

Encapsulating Visions of Nationhood

Finland (1911) as a Memory Box

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At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there was a growing interest in Finland to increase tourism by making the home country known among its own citizens and by arousing international interest in travelling to the shores of the Baltic Sea. In 1911, an international fair for tourism, *Die Internationale Reise- und Fremden-Verkehr Ausstellung*, was planned to be organised in Berlin, and the initiative was taken in Finland to produce a promotional film for the exhibition. This was exceptional in the sense that no previous film advertising an entire country is known to have been produced in the history of cinema.¹

The urge to apply modern technology in building an international reputation, or at least in giving a sign of existence for the international community, was deeply rooted in the upheaval of national sentiments in Finland that was still a part of the Russian empire at the time. The policy of Russification was particularly oppressive during the years 1899–1905 and 1908–1917. Finns have traditionally called these periods *sortokaudet* (years of oppression) and interpreted them in terms of national threat; yet, they were in

1 On Finnish travel films, see SALMI, 2002, pp. 26-29, SEDERGREN/KIPPOLA, 2009, pp. 200-236. The credit of the first film to market an entire country has often been attributed to the long documentary *Finlandia* (1922), produced in the newly independent country. This credit may well be given to *Finland* which was made eleven years earlier despite the fact that Finland was still part of the Russian empire.

fact part of a larger interest to abolish the autonomy of non-Russian minorities within the Russian empire.²

During these years of turmoil, a compilation film entitled *Finland* was produced. Finland had already been invited to the Berlin fair in 1909, but only a year later the idea about the film was conceived.³ At this point, the schedule looked tight. The Finnish Tourism Association (Suomen Matkailuyhdistys) contacted the engineer Karl Emil Ståhlberg who owned the pioneering Finnish film company Atelier Apollo.⁴ Within just a few years it had produced the first fiction film in Finland, *The Moonshiners* (Salaviinanpolttajat, 1907), and dozens of short documentaries. It seems obvious that no shootings were made for *Finland* because of the rushed schedule and the film was edited on the basis of previous Apollo documentaries that portrayed Finnish cities, historic monuments and landscapes. At that time, films were usually very short, only a few minutes in length. In this respect, it is noteworthy that *Finland* turned out to be a long piece, 508 metres of film lasting almost 25 minutes.⁵ It was still in one reel and thus easy to perform.

Finland was compiled of 30 short travel films, produced by Atelier Apollo between 1906–1910, and many of the early Finnish films had actually been preserved through this particular copy. The final premiere copy also included German intertitles, of which 27 have been preserved.⁶ The film was shown in Berlin and Helsinki in 1911, but after this, the only copy suddenly disappeared for decades. When *Finland* was finally found again in the Finnish Military Archive it was like a memory box that did not only reveal rare, unseen moving

2 MOSS, 2005, pp. 481f., LAVERY, 2006, pp. 74-80.

3 The film was made for German audiences, or the audience in the German fair, but the name of the film remained in Swedish, which means that there is only one 'n', *Finland*. In German it would have been *Finmland*. The evolution of the name is depicted in detail by SEDERGRÉN/KIPPOLA, 2009.

4 SALMI, 1999, p. 83.

5 This is based on the assumption that the film was screened with the speed of 16 fps (frames per second). The question of frame rate is essential in estimating how long early film screenings lasted. Today, most of the films are projected with the speed of 24 fps and 25 fps in the case of video recordings. If shown with 24 fps, *Finland* would last over 18 minutes. Reducing the frame rate significantly influences the reception of the film. It is most probable that *Finland* was filmed and projected with 16 fps, which means that the shots left a much more peaceful impression on the audience than with 24 fps. I have previously discussed the frame rates of early Finnish cinema in SALMI, 2002, pp. 16-18. See also the filmographic details of *Finland* at <http://www.elonet.fi/fi/elokuva/162301>, 16.03.2014.

6 SALMI, 1999, pp. 84f. 1.

images and glimpses of early film history, it also offered an access to early twentieth-century Finnish landscapes and sceneries as the contemporaries wanted them to be seen through foreign eyes and perhaps even how they consciously aimed at transmitting this heritage to future audiences.

This resembles the way Aleida Assmann has characterised the complex nature of memories. She notes that places of memory should not be analysed only from the perspective of temporal dimension, since memories always include also horizontal qualities. Therefore it is illuminating to study what kind of spatial implications memories can have.⁷ In the case of *Finland*, the memory box seems to have an itinerary of its own, in the bygone world of the year 1911, but at the same time carries meanings about the past. Bernd Roeck also writes about these materialisations when he refers to “packets or boxes of memories” containing legacies from the past.⁸ From our present day perspective, *Finland* carries memories about the past but, to draw on Roeck’s point, brings forward historical signification as early as at the time of its production by referring, for example, to different previous traditions of depicting Finnish *lieux de mémoire*.⁹

In her book *Framing the Nation: Documentary Film in Interwar France* Alison J. Murray Levine interpreted, although in passing, documentaries as memory boxes. She writes:

When all of the human interactions surrounding documentary production are pulled into focus alongside the frame and the framer of a film, documentary films serve as a different kind of memory box. Neither faithful records of bygone practices, nor outdated documents that are patently untrue; they become dynamic sites of negotiations and exchange.¹⁰

Levine analyses mainly films from the 1930s, and her thoughts are not completely applicable to early cinema, but she makes the point of interpreting a film as a material object, comparable to a memory box that can be a site of negotiation about the past or a site of cultural exchange, both in temporal and spatial terms.

7 ASSMANN, 2011, p. 101.

8 ROECK, 2006, p. 11.

9 On the notion of *lieux de mémoire*, see NORA, 1989, pp. 7-24.

10 LEVINE, 2010, p. 161.

The aim of this article is to elaborate these thoughts further and to analyse *Finland* as a memory box by focusing on two different aspects of its memory-box-ness, on its spatial itinerary between cultures, between Finland and Germany in 1911 and on its temporal trajectory, its travel through time from 1911 to the present day. The latter is closely connected with the materiality of *Finland*, with the fact that this rare nitrate cellulose film has been preserved in the first place. Therefore, my essay starts with the history of the film reel which became a memory box also due to the fact that it remained on the dusty shelves of the archive unopened for such a long time. After that I change focus by considering the contents of the film and how it encapsulated visions of Finland, its culture and nature. As a conclusion, I shall return to *Finland's* dual nature as a memory box.

Rebirth of *Finland*

In 1911, *Finland* was screened 75 times during the tourism exhibition in Berlin and only four times in Helsinki.¹¹ This clearly shows that it was originally planned to attract foreign audiences and was made for performances abroad rather than domestic screenings. The itineraries of the actual film copy remain unclear. It is just as difficult to estimate how many copies there actually were. The only existing copy has survived at the Military Archives of Finland. It is likely that the reel was returned to Finland after the intensive use at the exhibition and was archived into the collections of the army, which was known as the last station for touristic materials. And it was this archive where the copy was finally “found” in the 1990s. The copy was subsequently restored under the guidance of the Finnish Film Archive to celebrate the centenary of cinema in 1995.¹² At that point also a soundtrack was inserted, emphasising Finnish brass music typical of the popular concerts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but no evidence is available on the type of music and sound effects used in the screenings in Berlin. This is important from the

11 KIPPOLA/SEDERGREN, 2003. Jari Sedergren and Ilkka Kippola argue, however, that the film might have been screened more often than the written sources suggest. This is based on the fact that the only existing reel was in a rather bad condition before its restoration. A film reel should stand around 80 performances without being so worn out as the copy was. See SEDERGREN/KIPPOLA, 2009, pp. 205f.

12 SALMI, 1999, pp. 80-84. KIPPOLA/SEDERGREN, 2003.

perspective of interpretation: only the visual appearance of the film is reliably similar to the copy that was screened in 1911, but the particular meanings attached to the images was, of course, produced by the interplay of sound and image in the original presentations. Today, we only have access to the image, not the sound.

As *Finland* as a cultural artefact had been hidden for almost 85 years, it was concretely an invisible and silent object. It was not lost in the sense that it *had* been archived together with other kinds of exhibition material and footage, but it became a memory box, without any possibilities of becoming part of cultural communication as it was forgotten. Thus, also its contents remained in secrecy.

When the box was finally opened, the finding proved to be sensational. Nitrate cellulose material is in itself extremely fragile; it is flammable, even explosive, and can dissolve into such a bad condition that nothing can be saved through restoration efforts.¹³ If the copy had been preserved somewhere else or if the reel had been archived in a wrong position, the memory box may have closed for ever. But since *Finland* had been stored under proper conditions, it could be restored for viewing. All this means that there are grounds to argue that, at least in this case, materiality has agency. The memory box is not only born out of human intentions and meaning-making: the chemical processes that constitute a film are an essential basis for *Finland* from the perspective of its memory-box-ness.

Before the end of the 1990s, the history of early Finnish cinema looked quite different.¹⁴ No fiction film prior to 1917 had ever been completely preserved. Some documentary films existed, however, but only around 20 titles were available. Before Finnish independence in 1917, a total of 326 Finnish documentaries are known to have been made. All footage that had been preserved could be presented within one hour.¹⁵ The first Finnish film known to have been made was shot in 1904 and featured children in their schoolyard in Helsinki.¹⁶ After 1906, film production became more regular, and the leader of the market was the company Atelier Apollo, headed by Karl Emil Ståhlberg.

13 On the nitrate film material, see SALMI, 1993, pp. 57-62.

14 Confer previous accounts of early Finnish cinema in UUSITALO, 1965; UUSITALO, 1972; HIRN, 1981.

15 I have explained this in detail in SALMI, 1999, pp. 80-83.

16 SALMI, 1999, p. 81.

The first fiction film *The Moonshiners* (Salaviinanpolttajat) was produced by Atelier Apollo in spring 1907.¹⁷

The audio-visual memory of Finland was distorted not merely by the fact that only a few films were available; it was also filtered by later opinions on what kinds of films were valuable for future generations. At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, the leading Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* commissioned a documentary on its own history to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the paper. The filmmaker Veikko Itkonen was hired to complete the film and, finally, the long documentary entitled *Thus Was the Present Day Born* (Näin syntyi nykypäivä) was premiered in January 1951.

During the production process, Veikko Itkonen contacted many of the early film companies and gathered footage for his film. He was especially interested in political events in Helsinki during the first decades of the twentieth century and took only those films that fitted his conception of the anniversary documentary. The rest of the material, portraying scenes from other parts of Finland, was abandoned, and since there was no film archive in Finland, it was soon destroyed.¹⁸ Thus, the making of the documentary *Thus Was the Present Day Born* became the distorting filter for the audio-visual heritage in Finland.¹⁹

The early films included in Veikko Itkonen's documentary depicted such events as the opening of the senate, the visit of the General Governor and the Czar in Helsinki, the funeral of Senator Leo Mechelin and the confirmation ceremony of the University of Helsinki.²⁰ Contrary to this, film programmes and announcements reveal that many of the early films showed sceneries from the countryside and portrayed historic monuments and smaller cities of Finland, but none of these films had been preserved.

The finding of *Finland* – the opening of the audio-visual memory box – completely changed the view on early Finnish cinema. *Finland* was compiled of earlier travel films, presumably shots between the years 1906–10 and, thus, it mediated 25 minutes of unseen material, views on cities such as Turku and Tampere, natural sceneries from northern and eastern parts of Finland and sites of memory such as the castle of Kajaani and the Valamo monastery.

17 UUSITALO, 1965, pp. 12f; HIRN, 1981, pp. 187-201; SALMI, 1993, pp. 74f.

18 The Finnish Film Archive was founded in 1957.

19 I have discussed this earlier in SALMI, 1996, pp. 145-163.

20 See Lauri Tykkyläinen's documentary *Suomalaisen lyhytelokuvan vuosikymmenet* (1985).

Itineraries of Finland: cartographic view and spatial imagination

Finland was composed in the form of a tourist route across the country. It starts with sceneries from Turku (in Swedish, Åbo) showing, for example, the Turku castle and the cathedral. In the existing copy, the route ends by the river Tornio in Lapland. The surviving list of intertitles tells, however, that there was one more location at the end of the film, Rovaniemi, but this scene has disappeared. In German, the last intertitle read: “Berg Ounasvaara bei Rovaniemi. Endpunkt der Eisenbahn am Polarkreis.”²¹ As this text reveals, the filmmakers wanted the audience to note that it was possible to travel by train up to the polar circle.

Clearly, the film is made to resemble an itinerary through Finland, almost as if it were meant to portray how Finland opens up for a foreigner that comes by ship from the Baltic Sea. The first harbour is Turku, and from there the traveller is expected to move forward following the coastal line. The film includes scenes from Naantali (Nådendal), Parainen (Pargas), Tammisaari (Ekenäs) and Hanko (Hangö) and continues further to Helsinki. The intertitles of the film can be listed here as an illustration of the cinematic itinerary:

- 0 [Turku Castle and the river Aura]
- 1 Turku Cathedral
- 2 River Aura
- 3 Naantali
- 4 Manor Joensuu
- 5 Manor Mustio
- 6 Parainen on the southern coast
- 7 City and sea bath Hanko
- 8 City Tammisaari
- 9 Ruins of the old fortress Raasepori
- 10 Aspects from Helsinki
- 11 The old city of Porvoo
- 12 Industrial city Tampere
- 13 Tourist route going down Mankala rapids

21 The intertitle list has been published by SALMI, 2001 according to the film copy, and later by KIPPOLA/SEDERGREN, 2003 and SEDERGREN/KIPPOLA, 2009, pp. 206f according to the archival sources.

- 14 The old castle of Viipuri
- 15 Imatra rapids
- 16 Saimaa Canal
- 17 Castle Olavinlinna at Savonlinna
- 18 Isle of Punkaharju
- 19 Castle Käkisalmi
- 20 Island cloister Valamo at Lake Ladoga
- 21 Island in Lake Ladoga
- 22 Mount Koli
- 23 Kuurna Canal at Pielis river
- 24 Tar boat in Kajaani
- 25 Departure of tourist boat from Vaala at Oulu river
- 26 City of Oulu and Merikoski rapids
- 27 Midnight sun over the Tornio river²²

22 This list is written down from the film. See also SALMI, 2001. Jari Sedergren and Ilkka Kippola have found the original intertitle list from the archives, and there are three missing elements: the first intertitle was “Åbo. Alte Burg”. Today this sequence exists but not the intertitle. The second missing part has been after the city of Oulu (Uleåborg). There was the intertitle “Stadt Torneå”, followed by moving images from the city of Tornio. The third missing sequence is the end, with the intertitle “Berg Ounasvaara bei Rovaniemi”. See SEDERGREN; KIPPOLA, 2009, pp. 206f. From the perspective of interpretation these differences are not a problem, since the film has been preserved almost in a complete form.



Figure 1: Map of Finland with cinematic stations

If these cinematic stations are positioned on a map (figure 1), the itinerary becomes more obvious. The route makes a quick sidestep to Tampere, one of the oldest industrial cities of Finland, giving evidence that Finland is also an industrial country, but right after that the camera returns to rural sceneries, and the cavalcade continues in the lake district, in Carelia and then moves towards the north. *Finland* offers a pathway through the country and is thus strongly cartographic by nature.

In his *Cartographic Cinema*, Tom Conley argued that a film often serves as a locational machinery; it establishes its own geography.²³ This also happened in *Finland*: the film implies a map, or merely a route through the country,

23 CONLEY, 2007, pp. 1f.

although this map is never openly shown. When the locations are put on a concrete two-dimensional map, it seems evident that the film reveals only a partial look over Finland, first concentrating heavily on the southern-western corner of the country, the most historical region of Finland, then moving eastwards, noting both Tampere and the capital Helsinki, subsequently focusing on Eastern Finland and following the railroad track towards Lapland. It is noteworthy that Ostrobothnia and Middle Finland are not depicted in the film. The reason might be, of course, that train and ferry connections were not ideal from the traveller's point of view in those parts of the country; however, the most obvious reason is the fact that Finnish national self-understanding had predominately been built on Eastern Finnish, especially Carelian cultural heritage.²⁴

The existing film consists of a total of 81 shots. Since the film was compiled of earlier short travel films, it is likely that images after particular intertitles are derived from separate films. The original short films might have been longer than the selected shots, but it seems that every film or item consisted of two or three shots. Many of the shots are like moving photographs, reminding of the very early films of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁵ The density of shots, and thus the use of montage, is at its highest in the sequences portraying tourist activities in Finland. The passage shot in Punkaharju consists of four images where travellers are seen wandering and admiring natural sceneries. The passage depicting Koli is based on three shots, and the tourist boat in Oulu river has as many as six shots. This sounds irrelevant as such, but the amount of shots indicates the effort to try to capture the dynamism of tourist activities and portray Finland not only as a series of beautiful landscapes but also as a site of action.

In its emphasis on Finland, the film particularly stresses waterways: if added up, the film owes almost one third of its duration to rapids, rivers, lakes and channels. The water-focused character of the film is already emphasised in the first images showing Naantali, Parainen and Tammisaari: the camera is on board, approaching these towns from the sea. This decision is carefully considered since the first images of the film give an impression of approaching Finland from abroad, by ship. This effect has been created by editing separate

24 Confer Juhana Saarelainen's essay on Kalevala and the Carelian cultural heritage in this book.

25 See, for example, SCHWARTZ, 1999, p. 187; MARSH, 2003, p. 71; BEUMERS, 2009, p. 5.

shots together but, obviously, this draws on the fact that moving camera shots were frequently seen in early cinema.²⁶

The centrality of moving, immersive shots is striking. To be sure, this feature can be linked with the touristic aims of the production, but can be also interpreted as a cartographic feature which, instead of topographic bird's-eye views, stresses locational navigation through the landscapes.²⁷ The camera has been positioned in the view of a potential tourist visiting Finland: s/he arrives by boat, continues by railway, takes a boat trip down the rapids and walks over the hills of Punkaharju. All this makes sense, considering the fact that the film was intended for the *Internationale Reise- und Fremden-Verkehr Ausstellung*. On the other hand, it is even more striking that there was suitable footage to be used in the editing of the film in the first place. If the material included in *Finland* is compared to the films that were previously known to have been preserved, the difference becomes obvious.²⁸ There is one immersive shot in the material that was incorporated into *Thus Was the Present Day Born* and all the other shots were rather stable, showing people passing by or focussing on street scenes. *Finland* was a memory box already for these aesthetic reasons: it included stylistically unique shots that have not been preserved in any other remaining reels. After the opening of the memory box, the view on the history of early Finnish cinema was radically changed. It is known that the setting of a camera on a boat, on a car or on a train was a regular practice in creating moving shots in other countries²⁹, and it was likely that this was also the case in Finland. But the finding of *Finland* proved that this technique was known and employed also in Finnish production. In this sense, the opening of the memory box had an impact on how the audio-visual heritage was, and will be, remembered.

26 See, for example, MUSSER, 1994, pp. 150, 248.

27 CONLEY, 2007, pp. 1f.

28 Confer the documentary *Suomalaisen lyhytelokuvan vuosikymmenet* (1985) by Lauri Tykkyläinen.

29 For further details, see HOLMBERG, 2003, pp. 129-147; MUSSER, 1994, p. 150.



Figures 10 and 11: Immersive shots in Finland

Finland draws on immersive shots and aims at mobilising the gaze. The supposed viewers, the passers-by of the Berlin exhibition, are like urban *flâneurs* who, instead of window shopping, can consume a virtual tourist trip to a distant country.³⁰ *Finland* is a commodity, aimed at arousing interest in travelling. According to Tom Conley, a film “encourages its public to think of the world in concert with its own articulation of space”.³¹ This happens in the case of *Finland*, too, as it persuades its spectators to join the travel and experience Finland only through its ready-made itinerary. Cinema can be interpreted as a technology of mobilising the gaze but, almost paradoxically, is simultaneously a technology of limiting the ways of seeing. It offers a particular selection of Finnish scenes, sceneries and routes and serves a mnemonic filter, remembering some locations and forgetting others.

Whose memory box?

As already argued, *Finland* can be conceived as a memory box, without which the remembrance of Finnish cinema would be completely different. It has had an impact on how the past of Finnish filmmaking is remembered – and, in fact, can be remembered. It enabled the activation of latent memories. It is important to ask, however, who the holder of memories finally is, whose memories they are and whose memory box the old dusted reel actually was.

The reel and its projection have become a memory box to those people, mostly film historians, who discovered the reel and opened the box in the 1990s.³² For them, it was a memory box *in relation* to the former understanding of Finnish film history. This is, however, only a limited view on *Finland's* memory-box-ness; the meaning of the word ‘memory’ can be interpreted in a more complex way.

It is possible to interpret that *Finland*, irrespective of its character as a tourist commodity, or perhaps because of it, was already a memory box in 1911, at the time of its original screening in Berlin. As a memory box, *Finland* has travelled in time, from 1911 to the 1990s and to the present day, but it also travelled in space, from the Finnish filmmakers to the Berlin audience in 1911.

30 On the idea of window shopping and cinema, see FRIEDBERG, 1993, pp. 1-10.

31 CONLEY, 2007, p. 1.

32 I belonged myself to the first film historians to analyse *Finland* and its cultural ramifications in the late 1990s. See closer SALMI, 1999, pp. 80-88; SALMI, 2001.

In addition to this, it may be argued that even its constituent parts, the separate travel films made prior to 1911, tried to capture ‘memories’ of Finland.

Pierre Nora has pointed out that there are “sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” and that there are “*lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory”.³³ *Finland* and its raw material, the short films depicting different locations in Finland, were portraying *lieux de mémoire*, sites that had already changed, that were under continuous transformation and that were layered by historical memories. Already the first images of *Finland*, with the castle and the cathedral of Turku, symbols of the medieval past of the country and perhaps unarticulated references to Finnish past under Swedish realm, refer to this point of departure. The Swedish connection might even have a political undertone, considering that *Finland* was compiled in 1911.

There are further aspects in the layered memories of the film. An eminent Finnish author of the nineteenth century, Zacharias Topelius (1818–1898) had written popular books such as *Finland framstäldt i teckningar* (Finland in Drawings, 1845) and *Boken om Vårt Land* (Book on Our Land, 1875) which became influential transformers of the notions of Finnish nature and culture.³⁴ They stressed provincial landscapes in a way that is echoed in the cinematic interpretation of *Finland* in 1911. Even the short travel films made prior to 1911 were in fact Topelian depictions of Finnish landscape, and early filmmakers wanted to create a certain filmic assemblage of Topelius’ views.³⁵ Therefore, even the constituent parts of *Finland* were stratified by memories, and the images from Koli and Punkaharju, for example, had already been etched into the national symbolic capital.

Finland seems to capture both diachronic and synchronic strategies in defining nationality. The original short travel films were mostly made for domestic audiences,³⁶ and national landscapes were employed in the construction of Finland as an emotional community at the time of the national upheaval. Still, these very same images were used to attract foreign audiences to come to Finland. Of course, it is impossible to know what kinds of images

33 NORA, 1989, p. 7.

34 KLINGE, 1998, pp. 271–274.

35 For further details, see SALMI, 1993, pp. 77f; SALMI, 1999, pp. 81f.

36 It seems, though, that the early film pioneer K. E. Ståhlberg had a plan of exporting Finnish travel films in the late 1890s. See Ståhlberg’s interview in the newspaper *Nya Pressen* 22 January 1897. See also SALMI, 1999, p. 82. There is, however, no evidence of any successful export activities.

were consciously set aside and not regarded as worthy of showing. It may be argued, however, that there is no fundamental difference between intended audiences, and domestic footage could be easily used for tourist purposes, too. Finnish filmmakers had portrayed *lieux de mémoire* to their fellow countrymen, and these same images could be used to widen the basis of remembering outside the community.

If a nation is an imagined community³⁷, this imagination has both internal and external ramifications that are bound together: the questions of how a community sees itself and how others see it, are inseparable – as well as the questions of how a community wants others to see it, how it imagines others to imagine it and how this imagination, in the end, influences the way others see it and a community sees itself.

Conclusion

In the beginning of the 2000s, it often looked as if the previous century was completely dominated by audio-visual culture. The new technologies such as CDs and DVDs have also left an impression that everything from the past would be available. It has, however, been estimated that only one third of the titles produced during the history of cinema has been preserved, meaning that most of the films are lost.³⁸ The transient nature of history is especially obvious in the first decades of cinema, and it is as clear that contemporaries did not usually see any lasting value in the films that were shot. When *Finland* was compiled during the years 1910–1911 it was not considered that someone could be interested in screening it after a century. *Finland* was made for contemporary purposes. Yet, as the film was made for the audience in Berlin, it also encapsulated visions of nationhood, and when it was shelved after the screenings in Berlin and Helsinki the reel became a silent object without possibilities to communicate with new generations.

Finland was already a memory box for the audience in 1911, both in Finland and abroad, but the memories it held were mixed in nature. The circulation of imagery on Finnish culture and nature in the early twentieth century resulted in persistence of memory which emphasised the “boxness” of

37 This refers to Benedict Anderson’s idea of a nation as an imagined community. See ANDERSON, 1983, p. 6.

38 ALLEN/GOMERY, 1985, p. 29.

Finland already in 1911. At the time of its making, there was an urgent need to create an image of the country, and there probably was no notion of the permanence of film as a historical medium, as something that could transmit messages to the future.

The curious history of the actual film reel led to it becoming a memory box in another sense in the 1990s. Its plain materiality played a role in this process but also the fact that *Finland* had been completely forgotten. This oblivion created necessary inertia that made it a memory box of audio-visual heritage. As this box was opened and the film had once again the possibility to communicate with the audience, it became – to draw on Alison J. Murray Levine’s words – “a dynamic site of negotiation and exchange”.

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