

Introduction: Film and History in the Twenty-First Century

Erik Hedling & Mats Jönsson

The following five texts were first aired at the third annual conference of The European Network for Cinema and Media Studies, NECS, which was held in Lund in June 2009. Organizing this multidisciplinary event, with more than 300 hundred participants and 260 papers, was a rewarding and exhausting experience for both of us. While listening to the multitude of inspiring papers presented by colleagues from around the world, we not only realized that historical research is a large and still expanding sector in our chosen field, but also that film studies has had a significant impact on many other disciplines, be it history, ethnology, anthropology, modern languages, or sociology. In short, what could be labelled as the historical turn has altered the academic landscape in the humanities today.

Just as we were getting underway with planning the conference, we were asked by *Scandia* to be guest editors of a thematic issue on “Film and History”. It struck us as both logical and appropriate to base such a volume on the 2009 NECS conference. Indeed, two of the authors below, American scholar Janet Staiger and Scot Duncan Petrie, were keynote speakers in Lund. The third contributor, Swede Mats Jönsson, has been an active member of NECS from the start of the network in 2006. And the fourth, Swede Tommy Gustafsson presented his research on the genocide in Rwanda as presented in western, audiovisual media at NECS. Swiss Vinzenz Hediger, in his turn, was one of the founding members of NECS.

Compiling five texts in a single thematic issue offers several advantages. For one thing, readers unfamiliar with ongoing research in international and national film studies are provided with a brief overview and an indication of where today’s media scholars are heading academically. Given that the five texts are so different regarding theory, method, and focus, readers will also get a sense of the variety of approaches available when historicizing film. In short, there are a number of rewarding ways for the historian to read the following

pages, not least when trying to map how film scholars deal with questions of historiography, verisimilitude, and veracity. Thus, we hope that the contents of this issue will result in future collaborations between historians and film scholars, and perhaps even between practitioners and theoreticians.

Turning to the texts themselves, Janet Staiger's contribution offers a new approach to how various types of film genre can be evaluated, critically scrutinized, and aesthetically compared. Her main point is that we ought to look more closely at the *practices* of grouping films and media texts historically. In his article, Duncan Petrie presents results from an ongoing research project dealing with film schools around the world. Here he traces the development of film education in Europe and the US from the end of the Second World War to the present, starting and ending in the UK. The text by Mats Jönsson focuses on the film relations between Sweden and Nazi Germany in the years 1933 and 1945. Particular emphasis is put on the production of German newsreels in Sweden during the war and the contemporary discussion in the two main trade papers. Tommy Gustafsson deals with Swedish television's handling of the Rwandan massacres in the 1990s. He discerns a biased discourse, at least partly based on denial. The genocide became an ingredient of a bad western conscience. Beside the Swedish news coverage, Gustafsson also turns to the many American fiction films produced about this historical disaster. Vinzenz Hediger, finally, analyses YouTube uses of clips from Oliver Hirschbiegel's highly controversial film *Der Untergang* (2004), on the last days of Adolf Hitler. The clips are employed in various juxtapositions, with unexpected semantic consequences. Hediger uses the term "meme", "a unit for a cultural idea that self-replicates in response to selective pressure in cultural environments", to study Hitler's appearance on the Internet.

In all, we hope that this will be a highly readable edition of *Scandia*.