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## **FILM IMAGES AS MEMORY TEXTS: GRAND NARRATIVES AND SHARED NOTIONS**

### **Abstract:**

This presentation analyzes how national identity can be constructed and reaffirmed through visual representation in historic feature films. By focusing on Estonia's film history, this presentation examines the relationship between culturally specific elements, formal ideals imported from Hollywood epics and generic ideas about past. What initiates the search and construction of national history as moving images? What function does it serve? How is fiction, that is characteristic to feature films affecting audience's perception of history as a factual story? What kind of objectives are determining variable stylistic approaches of their production design? These are just a few main questions that example the numerous layers of motifs and challenges, that provide copious material about narration and visual arrangements of history.

Estonia regained its independence in 1991. After the end of everlasting decades of ravaging Soviet occupation, the taste of freedom needed also grounding of national identity affirmation. The local film industry, that functioned as a puppet for headquarters of Moscow collapsed altogether with the Soviet system. It took 12 years for a first historic epic titled *Names in Marble* (2002) to be made. Needless to say, that principal aim was nationally defensive, as it depicted heroic actions of Estonians during World War I. This was followed by structurally similar films *December Heat* (2008) about Communist coup d'etat of 1924 and *1944* (2015) about dauntless actions of Estonians during World War II. Yet, it is captivating how the younger generation of filmmakers have turned away from epic war films and instead of national identity address Estonian collective memory. In *Crosswind* (2014) dissects trauma June deportations of 1941 through tableau vivant's cinematic approach. *The Dissidents* (2017) turns to humor in affluent retro-cliche's from 1980's. *The Days that Confused* is a bold homage to everything circulating in 1990's that defined Estonia's sluggish Eastern-Europness.

The analyzation of those films reveals how generational structures are influencing dynamic ways of capturing both national identity and history into purposefully stylized time-capsule. Because feature films are essentially dramatized narrations of history, that reinterpret its material with relative necessity and a certain point of view, they reflect vividly both past and its surrounding present. Although historic films can function as providers of meaningful narratives of national myths, they can also reflect intertextual mediations between generations themselves with their values as historical beings, that are constantly re-encoded.

### **Keywords:**

film art, history, nationality, visual studies, memory studies