

## **Call for Papers: Film and History**

### **Producing and Experiencing History in Sound and Moving Images**

**Keynote Speakers: Richard Dyer, Thomas Elsaesser, Gertrud Koch, Gerhard Paul**

This conference will explore a point of intersection between the disciplines of film studies and history, focusing on how films generate history visually and audiotively, modeling it and making it available to experience. While historians have not engaged in detail with these questions until now, in film studies approaches have been formulated which posit that watching and experiencing film and media images play a key part constructing historical events (Sobchack 1996). In addition, the cinema has been read as a site of historical consciousness that replaces historical depictions of events, making the sensibilities of early periods palpable (Kapelhoff 2008). In recent years, the field of “visual history” has become established as a new realm of research (Paul 2012) that looks at related issues and represents an adaptation of the pictorial turn. While the specific aesthetics of images long remained unnoticed in their historical examination as sources, the historian Gerhard Paul now places this issue consciously at the center of his research. This represents a possible paradigm shift: away from the dominance of writing and towards the dominance of images, which, according to Paul, is also the result of entirely new possibilities of image research. In this context, comprehensive archives have been established, for example the Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation, an impressive example for how the study of recent history can profit from this expansion of the field of historical research.

The auditive level of the moving image has been taken into consideration as well, although the audio history of film has been largely neglected until now. Since the 1980s, sound in film has increasingly become a relevant field of research, but this research remains largely limited to studies of sound aesthetics and the history of sound production or technology. While in some approaches, film sound is explicitly placed in the context of a cultural history of sound recording (Holl 2012), the general meaning of film sound for modeling history and the construction of historical experience is scarcely examined in a thorough way. An exception here is Richard Dyer’s study on the Hollywood career of African American singer Lena Horne, where Dyer places the aesthetic of Horne’s voice in the context of her film and television productions and analyzes her singing and (and sound), regulated by the studio system, from the perspective of cultural history and sociopolitical issues (Dyer 2008). All the same, it should be noted that the auditive level of film in history has found little attention. But here, too, there are approaches that understand visual history in the context of a society of “co-viewers” and, quite expressly, “co-listeners” (Lindenberger 2004).

In general, the interpretation of political and historical events has been and is increasingly carried out with the help of film as a medium (Lowry 1991, Paul 2008). Documentary photography and film flank historiography, while fictional films present over and over popular adaptations of historical narrations. Presuming that historical knowledge is constructed in the media (White 1987, Hohenberger/Keilbach 2003), film here functions as an aesthetic and narrative modeling of history; not only does it stage important historic subjects or biographies of historical figures, but also mediates historical knowledge in an audio-visual fashion, in this way creating images of the world and shaping our point of view. Film thus enters into competition with the standard historiography as well as other cultural techniques of memory (Kracauer 1927, Rancière 2003, Paul 2008) and proves to be a significant factor in the competition for interpretive hegemony, until now hardly explored by historians.

## 19<sup>th</sup> International Bremen Film Conference, May 7–11, 2014

While ever since 1898 historians like Boleslas Matuszewski have been exploring the question of the extent to which film could be relevant as a historical source (Matuszewski 1898), in most cases the medium has been seen as testimony of its time of emergence or grasped in the sense of a film historiography with an aesthetic orientation. Furthermore, in the wake of Siegfried Kracauer's work *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) there have repeatedly been attempts to understand social-historical developments, like the political victory of Nazism in the early 1930s, by analyzing contemporary film. All the same, film and film history were by no means recognized as a legitimate space of reflection for the historical discipline. It was only in the mid-1970s that Marc Ferro demanded a turn to film in order to open a new field of historiography, the history of human imagination and desires. Ferro's interest is not directed only at certain film documents, but takes film as a document of history, as a reading of its subject and its states of emergence.

Since the 1970s, this development has been accompanied by an important transformation in film studies: various approaches have sought to re-formulate film historiography. During the 1980s, these critical approaches were grouped under the term "new film history," which was understood generally as the expansion of an aesthetically-oriented film historiography to include the economic, technological, social, and historical level. In the course of this transformation, film studies has demanded a more differentiated and complex understanding of historiography and historical reflection.

An important impulse for the mutual approach between film studies and historiography was the so-called linguistic turn. A key figure in the historiography was Hayden White (1987, 1991): his reading of the narrative character of history, which structures data in a targeted fashion, sharpened the gaze for film as a medium. Later, Robert Rosenstone (1995) located a new form of historiography in the medium of film itself, proposing a multimedia form of historiography. Robert Burgoune (2008) takes a similar perspective when he describes (historical) film as critical dialogue between present and past. In the context of research on documentary film in particular, this perspective has been the subject of critical reflection in terms of the relationship between film and history (Hohenberger/Keilbach 2003).

The 19<sup>th</sup> International Bremen Film Conference will explore these positions at the intersection between the disciplines of film studies and history, most importantly taking account of research on the production and experience of history in moving images and sound. The conference will consist of lectures, discussions, film screenings, and performances, and will take place in the local cinema (CITY 46). The organizers seek to contribute to the debate outlined above. The conference is addressed to film scholars and historians who:

- work on theoretical approaches to the field of research sketched above
- explore the relationship between history and film using exemplary works of the world cinema
- explore examples of the relationship between history and film in the European context
- or explore examples of the relationship of history and film beyond Europe, i.e., in the US, Latin America, or other regions.

If you would like to hold a lecture at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Bremen Film Conference (20 min. presentation & 20 min. discussion), please submit an abstract (max. 1 page in length, German or English) and a CV by December 1, 2013. Accepted participants will be informed by January 12, 2014. Travel funding is available to a limited extent. Please send your submissions to Winfried Pauleit and Delia González de Reufels at the following address: