

## Cinema, War and Democratic Agency: Exhibition, Moviegoing and Everyday Resistance, 1939-1945

Two-day seminar on media and history

**Venue** | Stiftelsen Arkivet, Vesterveien 4, 4616 Kristiansand S, Norway

**Dates** | Thursday 24 – Friday 25 November 2016

In the period 1939-1945, the Third Reich sought to conquer the world not only by brute force, but also through cinema. This is well known and overwhelmingly documented. How did European audiences and exhibitors respond to this challenge? What strategies and forms of resistance or collaboration did they adopt? And what can be learnt from this today?

The anthology *Cinema and the Swastika* (2007) was a milestone and turning point in new cinema studies. This was the first broad, systematic investigation of the Third Reich's attempt to influence, infiltrate and acquire film markets outside Germany. The articles in the book were primarily oriented towards political and economic conditions, and therefore more concerned with production and distribution than exhibition and reception. It seems that *Cinema and the Swastika* opened up the field for comparative analysis and international research. In 2012, the newly established *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* provided a special issue on Scandinavian cinema during the Second World War. The publication contains 15 articles about conditions in – and relationships between – Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Germany. Several articles are comparative and written by two or more authors. A wide specter of topics are addressed, but moviegoing and reception are not among them.

Today, exhibition, moviegoing and reception is a fast developing interdisciplinary field of international research. In 2011, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* brought a special issue on cinema culture in Britain during the Second World War. Still, there have been few attempts to compare and explore these phenomena across national borders.

Thus, this seminar aims at providing both an overview and fresh samples of ongoing research on wartime film exhibition, moviegoing and reception within a comparative framework. We will seek the balance between top-down and bottom-up perspectives and welcome different methodologies, perspectives and disciplinary inputs.

### Cinema as a battle place

To paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu's famous words: "La sociologie est un sport de combat", it is tempting to coin the phrase: Cinema is a battle space. How did this unfold during the Second World War?

Contributors to the seminar will be encouraged to address at least one of these questions (*possible topics are mentioned in brackets*):

- To what extent did cinemas and cinema owners retain their **independence** during the war? (*Exhibitors' strategies*)
- How did Nazi ideology influence **cinema policy** in Europe? (*Film exhibition; Third Reich 'Kulturpropaganda'; collaboration*)
- What kind of **pressure** were cinemas exposed to? (*'Gleichschaltung'*)
- How did European **audiences** respond to the challenge imposed by the new cinema politics? (*Moviegoers' practices; reception: quantity and quality; spectators' and citizens' democratic agency in a context of war; the impact of war propaganda*)

### **About the seminar**

The seminar is designed to be both a small-scale networking event for scholars and media professionals, and at the same time an event open to the public.

Two of today's most influential researchers on the topic of cinema during the Second World War, Belgian media historian Roel Vande Winkel and Danish film historian Lars-Martin Sørensen, have both confirmed their participation in the seminar.

In all, six presentations will be included in the program. Both explicitly comparative-oriented presentations and case studies on wartime exhibition and moviegoing in a single country, region or city are welcome. The organizer of the seminar will try to cover as many different parts of Europe as possible: Germany and/or other Axis powers, affiliated and/or co-belligerent states, neutral countries, Allied powers, occupied "Germanic" countries, and occupied countries in Southern and/or Eastern Europe.

Both days will be concluded with a wrap-up led by a moderator which will allow for discussing and comparing the phenomena of exhibition and moviegoing across national borders.

### **Film exhibition**

In connection with the seminar a series of three relevant films from the period will be shown at the Cinematheque in Kristiansand: The Norwegian "NS film" *Unge viljer* (lit. 'Young Wills', 1943), and the two German Ufa-productions *Titanic* (1943), starring the Norwegian actress Kirsten Heiberg (1907-1976) in a supporting role, and *Münchhausen* (1943). *Unge viljer*, directed by NS propagandist Walter Fyrst, is usually seen as the only Nazi fictional feature produced in Norway during the war. *Titanic* began as a prestigious film project initiated by Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. However, by the time it was finished Goebbels decided that the film was no longer suitable for exhibition in Germany. *Münchhausen* represents the most common and popular genre of wartime productions in The Third Reich, as well as in Norway – the light comedy.

All three films will be shown again in the very same cinema theatre in which they were screened in wartime Kristiansand.

### **About the organizer**

At the heart of the seminar lies Thomas V.H. Hagen's ongoing PhD project on cinema politics in Norway 1940-1945 at the University of Agder. Read more about the research project here: <http://stiftelsen-arkivet.no/kampen-om-kinoen-i-norge-1940-45>. Hagen has previously contributed to books, journals and exhibits on topics such as the Holocaust, the former KZ camp and 'Zuchthaus' Sonnenburg, resistance and collaboration in Southern Norway, film history and memory politics.

Stiftelsen Arkivet is a memorial, documentation and learning center, which is situated in the building formerly used as a regional Gestapo HQ from 1942 to 1945.