

Film as medium om geskiedenis te verstaan

Bewegende film is vir die eerste keer in die Europese somer van 1895 deur Auguste en Louis Lumière in Frankryk geprojekteer.¹ In die twintigste eeu het hierdie medium daartoe aanleiding gegee dat realiteit as fiksie uit die eksklusiewe ruim van die alfabetiese leesfunksie na die leesruim van oudio-visuele voorstelling oorgegaan het.²

Geskiedenis as menslike denkfunksie is onteenseglik daardeur geraak. In die eerste plek is historiese gebeure vir toekomstige geslagte op film vasgelê. Tweedens, het film die geleentheid geskep vir geskiedenis om in simbiotiese wisselwerking tussen geskiedenis-as-wetenskap en geskiedenis-as-(fiksionele)-kunsuitdrukking gestalte aan te neem.

Wanneer gelet word op die erns waarmee filmmakers geskiedenis benader, is dit noodsaaklik vir historici om oor die essensie en verantwoordbaarheid van historiese waarheid te besin. Opsigself kan die soeke na “waarheid” ‘n nuwe inhoud aan werklikheidsbesef gee, want, verklaar die pragmatiese filosoof, Richard Rorty:

The trouble with aiming at truth is that you would not know when you had reached it, even if you had in fact reached it.³

Die filmmedium is ‘n terrein waar waarheid en minder akkurate pogings tot waarheid op ‘n kritieke punt ontmoet om as kunsvorm sosiale kommentaar te lewer.

In die artikel *Die gedaante van die historiese feit op film*, wat die filmresesent en skrywer, Leon van Nierop, op versoek van *Historia* geskryf het, kan die leser indrukke kry oor die wyse waarop daar in films met die geskiedenis omgegaan word.

Dat daar leemtes rondom historiese akkuraatheid bestaan, ly geen twyfel nie. Dit is opsigself ‘n belangrike onderwerp van ondersoek vir historici. Feit bly staan: die film is ‘n tydgenootlike dokument wat belangrike insigte tuisbring.

Een voorbeeld is die bekroonde film *American Beauty* (1999). Van Nierop verklaar dié flik is die eerste een in ‘n lang tyd om die geskiedenis van die Amerikaanse gesin oop te vlek. Hy verwys dan na die regisseur, Sam Mendes, wat by geleentheid verduidelik het dat die gesin nog altyd die hoeksteen van die Amerikaanse Droom was. Vele geskiedkundige figure het al hul loopbane en lewens op die fondament van hul gesinne gebou, en as daardie fondament kraak, stort hul loopbane (en in baie gevalle, geskiedenis) ook in duie.

1. R.C. ALLEN, *Film history and practice* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1985), p. 18.

2. Kyk o.m. R.C. ALLEN (Red.), *Channels of discourse: Television and contemporary criticism*, (Hersiene uitgawe, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1992), pp. 1-30; J. MONACO, *How to read a film: The art, technology, language, history, and theory of film and media* (Hersiene uitgawe, Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 195-306, 380-411.

3. R. RORTY, *Philosophy and social hope* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1999), p. 82.

In 'n globaliserende wêreld (buite die geografiese grense van die Verenigde State van Amerika) kan die geskiedenis van die gesin ook binne die raamwerk van die betrokke film raakgesien word.

Vir die tyd waarin ons leef is dit miskien noodsaaklik vir die historikus om te besin oor die wyse waarop die film as medium gebruik kan word om die verstaansproses van die hede- en verledensproblematiek van meer dimensies te voorsien. Vir diegene wat daarin belang stel om die potensiaal van film en geskiedenis te verken is die webwerf *A midwife's tale: Martha Ballard's diary online*⁴ 'n goeie empiriese vertrekpunt.

HGSA Konferensie 2000

Die tweejaarlikse konferensie van die Historiese Genootskap van Suid-Afrika vind vanjaar tussen 24 en 26 Augustus op Richardsbaai in KwaZulu Natal plaas.

Die tema, *Behoeftes en uitdagings van geskiedenis as onontbeerlike navorsings- en onderrigterrein in die nuwe millennium* is uiters relevant.

Volgens die organiseerders gaan twee vooraanstaande Europese historici – na alle waarskynlikheid proff. Jörn Rüsen (Duitsland) en Frank Ankersmit (Nederland) – as sprekers optree.

Die bestuur van die Historiese Genootskap doen 'n beroep op almal wat graag die dissipline van geskiedenis wil bevorder, om die konferensie by te woon.

4. Kyk WWW.DoHistory.org

Film as medium for understanding history

Moving film was demonstrated for the first time in the European summer of 1895 by Auguste and Louis Lumière in France.¹ In the twentieth century the medium gave rise to a situation in which reality, as fiction, was taken out of an exclusive sphere of the alphabetical reading function to the reading space of audio-visual representation.²

History as function of human thought was directly affected. In the first place historical events were recorded for posterity on film. Secondly, film created the opportunity for the symbiotic interaction of history as science and history as artistic (fictional) expression.

When we note how seriously film makers approach history, it becomes clear why it is important for historians to contemplate the essence and accountability of historical truth. In itself the search for truth can give new content to the consciousness of reality because, as the pragmatic philosopher, Richard Rorty, explains:

The trouble with aiming at truth is that you would not know when you had reached it, even if you had in fact reached it.³

The medium of film is an area where truth and less accurate attempts at truth, meet at a critical juncture as a form of art, to pass social comment.

In the article, *Die gedaante van die historiese feit op film*, written by the film critic and author, Leon van Nierop, at the invitation of *Historia*, the reader gets the opportunity to take note of some ways in which history features in the film.

Often there are shortcomings in respect of historical accuracy. In itself this is an important field of investigation for historians. Fact of the matter is: the film as a contemporary document can provide valuable insight.

One example is the highly acclaimed film *American Beauty* (1999). Van Nierop explains the movie was the first in a long time to cut close to the bone in the field of the history of the American family. He quotes director, Sam Mendes, who on occasion explained that the family has always been the cornerstone of the American Dream. Many historical figures constructed their careers and lives on the basis of their families. And should that base crack, their careers (and in many respects, history) are shattered.

1 . R.C. ALLEN, *Film history and practice* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1985), p. 18.

2 . See *inter alia* R.C. ALLEN (Ed.), *Channels of discourse: Television and contemporary criticism*, (Revised edition, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1992), pp. 1-30; J. MONACO, *How to read a film: The art, technology, language, history, and theory of film and media* (Revised edition, Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 195-306, 380-411.

3 . R. RORTY, *Philosophy and social hope* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1999), p. 82.

In a globalising world (beyond the geographical confines of the United States of America) the history of the family can also be viewed within the same framework.

It is thus of importance, for the times in which we are living, that historians use film as medium to provide more dimensions towards a better understanding of problems in respect of the present and the past. For those historians interested in exploring the potential of film and history the website *A midwife's tale: Martha Ballard's diary online*⁴ offers a good empirical point of departure.

HASA Conference 2000

The biennial conference of the Historical Association of South Africa will be held between 24 and 26 August 2000 at Richards Bay in KwaZulu Natal.

The theme of the conference *Needs and challenges of history as indispensable research and teaching field in the new millennium* is relevant.

According to the organisers two leading European historians – most probably Professors Jörn Rüsen (Germany) and Frank Ankersmit (The Netherlands) – will be keynote speakers.

The management of the Historical Association has made an appeal to all who are interested in promoting the discipline of history to attend the conference.

4 . See WWW.DoHistory.org