

## CALL FOR PAPERS:

### **Research in Film and History: New Approaches, Debates and Projects**

Bremen, November 29-30, 2018

**The interpretation of political and contemporary historical events is and will increasingly continue to be carried out via audio-visual media. The same goes for the production of historical memory. Media communicate and at times even create historical knowledge while film shapes our notion and comprehension of history. Film furthermore not only showcases historical themes or sheds light on the biographies of historical figures, but also conveys historical understanding and consensus in audio-visual form. In this way, film shapes our images of the world and influences our perception. It also increasingly competes with and adds to established historiography. The Bremen Conference will explore new approaches, debates and projects at the intersection between the disciplines of film studies and history.**

Film and media such as documentaries, feature films, home movies, TV shows and internet platforms are continuously infringing on what used to be foremost the field of academically trained historians: the narration of history. But historians' monopoly on conveying the past seems to have vanished. Documentaries, feature films and home movies certainly narrate history in aesthetically different ways and according to their own established traditions and modes – while TV shows and internet platforms make concessions to ratings and the economic interests of big data. Nevertheless, films and audio-visual formats provide us with narratives of the past and capture the attention as much as the imagination of (broad) audiences. And they establish a certain consensus on what it was (and is) like to live in a certain period of time. Films may choose to focus on master narratives of national histories, or on the contrary, dedicate themselves to micro history, which was established in the 1970s. Historians began to adopt a smaller scale of observation to concentrate on a smaller field of historical analysis: an individual, a social group, a village, a town or a neighbourhood. Furthermore, film scholars coined the term New Film History (Elsaesser 1986), indicating that aesthetically oriented film history could expand to include economics, the history of technology, sociology, contemporary history, and so on. These changes in historiography and film studies have laid the foundations for a significant approach between the academic writing of history, on the one hand, and the filmic narration of history, on the other. This conference is especially interested in the results of these approaches and in what films and audio-visual formats mean to the different ways of understanding a historical past in an actual present tense.

While historians and film scholars have more often than not shied away from specific genres such as the historical epic à la Hollywood because of its aesthetics and anachronistic interpretations of the past (Sobchack 1990), cinema itself has nevertheless been read as a site of historical consciousness. As such, film scholars have pointed out, film is able to present new historical depictions of events and to make the sensibilities of early periods not only accessible but palpable (Kappelhoff 2008). More recently, film's ability to shape and keep alive cultural memory by the sedimentation, migration and recurrence of past events, objects and identities has also been stressed (Elsaesser 2014). Historians, in turn, have assessed the power of media (and in particular the power of images), and developed the field of "visual history," which is now established as a new realm of research (Paul 2012). Furthermore, the discipline has begun to discuss historical films which construct a "world of the past on screen" as a specific "mode of historical thought" (Rosenstone 2013) and to consider their potential as other forms of history writing. This is a logical continuation of earlier works which have located a new form of historiography in the medium of film itself (Rosenstone 1995) and proposed a multimedia form of historiography. This represents a possible paradigm shift away from the dominance of writing and towards the inclusion of images and sounds, which is also the result of entirely new possibilities of image and audio-visual media research (Paul 2012). It is not surprising that comprehensive archives have been established which serve a double purpose: they preserve audio-visual material and hope to stimulate corresponding historical research. The Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation is a case in point and an impressive example of how the study of recent history profits from this expansion of historical research.

The Bremen Conference seeks to explore a point of intersection between the disciplines of film studies and history, paying particular attention to new approaches to this interdisciplinary field. Again, significant changes in historiography have produced important impulses for the mutual approach between film studies and history. Hayden White's reading of the narrative character of history, which structures data in a targeted fashion (1987, 1991), and the linguistic turn have enabled a new understanding of film as a medium. Acknowledging the key role that watching and experiencing film and media images has played in the construction of historical events (Sobchack 1996) has led historians to pay careful attention for example to the filming of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (Lindeperg 2018). The conference also focuses on debates about how films generate history and historical knowledge visually and auditively and on how they model historical memory and resonate with personal experiences. Finally, we would also like to discuss new projects which address these questions either in research or film making.

Abstracts are invited on topics related, but not limited to:

- Contemporary history and media
- Historiography and audio-vision
- Audio history
- Archives and cultural memory
- Education and outreach
- Interactive documentary

Possible themes for panels which are related to the research interests note above are furthermore:

- Liberation Footage of the camps after WWII and digital repository
- Societal change and social movements in film
- Latin American dictatorship and trauma in film and media

Confirmed speakers: Erica Carter (King's College London), and Thomas Elsaesser (Columbia University New York) presenting his film *DIE SONNENINSEL*, D 2017

If you would like to participate with a short presentation (20 min.), please submit an abstract (max. 1 page in English) and a CV by May 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 or panel of three to four contributions. Abstracts for papers and panels which address any of the above topics and choose an interdisciplinary and/ or film-theory approach are welcome. A small travel allowance (we pay the hotel for up to two nights) may be granted but funds are limited. Accepted papers will be invited for publication in the first issue of *Research in Film and History* (coming soon).

Please send your submissions to conference organizers Delia González de Reufels, Rasmus Greiner and Winfried Pauleit to the following address: [film-history@uni-bremen.de](mailto:film-history@uni-bremen.de)

Accepted participants will be informed by May 11<sup>th</sup> 2018.