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## “Movies, Mind and Meaning”

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### Abstract

Construction of identity and meaning is becoming increasingly important in both media studies and religion scholarship. (Lövheim, 2004) Meaning construction outside traditional religion has become more interesting for religious studies and what individuals in the audience do with all messages circulated through media in everyday life has attended increasing interest within media studies (Stout and Buddenbaum, 2001). Motion pictures, soap operas and advertising are all examples of media contents which generate ideas among its audience which to a various degree are used as resources within the construction of identity (Jansson, 2001).

The investigation of what modern humankind's world views look like and what components they are composed of, in this context seems to be an important topic of investigation (Holm and Björkqvist, 1996). The ways in which the development of media has effected the daily lives of individuals is interest as is the nature of the self and the ways in which the process of self-formation is affected by the profusion of mediated materials (Thompson, 1995).

Film and religion are my interest within this larger frame. The topic is not exactly new but the combination of film and religion has during the last ten years resulted in a rapidly growing number of books by scholars interested in this field (Lyden, 2003). One growing focus is on the role that films can and do play within the emerging and developing valuesystem of people in the West today (Marsh, 2004). The British theologian Clive Marsh's point of departure is very similar to my own. Viewers bring to a film life-experience, immediate concerns and worldviews and the exploration of this interplay between movies and the interpreting process of meaning making is the very focus in this paper. Theoretically, the semeiological model of Alf Linderman is combined with cultural cognitive approaches used by a number of Scandinavian media scholars developing perspectives in audience theory (Linderman, 1996, Höjjer and Werner, 1998).

### **13 individuals, their favourite movie and what it means to them in their life**

My aim is to examine how individuals comprehend film and what the meaning process look like. In this paper I present the outcome of 13 interviews with young people about their favourite film. I suggest how it is possible to interpret how they interrelate film comprehension with their personal beliefs and their culturally constructed worldview from a sociocognitive point of view. Examples of films chosen range from Disneys *Lion King* (1994), sciencefiction and fantasy successes like *The Matrix* (1999) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001) or the next best movie ever according to [www.IMdb.com](http://www.IMdb.com) *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) as well as the Swedish blockbuster *Så som i himmelen* (2004), aka “*As in Heaven*”.