in our hands. Most of the early band sites are gone forever.
* The quality of sound is bad: The internet sites are dependent on MP3 and other formats of sound compression (but maybe we've already grown accustomed to such sounds; MP3 has been with us 18 years)
* Their practices are in many cases against the law: anarchists have no rights/liceneses to use music works.
* The memory almost full syndrome: the over-saturation of music data can result in the loss of cultural appetite.

And so on. The list continues and implies that maybe there is a work to do for archivists. We can educate anarchivists. Maybe we should establish special work shops or digital schools. Actually, some of you have already done this.

It is easy to criticize YouTube and other similar services. On the other had, YouTube is not only a nightmare for professional archivists. It is also convenient and fun. It gives access. So, instead of

separating the professional archive world from the non-professional world of anarchives it is more reasonable ask whether there is room for cooperation. After all, we both belong to the memory industries of music, and, usually, to the non-profit part of it. I suppose there is enough common ground where the both worlds can meet. At the moment, it of course looks like anarchivists have more to learn from archivists than the other way around. But maybe we can learn something from anarchivists. Here are some suggestions:

* There are no hierarchies in terms of time and place: with the impulse of "imagine no countries" everything is accepted, there is, for example, no national agenda, no certain historical period is prioritized over other periods
* There are no aesthetic criteria: this is good, nothing is too trivial; it is high time for archives to learn the lesson today's crap can be tomorrow's treasure, every piece of music, every pop scrap can be valuable
* License to be creative: How, for example, archive materials might be used in education projects?

Is there something else for us to learn from the anarchvists? This is a question I want to leave for you to discuss.