

Ingrid Stigsdotter (Ed.)

# Making the invisible visible

Reclaiming women's agency in  
Swedish film history and beyond



NORDIC ACADEMIC PRESS

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# Foreword

*Jannike Åhlund*

Who coined the phrase ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder’? Was it the ancient Greeks, the British poet John Lyly, William Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin—or in fact a long-forgotten British writer by the name of Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, writing under the *nom de plume* ‘The Duchess’, in whose novel *Molly Bawn* (1878) the phrase first appears in print?

‘History is in the eye of the historian’ is maybe a trite paraphrase, but it does spring to mind when reading this anthology about women in early and recent film history. The existing accounts of film history are remarkably one-eyed, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate. The literature’s cyclopean vision has resulted in women’s exclusion from film history.

Women who owned or ran cinemas, women musicians who played in early cinemas—and even to a certain measure canonized women filmmakers like Mai Zetterling have, from a historical perspective, had their unfair share of oblivion, omission and neglect. Not even the women’s movement in the 1970s succeeded in putting the issue of women’s film-making on the agenda in a game-changing way.

These examples make it obvious that previous generations of film historians in many instances, in the words of Ingrid Stigsdotter, ‘have tended to take for granted that women ... represented just an attractive front/surface, or were running the errands of a male manager’ or director, that women’s contributions did not merit the attention of a chronicler assessing things past. In other words, the women’s appearance and activities in various professional fields were simply if not outright un-natural, decidedly not the norm, and hence could be disregarded.

This collection draws attention to a number of startling examples



of women who have been omitted from film history, examples that appear symptomatic of how women have been downplayed, overseen or simply excluded from film historical accounts. Why? Ignorance? Low esteem? Male canonization? All those factors variously apply, although the context may differ, but the recurring bottom line is the low value attributed to women's contributions—in any context. As Stigsdotter's citation from the media scholar Erin Hill puts it: 'Women were never absent from film history; they often simply weren't documented as part of it because they did "women's work"'.<sup>1</sup>

So, is this just the habitual feminist ranting about the ever-present absence of women, reflecting an urge to shift history to herstory?

The binary coupling of absence–presence and invisibility–visibility is now a key consideration when (re)writing women's film history, as introduced in Eirik Frisvold Hanssen's contribution, 'Visible absence, invisible presence: Feminist film theory, the database and the archive'. The National Library of Norway (where Hanssen is Head of the Film and Broadcasting Section) has, as part of the 'Women's Film History Network' initiative, become a partner in the website project *Nordic Women in Film*, which has brought a number of practical and methodological issues to the fore.<sup>2</sup> It deals with inclusion, emphasis, the relationship between history and contemporary culture, goals, and, not least, how the film archive in itself can be activated in writing the history of women's role in film history. (These are, incidentally, issues that I, as editor of the aforementioned website, ponder on an almost daily basis.)

The binary pair invisibility–visibility deals primarily with how film history is written—who's in and who's out—while absence–presence emphasizes how the film industry works, with a focus on current absences and the lack of women in certain 'key functions'. The central question in this context is 'How do we make absence and presence visible at the same time?'<sup>3</sup>

On the heels of this question comes another, and it is one of vital importance. Can the mission to rewrite history be combined with predefined goals and official gender policies? The work of institutions such as the Swedish Film Institute is policy-driven, working for example towards gender equality in film production. In this

context, this book also highlights the risk of ‘aligning historical research with too specific, predefined, instrumental goals—to know a little too well in advance what one is looking for.’<sup>4</sup> Indeed, history and research should provide the possibility of surprise, as Hanssen writes. And as is manifest in the contributions to this anthology, the research and the archival excavations do offer a number of surprises as to the extent of both absence and invisibility.

Gender policies and political aims do not always make comfortable companions, but here they are brought together with their not-so-distant relatives in the rhetorical context of the *Nordic Women in Film* site. The common ground shared by academia and institutions in the broader context of linking historiography and present-day conditions for women working in the film business (if we regard it as such) is *rethinking*, along the lines of what Hanssen proposes: auteurship, professional categories, inclusion–exclusion, archival absences (‘Why?’ instead of ‘Who?’), and the use of archives as alternative sources.

How archives are assembled, organized, and made accessible is crucial, as is how we collect, circulate, and contextualize material—and how we use and interpret it. Setting the record straight can be laborious when source material is scarce.

What needs to be done in order for women to ‘reclaim’ (with or without scare quotes) their place in film history? More research! seems to be the answer. A paramount consideration, as Ingrid Ryberg points out, is that the

emphasis and celebration of forgotten ‘pioneering’ achievements and overseen aesthetic subversiveness invokes a notion of the woman filmmaker as independent oppositional creative agent, hence disregarding the specific historical terms, conditions and interplays on which film-making depends.<sup>5</sup>

It is these kinds of specific historical terms and conditions that come to light in this anthology. And as Dagmar Brunow writes in ‘Queering the archive: Amateur films and LGBT+ memory’, ‘Everyone needs memories to create their identities.’<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016): 5, cited by Ingrid Stigsdotter elsewhere in this volume.
- 2 <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/>
- 3 Eirik Frisvold Hanssen elsewhere in this volume.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ingrid Ryberg elsewhere in this volume.
- 6 Dagmar Brunow elsewhere in this volume.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tytti Soila who set things in motion by recruiting me to Stockholm University in 2014 in order to work on the first collaboration between Stockholm University and the Swedish Film Institute relating to the 'Nordic Women in Film' project.<sup>1</sup> Tytti also encouraged me to embark on this anthology project following the symposium that we co-organized at the end of that project, and that bore almost the same title as the present book.

Some of those who took part in the symposium 'Making the Invisible Visible in a Digital Age' in Stockholm in October 2014 are among the authors included in this volume, but my gratitude extends to those whose contributed indirectly to this book by participating in the symposium discussion. The same goes for the panellists and attendants of the follow-up symposium, 'Transnordic Trajectories: Past, Present and Future Film History through Nordic Women in Film' in 2017. This was co-organized with the Swedish Film Institute, where my main collaborator was Jannike Åhlund, whose energetic spirit and formidable communication skills have been crucial to all of our joint ventures. I am very happy that Jannike was able to write the foreword for this book before retiring from her position as editor of 'Nordic Women in Film'. She will be sorely missed at the Swedish Film Institute, but will no doubt continue to enrich Swedish film culture, whether through the medium of film or the printed word.

'Transnordic Trajectories' was arranged as part of a network project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers,<sup>2</sup> and I want to express warm thanks to the helpful administrators of that grant, Nordic Information on Gender (Nordisk information för kunskap om kön, or NIKK). I am also grateful to Christine Gledhill for useful and encouraging feedback on the book proposal, as well as to the two anonymous peer reviewers who gave extensive constructive

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Ingrid Stigsdotter  
Stockholm in the autumn 2019

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## Notes

- 1 For the *Nordic Women in Film* project, see the introduction to this volume. The project is also mentioned in Jannike Åhlund's foreword and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen's chapter elsewhere in this volume.
- 2 This network project informs Eirik Frisvold Hanssen's reflections elsewhere in this volume.

# Tracing women's agency in Swedish film history and beyond

## An introduction

*Ingrid Stigsdotter*

This anthology recovers forgotten aspects of women's work and memory, tracing women's film work through the lens of Swedish film history, with a few forays into international film ventures. Using a variety of methods and approaches, including careful study of previously neglected archival material, lived experiences, interviews, and theoretical reflections on feminist historiography, the book explores themes of women's agency and (lack of) visibility in a cultural context very different to Hollywood, thus providing readers with a healthy counterweight to the dominance of Anglo-American material in film scholarship published in English.

In Sweden, as in most small European film-producing nations, film-making is subsidized by the state. Since its inauguration in 1964, the Swedish Film Institute (Svenska filminstitutet) has distributed public funding to Swedish film production. This government-funded foundation also serves as the main custodian of Swedish cinema heritage through its archive, where all films that have been shown in Swedish cinemas are deposited and preserved. It is thus an institution of paramount importance for anyone keen to understand Swedish film culture. In recent years, the Swedish Film Institute has managed to generate significant international interest in Swedish film culture in terms of gender and representation because of the gender equality measures implemented by the foundation's current CEO, Anna Serner.<sup>1</sup> By making frequent appearances at international film

festivals, Serner has communicated the Swedish Film Institute's aim to make key film professions (director, producer, and screenwriter) less dominated by one gender, coining catchy phrases like '50/50 by 2020'. The widespread revelations of discrimination and sexual harassment by the #MeToo movement has boosted international interest in film industry policy strategies for gender equality, and thus in Swedish film.<sup>2</sup> Serner's '50/50 by 2020' mantra has been particularly successful; it has been adopted as the title for the European support fund Eurimages' gender equality strategy for the period 2018–2020,<sup>3</sup> and is used in web campaigns demanding change in Hollywood as well as in French cinema.<sup>4</sup> While Serner's outspoken support for and implementation of gender equality measures are significant, it is misleading to suggest—as did the headline of a 2017 newspaper article, 'Anna Serner: The woman who changed a film industry'<sup>5</sup>—that the increasing number of women directing Swedish films in the 2010s is Serner's individual achievement.<sup>5</sup> As early as 2000, the government charged the Swedish Film Institute with a mission to promote equality, and since 2006 the institution has officially worked to achieve an equal share of women and men in specific production roles (director, scriptwriter, and producer). In their introduction to *Making Change: Nordic Examples of Working Towards Gender Equality in the Media*, a 2014 publication designed to provide an overview of information on gender equality in Nordic media, the editors observe that being at the forefront of gender equality internationally forms part of the official self-image of the Nordic nation-states.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the reason that gender equality in the film industry is a political question at all has historical roots in the women's movement of the 1970s, when Swedish film workers organized to demand change.<sup>7</sup> Even though this collection of essays deals with films made before gender equality became a key objective in Swedish film funding, the book is thus of interest to international readers curious about Swedish film culture following #MeToo and '50/50 by 2020', since its second part is focused specifically on the legacy of the 1970s women's movement. Furthermore, the contemporary association

between Swedish film and feminism makes Swedish film history a compelling case study for expanding the horizon of Anglophone scholarly research on women's agency in a film industrial context beyond the dominant Anglo-American focus.

The original impetus for publishing these essays was an international symposium entitled *Making the Invisible Visible in a Digital Age* that Tytti Soila and I co-organized with Jannike Åhlund and Kajsa Hedström of the Swedish Film Institute in Stockholm in November 2014. At this event, scholars interested in feminism and film historiography convened to discuss the Swedish Film Institute's web portal *Nordic Women in Film*, a unique knowledge bank for researchers and general audiences featuring research and information on women working in the Nordic film industries. Representatives from Nordic research institutions, archives, film schools, and organizations such as Women in Film and Television (Wift) met with internationally renowned film scholars for a series of presentations, screenings, and discussions. Less than a year before the event, the *Women Film Pioneers Project* had been launched as a collaborative digital research resource on women active in the period of silent cinema around the world, and authors who had contributed to that project, including one of its founding editors, Jane Gaines, presented their research at the Stockholm symposium.<sup>8</sup> The launch of two new important initiatives for providing digital access to research shaped by feminist strategies and perspectives made for interesting debates, and at the end of the symposium the organizers concluded that the important themes raised in discussion would benefit from being developed in greater depth in writing. And this essay collection is the outcome.

In the years immediately following the 2014 symposium, the *Nordic Women in Film* website was launched as a Swedish language project focusing primarily on film workers in Sweden.<sup>9</sup> By the end of 2017, an updated, more Nordic version of the site—albeit still coordinated by the Swedish Film Institute—was introduced, featuring information about Danish and Norwegian women. Although this book is closely connected with my background as a mediator



between academic and film heritage perspectives when the *Nordic Women in Film* site was created, it is not intended as a companion to the portal. The majority of the content on *Nordic Women in Film* is published in Swedish, Norwegian or Danish, and only a few texts have so far been translated into English. For international readers interested in *Nordic Women in Film*, whether as an example of archival access work, as a way of communicating research beyond scholarly journals, or because of an interest in individual film workers or issues presented on the site, this book will provide insights into the venture, but until funding for translating material into English is obtained, the site will remain a Nordic resource, despite its Anglophone title. For readers familiar with Nordic languages, the new perspectives on archival methodology and Scandinavian film history offered in this anthology should prove useful by framing *Nordic Women in Film* in an international context of feminist approaches to film.

The impact of digitization has informed this book, and the essays by Hanssen, Stigsdotter, and Brunow in particular engage with issues relating to digital access. Because the anthology deals primarily with traces of film culture from the previous century, and since digital technology is not the focus of all the case studies, the ‘digital age’ part of the original symposium title—*Making the Invisible Visible in a Digital Age*—has been dropped from the book. However, all of the authors of course share the experience of carrying out research in an era of extremely rapid developments in digital film technology and culture, and the essays were after all collected partly at the behest of a film heritage institution that wishes to disseminate film history on a digital platform. The digitization of contemporary film production, exhibition, and distribution has profound effects on film archival work, and as a result on film historiography. Because, as Bregt Lameris (referencing Paul Ricoeur) points out in *The Film Museum Practice and Film Historiography*:

the interpretation of history does not begin with the historian but with the archivist. The decisions made by archivists on what should

and should not be included in a collection are the first step in the process of interpreting historical facts; all the succeeding choices the historian makes depend on the composition and structure of the archive. As a consequence, the archive is not only the 'starting point' of historical research, it is also part of the historiographical discourse.<sup>10</sup>

From a different but related perspective, Catherine Russell states that the film archive 'is no longer simply a place where films are preserved and stored, but has been transformed, expanded, and rethought as an "image bank" from which collective memories can be retrieved'.<sup>11</sup> Russell's focus is the reuse and appropriation of archival footage in contemporary film-making, rather than researchers using archival material to write history, but she studies how distribution and access across new digital platforms affect 'archiveological' practices.<sup>12</sup> As Russell points out, the term 'archiveology' has not only been used to describe the recycling of archival materials, but also the study of archives, in for example the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.<sup>13</sup>

This anthology can be understood as part of an archival turn in contemporary Film Studies,<sup>14</sup> through its inclusion of novel approaches to a wide range of previously neglected archival materials, ranging from collections at the National Library of Norway (Nasjonalbiblioteket) to the archives of the Swedish Musicians' Union (Svenska musikerförbundet) in Gothenburg, digitized census collections at the National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet), the private archive of a senior academic and feminist activist in Sweden, the archival material held at the Lesbian Home Movie Project (LHMP) in Maine, US and the bildwechsel in Hamburg, Germany, and finally, various archival collections held at the Swedish Film Institute.

According to the library and information science scholar Jeanette A. Bastian, who has surveyed literature about the archival turn across various disciplines, the term is used in contemporary humanities and social science research to signal a recognition of

the archive (whether digital or analogue) as ‘a knowledge space to be approached, constructed and even confronted in numerous ways and from many perspectives.’<sup>15</sup> As Bastian rightly notes, the current archival turn is actually a ‘re-turn’, one of several turns, the first occurring in European history studies in the early nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> However, contemporary concerns with the archive in film research—as well as in many other disciplines—are intimately tied to the digitization of cultural production and consumption.<sup>17</sup> Symptomatically, Giovanna Fossati’s *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (2009), one of the more influential books in the archival turn of Film Studies, addresses digitization in its very title.

Rereading the introduction to *From Grain to Pixel* in 2019, one is struck by the fact that when Fossati’s book was published, projection was ‘still almost all analog’, and few feature films were shot using only digital cameras, whereas digital technology today dominates not only editing but production as well as exhibition.<sup>18</sup> Fossati was of course well aware that the practices she described were in the process of dramatic change, and suggested that this ‘transitional moment’ provided an exceptional (albeit also ‘uniquely limited’) perspective for critical reflection.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in the past decade several scholars have taken on the challenge of analysing film archives and archival methods for preserving and providing access to film and film-related materials.<sup>20</sup> And when we consider the impact of digitization, the significance of databases—where born-digital and digitized archival materials are stored—and search engines used to retrieve data within such systems should not be overlooked, since information kept in digital systems becomes literally useless without efficient search functions.<sup>21</sup>

As Caroline Frick notes in her study of the politics and practices of film preservation, considering the power archives have to shape film history, it is important that media scholars approach archives not only as resources for researching specific topics, but as institutions worthy of critical investigation in themselves.<sup>22</sup> The archival turn is arguably intertwined with an institutional turn, as

researchers pay increasing attention to heritage institutions and the values that shape their practices.<sup>23</sup>

Russell cites Paul Flaig's image of the 'masculine archivist and the feminine body of the archive'<sup>24</sup> to highlight the risk that archive users end up perpetuating 'the gendered structure of the media archive itself'.<sup>25</sup> In her account, the archival users are filmmakers, but the metaphor is relevant also in relation to research, because as several of the essays in this book highlight, scholars searching for women's agency in archives are often faced with highly unsatisfying records.

The women's history pioneer Gerda Lerner pointed out that feminist historians attempting to create women's history started out using two strategies that were grounded in traditional history methodology, which she called 'the history of "women worthies" or "compensatory history"', and "contribution history".<sup>26</sup> More than forty years after Lerner published her article, this book provides an interesting opportunity to revisit her arguments and consider to what extent women's *film* history—to which this anthology is a contribution—has employed or still employs these strategies today. 'Compensatory history', according to Lerner, asks questions about notable women who are missing from the history books and their achievements. Within feminist film history, this is perhaps best exemplified by the (re-)discovery and celebration of neglected or forgotten women directors and their films. To give the director the artistic credit for the making of a film, despite most films being the result of collaborative efforts, is a tradition known in film theory as *auteurism*, and since the concept of the *auteur* director has been strongly associated with male creative genius, and many feminist film historians reject the idea that one individual should be thought to control the film, this is a conflicted area of feminist research.<sup>27</sup> The sustained interest in the history of women filmmakers among feminists is however not surprising, since there are feminists among women filmmakers as well as among theorists. In addition, in the early years of feminist film theory there was a very close connection between theory and film practice.<sup>28</sup>

Lerner insisted that 'notable women' were 'exceptional, even deviant'

in order to highlight that traditional history has focused on the ruling classes. Within the context of film, her reference to class distinctions serves to remind us about the professional hierarchies within film culture, where roles that are considered prestigious are associated with agency and power, and thus more likely to be documented and leaving traces in the archive. *Making the Invisible Visible* attempts to expand the field of enquiry, and by doing so make women's work more visible.

'Contribution history' is in Lerner's words a focus on women's 'contribution to, their status in and their oppression by a male-defined society'.<sup>29</sup> According to Lerner, when we discuss women's 'contribution to' something—in her example, a particular political movement—then 'the contribution is judged first of all with respect to its effect on that movement and secondly by standards appropriate to men'.<sup>30</sup> What Lerner found lacking in contribution history was the significance of the work of women in relation to other women. Contribution history also tends to focus on women's oppression and the struggle for women's rights,<sup>31</sup> an important and necessary part of women's history, but Lerner argued that this approach tends to end up describing 'what men in the past told women to do and what men in the past thought women should be'.<sup>32</sup>

While feminist film history still deals with women's discrimination and oppression—whether in terms of sexist industry practices, or of objectifying representations on screen—it does more than just account for male-dominated practices and patriarchal ideology. Research on the history of gendered work practices presents a challenge to established ideas about which aspects of film culture are worthy of analysis. And as Erin Hill writes in her study of women's work in American media production, 'Examining the types of work women could and did do in the wake of sex segregation reveals their agency—both in their own careers and in their industry's history'.<sup>33</sup>

While methods for 'doing women's film history'—to paraphrase the title of Christine Gledhill's and Julia Knight's anthology (2015) and the related *Doing Women's Film and Television History* conferences—are multifarious, tentative and experimental, and researchers

informed by feminism are heterogeneous in their perspectives, contemporary film scholars investigating women and film defy norms and structures defined by earlier generations of film historians, whose work was uninformed by gender perspectives. In a review published in *Cinema Journal* in 2009, Adrienne L. McLean described feminist film historians in the twenty-first century as characterized by fearlessness and a refusal to be hindered by the absence of material:<sup>34</sup>

If one is seeking information about women as historical subjects and still plagued by a paucity of material, of evidence of agency in the usual sense, then use what material there is, and redefine agency in a way that it can be shown always to have been there, in however conditional, contingent, or fragile a form.<sup>35</sup>

Another way of putting this, which similarly resonates with my experience editing this collection, is Shelley Stamp's suggestion that feminist film historians 'must trace the shapes defined by women's absence'.<sup>36</sup>

The first part of the book, 'Archival interventions: Locating women's agency in the archive' contains essays that concentrate on methodological issues, and research that reclaims the archive in the spirit of Vicki Callahan's *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*. The essays cover neglected dimensions of silent film culture in Sweden and Norway, reflections on archives and access, and the use of archival film as cultural memory in documentary work from various time periods.

In 'Visible absence, invisible presence: Feminist film history, the database, and the archive,' Eirik Frisvold Hanssen explores two sets of coexisting binaries that he argues inform ventures such as the *Women Film Pioneers Project* and *Nordic Women in Film*: the invisibility–visibility binary, which concerns who is mentioned and who is left out in the writing of film history, and why; and the absence–presence binary, which concerns the lack of women in certain professional functions in the film industry and is related

to the fact that some kinds of work—and some types of film—are considered more important than others. The essay explores how these two sets of binaries can be treated together, particularly in film historical research, revealing a striking absence of women in certain key functions in the film industry, and yet a significant, continual, often invisible or unseen presence throughout film history. Hanssen engages with recent contributions to feminist film historiography, including publications by Jane Gaines, Vicki Callahan and Shelley Stamp, and concludes by connecting with a specific case, the private archive of the Norwegian set designer Grethe Hejer, donated to the National Library of Norway in 2014.

Christopher Natzén investigates a specific period in early Swedish cinema history in 'Female cinema musicians in Sweden, 1905–1915', considering the role played by musicians in shaping cinema culture. By analysing cinema programmes and contextualizing this using contemporary press materials that commented on musical practices in Swedish cinemas as well as documentation from the Swedish musicians' union in the same period, Natzén shows how previously unused archival materials document the important part played by female musicians in establishing cinema music practice in Sweden in the silent era. At the same time, he outlines a range of difficulties facing the researcher wishing to explore women's work in cinema music, and provides glimpses into the lives of women who have not previously been included in Swedish film historical accounts. In that respect, as well as in terms of its focus on the silent era, his research ties in with the subsequent essay, 'Women film exhibition pioneers in Sweden: Agency, invisibility and first wave feminism', in which Ingrid Stigsdotter looks at the role played by women in Swedish film exhibition from the silent era and into the early sound era. Although the minutes of film exhibitors' meetings and reports in film journals show that the professions of cinema owner and film exhibitor were male-dominated in early twentieth-century Sweden, Stigsdotter's archival research suggests that a large number of women were involved in running cinemas in the silent era, and some continued to own and run cinemas for several decades,

crossing into the sound era. Citing Erin Hill and Miranda Banks, she points to similarities between the status in scholarly research of 'below-the-line' professions and work in film exhibition. Detailing some of the methodological difficulties of researching these often unknown women and their contribution to Swedish film culture, Stigsdotter highlights the need to investigate the links between first-wave feminism and film cultural pioneers, as well as the development of cinema culture in the provinces.

The final essay in the first part of the book does not discuss Swedish films, institutions, or filmmakers; rather, in 'Queering the archive: Amateur films and LGBT+ memory,' Dagmar Brunow singles out the hidden narratives in heritage institutions and the need to excavate the forgotten audio-visual LGBT+ heritage in the archives, thus highlighting methodological issues relevant to film historians who use archival material from national contexts in their work. Brunow shows how curated access to digitized amateur film can contribute to an intervention into heteronormative historiography. Drawing on archive theory (Derrida, Foucault, and Stoler), she uses a perspective that merges theorizations of the archive as a power structure with media-archaeological approaches that accent the materiality of the archive. Her approach links the feminist film history project with cultural memory studies, and presents amateur films as a source for LGBT+ memories. Brunow looks at practices of collecting, cataloguing, and curating access as tools for the remediation and recontextualization of archival footage. She argues that archivists need to reflect on their practices, which run the risk of either unqueering LGBT+ lives or adding to their vulnerability.

The second part of the book, 'Women, Film and Agency in the 1970s and 1980s,' revisits the decades when feminism and women's liberation became mainstream and began to impact seriously on both practical film-making and film theory. The three essays in this section deal with various aspects of Swedish film culture of the 1970s and 1980s, ranging from feminist debates in Swedish film criticism to women's film-making.

Despite a chronological shift from Brunow's essay, with its focus



on lived experience and memory work, those concerns are still highly relevant in Tytti Soila's essay, 'Activism, ideals and film criticism in 1970s Sweden'. Her contribution is a personal reflection on activism and ideals in the 1970s, remembering the film critical tendencies in feminist interest groups such as the Swedish Women's Film Association (Svenska Kvinnors Filmförbund, SKFF), of which Soila was a member. She outlines the debate about representation prompted by a number of Swedish films released between 1974 and 1977, with particular focus on a hearing organized in November 1976. At this hearing, the topic of sexism in contemporary film and in film critical reviews was discussed by a panel made up of the leading film critics in Sweden, and the actress Ann Zacharias, the 'object' of the male critics' supposedly voyeuristic gaze, came forward in their defence. This essay portrays a moment of feminist activism in the cinema culture of 1970s' Stockholm, placing the event in its cultural context. In addition, Soila discusses the relationship between filmic authorship—associated with male *auteurs*—and the idea of making one's voice heard, so important to the feminist movement.

Just as the on-screen representation of women was central to the debates outlined in Soila's essay, it plays an important role in Elisabet Björklund's essay, 'Freedom to choose: Reproduction and women's agency in three Swedish films of the 1980s'. The focus here, however, is on three specific fictional films made in the 1980s by women directors (Gunnel Lindblom, Marianne Ahrne, and Ann Zacharias), in which unwanted pregnancy and abortion play key roles in the storylines. This period saw a rise in the number of Swedish films directed by women, and film narratives increasingly reflected questions closely related to the women's movement, such as the possibility of combining motherhood and a professional career, or the right to abortion on demand. Combining a careful textual analysis with a discussion of the films' reception, Björklund pays particular attention to the gendering of the filmmakers and their films in the critical discourse when the films were released. She also considers how the filmic narratives represent the changes

in women's freedom that had taken place in the 1970s and 1980s, and ultimately explores two kinds of agency: the agency of women filmmakers of the 1980s in representing reproductive issues; and representations of women's agency when making reproductive choices.

Similarly, the last essay explores films that have been neglected in film historical writings. Ingrid Ryberg, in 'An elevated feminist ahead of her time? Mai Zetterling's non-fiction shorts in the 1970s and 1980s' addresses probably the most internationally renowned individual portrayed in this anthology. As a 1950s film star turned filmmaker, known as the only female auteur director in Sweden's 1960s art cinema, Mai Zetterling has received a great deal of attention, but thus far scholars have concentrated on her career up to the critical failure of her film *The Girls* (*Flickorna*, 1968). Ryberg deals with the 'bad timing' of that film, for only a few years later *The Girls* would epitomize the exact moment of the new women's film culture, and opened numerous film festivals around the world. Ryberg shows how Zetterling herself played a crucial role in this film culture, not just as an icon, but as a spokesperson, and considers her little-known non-fiction short film production from the 1970s and onwards, including *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* (1978) and the infomercial *Concrete Granny* (*Betongmormor*, 1986). Women's liberation was gaining considerable political currency in these decades, and Sweden's image as a forerunner in gender equality was beginning to form, but as Ryberg points out, the economic and material preconditions for women's film-making remained difficult in Sweden, and in Zetterling's case practically impossible. Contesting the often-repeated idea that Zetterling was 'ahead of her time', Ryberg suggests that this notion has counterproductively contributed to obscuring not only her production of non-fiction shorts in the 1970s and 1980s, but also the crucial role that Zetterling played in the transnational feminist film culture in this era.

Although some of the essays in this book deal with the silent era, thus contributing to the same field of research as the *Women Film Pioneers Project*, the majority also extend their attention into the

1930s and beyond, making visible much of what is absent from traditional film histories, and contributing to a reclaiming of women's agency in an expanded understanding of the field of film history.

The book addresses methodological issues in feminist film history and includes queer perspectives on both amateur and professional film-making. It contains original research on careers and professions that have been considered marginal in traditional accounts of film history and film archival practices in relation to LGBT+ memory, as well as new perspectives on women's film-making, film feminism, reception, and criticism.

Some readers may come to this book motivated by an interest in contemporary Swedish film culture fuelled by #MeToo and the Swedish Film Institute's current strategies for achieving gender equality in film production. Although the essays in this collection do not explain or directly comment on these issues, their variety of themes and approaches make a compelling case for a women's film history that encompasses critical approaches to film heritage institutions, and considers the exhibition, reception, and distribution of film, as well as production contexts. Visibility, invisibility, and agency are key issues to take into account when approaching the topic of women and film, whether in the past or in the present. To understand the complex issue of women's agency in film today we also need to understand the past. Each of the seven case studies in this book makes a telling contribution to that aim.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, Heyman 2015; Maddox 2017.
- 2 For more on #MeToo and its impact on scholarly media research, see the special section in Loist & Verhoeven 2019.
- 3 <https://site.505oby2020.com/home> and <http://www.5050x2020.fr/>. Accessed 17 June 2019.
- 4 Eurimages 2017; <https://site.505oby2020.com/home>; <http://www.5050x2020.fr/>.
- 5 Maddox 2017.
- 6 Edström et al. 2014, 9.
- 7 See Jansson & Wallenberg, in press.

- 8 <https://wfpp.cdrcs.columbia.edu/>. Eirik Frisvold Hanssen discusses *The Women Film Pioneers Project* elsewhere in this volume in 'Visible absence, invisible presence: Feminist film history, the database, and the archive'.
- 9 <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/>. Nordic Women in Film was launched in April 2016.
- 10 Lameris 2017, 31.
- 11 Russell 2018, 1.
- 12 Ibid. 12.
- 13 Derrida 1996; Foucault 1972; see also Ebeling & Günzel 2009.
- 14 See Smoodin 2014, 96 ff.
- 15 Bastian 2016, 3.
- 16 Ibid. 7.
- 17 For a brief critical overview of contemporary approaches to 'the archive' and the notion of 'heritage' in cultural theory, see Frick 2011, 11–20.
- 18 Fossati 2009, 12–13.
- 19 Ibid. 13.
- 20 A further important work is Jones 2012; for alternative video collectives and issues with access in European archives, see Brunow 2017, 98–110 and Brunow 2012, 171–82; for Scandinavian archives, see Brunow & Stigsdotter 2017.
- 21 See Anderson 2014, 100–14.
- 22 Frick 2011, 7.
- 23 See, for example, Jansson 2016, 18–231; Snickars 2015, 63–7.
- 24 Flaig 2015, cited in Russell 2018, 185.
- 25 Russell 2018, 185.
- 26 Lerner 1975, 15.
- 27 Elsewhere in this volume in 'Activism, ideals and film criticism in 1970s Sweden', Tytti Soila discusses authorship and women filmmakers within the context of Swedish film culture in the 1970s, and Ingrid Ryberg considers the problem of highlighting individual 'pioneering' achievements in 'An elevated feminist ahead of her time? Mai Zetterling's non-fiction shorts in the 1970s and 1980s'. For a useful discussion of authorship which argues in favour of feminist engagement with the work of female directors, see Tasker 2010, 213–30.
- 28 For a lucid discussion of the historical relationship between feminist theory, feminist filmmaking, and 'women's cinema'—whether understood as films made by women or films addressing women by way of genre or theme—see White 2015, 1–27.
- 29 Lerner 1975, 16.
- 30 Ibid. 16.
- 31 Ibid. 17.
- 32 Ibid. 19.
- 33 Hill 2016, 6.
- 34 The publications reviewed were Lant 2006, Hastie 2007, and Parreñas Shimizu 2007.

- 35 McLean 2009, 144–5.  
 36 Stamp 2015, discussed by Eirik Frisvold Hanssen elsewhere in this volume in ‘Visible absence, invisible presence: Feminist film history, the database, and the archive.’

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PART I

ARCHIVAL INTERVENTIONS –  
LOCATING WOMEN'S AGENCY IN THE ARCHIVE





# Visible absence, invisible presence

Feminist film history,  
the database, and the archive

*Eirik Frisvold Hanssen*

In this essay I aim to address a series of theoretical and methodological questions relating to current projects that disseminate film historical research focusing on women's contributions, and in particular the role of the film archive in these efforts. Although the argument is of a general nature, it is nonetheless informed by specific circumstances. The essay was written in conjunction with the National Library of Norway's involvement in a specific project—the website, *Nordic Women in Film*, initiated by the Swedish Film Institute, and linked to the research project 'Women's Film History Network: Norden' (2016–2017).<sup>1</sup> In a newspaper commentary on the launch of the Norwegian content published on *Nordic Women in Film* in December 2017, film scholar Johanne Kielland Servoll described the website as a kind of 'awareness project' (*erkjennelsesprosjekt*) similar to the logic of counting within discourses on gender equality or the Bechdel–Wallace test, revealing how many—or how few—women who have worked behind the camera in Norwegian film history.<sup>2</sup> At time of writing, the website includes biographies and filmographies relating to 295 Norwegian women working in the film industry, along with 45 in-depth articles and interviews covering a variety of Norwegian angles on historical periods, professions, and film genres.

Contributing material to be published on the website entailed a number of choices and questions for the National Library of Norway, some of which I will examine more thoroughly in what follows. What should be included in such a website? And how can the film archive in itself be activated in writing the history of women's roles in film, both in a practical and perhaps political sense?

When framing projects that attempt to display the role of women in the film industry, whether by grouping the historical and the contemporary, as in the *Nordic Women in Film* website, or having a delimited historical period, such as the database of the *Women Film Pioneers Project*, focusing exclusively on the silent era,<sup>3</sup> one seems to have to grapple with two sets of co-existing binaries that are interrelated but also fundamentally different: what I would argue should be termed the invisibility–visibility binary on the one hand, and the absence–presence binary on the other.

The invisibility–visibility binary is concerned with how film history generally is written—who is mentioned, who is left out, and why. On the other hand, the absence–presence binary rather emphasizes how the film industry works, with the main attention usually (but not necessarily solely) directed towards the present, often focusing on absences, the lack of women in certain key functions. The notion of key functions in film production are central to both Norwegian and Swedish discussions and film policies on gender equality in film production, and usually refers to three professions: directors, screenwriters, and producers. In this model, some kinds of work, and some types of films, are inevitably considered more important than others.

So what do the words absence, presence, visibility, and invisibility mean in this context? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the word 'absence' can be defined as the 'state of being absent or away from a place, or from the company of a person or persons.'<sup>4</sup> The word is usually contrasted with 'presence', defined as 'the fact or condition of being present; the state of being with or in the same place as a person or thing; attendance, company, society, or association.'<sup>5</sup> Referring to these dictionary definitions, Amanda Bell points

out that the two terms, absence and presence, are dependent upon 'the notion of being', which means occupying a place. Therefore, Bell argues, 'the definitions of presence and absence explicitly rely upon the states within which they are found', which can be defined as, for example, the world, images or representations.<sup>6</sup> In our case, absence and presence can be located within both the film industry throughout history and in the writing and remembrance of that history. According to the OED, 'visibility' refers to the 'condition, state, or fact of being visible; visible character or quality; capacity of being seen (in general, or under special conditions)' and also the 'degree to which something impinges upon public awareness; prominence.'<sup>7</sup> 'Invisibility', on the other hand, is the 'quality or condition of being invisible; incapacity of being seen.'<sup>8</sup> While absence is understood in contrast or opposition to presence, both visibility and invisibility are categories that presuppose presence. The issue is rather the capacity or incapacity of that which in fact is present to be seen, or to affect public awareness. But absences can and should also be made visible. One productive way to display absence is of course using statistics. The fact that zero per cent of Norwegian feature films between 1911 and 1948 were directed by a woman speaks volumes, but does not tell the whole story.

The notion of absence was central to early feminist film theory from the very first. Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane argued that the beginning of the theorization of the female spectator in feminist film theory took place in Laura Mulvey's seminal 'Visual Pleasure' essay in 1975, where ironically, 'its "origin" is constituted by an absence. ... What was so overwhelmingly recognizable in "Visual Pleasure" was our own absence.'<sup>9</sup> This notion of absence was, of course, followed by extensive academic work on female spectatorship, combining empirical historical research with feminist theoretical perspectives (by the likes of Miriam Hansen, Janet Staiger, and Jackie Stacey), and subsequently discourses on how to deal with other forms of 'absences' from these accounts, linked, for example, to ethnicity and sexuality.

If we assume that both absence *and* presence can be made both

visible *and* invisible, are there ways to think of these two sets of binaries together, particularly in film historical research? How can one make visible the striking absence of women in certain key functions in the film industry at the same time as one similarly makes visible the significant, continual (often unseen or invisible) presence and contribution of women throughout film history? In short: how do we make absence and presence visible at the same time?

Regardless of emphasis, projects such as *Nordic Women in Film* and *Women Film Pioneers* entail explicit ambitions for change, directed towards an understanding of the past, as well as the future. One type of change is connected with how film history is written and understood; another type towards future film policies. Different forms of aims involving different forms of change also demand diverse methodologies, to a large extent informed by specific institutional conditions—bringing together the practices of film archiving, film historical research, and contemporary film policy.

Both film historiography and feminist film theory view the medium itself, individual works, or contexts and practices in the light of specific formative cultural and social structures. As a database, the *Nordic Women in Film* project is interesting in the way its formation, by the Swedish Film Institute, has been explicitly described as an effort to achieve a particular, predefined goal: gender equality in film *production*. The rationale for including a database of female film professionals throughout history in an effort to implement specific film policy strategies is explained by the assumed polemic function of such a website. As argued in a paper published by the Swedish Film Institute on the European Council website, efforts 'to achieve gender equality are often met by arguments and explanations as to why it simply isn't possible', and one strategy is 'to meet every argument with an action' and 'each challenge with a constructive suggestion'.<sup>10</sup> The first of these arguments is defined as follows: 'There are very few competent female filmmakers'. The statement itself is not attributed to anyone, but seems to be intended as a composite of contemporary views (implicit or explicit) without a clear source. At any rate, the Swedish Film Institute's response is:

‘No, we disagree. There are plenty of competent women making film. However, those women are not visible enough. This is why we are setting up a web site to make female filmmakers in the Nordic region visible, from the early days of cinematic art up to the present day.’ The concept of the website as a response to an argument, in order to subsequently reach particular goals, is repeated in an article by Johan Fröberg of the Swedish Film Institute, claiming that the website, ‘by showing the plethora of successful Nordic women in film, will refute the argument that there are only a few competent women filmmakers.’<sup>11</sup>

When the aim of the project was initially described on the website itself, in a short paragraph the two binaries of absence–presence and invisibility–visibility were posited together in a way that both demonstrates their interrelationship as well as seemingly irreconcilable differences. The role of women throughout film history was presented in the following manner:

In the early days of film there was a relatively high proportion of women working in the industry. They disappeared with the rise of the talkies—and did not reappear until the 1970s, even though there were pioneers and individuals active during most decades. Quite simply, it is time to showcase these women, to accord the stories and professional competencies of women in Swedish film history their rightful place, and to take a closer look at films and contributions that have been forgotten, neglected—or perhaps written off by male corps of critics.<sup>12</sup>

This is a story of a strong female presence in the silent film era, followed by a ‘disappearance’ at a particular point in history (‘with the rise of the talkies’) and a subsequent ‘reappearance’ in the 1970s. Even though the verbs ‘disappear’ and ‘reappear’ are used, there is also the assertion that women did not completely vanish—‘there were pioneers and individuals active during most decades’ (although the phrase ‘most decades’ actually implies a total disappearance at some point between the 1930s and 1960s). Perhaps

more importantly, the website itself in effect negates the assumption of a disappearance, by containing biographies of approximately 775 Swedish female film professionals through the entirety of Swedish film history, and thus an inclusive approach to cinematic authorship, along with in-depth articles on female film exhibitors and cinema musicians. And along with the account of the fluctuating absence and presence of women, there is also an argument concerning visibility and invisibility, the need to 'showcase', to accord certain contributions 'their rightful place' in the writing of Swedish film history, as well as descriptions of (gendered) dynamics of power excluding, neglecting, and undervaluing certain contributions.

Several film scholars, including Jane Gaines, Vivian Sobchack, and Vicki Callahan, have pointed out that feminist film historiography always relates to the present—as Gaines has put it, "the 'historical turn' in film feminism is also, and as much about feminist film theory."<sup>13</sup> The way the formation of the *Nordic Women* database was prompted by contemporary film policy goals somehow echoes Callahan's call for a non-chronological media-archaeological approach to film history, conceived within the framework of the present.<sup>14</sup> There is nonetheless always a danger of aligning historical research with overly specific, predefined, instrumental goals—to know a little too well in advance what one is looking for. History—and archival research—should ideally provide the possibility of surprise. To what extent are models for writing and presenting the history of silent film applicable for the writing and display of comparable histories about later periods, and the understanding of the current situation? To change the way the history of film is written must also involve the rethinking of categories. What does 'participation' and 'inclusion' in the film industry mean? What does 'absence' and 'exclusion' refer to? How broad should the notion of 'authorship', or even 'key function', be?

In an essay on the work ahead for what she characterizes as 'feminist media historiography', Shelley Stamp refers to her own research on the filmmaker Lois Weber, and reflects on the discrepancy between the extent of Weber's achievements and the invisibility

of these achievements both in contemporary discourses and the subsequent writing of film history. Similarly, Stamp argues that there is a discrepancy between the wide range of existing scholarship on women's engagement with early film culture produced in the past two decades and the limited impact this work has had on dominant accounts of silent film history, both in popular and scholarly domains. Feminist historiography is not a 'competing narrative that repeats the methods and tropes of conventional history'. Stamp encourages film historians to look 'past the screen', to produce 'film scholarship without film', focusing on women's part in shaping discourses on cinema, in roles such as film critics and film censors.<sup>15</sup> Stamp also argues that one important strategy for achieving a rewriting of film history is to 'fundamentally reconceive authorship', because the 'true scope of women's engagement with, participation in, and production of early movie culture comes into view only when we move beyond a focus on female directors and screenwriters'—not least because women's contributions might be obscured or uncredited. To write feminist media history should also entail tracing 'alternative genealogies' and studying 'alternative archives and unorthodox materials' not usually studied in traditional film history. And importantly, Stamp argues that a feminist media history 'must make absence productive'. Absences do not necessarily need to be filled, but could rather be made visible, as in Giuliana Bruno's work on Elvira Notari, where the impossibility of reconstructing a full picture is acknowledged by making absences evident, which in Bruno's account is comparable to the preservation of frescoes.

The online database, *The Women Film Pioneers Project*, launched by Columbia University in 2013, focuses on female film professionals in the silent era. The front page of the website presents 'the inclusion of producers, directors, co-directors, scenario writers, scenario editors, camera operators, title writers, editors, costume designers, exhibitors, and more' as a means to 'make the point that *they were not just actresses*'.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the Nordic website, several actresses are included but the main focus is given to women working behind the



scenes in a broad sense. Like the Nordic website, the *Film Pioneers* database is also associated with a set of goals, albeit articulated quite differently. The goal of the project is 'to jumpstart historical research on the work of women filmmakers from the early years of cinema, ending with the coming of sound; to facilitate a cross-national connection between researchers, to reconfigure world film knowledge by foregrounding an undocumented phenomenon: these women worked in many capacities'. The *Pioneers* website also foregrounds the numerous female film professionals in the silent era, claiming that more women 'worked at all levels inside and outside the Hollywood film industry in the first two decades than at any time since', and that the high incidence of women workers 'was not limited to the US'.

Reclaiming the word 'pioneer', associated with traditional male-dominated film historiography, a striking aspect of the database is the wealth of occupations that are included. An important experience in the project, again according to the website, was that researchers 'found more women than anyone expected to find', leading to the adoption of the maxim that 'What we assume never existed is what we invariably find'. This is both reflected in thematic articles on female film editors, camera operators, film colourists, film exhibitors, and the presence of African-American women in the film industry, as well as in the more than one hundred types of professions (some overlapping) associated with women listed in the database. The wealth of occupations, and subsequently a broad notion of cinematic authorship suggest the potential for tracing important continuities with regard to women's contributions to film history, also in periods that seem to be primarily associated with notions of disappearance, absence, and exclusion. The Scandinavian entries, though limited in number, reflect the inclusive approach, and include the Norwegian film censor, journalist and theatre critic, Fernanda Nissen, Swedish film censor, Marie Louise Gagner, and Swedish title writer and designer, Alva Lundin.<sup>17</sup>

Victoria Duckett and Susan Potter have argued that the field of research on women and silent cinema provides 'the opportunity to

explore film history anew'. What distinguishes the period is how 'women are located at every stage and in all facets of the silent era filmmaking process'; it is precisely the recognition of a multitude of contributions, various forms of cinematic 'authorship' that they argue 'permits the critical expansion of the word "*filmmaker*" and its relation to histories of cinema, gender and modernity'.<sup>18</sup> So while research on women in silent film examines a period where women, according to many of the historians of the era, were involved in the film industry to a seemingly unequalled extent, the inclusiveness with regard to a multitude of professional contributions and forms of cinematic authorship could also constitute a useful foundation for the study of later periods, tracing the continuities in women's contributions throughout film history.

This is because, as Duckett and Potter point out, research reframing the significance of gender in early cinema involves a 'reorientation' not only of 'history but the approach and methodologies by which it is undertaken'.<sup>19</sup> Such a reorientation begins with the 'presumption that film history is incomplete', and here the authors in part direct their attention to the archive, in many ways the basis for the writing of history, and the way women's contributions are absent. The challenge lies in recovering 'the work of female filmmakers, in the broadest sense of the term, without replicating the implicitly masculinist paradigms of film theories and histories that excluded them in the first place.' As argued by Gaines, these contributions, not to mention the influence and power of women during this period, have not only been largely absent from traditional film historiography, but were also largely unacknowledged by feminist film theory in the 1970s onwards.<sup>20</sup>

A project such as *Nordic Women in Film* thus presents the opportunity both to activate and to reconsider the holdings of the archive. An archive is of course always comprised of very limited fragments and traces of the past, and could never assume to present history as a whole. Both the holdings of the archive, as well as access to these holdings, are the result of choices, which again are fundamentally informed by the relationship between knowledge and power. As

Jacques Derrida argued, there 'is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.'<sup>21</sup> Consequently, what is missing from the archive is of course less likely to become part of scholarly research on film history. Thus, it becomes vital to ask how a foregrounding of the archive, of the collections, of the mechanisms that inform our holdings (many of them beyond our control—but certainly not all) and the glaring absence of certain materials in itself can contribute to an understanding of mechanisms of absence and exclusion in film history in a general sense. To include the archive—ourselves—as an agent of power actively taking part in processes of ignoring and forgetting might even spur us to seek out new collections, such as female film professionals' personal archives. Duckett and Potter argue for the identification of gaps in current film histories, linked to a notion of forgetting, implying that asking 'why' there is an absence is as important as asking 'who' is in fact absent. Another key question posed by the authors is difficult to resolve, but remains fundamental to the construction of a database on female authorship in cinema: 'How can we write histories of cinema that are more inclusive while not eliding processes of exclusion or other dynamics of power?'<sup>22</sup> For an archive, one obvious strategy is self-reflection—drawing attention to the processes and dynamics involved in the archive itself, including, but not limited to selection processes (what material is included, accepted, or actively sought after), as well as other archival activities such as preservation and restoration (what materials are prioritized), the organizing of particular collections, including cataloguing and the production of metadata (to what extent is the existence of the material made known), and of course access for researchers and the general public.

In Vicki Callahan's edited volume on feminism and film history, symptomatically titled *Reclaiming the Archive*, she argues that 'the history we present as feminists always implies a kind of reclaiming, rewriting and recontextualization of materials', adding: 'What the

cinema and feminism represents *historically* are new ways of seeing and thinking about the world, and as such the cinematic metaphor is a central one, I would argue to a feminist agenda.<sup>23</sup> One of the sections in the book is titled ‘Rewriting Authorship’,<sup>24</sup> suggesting new and more heterogeneous ways to see and think about cinematic authorship, which Callahan links to the broader film theoretical concept of ‘enunciation’, claiming that ‘the attention for much feminist scholarship has been on finding alternative paths of entry into the codes of cinematic enunciation. Women’s “voices” are then found in stars, audiences and formalist strategies rather than in the individual humanist author so prominent in most directorial studies.’<sup>25</sup> Although one can argue that these alternative paths have been mapped out by necessity, because of women’s limited access to certain dominant arenas in the film industry, they have also been instrumental in broader film historical and theoretical debates, for example the importance of reception and exhibition contexts, and the critique of auteurist perspectives. As Yvonne Tasker argues in the same volume, ‘the work of feminist film historians in documenting the contribution of women in the film industry represents not only an important attempt to write women’s history but a rejection of the claims made by, or more typically on behalf of, one person—the male director to have priority over the text.’<sup>26</sup> At the same time, in part because the centrality of the filmmaker remains so strong in film discourse, Tasker also argues that the ‘*visibility* of women filmmakers’ (in a male-dominated field) is a crucial question that needs to be addressed.

Here, the challenges of limiting oneself to the absence–presence binary and a list of ‘key functions’ and a set definition of ‘authorship’ are pertinent, at least without a consideration of the historical and ideological reasons why certain credits are considered more valuable than others, including the recognition that the status of professional functions (for example, reflected in wages) fluctuate throughout history and across geographies and industries. To compare the current situation with a preceding period in film history, such as the silent era, the fact that women probably were more prominent

in film production *and film culture* overall is not the only revelation. There are also numerous differences in standards, conventions, stylistic preferences and notions of authorship, across time as well as geographies. The prominent position of the set designer in European (perhaps especially German) film industries in the 1920s, in terms of prominence in the creative process, a status comparable to the director and screenwriter, the determining role for the look of the film, as well as billing and salaries, is well known, and can be contrasted with both the contemporary US film industry and the current situation in European cinema.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to include a brief example of how the archive itself, or perhaps rather the work carried out in the archive, can contribute to alternative discourses and ways of thinking about a national film history, and how individuals' contributions are counted. The Norwegian set designer, or 'film architect', Grethe Hejer (born 1926) donated her personal archive to the National Library of Norway in 2014.<sup>28</sup> A trained architect, Hejer documented her work as a production designer over a career spanning four decades, which included 23 Norwegian feature films and 58 television productions.<sup>29</sup> In addition to being a document of an astounding career, the archive obviously also provides extensive insight into Norwegian film and television production history in general. The archive also directed our attention to Hejer's career as a filmmaker, directing, or co-directing ten short films between 1974 and 1989, many in collaboration with film director Kåre Bergstrøm and writer André Bjerke, whom she also collaborated with on several feature films. Most of these films were shown on Norwegian television, but several were also screened at international film festivals. To acknowledge Hejer's practice as a filmmaker along with her work as a production designer, and for the first time producing a complete filmography, cannot in itself be characterized in terms of an 'archival find', meaning that it reveals something new or completely unknown—but thanks to research in connection with the archive, attention was drawn to notable and thoroughly overlooked film-making efforts. The example of

Grethe Hejer demonstrates the necessity of looking in unexpected places, and the benefits of being open to including various forms of authorship (acknowledging the centrality of professions such as the production designer) and types of films (including short films, documentaries, and television productions). Our approach to the writing of film history should be informed by openness to what a ‘key function’, or significant contribution, entails, while also acknowledging the importance of increasing the visibility of the women who have succeeded in the male dominated arenas of film directing, producing, and screenwriting.

## Notes

- 1 <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/> For the *Nordic Women in Film project*, see Jannike Åhlund’s foreword and Ingrid Stigsdotter’s introduction to the present volume.
- 2 Kielland Servoll 2017, 28–9.
- 3 Gaines et al. 2013.
- 4 OED s.v. ‘absence’.
- 5 OED s.v. ‘presence’.
- 6 Bell, ‘absence/presence’, Chicago School of Media Theory: Keywords, University of Chicago, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/absence-presence/>, accessed 16 June 2019.
- 7 OED s.v. ‘visibility’.
- 8 OED s.v. ‘invisibility’.
- 9 Mulvey 1975, 6–18; Bergstrom & Doane 1989, 7.
- 10 Swedish Film Institute 2013.
- 11 Fröberg 2014, 26.
- 12 <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/about/>. Editor’s note: the quotation is from the version of the website that was launched in April 2016, and the ‘About’ page has since been updated.
- 13 Gaines 2004, 115–17; Sobchack 2006, 67; Callahan 2010, 2–3.
- 14 Callahan 2010, 2.
- 15 Stamp 2015.
- 16 Gaines et al. 2013, added emphasis.
- 17 Myrstad 2016; Olsson 2014; Bull 2014.
- 18 Duckett & Potter 2015.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Gaines 2004, 113–14.
- 21 Derrida 1995, 4 n. 1.

- 22 Duckett & Potter 2015.
- 23 Callahan 2010, 5.
- 24 Ibid. 127–57.
- 25 Ibid. 127.
- 26 Tasker, 'Vision and Visibility: Women Filmmakers, Contemporary Authorship, and Feminist Film Studies' in Callahan 2010, 213.
- 27 See Bergfelder et al. 2007, 42–3; Thompson 2005, 53–7.
- 28 The description of Hejer's archive owes much to Øivind Hanche (2017) and Kirsti Ladegård (2018) and their work organising the archive, and Ladegård 2014 for an unpublished report on Hejer and her archive.
- 29 Including notable films such as *De dodes tjern* (Kåre Bergstrøm, 1958), *Edvard Munch* (Peter Watkins, 1974), and *Hud* (Vibeke Løkkeberg, 1986), and ambitious, high-budget television series such as *Benoni og Rosa* (Per Bronken, 1975) and *Jenny* (Per Bronken, 1982).

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- — Radha Vatsal & Monica Dall'Asta (eds), *Women Film Pioneers Project* (Center for Digital Research & Scholarship; New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2013–), <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/>.

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# Female cinema musicians in Sweden 1905–1915

*Christopher Natzén*

Recollecting her time as a musician at the cinema Nya Biografen in Nässjö in southern Sweden, the pianist Elvira Lindeberg gave the following description of working conditions in the early 1910s:

‘It was quite hard work, being a pianist a pianist,’ says Miss Elvira Lindeberg in Nässjö. ‘The night before the premiere we were able to see the film in order to select suitable piano pieces for it. Then I had to fit those to the film’s action ... In addition, you had to provide some sound effects. When someone knocked on a door or fired a gun I knocked on the piano or opened and closed the piano lid hard. In the latter case, a bass drum could also be used if we had access to one. What did it matter that the shots came a long time after the gun smoke and sounded like a small nuclear bomb, when the audience was so entranced that not even a grenade explosion would have broken the illusion.’<sup>1</sup>

In a few sentences Lindeberg described her job providing a musical accompaniment and sound effects for moving images. From picking appropriate music and fitting it to the images in order to support the narrative to providing illustrative sound effects, meticulous planning was needed if she was to establish a filmic illusion of reality. And all this work was carried out under time pressure.

That it was a woman who uttered these words about music and

sound effects is not surprising. Women have always formed a part of the film workforce, and cinema musicians were no exception. In the past decade, researchers have shed light on women's work in film beyond being actresses.<sup>2</sup> However, judging by historiographies of film music, it is still mainly a story seen through the lens of Lindeberg's male colleagues.<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of dealing with bad working conditions and long hours in cinemas have been made from a male perspective. Male voices have also expressed views on what kind of music should be used and how to best accompany a film. In that sense Lindeberg's recollections are an exception to the rule.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the membership of the Swedish Musicians' Union (Svenska musikerförbundet), it is evident that from the time of its foundation in 1907 the union counted many women among its members. Not all of them worked in cinemas, but it was a fact that when the cinema orchestras grew in size many of them employed female musicians. Some women reached the position of conductor and musical director, which would have been an impossibility if they had not mastered their trade. While sons of musicians in the early twentieth century often found positions in the leading orchestras, their daughters often found employment in cinemas.<sup>5</sup>

Today, our understanding of the part women played in shaping Swedish cinema music culture is clouded by the fact that when cinema moved from a low-brow popular entertainment format to a more professionalized programming culture in permanent venues, cinema music practice also became more organized. The Swedish Musicians' Union had a central role in the increasingly standardized musical accompaniment. At the board level, the union was an all-male club that organized work and set policies. As I will argue, this meant that the female musicians' impact has been omitted from histories of film music, despite forming a large part of the development of the music culture in Swedish cinemas.

This essay trains the spotlight on female musicians in cinema's formative years. At this stage it is not possible to give a detailed description, but I hope to show it is possible to tell fresh stories about musical accompaniment, and that there are numerous traces

that point towards a different understanding of the cinema music culture, at least in Sweden. Beginning with a brief description of Swedish musical life in the early twentieth century in general and film music in particular, I survey what is known today about Swedish cinema music culture. I demonstrate the erroneousness of many contemporary accounts and later academic writing on Swedish film music because they exclude and downplay female musicians—a constant trend since the earliest writings on cinema music culture, upheld by later research. The sheer extent of the exclusion can be traced to specific archives, illustrating the challenges of archival research. However, as I will argue, it is possible to present a broader and more inclusive account of cinema music culture, if only researchers were prepared to consult alternative sources.

### Early cinema music culture

In the nineteenth century, the distinction between professionals and amateur musicians grew sharper.<sup>6</sup> The structure of symphonies and piano sonatas began to evolve towards greater complexity and extended length. Instrumental music and lieder came to be perceived as the highest aesthetic form of music. This ‘serious’ music was contrasted with more popular songs and performances from, for example, the music hall scene.<sup>7</sup> This dualism became very significant for the development of cinema music in Sweden, which saw popular melodies mixed with nineteenth-century instrumental music, the former initially to draw crowds to the new medium, the latter to add artistic value to the performances a few years later, in an effort to improve cinema’s initial reputation as low-brow entertainment.

Women’s importance for Swedish musical life in the early decades of the twentieth century was reflected in a decision about terms of employment by the Concert Association (Konsertföreningen) in Gothenburg, which sheds light on the union’s policies. On 3 April 1908 it was decided that ‘On the question of women for the orchestra, the board agrees that they should have salaries equal to the male members’.<sup>8</sup> This decision was met with criticism, and

at an extraordinary board meeting on 8 April it was followed up with a clarification, which explained that the decision would not apply retroactively, and that currently employed 'women should remain in the lowest pay grade.'<sup>9</sup> The two decisions show that from its founding in 1907 the union divided up the musicians it represented according to gender.

One feature of culture at the turn of the last century was otherwise its silence. If you did not play music yourself, did not have a gramophone, and were not visited by street musicians, your everyday life—unless you frequented a church, café, restaurant, or other public establishment—would be characterized by a musical silence that can be hard to understand today. It also meant a different way of listening than we have become accustomed to—people listened more intently whenever music *was* heard.<sup>10</sup> Places where films were screened became locations for experiencing music, and arguably such places were soon the most important music venues.

Predominantly, the accompaniment to early film screenings consisted of live music, often in the form of a piano or a violin. The gramophone, phonograph, and other kinds of mechanical accompaniment were also in regular use. In Sweden the gramophone in particular was popular on and off throughout the period that we today call the silent era. During the transition to sound film in the late 1920s, several sound systems also came to rely on the technology behind the gramophone, as illustrated by the first commercially viable system, Western Electric's Vitaphone.

It is clear from contemporary sources that some musicians in the early twentieth century just played any kind of music that they knew, regardless of a film's narrative context, thereby giving early film accompaniment a bad reputation.<sup>11</sup> For example, in 1912, the musicians at the Maxim cinema in Luleå are said to have used for the beginning of each screening a Swedish popular melody called *Eldgaffeln* ('The Poker') by Einar Landén, followed by a waltz. The same music was subsequently used for the film and between acts, screening after screening, night after night.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, musicians such as Elvira Lindeberg understood the importance

of appropriate musical accompaniments, ensuring the music supported the narrative, thus strengthening the cinematic illusion. In other words, some cinema musicians quickly picked up the practice already established in variety entertainment of choosing melodies to follow the unfolding narrative; others used music in a way that was more detached and unrelated to the image content. The latter has dominated descriptions of early cinema accompaniment in Sweden, and because it has been routinely paraphrased in both contemporary writing and later academic scholarship, this image of cinema music lives on. Lindeberg's reasoning about appropriate music and how to match it to the images has thus had to give way to anecdotes like this one from the autobiography of the author and jack of all trades Waldemar Hammenhög:

It was a film based on Anton Dvořák's 'Humoresque' [about] a little chap who obtained a violin by force from his stingy father and went on to become a great violinist. The film was good, but it was prescribed that we were only allowed to play 'Humoresque' for the whole screening. It became damned tiresome, four hours a night, and on Sunday eight with the matinée. ... But one night, the last Wednesday screening in the fifth week, there was a boozier in the theatre who suddenly screamed at me, 'Don't you know any other piece, you bugger?' Then the audience woke up! Then the audience was listening ... at last there was someone who had listened to the actual piece of music.<sup>13</sup>

While it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from Elvira Lindeberg's and Waldemar Hammenhög's recollections, the quotes cited in this essay show that the nature of early cinema music did not just depend on the skill of the musicians. It was rather a question about who knew the trade and understood the musical particularities of the film medium—what did or did not work musically in a cinematic context in terms of tempo, rhythm, and harmonics. Additionally, looking at contemporary writings, it seems as though only male musicians were asked to express their opinions on how

music might be appropriately used at film screenings, even though many women musicians were involved in film music performances.

With the establishment of permanent premises, there was a shift in musical practice in Sweden. With fixed venues, both the films and their presentation were subject to new requirements from audiences. The skills of particular musicians could be an advantage in the competition with other cinemas. But it also placed greater demands on the musicians. Whereas the musicians in the itinerant exhibitors' heyday performed with the same film day after day in different locations, the establishment of permanent venues involved rapid changes of programming. There could be several different programmes in a single week, making it more difficult to prepare a well-planned accompaniment, and it was no longer acceptable to repeat the same music night after night.

In these years, the Musicians' Union's objectives included tariffs and musical standards. As film professionals sought to increase the reputation of cinema entertainment, there was also a move to standardize cinema music. Cinema should be cinema and not a variety show, as an editorial in the journal *Nordisk Filmtidning* put it in 1909.<sup>14</sup> The union favoured the music that in the nineteenth century had been deemed 'serious'. By 1909, cinemas in Malmö were listed in an official tariff.<sup>15</sup> This had every cinema as being equal in size; later tariffs, however, would be rated according to the number of seats. The salary the union demanded in Malmö was 150 kronor a month (roughly €830 in today's money). Although musicians worked seven days a week and received no wages in the summer months when cinemas were closed, relatively speaking this was a high salary. In comparison, theatre musicians were paid 135 kronor a month according to the same tariff. The figures could be interpreted as a sign that the union as early as 1909 saw cinemas as one of the most important establishments for their members, surpassing theatres.

## Recollections of cinema music culture

On 19 December 1907 the Swedish Musicians' Union was founded. Typically, a photograph from the founding meeting only portrays men around the table.<sup>16</sup> Even though the union's membership almost immediately became more heterogeneous, there was no woman on the board. True, the union represented every group of practising musicians, from musicians employed by concert houses to military bands and, of course, cinema musicians, but nevertheless this photograph had little to do with the reality of film music practice in Sweden at that stage. On the other hand, it illustrates very well what happened when musical praxis in Swedish cinemas became increasingly standardized and the musicians organized.

One difficulty when exploring female musicians' contribution to cinema music culture in Sweden is the nature of the sources. For example, the surviving correspondence and minutes of the Swedish Musicians' Union are an important source when researching cinema musicians' working conditions, since they provide evidence on many issues, such as how many musicians worked in cinemas and what was seen in general as appropriate music, as well as giving details of everyday work. In this material men are more than present, and considering the many female members of this union they are strangely absent from the archive materials.

I have gone through the existing documentation from the national union as well as the branches in Gothenburg and Stockholm for 1907 to 1932. Regardless of archive, it all has one thing in common—female musicians are for the most part not present in the material. Why? I will raise three interrelated answers to this question. First, the surest way to end up in the union's correspondence was to be involved in something that went against union regulations. In short, you needed as a musician to have done something wrong in order to attract the attention of the union. Women members who were good workers and followed regulations might therefore only be listed in the membership registers. Second, those who were mentioned in the records were generally members who were



able to make their presence felt at union meetings, making sure that union representatives saw their arguments as worthy of being transcribed—not necessarily an easy task for women in the early twentieth century. Third, we should consider the process of appraisal that guided which records were saved at each specific archive. The criteria used to decide what should be archived reflected what was deemed important for posterity. In this particular situation the people in power who took up space—literally in the photograph from the union's founding—and whose actions were considered worth discussing, and hence worth saving, were all men. Women's experiences made visible in a collection held by a male-controlled union, such as the decisions made by the Gothenburg branch in April 1908 mentioned at the start of the essay, were therefore an exception to the rule. Our understanding of women's contributions to the ongoing development of music in the cinemas is further clouded by contemporary and later recapitulations of the 'miserable' music, and reactions from the musicians' community to such claims.

It would be a decade into the new century before cinema music began to be mentioned in periodicals and newspapers, and when it did, it was the noise that was highlighted. In 1909 *Nordisk Film-tidning* wrote about the woeful music heard in Stockholm cinemas:

It is more a rule than an exception that the piano is out of tune. If the pianist does something, he most often thumps the keys violently; he clearly does not have any ability, or, if he has, makes little effort to show it.<sup>17</sup>

The same article noted that it would be of benefit to cinema owners to improve the music. Good music, it was argued, could even cover other flaws in a venue. The author argued that piano accompaniments should be replaced by a small string orchestra, while stressing the various automated instruments available if in doubt. However, the author gave no further description of cinema music, other than asserting that it was bad. This raises several questions. For example, which cinemas had the author visited? It is true that in 1909 the

most common practice was accompaniments by a lone pianist or violinist, but the move towards ensembles was already underway, exemplified by the Gothenburg cinema Göteborgs Kinematograf, which for a few weeks in March 1908 used an ensemble of five musicians.<sup>18</sup> Lindeberg's explanation quoted earlier also showed that other ways to accompany films were already known. It is illustrative that this writer used the pronoun 'he' for the person responsible for the 'noise'. Naturally, it is dangerous to make general claims from an anonymous article, which was one of only few on the topic from the period. We do not know who the author was, and thus nothing about his or her understanding of film music. I would argue, though, that in this instance it is possible to claim an influence from the formation of the Musicians' Union and its gendered perspective. In writings about musical accompaniments in Sweden, 'musicians' became synonymous with male musicians. This can be seen in articles in the entire silent period.

It might be tempting to suggest that the reason behind the lack of female musical experience in contemporary writings was the lack of female musicians. How erroneous such an argument would be, however, is particularly evident when looking at cinema programmes, because in such materials, female musicians are frequently named. I have surveyed close to 10,000 programmes from across Sweden, covering the years 1904 to 1920, and just a few examples of women mentioned as responsible for the musical accompaniment in the programmes in this collection suffice to show that they were numerous: Anna Ternow at the Valhallabiografen in Oskarshamn, 1909–1910; Agda Söderbergh, Kalmarbiografen in Kalmar, 1913; Mrs Clementz, Scalabiografen in Gävle, 1910–1911; Miss Signe Björklund, Stora Biografen in Eskilstuna, 1911; Mrs G. Hjorth, Linköpings Elektrobiograf in Linköping, 1911; Ellen Swensson, Visby Biografteater in Visby, 1912; Ingeborg Kahl, Visby Biografteater in Visby, 1912; Miss Wiberger, Elektrobiografen in Katrineholm, 1913; Miss A. Baresch, Röda Kvarn in Umeå, 1914; Mrs Ninni Bech-Rehmenes, Röda Kvarn in Umeå, 1914; and Anna Lindgren, Bollnäsbiografen in Bollnäs, 1916.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, when the same periodical, *Nordisk Filmtidning*, summarized 1909, it reported on a marked improvement in the music, keeping pace with cinema developments in general—and contradicting the earlier quote.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, an article in the journal *Filmbladet* in 1916 described the development of film music in the previous few years as a constant transformation.<sup>21</sup> Gone were the out-of-tune pianos, as well as the electric instruments that this author associated with early cinema music praxis. Music's most important feature in a cinema was instead its ability to match the images in order to enhance them. The *Filmbladet* article noted that all this had been driven by the audience, supporting the argument Rick Altman makes in 'Film Sound—All of It'.<sup>22</sup> Music was given as a partial explanation for the cinema culture's rapid development at the theatre's expense, a claim supported by the 1909 Malmö tariff mentioned above.

The individuals who were invited to comment on the article in *Filmbladet* were both men: Rudolf Sahlberg, musical director at the Röda Kvarn cinema in Stockholm and Adolf Baumert, conductor at the Imperial cinema, also in Stockholm. Sahlberg considered it important for a conductor to choose music from both the symphonic repertoire and popular melodies according to the audience's taste. He gave the music an interpretive function with the freedom to contradict what the images showed. According to Sahlberg, music was especially useful when creating a film's atmosphere. Baumert largely confirmed what Sahlberg described, adding that it was only with the establishment of permanent venues such as Röda Kvarn in the Sveasalen theatre in 1912 (a different Röda Kvarn to the one where Sahlberg worked) that a new era began.<sup>23</sup> Both Sahlberg and Baumert thus described a similar music practice as the one explained by Elvira Lindeberg.

The absence of comments from female musicians in this article was not exceptional. Whenever cinema music's function and motivation was discussed in periodicals, it was always male musicians who were asked to comment. This assertion is based on a study of every issue of the main Swedish film and music periodicals in the period:

*Nordisk Filmtidning* (1909–1910), *Svenska musikerförbundets tidning* (1910–1919), *Biografen* (1913–1915), *Filmbladet* (1915–1925), *Filmnyheter* (1920–1929), *Biografbladet* (1920–1952), *Musikern* (1920–), *Svensk Filmtidning* (1924–1939), and *Biografägaren* (1926–1966). In all of these issues, not a single woman was allowed to present her point of view on cinema music. The conductor Greta Håkansson, who worked at the Påfågeln cinema, was given a biographical and honorary article in *Musikern* in 1928.<sup>24</sup> But she was not asked to comment on musical practice, nor was it her musical skills that were highlighted, even though she had been playing in cinemas since at least 1915.<sup>25</sup> Instead, much was made of her loyalty to union policies and regulations—the editor, Gustaf Gille, seemed to find it necessary to place emphasis on this in order to justify the inclusion of her biography in the publication.

The lack of interest in or disregard of women musicians' work is mirrored and further illustrated in later academic writing. In 1979, the film historian Rune Waldekranz wrote an article about the development of musical accompaniment.<sup>26</sup> The essay gives a general description about film music accompaniment in the silent period, drawing mainly on the work of Roy Prendergast.<sup>27</sup> The sections about Swedish circumstances rely on Waldekranz's own research. The article begins by arguing that early exhibitors in the period 1896–1906 primarily used the gramophone as a means to provide accompaniment in Sweden. Waldekranz's narrative is that from this period onwards, gramophones were followed by live music with lone pianists and travelling virtuosos, but the development of permanent venues ushered in the standardization of music practice and larger ensembles. Together with longer films, the music then also became more intricately fitted to the film. In establishing this, the article follows our understanding of the larger development of Swedish musical culture. However, by focusing on virtuosos in the early period, Waldekranz misses that the culture of cinema music was one created by ordinary musicians; instead, he leaves the reader with the impression that a succession of male musicians and directors were the pioneering developers of cinema

music in Sweden. Many of the lesser-known musicians whose contribution Waldekranz ignores were women. By looking at the cinema programmes mentioned in this essay it is clear that women's contribution to the field was just as extensive as that of the men who hold Waldekranz's attention.

## Conclusion

The 'silent era' was not a period of unbroken, repetitive musical accompaniment. Instead it was characterized by a diversity of musical practices. For some musicians, the music was rather a part of a film's exhibition than an integrated aspect of the film itself. Often the smallness of an ensemble or the presence of a solitary pianist only underlined certain aspects of the narrative rudimentariness. Other musicians worked according to the principles set out by Elvira Lindeberg, and with the introduction of permanent cinemas demands were raised, both concerning the content of the films and how they were presented.

Despite the important function of music and sound in helping an audience become absorbed in a film, one obstacle to research, and particularly research on female musicians, has been that such fundamental music practices were seldom mentioned in reviews. Accompanying music was seen as such an evident part of the screening practice that it was not considered newsworthy enough to write about. And when the function of cinema music was discussed in trade publications it was not women who were asked to voice their opinion; the musicians who were permitted to contribute to the discussion were all men. Women have arguably also been misrepresented in histories of the development of a cinema music culture in Sweden.

I wrote in my introduction that if researchers were willing to consult alternative sources, such as the cinema programmes discussed in this essay, a different and more inclusive vision of cinema music would appear. This would eventually lead to a rewriting of the history of cinema music culture in Sweden. The programmes

are a useful source that helps form a more complete picture of the period 1905 to 1914. If nothing else, the source material shows that women were accompanying moving images as well as working as musical directors in cinemas. However, when comments about the musical practice in cinemas became more common, often stressing the poor quality of the music, the response was to change the cinema programming. The programmes started to use expressions such as ‘good’, ‘high quality’, and ‘excellent’ to describe the music an audience could expect to hear in the cinema. Unless an outstanding musician was going to make a guest appearance, the musicians themselves were no longer mentioned. This makes it even harder to research women’s contributions to cinema music culture after 1914. As programmes increasingly failed to mention the names of the musicians, and as female musicians were not mentioned in or allowed to voice their opinion in periodicals, and left few if any traces in the Musicians’ Union’s archive, they literally disappeared from the history of Swedish cinema music.

## Notes

- 1 Ray 1949, 3. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 2 See, for example, the *Women Film Pioneers* project (<https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/>) and *Nordic Women in Film* (<http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/>), discussed elsewhere in this volume in Stigsdotter’s introduction, Åhlund’s foreword, and Hanssen’s essay ‘Visible absence, invisible presence: Feminist film history, the database, and the archive’.
- 3 The focus in Sweden and elsewhere has been on the role and function of music, rather than on the practising musicians, and therefore discussions have centred on descriptions of the music, rather than questioning the extent to which such claims apply to both genders.
- 4 For this article, all film journals from the period have been reviewed as well as the Musicians’ Union’s archives from the main board and from the union departments in Stockholm and Gothenburg respectively. These sources have one thing in common—female cinema musicians are generally not represented in the material.
- 5 Edström 2009, 20–1.
- 6 Grout & Palisca 1988, 662.
- 7 Edström 2009, 59–60; Grout & Palisca 1988, 659.

- 8 Landsarkivet i Göteborg (Regional State Archives in Gothenburg), Svenska musikerförbundet, Sektion 2, Göteborg, Protokoll från styrelsesammanträde, 3 April 1908, § 3 (Swedish Musicians' Union, minutes of the Gothenburg board).
- 9 Landsarkivet i Göteborg, Svenska musikerförbundet, Sektion 2, Göteborg, Protokoll från extra sammanträde, 8 April 1908, § 6 (Swedish Musicians' Union, minutes of an extraordinary meeting).
- 10 Edström 2009, 39.
- 11 'Musikens anpassande för filmen' 1920, 213–14.
- 12 'Från "rörliga bilder" till Cinemascope' 1956, 10, 13.
- 13 Hammenhög 1942, 92–3.
- 14 'Vårt program' 1909, 4.
- 15 Edström 1982, 17.
- 16 Ibid. 32.
- 17 'Musiken å biograferna' 1909, 2.
- 18 Advertisement for Göteborgs Kinematograf in *Göteborgs-Posten*, 13 March 1908, 1.
- 19 All programmes can be accessed at <https://biografblad.kb.se/> or <http://filmarkivforskning.se/>, both accessed 16 June 2019.
- 20 'En återblick' 1910, 1.
- 21 'Biografmusik' 1916, 349–50.
- 22 Altman 1999, 31–48.
- 23 The Röda Kvarn in Sveasalen had 867 seats, making it a leading cinema in the city. Established in 1912, it initially employed 12–14 musicians under the direction of Gustaf Erbs (Berglund 1993, 309). The Röda Kvarn where Sahlberg was conductor was established in 1915 and had 14 musicians. Sahlberg became its conductor in 1916 and held the position until the arrival of sound film (Berglund 1993, 307–308).
- 24 Gille 1928, 336–7.
- 25 Advertisement for the film *Ned med vapnen* in *Aftonbladet*, 1 December 1915, 4.
- 26 Waldekranz 1979, 179–99.
- 27 Prendergast 1992.

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# Women film exhibition pioneers in Sweden

Agency, invisibility and first wave feminism

*Ingrid Stigsdotter*

In my ongoing research on women's historical contribution to Swedish film culture, an important discovery regarding women's agency has been the number of women who were active in cinema management early on in the twentieth century. Many of these women owned or managed one or several cinemas during a short period of time in the 1910s or 1920s, and then moved on to another business, or left the workforce due to changed circumstances (such as marriage or retirement), but some of them maintained a long career in film exhibition, lasting well into the sound era. Since the formation of a Swedish cinema culture coincided with the campaigns for women's suffrage and women taking up an increasingly large share of the waged workforce, the women who made their way into cinema exhibition in the first decades of the century should be understood within the context of first wave feminism, the women's movement of the nineteenth century which reacted against women's exclusion from or marginalization in politics, economy, and society.<sup>1</sup> This essay builds on previous findings regarding women cinema owners and managers in the silent era, in order to discuss the methodological issues involved in researching these (largely) unknown women and why an investigation of their agency is important, despite the scarcity of available documentation.<sup>2</sup>

## Swedish film exhibition and women exhibiting film in Sweden

Although there has been some research on Swedish cinema exhibition history, most publications have focused on mapping cinema exhibition locally and/or on the contribution of specific individuals (who have been male) or companies (not run by women).<sup>3</sup> Women are occasionally mentioned in research on sound film experiments, musical practices in relation to silent film, or the coming of sound, but the most well-known innovators, entrepreneurs and musicians were male, and little is known about the female performers.<sup>4</sup>

The existence of women exhibiting film in Sweden in the silent era has not been entirely overlooked by historians. However, although Leif Furhammar mentions that some of the earliest cinemas in Sweden were run by financially independent women, and several female names appear in the listings of early film exhibitors in Rune Waldekranz's dissertation on film exhibition in Sweden, the extent of these women's contribution to the development of film exhibition in Sweden remains unexplored.<sup>5</sup> Waldekranz's attempt, in his dissertation, to map film exhibition practices across the whole of Sweden, rather than focusing on the introduction of film in the large cities, was ahead of its time, as Jernudd rightly points out.<sup>6</sup> His later attempts to present an all-encompassing history of film are more problematic and dated, but he did bring attention to the variety artist and theatre director Anna Hofman-Uddgren's pioneering contribution to Swedish film history as director of films in 1911–1912.<sup>7</sup> In this context, however, Waldekranz drew attention to Hofman-Uddgren primarily as a director, and did not discuss her involvement in early film exhibition culture in Stockholm, as director of programmes for the entertainment venues Svea-Teatern, Variété-Teatern, and Victoria-Teatern between 1898 and 1904, where film screenings were mixed with live performances of various kinds.<sup>8</sup>

Most film exhibitors in early twentieth-century Sweden were men, but even before permanent cinema venues were established, women were involved in organizing film screenings. These pioneers

of Swedish film exhibition culture appear often, as was the case with Hofman-Uddgren, to have come in contact with the film medium through contemporary variety entertainment. The earliest example of a woman being linked to film exhibition in Sweden dates from the summer of 1896, when the chansonette artist Annette Teufel, a popular performer on the Stockholm variety circuit,<sup>9</sup> became associated with a film screening at the Berns' salons, advertised as 'Annette Teufel's cinematograf'.<sup>10</sup> The newspaper *Stockholms-Tidningen* stated that in the screening, the audience would encounter Teufel's 'charming representation' as a dancer, which suggests that the film programme included filmed images of Teufel dancing.<sup>11</sup> However, the article also claimed that Teufel was the owner of the 'Zinematograf', the machine used to project the films at Berns', and that she owned another such machine in London.<sup>12</sup> According to Waldekranz, Teufel's projector was described in the press as handled by a 'Frenchman',<sup>13</sup> and from this the film historian reasoned that Teufel's name had likely been exploited in this context just to attract press coverage and audience interest, but that a French film exhibitor was probably in charge of the actual screening. Bengt Idestam-Almqvist similarly argues that the popularity of Teufel's name and persona is a more likely reason for attributing the screenings to her than any involvement on her part in the actual film projection; unlike Waldekranz, however, he claims that she was probably working with a British partner previously active in Berlin, rather than with a Frenchman, and he describes Teufel as being known for her entrepreneurial skills, implying that she would be a good business companion for the touring film exhibitor.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of who actually projected the films, Waldekranz and Idestam-Almqvist may be correct in presuming that Teufel's involvement was primarily to attract audiences, but it is nevertheless interesting that the name, image, and reputation of a popular female artist was used to promote the film medium in Sweden at such an early stage. As Antonia Lant has shown, even prior to the invention of cinema, a pictorial tradition had been established where women were seen demonstrating optical instruments that could

**Berns' Salonger.**  
 Hvard. kl. 3-7 e. m. Sön- & Helgd. kl. 3-6 e. m.  
**Table d'hôte à 2 kr.**  
**Taffelmusik**  
 at  
**Rumäniska Kapellet,**  
 alternerande med det berömda Italienska  
 Militärkapellet  
**Banda Municipale di Pratola**  
 från Abruzzerna (42 man i uniform)  
 under anförande af Maästro Lorenzo Pupilla.  
 Kl. 7-11 e. m.  
**Stor instrumentalkonsert**  
 under anförande af Hr Aug. Meissner,  
 alternerande med  
**Rumäniska Kapellet.**  
**OBS! Sista veckan OBS!**  
**Rumäniska Kapellet.**  
**Annette Teufels**  
**Cinematograf**  
 kommer att förevisas dessa dagar.  
 ➡ Den 1 Augusti börja ➡  
**Föreställningarna i**  
**Salongerna.**

Figure 3.1. Advert associating Annette Teufel with screenings at Berns' salons. *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 July 1896.

be used for entertainment and education, such as magical lanterns and dioramas.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, while I have found no evidence of a continuing involvement on the part of Teufel in film exhibition, it was not uncommon in the early years of film for individuals to develop a brief interest in the new medium and then abandon it altogether. It should also be noted that the presence of a French projectionist is not in itself evidence of Teufel not being actively engaged in the film screenings.

Whereas it is difficult to assess Annette Teufel's role in the Berns' film screenings in 1896, Marguerite Vrignault Chenu is an example of a woman whose presentation of films to Swedish audiences is fairly well documented. Madame Vrignault toured the three largest

Swedish cities—Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö—in 1901 showing a programme of film experiments with sound and music called ‘Immortal Theatre’ (*Odödliga Teatern*), which had been premiered in 1900 at the Paris Exposition Universelle, under the name Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre.<sup>16</sup> In contemporary press coverage of the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre in Stockholm in 1901 Madame Vrignault received all the credit for the screenings, and Swedish journalists even described her introductory lecture in some detail.<sup>17</sup> Waldekranz mentions ‘Madame Rignault’<sup>18</sup> as the agent of the photographer Clément Maurice.<sup>19</sup> However, according to Robert Hamilton Ball, Madame Vrignault (also known by her second family name, Chenu) was not acting on Maurice’s behalf; Hamilton Ball claims that she was the owner of the film programme, and toured Europe with the films after having managed the small theatre at the Paris exposition where the films were first premiered.<sup>20</sup>

Waldekranz and Idestam-Almqvist noted Annette Teufel’s and Madame Chenu’s appearances in (advertising of) early film screenings in Sweden, but did not examine this further, thus downplaying whatever significance it might have had. Men became dominant in other areas of film culture, and the history of film was written as the story of great male auteurs. This seems to have influenced the writing of film exhibition history too, for previous generations of film historians tended to take for granted that women who were mentioned in descriptions of early film exhibition were just an attractive front, or were running errands for a male manager.

As Kathryn Fuller-Seeley and Karen Ward Mahar point out in their essay on women in US film exhibition, ‘the *business* of running a small retail, entertainment, or service establishment’ such as a cinema was not in itself gendered as ‘masculine’ at the turn of the twentieth century, even though the film medium’s association with science and technology, and especially the need to operate a machine to project films, meant that certain aspects of the work might be described as requiring ‘masculinized skills’.<sup>21</sup> In Sweden, just as in the US, many women were already active as theatre directors and managing shops at the time when cinema was introduced. Indeed,

when the first 'store-front cinema' (a shop temporarily adapted to be used for film screenings) opened in Stockholm in 1897, the owner was a woman, Svea Schmidt. Waldekranz hypothesized that Schmidt's neighbour Johan Hanson, who had already shown film in another location with his partner A. Sellgren, 'persuaded Mrs Svea Christina Schmidt who owned the shop at Drottninggatan 68 to adapt this into a cinema.'<sup>22</sup> But in Schmidt's letter to the governor general (Överståthållarämbetet) regarding the permit to show film on the premises there is nothing to suggest that Schmidt had to be 'persuaded' by her male partners: for all we know, she may have been an entrepreneurial business woman inviting Johan Hanson to use her shop for film screenings.<sup>23</sup>

The professional backgrounds of early film exhibitors in Sweden included, according to Tommy Gustafsson, 'funfair owners, wholesale dealers, bank managers, restaurant owners, bookkeepers, magicians, and manufacturers.'<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, temperance lodges played an important role as early Swedish film exhibition venues. This may be relevant for women's involvement in film exhibition in the sense that many Swedish women were engaged in the temperance movement and such venues would have represented respectable public spaces for women to frequent outside the domestic sphere.<sup>25</sup> As Gustafsson points out, in the first decade after the invention of film, Swedish audiences had few opportunities to visit the rare screenings organized by travelling exhibitors passing through the country, and it was not until after permanent cinemas began to establish themselves, first in the capital, Stockholm, and the second largest city, Gothenburg, in 1904–1905, and then in the provinces, that film became popularized.<sup>26</sup> The early film screenings in the context of Stockholm theatre culture where Anna Hofman-Uddgren played a part, and where other women like Annette Teufel and Marguerite Vignault Chenu appear to have contributed, are thus examples of an early, ephemeral film culture, limited to the Stockholm entertainment circuit. Nevertheless, considering that Hofman-Uddgren's producer, when she became a filmmaker, was N. P. Nilsson, one of Stockholm's early cinema owners, and her first experience of

working with film was in exhibition, her early ventures into film direction might actually be understood as a natural extension of her use of film in the Stockholm variety circuit in which she had been a leading figure since the late nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

In the mid-1910s, Swedish cinema owners and managers began to organize in professional organizations, such as Sweden's National Association of Cinema Owners (Sveriges Biografägareförbund), founded in 1915 and the Swedish Film and Cinema Society (Svenska Film- och biografmannasällskapet), founded in 1917. Surviving records from these organizations, as well as contemporary articles in the trade press, show that cinema management was a male-dominated profession in early twentieth-century Sweden. However, women contributed to this culture. The 1910 Swedish census was the first to include the term that would become the established Swedish word for cinema theatres, *biograf*. The digitization of this census has made it possible to establish that in 1910, thirty-four individuals, out of which two were women, described themselves as cinema owners (*biografägare*) when asked to define their profession.<sup>28</sup> In addition, fifteen men described themselves as cinema managers (*biografköpare*), and five men as cinema directors (*biografdirektör*).<sup>29</sup> Considering that permanent venues for film exhibition had been established in Stockholm and Gothenburg in 1904–1905, and continued to spread across the rest of the country thereafter, and that there were twenty-five permanent cinema venues in Stockholm alone as early as 1909, it is clear that not all Swedes who owned and/or managed cinemas gave that as their occupation in the census of 1910.<sup>30</sup> Among those who did, however, women represented almost 4 per cent, and almost 6 per cent of those claiming to own a cinema, figures that can be compared to Fuller-Seeley and Ward Mahar's estimate that women accounted for between 2 and 5 per cent of American nickelodeon owners in the years following 1907.<sup>31</sup>

One difficulty when tracing the history of women film exhibitors in Sweden is that the digitization of the Swedish census, which enabled the identification of (some) women cinema owners in



1910, does not include the census of 1920, and only a very small section of the census of 1930 had been digitized at time of writing.<sup>32</sup> However, even without comparable census data—which might give some clue as to whether the percentage of women among all cinema owners and managers in Sweden increased, remained stable, or decreased in the 1910s and 1920s—other records reveal that women remained a consistent minority presence among Swedish exhibitors throughout the silent era and into the cinema culture of sound film.

### A life in Stockholm cinema exhibition

In 1918, the Swedish film trade journal *Filmbladet* noted that women managed just under 5 per cent of the cinemas in the capital, Stockholm.<sup>33</sup> The reason for *Filmbladet's* interest was its profile of a Stockholm-based female cinema owner, Wilhelmina Larsson (who changed her surname to Acrel on her marriage a few years later). Women cinema owners in the silent era tended to manage a single neighbourhood cinema rather than branching out into the entrepreneurial schemes tried by some of their male counterparts, who launched cinema chains or diversified into film production.<sup>34</sup> Yet the smaller scale of women exhibitors' businesses does not fully account for why an individual such as Larsson-Acrel, who had started work in film exhibition in 1912, and was profiled in the trade press in 1918, and then stayed in the industry and remained active in professional organizations into the 1950s, has thus far been invisible in accounts of local cinema history. Larsson-Acrel began her cinema career working for Anton Gooes, who with his brothers Gunnar and Gustav was among the early pioneers of travelling film shows in Sweden.<sup>35</sup> She worked as a cashier or box office assistant at the Bostock cinema in Lästmakaregatan in central Stockholm, and in 1914, only two years after having been contracted by Gooes, she bought the cinema from her employer.<sup>36</sup> Larsson-Acrel made her first application for a permit to show film programmes with instrumental music in July 1914.<sup>37</sup> The *Filmbladet* article describes

Larsson-Acrel's progression from cashier to owner and manager of the cinema in these enigmatic terms:

How this happened and the fact that it did happen is connected with a story that is sufficiently exciting in its own right, and which one might well, with a few handy embellishments, make into a film that would be a box office success. But be that as it may. To get to the core of the matter, in brief, Miss Larsson kept her eyes open when for one reason or another the cinema was put up for sale. She went up to the director and asked to be allowed to buy the business.

Yes, well, that would do. As long as she could raise the money.

It was this very chapter of the film that would make for an exciting act under the title 'The hunt for money', because the hunt offered a fair deal of both exciting and surprising points. But they are a private matter. In a nutshell, Miss Larsson managed to get hold of the money and buy the cinema, which she has owned and managed for four years now.<sup>38</sup>

The documented information about Larsson-Acrel's work in Swedish film exhibition does not quite match the hints of action and adventure in *Filmbladet's* story, but her career was nevertheless interesting. In May 1919 she was one of the first women to join Sweden's National Association of Cinema Owners (later the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association, or Sveriges Biografägareförbund), and the same year she was also active as the treasurer of the local Stockholm Cinema Owners' Association (Stockholms Biografägarförening).<sup>39</sup> In both *Filmbladet's* 1918 profile and a later interview in the trade journal *Biografägaren*, in which she looked back at her career as a cinema exhibitor, Larsson-Acrel described Bostock as rundown at the time when she took over the business in 1914.<sup>40</sup> She refurbished the cinema and made further improvements with careful programme selections, arranging to have the first run of films from Pathé Frères, and making a deal with the distributor Skandinavisk Filmcentral for Bostock to receive their programmes, which included several Chaplin shorts,

immediately after the cinema where their films had their first run.<sup>41</sup> According to Olle Waltå, two Chaplin films (*A Film Johnnie* and *Getting Acquainted*, both 1914) had their Swedish premiere at the Bostock in 1918.<sup>42</sup> In her comments in 1934 Larsson-Acrel emphasized that cinema management involved not only looking after the venue so that the physical place was comfortable and welcoming, but also a clever choice of programmes for her intended audiences.

In her application to the authorities in July 1916 for a permit to screen films at the Bostock, 'Stig Arne Acrel' was named as the cinema's projectionist, and in December 1921, Wilhelmina became Mrs Acrel. As a married woman, she continued to own and manage the Bostock cinema for over thirty years. Although Bostock was the exhibition venue with which she was primarily associated—she reportedly stood behind the counter and sold the tickets herself throughout the silent era—she also had shorter stints as the director of other Stockholm cinemas: she bought Skånebiografen in 1916, which she renamed Södra Kvarn, but sold it the following year; and for a few months in 1923–1924 she managed both the Grevture in Grevturegatan (a few minutes' walk from the Bostock) and Stjärnbiografen, southwest of the other two cinemas. An advert for Grevture in the local daily newspaper *Stockholms-Tidningen* in January 1924 shows that Acrel was screening the Austrian sex education film *Kvinnans hygien* (*Hygiene der Ehe*, dir. Erwin Junger, 1922, *Marital Hygiene*).<sup>43</sup> The film was presented in the following words:

Make sure to get hold of your tickets in time, because you must see what every woman ought to know:

*Kvinnans hygien*

The film is based on the Latin motto 'Homo sum nihil humani a me alienum puto', that is, 'Since I am a human being, nothing human should be unknown to me.' Every Swedish woman should know both her own body as the process of fertilization and her duty as a mother to give life to healthy, capable citizens.

Shown only to adult women.

Attention! Female staff only.<sup>44</sup>

Elisabet Björklund has described how this film was shown to women-only audiences when it premiered in Sweden, pointing out that when the film was passed by the Swedish censors in November 1923, the censorship card noted that the film's distributor, Oscar Rosenberg, promised that the film would only be shown to female audiences.<sup>45</sup> At this time, the practice of gender-segregation for screenings of sex education films was being introduced in order to create a respectable and safe context for this sensitive topic, although as Björklund shows, paradoxically the practice was often interpreted as sensationalist, since the special treatment of the films framed the content as daring.<sup>46</sup> Contemporary adverts in other cinemas presented the film in terms similar to the Grevture advert, but Larsson-Acrel appears to have been unique among Stockholm cinema owners in promising that the gender segregation would extend to the staff too, which might be considered an advantage for those attending a screening of this kind.<sup>47</sup>

Larsson-Acrel continued to manage the Bostock until 1945, when she sold it to AB Europa Film, but its status among Stockholm cinemas appears to have peaked in the late 1910s and early 1920s.<sup>48</sup> In 1929, she was made director of a distribution company set up by the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association called Filmbyrån (The Film Agency), renamed Sverige Film (Sweden Film) in 1945, and she remained head of this venture until the mid-1950s.<sup>49</sup>

Of all the women cinema owners in Sweden that I have been able to identify who were active in the silent era, Larsson-Acrel had the longest career. Starting out as an unmarried woman in her twenties, the second woman admitted to membership in the National Cinema Owners' Association—accepted into a professionalized circle of film exhibitors—her life was not typical of Swedish women cinema owners of the silent era. The fact that she had profiles in two influential trade publications—*Filmbladet* in 1918 and *Biografägaren* in 1934—and featured in the portraits of Swedish film sector notables that the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association published in 1920 proves that she did not go unnoticed by her peers. The majority of her contemporary female colleagues have

left fewer traces. Sometimes just a name, sometimes the address of a cinema or a home address, and in some cases a date of birth. But despite the fact that Larsson-Acrel was an active member of several professional organizations, and featured several times in the trade press, she is completely absent from published histories of the Bostock cinema, which attracted attention in the Swedish press for example in the 1970s, when it became a pornographic cinema, and in the 1980s, when it finally closed down, mourned as one of the oldest cinemas in the Nordic countries.<sup>50</sup>

Kurt Berglund's book about Stockholm cinemas, published in the 1990s, mentions only the Gooes brothers and Europa Film as owners of Bostock, even though Anton Gooes ran the cinema for fewer than nine years, whereas Larsson-Acrel owned the business for over three decades, including the transition from silent to sound.<sup>51</sup> The Gooes brothers are known as early pioneers of film exhibition whereas Europa Film was a well-known film production company of long standing, active from the early sound period until the 1980s: the cinema owners who already form part of the received national film historiography have been deemed more relevant to the contextualization of the Bostock cinema than an unknown woman. But film history is not just a succession of great inventions, deeds, and achievements; film historians should also consider the daily grind by individuals who never became famous because their work—whether in production, distribution, or exhibition—was only moderately successful. We need to discuss the problems of inclusion for professionals in a field where the internal jargon revealed that being a man was assumed to be natural and normal.<sup>52</sup> Take a broader view of Wilhelmina Larsson-Acrel's (non)treatment in film historical accounts, consider other conspicuous absences, and one might reasonably argue that it is indeed typical of the invisibility of, and low value placed on, women's contributions to film culture.

## Researching Swedish cinema exhibition history

In Swedish film trade journals, the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association's archives and published registers, the 1910 census, and business records, I have so far found evidence of around 120 women who owned and/or managed cinemas or travelling film shows in Sweden in the era of silent cinema.<sup>53</sup> This includes most of the women who became members of the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association in the silent era, and many women who remained active as cinema owners in the same place for long periods, but it likely excludes a large number of women involved in film exhibition in temporary venues, as well as many of those who tried their luck in the business only for a few years, and women who ran cinemas owned by their husband and who received no individual credit in their own name.<sup>54</sup> For the first few years of cinema, I have consulted primary sources that document film exhibition in Stockholm, while for local cinema exhibition in small and average-sized towns I have had to rely on secondary sources, which are often thin on the detail of women's roles.<sup>55</sup>

The Swedish Cinema Owners' Association published a register regularly from 1930, which provides useful information about the women who owned or managed cinemas in the early years of sound cinema and throughout the 1930s and 1940s, while mapping women's ownership and management in the 1910s and 1920s has proved more difficult.<sup>56</sup> Numerous women who were neither cinema owners nor managers were involved in cinema exhibition in other ways, whether as musicians, usherettes, or box office assistants: work that may be compared to the below-the-line professions in film production.<sup>57</sup> Erin Hill writes of Hollywood in the classical era that "Women were never absent from film history; they often simply weren't documented as part of it because they did "women's work", which was—by definition—insignificant, tedious, low status, and noncreative."<sup>58</sup> The focus of this essay is women as cinema owners or managers, but Hill's comment is nevertheless highly relevant for women in film exhibition too. For example, the only explicit references to women that I have found in the minutes of the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association's board in

the silent era (apart from lists of approved members that include women) are when board members in December 1918 and January 1919 discussed employing a low-paid female office assistant, and again in 1920 when they had to fill the position again, because the assistant had found more lucrative work elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, women often gained experience from more than one area of work in film exhibition or related businesses before becoming the manager or owner of a cinema.

One reason that this area of film culture is under-researched is that film history has tended to prioritize production over exhibition, distribution, and consumption. As Antonia Lant has noted, feminist film research in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the need to acknowledge women's work 'on both sides of the camera', and inevitably did not cover the many kinds of jobs available in the field of cinema culture.<sup>60</sup> And Hill's words on women's work in the context of American production seem applicable as a reason for research into other fields, including exhibition: 'Examining the types of work women could and did do in the wake of sex segregation reveals their agency—both in their own careers and in their industry's history.'<sup>61</sup> Hill describes her work on media production as providing 'historical fill light' to the auteurist view of film history, where writers' 'esteem for great movie makers often acts like a spotlight, plunging the contributions of the less conspicuous into darkness and rendering the great men themselves less interesting by blowing out their most well-known features with harsh, flat light.'<sup>62</sup> By widening the focus from production—which is usually perceived as the more creative, artistic side of film culture—to exhibition, and by investigating *women's* work in film exhibition, my research aims to spread the 'historical fill light' even further.

### Cinema owners and the women's movement

As in many other countries, the formation of a Swedish cinema culture coincided with the campaign for women's suffrage and with women taking up a much larger part of the paid workforce. As

already noted, this was the direct result of the movement initiated in the nineteenth century known today as first-wave feminism, which strove 'to extend the social contract so that it included political citizenship for women.'<sup>63</sup>

The public debate about labour legislation was affected by the increase in women in waged work in the early twentieth century. According to the official statistics based on the Swedish census, the total number of working women in Sweden increased by around 25 per cent between 1900 and 1910, and then by another 31 per cent between 1910 and 1920.<sup>64</sup> The percentage of adult Swedish women in waged work rose from 30 per cent in 1910 to 36 per cent in 1920, and continued to increase throughout the 1920s so that by 1930 fully 38 per cent of the adult female population of Sweden was in the waged workforce in some capacity.<sup>65</sup>

So was this increase of women in waged work mirrored in the new work sector of film exhibition? We have seen that only 34 Swedes, men and women, called themselves 'cinema owners' in the Swedish census of 1910. One of them was Anton Gooes, Wilhelmina Larsson-Acrel's employer at the Bostock in Stockholm, who as we know sold the cinema to her in 1914. But the two women included among the cinema owners in the census did not belong to the Stockholm cinema culture: Matilda Andersson (née Pettersson, born 1847 in the town of Borås) was based in Karlstad, and Selma Åman (born 1879) ran a cinema in Eskilstuna. The role of women in early provincial film exhibition certainly merits further investigation, considering that the first two women in Sweden who officially declared their profession to be 'cinema owner' were both based in provincial towns rather than in any of the larger Swedish cities.

About Matilda Andersson little is known, except for the fact that she was a widow, and that in the year when the census was collected, she also registered her name in *Kvinnligt yrkesregister* ('Register of female professions'), a Swedish publication that appeared between 1904 and 1922, initially on an annual basis but slowing down during the First World War. The register featured adverts and listings for individual professional women and businesses run by women, and



LOCATING WOMEN'S AGENCY IN THE ARCHIVE

Sida 188.  
Utdrag ur Församlingsboken för *Eskilstuna* förs. i *Salmenack* lin. 4. 1/1 1910.

Hus- nr	By eller lögskola (kvartier eller stads- delar). Namn (nationalitet) i hvarje person; familje- ställning (h. = hustru, v. = vid, f. = fader, s. = son, titel (om nämnd i lin. 1 till 3 1/2 spalten), icke öfvt).	Ålder och nummer i yrkesregister. Namn i yrkes- registret. Ålder (om nämnd i lin. 1 till 3 1/2 spalten).	Födelse- ort (Om nämnd i lin. 1 eller 1 stst).	Yrke										Troskapsinlämnelse Nationalitet (om nämnd) Förvarande.	
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19	Wahlström Johanna Magdalena	1874	Åby, Åbo												
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Figure 3.2. From the Swedish census 1910, Eskilstuna parish, including listing of cinema owner Selma Åman. Courtesy of Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives).

its aim, according to the editor Bertha Wiman, was to ‘disseminate knowledge about professional, independent women working in our country in various fields, in order to make the capital of female labour force, knowledge, and professional skills as fruitful as possible.’<sup>66</sup> *Kvinnligt yrkesregister* also reported on women’s organizations’ national and international congresses, and published articles about the social and legal position of women in Sweden, with yearly summaries of what had been achieved in the ongoing campaigns for

women's rights, in particular in terms of suffrage and employment regulations. In 1921, Sweden's Constitution was amended to give women the right to vote. The publication of *Kvinnligt yrkesregister* ended in 1922, signalling the strong link between the reasons for publishing the register and the campaign for women's suffrage. Several of the women who contributed to the publication were journalists with progressive views, and educated professions such as 'lecturers', 'teachers', and 'writers' featured prominently in the register.

Andersson's listing appeared in the 1910 issue of *Kvinnligt yrkesregister*, with her cinema theatre (*biografteater*) placed alphabetically between sculptresses (*bildhuggare*) and suppliers of artificial flowers (*blommor, artificiella*). It reappeared in 1911 and in 1912, and in 1913 her name was joined by a second cinema owner, Anna Ternow in Oskarshamn. After this, the publication did not feature any more cinema theatre listings. There is no other evidence to suggest that these two women were engaged in the campaigns for married women's right to work, women's right to vote, or related issues, but the fact that they chose to advertise their businesses in this context is thought-provoking given our understanding of the work of pioneering women film exhibitors in the new entertainment culture that was developing in Sweden in the early 1910s.

There was at least one clear link between Swedish film exhibition in the silent era and the women's movement, though: Anna Johansson-Visborg, a labour and union activist (and later politician) in Stockholm. Her husband Sven Wisborg was a cinema musician when they met, but in 1914 they started to run Hornstullsbiografen in the Stockholm neighbourhood of Södermalm, and a few years later in 1921 they built Brommateatern, which Anna Johansson-Visborg would manage for over thirty years.<sup>67</sup> Although famous in her capacity as a Social Democrat politician and union official rather than for her work as a cinema owner and manager, Johansson-Visborg is an interesting example of a woman engaged in progressive labour politics and women's suffrage who also worked in cinema management for many years. It is also interesting to note that *Kvinnligt yrkesregister* was mentioned in *Filmbladet*, the leading



Figure 3.3. Anna Johansson-Visborg. Photograph from *Stockholms stadsfullmäktiges sjuttiofemårsjubileum, 1913–1938*. Photo: Stockholms stadsarkiv (Stockholm City Archive).

cinema trade journal, in 1917, and that the film censor Gustaf Berg, a regular contributor to *Filmbladet*, wrote an article for *Kvinnligt yrkesregister* in 1916.<sup>68</sup> Although *Filmbladet* did not publish articles in direct support of women's suffrage, Berg's contribution to *Kvinnligt yrkesregister*, like the decision of the editor to mention the register despite the few references to film-related work in the publication, suggests that influential figures in the Swedish cinema trade were monitoring the progress of the women's movement, and that some of the women active in the campaign for suffrage were interested in Swedish film culture.

Selma Åman, the second woman cinema owner listed in the 1910 census, is not quite as mysterious as Matilda Andersson, thanks

to an interview in *Filmbladet* in 1916 and a profile in the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association's portrait gallery.<sup>69</sup> In the *Filmbladet* article, Åman explained that her career in film exhibition began in the town of Borås in 1904, when her husband took over a cinema business there, and she, after some negotiation with her husband, was trusted with the responsibility of selling tickets. In 1906 the couple moved to the town of Eskilstuna, and when her husband fell ill Åman gradually took over the business, becoming its formal owner when her husband died.<sup>70</sup> She bought a better venue for the business, and successfully managed the cinema for several years before selling it to the large film company Svenska Bio in 1913. Åman then stayed on working as the local manager for Svenska Bio, and this was her role when *Filmbladet* interviewed her in 1916. Having started in the business before the first major debates about the potential damaging effects of film, which eventually led to the establishment of state censorship in Sweden in 1911, Åman explicitly contrasted the 'simple' entertainment of the early years with the mature art form that she associated with the cinema of 1916.<sup>71</sup>

### Box offices and projection booths

At times in the interview with Åman, her description of the gendering of the cinema space prefigures Lant's description of the projectionist's booth as a male sphere. Åman talked about her late husband's initial reluctance to allow her access to 'all the mysteries of Cinema', on the basis that it 'was something that us dames could not understand.'<sup>72</sup> The projection booth, that 'world of wonder', 'was not to be entered on any account.'<sup>73</sup> But she went on to explain that her own curiosity, coupled with necessity when her husband fell ill, led her to teach herself the business of cinema, including how to project films, after an incident with a drunken projectionist: 'After that experience there was practice and experimentation night and day, until I felt safe with the cinema machinery and had the time to train a new projectionist.'<sup>74</sup>

Lant contrasts the 'opaque box' where the usually male projectionist worked with the transparent glass boxes where the usually

female box office assistants were on display as they sold tickets.<sup>75</sup> These two professions do appear to have been among the most divided along gender lines in the Swedish cinema business. The first part of the business that Åman's husband gave her access to was ticket sales, and as previously mentioned, the Bostock's Wilhelmina Larsson-Acrel started her cinema career as a cashier. The Stockholm cinema owner K. Hjalmar Lundblad, who would become an important local cinema manager, started his cinema career in 1906 as a projectionist at Östermalmsbiografen, and he seems to have met his wife Stina (née Schagerström) when she was a box office assistant at the same cinema.<sup>76</sup> In an article in *Filmbladet* in 1919, Stina Lundblad was held up as an example of how 'the unerring judgement of a woman' can result in a cinema characterized by 'meticulous order, good selection of pictures' and 'comfort and wellbeing'.<sup>77</sup> Part of this article can be found in the Waltå collection, an archive consisting of copies of press materials and official records relating to Stockholm cinemas. But the copy of the *Filmbladet* article about the Lundblad couple included in the archive section on Östermalmsbiografen has been edited by Waltå so that it seems to profile only Hjalmar Lundblad.<sup>78</sup> The parts of the text where Stina was mentioned have been omitted, as has the reference to her in the title of the article—a clear example of a woman film exhibitor literally being edited out of film history because the person amassing the archive decided that her involvement was unimportant. Yet, the reader who consults the original article will find that it argued that a woman's touch could be important to the success of a cinema, if only because women made up more than half the cinema audience, and that a woman working in a cinema might be better placed to cater to a female audience's taste.

Why Waltå—who in his documentation of other cinemas mentions women owners, and even remarks on Wilhelmina Larsson-Acrel's long career—decided that Stina Lundblad was irrelevant to the history of Östermalmsbiografen we will never know, but one guess is that Waltå, who worked for years in Swedish film exhibition and

distribution, knew that Stina was later less active in the business. In K. Hjalmar Lundblad's archive (held by the Swedish Film Institute), a small collection of mainly professional correspondence, the references to his wife are few, and associated with social events. In 1918 both Hjalmar and Stina were named in an invitation to dinner with staff from the film company Svenska Filmskompaniet, but thereafter she was hardly mentioned at all except in relation to the planning of a wedding (probably their daughter's) at the Swedish open-air museum Skansen in 1930, and a few polite greetings in letters from Lundblad's clients who were on close enough terms to know his family. Considering that after the coming of sound Lundblad was successful enough to expand his business into a small chain (which he owned well into the 1960s), it seems likely that Stina's work in the cinema diminished or ceased completely when the Lundblad cinema firm became more prosperous.<sup>79</sup>

But in 1919 *Filmbladet* praised Stina for her contribution to her husband's work, and given that both their backgrounds were described in *Sveriges Film- och Biografmän* (1920), one might presume that at least in the beginning, Stina was more qualified to deal with accounts and figures than her husband: K. Hjalmar had begun life as a mechanic before becoming a projectionist when he was 25, whereas his wife trained at a business school (Påhlmans Handelsinstitut), and worked in a book and music shop before becoming a cinema cashier.<sup>80</sup>

### Taste and music

*Filmbladet's* 1918 article about Wilhelmina Larsson-Acrel has similarities with the description of Stina Lundblad, in that Larsson-Acrel's good taste is emphasized: the author points out that having bought the Bostock, Larsson-Acrel had to 'paint and renovate and decorate and embellish' the venue while 'at the same time, the programmes were selected with greater discrimination.'<sup>81</sup> Both Larsson-Acrel in 1918 and Åman in 1916 referred to an earlier era of 'bad' films, which they contrasted with a contemporary, more sophisticated

film culture. For example, Åman talks about competition from a travelling exhibitor who showed much poorer film programmes, but attracted children by giving away sweets and lowering ticket prices.<sup>82</sup> And when Larsson-Acrel mentioned the business she took over in 1914, she described finding it 'dragged down' by all sorts of inferior music and variety performances, while after four years of her improvements 'the cinema is something completely different. And the audience is also a different one.'<sup>83</sup>

Larsson-Acrel links bad taste to bad musical performances in the cinema. Piano-playing skills were an important component in middle-class female education in the early twentieth century, and it is well known that many women worked as cinema musicians.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, film programmes from Selma Åman's cinema in Eskilstuna for 1910–1913 advertised the fact that the films were accompanied by 'first-class music by Miss Signe Björklund', and when the Elite cinema in Stockholm advertised in the daily press to recruit a pianist in 1910, they specified that they preferred a female musician.<sup>85</sup> And just as women could advance from working the cash register to managing the cinema, female musicians could also move from accompanying films to curating programmes. One example of a woman crossing over from piano-playing to cinema management was the musician Ingeborg Sofia Emelia Krysell (née Kahl) who started as a pianist at Visby Biografteater, a cinema on the island of Gotland. After three years there, working under the name Ingeborg Kahl, she seems to have become director and musician at a rival cinema, Skandiabiografen, where she stayed for at least five years.<sup>86</sup>

To replace rowdy variety acts with respectable women pianists could possibly be seen as a way to elevate the status of the cinema—or just a way to cut costs. Gustafsson warns against the tendency to accept at face value the description of Swedish cinema audiences in the 1910s as consisting of only uneducated members of the working class, pointing out that while Swedish population was then overwhelmingly dominated by the working class in terms of social stratification, there is ample evidence in contemporary

newspaper articles and photographs of members of the middle class visiting cinemas, even though the general image of the audience in public discourse was that of ‘a faceless mass of the uninformed’.<sup>87</sup> Regardless of whether the kinds of audiences at cinemas managed by Åman and Larsson-Acrel really did change or not, their statements fell within a teleological discourse of cinema culture as constantly improving, which chimed with the business interests of the industry. After all, at a certain point in early American film production, women directors and screenwriters came to represent ‘propriety and uplift’ in a much-criticized business sector, just as a discourse of taste, interior decoration, comfort, and politeness formed around women working in American cinema exhibition.<sup>88</sup> When it came to the overall management of cinemas and the selection of film programmes, some characteristics that at this point were associated with femininity seem to have been welcomed in Sweden in the 1910s—as in US screen culture at this time—allowing *Filmladet* to profile women cinema owners as well-suited to their jobs.

## Conclusion

Since women entered into the cinema business at different times during the formation of Swedish cinema culture, and differed in terms of age, background, and civil status, it is important to acknowledge that while they shared a minority status as women in a male-dominated work culture, women in Swedish film exhibition never constituted a homogenous group. Fuller-Seeley and Ward Mahar suggest that the American film industry’s ‘concerns over outside censorship gave women influence in the business’, and that some women film exhibitors ‘really did appear to be interested in cleansing the movies.’<sup>89</sup> To what extent the individuals whose work in film exhibition I have traced in this essay were influential beyond the walls of their own cinemas is difficult to evaluate, and in order to analyse whether there were any particular patterns in their curatorial practices that might be seen as connected to their



status as women pioneers in a male world a far more detailed study of cinema programming practices will be needed.

Thus, there are several dimensions to consider when analysing Wilhelmina Larsson-Acrel's women-only screenings of a sex education film on 'marital hygiene'. While it may be tempting to place her programming of *Kvinnans hygien* in a context of taste and cleanliness, and of course the ideals of women's education, questions regarding commercial appeal and sensationalism must also be taken into account, as well as the rather unsavoury—but at the time widespread—ideas about eugenics which were part of the film's message. Nevertheless, the similarities between American and Swedish discourses on propriety and comfort are fascinating. And considering that in 1911 Sweden, unlike the US, actually introduced state censorship, after years of debate in which female teachers, such as the censor Marie-Louise Gagner, were highly active, women can of course be seen to have shaped silent Swedish film culture in terms of influencing what was *not* to be screened.<sup>90</sup>

Like its American counterparts, the trade journal *Filmbladet* appears to have championed women cinema owners in the latter half of the 1910s, possibly as part of a general drive to create a cleaner, nicer image of the cinema-going context. But more importantly, it is clear that further research is needed into the work practices and curatorial choices of women cinema owners. Whereas here I have focused mainly on cinema owners in the Stockholm area, future research on women's agency in film exhibition will also need to consider the development of cinema culture in provincial towns and rural areas. The relationship between cinema culture and women's rights also merits more in-depth exploration. In early Swedish cinema culture there was an interesting tension between an emerging modern urban entertainment culture with questionable morals and violence, and, on the other hand, an educational tradition closely connected with the temperance movement. To understand the role women played in Swedish silent cinema culture, it is also necessary to consider how women could justify their presence in a film culture that was associated with both vice and educational potential.

As this essay has shown, while earlier generations of Swedish film historians may have painstakingly documented other aspects of cinema culture, their interest in businessmen and commercial and/or artistic success has meant that research topics such as the place of women in the music culture of silent cinema, gendered exhibition practices, or the relationship between cinema and the women's movement remain largely uncharted.

## Notes

- 1 For first, second and third wave feminism, see Gillis et al. 2004, 1.
- 2 Stigsdotter 2016; Stigsdotter 2013.
- 3 For local conditions, see, for example, Jernudd 2012; Jernudd 2007; Nordström & Östvall 2002; Vesterlund 2006, 68–99. For individuals and companies, see Olsson 1999; Olsson 1989 which does, however, include a discussion of Lundberg's female employee Mimi von Platen (23), and mentions that Lundberg's sister Maria Persson who lived in Copenhagen was involved in the Danish side of his cinema business (29–32).
- 4 Wallengren 1998; Natzén 2010, 215–18; Natzén 2014, 36–48. See also Christopher Natzén elsewhere in this volume.
- 5 Furhammar 2003, 24; Waldekranz 1969.
- 6 Jernudd 2012, 20.
- 7 Waldekranz 1986, 257–72.
- 8 Activities that Waldekranz would have been aware of, since he listed these screenings in 'Levande Fotografier' (1969).
- 9 For Annette Teufel and the Stockholm variety scene of the 1890s, see Ivarsson Lilieblad 2009.
- 10 *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 July 1896.
- 11 *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 6 August 1896, 'tjusande återbild'. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Waldekranz 1969, 70.
- 14 Idestam-Almqvist 1959, 84–5.
- 15 Lant 2006, 563; see *ibid.* 9 & 581 for women in adverts for cinematic attractions and women as managers of magic lantern shows. For reasons of space I will not explore the question of women's involvement in exhibiting pre-cinematic moving image attractions such as panoramas in Sweden, but it is worth noting that Waldekranz (1969) lists a 'Mrs Augusta Engelbrecht' as owner of the Panorama International in Stockholm (4), whereas Svenska Filminstitutet (Swedish Film

- Institute) (SFI) Stockholm, Olle Waltås samling (Olle Waltå collection) lists 'Berta Engelbrektsson' as manager of Panorama International. The Olle Waltå collection, held at the Swedish Film Institute, consists of copies of articles and official records related to Stockholm's cinemas. Olle Waltå (1923–2004) was an amateur film historian who put together his collection over 40 years in Swedish film distribution and in retirement. His source on this occasion was the police register for events (*tillställningsdiarier*) in Stockholms Stadsarkiv (Stockholm City Archives).
- 16 The concept of 'Immortal Theatre' (*Odödliga Teatern*), the Swedish expression used to market the early screenings with sound and music, is usually credited to Numa Peterson, who saw the Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre in Paris in 1900 and would go on to create his own 'Swedish immortal theatre'; see Natzén 2010, 95.
  - 17 *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 2 September 1901; see also SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 7.
  - 18 A misspelling probably inherited from the French film historian George Sadoul; see Hamilton Ball 1968, 304.
  - 19 Waldekranz 1969, 208–209.
  - 20 Hamilton Ball 1968, 27–8.
  - 21 Fuller-Seeley & Ward Mahar 2013, original emphasis.
  - 22 Waldekranz 1969, 100.
  - 23 Letter cited in *ibid.* 101.
  - 24 Gustafsson 2016, 245.
  - 25 According to Jernudd (2012, 21), the Free Church movement in particular attracted younger working-class women.
  - 26 Gustafsson 2016, 244–5.
  - 27 For more on N. P. Nilsson, see Idestam-Almqvist 1959, 156–60.
  - 28 National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet), digitized census records 1910 (available to registered users of the National Archives' 'Digital Research Room'), <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/folkkrakningar>, accessed 22 May 2019.
  - 29 Five additional individuals used the word for 'cinema' in the descriptions of their professions in 1910—two female pianists, one female cashier, one male conductor and one male janitor.
  - 30 Jernudd 2012, 23; Berglund 1992, 38. Cinema owners whose educational background or managerial status allowed this probably used other titles ('managing director', 'engineer', 'architect') than 'cinema owner', which in 1910 had a lower status than these more established titles, being so recent.
  - 31 Fuller-Seeley & Ward Mahar 2013.
  - 32 Information about the digitization project is available (in Swedish) at <https://riksarkivet.se/swecens>, accessed 22 May 2019.
  - 33 *Filmbladet* was published between 1915 and 1924; 'Film- och Biogubbar XXIV: Fröken Wilhelmina Larsson' 1918, 37.
  - 34 Although, as already noted, Anna Hofman-Uddgren transitioned from organizing film programmes to directing films.

- 35 Berglund 1992, 26–7. The spelling ‘Gooes’ will be used in this chapter based on the spelling used in the Swedish census records, although the spelling ‘Goes’ is sometimes found in both contemporary publications and film historical references.
- 36 *Filmbladet* 4/3 (1918), 37–8.
- 37 SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 14.
- 38 *Filmbladet* 4/3 (1918), 37.
- 39 The first woman to enlist as member in the register was Miss Alma Markusson, another Stockholm-based cinema owner (membership number 24) in November 1918, while Larsson-Acrel appears to have been the second woman to join (membership number 55); Sveriges Biografägareförbund 1920, 26.
- 40 Acrel quoted in ‘Kort intervju med 20-årsjubilerande biografägarinna’ 1934, 4.
- 41 Public records copied by Waltå support this claim. In particular there appears to have been a major refurbishment in 1922 (SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 14); Acrel in *Biografägaren* 9/12, 25 August 1934, 4.
- 42 SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 14.
- 43 Acrel in *Biografägaren* 12, 25 August 1934, 4; *Filmbladet* 4/3 (1918), 38; Sveriges Biografägareförbund 1920, 26. The Swedish release title of *Kvinnans hygien* is important for the discussion here, and is therefore used throughout.
- 44 *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 21 January 1924, 4. The emphasis on reproduction by ‘healthy capable citizens’ suggests that the film was inspired at least in part by eugenics, which also fits with the original German title *Hygiene der Ehe* which could be translated as ‘marital hygiene’ or ‘the hygiene of marriage’.
- 45 Björklund 2012, 67. The title chosen for Swedish distribution, *Kvinnans hygien* (‘Female hygiene’ or ‘Women’s hygiene’), might be connected with the stated intention to screen the film for women only.
- 46 Björklund 2012, 66–8.
- 47 *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 21 January 1924, 4.
- 48 Apart from the information provided in the 1918 *Filmbladet* article, Acrel appears in the records of the Swedish Cinema Owners’ Association and the local Stockholm Cinema Owners’ Association (*Stockholms Biografägareförening*), which was taken over by the national organization in 1920, and is listed as owner and manager of the Bostock in the registers of Swedish cinema owners published by the Association of Cinema Owners in 1930, 1936, 1939, and 1942. Additional information has been found in the Waltå collection; however, I have not been able to check the veracity of all of the press citations and archival records Waltå refers to.
- 49 SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 14. Acrel also appears to have returned to cinema management in the 1950s, despite having sold the Bostock in 1945: she is listed as running the Atlas cinema in the early 1950s, and she seems to have taken over the Artist cinema from another woman, Svea Zetterström, in 1957, which she then sold in 1958.
- 50 SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 14, press cuttings.

- 51 Berglund 2012, 288.
- 52 Examples include the title of *Filmbladet's* series profiling people in the industry, 'Film och biogubbar', which translates as 'Film and cinema lads', and frequent references in the press and in professional organisations to 'biografmän' ('cinema men').
- 53 In the early 1920s the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association had around 200 members. In *Sveriges Biografägareförbund 1920*, 95 the Association estimated the total number of cinemas in Sweden (run by members and non-members) to be 703.
- 54 A survey of the membership records for 1915 to 1931 is necessarily inconclusive, given varying legibility and the inconsistent use of gender-specific titles—Fröken (Miss), Fru (Mrs), Herr (Mr).
- 55 Jernudd 2012 & 2007; Nordström & Östvall 2002; Vesterlund 2006; and the pioneering efforts of Waldekranz 1969. Vesterlund 2006, 69 does mention cinema's potential as a new public arena for women as a relevant area of research, but does not apply a gender perspective in his discussion of early screenings in Gävle.
- 56 *Sveriges Biografägareförbund 1930*; *Sveriges Biografägareförbund 1936 & 1942*.
- 57 For the below-the-line concept and gender, see Banks 2009, 87–98.
- 58 Hill 2016, 5. Rather than labelling women as below-the-line workers, Hill (*ibid.* 9) writes of 'movie workers', a term which may include roles that fit neither below nor above the line.
- 59 One of the board members commented that it would be difficult to find a 'qualified' assistant for the proposed salary; Svenska Filminstitutet (Swedish Film Institute) (SFI) Stockholm, *Sveriges Biografägareförbunds arkiv* (Archive of the Swedish Cinema Owners' Association), Board minutes, 7 December 1918 & 25 January 1919; SFI, *Sveriges Biografägareförbunds arkiv*, Board minutes, 9 January 1920.
- 60 Lant 2006, 548–9.
- 61 Hill 2016, 6.
- 62 *Ibid.* 13–14.
- 63 Gillis et al. 2004, 1.
- 64 Kungliga statistiska centralbyrån 1919, 47; Kungliga statistiska centralbyrån 1927, 61.
- 65 *Ibid.* 68–9, though the increase from 1910 to 1920 was probably somewhat exaggerated due to the methods used in 1910, which excluded some types of female work that were later included; Statistiska centralbyrån 1938, 70.
- 66 Wiman 1912, 9.
- 67 SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 20; Höglund 1951, 64; Berglund 2012, 75–6. They opted for different spellings of the family name when they married, her with 'V', his with 'W'.
- 68 *Filmbladet* 3 (1917), 13; Berg 1916, 91–2 & 96. A curious contribution, being the only text by a man in all the years it was published, and relating to women's interests only insofar as it mentions that film provides its audiences with new ideas about interior design and fashion.

- 69 'Film- och biogubbar XV' 1916, 149–50; Sveriges biografägareförbund 1920, 80.
- 70 *Filmbladet* 10 (1916), 149, where Åman explained that the reason they moved to Eskilstuna was that it was one of the few towns in Sweden that did not yet have a cinema.
- 71 Gustafsson 2016, 245; Jernudd 2012, 23; 'Film- och biogubbar XV' 1916, 149.
- 72 Lant 2006, 579.
- 73 'Film- och biogubbar XV' 1916, 149.
- 74 *Ibid.* 150.
- 75 Lant 2006, 579.
- 76 'Film- och biogubbar XXXXIV & XXXXV' 1919, 356–7.
- 77 *Ibid.* 356.
- 78 SFI, Olle Waltås samling, vol. 15.
- 79 The archival records provide fascinating insights into the gendered roles among Swedish cinema employees in the 1930s and 1940s. Employee lists show the work was divided between male projectionists and attendants/caretakers and female cashiers/box office assistants and cleaners. There are numerous copies of letters of recommendation, almost all for female box office employees who are praised for their work, whereas male employees are mainly documented in correspondence as projectionists who were fired or received warnings for unreliability and drunkenness—the drinking in the projectionist's booth that Selma Åman described in 1916 appears to have become a well-established tradition by the 1940s.
- 80 Sveriges biografägareförbund 1920, 27. K. Hjalmar Lundblad studied at Tekniska Skolan in Stockholm, but the article does not specify which subjects or to what level.
- 81 *Filmbladet* 4/3 (1918), 38.
- 82 'Film- och biogubbar XV', *Filmbladet* 10 (1916), 149–50.
- 83 *Filmbladet* 4/3 (1918), 37.
- 84 See Christopher Natzén elsewhere in this volume.
- 85 Advert in *Dagens Nyheter*, 6 December 1910, 12.
- 86 Sveriges Biografägareförbund 1920, 60.
- 87 Gustafsson 2016, 245.
- 88 Lant 2006, 561, 580.
- 89 Fuller-Seeley & Ward Mahar 2013.
- 90 Jernudd 2012, 23; Olsson 2013.

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# Queering the archive

## Amateur films and LGBT+ memory

*Dagmar Brunow*

A film clip on *Vimeo* shows two women on the American coast, climbing onto a ship pulled up on the shore and then scrambling on some rocks.<sup>1</sup> This home movie from 1938 features New York schoolteacher Ruth Storm (1888–1981) and a friend visiting Maine, where Storm would later retire with her last lover Almeda (‘Meda’) Benoit.<sup>2</sup> From the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s Storm had been filming her life, mostly on 16mm film. Almost 80 years after it was filmed, this sequence was made available to global audiences. Setting out ‘to seek, preserve, document, and screen amateur home movies shot by or depicting lesbians’, the Lesbian Home Movie Project (LHMP) in Maine has embarked on a memory project with the potential to rework LGBT+ heritage and regional memory alike.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone needs memories to create their identities. Although these rare early lesbian home movies can be a precious addition to audiovisual memory, only a small number of them will survive (audiovisual memory here being the sum of images, sounds, and narratives circulating in a specific society at a specific moment). Their preservation is urgent because these films diversify cultural memory by offering previously unheard stories. As analogue footage is decaying, digitization has not only been used for the purpose of preservation and restoration, but also to create access to films via online exhibition.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 4.1. Chenoweth Hall and Ruth Storm at Corea, Maine, in the late 1930s. Courtesy of the Lesbian Home Movie Project, Maine.

Archival practice can intervene in a film historiography that has obscured the agency of women as filmmakers. At the same time, it raises questions about queer visibility in the archive. Lesbian home movies can be found in private homes, in moving image archives, mixed-media archives, and in LGBT+ archives, for example grassroots or community archives, but their lesbian production or exhibition context may be obscured by cataloguing and metadata.<sup>5</sup> Unless a context is provided by the archivist, silent home movie images alone would hardly give away that they depict lesbian lives. The same goes for lesbian home movies found at auctions, jumble sales, or flea markets. Too often the footage runs the risk of being 'read' through a heteronormative perspective which erases the lesbian content, for example by turning lovers into good friends or colleagues. Once the personal memories have entered the public sphere, for whatever reason, 'lesbian signifiers become all but impossible to read, let alone prove', as Sharon Thompson, founder and executive director of the LHMP, reminds us.<sup>6</sup> This is

why a lack of contextualization might lead to forgetting. In this case the film will be lost to LGBT+ heritage. The question is how archival practice can diminish the risk of unqueering the footage, especially in the context of online exhibition. Still, the archival practice of creating access is of vital importance, as a film needs to stay in circulation to be remembered and to become part of LGBT+ heritage. A film which is confined to the shelves will easily be forgotten. Since memories are created in the process of reception, and through the narratives thus evolving, archives need to create access to their audiovisual material. Digitization can contribute to archival outreach since it allows for the circulation of films to an unprecedented extent. Yet, access cannot be provided to all of the content due to legal or ethical considerations as well as lack of resources.<sup>7</sup> The shift from a private viewing context to the public sphere, meanwhile, implies new challenges for the preservation of LGBT+ heritage.

This essay argues for the urgency of lesbian home movie preservation, examining the challenges involved when curating access to the collections and, in doing so, exploring the relationship between archival practice, audiovisual memory, and LGBT+ heritage. Its purpose is to contribute to the growing research on queer archives, but it also acknowledges the media specificity of moving image archiving.<sup>8</sup> While research on moving image archives tends to neglect specific questions of archiving LGBT+-related films, studies on queer archives often ignore the specific requirements involved when archiving audiovisual footage. Notable exceptions are one-off journal articles by US-based archivists, such as Lynne Kirste, Special Collections Curator at the Academy Film Archive; Kristin (KP) Pepe who became involved in the Outfest Legacy Project; and Sharon Thompson, director of the Lesbian Home Movie Project. These archivists have offered important insights into the challenges of archiving LGBT+-related film stock, but we need more research that brings together questions of the archive and its fundamental role in the creation of audiovisual memory and LGBT+ heritage.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this essay will examine three archival interventions

against forgetting: collecting, circulating, and contextualizing. To start with, let us first tease out the relationship between memory and the archive.

### Minor cinema, memory and heritage

Lesbian home movies and amateur films challenge the gendered and sexual norms of archival visibility.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that home movies follow generic conventions and are performative acts just like all forms of documentary film-making, the truth claim for home movies has been strong.<sup>11</sup> Home movies have therefore been acknowledged as a historical source.<sup>12</sup> From this perspective, the strength of lesbian home movies lies in their capacity to offer a window into the past, 'into ordinary LGBT life, what we did, how we lived, our homes, vacations, hobbies, pets, parties, friends, and all that is often invisible in film history', as Kirsten (KP) Pepe states.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, as Sharon Thompson notes, the footage archived at the Lesbian Home Movie Project conveys glimpses of everyday life by depicting 'lesbian life outside of the bars documented to date: Lesbianism on vacation. Lesbianism in the front yard. Lesbianism on the ball field.'<sup>14</sup> As a means of self-fashioning, home movies and amateur films have the capacity to counter stereotypical media representations and to carve out discursive spaces for queer lives. Early lesbian home movie footage diversifies the audiovisual memory of LGBT+ lives before Stonewall, a memory from which images of everyday queer lives were excluded. Home movies and amateur film-making can offer fresh perspectives of LGBT+ pasts beyond dominant representations framed by criminalizing discourses, such as images of raids and police surveillance.

Highlighting the role of the archivist requires a theoretical shift from the notion of the 'archive' to the process of 'archiving'. Contesting the alleged neutrality and objectivity of the archive, Michel Foucault's, Jacques Derrida's, and Ann Laura Stoler's theorizations have resulted in a paradigmatic turn from the storage of knowledge to its production.<sup>15</sup> The archive is 'a space where queer subjects

put themselves together as historical subjects, even if done in the context of archival lack.<sup>16</sup> As an agent in its own right, the archive has been theorized as a process in which knowledge and facts are continuously recreated and transformed, but archives are nothing without their archivists, who provide a framework for the interpretation of the holdings. As Jack Halberstam claims, archives need ‘users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making.’<sup>17</sup> Archivists construct archival records through practices such as collecting, selecting, discarding, and cataloguing. They apply metadata to describe and categorize the archival holdings for the purpose of making them searchable—and findable. Choosing adequate terms for catalogue entries, keywords or tags is even more important in times of digitization as the searchability of digitized content is dependent on its metadata. In this process the archivist becomes a memory agent whose work feeds into audiovisual memory. If we understand the archive as the foundation from which history is written, cultural memory can only become polyvocal and diverse if the archive creates multiple narratives and images. Archivists are therefore agents who can contribute to renegotiating audiovisual memory—they do not determine, but can influence whether it will be perpetuated or subverted.

A research perspective situated on the margins can indicate which voices are missing from cultural memory. It provides a useful tool for examining the centre, and the exclusions the centre produces. Therefore, the notion of ‘minor cinema’ can be useful. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘minor literature’, it has been used in film studies to highlight the power relations inherent in film production, distribution, and exhibition.<sup>18</sup> It is a concept not to be understood in binary terms of a counter-cinema practice, but as a relational mode. I would argue it can be adapted to archival practice by employing the term ‘minor archives’. The expression ‘minor archives’ can be used as an umbrella term for archives with a specialist collection policy, dedicated to foregrounding the omissions often found in national archives, such as feminist herstory archives,

Black or other ethnic minority archives, or LGBT+ archives. Minor archives can be regarded as interventions into the omissions and exclusions produced in the process of archiving. Minor archival practice can add to the polyvocality of cultural memory.<sup>19</sup> In my recent research project, 'The Cultural Heritage of Moving Images', financed by the Swedish Research Council (2016–2018), I examine ways of curating access within film archives in the wake of digitization and diversity politics. While I study national film archives in Europe, especially the collections administered by the Swedish and the British film institutes, I argue that in order to create polyvocal audiovisual memories, national film archives could profit from the work and expertise of minor archives.

This essay draws on two minor archives that are examples of best practice: the Lesbian Home Movie Project (LHMP) in Maine and bildwechsel in Hamburg. The LHMP was founded by Maine-based writer and archivist Sharon Thompson along with film critic B. Ruby Rich, based in San Francisco and professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and Kate Horsfield, founder of the Chicago Video Data Bank. The project's existence is inextricably linked to the discovery of Storm's home movies after the death of Storm's last lover Meda in 2009. During the LHMP's archival work with the Ruth Storm collection, today consisting of eighteen 16mm reels, more home movie collections surfaced, adding up to 20 analogue film and videotape collections, which have been digitized by the LHMP. In order to deepen the understanding of the archival work accomplished by the LHMP I also draw on the feminist archive bildwechsel, based in Hamburg in Germany.<sup>20</sup> bildwechsel was founded in 1979, and, dedicated to video work by and about female artists and filmmakers, its archival practice aims at representing women and transgender artists in general, regardless of their sexual orientation. To date, bildwechsel has collected more than 8,000 videos, the majority of which are still on analogue stock, ranging from works by Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman, Monika Treut, and Martha Rosler to artists' interviews, experimental film-making, documentary films, and video diaries.



Figure 4.2. Ruth Storm with her Cine Kodak Model K, date unknown. Courtesy of the Lesbian Home Movie Project, Maine.

If we compare the self-fashioning of the LHMP archive with that of bildwechsel, we could argue that the LHMP, in its name and scope, foregrounds (sexual) identity politics, whereas bildwechsel situates itself in the context of feminist (but trans-inclusive) separatism.

### Collecting: into the archives, onto the shelves?

Lesbian home movies and amateur film-making, like other forms of minor cinema, are often on neglected formats, such as video, 8mm, or 16mm. While the earliest home movies in the LHMP's collections date back to the 1930s, video allowed easier and cheaper access to film-making in the 1970s, with archival works documenting pride



parades, activist gatherings, or women's music festivals. Though based on the will to remember, archival operations include the dimension of forgetting too, as the material collected, preserved, and restored is only a small fraction in comparison to what has been lost. Lesbian home movies could be forgotten for various reasons. Where they remained with the filmmaker until her death, the films might have been destroyed or discarded by homophobic relatives. Another crucial factor, already mentioned, is the ongoing decay of the analogue film stock. Sharon Thompson of the LHMP reminds us of the fragility of home movies, for 'Their media are easily damaged: heat, humidity, dust, and time are major issues.'<sup>21</sup> Decay is accelerated even further if the footage is not stored in climate-controlled vaults, but kept in inadequate conditions in private homes, in attics, on shelves, or under beds. Even if reels or tapes survive, they need to be screened if they are not to be forgotten. Analogue gauge requires equipment that is able to project 8mm, super8, 16mm, or outdated video formats. As such equipment is lacking in many homes and archives, a substantial amount of lesbian home movies and amateur films will be lost forever. Archivists have therefore been reaching out to LGBT+ communities, encouraging filmmakers to donate their home movies to film archives.<sup>22</sup>

Through collaborations, different archives can help each other retrieve queer histories: minor archives can profit from the resources provided by major archives, whereas major archives can draw on the knowledge created by the communities around minor archives. Access to climate-controlled vaults is but one of the challenges minor film archives are facing. As Lynne Kirste details, 'Climate-controlled storage, necessary to prevent deterioration of films and tapes, is typically out of reach financially, as are viewing equipment for more than one or two media formats.'<sup>23</sup> *bildwechsel* is a rare exception in providing the necessary video recorders required to play the 19 different video formats available in the archival collections. The LHMP collaborates with the Northeast Historic Film Archive in Bucksport, Maine, where it rents space for its analogue footage to be stored in climate controlled conditions. While such archival

collaborations set out to counter the invisibility of LGBT+ lives, new challenges emerge when lesbian home movies start circulating in the heteronormative public sphere.

### From safe space straight into cyberspace?

Cultural memory is never stable, but always in flux and constantly reworked. Films need to circulate to be remembered, as only their distribution and dissemination provide a context and framework for their reception. My conceptualization of memory as inextricably linked to circulation, rather than to archival storage, has been inspired by recent trends in memory studies.<sup>24</sup> To become part of these circulating memories, films need to be freed from the confinements of the archive. Archival footage can be circulated in various ways, for example by public screenings or by reinserting it into other new film projects. Moreover, it can be uploaded for online exhibition on the archives' websites, YouTube, or Vimeo, and can thus reach out to worldwide audiences. This, in turn, has both legal and ethical implications. To illustrate, the LHMP screens selected films from its collections in queer or feminist contexts, such as gender studies classes, at conferences, film festivals or in friendship groups, provided the donors have agreed to public exhibition. Vimeo clips and photos are shared via a Facebook page that was established in 2012. Some of the footage has become part of the documentary *Reel in the Closet* (Stu Maddux, US 2015), which remediates home movies and other archival footage from a number of film archives and queer preservation projects. By making the footage available to global audiences, *Reel in the Closet*, which premiered at the Frameline San Francisco International LGBT+ Film Festival before touring the queer film festival circuit in the US and Europe, has become a travelling archive for queer memories. Moreover, the collaborative digitization project 'The Woman Behind the Camera: Home Movies and Amateur Film by Women, 1925–1997' by the LHMP, Northeast Historic Film and the Chicago Film Archives, enables online access to home movies

or film clips from the collections on the homepage of the LHMP, launched in 2019.<sup>25</sup>

Home movie and amateur filmmakers have trusted LGBT+ archives as safe havens for their material, where it is taken care of in a context of affection and solidarity.<sup>26</sup> Creating online access to footage once intended for private or semi-public viewing begs the question of whether this is an ideal solution, especially considering the fact that film-making individuals may originally have relied on the safe space provided by a lesbian minor archive. Handing over such 'archives of feeling', as Cvetkovich has it, in times when queer lives have only recently been de-criminalized or de-pathologized is still a matter of trust. It is doubtful that the private memories will be met with the same understanding once they have entered the public sphere through online exhibition. Moreover, online access can be hindered on legal grounds, such as property rights or personal rights. In Germany, where the legal concept of 'fair use' does not exist, music rights have often been the main barrier to the online exhibition of film heritage. Apart from legal issues, archives such as the LHMP or bildwechsel take ethical issues into account. Even if permissions for online exhibition have been granted by the donors, footage might not be uploaded if it is considered by the archivists to be too private for online circulation or problematic for other reasons. For instance, film images of nudity, especially toplessness, have become an issue for the archivists to address, as Sharon Thompson points out: 'In the feminist context of the time, going topless meant claiming the freedom men had always had. In a streaming context, many filmmakers and participants fear it being read, and used, as pornographic, a repugnant idea to many.'<sup>27</sup> Uploading or not uploading footage showing topless women at feminist separatist events, such as women's music festivals, involves decisions based on ethical considerations. Another challenge for the archivists comes from representations of acts that might address legal issues. As Sharon Thompson writes, 'some wholly public events in the tapes involved actions not strictly speaking legal; for example, a group going out late at night with spray cans of paint

to emblazon a highway wall with feminist and gay slogans and symbols. Decades later not everyone wanted to flaunt what they'd done.<sup>28</sup> For such cases, the LHMP often involves the donors and other contemporaries in the decision-making process.

As for the challenges to be faced when curating online access, the archival practice of *bildwechsel* can offer inspiration for other audiovisual archives. *bildwechsel* currently has three levels of access to its collections.<sup>29</sup> First, for the major part of the collections, access is granted to visitors on-site only. Second, regionally limited access might be possible for programmes curated by *bildwechsel*, for example in collaboration with the Hamburg Cinemathèque at the Metropolis cinema, or the International Queer Film Festival Hamburg. Third, only a very limited number of digitized videos are globally accessible online, after all the rights have been cleared. Neither *bildwechsel* nor the LHMP has a commercial interest in the footage, and they do not define themselves as distributors of the material, but, as archives, they also want to grant access to the films, albeit only on terms which are accepted by the individual rights holders. Both *bildwechsel* and the LHMP sign contracts with each of the rights holders, detailing to what extent, and to whom, the material should be available. Sometimes, the permission from the donor, creator, or participants is required before access is granted to the collection or part of it; in other cases, the filmmakers grant access on the premises of the archive only, or might agree to a limited distribution, for instance screenings arranged or curated by the archives. It can take several months of emailing back and forth before a final agreement is reached. However, apart from its obvious advantages of wide access, online exhibition does also involve the risk of making the queer content of the films invisible, unless it is specifically marked and framed as such.

### Out of the archives, into the closet?

Since the traces of LGBT+ pasts have often been hidden or overwritten, the contextualization of film footage is a crucial task for archivists. As Patricia Zimmermann points out for home movies

in general, 'signification is often not embedded inside the representation.'<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, lesbian home movies might be even more complicated to handle because the lesbian content might be easy to miss. The main reason is the invisibility of lesbian loves and lives in the public sphere, closely related to the scarcity of lesbian media representation. Sharon Thompson emphasizes the difficulties of decoding lesbian signifiers: 'Two teenage girls doing the twist; a gaggle of young women playing volleyball; a flirtatious wink, a thrown kiss, a warm glance? Good luck finding someone at an estate auction able and willing to tell the inside story.'<sup>31</sup> It can therefore be of vital importance to prevent the material from being unqueered in viewing contexts that are not specifically marked as LGBT+-related.<sup>32</sup>

In private or semi-public exhibition contexts, lesbian home movies create audiences of queer kinship groups. These viewing contexts, in which the filmmaker and her close circle used to be present, have provided a framework of interpretation for the—often silent—film images projected. During the screening, members of the audiences tend to comment on the images and negotiate their meaning. As José Esteban Muñoz famously notes:

Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, . . . while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility.<sup>33</sup>

Muñoz's ideas offer a fresh perspective on queer archival practice. Just like performance, which Muñoz focuses on, archival practice can have a performative impact on the construction of LGBT+ heritage by including those film images that do not offer any 'visible evidence' for a specific sexual identity. Still, they can be understood in terms of queerness as suggested by Muñoz, 'as a possibility, a sense of self-knowing, a mode of sociality

and relationality.<sup>34</sup> Contextualization provided by archivists can frame the meaning of films. While an act of unqueering might be a deliberate oppositional reading of the film images, a lack of contextualization does not have to be an intentional act, but could simply be the result of limited resources or a lack of priorities, as for example in heteronormative archives. However, an act of unqueering the film images results in an erasure of LGBT+ lives. To prevent LGBT+ heritage from being overwritten, the LHMP puts an impressive amount of effort into the contextualization of its digitized archival holdings. The archivists conduct oral history interviews with those who have participated in the film production and with their partners and friends. The resulting information offers invaluable help for future users and researchers. Creating such contextual information around the archival footage provides a framework for the circulation and reception of these films and videos as LGBT+ heritage.

We should not forget that the archive itself, in its scope and intended audience, does offer a framework of interpretation for its users. An archive dedicated to LGBT+ heritage differs in this respect from general moving image archives, for as Kirste states, ‘Researchers at LGBT archives begin searches knowing that every film or tape in the institution is queer-related, whether or not other cataloguing details exist in the archive’s database.’<sup>35</sup> Likewise, we need to distinguish between different forms of online exhibition. On video streaming sites such as YouTube or Vimeo, the contextualization—the ‘naming’—will have to be provided by the archivists who upload the footage for global circulation. They can decide to ‘name’ the LGBT+ context in the title they choose for the clip, as well as in the accompanying text, or in their choice of tags for each individual video clip. These algorithms will then continue to contextualize the clip—beyond the control of the archivist—by recommending other videos to watch. The videos thus provide an interpretative framework for users, which they can accept, oppose, or negotiate.<sup>36</sup> The advantage of video-sharing websites such as YouTube or Vimeo is their global access, at least in theory,



Figure 4.3. The video castle. Courtesy of durbahn, bildwechsel, Hamburg.

and the chance that the videos can be found, either intentionally or at random.

Highly sceptical towards YouTube due to its erratic upload policy, bildwechsel has created its own online exhibition tools for archival content.<sup>37</sup> After experimenting with various online formats, bildwechsel launched its exhibition window, the video castle (Videoschloss) in 2016.<sup>38</sup> Designed by bildwechsel co-founder, archivist and visual artist durbahn and programmed in-house by members of the bildwechsel team, the 'video castle' is constantly expanding. With its design reminiscent of both the Swedish-Finnish artist Tove Jansson's Moomin house and an old-fashioned computer game for kids, the video castle can be entered like an exhibition space or an art gallery. Via a lift the user moves between the different floors, with each floor offering a selection of videos, grouped by themes such as animation videos or videos documenting bildwechsel's own heritage. A clear link to the bildwechsel archives is established by the texts that accompany the uploaded videos, but also by the virtual architecture of the exhibition space, the video castle. Carving out discursive spaces for queer, feminist, or lesbian

subject positions, the video castle, with its cross-media setting, provides a framework of interpretation for online audiences, thereby contributing to the creation of transnational queer kinship groups celebrating a feminist audiovisual heritage.

### Towards a polyvocal LGBT+ heritage

This essay has highlighted the various challenges archivists are facing in lesbian minor cinema archiving, focusing on issues of collection, circulation, and contextualization. While the need for preservation is urgent, there is also a great necessity to curate access to the digitized footage, because it is circulation rather than storage that creates memories. In this context it has become crucial to recontextualize the images. The archive thus 'becomes a place of recovery, a recuperative project of moving from silence to productive, transformative discourse.'<sup>39</sup> Contextualization can prevent lesbian images from being unqueered and thus being erased from LGBT+ memory and heritage. The risk of unqueering archival footage leads to another question, which has not been addressed in this essay, but which is worth further discussion.<sup>40</sup> Drawing on Johanna Schaffer's critical study of the ambivalences of visual representation, we could ask how archives can acknowledge minorities without reiterating and perpetuating their minority subject position.<sup>41</sup> For minor archives, such as bildwechsel or the LHMP, this question is less relevant: founded in reaction to the omissions produced in other archives, minor archives deliberately foreground their minority position. For national archives, however, the question of ambivalent intent when representing minorities needs to be discussed and calls for further investigation.

Overall, lesbian home movie makers or film collectives need to be encouraged to entrust their footage to archives, especially ethnic minority, disabled, or working-class filmmakers. While the archive recently has become a buzzword in the arts and humanities, more theorization and research needs to be done, especially around the question of 'Whose Heritage is it?', to quote the title of a talk given



by Stuart Hall in the late 1990s.<sup>42</sup> In it Hall criticized the notion of cultural heritage as inherently white and middle class. Film-making, after all, does not occur outside the power relations at work in society. As a result, rather than being a 'history from below', home movies have a rich history as a middle-class cultural practice. Instead of automatically offering counter-narratives, many home movies tend to tie in with hegemonic discourses. However, lesbian minor cinema is an intervention into film studies: it both challenges patriarchal notions of home movies as a predominantly male practice and it intervenes in the burgeoning research field on home movies, where LGBT+ film-making tends to be sidelined. I would argue that it would be too reductive to conceptualize the queer archive exclusively as an archive of trauma. While gays, lesbians, and transgender persons have indeed been criminalized and pathologized throughout history, LGBT+ home movies and amateur films are an important means to diversify the public narrative by showing LGBT+ lives lived beyond the legal and medical discourses. Moreover, such film inscribes queers into the public sphere, into everyday life, into family life, into rural life, into regional landscapes, into city life, into festivities, into national holidays. In short, by queering the audiovisual memories circulating in society, they diversify the narratives of the past and so contribute to the polyvocality of cultural memory.

Luckily, archival projects have been teaming up to preserve LGBT+ film-making. The Outfest UCLA Legacy Project for LGBT Moving Image Preservation, founded in 2005, a collaboration between the Outfest Los Angeles LGBT Film Festival and the UCLA Film and Television Archive, has broken new ground in the restoration and renewed circulation of queer film classics, independent film productions, and home movie collections.<sup>43</sup> Although more archival projects for the preservation of LGBT+ audiovisual heritage are currently emerging, especially in the US, further measures need to be taken to stop the global decay of analogue film footage and to ensure the sustainable preservation of our film heritage.<sup>44</sup> As Pepe concludes, 'The preservation work by the community-based archives, the institutional archives, the

studios, and the Legacy Project are significant steps to ensure the survival of important and endangered LGBT works, but the work still left to be done is endless.<sup>45</sup>

This essay has emphasized the agency of the archivist. While moving image archivists have often been conceptualized as gatekeepers who prevent access to fragile analogue film stock, digitization has turned them into enablers who provide access to the archival holdings. Another urgent question remains, though, especially for archivists in minor archives. How can their vast knowledge, often acquired over several decades, be passed on to a new generation? Cherishing ‘the rich ties between generations that connect lesbian communities’ is of vital importance to avoid the queerness ‘transmitted covertly’ (Muñoz) ending up on the road to oblivion.<sup>46</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Ruth Storm Collection, Excerpt, C. 1938, Sharon Thompson, 25 June 2015, <https://vimeo.com/131782501>, in full at <https://www.lesbianhomemovieproject.org/item/maine-i/>.
- 2 See Thompson 2015, 114–16.
- 3 Thompson 2015, 115. Its collection now includes more than 500 films and tapes donated from all over the US. Note that for the purposes of this essay, the term ‘LGBT+ heritage’ will only refer to productions by, for and about LGBT+ audiences, but not including all those cinematic moments which have been appropriated by audiences through queer readings, and which therefore, undoubtedly, have become parts of LGBT+ heritage.
- 4 It is doubtful that digitization will be a sustainable means of preservation; parallel analogue restoration would be recommended. See Brunow 2017, 98–110.
- 5 Kirste 2007, 134–40; Olson 2001, 639–68.
- 6 Thompson 2015, 115.
- 7 See also Fossati 2009; Brunow 2017.
- 8 Muñoz 1996, 5–16; Cvetkovich 2003; Halberstam 2005; Morris 2006, 145–51; Danbolt 2010, 90–118; Marshall 2014, 1–11; Stone & Cantrell 2015.
- 9 See Kirste 2007; Pepe 2011, 632–8; Thompson 2015.
- 10 Following Czach 2014, 27–37, I use home movies and amateur filmmaking as two sides to a continuum.
- 11 For an overview of the development of home movie research, see Rascaroli et al. 2014.
- 12 See Zimmermann 2008, 1–28; see also Smith 2018.

- 13 Pepe 2011, 635.
- 14 Thompson 2015, 114.
- 15 Foucault 1972; Derrida 1996; Stoler 2002, 87–109. For a more detailed discussion of the notion of the 'archive,' see Brunow 2015.
- 16 Marshall et al. 2014, 2.
- 17 Halberstam 2005, 169–70.
- 18 For references, see Brunow 2015; Andersson & Sundholm 2017: 79–92.
- 19 Zimmermann 2008 has introduced the notion of polyvocality, based on theorizations by Robert Berkhofer, in the study of home movies.
- 20 See Brunow 2012, 171–82; Brunow 2015.
- 21 Thompson 2015, 115.
- 22 See *ibid.* Donors of analogue footage are not charged by the LHMP for its digitization, documentation and preservation. Instead, they get a digital copy in return.
- 23 Kirste 2007, 135.
- 24 For example, Erll & Rigney 2009; De Cesari & Rigney 2014; Brunow 2015.
- 25 <https://www.lesbianhomemovieproject.org>, accessed 1 March 2019.
- 26 Cvetkovich 2003. Kirste 2007, 136 provides a useful overview on the challenges of collecting and preserving films in moving image archives versus LGBT+ grassroots archives.
- 27 Thompson 2018.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 See Brunow 2015.
- 30 Zimmermann 2008, 16.
- 31 Thompson 2015, 115.
- 32 I am referring here to viewing contexts rather than the reception by individual audience members. In the process of reception, as Stuart Hall (1999, 90–103) has outlined, the viewer can accept, oppose or negotiate not only the representation in the film, but also, I would add, the framework of interpretation provided by the industrial context of production, distribution, and exhibition.
- 33 Muñoz 1996, 6.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Kirste 2007, 136.
- 36 Hall 1999.
- 37 Brunow 2012 & 2015. bildwechsel's founder durbahn has experimented with YouTube for the dissemination of own video clips, mainly those part of the 'video museum'. The video museum is another part of the archive's self-reflexive approach to archiving as an artist practice.
- 38 <http://durbahn.net/videoschloss/>, last access 20 February 2018. For more detailed descriptions, see Brunow 2015; Maule 2016, 381–400.
- 39 Stone & Cantrell 2015, 3.
- 40 See Brunow 2018, 174–95.
- 41 Schaffer 2008.

- 42 Hall 2002, 72–84.  
 43 <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/outfest-ucla-legacy-project>, last access 20 February 2018.  
 44 For example, LGBT+ home movies are currently being digitized by the archives of the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society and the Metro Theatre Center Foundation, also based in San Francisco. Also the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York have digitized some of their audiovisual collections, for example the Dyke TV collection and the Daughter of Bilitis Video Project.  
 45 Pepe 2011, 637.  
 46 Thompson 2015, 114.

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PART II

WOMEN, FILM AND AGENCY  
IN THE 1970S AND 1980S





# Activism, ideals and film criticism in 1970s Sweden

*Tytti Soila*

This is how I remember it.

The 1970s in Sweden was a period when activism was easy. The welfare state was still strong and unquestioned, with the possible exception of those who actually benefited from its generosity. Raising funds for different kinds of collective and cultural activities was not difficult: the government, local authorities, and others such as adult educational associations favoured many kinds of initiatives. Thus, for instance, local authorities offered—without charge—space for gatherings such as seminars for study groups, or rehearsals for amateur plays. Many schools were open after hours for almost anyone who could produce some kind of plan or affiliation to an organization. Not only public authorities, but even organizations such as labour unions had their heyday of prosperity and influence, and it was common for them to encourage cultural and collective enterprises. That is, culture was all, and ‘alternative’ (‘non-commercial’), vaguely leftist cultural expressions were preferred.

One of the central concepts in circulation was ‘criticism’, deriving from a variety of theoretical and political (Marxist) sources, such as the Frankfurt school, which had been introduced in academia and political study circles in many places. In the aftermath of the expansion of the 1950s film club movement—with its origins in fan cultures—criticism was a notion naturally adapted in film culture as well. In addition, the profession of a film critic developed from

its early function to the point where ‘anybody could write criticism’ and soon gain an air of authority and poise.<sup>1</sup>

Critics and criticism from different areas of the same field could conflict fiercely with each other, as happened between the members of the feminist movement, who insisted on more power for women in the film industry, and the film critics in the daily press. As will be seen, the critics could be blamed for betraying their critical assignment and being blind to, if not supportive of, the obvious machismo and sexist portrayals of women in film. This was particularly obvious in regard to the many coming-of-age films that were produced by the new generation of filmmakers in 1970s Sweden. The choice of target genre is striking, though, since this was a period when a large number of porn films were produced in Sweden as well. One might think that due to their blatantly debasing treatment of the female characters, the porn industry would be a given target for (women) film activists. Yet this was not the case. It is therefore possible to speculate that the public debate of the mid-1970s was not as much about machismo as it was about the privilege of being able to tell the coming-of-age story of the new post-war generation, a generation unlike any other.

### The organization

Many associations and interest groups were established in the 1970s, including the Swedish Women’s Film Association (SKFF, Svenska Kvinnors Filmförbund). Other organizations with interest in films and film production were established as well, for instance Tensta Film Association (Tensta Filmförening) in 1974 and the Film Workshop (Filmverkstaden) in Stockholm in 1973. Some organizations were founded by immigrants—from Southern Europe or Latin America, for example—such as Cineco, founded in 1976, the same year that SKFF was officially registered.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding SKFF, a few embryonic groups for the exchange of ideas on film existed before its official registration, started by women with backgrounds in journalism, national television (until 1978

called Sveriges Radio, SR), film production at the Swedish Film Institute's Film School (Filmskolan, from 1970 the Dramatic Institute)—or cinema studies at Stockholm University. Not all members were filmmakers or filmmakers *in spe*; some were interested in an academic career or in film journalism. Some SKFF supporters were just activists involved in promoting women's issues across all fields of society, including film. However, a majority of the founding and future members of the association were either employed in different positions at the public television or freelance film workers. Often they were organized by FilmCentrum (an association for independent filmmakers established in 1968) or the Film Workshop, run by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and SR to support 'unestablished' film workers in their ventures.<sup>3</sup>

The groups that were to form the SKFF recruited wherever people interested in film got together: at the meetings of FilmCentrum, in SR's staff lounge, or in the foyer of the Film House (Filmhuset). As for myself, I was recruited during a break between two lectures by my fellow student Pia Kakossaios, and in 1975 I joined a production group, even though I was not that interested in film production. Margareta Wästerstam and Märিত Andersson were leading members of the group because of their competence and vast experience of television and documentary. I also remember the Norwegian Bibbi Moslet, later a dramaturge at the National Opera in Oslo, the future authors Gunilla Boethius and Agneta Klingspor, and the photographer Maria Bäckström participating in meetings during this pre-SKFF period.

Far from all women engaged in film production—or film criticism for that matter—were interested in membership of the SKFF. Many women were busy working on their careers, and left-oriented film politics were not everyone's priority. A handful of resourceful women did indeed navigate the film industry successfully. But its structure, reminiscent of a mediaeval guild system in which each master had his apprentice, having himself been trained in the profession by an earlier master, made it very difficult for women to push through.<sup>4</sup>

The increasing number of (government-supported) bodies offering opportunities for film-making did not make much difference for women, at least not when it came to gaining positions as film directors. And as a woman, it was equally difficult to find a job as a cinematographer. In the three-year period that this survey covers, there was not a single feature-length film shot by a woman. Three women, Marianne Ahrne, Mona Sjöström, and Maj Wechseltmann, were credited as directors of feature-length films in 1974–1976: Wechseltmann and Sjöström directed documentaries screened in cinemas, and Sjöström only as a co-director with Ulf Hultberg of two documentaries on Ecuadorian women.

Women's careers seemed to find their highest peak in such 'supporting' professions such as scriptwriters, production assistants, film editors, script supervisors, and TV producers. Some female TV producers actually did direct features and series. But at the time it was as if this did not count either. Television did not have the same cultural status as the cinema, and to be valued as a director you had to have created a strip of celluloid and demonstrated mastery of the feature, shown in a cinema.

### The ideals

The valorization of cinema over television had several reasons. One was the overarching ideology based on auteur theory and its common interpretation, which considered the position and artistic views of the director to be crucial for a film's construction and meaning. This would be one of the major features in defining the Art House film-making that was promoted by the Swedish Film Institute and its leadership in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> A film director was regarded as a writer, an author of stories; as a unique individual, faithful to his values and opinions and eager to express his (or—more rarely—her) world view.<sup>6</sup> The film director's pen was the camera. Essentially, a film director should master the tools of film-making—and be responsible for the entire production process.<sup>7</sup> Such ideas were debated and best articulated in the film magazine

*Cahiers du Cinema* throughout the 1950s, and the film director as an auteur made a conspicuous entry at the international film festival in Cannes in 1959.

Swedish critics and film workers became deeply impressed by the French generation of 1959, as were the rest of the world. Auteur theory involved the figure of a critic as well. The role of the critic was to be the expert to 'explain the meaning and value of the work of an auteur in a mutual system of dependency and admiration.'<sup>8</sup> Mariah Larsson has shown how a small circle of men around the CEO and founder of the Swedish Film Institute, Harry Schein, created a hands-on policy that reflected their understanding of the notion 'culturally valuable film' and how this kind of film was ideally produced: by a (male) auteur.<sup>9</sup>

Bo Widerberg, Jan Troell, and Vilgot Sjöman were among those who were to consolidate their position in terms of auteurism in the 1960s, as did Mai Zetterling—with her four feature films, the only Swedish woman to make a name for herself as an auteur in the period. Ingmar Bergman, standing on the shoulders of his mentors such as Alf Sjöberg, Lorens Marmstedt, and a few others was, in a sense, isolated in a category of his own. At this point he was already a world famous, financially independent 'persona', but in Sweden also genuinely *non grata*, especially among the younger generation of leftist cultural workers.<sup>10</sup>

The second, compelling factor in the pursuit of a position as a film director would have been a righteous quest to make oneself heard. The item that perhaps best condenses the sentiments of this period of the feminist enterprise in Sweden is an LP from 1971 made in the studios of Musiknätet Waxholm (later MNW Music) with the title *Sånger om kvinnor* ('Songs about women'). This collection of songs had been assembled on the initiative of an action group called Grupp 8 (Group 8) and was based on a long-running stage play *Tjejsnack* ('Girl talk') directed by Suzanne Osten and Margareta Garpe for Stockholm City Theatre. One of the songs on the album had a chorus, 'Oh, oh, oh girls, we must raise our voices to be heard!'<sup>11</sup> Sung to a march-like, up-beat tune with emphasis

on the first syllable of each word, it is the essence of the entire movement: the sound and strength of a woman's raised voice, on its own or as a group of voices, was the means to articulate both identity and goals.<sup>12</sup> A call to breathe deeply, raise your voice, and make yourself heard would provide a position in society at large. A position meant a place, a point of view, and, hence, a relation to the others, which as we know is the basis of identity.

The film movement of the 1970s generation that SKFF was a part of struggled with a number of contradictions and double binds, most of which remained unsolved, perhaps even unrecognized. Most likely, this was part of the reason why the movement did not quite fulfil its goals and expectations. In the field of film and production, there was (and arguably still is) a demarcation line between those who were on the 'inside', established at major theatres and in the film industry, and those who were on the 'outside', either aspiring to positions on the inside, or wanting to stay outside large institutions for political reasons. The latter were strongly critical of government-supported film policy and the politics of the SFI.<sup>13</sup> But as already noted, they still applied and received funding for their film projects from the very sources they so harshly criticized—an unhappy situation for all concerned.

On the one hand, it was important to stress that film was a collective enterprise, and many overtly politically conscious film directors preferred the professional title of 'film worker' to that of film director. But on the other hand, many filmmakers aspired to sole artistic leadership exercised by one person. Such a pseudo-democratic state of affairs inevitably created organizational problems on set, with personal conflicts sparked by confused boundaries between different functions, and, as a corollary, frustration and loss of energy.<sup>14</sup>

The SKFF activists had yet another project to handle, not directly contradictory but rather bidirectional: embedded in the quest for the position of film director was a concern about what was perceived as unrealistic, stereotypical images of women in film. The argument went that if women were 'allowed' to direct films, the

images of women on the silver screen would be more in line with truth—recognizable thanks to the experiences of the many. This, of course, had been a key argument of the international feminist movement since the early 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Criticism of female images was not only directed at film producers, but also at the ‘receiving’ part of the communication model—the film critics and journalists. Activist women in the SKFF and elsewhere expected film critics to condemn the unrealistic portrayal of women in film, and to insist on more rounded characters, preferably created by women. In other words, the women interrogating the field of film production expected the film critics to support their initiative. The exact reasoning that prompted this expectation is obscure, but, as has been suggested above, it probably had to do with how the notion of criticism itself was understood. If the SKFF activists perceived themselves as critical of the status quo, then all (film) critics were expected to share their standpoint. A non sequitur, of course.

### The output

The early 1970s witnessed a slew of coming-of-age stories, in this case the tales of the generation born in the 1940s. Two novels that were very successful and had a lot of publicity are of particular interest to my discussion, because they were both adapted into films almost immediately after their release, in the first flush of critical and financial success. One was *Jack*, written by the Swedish pop singer and author Ulf Lundell, a book on ‘how it feels to be young in the 1970s Sweden’, released in 1976. Lundell’s tremendous success was however preceded by *Det sista äventyret* (‘The Last Adventure’) written by Per Gunnar Evander in 1973.

Evander was a schoolteacher, a few years senior to the generation born in the 1940s. Before publishing *Det sista äventyret* he had directed four films. With this novel, he hit a nerve. This was a story in line with films such as *Family Life* (Loach, 1971), *A Woman Under the Influence* (Cassavetes, 1974), and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Forman, 1975)—all loosely connected with the public interest



in psychotherapy and self-help books such as Arthur Janov's *Primal Scream* (1974) and David Cooper's *The Death of the Family* (1971). The psychoanalyst Alice Miller's theories of oppressive family patterns and children's self-destructiveness formed a background for stage plays as well as therapy sessions. Freedom was another core notion, and Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941) was listed as course literature even in Cinema Studies.

*Det sista äventyret* is the story of a young, sensitive man, Jimmy, oppressed by his family and dismissed from compulsory military service as a misfit. He has a love affair with a pupil, Helfrid, at a school where he works as a substitute teacher. As the relationship falters because of Helfrid's infidelity, Jimmy has a breakdown and ends up in a mental institution. The story closes on a marginally more positive note as Jimmy and another mental patient admire the beautiful view of the lake. Ann Zacharias—who in spite of her youth already had appeared in French porn films—plays Helfrid. Jimmy's part was shouldered by Göran Stangertz, a baby-faced actor very popular in this particular period. Stangertz also went on to play Jack, the protagonist of Lundell's eponymous novel, which was adapted shortly after the book's publication in 1976 and had its premiere in 1977.

The preparations and shooting of *Jack* were the source of much gossip. It was said that Lundell himself would be 'allowed' to direct the film. However, Janne Halldoff, the director of *Det sista äventyret*, was recruited to direct *Jack*. Halldoff came from a middle-class family, and had been an amateur photographer since he was a child. He was quite a productive director, and had made sixteen feature films in the ten years before *Det sista äventyret*. He had a reputation for being an easy-going guy whose films were equally easy-going, thematizing the notion of freedom in films portraying groups of young men, with an approach similar to films like *American Graffiti* (Lucas, 1973) or *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967). Characteristically, Halldoff's next film project after *Det sista äventyret* was called *Polare* ('Buddies', 1976).

*Det sista äventyret* was considered Janne Halldoff's comeback. He

had not been successful with any of his six films in the first half of the 1970s. *Det sista äventyret* opened on 24 October 1974, and the critics were almost unanimously positive, hailing the story as well as the photography and casting as excellent. Both Ann Zacharias and Göran Stangertz got positive comments: Stangertz for his acting skills (the following year he would receive a Guldbagge, the Swedish equivalent of an Academy Award, for best leading male actor), Ann Zacharias for her good looks. Hanserik Hjertén, the leading film critic in the country's largest morning paper, *Dagens Nyheter*, described her as a 'Skogsrå i pessarålder', literally 'a nymph of diaphragm-using age', which apart from reducing the actress to a sexual object signalled to the reader that she looked (and was) very young.<sup>16</sup>

Hjertén was a decent man and a highly regarded film critic. But his comment about Ann Zacharias was one of those expressions that took on a life of its own in the press, and surfaced any time Zacharias got attention in the press, which happened a great deal in 1975. The number of buddy movies and novels in circulation, together with the rumours and publicity surrounding *Jack's* production, confirmed the SKFF members in their view that film politics, and indeed the entire system of film production in the country, was biased towards men—particularly young men. Halldoff not only directed, he shared the scriptwriting with Lundell. This was clearly an example of buddies helping out buddies. SKFF meetings rang with angry voices. They wondered, rightly, when the stories of young women would be told, and who would be 'allowed' to tell those stories—stories without a stereotyped young woman seducing a young man just in order to betray him.

### The debates

On 28 January 1976 another film, *Hallo Baby* ('Hello Baby') had its premiere. The film was a collaboration by the painter Marie-Louise Ekman (née Fuchs, later De Geer) and her then husband Johan Bergensträhle. She was responsible for the script, set, and costumes,

and also played the leading character, Flickan (the Girl), in the film. In fact, *Hallo Baby* was later frequently credited to her rather than to Johan Bergenstråhle, probably because of the overall presence of her artistic style. With its colouring, characters, settings—indeed, its entire cinematic universe—this film would contribute to the future branding of Marie-Louise Ekman in film and other media.

*Hallo Baby* was daring, and featured both male and female nudity. Among other things, it exposed the intimate body parts of its leading lady, seven-months pregnant, dressed in a tutu, as she bends over a windowsill, wearing no underwear. Even in the liberal 1970s (out of 69 feature films made in Sweden in 1974–1976, 19 were porn films) the film was received with mixed feelings. Initially, the critics were divided between those who considered the film a brilliant reflection on modern sentiment (Åke Janzon) and those who saw in it a hideous piece of celebrity exhibitionism (Jurgen Schildt).<sup>17</sup> Birgitta Bergmark, a TV producer, soon initiated a debate in *Aftonbladet*, presumably after contacting Schildt, who was the paper's film critic. Bergmark opined that *Hallo Baby* was just another example of the contempt of women, depicting them in particularly spiteful terms.<sup>18</sup> Another view was presented by the author Åsa Moberg, who held that the film's all-encompassing irony—fashioned in excess, colouring, and the use of camera—presented some thoughtful criticism of familiar stereotypes.<sup>19</sup> The debate was to continue through February and into March.

Misogyny in film had been discussed earlier, of course, as Gun-Britt Sundström, a columnist in the liberal daily *Dagens Nyheter* noted. Thus, for example, in 1974 Ingmar Bergman and his favourite actor Erland Josephson were targeted for the images of women in Bergman's 1972 film *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*).<sup>20</sup> However, it was probably the heated debate about *Hallo Baby* and the continuing anger at 'buddy productions' that led SKFF members to ask my fellow students Giesela Appelgren and Elise Jonsson and me if we might be interested in looking into contemporary film criticism and the ways in which it discussed female characters. Yes, we were. One of the assessments in the Cinema

Studies undergraduate programme at Stockholm University was to present a lengthy written report. This would be a perfect topic. SKFF's membership decided that the report should be used as the basis for a hearing arranged in cooperation with the Journalist Club of Stockholm.

The hearing took place on 8 November 1976 in ABF-huset (ABF House), a building owned by the Workers' Educational Association, the largest such venue in the country. The title of the hearing was 'The woman in film criticism.' Several well-known film critics from some of the major dailies agreed to participate in the panel (Jurgen Schildt from *Aftonbladet*, Hanserik Hjertén from *DN*, Jonas Sima from *Expressen*, and SKFF member Maria-Pia Boethius, also from *Expressen*). Also participating were Ann-Katrin Agebäck, a student advisor at Stockholm University, who would later be a member of the government authority for film censorship, as well as the actress Gunnel Lindblom, known for her roles in many of Ingmar Bergman's films. She was to release her first feature-length film as a director, *Summer Paradise (Paradistorg)*, a few months later in 1977.

The three of us presented the results of our study. And just to be clear, the study we presented was poorly executed. It consists of nineteen sparsely written pages and is quite biased. The report has the same title as the hearing, 'The woman in film criticism', and presents excerpts from a number of film reviews published in 1974–1976.<sup>21</sup> We had been looking for whatever annoyed us, which meant that at best the report could be called an inductive study—a collection of material for developing a thesis to be tested later. In other words, while practising criticism of the cultural conditions of our time, we forgot to criticize our own project. The report, while it does present its sources, fails to answer the question of the representativeness of the samples used. The survey refers to a total of twenty-five films, including both Swedish productions and foreign imports, but it is hard to ascertain what the principles of selection had been.

It should be noted that films such as Ingmar Bergman's adaptation *Scenes from a Marriage (Scener ur ett äktenskap, 1974)* and

*The Magic Flute* (*Trollflöjten*, 1975), Vilgot Sjöman's *A Handful of Love* (*En handfull kärlek*, 1974) and *Garaget* ('The Garage', 1975), Bo Widerberg's *Fimpen* ('The Butt', 1974) and *Man on the Roof* (*Mannen på taket*, 1976) were not included in the survey. Of course, in the 1970s a student's access to feature films was limited to those titles that were on release in the city cinemas or shown at the Cinemathèque. However, the reviews of films that we had not been able to see must have been accessible. Also, it is hard to understand how the study—and the entire debate—managed to totally ignore the fact that only weeks before Marianne Ahrne had been the first woman ever to receive the Best Director Guldbagge for her 1976 film *Långt borta och nära* ('Near and Far Away'). Thus, it is plain that the aim of the survey was not to critique the films directed by well-established directors, but those with a status more on a par with the women aspiring to the position of film director—their possible rivals, in other words.

The cover picture of the report is very revealing as a statement that confirms the thesis of the survey. It depicts a naked woman sitting on her knees with her hands and hair cast back, blood running across her right breast. In front of her stands a laughing man in a white tuxedo, holding a gun. The picture is a convincing example of a woman being subjected to deadly violence by a man, and she is, undoubtedly, an object of the spectator's voyeuristic gaze as well. However, the picture is from *Hallo Baby*, a sequence from a film-in-a-film that was clearly critical of the porn industry and the way it treats women. Was it fair to strip an image from its context and use it for our own purposes? The simple answer is no.

The report also gives a brief account of the hearing itself. At the event, the students (the three of us) described the findings of the survey, after which an intense and sometimes heated discussion took place. Hanserik Hjertén's description of the character Helfrid in *Det sista äventyret* was singled out. Hjertén was deeply unhappy and apologized for using an expression that reduced the actress to an object of sexual fantasy. Ann Zacharias, who played the role of Helfrid in the film, was sitting in the first row in the audience and

said that she did not mind at all. Some of the critics were quite defensive though, and especially Jurgen Schildt, who held that after all, it was impossible to please everyone when it came to the task of evaluating an artistic product—‘should the devil be a film critic?’ he asked.<sup>22</sup> Actually, the film critics present did not come in for much criticism, as the discussion took a more general turn when most of the panel and the audience agreed that the number of female film critics was too low. More women in the field, it was reasoned, would probably change the mode of criticism for the better.

The event resulted in a written resolution sent to the editors of all the major newspapers demanding that they engage more women in film journalism. It is also worth noticing that in the mid-1970s, on a chilly night in November, an audience some 120 strong had turned up to this event. A hearing like this, with a minimum of advertising, arranged by a small, newly established group of women, and based on a report written by three undergraduate students, managed to get well-known, even famous, people to participate. The occasion was open for anyone interested and—a prerequisite for such an event in Stockholm, like the hire of the auditorium itself—free of charge.

On 25 January 1976, three days before *Hallo Baby* opened in cinemas, the Norwegian director Anja Breien’s film *Wives* (*Hustruer*, 1975) had its Swedish premiere, which passed without much notice. Gunnel Lindblom’s film *Summer Paradise* opened in February 1977 and received quite positive reviews, as did *Långt borta och nära* by Marianne Ahrne.<sup>23</sup> The first coming-of-age film portraying a young girl from the 1960s generation premiered in December 1977. The film was called *Mackan* and was directed by Birgitta Svensson. The reviews, mostly by male critics, were devastating. This did not pass without protest, however. A handful of responses were published, pointing out what was considered unfair treatment because of the director’s gender.<sup>24</sup>

## The aftermath

Nearly half a century has passed. Having lived at a particular time in a particular place, I have told a story of a feminist action in which I played a small part. While weaving my reminiscences into a narrative, I realized I was not only looking back at the action and the images that remained in my head, I was also looking for material—reviews, interviews, and historical accounts to create a context to support these images and reminiscences. In looking back, the work seems to resemble the one described by Annette Kuhn in her *Family Secrets*. She writes that ‘Memory work has a great deal in common with forms of inquiry which involve working backwards, searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence.’ In addition, it is worth stressing that when the past is penetrated by the present, the ‘patching together’ produces an analytical—or rather, an explanatory—discourse, which I hope may be discerned here. And of course, this essay is not the last word because, by putting an end to my story, I yield it to others. Or as Annette Kuhn would put it, ‘Clearly, if in a way my memories belong to me, I am certainly not their sole owner. All memory texts constantly call to mind the collective nature of the activity of remembering.’<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Jurgén Schildt, cited in Appelgren et al. 1976, 17. In this essay, I cite in the endnotes the sources I believe to have contributed to my composition of the ‘memory-image’ of the issue.
- 2 Nilsson 1989, 29–30.
- 3 Svenstedt 1971, 45.
- 4 Soila 2004, 12 ff.
- 5 Larsson 2006, 59 ff.
- 6 Luthersson 1986, 386.
- 7 Astruc 2009, 32.
- 8 Caughie 2001, 12 ff.
- 9 Larsson 2006, 52.
- 10 Bergom-Larsson 1977, 152–3.
- 11 ‘Oh Oh Oh tjejer, vi måste höja våra röster för att höras!’

- 12 Nilsson 1989, 34–5.
- 13 Svenstedt 1971, 100–109.
- 14 Soila-Wadman 2003, 14–15, 23–6.
- 15 Kuhn 1982, 84 ff.; Rich 1998, 71 ff.
- 16 Hjertén 1974, 22. At this time, the diaphragm was the contraceptive of choice for young women, whereas older women used the pill.
- 17 Janzon 1976, 11; Schildt 1976.
- 18 Bergmark 1976.
- 19 Moberg 1976.
- 20 Sundström 2016, 50. Editor's note: for films with an official English-language title, the original title is listed in brackets when first mentioned and the official translation is used throughout the text. For films that do not have an official English-language title, an English translation of the title is given when first mentioned and the original title is used throughout the text.
- 21 In Swedish 'Filmkritikens kvinna'; Appelgren et al. 1976.
- 22 In Swedish 'ska fan vara filmkritiker'.
- 23 Editor's note: for Marianne Ahrne, see Björklund elsewhere in this volume.
- 24 Soila 1977.
- 25 Kuhn 1995, 4–5.

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## Freedom to choose

### Reproduction and women's agency in three Swedish films of the 1980s

*Elisabet Björklund*

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the number of Swedish feature films made by women directors increased. In the 1950s, only 2 of the 315 feature films made that decade were directed by women (0.6 per cent), and in the 1960s, when 235 feature films were produced, 12 were by woman filmmakers (5 per cent). In the 1970s, 26 of 205 feature films were directed or co-directed by women (12.7 per cent), and in the 1980s, the share had grown to 44 out of 244 (17.6 per cent).<sup>1</sup> This changing pattern can be related to the women's movement and the growing number of women working with culture in general during this period.<sup>2</sup> However, it can also be tied more specifically to the opening of the Swedish Film Institute's Film School (Filmskolan) in 1964, which gave women greater access to jobs within the film industry. As a consequence, a growing group of women made their debuts as film directors in subsequent decades, among them Gunnel Lindblom, Maj Wechseltmann, Marie-Louise Ekman, Marianne Ahrne, and Suzanne Osten.<sup>3</sup>

In the same period, women gained greater freedom over their bodies and reproduction, and the possibilities for combining motherhood and a working life improved. Abortion on demand was introduced in Sweden in 1975, around the same time as a number of other reforms were carried through related to women's roles in the labour market, among them the introduction of individual

taxation in 1971, gender-neutral parental insurance in 1974, and the expansion of childcare from the mid-1970s.<sup>4</sup> These changes came parallel with developments in reproductive research and technology that altered the ways in which pregnancy and childbirth could be controlled and monitored, for example through new contraceptives and technological advances in maternity care.<sup>5</sup>

In this essay, I explore the intersection between these developments in Sweden. My focus is three films dealing with issues related to reproduction: Gunnel Lindblom's *Sally and Freedom* (*Sally och friheten*, 1981), Marianne Ahrne's *På liv och död* ('A Matter of Life and Death', 1986), and Ann Zacharias' *Testet* ('The Test', 1987).<sup>6</sup> These three productions are all narrative fiction films with theatrical distribution that were made by Swedish women directors in the wake of the sexual revolution. Reproductive themes are explored in different ways in the films. The story in *Sally and Freedom* is framed by two abortions. Sally—a 30-year-old social worker longing for freedom and independence—is pleased with having only one child and decides to terminate her pregnancy at the start of the film and separate from her husband, Jonas. Soon she starts a new relationship with Simon, a teacher who shares her ideals, which proves more difficult than she expected, and results in her having another abortion at the end of the film. *På liv och död* is about the complicated relationship between Nadja, a star journalist and photographer, and the gynaecologist Stefan, and the story is set in the delivery ward where Stefan works and where Nadja is writing a report for her paper. Finally, *Testet* is a chamber drama about a young couple—the Swedish woman Inga and her French partner Richard—which takes place while they wait the two hours for the result of Inga's pregnancy test.

Two issues are in focus in my essay: first, the gendering of the presentation of the filmmakers and their films in reports about them in the press, and second, how the changes in women's freedom that had taken place in the 1970s and 1980s were represented in film. Combining a discussion of women filmmakers with a discussion of reproduction is not straightforward. Any study of women

directors will be full of complexities, as has been widely discussed and problematized, not least in connection to issues such as authorship and feminism.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, connecting women directors with reproductive subjects runs the risk of constructing these issues as ones on which women have a specific perspective because they are women, which could imply an essentialist view on gender and a problematic approach to the category of women, understanding it as a homogenous collective that shares one single perspective. The goal of the essay is, however, not to draw any conclusions from the analysis of the films based on the gender of the filmmakers. On the contrary, I am interested in seeing how the gender of the directors and the issues of the films shaped the way they were discussed. Furthermore, I wish to examine how a number of questions that are often framed as especially relevant to women were represented in the cinema at a historical moment when women's freedom in these matters had increased and their opportunities for artistic expression in the film industry had grown. The essay thus explores two kinds of agency: the agency of women filmmakers of the 1980s in representing reproductive issues; and representations of women's agency when making reproductive choices.

### Women filmmakers and 'women's problems'

Reproduction has in different ways been a motif in Swedish film culture for a long time, which reflects the attention given to this issue in Swedish political life in the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s especially, many films on topics such as abortion, motherhood and childbirth were produced and imported, and a few of these were made by women. In 1949, Danish director Alice O'Fredericks made the film *We Want a Child* (*Vi vil ha' et barn*) together with Lau Lauritzen, which showed an actual birth and gained a great deal of attention in both Denmark and Sweden.<sup>9</sup> And in 1956, Mimi Pollak directed the sex education film *Rätten att älska* ('The right to love') on abortion and other issues related to sexuality on the major Swedish film company Europa film. Women

also had an influence on films on these topics in other ways. For instance, social welfare officer Lis Lagercrantz-Asklund was involved in two sex education films in the 1940s, and there were also films based on books or manuscripts written by women, such as Ingmar Bergman's *Brink of Life* (*Nära livet*, 1958), for which author Ulla Isaksson wrote the screenplay. In the 1960s, when sexuality and abortion were hotly debated in the media, reproduction seems paradoxically not to have been a subject of film interest, unlike previous decades. However, there were important exceptions, most notably the films of Mai Zetterling, which were all characterized by a critical view of reproduction and motherhood.<sup>10</sup>

In the late 1960s and 1970s, reproductive rights became a key concern for the women's movement, and reproductive themes were central in the many different expressions of 'women's culture' that appeared in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, few feature films made by women explored these issues. The absence of the theme from the cinema repertoire in general was remarked on in the Swedish reception of Danish director Astrid Henning-Jensen's *Winterborn* (*Vinterbørn*) in 1978. Based on the best-selling novel by artist and author Dea Trier Mørch, this film followed a number of women on a delivery ward and included footage from an actual birth. 'The most amazing thing about this film is that it was made at all. A piece of reality in the middle of the dream factory', one reviewer noted.<sup>12</sup> However, reproductive themes were examined by women working in documentary genres in the relatively new medium of television. For instance, in 1974 Maj Wechseltmann made the documentary *Omställningen* ('The change'), which examined the change involved in having your first child, and from a Marxist and feminist perspective was sharply critical of the information given to pregnant women and parents. In the 1980s, when the films analysed in this essay were produced, issues related to reproduction were rare in narrative fiction film on release.

The three directors in question entered into film-making in different ways, but they all had previous experience in the world of cinema. Lindblom had a long career as an actor behind her when

she made her first feature film *Summer Paradise* (*Paradistorg*) in 1977, having starred in numerous films by Ingmar Bergman, among others. She made her films at Bergman's production company Cinematograph. Ahrne had studied at the Film School at the Swedish Film Institute and had made a number of short films and documentaries—among them one on the abortion issue in France—before her first feature film *Långt borta och nära* ('Far away and close') premiered in 1976. Zacharias was an actor who had starred in many international productions and broke through in Sweden in the film *Det sista äventyret* ('The last adventure', Halldoff, 1976). *Testet* was her directorial debut.

Despite their experience and contacts, all three directors had difficulties finding financial support for their projects. Lindblom said in an interview that 'the gentlemen in charge' did not approve of her scripts, as they were convinced they were only of interest to a limited audience.<sup>13</sup> When Ahrne made *På liv och död* in 1986 it was her first film since her feature debut in 1976; she had not been able to realize any of her projects due to lack of funding.<sup>14</sup> And Zacharias said in an interview that she had 'been fighting like an animal for two years in order to make the film.'<sup>15</sup> When the reporter asked if she was 'disillusioned', she replied in the affirmative.

All three films can be characterized as art films rather than commercial entertainment films, both in terms of narrative (they are all open-ended, for example) and in terms of institutional framework (they were all made by minor production companies and co-funded by the Swedish Film Institute). They are also characterized by the presence of the filmmaker and her voice.<sup>16</sup> While *Sally and Freedom* was based on a manuscript by journalist and dramatist Margareta Garpe—active in the influential feminist organization Grupp 8 (Group 8)—both Marianne Ahrne and Ann Zacharias wrote the scripts for their films in addition to directing them, and Zacharias acted as producer and set designer too. The filmmakers are also present in their respective films in different ways: Lindblom played the role of Nora—Sally's colleague—in *Sally and Freedom*, Zacharias played the main lead in *Testet*, and



Ahrne made a short cameo appearance in *På liv och död*. The films thus represent a type of cinema that was in the process of aligning with alternative modes of narration and auteur traditions. *Testet*, moreover, was shot in French, which made it an unusual Swedish production. None of the films gained much in the way of an audience in cinemas, but Zacharias' film, which was made on a very low budget, returned its costs, and both Lindblom's and Ahrne's films were screened on television a few years after their premiere, where they probably reached a substantial audience.<sup>17</sup>

Gender played a part in the discourse about all films, both in terms of the gender of the filmmakers and the topics treated. *Sally and Freedom* was frequently labelled as a 'women's film' or a film about 'women's problems', and many articles pointed out that it was made by women.<sup>18</sup> The issue of representation was also brought up. For example, Lindblom said that she did not think that women made films differently than men, but expressed a wish to counter dominant representations of women, especially those of Hollywood films.<sup>19</sup> It is also clear that the filmmaker aimed to create a portrait of a complex woman. In an interview, the screenwriter Garpe and the actor Ewa Fröling described the character Sally as an 'ordinary' woman, with faults and contradictions.<sup>20</sup> One critic also called her 'a contemporary anti-heroine with very human flaws'.<sup>21</sup>

Ahrne took a rather oppositional stance towards the gendering approach to her film. In various interviews, she resisted the label 'woman filmmaker' and said that she did not want to be called a feminist. However, she also said that in her view women did not make films about 'rubbish'.<sup>22</sup> She also distanced herself from the idea that *På liv och död* was a 'women's film' just because it was set on a delivery ward.<sup>23</sup> The film was not about maternity care, she explained. Instead, she had used the environment as 'frame and mirror' for the film's theme of love.<sup>24</sup> Actor Lena Olin was, however, positive about starring in a film 'by women and for women', and thought that realistic portraits of women were scarce in Swedish film.<sup>25</sup>

Zacharias, meanwhile, had a public persona that played an important role in the promotion of *Testet*. She was a familiar face

for Swedish audiences at the time, not least because of her past relationships with the popular artists Sven-Bertil Taube and Ted Gärdestad, and she frequently appeared in the news. When interviewed, she often took the opportunity to express her views on gender roles, and talked openly about being a single mother of three. Many interviews highlighted this. Zacharias was, for example, often photographed with her children, which established an image of her as a mother. She furthermore presented herself as a strong and independent woman for whom children were nevertheless more important than a career. In one interview, she even said she despised people who did not want children, calling them 'highly dangerous'.<sup>26</sup> Like Ahrne, she did not want to be called a feminist and recurrently claimed that women should not try to be like men. Instead, she wanted 'female ideals', like 'Caring instincts', to become dominant and thought that women should be proud of their femininity.<sup>27</sup> One aim of her film, she said, was to 'help start a dialogue between women and men'.<sup>28</sup> The connection between Zacharias and her film was so strong that one critic stated that she interpreted the main protagonist as being Zacharias herself.<sup>29</sup>

The reproductive themes were in themselves not central to the reception of the films. *Sally and Freedom* received the most attention, and many reviews focused on its theme of freedom and women's liberation, but the abortion theme as such was rarely raised. Critic Christina Palmgren, however, noted that 'The question is if [Sally's] opportunities to wake up, to start examine the real conditions of freedom had existed without the right to abortion on demand'.<sup>30</sup> *På liv och död* was mostly discussed as a film about relationships, and had on the whole a rather poor critical reception. Many critics thought that its story was banal, and there were gendered comments drawing parallels to girls' stories or women's magazines.<sup>31</sup> The reception of the film even led Tytti Soila to write an article in the film journal *Chaplin*, arguing that the criticism was unprofessional.<sup>32</sup> With regards to *Testet*, finally, many critics saw its theme as important, but commentators tended to focus on the 'battle of the sexes' rather than on reproduction.<sup>33</sup>

As films made by women directors dealing with reproductive issues and made in an art cinema tradition, *Sally and Freedom*, *På liv och död*, and *Testet* were thus outside the mainstream. Moreover, while the reproductive themes of the films were not highlighted in their reception, they were all discussed in gendered terms.

### The complexity of reproductive choices

Common to all three films is that they thematize women's ability to choose whether or not they want to become mothers. This is perhaps clearest in *Sally and Freedom* and *Testet*, as both these films deal with abortion. Abortion on demand was introduced in Sweden in 1975, the process having started in the early 1960s, when young liberals and social democrats initiated a major debate, demanding a legislative reform. The liberalized abortion praxis throughout the decade, as well as feminist engagement in the early 1970s, meant the issue was not allowed to rest. The new law gave women the right to decide themselves whether or not to have an abortion up to and including the eighteenth week of pregnancy.<sup>34</sup> By the 1980s, a woman's choice whether to have an abortion was thus established in law, but a key point in both *Sally and Freedom* and *Testet* is that individual freedom is not uncomplicated, and that the choice always depends on and affects other individuals.

In *Sally and Freedom*, this is articulated in the film's overall narrative form, in which Sally's physical environment plays an important part. After Sally's first abortion, she and Jonas have a fight in which Jonas expresses his frustration at not having anything to say about Sally's choice. Here, Sally seems confident about her rights and her wish to live an independent life, and when Jonas angrily starts to take books from the bookshelves and pack them in a sports bag, Sally protests, as some of the books are hers. This scene is paralleled in two different ways later in the film. In the scene where Simon is moving in with Sally, she becomes hesitant because he starts putting his books on her shelves and wants to repaint the flat. But when later in the film Sally's and Simon's relationship becomes rocky,

Sally starts to move the bookshelves around in order to redecorate the flat herself. At this point, she has also changed her mind about having children. Human beings are complex, they do not always act rationally and they are influenced by people in their environment; these are central points in the film, and Sally's way of relating to her home becomes symbolic of her shifting views on freedom, on her relationship to men, and on having children.

*Testet*, similarly, portrays choice as something dependent on circumstances and relationships. The central conflict revolves around Inga wanting to know if Richard wants to have a child with her before they get the result of a pregnancy test. The point of departure in itself thus underlines how pregnancy is something optional, but the film nevertheless represents abortion in a negative way. Both Inga and Richard have past experiences of abortion, conveyed to the audience in a scene where they narrate these experiences to each other. Inga's story is emotional and she is full of remorse. She is shot from the front in medium close-up, she avoids looking Richard in the eyes, and she repeatedly touches her face and her hair while talking. She describes the experience as 'terrible' and mentions how she was affected by seeing a photograph of a five-month foetus sucking its thumb. She concludes her story by stating that she killed her child. More calmly, but facing away from Inga, Richard then explains how he did not dare visit his former girlfriend in hospital when she had her abortion, and that they were unable to talk to each other afterwards. He calls the abortion a 'murder' (*meurtre*), but when Inga reacts to his choice of words, he recants, stating that it was of course not a murder. Inga, however, then questions his conviction, asking him when life begins. Although *Testet* constructs abortion as a possible choice, both Inga's and Richard's stories portray this choice as something inevitably burdened with guilt and shame, and ethically problematic. Their stories chime with more critical positions on abortion developing at the time, not least internationally but also to some extent in Sweden.<sup>35</sup>

Another way in which choice is thematized in the films is in the

way that they create contrasts between the situations of the female protagonists and other women, thus accentuating how different contexts shape the women's chances of making reproductive choices. In *Sally and Freedom*, one example of this is how Sally's freedom to choose her lifestyle is juxtaposed with the more restricted freedoms of women that she meets in her role as social worker. The theme is most clearly expressed in relation to historical differences, however. Sally's freedom is recurrently contrasted with the more limited freedoms of older women surrounding her. For example, Sally repeatedly confides in her slightly older colleague, Nora. When Sally tells Nora about her experience of the abortion, Nora mentions that she herself had to go to Poland to get an abortion. What Nora here refers to is that Swedish women in the early 1960s, when the possibility of getting access to legal abortion in Sweden was limited, instead travelled to Poland, where abortion on demand had been legal since 1959. This was given a lot of attention in the press and was known as the 'Poland affair', a media event that did much to change public opinion on Swedish abortion legislation.<sup>36</sup>

The most prominent example, however, is how Sally's options are contrasted with her mother's sacrifices. Throughout the film, Sally's mother is characterized as a woman who has lived her whole life for the sake of others. The first time she appears in the film, she has been looking after Sally's daughter Mia, but cannot stay to eat the dinner that she has prepared as she has to rush home to cook the same dinner for her husband. In a later scene, she serves hamburgers to the entire family, standing with a bent back and neatly putting them on each plate, while her husband is reading a book about Einstein to Mia, and Sally—dressed for a party—is flipping through a magazine. At the dinner table, she also feeds her own ill mother with a spoon. Sally's mother 'represents an entire generation of women', critic Elisabeth Sörenson noted in a review.<sup>37</sup> The other two films create comparable contrasts between past and present. In *På liv och död*, Nadja tells Stefan about how the maternity ward is a difficult place for her as she was an unwanted child—her mother became pregnant with a married man and could not get

an abortion. Similarly, in *Testet*, Inga in one scene tells Richard that she was not planned and that her mother had to get married when she got pregnant. She was thus the reason her mother could not have the life she wanted.

In *På liv och död*, contrasting images of women are also used to illustrate that women prioritize relationships and motherhood differently. At the hospital, Nadja encounters numerous women who represent different attitudes in relation to motherhood, and a dividing line is drawn between those who put their love for a child first and those who put their love for a man first. Nadja's position is clear—she cannot relate to motherhood, but she can relate to strong feelings of attachment to a man. She explains this explicitly in a scene featuring her voice-over reading a letter to Stefan. It is to a great extent Nadja's perspective that is focalized through the film—symbolically represented by her identity as a photographer. This is most evident in a sequence of shots that creates a contrast between two very different women. First, Nadja talks to a mother who is portrayed as her opposite. Partly talking to Nadja, partly talking to her baby in a 'baby voice', the woman explains smilingly that her husband did not want a child, but that she removed her coil without telling him in order to get pregnant anyway. In addition, the woman says that she would have kept her baby even if the man had left her—'That's what we need men for, isn't it?'—and cannot remember whether or not her husband was present when their child was born.

After this, the film cuts to a scene in a delivery room in which Marta, a young woman, delivers a baby boy, while Nadja gets to watch. Marta is very upset that her husband is not present and talks to Nadja about her feelings. During their conversation, Nadja's and Marta's faces are shot in close-up, underlining how Nadja is emotionally much closer to Marta than to the woman in the previous scene, where the conversation was shot at a greater distance. The birth in itself is also shown, a choice that was probably designed to make the emotions and pain expressed by Marta more intensely experienced by the audience. Later in the film, Nadja learns that

Marta threw her baby out of the window when she arrived home to find her husband, Peter, with another woman. Nadja can relate to this tragic and desperate action as it emanates from passionate love—Marta has described her love for Peter as being ‘a matter of life and death’—which Nadja shares through her love for Stefan.

### Medicine and medical rooms

In all three films, medicine and the physical environment represented are also significant. *Sally and Freedom* and *På liv och död* both have representations of medical institutions. Sally’s two abortions take place at a hospital. The procedures are not represented as horrible or unpleasant, but rather as a bit impersonal and of a routine character. Sally is given a sedative injection before the operation and is rolled away in her bed through a semi-dark corridor in a row with a number of other women who are having abortions. In the scenes depicting the beginning of the operation, Sally’s face is repeatedly framed in close-ups which show her dizziness from the injection, while the doctor and the nurses are generally shot from a distance, and impersonalized through their green clothes and face masks. Sally’s wish to be anaesthetized is not complied with, and when raising the issue a second time she is asked if she has been doubtful about the operation. In the scene after the abortion, she is however seen in her bed with a faint smile on her lips, indicating that she is content with her choice. When talking to Nora in a later scene, she describes the procedure as an ‘assembly line, just like here with us’—creating a connection between the systems of medical and social care by linking them both to mechanized factory production. By the end of the film, the camera shows a scene similar to the one at the beginning, in which Sally and a number of other women are rolled down a corridor in a row towards their abortions.

The film that gives most space to the depiction of a medical environment is *På liv och död*, as it is set on a delivery ward. Many scenes portray the environment as rather brutal. For example, early in the film a woman whose baby has been prematurely born

describes the delivery through Caesarean section as ‘the night of the long knives’. ‘I felt the knife to my stomach even before I was anaesthetized’, she says and goes on that she afterwards was expected to be happy, despite having been ‘cut up both lengthways and sideways’. Many of the caregivers at the hospital are also represented as quite cold and unsympathetic and there is a rough jargon between doctors, midwives and nurses. When asked about her experiences from the ward in one scene, Nadja states that what strikes her is the loneliness of the women:

They are sliced up, and cut up, and sewn together. They are vulnerable and exposed, and everybody tells them to spread their legs, it’s nothing, it will pass. And then they are abandoned. They are lying there bleeding and their bodies look like nothing, and they are asked to be happy. I feel sorry for them.

Maternity care was an issue of much discussion in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s, and was a question with which the women’s movement was deeply engaged. At first, this was articulated through the demand for pain-free deliveries, but later the focus shifted to a struggle to regain power over the body, through demands about giving birth ‘naturally’.<sup>38</sup> As a film depicting a delivery ward made during this period, *På liv och död* was in line with feminist ideas of the time. However, the film does not present arguments about specific questions related to maternity care. It tends rather towards expressing a general disappointment with the lack of love and support offered to women in a patriarchal society. For example, in a scene depicting a complicated delivery, two of the midwives calmly discuss a food recipe with minced meat while the woman is giving birth. Noting that the father is more interested in looking at the emerging baby than in holding the woman’s hand, Nadja gets an angry outburst and starts to yell at him. The film’s representation of the medical environment is in line with feminist approaches to the hospital as a symbol for patriarchy or masculinity, as it is the place of work for Stefan, whereas Nadja is only a visitor. ‘This is



your place, you like it here, and I am full of hostility', as Najda puts it in one scene.

In contrast to *Sally and Freedom* and *På liv och död*, *Testet* does not portray a medical environment, but is completely set in Inga's flat. This setting is clearly coded as feminine. Maaret Koskinen noted in a review that this gives Inga the upper hand in the film:

Just look at the mise-en-scène (designed by Zacharias) in the room where most of the film takes place. A white room, here and there accentuated by pink details; the large floral patterns of the curtains and pillows; a gorgeous plant on the floor; and—rather over-explicit one might think—a bookshelf filled with porcelain eggs. This is a veritable greenhouse, a uterus, a female room in all senses—a room that the man is attracted to but also a prisoner in.<sup>39</sup>

Koskinen's interpretation holds water. At the same time, it is also significant that the film is structured around the pregnancy test and its reaction time. In another review, Ingrid Hagman discussed the film's thematization of time, noting among other things how Inga and Richard relate differently to the reaction time of the test due to gender differences.<sup>40</sup> But one could also see the test as a symbol of the relationship between medical technology and women's bodies. At the start of the film, Inga places the test with her urine in the middle of the breakfast table (among boiled eggs and an egg-shaped timer) so that it will not go unnoticed by Richard. It is thus Inga who herself decides to take the test, which means that it is her actions that set the story in motion. However, the reaction time of the test shapes the dramaturgical development of the film. Read in this way, the central placement of the test symbolizes how medical technology impinges on our private lives. The film thus displays a subtle criticism towards reproductive medicine and technology. This is also noticeable as Inga in one scene says that she only uses her diaphragm to please Richard, as she is fully capable of achieving orgasm without him penetrating her. Here, contraceptives are associated with women's subordination to the pleasures of men.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusions

*Sally and Freedom*, *På liv och död*, and *Testet* are all films directed by women filmmakers that revolve around themes of women's choices in relation to reproduction. The films were all made at a time when the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s had led to greater freedom for women, both in relation to their bodies and in relation to their working life. At a first glance, the films can hence be seen to simply reflect these new freedoms. However, my analysis in this essay indicates that the image is more complex.

Women's opportunities for agency in film-making had certainly increased, and the films studied are examples of the fact that more women directed films than before. However, even though reproductive rights were central to the women's movement, all three directors found it difficult to find financing for their film projects and issues like pregnancy, abortion and childbirth were not prominent in Swedish fiction film production during this period. It is reasonable to conclude that the process that had made it possible for a greater number of women to work in film also resulted in a small but nevertheless noteworthy production of films on themes that were otherwise not much explored. At the same time, to be a woman filmmaker directing a film on issues identified as 'women's problems' was clearly not beneficial for directors wishing to have their work valued on other terms than 'by/for/about women'. Furthermore, this position was something all three directors reflected on and related to in different ways. Lindblom, Ahrne and Zacharias had different aims with their films and took different stances towards the position of 'woman filmmaker', but none of them escaped a gendered discussion.

In addition, the ways in which the films represent reproductive issues do not necessarily match expectations. All three films reflect on the fact that women of the 1980s had very different possibilities compared to women in the past. In these films, women are allowed to be ambivalent or negative towards the state of motherhood, and its female characters express a complexity of feelings and shifts in determination. The films also share a critical view of medicine

and medical authority. This is especially distinct in *På liv och död*, where many of the midwives and doctors are portrayed as lacking in their understanding of the women's feelings and situations. It is also noticeable in *Sally and Freedom*, where women have abortions in an 'assembly line' manner, and in *Testet*, where the pregnancy test structures and limits the course of action for the protagonists. In these ways, the films can be understood as sharing certain feminist aims, as they present nuanced representations of women and a critical perspective of medical power.

Nevertheless, the three films do not present the political changes of the 1960s and 1970s as a simple road to increased freedom and happiness for women. In *Sally and Freedom*, to have an abortion is not portrayed as an easy choice, but rather as dependent on a multitude of factors, and in *Testet*, it is constructed as a traumatic and ethically problematic experience. Contraceptives are also to some extent problematized in the films, as the freedom and control that these grant women are represented as resulting in questionable actions—in *Sally and Freedom*, Sally stops taking her pills without telling Simon, and one of the characters in *På liv och död* removes her coil without telling her husband. In *På liv och död*, the representation of the choice not to reproduce is also ambivalent. While Nadja's portrayal as a woman who is not longing for motherhood can be seen as liberating, her feelings are at the same time explained as emanating from her complicated relationship with her own mother, which can be seen to pathologize her.

As discussed in the introduction, connecting women filmmakers to certain themes is problematic for a number of reasons. The point of the analysis that I have presented here is, however, not to state that the ways in which reproductive issues were handled in these films were exclusive to a female or feminine perspective, or a clear expression of a specific feminist position. On the contrary, by demonstrating the differences between the filmmakers and the sometimes unexpected ways in which their films deal with their topics, my short case study highlights precisely the problematic nature of this connection.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 These numbers have been calculated from information in Åhlander 1984, Donner 1977, Åhlander 1989, and Åhlander 1997—volumes 5–8 of the filmographic publication *Svensk filmografi*. However, it only lists feature-length films screened in cinemas. Short films and films shown for example on television are thus not included in the numbers.
- 2 See Isaksson 2007, 189–191.
- 3 Soila, 'Sweden', in Soila et al. 1998, 142–232, 217–20; Koskinen, 'Kvinnliga filmare: En framgångshistoria', in Åhlander 1997, 43–56; see also Tytti Soila elsewhere in this volume.
- 4 Florin & Nilsson 2000, 74–5.
- 5 See Jansson 2008, 75–114.
- 6 Editor's note: for films with an official English-language title, the original title is listed in brackets when first mentioned and the official translation is used throughout the text. For films that do not have an official English-language title, an English translation of the title is given when first mentioned and the original title is used throughout the text.
- 7 See, for example, Butler 2002; for the Swedish context, see Soila 2004, 9–24; Larsson 2006, 12–16.
- 8 See, for example, Qvist 1995; Björklund 2012.
- 9 Söderbergh Widding, 'Denmark', in Soila et al. 1998, 17; Björklund 2012, 87–9.
- 10 Larsson 2006, 125–67.
- 11 Isaksson 2007, 79–86, 200–204; Jansson 2008, 236–8; Sarrimo 2000, 31–6; see also Kline 2010.
- 12 Quoted from the Swedish Film Database, <http://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=5431#comments>, accessed 4 May 2019. All translations are the author's own unless otherwise noted.
- 13 Tottmar 1983.
- 14 Sörenson 1985; Svensson 1985.
- 15 Ericsson 1986.
- 16 See Bordwell 2002, 94–102.
- 17 Swedish Film Database, s.v. 'Testet', <http://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=16865#comments>, accessed 4 May 2019; 'Fröling och friheten' 1983; Samuelsson 1983; Jarlvik 1990.

- 18 In Swedish, 'kvinnofilm' and 'kvinnoproblem'. See, for example, Skawonius 1981; Vejde 1981; Nordström 1981.
- 19 Tottmar 1983.
- 20 Kullenberg 1981.
- 21 Lundberg 1981.
- 22 Hansson 1985; Soila 2004, 34–6.
- 23 Lindberg 1985.
- 24 Redvall 1985.
- 25 Andersson 1985.
- 26 Bodström 1987.
- 27 Lundblom 1986, 5–7; see also Ennart 1986; Bodström 1987.
- 28 Ericsson 1986.
- 29 Svensson 1987.
- 30 Palmgren 1981.
- 31 Eklund 1986; Olsson 1987; see also Schildt 1986.
- 32 Soila 1987.
- 33 See, for example, Koskinen 1987; Sörenson 1987.
- 34 Lennerhed 2013, 13–18.
- 35 Lennerhed 2011, 237–56.
- 36 Lennerhed 2013, 15–16.
- 37 Sörenson 1981.
- 38 Jansson 2008.
- 39 Koskinen 1987; also Koskinen 1997, 52.
- 40 Hagman 1987.
- 41 This opinion was also expressed by Zacharias in an interview (see Ericsson 1986).

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## An elevated feminist ahead of her time?

Mai Zetterling's non-fiction shorts  
in the 1970s and 1980s

*Ingrid Ryberg*

There are many Stockholms and the name means many things for many people. But for me it is the city of my childhood. The city of a thousand threads. The city of the silent crowds. The city with no faces. The city of no dreams. The city of a million hidden people. The city with the greatest solitude. The city of prosperity—

Mai Zetterling delivers these lines, her personal thoughts about the city of Stockholm, in a voice-over accompanying an early scene in the short film *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* (Mai Zetterling, 1978), in which we see the Swedish director and actor in a crane, travelling up, high above a wintery view of the Kungsträdgården park in central Stockholm. The year is 1977. A Canadian production company has invited her to contribute an episode to the TV series *Cities*.<sup>1</sup> Melancholic and ironic by turns, Zetterling paints a portrait of her hometown, a city where she has not resided permanently for the last thirty years and where she obviously does not feel at home. The film's working title was 'The Native Squatter'.<sup>2</sup> Impersonating not only herself, 'author, actress, filmmaker Mai Zetterling,' as she introduces herself, but also 'author, alchemist August Strindberg' and 'author, philosopher, run-away-queen Christina,' Zetterling gives



the viewer a tour of places such as Sweden's state-governed chain of alcohol shops, Systembolaget, major tourist attractions such as the open-air museum Skansen, the medieval city centre, and the Royal Dramatic Theatre that she herself in 1942 had entered as a young acting student, soon to become movie star.

Viewing the city from her elevated position in the crane, Zetterling invokes Strindberg's famous opening lines to his novel *The Red Room* (*Röda rummet*) from 1879 by asking: 'Taking a bird's eye view over my city, what do I see?'. In this way, she also impersonates a recurrent description of herself as a stranger or 'rare bird' in the Swedish cultural landscape.<sup>3</sup> She was the movie star with an international career who re-made herself as filmmaker in the 1960s. Starting with short documentaries for the BBC, she soon advanced to become one of the first women art film auteurs in Europe. Her first Swedish features *Loving Couples* (*Älskande par*, 1963) and *Night Games* (*Nattlek*, 1966) both got a mixed reception in the Swedish press, but her third, *The Girls* (*Flickorna*, 1968), caused a scandal.<sup>4</sup> The film was infamously deemed 'a case of clogged up menstruation' by the journalist Bo Strömstedt, failed to attract an audience and was not considered worthy of the Swedish Film Institute's so-called 'quality premium.'<sup>5</sup> Zetterling's film-making career in Sweden stopped short. It took eighteen years before she was able to make her next, and final, Swedish feature, *Amorosa* (Mai Zetterling, 1986). However, she was far from unoccupied during these years. In addition to directing films such as the British feature *Scrubbers* (1982) and the children's short *Månen är en grön ost* ('The Moon is a Green Cheese', 1977), writing novels and directing theater, and forming part of launching the organization Film Women International, she also directed a number of commissioned non-fiction shorts—*Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* being one of them.

When given the opportunity to look back on Stockholm from the detached position of the 'exile director' a decade after *The Girls*, Zetterling uses a dry voice-over to contemplate the Swedish population's distanced shyness, problems with alcohol, perfect surfaces and banal dreams. Her observations recycle judgments

about the Swedish population from her early BBC documentary *The Prosperity Race* (1962), a film that just like *The Girls* had caused a scandal and even resulted in descriptions of Zetterling as traitor to the nation.<sup>6</sup> It also echoes Susan Sontag's 'A Letter from Sweden', an essay written in 1969 about Sontag's experience of Sweden while directing *Duet for Cannibals* (Susan Sontag, 1968), the first of her two Swedish films.<sup>7</sup> Sontag was invited to Sweden by the production company Sandrews and given the unique opportunity to direct two features at the very same time that the doors to Swedish film closed for Zetterling, who had also made her films under the aegis of Sandrews. This is ironic considering the devastating criticism that Sontag's films also received, but simultaneously symptomatic of a wish to launch, but failure to sustain support for, a woman auteur in Swedish film at the time.<sup>8</sup>

In this essay, focusing on Zetterling's little-known non-fiction short film production in the 1970s and 1980s, including *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* and the infomercial *Concrete Granny* (*Betongmormor*, 1986), I discuss how a similar paradox conditioned her film-making opportunities during these 'exile' years—a period that is largely associated with the establishment of so called 'state feminism' or 'women-friendly' welfare politics in Sweden.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, the issue of women's liberation was gaining considerable political currency and the notion of Swedish gender equality became internationally viable.<sup>10</sup> In promoting this image of Sweden, an internationally successful feminist director such as Zetterling could function as a front figure. On the other hand, the economic and material preconditions for women's film-making in Sweden remained difficult, and in Zetterling's case practically impossible. I argue that Zetterling's commissioned non-fiction shorts from this period—produced in vastly different contexts, ranging from the Olympic Committee to Denmark's Royal Greenland Trade Department—set in motion and exploited an image of Zetterling as an emancipated and progressive Swedish feminist. Drawing on Victoria Hesford's work on the American women's movement, I discuss these films as examples of the feminist film culture's

complex interrelation with the broad public, transnational contexts and political and commercial interests.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, I argue that these short films testify to a significant articulation of a distinct feminist aesthetics, characterized by the employment of strategies such as the female gaze and drag impersonation. Highlighting such notable characteristics of these hitherto largely neglected films, this essay interrogates popular accounts of Zetterling as an oppositional outsider struggling against the stream. Contesting the often-repeated idea that Zetterling was ‘ahead of her time’, I propose that this notion has counterproductively contributed to obscuring not only her short films, but also the crucial role that she played in the transnational feminist film culture in the 1970s and 1980s. My essay sheds light on this largely overlooked aspect of Swedish film history.

### Zetterling and the feminist film culture

While the harsh criticism of *The Girls* and Zetterling’s subsequent setbacks in Swedish film are well known, little attention has been given to the film’s quick elevation to cult status in feminist film culture. According to Zetterling herself, Susan Sontag was one of the international feminist icons who, just like Simone de Beauvoir, celebrated and promoted *The Girls* as a masterpiece, resulting in the film’s opening of the First International Festival of Women’s Films in New York in 1972.<sup>12</sup> The screening received a small notice in the Swedish press, commenting on how ‘The almost exclusively female audience seemed to especially enjoy a scene where a group of women throw tomatoes, eggs and pies at pictures of Charles de Gaulle, Lyndon Johnson, Moshe Dayan, Mao Tse-tung and Adolf Hitler’.<sup>13</sup> The International Festival of Women’s Films in New York was the first in a range of similar festivals through which the feminist film culture emerged, along with the launch of distribution companies such as Women Make Movies, the magazine *Women & Film* and other crucial publications such as Marjorie Rosen’s *Popcorn Venus* and Claire Johnston’s *Notes on Women’s Cinema*.<sup>14</sup>

*The Girls* was celebrated in many of these contexts, including at the Copenhagen International Women's Film Festival in 1976, where the programme criticized the film's unjust reception in Sweden and exclusion from the Danish cinema and television repertoire:

A women's film festival had to happen, before this amazing film could have its Danish premiere. It is largely characteristic of both this film and several other films by Mai Zetterling that first in the context of the new women's movement they have been pulled out in the light, understood and valued.<sup>15</sup>

In her autobiography, Zetterling comments on how *The Girls* now suddenly took her to 'Paris, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Rome, Australia, Africa and even Stockholm' and how she drew strength from this new appreciation.<sup>16</sup>

In an influential early chronicling of some of the major events and activities that the feminist film movement emerged through, B. Ruby Rich contends that from 1975 and onwards the initial activist spirit of the movement and its productive crossover between practice and theory gave way to academic specialization and a view of feminist film as 'an area of study rather than a sphere of action.'<sup>17</sup> Rich also identifies a foundational dichotomy between realist and avant-garde styles in feminist film-making, a dichotomy recurrently addressed in feminist film theory ever since.<sup>18</sup> An overlooked aspect in debates about feminist film form and the movement's institutionalization is the interaction with non-academic institutions and broader public contexts that crucially enabled and thus contributed to shaping the film culture. As I will discuss below, the sometimes unconventional instances that supported feminist filmmakers at this time were not necessarily characterized by activist or oppositional aims.

One such overlooked context that enabled crucial networking between women filmmakers was provided by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in the 'International Women's Year' in 1975. As part of the organization's large initiative to 'promote new efforts in the struggle to end

discrimination against women', an international symposium on 'Women in Cinema' was organized in the Valley of Aosta in July 1975. The purpose was:

to provide an opportunity for women active in cinema from many different countries to exchange views on the various theoretical and practical considerations of their work, to discuss their mutual or different problems and points of view and to consider action that might be taken to improve their professional lives and the image of women projected in films.<sup>19</sup>

Among the twenty-eight delegates from sixteen countries, four came from Sweden: Mai Zetterling, Maj Wechseltmann, Bibi Andersson, and Anna-Lena Wibom. Other participants included Susan Sontag, Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman, María Luisa Bemberg, Durga Khote, and Márta Mészáros. Zetterling led one of the two workshops, the so-called 'Money Workshop', where according to one report she suggested the creation of an international association for women working in cinema.<sup>20</sup> The proposal resulted in the formation of 'Film Women International', the main outcome of the symposium. 'Film Women International' was constituted with goals such as 'supporting the production and distribution of films that promote a new and truer portrayal of women', as well as 'to work towards equal representation of men and women in all national and international festival committees and juries'.<sup>21</sup> It was decided that the association would be based in Stockholm, headed by Anna-Lena Wibom from the Swedish Film Institute.<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly, the Swedish delegates played a crucial role in the symposium and in the ambitious planning of 'Film Women International'. Back in Sweden, the initiative received some attention in the press.<sup>23</sup> Bibi Andersson agitated in an interview with one newspaper that: 'We must fight against films that depict women as sex objects, lovers, virgins, tarts or generally unpleasant ploys', and stated that 'the banalization of women is worse than ever. Now we must work to get rid of the clichés'.<sup>24</sup>

For unclear reasons, most probably financial, no further meetings or activities seem to have taken place under the banner of 'Film Women International'.<sup>25</sup> Instead, Anna-Lena Wibom formed part of founding the Swedish Women's Film Association in the beginning of 1976.<sup>26</sup> This organization turned into a lively platform for women's film culture in Sweden in the following decade, organizing workshops, screenings, study circles and a film festival in 1983 that unsurprisingly invited and celebrated Mai Zetterling.

Interestingly, UNESCO's International Women's Year also provided Zetterling with the opportunity to make the short film *We have many names* (*Vi har många namn*, Mai Zetterling, 1976), originally commissioned by the BBC on occasion of the Women's Year, but later adopted by the Swedish Television, where it was broadcast in April 1976.<sup>27</sup> The film is about a woman, played by Zetterling herself, who is left by her husband after a long marriage, in which she carried the main responsibility for the household and children. The Swedish reception was lukewarm.<sup>28</sup> Yet the film was screened in Cannes, and also included by the women's film festival in Copenhagen. During this same year, Zetterling was also involved in collaboration with Simone de Beauvoir who had invited her to adapt *The Second Sex* (*Le deuxième sexe*, 1949). The project was planned as a seven hour long internationally co-produced TV series depicting 'women's situation in different areas of the world, how it was, how it is'.<sup>29</sup> Zetterling stated that she was also interested in portraying 'Simone de Beauvoir's own development'.<sup>30</sup> In an interview, de Beauvoir equally talked enthusiastically about the work, praising *The Girls* and speaking about the new project's potential to raise awareness amongst women.<sup>31</sup> *The Second Sex*, just like 'Film Women International' and numerous other projects that Zetterling sought to initiate in these years, was never realized. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that apart from her setbacks in Swedish film, Zetterling experienced a kind of 'prime time' in relation to the transnational feminist film culture in the 1970s, playing a crucial part in and earning significant re-evaluation through this movement.<sup>32</sup>

## Haunted by re-evaluation

To this day Zetterling continues to be described as 'ahead of her time', almost every time her name appears in public in Sweden.<sup>33</sup> According to Zetterling herself, Susan Sontag was one of the first to make this judgment about *The Girls*, specifying that the film was 'some five years' ahead of its time.<sup>34</sup> In a mapping out of the Swedish filmography of the 1960s, published in 1977, Harry Schein, the founder and director of the Swedish Film Institute, also invoked this idea, as well as the notion of Zetterling as a stranger or 'rare bird' in her home country:

Through a use of imagery that was a bit overloaded, Zetterling's films became alien elements in Swedish film. More noteworthy is how the view of women that her films reflected, especially those that she wrote herself, *Night Games* and *The Girls*, was well ahead of its time, before the women's issue was generally accepted by the male dominated society. *The Girls* did not receive a quality premium from the Film Institute's committee, and the consequences thereof were the same as for Jörn Donner. The committee's decision in both of these cases are the only grave mistakes that have been made obvious in hindsight by our contemporary perspectives.<sup>35</sup>

Schein's statement is intriguing in its rhetorical twists and insertion of notions such as 'the view of women' and 'male-dominated society'. It says something about the popularization of such terminology in Sweden by 1977 and reveals some of the effects of calling Zetterling 'ahead of her time'. Schein suggests that by 1977, Sweden had stepped out of ignorance and generally accepted the issue of women's rights. Indeed, by then, several political 'women-friendly' reforms had taken place in Sweden, including parental (rather than maternity) leave and free abortion. Gender equality had started to become a Swedish trademark, promoted not least by Schein's good friend, Social Democrat Olof Palme (Prime Minister between 1969-1976 and 1982-1986).<sup>36</sup>

However, this presumed new progressive, ‘contemporary’, perspective on women’s rights—supposedly embraced even at the Film Institute—did not result in offering Zetterling a second chance or actually putting the issue of women’s film-making on the agenda. Rather than opening new doors for Zetterling or other women filmmakers, the effect of the dramaturgy of Schein’s re-evaluation of *The Girls* and rejection of the quality committee’s decision was to fix her at the moment in time she was considered too radical for—1968. In much the same way, the continuous repetition of the notion of Zetterling as ahead of her time and in need of constant re-evaluation and rediscovery by Swedish filmmakers and critics seems to have become a mantra that in fact does very little for the reassessment of Zetterling’s role in film history.<sup>37</sup> Rather, it has become a counterproductive feminist rhetorical figure that obscures and elides the fact that a re-evaluation and canonization of *The Girls* as a feminist masterpiece took place very shortly after its premiere, and that Zetterling played a decisive role in transnational feminist film culture. Moreover, while recurrently drawing attention to *The Girls* and the scandal of its reception, this mantra has paradoxically not urged a rediscovery of Zetterling’s filmography after *The Girls*, including her non-fiction work from the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite the long-running idea that Zetterling’s work needs re-evaluation, until 2015, her filmography in the Swedish Film Institute’s database lacked information about her work from the 1970s and 1980s. One reason for the incomplete records of Zetterling’s work in these years is the fact that many of her productions were made abroad. One example is *Mai Zetterling’s Stockholm*, a film broadcast in Canada as part of the thirteen episode TV series *Cities*. There are no known records of the film’s exhibition history in Sweden.<sup>38</sup> Another likely reason for the gaps in the filmographic records is the film historiographical privileging of the notion of the auteur and feature-length fiction films, also in feminist film theory.<sup>39</sup> The notion that Zetterling was ahead of her time indeed invokes a celebratory idea of a misunderstood genius with a distinct individual creative vision that was too radical for her backward



contemporaries. Feminist film theory, emerging in tandem with the feminist film movement in the 1970s, has predominantly focused on individual directors and issues of film style and aesthetics. The rediscovery of individual women filmmakers such as Alice Guy, Germaine Dulac, Dorothy Arzner, and Maya Deren and the reclamation of their place in film history have been central.

However, such rhetorical emphasis and celebration of forgotten 'pioneering' achievements and overseen aesthetic subversiveness invokes a notion of the woman filmmaker as an independent oppositional creative agent, hence disregarding the specific historical terms, conditions and interplays on which film-making depends.<sup>40</sup> The politics of representation in women's film-making, scrutinized for instance in the so-called 'realist debates', has largely been considered as autonomously reflecting distinct, sometimes conflicting, feminist agendas. The extent to which women's film-making has been shaped, also aesthetically, by various conditions of possibility determined by financing opportunities, production, and exhibition contexts are often overlooked. Shifting focus to the institutions and circumstances that women's film-making depended on in the 1970s and 1980s not only complicates the notions of women film auteurs and pioneers, but also challenges ideas about the feminist film culture as an independently oppositional movement.

In her work on the American women's movement, Victoria Hesford draws attention to the interplay between the movement and the broad public. Hesford examines how the women's movement has come to be remembered and summarized, in academia and popular culture alike, through one particular 'image-memory', the figure of the bra-burning lesbian feminist. This lingering figure, Hesford demonstrates, was popularly constructed in mass media as well as in activist texts through various rhetorical strategies. Drawing on Hesford, I propose that rather than being seen as autonomous products of an individual feminist's vision or as reflections of the feminist movement's various political tendencies only, women's film production in the 1970s and 1980s should be analysed as being imbricated with broader public contexts.

Unlike other forms of ‘women’s culture’ that emerged as part of the women’s movement, film production demanded considerable budgets and technical access and support, hence necessitating an infrastructure that involved a variety of instances and institutions.<sup>41</sup> Importantly, women often had to seek funding outside of established film institutions, and Zetterling is an example of this. Therefore, I contend that the films that women managed to make in these years, rather than being independently oppositional, are also indicative of what issues women were able to raise and get support for—at the time of the popularization of the issue of women’s rights and establishment of ‘state feminism’ in Sweden. Zetterling’s filmography in the 1970s and 1980s provides fascinating case studies for investigating the ways in which feminist film-making intersected with transnational contexts and national and commercial interests, as well as how Zetterling’s feminist persona, rather than being deemed too radical or ahead of her time, is set in motion as a crucial component in these films.

### Commissioned opportunities to examine masculinity

During her ‘exile’ from Swedish film, Zetterling directed a number of short commissioned non-fiction films for diverse contexts. In 1972, she was the only woman of eight international directors, including Miloš Forman, Claude Lelouch and John Schlesinger, to document the Olympic Games in Munich, resulting in the collection *Visions of Eight*. The project affirms Zetterling’s international auteur status at a time when she was not able to make films in Sweden. Her segment ‘The Strongest’ looks at male weightlifters, capturing the silent, low-key emotional drama of preparation and practice as well as the actual competition. Zetterling’s portrayal of the weightlifters is not celebratory, but rather a gentle backstage observation of vulnerability, softness, and intimacy between men. The men are recurrently framed either in large, wide shots, often filmed from a high angle, making the weightlifters appear as tiny players in the imposing and often desolate gym and arena

environments, or in medium shots and close ups focusing on body parts, such as muscular torsos and half-naked buttocks. The film is characterized by what could be described as a critical 'female gaze' deconstructing the hard surface of heroic masculinity.<sup>42</sup> As Mariah Larsson has shown, Zetterling's films in the 1960s, not least *The Girls*, saw masculinity through a critical lens emphasizing coldness, power and violence.<sup>43</sup> In 'The Strongest', by contrast, the lens is tender, almost eroticizing. Whereas feminist film-making, art, and criticism at the time was largely devoted to exposing and criticizing the superficial and submissive role of womanhood in art, literature and film, Zetterling here turns the gaze onto men and masculinity instead. In her autobiography, Zetterling writes that she turned down what she found to be the commissioners' too obvious suggestion that she should focus on the women in the games.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, as original as her approach may have been, and as much as her participation in the collection may have reinforced her feminist auteur status, the Olympic Committee commissioned the short, and it was thus not Zetterling's exclusive, independently conceived idea. The topic however did inspire Zetterling to start planning a larger, but never realized, film about the Olympics together with Lisbeth Gabrielsson, producer and commissioner at the Swedish Film Institute.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to *Visions of Eight*, Zetterling was not the only woman invited to portray her hometown in *Cities*. Outspoken feminists such as Germaine Greer also participated, as did Melina Mercouri, who had also been present at the UNESCO symposium in Aosta. In *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*, the sarcastic observations regard not only Swedishness, but also patriarchy and marriage. In the role of Queen Christina, decked out in a cape and feathered hat, Zetterling writes on the wall of an exhibition at the House of Culture (Kulturhuset) in central Stockholm: 'Marriage is warfare'. Through her parody of August Strindberg, an author famous not least for his misogynist portrayals of women and complicated heterosexual love affairs, the film represents masculinity in a critical spirit, much less tender than in 'The Strongest'. *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* hence

recalls and draws from themes characteristic of many of Zetterling's previous films. Larsson highlights how the bourgeois institution of marriage, masculinity, and Swedish society are all recurrently portrayed through a critical lens in Zetterling's early documentaries and feature films alike. She argues that the controversy and harsh criticism of *The Girls* was caused not only by the film's feminist caricature of masculinity, but also by the gloomy light in which Zetterling portrayed Swedish society and the welfare state.<sup>46</sup> In particular she highlights Zetterling's recurrent representation of a hypermodern bomb shelter in Stockholm, reused in *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*, as a symbol of the Swedish population's deep inner fear and preparedness for warfare despite being a neutral country.

However, by impersonating Strindberg herself in *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*, the director explores a new strategy for criticizing and mocking masculinity. Her drag parody amplifies and mercilessly ridicules the constructed nature of the male artist genius, its misogynist and romanticized outsidership and neuroticism. The on-camera inclusion of the act of dressing up as the male character emphasizes this constructivist critique of gender. Zetterling theatrically puts on a wig and moustache in front of and looking into the camera, while answering off-screen questions about Strindberg's hatred of women. Taking self-portraits and operating a slide show, she goes on to quote Strindberg's derogatory view of actresses as untalented, moan about the many fears and demons that haunt him and presents his paintings with titles such as 'Shit yellow sky' and 'Shit green landscape'. In *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*, Zetterling hence not only reinforces her criticism of Sweden, but reaffirms her feminist persona by fiercely attacking one of the foremost national heroes in Swedish literary canon—a move in line with the transnational feminist cultural criticism of the time.<sup>47</sup> Importantly, instead of seeking to remedy dominant 'images of women' or deconstruct women's 'to-be-looked-at-ness', she turns the camera towards men.

The examination of masculinity continued in Zetterling's next project. Shortly after the production of *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*, she travelled to Greenland in order to make a documentary short

about traditional seal hunting practices, *Of Seals and Men* (1979), a film that was commissioned by Denmark's Royal Greenland Trade Department. Mariah Larsson and Anna Westerstahl Stenport discuss how colonial and feminist film contexts intersect in the documentary.<sup>48</sup> By focusing on the merits of the traditional seal hunt, in contrast to the then ongoing international debate and global opposition to seal-skin trade, the documentary promotes Danish trade interests. At the same time, the ethnographic documentary form allows Zetterling, whose presence behind the camera is stressed through her voice-over, an opportunity to portray the male hunters with an objectifying, eroticizing 'female gaze'. Larsson and Westerstahl Stenport contend that the men 'become archetypal male figures, like motorcycle riders or gunfighters—Marlon Brando, James Dean, Clint Eastwood—objectified in a way that is at odds with their active work as hunters.'<sup>49</sup> Yet, such objectification also draws from and reinscribes a conventional visualization of the colonial Other.

In these three commissioned non-fiction shorts, Zetterling develops her feminist aesthetic by critically examining and objectifying masculinity through strategies that could be understood as using the female gaze and drag performance. Employing these strategies was not necessarily to be ahead of her time, but still original since they were not standard elements in feminist film-making, which at the time was largely invested in either portraying 'real' women or in destroying the visual pleasure of the medium. Unlike Zetterling's fiction films in the 1960s, these non-fiction shorts not only criticize but also eroticize masculinity.<sup>50</sup> Importantly, these original explorations of feminist strategies were enabled by, not in conflict with, the commissioning institutions. The fact that a film made under such politically problematic conditions as *Of Seals and Men* still offered Zetterling an opportunity to reaffirm her feminist persona is a reminder that feminist film-making, rather than automatically challenging intersecting dominant structures, may instead draw on and reinforce colonial and commercial interests. By strategically commissioning Zetterling, Denmark's Royal Greenland Trade



Figure 7.1. Mai Zetterling on location for *Seals and Men* (1979). Photo: The Swedish Film Institute/Mai Zetterling Archive.

Department aimed for a specific political credibility and cultural capital, as Larsson and Westerstahl Stenport note.<sup>51</sup> It is probable that a similar motive prompted the construction corporation SKANSKA in 1986 to choose Zetterling as director of a promotional short, *Concrete Granny*, discussed below.

### The feminist ethnographer as globetrotter and national trademark

*Of Seals and Men* makes explicit how Zetterling's feminist auteur persona intertwines with her role as ethnographer, a role established in her four documentaries for the BBC in the early 1960s. In these shorts, Zetterling sets out to explore four different groups of people: Sami, Roma, Swedish and Icelandic populations. Travelling to the north of Sweden, the south of France, Stockholm and Iceland in order to film these groups, the shorts present Zetterling's voice-over as well as on-camera reflections about what she sees. According to

her autobiography, the BBC demanded that Zetterling should appear in front of the camera in the films.<sup>52</sup> Yet, if the idea was to draw on Zetterling's star persona, this also placed her in the authoritative position of explorer and interpreter of these cultures. The role of ethnographic documenter affords Zetterling the Eurocentric and male-coded privileges of an authoritative voice and gaze, as well as the agency and mobility of an adventurer in the world. In her autobiography, she comments on how these early films allowed her to not only explore the medium but also the world. These qualities are reactivated and implicated in her feminist auteur persona in the non-fiction work in the 1970s and 1980s. These films draw on Zetterling's persona as authoritative critical observer of the phenomena she examines: the Olympics, Stockholm, seal hunt, and, not least, masculinity.

The short, non-fiction format paradoxically reinstated and amplified Zetterling's feminist auteur status and afforded her privileges of authority and mobility at a time when her agency in and access to the field of fiction film production in Sweden was heavily restricted. In the non-fiction shorts, Zetterling's outsidership is rather reinscribed as an asset. Invoking the notion of herself as detached outsider and 'rare bird', Zetterling observes her subjects literally from above by recurrently choosing a high camera angle, 'a bird's eye view', in significant contrast to low-angle shots in her fiction films.<sup>53</sup> In 'The Strongest', a weightlifter practices lifting positions in a car park while the high-angle camera slowly zooms out until the weightlifter is seen only as a small dot in the middle of concrete surroundings. *Of Seals and Men* includes the arrival to Greenland, filming the vast landscape from a helicopter and *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* includes high-angle shots over the city from the air and from the outdoor lift Katarinahissen, as well as from Zetterling's subjective point of view in the crane above Kungsträdgården park.

This signature perspective and other characteristics of these three films are recycled once more in Zetterling's perhaps most bizarre venture into commissioned non-fiction film-making, *Concrete Granny* (*Betongmormor*) from 1986. The film is a grandiose infomercial



Figure 7.2. Mai Zetterling on the set of *Concrete Granny* (1986). Photo: The Swedish Film Institute/Mai Zetterling Archive.

made for the corporation SKANSKA, promoting the industry's construction projects all over the world. Zetterling herself plays the role of 'concrete granny', coaching her grandson as he applies for an engineer job at SKANSKA. The grandson is played by Philip Zandén who also formed part of the cast of *Amorosa*, Zetterling's first Swedish feature after *The Girls*, that premiered the same year. Followed by a couple of spies from a competing corporation trying to convince her to reveal the secret behind the company's success, concrete granny travels around the globe demonstrating among other sites a water reservoir in New York City, a school in Algeria, an airport in Greenland, a power plant in Indonesia, and a bridge and a ski resort in Sweden.

In addition to observing these sites through high-angle, glossy shots from helicopters, cranes and rooftops, *Concrete Granny* also reuses Zetterling's authoritative voice-over and playful impersonations—including of male characters and, more problematically, of a veiled woman in Algeria. Whereas *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*



turns the ethnographic gaze onto Swedishness, masculinity, and marriage, criticizing and ironizing over self-aggrandizing notions of progress and modernity, *Concrete Granny* promotes the idea of Sweden's industrial superiority. The mobilization of Zetterling's authoritative ethnographer as well as feminist persona here contributes to selling the idea of Swedish progressiveness and innovation. Zetterling's impersonation of concrete granny invokes notions of the modern Western emancipated woman through an emphasis on independence, agency, and mobility, for instance by adventurous shots of Zetterling, dressed in a vintage pilot hat, driving various vehicles, such as a 1950s style convertible car, a motor boat, and a helicopter. The concrete granny moves freely in the world, among different cultures and in and out of costumes, male and female. Just like the presented construction projects, this modern character functions as a symbol and trademark of Swedish progressiveness and excellence. The film interweaves self-celebratory notions of Sweden as a country in the forefront of both the construction industry and women's liberation. Both are represented as attractive export products contributing to the development and modernization of the rest of the world. However, it should be added, there is a disjunction between the elements of the film that potentially undermines its message. The voice-over is delivered in the same ironic tone as *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm*, and the almost hysterically exaggerated emphasis on SKANSKA's excellence opens up the possibility to read the film as mocking the company's grandiosity, rather than as a sincere promotion.

## Conclusion

*Concrete Granny* mobilizes the notion of gender equality in Sweden, performed and impersonated by renowned feminist filmmaker Mai Zetterling, as a fundamental aspect of Swedish progressiveness in order to promote SKANSKA's international projects. The infomercial epitomizes the paradoxical conditions under which Zetterling made her non-fiction films in the 1970s and 1980s. While the

filmmaker was unable to get funding for fiction features in Sweden after the scandal with *The Girls*, outside of Sweden, Zetterling's feminist persona was not considered too radical but embraced, bringing cultural capital and credibility not only to independent TV productions such as *Cities* but also to SKANSKA, Denmark's Royal Greenland Trade Department, and the Olympic Committee.

By shedding light on how Zetterling's feminist auteur status was affirmed and strengthened not only within the transnational feminist film culture in the 1970s and 1980s, but also in the widely different national and transnational production contexts of 'The Strongest', *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm, Of Seals and Men* and *Concrete Granny*, my aim in this essay has been to draw attention to the interrelation or even cross-fertilization between feminist film-making and broader contexts, commercial as well as public service. Zetterling's non-fiction film-making in these years is a symptomatic example of how women, while rejected or overlooked by dominant funding institutions like the Swedish Film Institute, have been able to make and fund films through creative and unconventional means.<sup>54</sup> Non-fiction formats, for instance documentary made for public service television companies such as, in Zetterling's case, BBC and CBC, have often been more accessible to women filmmakers. Importantly, the non-fiction format and Zetterling's interaction with not only John McGreevy Productions, but also large commercial instances such as the Olympic Committee, Denmark's Royal Greenland Trade Department and SKANSKA enabled her to explore original, feminist, aesthetic strategies, such as the female gaze and drag performance, in order to examine, criticize and eroticize masculinity.

Examining how the feminist film culture interrelated with the broad public, transnational contexts, and political and commercial interests implies problematizing notions: of the movement as independently oppositional; of feminist aesthetics as autonomously reflecting radical agendas; and of women filmmakers as isolated auteurs and pioneers struggling against the stream. Importantly though, in the case of Mai Zetterling, shifting focus away from heroic

accounts of a misunderstood genius outsider ahead of her time does not imply depriving her of the re-evaluation and celebration she has earned since the 1970s. Rather, it is to acknowledge her legacy and crucial contributions to feminist film history and aesthetics beyond established film industries and histories.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 John McGreevy Productions. The thirteen-episode series was broadcast on CBC, 1979–80.
- 2 Svenska Filminstitutet (Swedish Film Institute) (SFI), Stockholm, Mai Zetterlings arkiv, A1.9.2, 'Film.MAI ZETTERLING'S STOCKHOLM (1979).
- 3 Larsson 2006, 18, 31, 43, 50, 185–6, 190; Stigsdotter 2015.
- 4 Editor's note: for films with an official English-language title, the original title is listed in brackets when first mentioned and the official translation is used throughout the text. For films that do not have an official English-language title, an English translation of the title is given when first mentioned and the original title is used throughout the text.
- 5 Strömstedt 1968; Larsson 2006, 168–70; Schein 1977, 26.
- 6 Larsson 2006, 48.
- 7 Sontag 1969. Sontag's second Swedish feature *Brother Carl* premiered in 1971.
- 8 Larsson 2006, 51–2 draws attention to the stated wishes of producer Rune Waldekranz and Harry Schein, founder of the Swedish Film Institute, as crucial to Zetterling's opportunity to make her first feature; Lundström 2015: 49–59.
- 9 Hernes 1987.
- 10 Martinsson et al. 2016.
- 11 Hesford 2013.
- 12 Wilson 1976.
- 13 'Kvinnornas filmfestival', 1972; 'Mai Zetterling bejublad', 1972. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 14 Rosen 1973; Johnston 1973.
- 15 'Flickorna', 1976, 19.
- 16 Zetterling 1985, 218.
- 17 Rich 1978.
- 18 For example, Kuhn 1982; de Lauretis 1985, 154–75; Juhasz 1994, 171–90.
- 19 UNESCO 1976.

- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Hjertén 1975.
- 23 'Filmkvinnor bildar eget världsförbund', 1975.
- 24 Bjelf 1975.
- 25 Skawonius 1976.
- 26 Svenska Filminstitutet (Swedish Film Institute) (SFI), Stockholm, Svenska kvinnors Filmförbund-arkiv (Swedish Women's Film Association Archive), Anna-Lena Wibom, 'Kallelse, Konstituerande möte—Svenska kvinnors filmförbund', 12 February 1976.
- 27 Sjöberg 1976.
- 28 Eklund 1976; Sörenson 1976.
- 29 Wilson 1976.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Brison 2003, 197.
- 32 See Fischer 2017, 36–46.
- 33 For example, Domellöf-Wik 2013; Bendjelloul 2015.
- 34 Wilson 1976; Gustafsson 1976.
- 35 Schein 1977, 26.
- 36 Koskinen 2016, 153–67.
- 37 See Larsson 2006, 193 ff.
- 38 *Cities* was broadcast on CBC, 1979–80. A shortened 25-minute version of the original 50-minute film was unexpectedly discovered in a collection of 16mm films that the Swedish Institute planned to throw away in 2009 (Linder 2015).
- 39 See Larsson 2006, 193 ff.; Hollinger 2012, 230–46; Grant 2001, 113–30.
- 40 See Tomadjoglou 2015, 95–109.
- 41 Isaksson 2007.
- 42 See McDonald 2011, 115–16.
- 43 Larsson 2006, 152 ff.; see also Difrient 2005, 1506.
- 44 Zetterling 1985, 208.
- 45 Linder 2015.
- 46 Larsson 2010, 263–9.
- 47 For example, Millet 1970.
- 48 Larsson & Westerstahl Stenport 2015, 106–29.
- 49 Ibid. 117.
- 50 Larsson 2006, 134–5.
- 51 Larsson & Westerstahl Stenport 2015, 126.
- 52 Zetterling 1985, 171.
- 53 See Fischer 2017; Larsson 2006, 104, 135.
- 54 See Larsson & Westerstahl Stenport 2015, 112.

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**Dagmar Brunow** is an Associate Professor in Film Studies at Linnaeus University, Sweden. She has published widely on questions of cultural memory and the archive, video, and the essay film as well as feminist and queer film-making. Her most recent research project ‘The cultural memory of moving images’ (2016–2018) was financed by the Swedish Research Council. She is the author of *Remediating Transcultural Memory: Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (De Gruyter, 2015) and the editor of *Stuart Hall: Aktivismus, Pop und Politik* (Ventil, 2015).

**Eirik Frisvold Hanssen** is Head of the Film and Broadcasting Section in the Department of Collections and Research at the National Library of Norway. He holds a PhD in Cinema Studies from Stockholm University and was an Associate Professor of Film Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (2006–2014). He has published extensively on film history, visual culture, colour and cinema, and intermediality in numerous edited collections and academic journals. He is the co-editor with Jørgen Bruhn and Anne Gjelsvik of *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions* (Bloomsbury, 2012) and with Maria Fosheim Lund of *Small Country, Long Journeys: Norwegian Expedition Films* (Nasjonalbiblioteket, 2017).



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**Ingrid Ryberg** is a filmmaker and Senior Lecturer in Culture, Aesthetics and Media at the Department of Cultural Sciences, University of Gothenburg. Her current research, supported by the Swedish Research Council, explores feminist and queer film cultures in Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to academic publications, the research has resulted in the feature-length documentary *En armé av älskande* (*An Army of Lovers*, 2018), about queer film-making in Sweden in the 1970s. She is co-editor of the recent volume *The Power of Vulnerability. Mobilising affect in feminist, queer and anti-racist media cultures* (eds. Anu Koivunen, Katariina Kyrölä & Ingrid Ryberg, Manchester University Press, 2018).

**Tytti Soila** is Professor Emeritus in Cinema Studies at Stockholm University. She has published widely on Nordic film history and feminist film theory. Her continuing research is on women's roles and positions in the film industry, popular culture, and the history and theory of documentary film.

**Ingrid Stigsdotter** is a researcher in Cinema Studies at Stockholm University, with interests that include reception, representation, and archives. She has collaborated with the Swedish Film Institute on several projects, including 'I-Media-Cities' (2016–2019), funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme, and the 'Women's Film History Network: Norden' (2016–2017) with funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers' gender equality fund. Her current research on women and film is funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond: The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (RJ) as part of the interdisciplinary project 'Representing Women: Gendering Swedish Film Culture and Production' (2018–2020).