

**21<sup>st</sup> International Bremen Film Conference, April 27–May 1, 2016**

**Call for Papers: Cinema and Childhood**

**The 21st International Bremen Film Conference will investigate the relationship between cinema and childhood in terms of film’s aesthetic, media, and cultural history. Until now, this complex has been explored primarily from a pedagogical or psychological perspective, regarding the child as a spectator: the focus has been placed on the impact of film on children and the films that children are shown. More recently, the sociological childhood studies, which problematize “childhood” as a social and cultural construct, initiated the analysis of childhood images and narratives in film history. But until now, film studies perspectives that explore childhood as a fundamental figure in the cinema—as an aesthetic, cultural, and historical phenomenon—have remained rare.**

Keynotes: Alain Bergala, Vicky Lebeau, Karen Lury

A look at the history of film and thinking about film reveals many different links between childhood and cinema that broach fundamental questions of film’s mediacy and aesthetics. Film and its predecessor, photography, were created during the period when childhood was being “discovered” as a separate phase of life. Recording this fleeting period also contributed to altering our view of it, and at the same time emphasized the specific potential of filmic realism. The child as film actor challenges the question of the boundaries between being and performing, of film production, and the relationship between director and actor. In over one hundred years of cinematic storytelling, scenarios of initiation—in addition to love and death—constitute the universal narratives of film. In film theory the attitude of the director and situation of the spectator have also been linked to childhood. The comparison of the spectator’s situation with a childlike state relate to the cinema as an apparatus or to the audiovisual aesthetic that addresses primary senses (i.e., seeing and hearing), highlighting its imaginary dimensions and the aesthetic experiences of film. Furthermore, cinephile discourses foreground the biographical and educational dimensions of film experience: how the films seen in childhood shape perception and memory, and how they are reactivated in the adult’s film experiences.

Conversely, the medium offers specific possibilities for representing and deliberating upon childhood as a sociocultural construction, adults’ biographical experience, or children’s reality. As a cultural product, film reflects cultural images of childhood. As a narrative and documentary medium, it enables directors to deal with biographical experience. As a recording medium, it can capture children’s specific physicality, gestures, and movements, and give them space to help shape their images in the production process. As an audiovisual form, it communicates an experience of childhood by way of seeing and listening, the senses of primary world experience. It stages a view of the child, the adults’ perception of the child and might, when children use the camera, even express children’s own world views. With films as social media, spectators can remember their own childhood and communicate about it.

The relationships between cinema and childhood traverse the most diverse aesthetics, genres, and times: think of early silent film and amateur films that document “first steps” or child play, classical Hollywood cinema’s child stars and stories of initiation, the child figures subjected to the horror of historical traumas in Eastern European or South American cinema, the biographically-tinged childhood films of European and international auteur cinema, animation’s fantastic worlds, and the evocations of the childlike gaze in experimental film.

The 21st International Bremen Film Conference offers a platform to discuss this complex relationship between childhood and cinema. The conference will combine lectures, panel discussions, film screenings, and conversations, and will take place from April 27 to May 1, 2016 at Bremen’s community cinema CITY 46. Abstracts are requested for papers that address questions of representation, spectator experience, acting, production processes, or biography and education, taking into account the film’s specific aesthetic mediality.

Please submit abstracts (2000 characters) with a short curriculum vitae by Oct. 30, 2015 in German or English to Bettina Henzler ([henzler@uni-bremen.de](mailto:henzler@uni-bremen.de)).