

# CINÉMA&CIE

## INTERNATIONAL FILM STUDIES JOURNAL

CALL FOR ESSAYS | SPECIAL ISSUE NO. 29

### Re-intermediation: Distribution, Online Access, and Gatekeeping in the Digital European Market

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**Deadline for abstract proposal: March 10, 2017**

This special issue seeks to examine the on-going transformation in the gatekeeping systems regulating the digital distribution of audiovisual content in the European context.

The past decade has witnessed a weakening of the role of traditional intermediaries in the screen industries such as distributors, exhibitors and broadcasters. This is due to a series of phenomena affecting the traditional patterns of film distribution and consumption, such as the shrinking of the theatrical window; the crisis of home video physical formats; the evolution of online streaming, especially after the arrival on the European territory of OTT behemoths like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video (Cunningham and Silver 2013); and finally the dissemination of informal services such as P2P portals and linking sites/cyberlockers.

Many of the early contributions to this field of research underline the disruptive role of these factors in what has been defined as a welcome process of disintermediation (Iordanova and Cunningham 2012; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). However, an excessive emphasis on the supposed disappearance of intermediaries could lead to a rhetoric of unconditioned, limitless and ubiquitous content access, and of the democratization of audiovisual culture in the digital age.

On the contrary, this special issue draws on the assumption that, rather than disappearing, intermediaries are instead changing shape through a process of re-intermediation involving a negotiation between several subjects, all interested in maintaining control over content access (Gubbins 2014; Tryon 2013; Crisp 2015; Vonderau 2015). Therefore, the current digital scenario is characterized by the emergence of new forms of intermediation, which include legal battles over licensing and distribution rights, film festival networks as additional distribution circuits, the interface design of digital archives and catalogues, the role of content aggregators, the online positioning of public-service broadcasters facing digital competition, and the “social distribution” made by online communities.

In fact, this process of re-intermediation also concerns informal distribution platforms (e.g. P2P portals and linking sites connected to cyberlockers), which feature new forms of gatekeeping through their own strategies, goals and the constant interaction with formal distribution and its main players (Lobato and Thomas 2015).

The need for an understanding of the main transformations in gatekeeping mechanisms is also important in the field of supranational policymaking. We refer, for instance, to the heated debate surrounding the European Digital Single Market strategy, in which the removal of geoblocking mechanisms (Lobato and Meese 2016) and the possible abolition of exclusive territorial licensing (Cabrera Blázquez, Cappello, Grece and Valais 2016), elicited different responses in a variety of stakeholders, including European producers and distributors, European public-services and commercial broadcasters, global OTT giants or smaller European VOD services, and consumer organisations.

Finally, considering online distribution simultaneously as an opportunity, a challenge, and a threat, also affects the policies and practices of audiovisual archives, which are increasingly compelled to regulating online direct access, for both professionals and non-professional users (such as scholars and students), to their catalogues.

Based on this general theoretical framework, the special issue aims to focus in particular (but not exclusively) on the following topics:

- Interactions between formal and informal services and practices;
- Tradition and innovation of the business models in the audiovisual sector;
- Legal issues (copyright holders' rights and consumers' rights) in the audiovisual sector;

- The relationships between policymakers (i.e. the EU) and the audiovisual industry with respect to online distribution and the access to audiovisual products;
- Strategies of control and curatorial styles in VOD platforms and especially SVOD platforms;
- Strategies of control and customization of the viewing experience;
- The organization of on demand catalogues, and its role in shaping the access to audiovisual products and the visibility of content;
- Interactions between distribution platforms and social media;
- “Piracy” and “social distribution”;
- Strategies of control and curatorial styles in unauthorized VOD platforms like P2P portals and linking sites;
- The organization of catalogues and the visibility of content on unauthorized VOD platforms;
- Day and date releases and other attempts to re-shape the traditional window system;
- Ongoing processes of re-definition of the audiovisual sector (production, circulation, consumption), with particular reference to phenomena of hybridization between cinema and television;
- Synergies and competition between SVOD services and pay TVs;
- The main features and gatekeeping functions of “catch-up TVs”, with particular reference to public and commercial broadcasting services;
- Synergies and cross-promotion strategies between traditional film festival and online distribution;
- The role of film festivals and Awards in the organizing strategies and curatorial approach of VOD catalogues;
- The main features and gatekeeping functions of online film festivals;
- The main features and gatekeeping functions of digital, online audiovisual archives;
- Forms, strategies and difficulties faced by traditional film archives when moving online;
- Strategies of control and curatorial styles in the online platforms of audiovisual archives;
- The organization of the cataloguing of online archive platforms, and its role in shaping access to audiovisual products and the visibility of content;
- Personalization strategies and interactions with social media in online archive platforms.

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### **Submission details**

Contributors are asked to send an abstract in English or French (300-500 words, 5 keywords, and 5 bibliographical references) and a short biographical note (150 words) to: [submissions.cinemaetcie@gmail.com](mailto:submissions.cinemaetcie@gmail.com) by **March 10, 2017**.

All notifications of acceptance will be sent no later than **April 1, 2017**.

If accepted, 4,000 word essays will then be required for peer review by **July 31, 2017**.

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