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Alien Octopodes:

Öyvind Fahlström's *Du gamla, Du fria*, and the Institutional Practice of Swedish Experimental Feature Films

Abstract

The aim of this master's thesis is to investigate the discursive networks and production contexts of the rare and insular phenomena of Swedish experimental features. As a point of departure, the tentative and limited filmography of Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström is expanded upon, as the thesis present a unique case study on his first and only feature film *Du gamla, Du fria* ("Provocation", 1972). The film was produced and distributed within the framework of the Swedish Film Institute's policies regarding valuable art and quality film. *Du gamla, Du fria*, alongside Peter Kylberg's *JAG* ("I", 1966) and Michael Meschke's *Skärseld* ("Purgatory", 1975), constitutes rare examples on how public authority and commercial film production merged with the more venturesome aspects of experimental film culture. These filmmakers were all feature film debutants and earned financial support from the established industry, which resulted in internal and public struggles in the field of commercially viable filmmaking.

The study focuses on two coherent areas of experimental film culture, which are conceptually placed pre- contra post the inauguration of the Swedish Film Institute. Here the early experimental features are introduced: *...och efter skymning kommer mörker* ("...and after dawn comes darkness", 1947) by Rune Hagberg; Carl Gyllenberg's *Som i drömmar* ("As in dreams", 1954); and Peter Weiss's *Hägringen* ("The Mirage", 1959); proposing that these films, in opposition to the SFI productions, expressed a distinct form of cultural practice, as they were conceived in a hermetic mode of experimental film production. By adapting a media-archaeological and discourse analytical approach these films and their experimental features are used in a summary manner to probe the complex relations between minor and major film cultures within Swedish historiography. Finally, based on the findings, the concept of avant-garde film is problematised as a distinct form of cultural practice.

Keywords: Öyvind Fahlström, *Du gamla, Du fria*, Peter Kylberg, *JAG*, Michael Meschke, *Skärseld*, Rune Hagberg, *...och efter skymning kommer mörker*, Carl Gyllenberg, *Som i drömmar*, Peter Weiss, *Hägringen*, The Swedish Film Institute, avant-garde film, experimental film, Swedish experimental features.

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Prologue

From a historical standpoint film is a very costly medium, which in extension also makes it an expensive art form to produce. In Eric M. Nilsson's short film *Brutal* from 1980, a lesson of the inner logics and conflicted implications in the economics of film is carried out; on the one hand its monetary economy, on the other hand its cultural and artistic economy. Images of men at the barbers are shown as a speaker laconically notes: "The film worker strains himself. Makes art. Makes art for money's sake... One metre... Two metres... Three metres... Four metres".¹ Shortly thereafter we see the laboratory technician and editor Bo Westerlund giving a short lecture in the conditions of material costs: "one meter sixteen-millimetre colour negative costs two crowns and thirty-seven öre. With development, working-copy, inflation to thirty-five negative, and copy, including VAT, ninety-four crowns and seventy-five öre for five seconds of film". Cut back to the barbershop and the voice recaptures: "To make these images costs totally two-hundred and seventy-four crowns per second. And this regardless of quality".²

The reality of film, as a material-controlled art, acts in commercial domains, whether you like it or not. The filmic avant-garde on the other hand has contested an opposition to this depiction throughout the history of the medium. In his 1969 classic work *Underground Film*, Parker Tyler argues: "artistic ingenuity is not to be equated with the material means of filmmaking; on the contrary, a great pride of the true avant-garde filmmaker is that he can produce extraordinary effects through manipulations that in themselves are not costly", to shortly thereafter note: "The Underground filmmaker [...] is still radically underprivileged so far as the wherewithal to make feature-length film is concerned".³ The avant-garde filmmaker's underprivileged relation to feature film production almost appears to be a historiographical truth, although there are sporadic exceptions.⁴ A truth that the American, as well as European and Swedish experimental tradition testifies to, where the short film commonly acts both as the format of expression and the carrier of canonical logics.

¹ Eric M. Nilsson, *Brutal*, 1980 (The Swedish Film Institute: 80-redaktionen, 7 min). The film is available at <http://www.filmarkivet.se/movies/brutal/> - the dialogue is in Swedish (my translation) – 2017-03-21, 04.04 PM.

² *Brutal* is 35mm in width, 205 metres long (7 min) and cost 115 000 crowns to make at the time. Film Fact Sheet *Brutal*, Swedish Film Database: The Swedish Film Institute, <http://sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/Item/?itemid=18709&type=MOVIE&iv=PdfGen> - collected 2017-03-24 (copy in author's possession).

³ Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1995 (Da Capo Press edition; first published in 1969), p. 4.

⁴ See: William E.B. Verrone, *The Avant-Garde Feature Film*, New York: McFarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2011. See the chapter "Previous Research and Literature Review".

Introduction

In 1991 a travelling retrospective on Swedish experimental cinema started, curated by Jonas Mekas and Claes Söderquist.⁵ An extensive inventory of Sweden's most influential avant-garde filmmakers was rediscovered in the catalogue and tour programme: Viking Eggeling, Gösta Werner, Rut Hillarp, Pontus Hultén, Hans Nordenström, Peter Weiss, Åke Karlung, Claes Söderquist, Gunvor Nelson, and many more. A closer look at the presented films quickly reveals that there is an abundance of short films, whereas films of feature length appear to be rarities. The exceptions that were to represent the Swedish experimental feature format in the *Swedish Avant-Garde Film 1924-1990*-programme were: Rune Hagberg's *...och efter skymning kommer mörker* ("...and after dusk comes darkness", 1947); Carl Gyllenberg's *Som i drömmar* ("As in Dreams", 1954); Peter Weiss's *Hägringen* ("The Mirage", 1959); and Öyvind Fahlström's *Du gamla, Du fria* ("Provocation", 1972).⁶

This disproportionate relation between experimental shorts and feature-length films, as depicted in the above-mentioned very ambitious venture, was by no means misleading. What one might call The Swedish Experimental Feature Film is, as shown by historiographical inquiries and in available research, a rare, insular, highly discontinuous, and almost ephemeral phenomenon in Swedish film history. In addition, it also recurrently resides in the interstices between the avant-garde mode of function and the more commercially institutionalised mode of production contexts. It is a highly complex object that in extension demonstrates a highly elusive and peculiar subject matter regarding economic and artistic discourses on film.

To complete the above-mentioned exposé, one also has to mention the Swedish composer and film artist Peter Kylberg and his avant-garde feature film *JAG* (1966, "I"). In his recently published dissertation concerning Kylberg's film making, film scholar Lars Diurlin points out the problematic conditions that surround *JAG*, as a cultural product, in the Swedish context: "a direct result of the alignment between cultural policy and cultural industry", a result that also, according to Diurlin, refers to Kylberg's position within the field: "in the joint between the commercial and the non-commercial, between the officially sanctioned cultural panoply and the alternative".⁷

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and survey this underprivileged relationship within the Swedish experimental film culture, practice, and context. In other words, to probe

⁵ Jonas Mekas et al., *Swedish Avantgarde Film 1924-1990*, New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1991.

⁶ Mekas et al., *Swedish Avantgarde Film 1924-1990*, p. 23-36.

⁷ Lars Diurlin, "Filmreformens förste avantgardist" – *Experimentalfilmaren Peter Kylberg*, Lund: Mediehistoriskt arkiv (No. 37), 2017, p. 32 (my translation). Diurlin's work constitutes an extensive study of Kylberg's filmic exploration which I will return to later on.

the experimental feature's discursive network and insular frequency in relation to the short film tradition. The foundation and material for the study comprises Rune Hagberg's *...och efter skymning kommer mörker* (1947), Carl Gyllenberg's *Som i drömmar* (1954), Peter Weiss's *Hägringen* (1959), Peter Kylberg's *JAG* (1966), and Öyvind Fahlström's *Du gamla, du fria* (1972).⁸ I also chose to add Michael Meschke's *Skärseld* ("Purgatory") from 1975 to the mix, as the film anchors to the specific discourses of *JAG*, and *Du gamla, Du fria*, produced in the mid-1960s or the beginning of the 1970s. The film is an early production that was fully financed by the Swedish Film Institute, founded in 1963. Meschke was in fact the first filmmaker to receive wherewithal from the Institute's, at the time, newly formed production funds. With Meschke's (the founder of the Swedish Marionetteatern) aptitude for intermediality and avant-garde theatre, that gave rise to some debate. Prior to the actual shooting of the film, Elisabeth Sörensson wrote in Svenska Dagbladet 1973: "it will certainly be somewhat of an experimental film", while Meschke in the same article expressed his inner thoughts and dreams of his first feature film project, which included "to paint with the camera".⁹

With this said, a demarcation must be established due to the given dimensions of this paper. An in-depth study that includes all of the above filmmakers and films is a venture that demands a considerably more extensive format, both in temporal and spatial terms. Therefore, the locus of my study will emanate from Öyvind Fahlström's experimental feature *Du gamla, Du Fria*, as well as his other production. The purpose for this manoeuvre, beside the already stated problem scope, works on two additional levels: the first relates to the fact that, despite Fahlström's influential position in the field of art history, both national and international, a more cohesive illumination of his impact on Swedish film culture is still rather neglected within the international field of film studies. The second refers to a methodological and theoretical opportunity, as Fahlström's avant-garde feature unlocks a differentiated spectrum of problems and discourses that relates to the comparative materials, as I herein employ the concept of "Swedish experimental features" as a summary term. Accordingly, I therefore use Fahlström's filmmaking as a case study, contrasting it to the compared material. Here it is of importance to see *Du gamla, Du fria*, in the light of experimental film culture in Sweden throughout an extended historical time frame, where aesthetics and different media outlets, as

⁸ There is a consensus within existing research on which films are to be considered avant-garde feature projects. See: Orrje; Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding; Diurlin. See also the chapters "Literature Review", and "Methodological Questions".

⁹ Elisabeth Sörensson, "Danteinspirerad film görs för första produktionspengarna", in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 January, 1973 (my translation).

well as cultural policies, the institutionalisation of art, and culture-industrial and alternative production modes are brought forth. Fahlström also evokes an inherently cross-boundary mode of study, both when speaking in terms of aesthetics and national contexts, as film scholars Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm and Astrid Söderbergh Widding state: “the Swedish context, as he held a central position on the art scene; the European context, in his case, mostly evoked by his ambition to portray a European political movement, in a project that he defined as European; finally, the American context, as he took an active part in the pop-art scene”.¹⁰

My ambition is not to write a parallel history of the experimental feature in relation to the short, nor is it to write *the* history of the Swedish experimental feature film on the whole. It is rather a hope of mine to bring forth a “cross illumination” of these films’ aesthetics through Öyvind Fahlström and his film *Du gamla, Du Friä*, as well as their production strategies, distribution, reception, and historiographical-discursive networks, along with the historical horizon they offer: 1947-1975. By doing so, I mobilize the experimental feature as a sort of litmus paper that allows an uncovering of different discursive formations that problematize Swedish experimental film cultures and practices.

The Estonian poet and critic Ilmar Labaan once wrote in respect of his friend Öyvind Fahlström: “You can consider Öyvind Fahlström as an alien octopus in the hydrosphere of Sweden in the 1950s, which was otherwise mostly populated by melancholic aquarium fish and unenterprising countryside perches”.¹¹ If we allow an expansion of the metaphor and apply it to the experimental features in Swedish cinema history, they similarly appear to be “alien octopodes”; they are often solitary ventures brought forth by interdisciplinary temperaments, hybrid artworks in the joint between the autonomy of the avant-garde function mode and the commercial industries, alternately semi-professional and anomalous co-productions, which strangely unfurl their arms in the “no man’s land” of cinema history.

Previous Research and Literature Review

Literature and research on avant-garde- and experimental cinema in an international context is fairly voluminous. I have already mentioned Parker Tyler’s *Underground Film: A Critical History*, in which Tyler primarily maps the “underground” cinema scene, with cases such as

¹⁰ Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm & Astrid Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture: From Early Animation to Video Art*, Stockholm: National Library of Sweden 2010, p. 136.

¹¹ Ilmar Laaban in *Expressen*, cited from Torsten Ekboms *Bildstorm*, Stockholm: Bonniers Förlag, 1995, p. 203 (my translation).

Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, Andy Warhol, etc.¹² To this pioneering text, an extensive body of equally important research and special studies can be added: Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* (1970), Davis Curtis's *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution* (1971), P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (1974), Malcolm Le Grice's *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977), and A.L. Rees *A History of Experimental Film and Video – From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (1999).¹³ In a generic sense the above-mentioned overviews tend to encompass the American or European conditions for experimental cinema history and canon, with points of departure in work (text)-centred and author-governed analyses. There is also a symptom of situating the avant-garde in terms of autonomous and oppositional codas in relation to the commercial and industrialised film-economic ecology. The cinematic avant-garde is still operating, with a notion of free filmmaking and antithetical function that defines the opposite realm to Hollywood. In further exemplification P. Adams Sitney concludes that: "The precise relationship of the avant-garde cinema to American commercial film is one of radical otherness. They operate in different realms with no significant influence on each other".¹⁴ This cogitation also resides in A.L. Rees's work: "The avant-garde rejects and critiques both the mainstream entertainment cinema and the audience response which flows from it. It has sought 'ways of seeing' outside the conventions of cinema's dominant tradition in drama film and industrial mode of production".¹⁵ In a historiographical evolutionary model of teleological exposition this is of course true, but the entirety of a "great history" tends to wash away aesthetical and production borderlands. This is a complex of questions that spasmodically emerges when confronting the Swedish experimental feature, and certainly when discussing *Du gamla, Du fria*, and the other SFI productions.

However, some of the later contributions have extended the historiographical implications paralleling the earlier works. Here one must mention Michael O'Pray's *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions* (2003), David E. James's *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (2005), and Malte Hagener's *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film*

¹² Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1995 (1969). Tyler's findings will be revisited when I focus on Weiss.

¹³ David Curtis, *Experiment Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution*, London: Dell 1971; Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, New York: Dutton 1970; P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avantgarde*, New York: Oxford University Press 2002, third edition (1974), Malcolm Le Grice *Abstract Film and Beyond*, London: Studio Vista 1977, A.L. Rees *A History of Experimental Film and Video – From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice*, London: BFI 2011, (second edition, 1999).

¹⁴ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. xii.

¹⁵ A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. 1.

Culture 1919-1939 (2007).¹⁶ Malte Hagener suggests caution before the linear acts of historiography: “theory formation is normally considered retrospectively: histories of film theory are written afterwards on the basis of the important canonised text (mostly from canonised writers)”.¹⁷ The primary focus of Hagener inverses the hermeneutical tradition, as it tends to substantiate teleological trajectories. Instead he mobilises a media-archaeological approach, where production modes, distribution systems, and socio-cultural conditions are allowed to precede the aesthetic-critical school.¹⁸ A similar operation is conducted by David E. James in *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, whereas, in an American context, the supposed polarisation between an autonomous avant-garde and the dominant “other” is nuanced: “historically, the social marginality of independent filmmakers and the enormous difference between their resources and the industry’s have influenced the avant-garde cinemas to think of themselves as categorically separate from Hollywood and reproduce the post-Romantic apotheosis of the autonomous artist”.¹⁹ James mobilises the term “minor cinema”, a term that was introduced by Tom Gunning within film scholarship.²⁰ Gunning in turn uses the term as a derivate of Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s structural analysis of Franz Kafka, where the concept “minor literature” is employed along with Kafka’s writing position; a position that is present within the dominant language (literature) – it operates in relation with the dominant culture, rather than in direct opposition to it.²¹ What James emphasises is the terminology’s relational carrying capacity and circular occurrence in the field of cinema as a whole: “But in fact innovations, inspirations, and cross-pollination in formal procedures, representational codes, and production strategies have circulated reciprocally through the entire field of cinema”.²² This notion is particularly applicable to the experimental feature as an indicator of film practice defined by the fluid interplay it evokes *with*, and *against*, the discourses that constitute the dominant language; both within and beyond what we call “major”.

In the present case, the “minor cinema” conception can also work analogously with the relationship between feature films and short films, but here in an inverted form. The history

¹⁶ Michael O’Pray *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions*, London: Wallflower Press 2003; David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*, Berkely: University of California Press 2005; Malte Hagener *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture 1919-1939*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2007.

¹⁷ Malte Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back*, p. 31-32.

¹⁸ Hagener, p. 12.

¹⁹ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 14.

²⁰ Tom Gunning, “Towards A Minor Cinema: Fonoroff, Herwitz, Ahwesh, Lapore, Khlar and Solomon”, in *Motion Picture*, 3: 1-2; 1990, pp. 2-5.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (translation Dana Polan), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

²² James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 14.

and tradition of experimental film art is generally constructed with the short film as the primary format of expression. As suggested, the experimental feature exists and produces an additional layer within the concentric figure that constitutes the minor film culture. The only actual research effort that addresses the concept of avant-garde or experimental features is found with film scholar William E.B Verrone and his monograph *The Avant-Garde Feature Film*. The tone of the study is already set in the first sentence: “There are many films one might call avant-garde”.²³ Verrone’s use of the term avant-garde allows him to include both an autonomous and a cultural-industrial function mode, where the “filmic avant-garde” is situated as a counterpoint to those films that only generate “public pleasure”: “So in the basic, fundamental sense, avant-garde films are just that: *different*”.²⁴ Verrone consistently uses a formalistic and aesthetic-critical argumentation, which in extension becomes problematic, as the distribution and production context is continuously denied. Although Verrone’s case studies are useful attempts to move beyond an often pre-canonised experimental film discourse, the result shows a recurrence of the old masters; they once more become masters, but in new aesthetic and historiographical intertexts and variations.²⁵

Research implemented in Sweden is central for the purpose of this study. It is not too extensive, but in spite of the fact that many aspects remain to be uncovered, there is thorough and ambitious input available. Returning to Peter Weiss, one must mention his personal and proficient overview *Avantgardefilm* (1956) as an early research effort.²⁶ In the 1950s, Weiss was one of the most prolific figures in creating a more cohesive cultural discourse on Swedish experimental film. In *Avantgardefilm* he knowledgeably presents American and European avant-garde film history and aesthetics, as well as some early Swedish experiments.²⁷ A starting point in a more modernised scholarly setting is Henrik Orrje’s licentiate thesis from

²³ William E. B. Verrone, *The Avant-Garde Feature Film*, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Verrone’s study is arranged alongside three historical vectors concerning avant-garde films in feature format: “The Historical Avant-Garde”, where Verrone for example studies Luis Buñuel’s *L’Age d’Or* (1930), Jean Coucteau’s *The Blood of a Poet* (1930), Hans Richter’s *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947), and Isidore Isou’s Lettrist film *Traité de bave et d’éternité* (1951); “The Real Avant-Garde”, which includes Andy Warhol’s *Sleep* (1963), Jonas Mekas’s *Diaries, Notes & Sketches: Walden* (1969); “The Contemporary Avant-Garde Feature Film”, here the categorisation becomes blurry as Verrone invokes art-house-filmmakers, such as David Lynch, Jean-Luc Godard and Peter Greenaway, but also more “full blooded” experimental ventures, e.g. E. Elias Merhige’s experimental horror film *Begotten* (1990). The film is a solitary undertaking in an economic and artistic context, as Merhige personally carried out the scriptwriting, directing, photography (16mm, Arriflex), and production.

²⁶ Peter Weiss, *Avantgardefilm*, Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1965. I will return to this book when discussing Hagberg, Gyllenberg, Weiss.

²⁷ Ibid.

1994, "Svensk experimentell film 1945-1990".²⁸ As the first inventory of experimental film history and its development in Sweden, Orrje's chronological study collects and maps an extensive selection of Swedish filmmakers and their work through a descriptive method.²⁹

Orrje later contributed to the anthology *Gunvor Nelson and the Avant-Garde*, with a chapter on the historical terms and contexts of Swedish experimental film that briefly touches upon the feature film works of Hagberg, Gyllenberg, Weiss and Fahlström as important events regarding the development of the minor film culture in Sweden.³⁰

The most prolific work on Swedish experimental cinema is the research carried out by film scholars Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm and Astrid Söderbergh Widding. The book *Konst som rörlig bild – Från Diagonalsymfonin till Whiteout* (2006) presents an initial and surveying description of heterogenic Swedish experimental film culture.³¹ Early on, the authors stress the difficulty in capturing a strict homogeneity from aesthetic, institutional, production strategy, and national viewpoints.³² Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding also relate to James's usage of the "minor cinema"-construct as a historiographical mode, transposing it to the Swedish situation.³³ Furthermore, one must mention *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, which is the primary book on the subject. Based on a foundation of analytical discourse, the above-mentioned scholars uncover the complex surroundings of Swedish experimental film culture:

When looking at Swedish experimental film culture it is evident that a teleological historiography is even more untenable. Experimental film never develops into a tradition or a movement, hence, there is no way of writing a plain teleological story. There is no inner meaning that is gradually brought forward in order to be realised as a complete, classical and

²⁸ Henrik Orrje, "Svensk experimentell film 1945-1990: En kronologisk och biografisk studie av några filmskapare och deras verk", unpublished, Stockholm University, The Department for Theater- and Film Studies, spring 1994.

²⁹ Orrje, "Svensk experimentell film 1945-1990", p. 5-6. Orrje's study is fundamentally important when it comes to the findings concerning experimental features, primarily on Hagberg's *...och efter skymning kommer mörker*. Orrje collects correspondence and survey answers from Hagberg and his experience of the production and shooting conditions of Sweden's first avant-garde feature film.

³⁰ Henrik Orrje, "New Beginnings: Swedish Experimental Film from Past to Present", in *Gunvor Nelson and the Avant-Garde* (ed. John Sundholm), Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003, pp. 57-69.

³¹ Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm & Astrid Söderbergh Widding, "I skuggan av spelfilmen: svensk experimentell film", in *Konst som rörlig bild – Från Diagonalsymfonin till Whiteout* (ed. Astrid Söderbergh Widding), Lidingö/Stockholm: Bokförlaget Lagenskiöld, 2006.

³² Ibid, p. 16.

³³ Alternatively: "free film". See: Lars Gustaf Andersson & John Sundholm, "Amatör och avantgarde: de mindre filmkulturen i efterkrigstidens Sverige", in *Välfärdsbilder – Svensk film utanför biograferna* (ed. Mats Jönsson & Erik Hedling), Stockholm: Statens Ljud- och Bildarkiv (Mediehistorisk arkiv 5), 2008, p. 229ff; See also Lars Gustaf Andersson & John Sundholm, *Hellre fri än filmare – Filmverkstan och den fria filmen*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014, p. 27.

canonical artefact contributing to ‘the Swedish experimental film’ or constituting ‘a Swedish experimental film’.³⁴

This notion is equally legitimate when applied to the primary material on which this thesis project focuses. These projects appear to be insular, ephemeral, and isolated phenomena, where aesthetics, production, distribution and reception are as fluid and volatile as the heterogenic Swedish experimental film culture and practice at large. Although Hagberg, Gyllenberg, Weiss, Kylberg, Fahlström and Meschke all are assigned a place within this history, the feature films’ existence, and the discourses they produced, are very laconically described. My hope here is to extend the research, on the one hand to Fahlström’s filmography, and on the other hand to the feature-length format; to situate and map it in relation to the short film tradition, but also to its “free” contra institutionalised frequencies – the Swedish experimental feature’s “cross-pollination in formal procedures”, if you will.³⁵

To sum up this literature review I once more want to mention film scholar Lars Diurlin’s dissertation on the composer and artist Peter Kylberg’s film experiments.³⁶ As I had the opportunity to follow Diurlin’s research in its final phase, it became an inspiration and an important reference framework for my own work on Fahlström and experimental features. Diurlin’s research consists of some close readings of Kylberg’s oeuvre, and of thorough archive studies of both Kylberg’s personal accounts and those of the Swedish Film Institute (among others). In his reading of *JAG*, Diurlin sees a unique constellation in the fact that the Swedish Film Institute, together with two established actors in the commercial film industry arena, SF (Svensk Filmindustri) and Sandrews, joined houses to produce an artistically ambitious avant-garde feature: “The film would emphatically be manufactured as an artistic and production-wise unique, official prestige product from SFI and the two commercial actors”.³⁷ Diurlin’s argumentation consistently points to how an experimental film practice was in fact connected to an institutional and commercially viable production.

Although Diurlin positions Kylberg as a totally unique element in this discourse, the problems and theoretical horizons must be extended in a comparative manner. In this discussion, my primary aim is to include and account for Öyvind Fahlström’s *Du gamla, Du fria* and also Michael Meschkes *Skärseld*. These films share some similar discursive

³⁴ Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm & Astrid Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture: From Early Animation to Video Art*, Stockholm: National Library of Sweden 2010, p. 13.

³⁵ James, *The Most Typical Avant-garde*, p. 14.

³⁶ Lars Diurlin, “Filmreformens förste avantgardist” – *Experimentfilmaren Peter Kylberg*, Lund: Mediehistoriskt arkiv (No. 37), 2017.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 174.

structures with Kylberg's case, and can in themselves constitute examples of how the Swedish Film Institute tried to facilitate experimental feature film productions, which, in spite of financing them, the Institute never really wanted to fully warrant.

Methodological Questions

The major objective of this study is to look at the Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström's experimental feature film *Du gamla, Du fria* as an event of institutional practice and a discursive network, both in terms of aesthetics and production strategies (including distribution and reception). Secondly, I hope to through this case study use Fahlström's feature as a probing mechanism that hopefully will serve as a sort of fluoroscopy on behalf of the insular, rare, and often overlooked cultural events that throughout the history of Swedish experimental film could be categorised as "Swedish experimental (or avant-garde) features". To operationalise this intention, quite rich and differentiated secondary material has been chosen that is represented by: Rune Hagberg's *...och efter skymning kommer mörker* ("...and after dusk comes darkness", 1947); Carl Gyllenberg's *Som i drömmar* ("As in Dreams", 1954); Peter Weiss's *Hägringen* (1959); Peter Kylberg's *JAG* ("I", 1966); and Michael Meschke's *Skärseld* ("Purgatory", 1975). These films will work not only as a body of comparative material, but also as keys for the contextualisation and theorisation of Fahlström's role within Swedish experimental film history and culture. By reading *Du gamla, Du fria* in the light of his historiographical colleagues, I will examine how Fahlström operated in relation to the concept of "minor cinemas", as proposed by James and Andersson, Sundholm, and Söderbergh Widding, and whether the insular phenomena of Swedish avant-garde features holds and creates unique positions, apart from the short film canon, within the history of Swedish experimental filmmaking.

The main research question is: How does the practical execution of Öyvind Fahlström's *Du gamla, Du fria*, both in terms of aesthetics and production logic, relate to, or divert from, avant-garde- and experimental film culture and practice? This implicitly evokes the sub-question: What happens when the concept of free film and the autonomous function mode of the avant-garde is absorbed in institutional and culture-industrial milieus?

My intention is not to write *the History* of Swedish experimental feature films. Such an endeavour would require a much wider scope, and the impossible idea of a homogenisation of Swedish avant-garde features. As we shall see, Hagberg's film from 1947 produces different discourses than for instance Fahlström's and Meschke's did in the 1970s. In other terms, no

evolutionary model will be proposed. Instead, it is my intention to investigate the condition of experimental features *pre* and *post* the establishment of the Swedish Film Institute.

In this regard, Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding provide a theoretical framework for the approach to Swedish experimental cinema: “The history of Swedish experimental film culture is simply a history of Foucauldian ruptures and changes, of small histories, of personal and accidental trajectories”.³⁸ Here, the methodological foundation is allowed a slight reconstruction in trying to trace the complex dynamics of the experimental feature, both prior and subsequent to the founding of the Swedish Film Institute, tending to “more and more discontinuities”, rather than “to be abandoning the irruption of events in favour of stable structures”.³⁹ The concept of the experimental feature will be used as a sort of litmus paper, probing the field of experimental film culture in its Swedish context. Thomas Elsaesser once pointed out the assets of such an endeavour: “Questioning the already-said at the level of existence: film history is best described as a series of discontinuous snapshots that illuminates a whole topography: the task is to map the field as a network, rather than discrete units”.⁴⁰

With this being said, the films that are scrutinised here form a relatively homogeneous corpus on different interworking levels: firstly, they are consequently described as avant-garde or experimental features, both in research and historical criticism; secondly, they are recurrently ascribed with terms such as “rarities”, “exceptions”, or with the simple fact that they are unusual.⁴¹ In addition, the filmmakers investigated in this study were all feature film debutants, and shared a conspicuously limited “training ground” within the short film format, prior to embarking on their respective lengthy projects. The films’ distinguishing descriptions lies in the fact that they, as opposed “to the short film, as carrier of the experimental film tradition in Sweden”, form an exclusive group of feature films that one way or the other produces discourses concerning the experimental film culture’s existence.⁴²

The point of departure is thus established. But in a hypothetical larger research project, the area of study may be subject to revision. One can mention Ingmar Bergman, with films such

³⁸ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 13.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language* (Translated from French by A.M. Sheridan Smith), New York: Pantheon Books, 1972 (1969, 1971), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, “Early Film History and Multi Media: An Archaeology of Possible Futures”, in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader* (eds. Wendy Chun & Thomas Keenan), London: Routledge, 2006, p. 17.

⁴¹ See for example: Leif Furhammar, *Filmen i Sverige: en historia i tio kapitel och en fortsättning* (third revised and extended edition), Stockholm: Dialogos i samarbete med Svenska Filminstitutet, 2003, p. 233; Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, “I skuggan av spelfilmen”, p. 40; Orrje, “Svensk experimentell film 1945-1990”, p. 93.

⁴² Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, “I skuggan av spelfilmen”, p. 40 (my translation).

as *Smultronstället* (“Wild Strawberries”, 1957) and *Persona* (1966), as a predecessor of experimental filmmaking incorporated in longer formats, as well as Vilgot Sjöman’s *Jag är nyfiken*-films (“I Am Curious – Yellow”, “I Am Curious – Blue”, 1967-68). These filmmakers are frequently mentioned in international overviews concerning avant-garde cinema.⁴³ Whether they should be included is for future research to examine, and as Andersson et al. conclude: “From a national viewpoint, however, the answer would probably be negative, as ‘experimental’ [...] has often been defined as that which institutionally cannot be included in commercial cinema”.⁴⁴ They will unfortunately be neglected in this study, however, they should probably not be totally disregarded, with James’s “cross-pollination”-notion in mind.⁴⁵

This notion still includes some of the films that are scrutinised here. In fact, *JAG*, *Du gamla, du fria* and *Skärseld* are all involved in a commercial apparatus, as they are institutional and industry-surveyed cultural products. Both *Du gamla, du fria* and *Skärseld* are early productions signed by SFI, which in a way places them, historically and theoretically, beyond the avant-gardist autonomous function mode of creating art. In Peter Bürger’s terms, the experiment has been appropriated and disarmed by the art institution.⁴⁶ But as shown in the following, they can still be viewed as hybrid products, with highly intermedial and free artistic dispositions, as the artists themselves produce capital that explicitly operates in opposition to both institutional modes of production and public pleasure. They can presumptively be perceived, as suggested by Rees, as “a distinct form of cultural practice, with its own autonomy in relation to mainstream cinema”.⁴⁷ But they can also be seen as incorporated elements in the economy that dictates the logics of cultural goods, to speak with Pierre Bourdieu.⁴⁸ In this interval, the hermeneutics of aesthetic values meet the media-archaeological approach. Malte Hagener emphasises this notion as he, via Walter Benjamin’s text “The Author as Producer”, argues that production strategy, distribution, and socio-cultural construction of meaning can precede the aesthetical-critical tradition: “The avant-garde [...] is characterised by the way it positioned itself differently within social, economic

⁴³ See for example: Verrone, p. 11; Rees, p. 9; Tyler, p. 231-232.

⁴⁴ Andersson et al., *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theory of The Avant-Garde* (*Theorie der Avantgarde*, translation: Michael Shaw), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974, p. 53.

⁴⁷ A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. xi.

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (transl. Richard Nice), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

and cultural force fields”.⁴⁹ This accounts for Fahlström as well as e.g. for Kylberg and Meschke.

Hence, it becomes imperative to bear in mind the Swedish experimental feature’s discontinuous, and ephemeral status over time, to subsequently focus on the documents, practices and discourses that constitute their respective origins. In concurrence with the discourse analysis and media archaeology methodology, I therefore also conducted minor archival studies. In this case, the archives of the Swedish Film Institute functioned as an indispensable source, primarily as regards *Du gamla, Du fria*. I studied a range of differential materials: programming guides, shooting reports, diary notes (hand written), correspondence, budget calculations, liquidity plans, scripts, scenario proposals, press clippings and others. From the viewpoint and scope of the paper at hand, this material is immeasurable, but it is my hope and ambition to present a satisfactory probing of the sources, in a dialogue with already existing research.⁵⁰

Outline

I have divided the thesis into five overriding chapters, which do not follow a given chronology. The first, “1. Öyvind Fahlström and the Art of Media Reflection”, discusses and provides some entries into the filmic world of Fahlström and his connection to the experimental film culture in Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter explains Fahlström’s limited training in the short film format, as compared to Kylberg and Meschke, before his feature debut. It serves as an approaching framework, describing the activities of Fahlström’s multi-media enterprise, and the historiographical and contextual terms that surrounded his position within the Swedish field of art and experimental filmmaking, which eventually led the Swedish Film Institute to produce the highly venturesome *Du gamla, Du fria*-project.

The second chapter, “2. Public Authority and Commercial Production”, briefly explains the inauguration of the Swedish Film Institute in 1963, its cultural policies concerning the concept of “quality film”, and its contradictory relationship to experimental filmmaking. Here

⁴⁹ Hagener, *Moving Forward, Looking Back*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ The studied material is naturally enough “very Swedish”. Regarding Fahlström’s artistic oeuvre, his filmmaking constitutes the most provincial part of his artistry, and subsequently the least introduced area of study in an international context. By making this material available to a wider, international field of research, I hope that the understanding of Fahlström’s collected work, as well as of Swedish film culture, will expand and be further investigated. Beforehand, I would therefore like to include a disclaimer, concerning any linguistic confusion. All documents were translated from Swedish to English by the author, and was carefully treated with respect for original meaning and tone.

I discuss the influential role Harry Schein (managing director of the SFI) imposed on the industry at large, but also his subjective positioning towards “artistically valuable film”. The following section, “3. The Possibility of Art as Political Agitation – Regarding ‘519-19’”, is a direct extension of the second chapter, as it presents a case study on Öyvind Fahlström’s first and only feature film *Du gamla, Du fria*, which further expands on the experimental feature as institutional practice. Here I present readings and analyses of archive materials, and in extension how Fahlström’s artistry rather reluctantly adhered to the rules of commercial filmmaking.

In an attempt to comprehensively broaden the theoretical contexts of *Du gamla, Du fria*, the fourth chapter, “4. Experimental Features and Institutional Practice”, studies Peter Kylberg’s *JAG* and Michael Meschke’s *Skärseld*, in comparison to Fahlström. Here the production contexts, distributional strategies, critical reception, aesthetics and origins are scrutinised to further uncover the supposed reciprocity between established and experimental film production.

The last chapter is “5. Recapturing the Avant-Garde Feature”, which retrospectively introduces the features of Hagberg, Gyllenberg and Weiss. These productions are discussed as distinct forms of cultural practices, which in opposition to their successors create a more hermetic sphere of experimental modes, both in terms of production strategies and within the public discourse. The concluding chapter works as a conceptual dividing line, pre- contra post the inauguration of the Swedish Film Institute, and consequently tries to clarify and cross-illuminate the contradictory and often arbitrary dichotomy of the commercial and non-commercial.

Finally, a concluding epilogue reconnects the discursive networks of Swedish experimental features, where my findings are discussed in the interstices between the minor and the major, between experimental film cultures as distinct forms of cultural practice and sporadic cross-pollinations within Swedish institutional film practice.

1. Öyvind Fahlström and the Art of Media Reflection

Still a sort of enigma within Swedish cinema history, the interdisciplinary artist Öyvind Fahlström (1928-1976) and the questions surrounding his collected artistic production tend to be highly complex. The width of Fahlström’s aesthetic universe extended to a constantly expanding and corresponding set of mixed artistic utensils: poetry, theatre, performance, happenings, radio plays, criticism, essays, visual arts and film, which were often interleaved

with large complexes of global politics. These considerations are mirrored in the fairly modest, but yet interdisciplinary and widespread research that has been conducted through the years, although the gaps become apparent in the domain of Swedish film studies.⁵¹

As a poetic innovator and introducer of an international avant-garde in Sweden, Fahlström presented his manifest for concrete poetry “Hätila ragulpr på fåtskliaben (“HIPY PAPY BTHUTHDTH THUTHDA BTHUTHDY”)”, in 1953.⁵² The fundamental command according to his treaty urged the poet to: “KNEAD the linguistic matter: That is, what can justify a denotation as concrete. Not just only kneading the whole of the structures: rather to start with the smallest elements, the letters, the words [- - -] Constantly a matter of reshaping the material, and not to be reshaped by it yourself”.⁵³ With a retrospective gaze, when fixed on his multi-artistic oeuvre, this idea followed Fahlström throughout his career and can be sensed in many of the works, e.g. in his variable paintings that invited the viewer to “manipulate the world” of the visual elements by introducing movable motifs within the pictorial frame.⁵⁴ When applied to the short filmography he completed during his lifetime, the

⁵¹ In my one-year master’s thesis I presented a first coherent research entry focusing on Fahlström’s films, primarily in a Swedish film-historiographical context, but also discussed their international contact areas. The study portrays Fahlström’s endeavours and aesthetical modes in filmmaking and mobilizes a comparative method, along with a historiographic-discursive and formalistic perspective, where the films are consequently contextualized in consonance with his other intermedial artistic production. See: Oskar Nilsson, “KRAMA Filmmaterial – En studie i Öyvind Fahlströms filmer”, One-Year Master’s Thesis, Film- and Media History, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, 2016-06-01. Despite the underprivileged and limited contributions within the film studies field, the scholarly flora regarding Fahlström has come to a gratifying expansion in both Swedish and international research. In the field of comparative literature Jesper Olsson’s dissertation *Alfabetets användning – konkret poesi och poetisk artefaktion i svenskt 1960-tal* (2005) is perhaps the most comprehensive and influential example, along with the international contribution of Antonio Sergio Bessa’s monography *Öyvind Fahlström – The Art of Writing* (2008). One should also mention Teddy Hultberg’s interdisciplinary and well researched *Öyvind Fahlström i etern – Manipulera världen/Öyvind Fahlström on the Air – Manipulating the World* (1999), along with the international exhibition catalogue of *Öyvind Fahlström. Another Space for Painting* (2001), which concentrates on Fahlström’s visual art as well as on his writings. Lastly, I want to give prominence to Moderna Museet in Stockholm, which in the period 2014-2017 devoted a special focus to Fahlström, presenting exhibitions and case studies concerning his kaleidoscopic production.

⁵² With the manifesto for concrete poetry, Fahlström establishes himself in dialogue with the avant-garde movements of the early 1900s, both explicitly, as Fahlström directly cites Marinetti’s treaty *Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista* (1912), and implicitly as he generates apparent quasi-poetic dimensions within the structure of his own manifesto – the words must be embodied in the realms of reality (practised) – which before him was exemplified by the Surrealists, as well as the Dada and Futurist movements. In my bachelor’s thesis in comparative literature I conducted a comparative study concerning Fahlström’s poetological pretences and poetic practices in the light of the contemporary French-Romanian poet Isidore Isou and the post-war Lettrist movement. In the study I show that Fahlström shares, rather directly, some of the poetic virtues practised by the Lettrists. See: Oskar Nilsson, “Solitära manifest – En jämförelse avseende poetologiska anspråk och poetiska praktiker hos Öyvind Fahlström och Isidore Isou”, Bachelor’s Thesis, Comparative Literature, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, 2015-06-04.

⁵³ Öyvind Fahlström, “Hätila ragulpr på fåtskliaben – Manifest för konkret poesi (1953)”, in *Bord – Dikter 1952-1955*, Bonniers Förlag; Stockholm 1966 (pp. 57-61), p. 60 (my translation). The text published first in 1954, by the stencilled journal *Odyssé*. The title is a direct quotation from the Swedish translation of *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) by A.A. Milnes.

⁵⁴ See further: Öyvind Fahlström, “Manipulera världen (1962)”, in *Om livskonst o.a.*, Albert Bonniers Förlag; Stockholm 1970.

“kneading”, the investigation of aesthetical boundaries, and constant experimentation is also present.

Fahlström’s art has been recognised internationally and through American acquaintances that he nurtured during the 1960s; he is one of Sweden’s most prolific artistic exports. However, Fahlström is still somewhat poorly introduced when transposed to a Swedish research context, and even more so in the domain of film studies. The Swedish Fahlström expert Teddy Hultberg emphasises in his bilingual monograph on Fahlström’s sound poems *Öyvind Fahlström i etern - Manipulera världen/Öyvind Fahlström on the Air – Manipulating the World* how Fahlström: “offers an early example of a genuinely media-related and media-reflective type of art”.⁵⁵ This notion relates to Fahlström’s work with text-sound compositions, visual art and poetry, and is certainly palpable within his filmic world. Yet, it is peculiar to see how his work with moving images creates an anomaly within the artistic flora he produced. His filmography is short, tentative, and amalgamated, and can perhaps even be perceived as untaught. Despite of this limited training ground, he went from creating a short absurdist documentary fragment, an experimental and complex short film, two one-hour long documentaries commissioned by Sveriges Radio – Sweden’s public television broadcaster – to finally be the first filmmaker to be fully granted wherewithal from the Swedish Film Institute in the making of a production-wise catastrophic, and critically depreciated avant-garde feature film.

1.1 E.A.T. and the Geography of Art in Motion

As an autodidact, Öyvind Fahlström’s creative path went from the concrete poetry of his 1952 manifest to the “signifigurative” sign paintings that incarnated his visual art. It was not until the latter half of the 1960s that he started dabbling with film as a complementary and incorporated instrument in his intermedial taxonomy of creation. The art of the 1960s generally necessitated the bridging of disciplines and mixing of aesthetic methods and tools, particularly when speaking with Swedish historiography, where Fahlström perhaps stands out as the most crystallised example. “Everything was set into motion”, Swedish musician and art critic Leif Nylén put it, in an attempt to pin down and recapture a slogan on behalf of the era.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Teddy Hultberg, *Öyvind Fahlström i etern – Manipulera världen/Öyvind Fahlström on the Air – Manipulating the World*, Stockholm: Sveriges Radios Förlag/Fylkingen, 1999, p. 8.

⁵⁶ Leif Nylén, *Den öppna konsten – Happenings, instrumental teater, konkret poesi och andra gränsöverskridningar i det svenska 60-talet*, Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening (publ. No. 107), 1998, p. 11 (my translation).

Fahlström's films offer a tentative and explorative mode both in attention to aesthetic and thematic parameters, often weaving together colliding artistic methods. His first film, the black and white *Mao-Hope March* (16mm, 4:30 min, 1966), was a vital part of the large-scale performance project *Kisses Sweeter Than Wine*, which in extension was a contribution to the legendary mixed-media theatre festival *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York in 1966.⁵⁷ When discussing Fahlström and film, *Mao-Hope March*, and especially *Kisses Sweeter than Wine* are important keys, as they contextually shed light on the historic-discursive networks that led provincial Sweden into a more international cycle of artistic dialogue.

The primus motor for *9 Evenings* and for the international initiative E.A.T. (Experiments in Arts and Technology) was the Swedish engineer Billy Klüver. The organisation of E.A.T. was an ambitious venture and formulated a symbiotic aim, where the merging of disciplines, art and science, and artists and engineers working together with equalised roles and status intended to create a synergetic and revolutionised space for creation: "We are not interested in adding art and technology, but in the third 'something' that arises when the artist and engineer meet [- - -] The goal of E.A.T. is to bring together two diverse groups. We do not regard this as a cultural action, but as a revolutionary one. We are not interested in a synthesis between art and science, but in what a combination of two separate areas could lead to".⁵⁸ E.A.T. became an international venture – local sections were formed in the US, Canada, Europe and South America – and some revitalised Dadaistic reverberations could certainly be heard.⁵⁹

Prior to E.A.T., Klüver and Fahlström first met at the Student Film Club of Stockholm University, in which Klüver served as a member of the board between 1947-1951, and as its chairman between 1949-1950.⁶⁰ The Film Club in Stockholm retrospectively constitutes a

⁵⁷ The festival laid the foundation for the initiative E.A.T. (Experiments in Arts and Technology), primarily organised by Swedish engineer Billy Klüver. For a more extensive overview of the festival and E.A.T., see: Billy Klüver, *Teknologi för livet. Om Experiments in Art and Technology*, transl. Barbro Schultz Lundenstam, Schultz Förlag AB: Stockholm 2004.

⁵⁸ Billy Klüver, "E.A.T. – Experiments in Art and Technology" (first published in *Paletten*, no. 4, 1967), in *Teknologi för livet. Om Experiments in Art and Technology*, Stockholm: Schultz Förlag AB, 2004, p. 84-86 (my translation).

⁵⁹ e.g. Olle Granath, "DADA i USA" (first published in *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 December 1970), also in *Teknologi för livet*, p. 117.

⁶⁰ Billy Klüver, "Gå på bio", in *Teknologi för livet*, 2004, p. 12-14. This personal account was composed by Klüver on behalf of Jonas Mekas prior to a screening of Swedish experimental film at The Anthology Film Archives in New York (*Going to the Movies, Swedish Avant Garde Film, 1924-1990*, New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1991). The text centres on Klüver's early attraction to the film medium (Klüver had in fact made a short animated film with the title *Motions of Electrons in Electric and Magnetic Fields* as his master's thesis at KTH in 1951) and recollects his memories of Fahlström's partaking in the student film club, often admitting to various film script competitions. A further remark notes that Klüver was in fact the only member that came from KTH (Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan, "The Royal Institute of Technology"). See also: Billy Klüver, "Öyvind Fahlström", in *Teknologi för livet*, 2004, p. 34.

space within Swedish historiography that gathered intellectuals in the 1940s-and 1950s with the primary interest of discussing the aesthetic and social impacts of film.⁶¹ Here they also met Pontus Hultén.

The collaborative acquaintance was expanded and manifested further some years later, as the pioneering director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Hultén, in the capacity of commissioner for the Swedish section at the Biennale in São Paulo – where Fahlström, in his birth-city of São Paulo, won a honorary award for his large-scale painting *Ade Ledic Nander II* – came to New York in the autumn of 1959.⁶² At this time Hultén was working on the central exhibition *Rörelse i konsten* (“Motion in Art”), in relation to the utterings of the 1960s avant-garde and the open notion of multi-media art.⁶³ Principally an important exhibition, *Rörelse i konsten* generated the signs of the 1960s avant-garde artistic modus: the mixed media, new techniques, the differentiation of materials, and the corporal interaction with technology and audience. It historically served as a metonymic coda of the “open” art-term of the 1960s, where the “movement” in art, the medium, also became the message, to speak with Marshall McLuhan.⁶⁴ Hultén’s new American contacts consequently became a seed for the Swedish-American artistic exchange during this time. With the help of Klüver, Hultén managed to get Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Richard Stankiewicz to contribute with one work apiece, which were incorporated in the *Rörelse*-exhibition, along with a consultation provided by Alan Kaprow who supported Hultén in the construction of a happening-room.⁶⁵

The echoes of their time at the Student Film Club in Stockholm came to influence the consistent collaboration between Hultén and Klüver during the early 60s. To quote Hultén, the medium of film was central to the Swedish-American exchange:

⁶¹ See: Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 51-57.

⁶² Pontus Hultén, “The New York Connection” (previously published in *Moderna Museet Stockholm 1958-1983*, ed. Monica Nieckels & Olle Granath, Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1983, p. 54-57), in *Teknologi för livet*, 2004, p. 144.

⁶³ *Rörelse i konsten*, premiered at Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam 1961, and was later shown at Moderna Museet in Stockholm and Louisiana, Denmark. The exhibition housed a range of 20th century modern artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely, P.O. Ultvedt, Viking Eggeling, Marcel Duchamp, to name a few. On behalf of Moderna Museet it was primarily important to serve as a locus point for the museum’s recognition and attention in an international art world. Leif Nylén, *Den öppna konsten – Happenings, instrumental teater, konkret poesi och andra gränsöverskridningar i det svenska 60-talet*, Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening (publ. No. 107), 1998. Cecilia Widenheim, “Efterkrigstid – framtidstro, tvivel och aktionism”, in *Moderna Museet – Boken* (ed. Cecilia Widenheim, Magnus af Petersens, Teresa Harth), Stockholm: Stockholm Design Lab, 2004. Andreas Gedin, *Pontus Hultén, Hon & Moderna*, Stockholm: Bokförlaget Lagenskiöld, 2016. See also: Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm, Astrid Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 101-102.

⁶⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, London/New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

⁶⁵ Hultén, “The New York Connection”, in *Teknologi för livet*, p. 144.

Billy and I kept an on-going discussion concerning the necessity of collaboration between his domain, technology, and my domain, which was art. We came to the conclusion that film was the most interesting medium in this context, and therefore decided to try and show the largest possible number of important films at the museum in Stockholm, where Billy would serve as an intermediary and interface, as he already had done when working in Paris. This consequently led to a long series of exhibitions of *New American Cinema*.⁶⁶

Soon after the *Rörelse*-venture, Hultén launched other border-crossing art shows via Klüver's intermediary position: *4 amerikanare* (1962, "4 Americans") concentrated on Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Stankiewicz, but was accompanied by film screenings, showing among others Jonas Mekas, Ron Rice, Robert Breer, Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol, and Stan Brakhage. *Pop-Konst, 106 former av kärlek och förtvivlan* (1964, "Pop-Art, 106 forms of love and despair") followed, illuminating artists such as Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and Lichtenstein. In the multi-media show *5 New York-kvällar* (1964, "5 New York-Evenings"), where Merce Cunningham danced to the music of John Cage, Rauchenberg reprised his attendance, contributing with costume and décor for Cunningham, along with the ostentatious performance *Shot Put*, as Fahlström performed his piece *Ur 'Mellanöl'*.⁶⁷ The activities at Moderna Museet established a prolific stature, embodying typical artistic expressions of the vanguard experimental culture. Moreover, in terms of experimental film culture one could notice a discursive shift, as pointed out by Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding: "Art was now suddenly experimental as such, and every film that was projected as part of events was thus simply art".⁶⁸

Thus, the surroundings of Fahlström's short film *Mao-Hope March* became more substantial, perhaps even more important, yet it is vital to track his view on film as an element among other elements, a part that feeds the whole. In this context, the borderless multi-media milieu in the US and in Sweden, his informal and unspoiled schooling of filmmaking was formed. The activities carried out at Moderna Museet, E.A.T. and *9 Evenings* serve as prolific historic examples to account for Klüver and Fahlström, along with another Swedish-American expat, Barbro Östlihn (married to Öyvind Fahlström 1960-1975).⁶⁹ These artistic exchanges

⁶⁶ Ibid (my translation).

⁶⁷ See: Nylén, p. 80-82; Hultén, "The New York Collection", p. 145.

⁶⁸ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 102.

⁶⁹ In her dissertation on Barbro Östlihn, art scholar Annika Öhrner researched Östlihn's role in the artistic room of the American neo-avant-garde. Östlihn's impact on both the art scene and on Fahlström's production is often marginalised in most Fahlström-literature, which Öhrner's monograph meritoriously complements. Annika

also tangent Fahlström's initial work with film, which analogously is to be found within these intercultural discursive and practical networks that connected the Swedish avant-garde culture to the American, thus expanding its provincial isolation to a tangible international integration.

1.2 Underground within Institution – Öyvind Fahlström and filmmaking

Two years after *9 Evenings*, Fahlström was to enter unfamiliar territory on two levels: firstly, in the making of an aesthetically methodologically sealed art product, a movie; secondly, art-making while dependent upon financial patronage, thus transposing his vanguardian counter-cultural characteristics to a world with more tangible rules. The most experimental and complex film Fahlström presented was the short film *U-BARN* (35mm, colour, 25min, 1968), which in comparison to *Mao-Hope March* could be viewed as his first film, since the latter work was not intended as an autonomous filmic product.

U-BARN, produced by the renowned documentarian Stefan Jarl (*Dom kallar oss mods*, 1968), allowed Fahlström to establish a contact with the Swedish Film Institute, which at the time did not fully operate as a production company. Jarl has since the production commented on Fahlström's entry into the field of cinema: "His references didn't come exclusively from the world of cinema, but rather from his artistic practice, and he understood that it was possible to use the medium of film to do things that no one had seen before. The questions he had were quite concrete: 'How do you shoot in slow motion?' or 'I want to film the clouds and they are supposed to move quickly across the sky – how do I do that?'" also stating that Fahlström did not "appear to be a cineaste" and that "He was [...] anti-authoritarian in relation to the medium itself".⁷⁰ However, the SFI granted Fahlström means (a quality bonus) to implement his most laborious and original film, as *U-BARN* explores a differentiated spectra of consciousness levels and reoccurring elements that Fahlström consequently meditated on throughout his art: large-scale political systems, social structures and injustice, documentaries, commercials, LSD, street theatre, and happenings. Many elements were allowed technical expansions within the filmic universe of *U-BARN*: nature scenes, time-lapses, kaleidoscopic overlays, image-in-image framing, and the use of extra-diegetic and intra-diegetic sound.⁷¹

Öhrner, *Barbro Östlihn & New York – Konstens rum och möjligheter*, Gothenburg/Stockholm: Makadam Förlag, 2010.

⁷⁰ Stefan Jarl, "U-BARN REVISITED – a meeting with Stefan Jarl", interviewed by Krister Collin, *U-BARN* (Booklet A), Stockholm: OEI Editör & Amundön, 2012, p. 6.

⁷¹ For a more cohesive exposé of *U-BARN*, see: Oskar Nilsson, "KRAMA Filmmateria – En studie i Öyvind Fahlströms filmer", 2016, p. 25. See also: Jonas (J) Magnusson and Jesper Olsson, "Film Film Fahlström Film

U-BARN should serve as a key for the understanding of Fahlström's filmic universe, not only as his most consummate film, but also in regard to themes, motifs and visual composition. With the making of *U-BARN*, we can also sense the radicalisation of Fahlström's art within the Swedish context. His years in New York from his vantage point in East Village exposed him to the socio-political fluctuations that followed the globally marketed American display of power at the time, drawing him to an aesthetic of provocation and counter-cultural manifestations – eager to bridge the fissure between art and life. In Leif Nylén's testimonial book, the mental legacies bestowed upon Fahlström are elaborated upon: "With his intense interest, not only in aesthetical experiments, but also in social, in 'the art of life' and utopias, Öyvind Fahlström naturally was attracted to the underground culture, the hippie-movement, the student revolution".⁷² The charter of ideas Fahlström exhibits in his filmmaking within the Swedish institutions puts him in an unusual position within the field. As a participant in artistic institutional exertions – Moderna Museet, The Swedish Film Institute, Swedish Television, etc. – Fahlström rather inexorably, particularly with the filmic work, translates the rhetorics of an American underground syllabus to a Swedish discursive phraseology.

In the case of *U-BARN*, the LSD-element is the most predominant and contemporary. Tentatively, it places Fahlström alongside a discourse that, within the field of experimental film culture, could be considered as underground cinema. Perhaps not in a traditionally conceptual manner, as he earned wherewithal from the industry, but when examining the subject matter in Fahlström's surrounding materials, the connection to the underground implicitly emerges. Within the context of the psychedelic underground culture of the late 60s, Fahlström uniquely separates himself from any other avant-garde filmmaker in Swedish experimental film culture, also as he infused the use of hallucinogens, in both an informative and an experiential manner, in a state-funded art product. The audiotope of *U-BARN* initially displays an extra-diegetic male voice, superimposed on images that Fahlström borrowed from an old American commercial for Lustre-Cream Shampoo, which describes the properties of LSD with a clinical terminology. When the film allocates to recordings of classrooms and institutions of the disabled, the voice transforms. It is now Fahlström himself, with a female partner, subjectively describing the consciousness-expanding experiences that potentially follow an administration of the drug: "Everything billows, time billows.... Everything... It is

(essay by Magnusson and Olsson", in *U-BARN* (DVD + 3 Booklets; booklet B), OEI Editör: Amundön, Stockholm, 2012.

⁷² Leif Nylén, *Den öppna konsten*, p. 160 (my translation).

like you can see that it billows, and so billows like every... every conception, everything [Fahlström]”.⁷³ Together with aesthetic-formalistic suggestions, such as time-lapse and kaleidoscopic image overlays, and documentary recordings of the welfare state’s therapeutic and educational milieus, *U-BARN* navigates in a narratologically associative and consciousness-expansive visual and sonorous charter.

Written in 1969, Parker Tyler’s classic survey *Underground Film: A Critical History*, touches upon the discourse on psychedelic cinema and the use of psychedelic anamorphosis in underground filmmaking. Tyler, however, is critical of what he calls “the Drug Attitude” when talking about the underground, i.e. the notion of using hallucinogens as an equaliser, an equivalent of perception, to evoke a surrealistic imagery:

The trouble with the Underground evolution of avant-garde film and its onetime radical transformation of reality is that current filmmakers regard such “magic” as easier than it is, as basically “inexpensive” (it isn’t), as only a matter of instant psychedelism... a lump of doctored sugar in your coffee and you virtually have a film, or if not, you have a trip, which to some is just as good as a film. This insidious attitude – the Drug Attitude, as I call it – does not depend upon actual narcotics but is a psychological idea with a moral force. I believe it a great continuing error and trust that somehow the Underground will work out of it by growing up and realizing the responsibilities of art. The artistic history of the avant-garde has very real models to offer the Underground filmmaker, if he will only understand both their do’s and their don’t’s. As it is, the New American Cinema notwithstanding, he has to overcome much infantile self-indulgence and fashionable camp hauteur. A thing may well be groovy and yet far from great.⁷⁴

The element of psychedelic anamorphosis in *U-BARN* induces conceptual and theoretical cachets within the medial rhetoric of Fahlström, rather than being technically implemented. It allows us to study and discuss Fahlström within the context of psychedelic cinema and counter-cultural underground film. In the context of “The Drug Attitude” Tyler continues to discuss filmmakers such as Kenneth Anger and Andy Warhol.⁷⁵ Although the historic-referential connection between Fahlström and Warhol is rarely touched upon in contemporary research, the aesthetics mobilised in *Chelsea Girls* (1966), is sensed in Fahlström’s filmography. The observational, often investigative, documentary style is a thread in all of his

⁷³ Excerpt from transcript of the audio in *U-BARN*. See also: Magnusson and Olsson, *U-BARN*, 2012, Booklet R, p. 5 (my translation).

⁷⁴ Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969, 1972, 1995 (1995 edition), p. 131.

⁷⁵ Ibid, s. 84-86.

filmic works. In addition, Fahlström also wrote a short text about Warhol and his filmic art in 1968, the year when Fahlström's whole filmic body of work found its conception, where he highlights the mode of this particular underground filmmaker: "an extreme cinema-vérité, but now applied on action, fiction. Cinéma-vérité, or life-film – large unbroken pieces of life, from his immediate environment [...] What we mean with cinema-vérité is based on the lightness and mobility of the camera and sound equipment".⁷⁶ Fahlström's analysis is on the whole well informed and proficient, and perhaps one can find a connection to his own elaborations with film here, primarily in *Du gamla, Du fria*, in which the cinema vérité-framework, the applications of action and fiction, is prominent. Rather than aligning himself along a spectrum, between liberated avant-garde on the one hand, and institutional and industry-funded art on the other, Fahlström bends the line, thereby making a cross-pollinating circle by connecting the two with each other. Fahlström's filmic idiolect consistently aims to create a levelled space, in which two artistic modes collide: "underground within institution".

1.3 Cultural sabotage and Middle Phases

In the following films, the documentary siblings *East Village* (black and white, 16mm, 39 min, 1968) and *Revolution Now* (black and white, 16mm, 59 min, 1968), Fahlström continues to elaborate on his visions – the search for a merging of art and life – by generating a cinema vérité-praxis, relying on a more passive and recording aesthetic. The two films were financed by Sveriges Radio and written and directed by Fahlström, whose object was to map the anti-war movement, along with the artistic milieu of New York at the time, through interviews and documentary portraits of his art colleagues and in-depth recordings of street theatre-companies, happenings, various demonstrations and LGBT culture.⁷⁷

As further exemplifications of Fahlström's operation, infusing an institutional framework with countercultural actions, *East Village* and *Revolution Now*, as they were funded by the state, tend to be agitating and even didactical when presenting the subject matter. In *Revolution Now* Fahlström uses recorded material of a TV-show presented by Allan Burke, who in Fahlström's words is a "specialist in sensational interviews and insulting questions". Fahlström was himself a participant in a political coup against Burke with fashion designer

⁷⁶ Öyvind Fahlström, "Warhol", in *Om livskonst o.a.*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1970, p. 103-101 (my translation).

⁷⁷ In *East Village* Fahlström investigates the work-process of his contemporaries John Giorno, Alex Hay, Robert Rauschenberg, and Steve Seaberg among others. *Revolution Now* is more focused on the cultural manifestations of the anti-war movement and its many underground expressions. Oskar Nilsson, "KRAMA Filmmateria", pp. 30-40.

and theatre critic Saul Gottlieb, where a type of artistic-revolutionary action is realised that Fahlström calls “Cultural sabotage”. The atmosphere in the studio is soon in a riot-like pandemonium as Gottlieb et al. hijack Burke’s usual content. Fahlström has later in his notes commented on this exercise in political art, explicitly reaching out to his Swedish audience: “the executives were so surprised that a large part of the invasion was broadcast! Swedish observers may view this as fun and games. In reality, it requires courage to participate in actions that result in police brutality and prison sentences. This kind of attack is not so much a demonstration – for or against something – as sabotage, deliberately destructive action”.⁷⁸ Fahlström’s combinations, as well as the dissolving of documentary, action, happening, art and demonstration became particularly fruitful, as the medium of television enabled his main aim: infusing an artistic and media-related awareness and outreach to a Swedish audience.⁷⁹ Both *East Village* and *Revolution Now* are testimonies to these complexes. Also serving as pilot studies to the questions Fahlström raises with *Du gamla, Du fria*, they point us towards his utopia where the artist makes art, but simultaneously occupies the position as opinion-former.

The aesthetic enunciations that gradually make themselves known in Fahlström’s filmic theory retrospectively figure as a thread through the filmography. They represent a filmic method that reduces the medium as a sort of amalgamate “middle-stage” or “middle-phase”, a stage that on the one hand refers to “agitation” – the political phase –, and on the other “making art” – the stylised phase, i.e. the play between the active, and the passive. They are motions that refer to the role of the artist and his connection, or dialogue, with the world; a notion that according to Fahlström was prominent and central, but also commutable in regards of medium specificity:

⁷⁸ Öyvind Fahlström, “Notes on Street Theatre and Demonstrations”, in *Öyvind Fahlström. Another Space for Painting*, Exhibition Catalogue, Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Actar, 2001, p. 251.

⁷⁹ Fahlström was very interested in mass media phenomena, both as artistic expression but also in wider contexts as he participated in Swedish TV-productions broadcasted by SVT that intended to capture the art of the 60s and 70s. In the TV-magazine *Studio 66* from 1966, Fahlström is filmed in his studio in New York. The viewers were presented a glimpse of the artist’s working milieu, as Fahlström consistently planned his work with the TV on. In the excerpt he shows a homemade remote-control, a long stick that allowed him to change the channel from his working station. Annika Öhrner writes: “The presence of the TV was not included in a prevalent romantic idea of the artist’s studio [...] Here the working mode of the new avant-garde was constructed (Öhrner, p. 94, 99, my translation). From a media-historic perspective this also points towards a notion of how art was mediated via the television during the 1960s. David Rynell Åhlen, in his dissertation *Samtida konst på bästa sändningstid. Konst i svensk television 1956-1969* (Lund: Mediehistoriskt Arkiv no. 31, 2016), suggests that the role of new media and technologies came to be central in the dissemination of art, as the new artist generation participated in numerous television programmes. This is vital in describing the story of Fahlström’s art, as well as in the media-historical discourse that surrounds him. See also: Nilsson, “KRAMA filmmateria”, p. 31.

You can reach out through the medium of film, but it is simultaneously a sort of theatrical stylisation that still makes it a middle-stage. Then you can further approach the act if you make documentaries or if you for example perform in front of enrolment agencies, film it and show it as agitator art [...] There are many levels one can use. I've got a feeling that visual art is by many means the least effective [- - -] I am interested in problems that concern what you can make of visual arts, but if I find myself in a situation where I can work with TV, theatre or film, I might as well do that.⁸⁰

It is perhaps this notion, in this middle-stage of artistic and living events, in which Fahlström's specificity emerges in relation to a multi-medial art concept – not seeing the limits of the medium, but its capacity to build worlds in transformation and in constant fluidity. Paradoxically enough, it was precisely these ideas that made his coming feature-length avant-garde project one of Swedish cinema's most anticipated as well as turbulent, chaotic and peculiar endeavours, at least when studying its counter-cultural modus, production conditions, and reception context.

2. Public Authority and Commercial Production

Fahlström's collected film production displays a relatively limited scope, and it is rather conspicuous that the feature project *Du gamla, Du fria* was picked up by the Swedish Film Institute. A key role, as often when discussing the historiography of Swedish film policies, was played by Harry Schein (1924-2006). As initiator of "den svenska Filmreformen (the Swedish Film Reform, 1963)", and founder of the SFI, Schein occupies the most significant and influential position within Swedish cinema history when discussing film both as a carrier of cultural meaning and a coherent and legitimate socio-political art form. The reformist incentives launched by Schein are difficult to condense; yet they are essential when discussing the condition of modern Swedish film, as well as the stories of institutionally funded experimental features, where terms such as "valuable art", "quality", "free Swedish film" and "progression" are actualised.

Despite the obvious problems with the concept of quality film, the term became common within Swedish historiography post-1960. Not known for its public and commercially valid conquests, the filmic avant-garde, perhaps in a fortunate and coincidental manner,

⁸⁰ Öyvind Fahlström, "Robert Kennedy (lotta) och Stokely Carmichael (kuk) seglar ikapp – en intervju med Öyvind Fahlström", Interview by Mats G Bengtsson and Leif Nylén with Öyvind Fahlström, *Paletten*, nr 3, 1968 (my translation).

sporadically managed to align itself along the requirements of Harry Schein and the Film Institute. When touching upon *Du gamla, Du fria* in *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding rightly point out that the SFI “had no tradition of regular funding for experimental filmmaking. Some experimental works had received funding or been awarded grants, but there was no explicit policy towards avant-garde attempts, hence the support had turned out to be quite arbitrary”.⁸¹ Correlating this notion, film- and media history scholar Per Vesterlund commented in a recent publication, a first cohesive biography of Harry Schein, on this suggested “arbitrariness” of Schein’s legacy: “Many got to make films who would otherwise not have. Many did not make films who otherwise would have”.⁸²

2.1 Harry Schein, the SFI, and the Creation of a Quality Field

Before embarking on his career within cultural policies, the Austrian refugee and chemical engineer Harry Schein built an ample body of film-critical work. In the above-mentioned biography, Vesterlund depicts Schein’s critical virtues. As a young student of film, Schein seems to promote the aesthetic freedom that is found in moving images rather than a condensed formalistic programme: “Within film, or within all of the arts, there are no general rules. That was Schein’s conclusion. Not an unimportant standpoint from a debater who soon was to launch quality as a film-political programme”.⁸³

Schein’s definition of “quality film” was part of the Film Agreement in March 1963, a constantly contested and rather provincial political term from a Swedish point of view.⁸⁴ The concept is intricate and, as many Swedish scholars have shown, inherently elusive. In the anthology *Citizen Schein*, Swedish film scholar Pelle Snickars grapples with the notion, proposing the counter question “What is quality?” which axiomatically debouches in the answer: “it is certainly not easy to pin down the quality concept. In many ways it is as evasive as it is subjective. But for Schein, quality, as said, was often uncomplicated”.⁸⁵ Speaking on behalf of the Film Institute, Schein retrospectively elaborated further on the term and its operational legitimacy in one of his many auto-biographies, *I själva verket*:

⁸¹ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 134.

⁸² Per Vesterlund, *Schein – En biografi*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2018, p. 14 (my translation).

⁸³ Ibid, p. 97 (my translation).

⁸⁴ Some of the proposals for the agreement in 1963 were presented by Schein in his outlook *Har vi råd med kultur?: Kulturpolitiska skisser*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1962.

⁸⁵ Pelle Snickars, “Vad är kvalitet?”, in *Citizen Schein* (Second edition, ed. Lars Ilshammar, Pelle Snickars & Per Vesterlund), Stockholm: Kungliga Biblioteket/Mediehistoriskt Arkiv no. 14, 2010, p. 162-164 (my translation).

Obviously, one does not experiment with objective quality criteria. We do not even glance at the future, and are aware that films of today, which are assessed as valuable, may not be maintaining their standards in a couple of years from now already. If we (society) want to stimulate the production of better films, the definition of quality must be that which we (society), right now regard as better films. The quality concept is not more complicated than that.⁸⁶

“Quality film” as a summary term for what Schein calls “better films” certainly houses some elitist notions, and after the launching of its principals it has consequently been met with critical and intellectual resistance. By appointing a jury of experts, Schein had created an alternative system, a “representative democracy”, driven by conventional commercial film distribution: “As in other areas of society, you then put your trust in specialists”.⁸⁷ The jury consisted of independent film experts, which in turn represented different areas of the film industry. Many were critics. As for the dubiously multi-faceted quality concept and evasive nature of the dichotomy subjectivity/objectivity in valuing art, Schein and the Institute requested subtle and balanced readings: “Not the opposite of subjectivity, namely objectivity. Rather an attempt of being as impartial as possible, to be open to all kinds of quality, and thereby contributing to a free progress of the Swedish film art”.⁸⁸ Schein’s purpose with the founding of an Institute devoted solely to the quality and progression of Swedish film was to authenticate the specificity of the art form, thus creating a cultural field that autonomously housed its own evaluation system, while simultaneously claiming its aesthetic and monetary individuality from the growing plague of national television habits.⁸⁹

In “Den svenska konstfilmsinstitutionen (The Swedish Art Film Institution)”, a fundamental article within the context of Swedish film scholarship, Lars Gustaf Andersson discusses the systematic reproduction of meaning that leads to the creation of an institution. In opposition to the narratives employed by Hollywood, the institution of art cinema, according to Andersson, mobilises and reproduces rules and values that accentuate support of domestic film production, films with emphasised artistic claims, and with a given prominence to the individual filmmaker.⁹⁰ Andersson argues that with the emergence of Ingmar Bergman as a

⁸⁶ Harry Schein, *I själva verket*, Stockholm: Nordstedts Förlag, 1970, p. 128 (my translation).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Schein, *I själva verket*, p. 129 (my translation).

⁸⁹ Snickars, p. 171.

⁹⁰ Lars Gustaf Andersson, “Den svenska konstfilmsinstitutionen”, *Filmhäftet*, no. 1-2, 1995, p. 6. Andersson argues via, and paraphrases an article produced by Stephen Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution”, first published in *Screen*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, in 1981. The thesis of Andersson’s paper is further substantiated by theories proposed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Louis Althusser, allowing Andersson to employ terms

counterweight to the entertainment- and popular film, a fission within the prevailing traditional field could be sensed, resulting in the “consolidation” of the art film institution: “a national film culture with a set-up of aesthetic values that offer resistance to the mass culture, primarily the American cinema”.⁹¹ The consolidation of the domestic Swedish art cinema institution, however, received its official standards along with the Swedish “film agreement”, in 1963 “when the domestic film culture received unprecedented economical and ideological support. Through an ingenious system of fees and funds, an economic policy of support could be established where ‘valuable film’, was rewarded at the expense of commercially profitable cinema – often an American brand”.⁹² Thus, with the establishment of a national Swedish Film Institute, the art of cinema became legitimised as an independently contested and domestically driven cultural field.

The film medium, historically characterised as an entertainment industry rather than an autonomous art form, underwent a public discursive shift through the strivings of Harry Schein and the Film Institute. The fees that were picked up via the movie theatres’ merits were set aside to stimulate a range of non-commercial filmic endeavours, such as a film school, various research departments, museums, archives, and theatres. And as for the questions of production, Harry Schein himself pointed out: “The support for the production of Swedish film was, aside from the jury meeting one day a year, a purely fiscal endeavour”, and that his position and task within the field was to “build a cultural institution, not an apparatus of production”.⁹³ The goal was, accordingly, to make the culture of Swedish film autonomous, to create a field that ruled over its own inner hierarchic logics and promoted the values of the filmic art in relation to other already consecrated art fields, a goal that in hindsight seems to be met. In their study of Filmverkstan (“The Film Workshop”), *Hellre fri än filmare*, Lars Gustaf Andersson and John Sundholm stated via the theory presented by Pierre Bourdieu on the construction of cultural fields that: “Hence, it is not really possible to

such as “hegemony” and “cultural field” as operative terms and definitions in the reading of Swedish cultural institutions.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 11 (my translation).

⁹² Andersson, “Den svenska konstfilmsinstitutionen”, p. 11 (my translation). Bringing to mind its rather complex structure, a basic premise of the reform was the elimination of the 25% movie theatre entertainment tax, which in turn was replaced by a 10% fee, based on ticketing, that was picked up by the Film Institute. The new system promoted the situation for the theatres, stimulating the frequencies of movie-going, simultaneously allowing the Film Institute to directly foster and strengthen the domestic production of the above-mentioned, valuable “quality film”. See: Leif Furhammar, *Filmen i Sverige*, 1991; Stockholm: Dialogos, 2003, p. 282-283.

⁹³ Harry Schein, *Schein*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag AB, 1980, p. 383 (my translation). Schein came to write a range of auto-biographical books: *I själva verket* (1970), *Schein* (1980), and *Makten* (1990) are some of the more extensive works.

speak about film as its own cultural field, until 1963, as a result of the founding of the Swedish Film Institute”.⁹⁴

2.2 The First Production

When discussing the avant-garde projects that came to see distributional daylight by the agency of the Film Institute, the discursive lines become rather blurred. Should we categorise them as secluded from the institutional logics, as the avant-garde *modus operandi* often counteracts the inherently rule-bound cultural field? Or are they perhaps a vital part of the national “progression” invoked by Schein, despite the traditional theorising assumption proposed by A.L. Rees, as: “a distinct form of cultural practice, with its own autonomy in relation to the mainstream cinema”.⁹⁵ When the avant-garde feature projects within Swedish film culture are absorbed in the institutional apparatus, one could ask: do they become more visible as experimental art works, or do their distinct cultural practice disappear? Is it even beneficial to call them avant-garde films? The definitions are in this case coalescent, but perhaps there is vitality to be found in the putative problem. To borrow a notion from Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding:

the often confusing historical and local, or national discourses on experimental film are, of course, direct evidence of its existence. And as long as filmmakers label their production ‘experimental’, or screenings are announced as experimental there is proof for reciprocity between theory and practice. Thus, the category is without doubt part of living practice and history, albeit in constant flux and change.⁹⁶

Fahlström’s *Du gamla, Du fria* as an experimental endeavour certainly connects to the reciprocal nature of the discursive reproductions that created the new field with the founding of the SFI. In his dissertation, Lars Diurlin occupies a rather specific standpoint on the matter: “The fact that Kylberg got the opportunity to be responsible for SFI’s first feature film project inevitably binds him to this newly constructed field, and to the institution of art cinema with

⁹⁴ Lars Gustaf Andersson & John Sundholm, “*Hellre fri än filmare*”: *Filmverkstan och den fria filmen*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014, p. 65 (my translation). Filmverkstan (1973-2001) was an initiative funded by SFI, which aimed to create a democratic and free public sphere for filmic experimentation, where independent, unestablished, semi-professional filmmakers were invited to produce short films. Many were immigrant filmmakers, where Filmverkstan became the only palpable option and venue for publicly funded productions.

⁹⁵ A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. xi.

⁹⁶ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 12.

its auteurs”.⁹⁷ The same could be stated on behalf of Fahlström as his fate within the institutional structures of filmmaking intersects Kylberg’s, however, with some distinct alterations, not only when observing his sparse filmography in relation to Kylberg’s: Fahlström never saw himself as a filmmaker, nor had he established a position within the Swedish film industry.

Although Fahlström held an eminent place on the international art map, he was ever the autodidact. For him all art was a mixture of play and protest, never to be bound by aesthetic rules or cultural policy. Nevertheless, these venturesome components eventually led the Film Institute to perceive Fahlström’s idea for a feature project as a proof of quality and progression. But perhaps the art of play, Fahlström as the *bricoleur*, became too playful, too accidental in its conscious lack of finitude, for the Institute to handle in the end.⁹⁸

3. Art as Political Agitation – “Regarding 519-19”

In an internal SFI-memorandum “regarding 519-19 Du Gamla Du Fria”, issued February 16, 1970, Staffan Hedqvist sketched some preliminary orders of instruction concerning Fahlström’s project. The tenth and last item on the list reads: “The film is estimated to be at hand in A-print [trial print], at the end of May/June – 70”.⁹⁹ In a commentary note to an earlier revised budget plan approved by Harry Schein, in April 23, 1969, Hedqvist together with *Du gamla, Du fria*’s production manager Tomas Dyfverman ascertained that: “As the production- and shooting plan shows, the production extends until April 1970, by the time the A-copy is expected to exist”.¹⁰⁰

At this point the estimated budget shows that the Film Institute were to grant the project a total of 938,282 SEK, an unprecedented sum of money in Swedish film production.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁷ Lars Diurlin, “*Filmreformens förste avantgardist*” – *Experimentfilmaren Peter Kylberg*, Lund: Mediehistoria, Lunds Universitet, p. 27 (my translation).

⁹⁸ In his monograph on Fahlström’s artistic method, Antonio Sergio Bessa writes: “Contrary to the engineer, the *bricoleur*, this fallen figure cannot afford to measure his experiments accurately because in order to build his systems, he has to make do with whatever is around (p. xvi)”. This notion seems to fit the turbulent milieu that characterised the shooting of *Du gamla, Du fria*. Fahlström’s affinity for artistic freedom certainly collided with SFI’s economic and legal ambits concerning film production. Antonio Sergio Bessa, *Öyvind Fahlström – The Art of Writing*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008.

⁹⁹ “P.M. rörande 519-19 Du Gamla Du Fria/Fahlström & Dyfverman”, memorandum by Staffan Hedqvist, for the Swedish Film Institute’s account, 16/2 1970. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁰⁰ “Kommentar till likviditetsplan”, supplement to liquidity plan for *Du gamla, Du fria*, revised 14th and 23th of April 1969. Signed by Staffan Hedqvist and Tomas Dyfverman, approved by Harry Schein. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁰¹ “BUDGETKALKYL (DU GAMLA DU FRIA, Film nr. 519-19)”, Budget estimation for *Du gamla, Du fria*, calculated by Tomas Dyfverman, certified by Staffan Hedqvist, 23/4 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

early documents drawn up by the Film Institute indicate that the goal was to have *Du gamla, Du fria* in cinemas by April in 1970, as the shooting had started in May 1969. Nevertheless, Fahlström's film did not see distributional daylight until the third of April 1972 at the Eriksberg cinema in Stockholm.¹⁰² With the advantage of hindsight, the above-mentioned memos rather poignantly frame the recurrent circumstances of Öyvind Fahlström's feature film debut: that of a constantly deferred premiere date.

3.1 The First Feature – An Experiment of Contradictions

As the SFI had already shown interest in Fahlström's filmic endeavours in 1968, primarily through Harry Schein's enthusiasm, *Du gamla, Du Fria* was to become the first feature film where the SFI had the sole production onus. Hence, producer and artist Staffan Hedqvist (1943-2001) was assigned as SFI's representative and production manager. Hedqvist was educated in production management at Filmskolan (SFI's Film School, the first formal film education in Sweden, initiated by the SFI after its launch in 1963) in 1967.¹⁰³ Hedqvist is prominent in the correspondence between Fahlström and the SFI. He also obtained an operational role in the marketing process that was initiated at the end of the production, prior to the release of the film. In a promotional text, Hedqvist states:

Fahlström's first film to be made in Sweden was a short, *U-Barn (Retarded Children)*, which was produced by the Swedish Film Institute. It was so good and interesting that when Fahlström submitted his script for *Du Gamla, Du Fria* the Institute just had to be interested. It is one of the Institute's tasks to stimulate Swedish production. The script had such a character and structure that it placed special demands on the production technique and the equipment. It was not unlike Fahlström's pictures and it was conceived in such a manner that some of the scenes and sequences were based on the form and expression of happenings. At that time, however, the Film Institute was not in a position to produce it. As a result an agreement was signed with a newly formed company, PROFILM, about carrying out the project. Profilm is run by Tomas Dyfverman, the executive producer, who worked with Fahlström on *U-barn*. The Film Institute made it possible to carry out the project by guaranteeing to handle the distribution.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Fact sheet on *Du gamla, Du fria*, Swedish Film Database; The Swedish Film Institute - <http://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/Item/?type=film&itemid=4890#release-dates> - retrieved 2018-05-04, 11:22.

¹⁰³ Hedqvist was a skilled organiser and worked with a range of prolific Swedish filmmakers such as Bo Widerberg, Jan Troell and Hasse Alfredsson. He was also scriptwriter and co-director with Lena Ewert on the controversial student film *Rekordåren 1966, 1967, 1968...* (1969).

¹⁰⁴ Staffan Hedqvist, "Öyvind Fahlström plays an important role in introducing current trends in international art to Sweden", promotional text written for the international distribution of *Du gamla, Du fria*, February 1971. The

The text reveals a dualistic approach to the production conditions of the feature project. On the one hand it states the apparent interest shown by the SFI in undertaking the project, on the other hand it reveals the uncertainty as regards the “character” and “demands” of the script.

The creation of Profilm AB was a manoeuvre that Fahlström and executive producer of *Du gamla, Du fria*, Tomas Dyfverman, brought about as it enabled them to receive full financing, but from the viewpoint of the SFI it was also necessary to separate themselves legally from the outcome of the project. In the second clause of a commentary supplement to the original agreement proposal, the SFI’s representatives stated:

As we reasoned our way to the suitability in creating a particular company for this production, it was very much a result of the request to separate SFI and this production legally as far as possible. Great attention should therefore be applied unto all phraseologies that can relate to this context. If this phraseology [...] is motivated by an alteration of this request, the following proposal will naturally fall flat. The agreement should – if the original thought is to be followed – rather give the impression that the film is made on Profilm’s initiative, and that SFI operates as the distributor, which grants a deposit that will be repaid from the film’s revenue – and when the deposit is regained, takes 90% of the film’s future profits.¹⁰⁵

The initial discussions concerning *Du gamla, Du fria*’s production strategies was followed by two separate documents of agreement before the official contract was set up: the first stating that “The artist Öyvind Fahlström and production manager Tomas Dyfverman intend to form the limited company Profilm”¹⁰⁶; the second, slightly edited “Profilm AB, with chairman of the board and artist Öyvind Fahlström, and production manager Tomas Dyfverman appointed CEO, intends to produce a feature film in colour with the working name *Du gamla du fria*; script, directing and editing Öyvind Fahlström”.¹⁰⁷

The agreement further specified that “According to the budget, Profilm AB set out the costs of the film with no more than 84,000: -, covering: Script, directing, editing and production management”, which in relation to the large payment burden, and indeed in fiscal

text was originally written in Swedish, and was also translated to French. Original copy, the Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹⁰⁵ “Kommentar till avtalsförslaget SFI – Profilm AB”, SFI’s commentary suggestions concerning the agreement on producing *Du gamla, Du fria*, 11/1 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁰⁶ “Agreement”, second stage contract between Harry Schein, SFI and Fahlström, and Dyfverman (Profilm AB), dated January 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁰⁷ “Agreement”, third stage contract between Harry Schein, SFI and Fahlström and Dyfverman, Profilm AB, 24/1 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

terms made the production a SFI-project.¹⁰⁸ Officially and publicly, however, SFI retained their position as silent partner, a patron of progression and quality within Swedish cinema.

The official, final, contract was drawn up on January 27, 1969, and comprised the general terms for Fahlström's oncoming prestige product. The Film Institute held Profilm, under the uninhibited management of Fahlström, accountable for the implementation of the production, as they were to successively attest payouts when the production called for it. In extension, this gave the SFI full insight into the bookkeeping of Fahlström and Dyfverman, as well as direct influence over the strategies of production, shooting and scripting. Principally the Film Institute owned the concept brought forth by Fahlström, and officially held all the rights to its exploitation and distribution, both domestically and internationally, as well as the hypothetical net revenue, which was divided into 90% in favour of the SFI, and 10% for Profilm. The fifth paragraph of the document stated: "The film's title sequence shall clarify that the Film Institute presents and distributes the film. Profilm AB shall be identified as producer, Dyfverman as production manager and Fahlström as author and director", a somewhat distinct indication of SFI's wishes to remain in the background.¹⁰⁹

As Fahlström embarked on fairly uncharted territory – an institutional feature film production – he had now not only become an artist bound by monetary systems and demands of product delivery, but also a partner in a company with direct dependency on the established industry. The surrounding materials of the production terms concerning Fahlström's experimental feature project reveal the marks of an extensive, and sometimes inhibitory, corporate apparatus. On the other hand, it was the disciplinary width and experimental modus Fahlström offered with his collected artistic oeuvre that made the Film Institute interested in the first place. And through the support shown by director Schein, a freely applied artistic method was now to be merged with the institutional practice of established film production.

3.2 The Consecration of Öyvind Fahlström – Why *Du gamla, Du fria*?

Looking at the advent of *Du gamla, Du fria*, a main attraction for its hypothetical realisation was primarily rooted in Fahlström's internationally recognised artistry, but also in the cinematic visions he had presented in the short films. *U-BARN*, for which Fahlström received funding from the Film Institute in 1967, did not only launch Fahlström as a filmmaker in Sweden. It was also perceived as a work sample, which found its way to hegemony in

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, clause 5 (my translation).

¹⁰⁹ "Agreement", final revised contract between the parts: the Swedish Film Institute (Harry Schein) and Profilm AB (Tomas Dyfverman, Öyvind Fahlström), 27/1 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

accordance with the ideology of the 1960s. As Hedqvist testified, *U-BARN* was just that good and interesting, and it would be negligent on SFI's part to not further investigate the filmic prospects of Fahlström.¹¹⁰ In this case Fahlström got to serve as the metonym of the general cultural political task, which was to stimulate the progress of Swedish film production.¹¹¹

In *I själva verket*, Schein comments on the SFI's involvement, as well as on the characteristics of Fahlström's artistic temperament:

Öyvind Fahlström's "Du Gamla, Du Fria" was attractive from a very special point of view. It is quite unusual that visual artists come to film, despite that they, like musicians, should really have a bigger affinity for film art than writers. Fahlström is one of our most interesting visual artists. It would be interesting to see what he could accomplish with the camera. But the project in itself was also appealing. It was controversial – it went straight into the reality of protest. The film was to be about a group of people, a free theatre group. It was to disrupt erotic and social taboos. The film was to be documentary and revolutionary, a meta-film if you will, that was to explore the end of this road, in my opinion this blind alley that constitutes the genre.¹¹²

Schein's personal contemplation on Fahlström's feature seems to correspond with the ideas that were embedded in the term "quality film". Fahlström's dabbling with the film medium was not merely a hermetic act of interdisciplinary experimentation, it was an elevation of the medium itself, and from a Swedish point of view yet another chance to consolidate the filmic art, both in aesthetic and social terms. Yet, the heart of the matter still appears to be quite contradictory, as Fahlström's filmography at large seems to be rather inadequate when placed in contrast to the strengthening of a whole film culture. It reflects the dual position the SFI held, as a public authority, able to provide a sustainable prominence to film culture, but simultaneously revealing a flawed institutional understanding of minor expressions.

Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding offer a clarification of this contradiction:

Although the film culture received considerably more public money in the 1960s, it did not necessarily imply that the state of the experimental film culture was improved. The model of the early 1960s highly successful genre, that of the art cinema, quickly became the norm for critics and institutions. The new standard did not encompass experimental modes. Thus it was more of a coincidence that films like Fahlström's feature *Provocation* received any funding; it was not

¹¹⁰ Hedqvist, see note: 101.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Harry Schein, *I själva verket*, Stockholm: P.A. Nordstedt & Söners Förlag, 1970, p. 174-175 (my translation).

the result of a specific policy regarding experimental film. In fact, the rise of international art cinema and the various efforts to create and sustain the art cinema institution resulted in delicate struggles between the triads of art cinema, short film and experimental cinema. Critics of the leading journals and newspapers and institutions like SFI unreservedly favoured the auteurist feature film. Short filmmaking was viewed both by the institutions and the trade as a necessary training ground before the ‘real thing’. On the other hand, the critics and the SFI supported short filmmaking because it was considered to enable the most intense and interesting experiments.¹¹³

In spite of Fahlström’s limited “training ground”, and unverified position within the context of short film experimentation, the “real thing” came to manifest itself for him rather swiftly. The coincidental nature of Fahlström’s feature could in this sense also be perceived as a symptom of the SFI’s untested production policy at the time, which in itself also had an equally short training period.

At that time, the SFI had also been involved in some other feature projects in its capacity as producer. Alf Sjöberg’s (1903-1980) *Fadern* (“The Father”, 1969), a subjectively suggestive adaptation of August Strindberg’s tragic drama from 1887, was produced in line with a 50-50 agreement of cooperation between SFI and Sveriges Radio. Schein’s personal accounts concerning the project, primarily recalling Sjöberg’s artistic capital and value, and the fact that he “had for a long time not been present in Swedish film studios, too long considering his artistic significance”, is further characterised by the elusive balance between quality and commercial viability, calling Sjöberg’s vision “unusual” in relation to it “not really suiting the present fashion of film. But I have always interpreted the public wish for pluralism in this way, that you should not have different types of producers, but different types of films”.¹¹⁴ As a consecrated agent within “the field of quality” that represented the institutional films of the 1960s, Sjöberg can be viewed as predecessor of Swedish film with pronounced artistic claims, thus making him a rather conventional investment, as opposed to Fahlström.¹¹⁵ A further extension of Schein’s and the SFI’s pluralistic undertakings in 1969/1970 resulted in another project where the Institute served as sole producer: *Jänken* (1970). TV-dramatist Lars Forsberg directed the film and, similar to Fahlström’s *Du gamla, Du fria*, the project was a feature film debut from another artist with abbreviated training in

¹¹³ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 137.

¹¹⁴ Harry Schein, *I själva verket*, p. 174 (my translation).

¹¹⁵ See: Lars Gustaf Andersson, “Den svenska konstfilmsinstitutionen”, p. 10. In 1944 Sjöberg made the film *Hets*, with Ingmar Bergman as assistant director and scriptwriter. This is often considered a canonised shift of paradigm in Swedish film historiography.

the short film format as, prior to *Jänken*, Forsberg's filmography only consisted of two short films: *Skjutfältet* ("The Shooting Field", 1963) and *Slut* ("End", 1966). According to Schein the project was initiated by Stefan Jarl, who at the time still worked for SFI as a production manager – a tenure he would terminate shortly after the commencement of the *Jänken*-production – and was perceived as an experiment in the widest sense.¹¹⁶

Fahlström's *Du gamla, Du fria* constitute a part of these artistically valuable, pluralistic and experimental incentives, which were rather incidentally promoted by Harry Schein and the Film Institute. Both *Fadern* and *Du gamla, Du fria* met with devastating critical receptions, whereas *Jänken* was fairly successful, but when aligning these three films in a comparative manner, it is the pluralistic, and seemingly arbitrary, agenda that stands out: three filmmakers, two feature-film debutants, one art cinema-comeback, one controversial avant-gardist, and one socially conscious TV-dramatist.

The producing role of the SFI in the late 1960s, was commented on by Schein in *I själva verket*:

It is possible that we will approach a different type of 'outreach' programme. Our demands on the quality of the projects are, of course, especially high if we automatically presume that we, with our limited resources, should also produce the films. Therefore, we now discuss the possibility of a more unassuming posture, and without thought to our own production, thereby obtain at least elaborate and rewarding film scripts and offer them to the open, commercial film market. I have no exaggerated optimism before the outcome of such an experimental enterprise. But all roads should be examined.¹¹⁷

Schein's viewpoint, despite some reservations, seems to resonate rather well with an experimental mode of production. And as he had argued before, the yet to be examined road of Fahlström and *Du gamla, Du fria*, was "attractive from a very special point of view", as Fahlström came from a disparate artistic universe than that of commercial cinema, adding to the controversial potential his feature seemed to capture.¹¹⁸

Despite the coincidental and arbitrary conception of Fahlström's feature, the film-political logics of it seem to align the quality concept of Schein and the SFI, a concept that perhaps should be perceived as a programme lacking dogmatic guidelines, rather than consolidating

¹¹⁶ Harry Schein, *I själva verket*, p. 175. Based on the social-realistic novella with the same title by Märta Weiss, *Jänken* became Forsberg's only contribution to the sphere of Swedish feature films. After his collaboration with SFI he devoted the rest of his career to making TV-movies.

¹¹⁷ Harry Schein, *I själva verket*, p. 176 (my translation).

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 174-175.

the reproductions of a public art-machine. But still, when two historically divided cultural modes unify, some practical irregularities are to be expected.

3.3 *Du gamla, Du fria* Ahead of Reality

The working title for Fahlström's project was "Likkistläggaren Rosander", which had been changed to its official title *Du gamla, Du fria*, when the script was delivered to Harry Schein and the SFI in 1968.¹¹⁹ The overarching themes regarding the film's counter-cultural properties are beneficially explained as an expansion of the aesthetic "middle phases" Fahlström had meditated on in his documentaries. As a chronological cultivation of Fahlström's collected filmmaking, his feature film picks up where he left us in *U-BARN*; with street theatre as a political and aesthetic tool, but with a newfound emphasis on the concept of *provocation*.

The film centres on a young group of leftist-oriented temperaments: the teacher Berit (Berit Nyman), medical student Ann-Charlotte (Ann-Charlotte Hult), photographer/model/artist (Marie Louise De Geer), revolutionary actor Björn (Björn Granath), aspiring folk singer Peter (Peter Wahlqvist), and Marxist student Hasse (Hans Mosesson).¹²⁰ Despite the fact that *Du gamla, Du fria* is categorised as a fictional feature, the documentary form of representation is present to a high degree. That these Swedish "leftist celebrities" portray themselves substantiates the film's experimental character and dual levelling; art as agitation, both in method and aesthetic. Together they form a radical collective theatre company, whose purpose it is to jolt the Swedish bourgeoisie's automatised conception of the world, by launching a national tour to publicly perform actions, street theatre and happenings. Their mobilisation adapts, along with the overall narrative of the film, increasingly drastic and extreme methods, causing the group to question their true ideologies, and eventually leading them to disband.¹²¹ Fahlström described the project in its initial state as:

¹¹⁹ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Harry Schein, 17/11 1968. Submitted with two original scripts and a synopsis, Fahlström sent a commentary appendix with some fundamental ideas for the feature project. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹²⁰ These actors were the only participants in Fahlström's collective film who received payment for their service. The employment contracts were set to remunerate each actor, within the official shooting period of 28/4 and 1/8 1969, with 10,500 Swedish crowns, with the exception of De Geer who, because of her slightly more distinguished celebrity, were awarded 11,400. Employment Contracts, issued by Profilm AB. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹²¹ For a more complete report on the sequences of events of *Du gamla, Du fria*, see: Nilsson, "KRAMA filmmateria", pp. 40-47.

A film in colour about an activist group in Stockholm, who wants to act through street theatre, agitation, happening, demonstration. Their odyssey through Sweden and confrontation with the welfare state [...] as they 'walk out to the people' [...] A film where cinema-vérité and candid-camera-sections tie together acted sections [...] The film wants, among other things, to show that political agitation as art is possible.¹²²

In *Du gamla, Du fria*, a number of contact areas to Fahlström's earlier artistic work are recaptured. The most prominent in relation to his work with film is the inspiration he found with the American left. The aesthetic middle phases he saw in street theatre companies now became transposed and related to a Swedish context, where Fahlström let his actors test their artistic and political potential. In an early letter to Harry Schein, Fahlström illustrated his visions and motives concerning his fictitious street theatre group:

I think it is inescapable that the group on which the script centres opposes the class- and consumer society on social democratic grounds. During autumn I heard a lot of arguments, by one or several action groups, especially in connection with the anti-TeenageFair-campaign, which I followed from within (because the group Totalvägrarna ["The unconditional conscientious objectors"], of which I am one initiator, was originally to take part in the planned debate panels of the teenage fair) – well, it is without hesitation, and needless to say no secret that all of these groups' ideological motivation is located, more or less, far to the left of the SAP [the Social Democratic Party]. The contact with the activist groups has, of course, also been rewarding in order to concretise the portrayals in the film [...] I do not see it as my task to try and display personal thoughts or theories about social development or new and unexpected facts. I am also aware of that all socialistic regimes have developed into authoritarian systems, and would like to look forward, to a widely more decentralised, open and initiative-stimulating, lifestyle-experimenting social model. But the purpose of making DU GAMLA DU FRIA is hardly to immerse myself in my own personal utopias, but to give glimpses of [what] is thought and done in Sweden today – the vision, the rhythm, the compilation of the materials, gives me more than enough leeway for my personal creativity.¹²³

Perhaps Fahlström appeals to Schein's publicly outspoken social democratic side when he rather cautiously implies that his film will move beyond traditional depictions of political

¹²²"FILM MED ARBETSNAMN DU GAMLA DU FRIA", letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Harry Schein 17/11 1968. Attached letter, with script and synopsis; *Du gamla, Du fria*. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹²³ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Harry Schein, 17/11 1968. Commentary appendix to *Du gamla, Du fria*; script and synopsis. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

practice, at least from a Swedish viewpoint. However, his main points are crystallised with eagerness due to the project's potential: vision, rhythm, and the compilation of materials. Fahlström's "purpose" can be traced to a practice of aesthetics that he continuously adapted throughout his career: the method of *bisociation*. The term is borrowed from the British author Arthur Koestler's book *The Act of Creation* (1964) and is interpreted by Fahlström as: "The compilations of: life – art, phenomenon – engagement, fact – delirious impulse, means something completely different than 'collage' 'everything goes beside everything' and suchlike. They are difficult, rare findings [...] when you take fragment A and find fragment B, and it furiously lights up when you rub A against B! Namely that the result becomes something totally different, and much greater than the sum of the two".¹²⁴ Bisociative practice relates to the experimental psychology of Fahlström's artwork, where the creative activity aimed to produce basic, but complex, patterns. Fahlström's affinity for manipulating worlds, to outline and disfigure larger patterns can be traced to this premise, in which art becomes life, play becomes politics, the aesthetic becomes message, and vice versa.

In the punctuated synopsis Fahlström submitted to Schein, along with his original scripts, the order of the compiled materials for *Du gamla, Du fria* is structured in 41 scenic instalments. With Fahlström's earlier work in mind, particularly his paintings and the extensive manuscripts he produced in order to carry out the visual product, the bisociative process again becomes present. The disparate elements were to blend with the counter-cultural acts of the avant-garde theatre company in *Du gamla, Du fria*; and when studying his precise and ambitious scene-synopsis, some bisociative schemas typical to Fahlström can certainly be identified in the consortium of different filmic scenarios: "1. Helikopter. Swish-image of Stockholm. Red star-rain"; "2. Kafé Marx. How to reach 'ordinary people'"; "4. Actual demonstration"; "5. Groceries"; "6. Anti-guard parade no. 1. 'reversed' changing of guards"; "7. Minorities. Squirrel wheel, Stimulantia and 500:- (prison, greasers)"; "9. Anti-conscription"; "10. Sail-demonstration"; "11. Pornographic store"; "13. Kissing couple"; "20. Shit-in"; "21. Wash-in"; "24. Sabotage"; "27. Doggies. The dog school of the army"; "33. Archipelago"; "41. Tanzania. The guerrilla base. Monotony, loneliness. Who is needed.

¹²⁴ Öyvind Fahlström, "Efter happenings", in *Om livskonst o.a.*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1970, p. 46 (my translation); Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, London: Hutchinson, 1964. The bisociative practice should not be confused with the surrealist automatism, where the emphasis is rather located within the passive condition before what André Breton, in his manifest, called "the light of the image", where the poet haphazardly happens to unite the pre-linguistic elements (André Breton, *Surrealismens manifest* (1924), translated to Swedish by Lars Fyhr, Halmstad: René Cockerberghs Partisanförlag, 1971, p. 50).

Patience”.¹²⁵ When listed in this manner, the scene items on Fahlström’s list by all means appear impossible to decipher. They create a cacophony of universal taboos and counter-cultural simulacrum, almost morphed into incredible linguistic entities or performers, known from his 1950s concrete poems, forever colliding in a complex of permuted verses. Of course, they only serve as a blueprint for the implementation of the feature project, but yet they reveal some important factors: on the one hand they offer an explanation for Fahlström’s artistic temperament, which retrospectively was difficult to translate to the practical field of conventional filmmaking; on the other hand, they hypothetically debunk the fact that Fahlström was an untrained filmmaker.

Harry Schein saw that Fahlström’s proposals had precarious dispositions, but expressed an initial enthusiasm about the project’s pre-production potential. After receiving the material from Fahlström, Schein directly forwarded it to Staffan Hedqvist and Göran Gunér at the Institute’s Film School, in order to promptly give a lengthy response to the aesthetic and political dimensions of Fahlström’s visions and rhythms: “I find nothing in your letter, in any way, to be offensive or even controversial. I am old-fashioned enough to see that art, to the extent that it should have a social function, must exist ahead of reality. A party-faithful, social democratic art is an absurdity. To be ahead of reality is to be left of the SAP”.¹²⁶ Schein agreed with Fahlström and retained his view on film that it, in spite of its monetary and commercial aspects, should always operate ahead of reality, without restrictive norms. That is a notion that not only agrees with Fahlström’s flora of correlating artistic disciplines, but also with the overall social function of the avant-garde in merging art and reality. But still, a note of hesitant warning was provided. Schein continues in his letter by cautiously juxtaposing the figures, commenting on Fahlström’s ideas, as well as on the constructive possibilities and hypothetical problems of their filmic manifestations:

If art from the beginning is given a social function, there is a certain risk that it is too far ahead of reality. So far that it has lost contact with the reality it wants to mediate, and with the people

¹²⁵ Selected elements from Fahlström’s synopsis, submitted to Schein 17/11 1968. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹²⁶ Letter from Harry Schein to Öyvind Fahlström, 18/11 1968. Commentary answer on Fahlström’s idea sketches, script and synopsis. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation). In the attached letter to Hedqvist and Gunér, Schein explicitly highlights the positive aspects of this collaboration, which “firstly lies in Öyvind Fahlström’s general talent and originality and in a wish, through film, to portray meaningful aspects of the Swedish [anti]violence attitudes [...] that apparently belongs somewhere with the youth, with the left, in the development countries, in the sex revolution”. Letter from Harry Schein to Staffan Hedqvist and Göran Gunér, 18/11 1968. Attached letter to scripts and synopsis; *Du gamla, Du fria*. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

it wants to affect. This is of course a truth with modification. To me all art, even the most experimental and avant-garde is of social significance, even if the social effect is, so to say, more and more indirect, the more advanced the artwork. It is, however, difficult to apprehend the intention with your film in this respect [...] To avoid all misunderstandings I again want to underline that I very much want you to make a film and that I fully dedicate myself to the principal arrangement of your project [...] My comments have the sole purpose to show that there are no differences between our objectives. But possibly in our assessments of the methods that should be used [...] In your manuscript, you challenge a range of more or less taboo areas. I believe that this is excellent and one of cinema's most important tasks. However, I ask myself, if it is proper to challenge so many taboos in one and the same film. Could this not be a waste of energy, that the one charge, so to speak, detracts from another? [...] The film, in this manner, becomes less of an interjection in the societal debate than a depiction of social outsiders.¹²⁷

Schein's response to Fahlström's project in its primitive state is ambiguous. The positivity towards the feature is overwhelming, as Schein again refers to the earlier co-produced short film *U-BARN*, praising its stylistic properties, inviting Fahlström to expand its form and ideas further in the feature project, but he still expresses some concerns regarding "the unclear picture of the film's composition [...] continuity, dramatic construction and inner coherency", as well as the rich material Fahlström intended to discuss in relation to scope.¹²⁸ The initial duality set aside, Schein was undeniably exited and expressed his unconditional support for Fahlström's aesthetic hybrid. The filmic protest was definitely to be made and the production began in the spring of 1969.

3.4 Aero Ektachrome Infrared and Ethical Implications

As the production of *Du gamla, Du fria* commenced, some of the more problematic aspects of its original conception emerged. The concerns on Schein's behalf seemed to be ominously justified, as Fahlström's implementation of his many visions came to obstruct the production in both temporal and monetary terms. Already in June 1969, Tomas Dyfverman notified the SFI that some sequences of *Du gamla, Du fria*, were to be excluded, and simultaneously stated that: "Despite these cuts, the budget of the film increases with 20,000, which is to be added on to the previously calculated total budget of the 23 April 1969".¹²⁹ This situation

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Letter from Tomas Dyfverman to the Swedish Film Institute (Attention: Dir Harry Schein), 18/6 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

recurred throughout the shooting process, as Fahlström's outreaching spontaneity and experimental approach continuously clashed with the institutional procedure. Regarding the duo of Fahlström and Dyfverman, the latter certainly possessed more fiscally sound and technically aware sensibilities. He developed a new version of the Techniscope 35mm film format, called InterScope, which kept the costs down considerably, but also allowed Fahlström to be more generous in his documentary style, which included the rather unconventional use of a soundless, hand-held 35mm camera.¹³⁰

The provocative mind of Fahlström did not only cause financial problems, but resulted in some legal action against the film crew, as well as against Profilm AB and the SFI. Three key sections of the film, which are still present in the final cut, resulted in legally questionable situations where Profilm AB had to seek legal counsel; in the first scene the theatre group is filmed desecrating the Wallenberg-Mausoleum by tossing coins, chanting, and dancing over the grave; the second displays a large water demonstration in Strömmen, Stockholm, where Fahlström, in cahoots with leftist journal *PUSS!*, orchestrates a sort of world-political action that includes the burning of the Swedish flag; the third shows the group mounting a board game décor on a military training ground, performing an anti-war theatre-game on unconditional conscientious objection.¹³¹ The two latter scenes led to police interventions, driving the company, including Fahlström himself, away from locations to hearings at the police station. Sound technician Håkan Lindberg later testified to the situation: "The team was arrested in connection with the flag burning at Strömmen, and we were detained at Gamla Stan's police station. Tomas Dyfverman then called Harry Schein, who called Olof Palme, who in turn called the chief of the national police Carl Persson. Everyone was immediately released from custody".¹³²

¹³⁰ In a letter to Schein, Dyfverman stresses the importance of the technical method, stating that the costs of *Du gamla, Du fria*, could increase further with "150 – 200 thousand if it were made in a normal fashion". The method was also internationally recognised and was to be exported. As Dyfverman pointed out, it was used for the olympic film in Mexico, as well as in two American television shows. Letter from Tomas Dyfverman to Harry Schein, 6/3 1970. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation). See further: Elisabeth Sörensson, "Ny svensk filmteknik", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11/7 1970.

¹³¹ Dyfverman established contact with the lawyer Göran Ekdahl, who according to Swedish law texts deemed some scenes of *Du gamla, Du fria*, considerably risky, especially the desecrations of the grave and flag. Letter from Assistant Lawyer Göran Ekdahl to Tomas Dyfverman 28/10 (this original copy is of inferior quality and misses a date of issue, but when studying the surrounding materials, it shows that these predicaments were discussed early on in the shooting process, therefor it is by my estimation a document from 1969). The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹³² Håkan Lindberg, "Kommentar från Håkan Lindberg" – "Om InterScope och inspelningen av 'Du gamla, du fria'", by Roland Sterner. - http://filmsoundsweden.se/backspegel/du_gamla_du_fria.html#puss - retrieved 2018-05-11, 16:42.

As expected, the unconventional shooting and sensitive content of *Du gamla, Du fria*, as a filmic experiment sanctioned by the official gatekeeper of Swedish cinema, made it an object of public and critical attention. Fahlström's attraction to the cinema-vérité- and candid-camera filming methods was particularly subject to debate. In addition to the InterScope technique developed by Dyfverman, Fahlström on his part wanted to experiment further with various types of film materials. Among Eastman Color 2554, 100 ASA; Kodak's black and white film Double X 5222, 250 ASA; and Kodak's black and white infrared sensitive film, the controversial Aero Ektachrome Infrared turned out to be most conspicuous, as it was primarily intended for still photography aircraft reconnaissance.¹³³ However, the purpose of using this film type, in consistency with Fahlström's artistry, was the disfigured imagery it produced, rather than spying on his fellow man. When reproduced, the photographic material picked up by the infra-film displays a distorted scheme of colours, which is seen in the end of the film, as the theatre company is located in a forest scenery performing intercourse with each other in various positions. The effect has a psychedelic undertone, and was registered by Fahlström during his field studies of the psychedelic underground when he discovered the film *Head* (1968) with the American pop rock group The Monkees. The method was a seemingly early idea of Fahlström's, who rapidly notified Schein: "I see that a film with the Monkeys [sic], 'Head', has already used a couple of infra-colour film sequences that are supposed to be 'stunning' (although more oriented towards psychedelic effects, than to distort everyday reality, as often I my case), so it is important to keep up...".¹³⁴

Regardless of Fahlström's intent with this specific equipment, the fact that the Film Institute had acquired the material in combination with his public orchestrations of provocative acts – the grave desecration, the flag burning, the shit-in, the overall disorderly conduct – led to a public discussion concerning equality before mass media, freedom of speech, and consensual interviews. Fellow avant-garde artist and experimental feature director Carl Gyllenberg indignantly criticised Fahlström and his crew, linking them to the contemporary debate on Lena Ewert's documentary *Rekordåren 1966, 1967, 1968...* (1969).¹³⁵ In 1969, Gyllenberg juxtaposed artistic freedom with the questionable "candid camera" element of Fahlström's feature in the daily newspaper *Expressen*:

¹³³ The equipment was specially ordered from the US, in conjunction with the initial shooting of *Du gamla, Du fria*, between the 17 and 24 of April 1969. Invoices. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹³⁴ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Harry Schein, 3/11 1968. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹³⁵ Ewert's film (she also worked as assistant director on *Du gamla, Du fria*) caused a huge public debate, and in extension a national "film brawl". The media debate and critique focused on *Rekordåren* because of its use of political interviews that surrounded the establishment's exercise of power in a democratic society, contra a true

In Öyvind Fahlström's first feature film financed by Harry Schein, the problem of equality before mass media will certainly be brought to its peak. Environmental expert Hård af Segerstedt in Sv D [*Svenska Dagbladet*, a daily Swedish newspaper] has complained over the Swedish cinema's use of hidden cameras and rough editing methods, but what will he say now when the Film Institute-gang has also laid claim to the infrafilm? With that you can, if you want, show the Swedish youth's tent life-sins, filmed in the middle of the night.¹³⁶

Gyllenberg was at the time preparing to shoot a project of his own, and met Fahlström and his team when they were attempting to shoot the infamous shit-in scene outside Enskilda Banken (Scandinavian Private Bank) in Stockholm.¹³⁷ The theatre group is preparing a political act by smearing themselves with human excrement, dressing themselves in paper bills and carrying signs. As the act progresses, bankers and people are passing by, flinching as they register the stench. The scene is prominent in its candid-camera aesthetic as Fahlström is shooting with a hand-held camera from afar. What Gyllenberg drew attention to in his article was the putatively immoral method Fahlström applied in his feature project, as well as the Film Institute's support for such an endeavour: "And where is the rights of average Joe supposed to go? He who stands there in the frame of the image and stares like a fool? Abused, laughed at and unable to make his voice heard [...] Then it is certainly about the cinema contra the individual – 1,5 million contra the human rights of the average Joe", also stating that as the crew noticed Gyllenberg's camera that day they aborted, since they "did not want their own hidden camera to be filmed".¹³⁸

The article has a somewhat misbegotten tone, as it seems to question the Swedish Film Institute rather than the artistic vision of Fahlström.¹³⁹ The infrared film was in fact not used

socialistic, democratic process driven by the people. The filmmaker's use of interview material pursuant to consent given by the subjects was questioned, and Harry Schein stopped the distribution of the film, turning it to a moral film debate, causing many Swedish film workers at the time to publicly protest the position of the Film Institute. The film was made by Ewert as a student project at Filmskolan, and was realised collaboratively with Olle Jeppson, Staffan Hedqvist and Ann-Charlotte Hult, the latter two also joining Fahlström and the *Du gamla, Du fria*-project. See also: <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/person/lena-ewert/> - Retrieved 2018-05-12, 17:41.

¹³⁶ Carl Gyllenberg, "Vad är 'Rekordåren' mot Fahlströms film?", in *Expressen*, 25/8 1969 (my translation).

¹³⁷ The scene was in fact not realised at the time Gyllenberg met the group, but was made on another occasion.

¹³⁸ Carl Gyllenberg, "Vad är 'Rekordåren' mot Fahlströms film?", *Expressen*, 25/8, 1969.

¹³⁹ Gyllenberg later revised his intention, saying that it was not to "hit out at Öyvind Fahlström, but to get responsible journalists and others to embrace Schein's open attitude, after the Rekordåren-film debate", again turning his gaze to Harry Schein's dishonest position: "I think that they should attend to it now, because who knows how Schein will position himself towards transparency when Fahlström's film is shown. He says even now that he has no knowledge of the fact that the gang to whom he gave some millions in advance is interested in shooting in the dark, a documentary film method sometimes compared to phone tapping [...] I thought it felt even more disheartening to hear that a young unsuspecting person, for a few bucks from the Film Institute's

in Fahlström's public recordings, but still Gyllenberg's alerts were noticed and discussed by the Institute, who already struggled with the marketing of *Du gamla, Du fria*. Staffan Hedqvist announced to Dyfverman that the SFI were not to answer any of Gyllenberg's "silly writings" as they only fuelled an already "infectious situation", however, still warned him of the fact that Gyllenberg recalled the debate concerning *Rekordåren*, and urged Dyfverman that they could "not release anything in Du Gamla Du Fria that we are not 100% convinced is legally waterproof".¹⁴⁰ Dyfverman in turn answered, pointing out that the accusation of infra-filming was "baseless" as the technique was used "on two occasions, one time with dedicated actors, because of the special effects that were pursued, the second time at a fully open shooting of an arrangement at Hötorget, where IR-lighting was used as reinforcement of the existing light".¹⁴¹ These types of public scrutinizes came to be reoccurring, successively revealing themselves in the remaining and final story of *Du gamla, Du fria*.

3.5 Deferred Dreams of The Institutional Avant-Garde

The questions and criticism surrounding Fahlström's cinematic provocation and legal violations were prominent, at the same time as the producers tried their best at keeping details from public exposure.¹⁴² When Fahlström's feature debut approached its already overdue premier in 1970, some of the critique concerned the fact that the Institute had given the project such a large sum of money. Ulla Swedberg at *Göteborgs-Tidningen* asked rather rhetorically: "Is it just that easy to walk up to the CEO of the Film Institute and explain yourself worthy of an institutional million to make your first feature film?" further stating that Fahlström's "internationally recognised artistry certainly played a part".¹⁴³ Swedberg continued in an interview with Dyfverman by asking whether the filmmaker and producer felt it to be an "eerie responsibility" to "borrow" that amount of money; what would happen "if the film were to flop?", whereupon Dyfverman replied: "Then the institute won't get their money back [...] One million may sound like a lot of money, but we think that the film will

advance, found himself in the police's and perhaps Säpo's annals. Yes, that this was more important than the pettiness of discussing the 'secrets' of a colleague in public". Carl Gyllenberg, "En Rekord-Intervju, in *Aftonbladet*, 30/8 1969 (my translation).

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Staffan Hedqvist to Tomas Dyfverman, 28/8 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁴¹ Letter from Tomas Dyfverman to Harry Schein, 1/9 1969. Dyfverman also stresses that significant care will be taken to retrieve participants' permission to show the shot materials. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁴² See: Betty Skawonius, "Fanbränning och gatuteater i Fahlströms första långfilm", in *Dagens Nyheter*, 6/7 1969; Fabricius, "Fahlströmfilm om provokation får dyr budget", in *Svenska Dagbladet* 23/8 1969.

¹⁴³ Ulla Swedberg, "Sagan om Du gamla, Du fria", in *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 22/11 1970 (my translation).

gross more than that. Otherwise, it is the purpose of the FI's production activity that the Institute is able to engage in another way than other commercial companies and support risky and/or necessary projects".¹⁴⁴ Fahlström on his part had also sensed the risks in an all too sensational preliminary publicity regarding his feature debut, and expressed these concerns to Schein:

On the other hand, it is important to not to push away lots of people with a shouting sensational publicity, which brings forth marginal or sensitive aspects (provocation) only. Because *Du Gamla* is not a film that will be assessed with the customary extra benevolence, and with the down adjusted scale of value that is applied on Swedish cinema in regular cases - - because it is so terribly expensive, and I am not a established filmmaker, and is perceived with mixed emotions by many, and so many others could [make so many] smaller films with all that money that Fahlström wangled himself to, and all that you know...¹⁴⁵

This statement reveals that the conventional practice and commercial logics of filmmaking had perhaps become slightly overpowering for Fahlström, who never really adhered to the institutional system and production procedure, and also not perceived himself as an established filmmaker. At this stage in the production process, in spite of Dyfverman's publicly persevered stoicism, *Du gamla, Du fria* were to embark on its most problematic stages, in which Fahlström's experimentations finally collided with the restraints of the funding agency.

The plan to premier the film in the spring of 1970 was delayed, and was a direct result of Fahlström's unconventional approach to editing practices. Fahlström's material extended to about 60 hours of film, and instead of choosing specific already existing sequences to build the final product on, he wanted to cut it all to fit his original vision.¹⁴⁶ After a long process and many extended workdays editor Lasse Haglund finally decided to quit the project, and

¹⁴⁴ Ulla Swedberg, "Efter två år och en miljon: Hemligaste filmen snart klar", in *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 22/11 1970 (my translation).

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Harry Schein, 25/2 1970. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation). Schein answered Fahlström February 27, reassuring him that the Institute were to back him both in the press and with strong marketing, but still begging Fahlström to "Kill your darlings", as the length of the material was overbearing. Letter from Harry Schein to Öyvind Fahlström, 27/2 1970.

¹⁴⁶ Sound technician Håkan Lindberg later stated that "Öyvind's idea was built around staged provocations, and to my recollection we got amazing material. But since the public did not react the way Öyvind had written in the script, he was disappointed and tried to cut the film in line with his original thought, instead of cutting in line with the material he actually had. The result was rather bleak, but could have been fantastic. Lasse Haglund did not have it easy". Lindberg also testifies to the supposed untrained instincts Fahlström showed in his capacity of a feature filmmaker: "Öyvind once demanded, during the shoot, that we put out 40 metres of train rails in the forest, to film when chickens were chased. We did as he said of course, but were soon too aware of the fact that chased chickens rarely follow a given path". Håkan Linberg, "Commentary on *Du gamla, Du fria* (my translation)" - http://www.filmsoundsweden.se/backspegel/du_gamla_du_fria.html - Retrieved 2018-05-14, 11:30.

was eventually replaced by Sten-Göran Camitz.¹⁴⁷ Another cause for the postponed finalising of the film was one of Fahlström's original visions, which he had presented in his synopsis as "Tanzania". Fahlström had begun the prospect of finalising *Du gamla, Du fria* with scenes from the third world already in June 1969. He had contacted the FRELIMO (The Mozambique Liberation Front, funded in Tanzania 1962) organisation, a nationalist movement who fought the Portuguese colonial powers for independent rights, stating that he sought "authorisation to film some aspects of medical care and training for the FRELIMO forces of liberation, in Tanzania and/or Mocambique".¹⁴⁸ Fahlström's plan was to arrange cinematic reflections on how young Swedish revolutionaries could make a tangible difference in the world. He put it in the letter: "to film a real and essential situation, within the framework of our general subject: meaningful and not meaningful ways for Europeans to participate in the struggle for liberation and development in the third world".¹⁴⁹ For this he wanted to use his actors, medical students Ann-Charlotte Hult and Olle Jeppson (Ann-Charlotte's fiancée) who at the time intended to go on a charter tour in Tanzania. However, the contact with FRELIMO ended, but Fahlström was still relentless in his vision and later approached P.A.I.G.C (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), with the same stated objectives.¹⁵⁰

The contact with Guinea-Bissau was more fruitful than the one with FRELIMO, and Fahlström continued to prepare the SFI for its realisation. Due to the editing situation, and Fahlström's overall expansive work, his wishes were finally declined. In a last attempt to persevere he wrote to Harry Schein in 1970:

As I can foresee the film now, it is as ever clear that the film would end in a flat fall [...] or completely oblique [...] if one does not incorporate a strong and interesting scene with Ann-

¹⁴⁷ Staffan Hedqvist, "Concerning the continued development of production 519 – 19 Du Gamla Du Fria", internal report to Harry Schein, 5/4 1970. The attachment states that Haglund had quit the project, without any obvious turmoil, but also that Fahlström's position on the final cut was adamant and rather autocratic. Report with attachments, by Staffan Hedqvist, Lidingö April 5 1970. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Marcelino dos Santos (Member of the Presidential Council and Secretary for External Affairs, FRELIMO), 29/6 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Fahlström also revealed: "Finally we deal extensively with and debate the heavy dependency by Swedish business on the Swedish banker family Wallenberg (they also have strong interests in the ASEA corporation). We also generally indicate how dependent the Swedish government is on private corporate business, in their advocacy of a 'mixed economy'". ASEA at the time had certain engagements with the Portuguese colonial powers in building elements for a power plant in the region, and it seems that Fahlström's intention with the grave desecration indeed was dependent on the Africa-segment, not only as a desultory provocation, but elementary for the structure of the film.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Amilear Cabral, P.A.I.G.C., 21/11 1969. The Swedish Film Institute Archive. Fahlström here ends the letter with: "I follow your struggle for the freedom of your country with attention and sympathy and send my best wishes".

Charlotte. Not only because she has become the most dominant female character, but also because a film such as this, about Sweden, should end in Africa, that is to say, bringing the perspective out to a broader level. That was clear for me even before I made the sketch-like synopsis I presented to you [...] It should at the least end with an expansion, again, of the perspective. [...] with exemplifications of action engagements, and with the demystification of terms such as working abroad and liberation armies (when and where do young Swedes really make themselves useful in the Third World).¹⁵¹

Despite Fahlström's social pathos and appeal to broaden his feature, both in aesthetic and conceptual terms, the Film Institute had to deny him a trip to Africa. The economic factors had finally become overpowering, and Harry Schein gave final notice to Fahlström on the termination of the Africa prospect on June 30, 1970.¹⁵²

Retrospectively it becomes clear that the supposed hybridity of an avant-garde feature governed by the agency of the commercial industry was to be repelled by the prevailing field of Swedish cinema. In this case one could argue that the Fahlström as a true avant-gardist had succeeded by expanding the filmic frontier from within the walls of the institution in a number of directions: legal, aesthetic, ethical, economical, commercial; and regarding what a Swedish cinema of quality really means, making the flaws of the term visible in a public context. However, *Du gamla, Du fria* was not perceived as a pure experiment by the SFI, nor by Fahlström himself, as the commercial apparatus surrounding its conception and realisation was highly tended to, both in financial and distributional terms, and both parties worked towards the creation of a viable filmic product.

Back in Sweden after a trip to the US in the summer of 1971, Fahlström tried in his own manner to set the initial tone for the marketing of his feature, stating in an interview with Margareta Romdahl that "The artist shall be project-maker instead of object-maker. The only interesting thing is to erase the borders between life and art".¹⁵³ The plan was to launch and market *Du gamla, Du fria* domestically and internationally as a uniform prestige product, and Staffan Hedqvist approached Fahlström with the idea that the artist should create the artwork for various posters and print items himself.¹⁵⁴ But despite clearing the inspection of

¹⁵¹ Letter from Öyvind Fahlström to Harry Schein, 25/2 1970. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁵² Letter from Harry Schein to Öyvind Fahlström, 30/6 1970. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹⁵³ Margareta Romdahl, "Fahlström hemma: 'Konstnären bör bli beslutsfattare'", *Dagens Nyheter*, 11/7 1971 (my translation).

¹⁵⁴ Staffan Hedqvist, "Beträffande marknadsföringen av Du gamla Du Fria", internal promemoria SFI, 5/11 1970. Concerning the marketing of *Du gamla, Du fria*, this process was also protracted, as Staffan Hedqvist again, in one last great effort, approached Fahlström about the artwork on March 1, 1971. Fahlström had gone

censorship in September 1971, it became more and more obvious that the Swedish theatres did not want to distribute the film.¹⁵⁵ The many provocative and ethically questionable elements of the film led to many theatre owners being afraid of being partly responsible for the displayed material, and thus be prosecuted. Although Fahlström and Profilm AB shouldered the legal responsibilities, some still remembered the conundrums surrounding Vilgot Sjöman's *Jag är nyfiken gul* ("I Am Curious Yellow", 1967), and many thought that the most sensitive parts of the film, especially the Wallenberg grave desecration, were to be cut before showing the film, as the press claimed in 1971 and 1972.¹⁵⁶ One of few critics in favour of Fahlström's uncensored and artistic freedom was Jonas Sima, who instead of adopting legal navel-gazing and accusing Fahlström of painting a caricature of the Swedish left, focused on its progressive and reformistic disposition: "The film can be perceived as a sort of self-criticism [...] The question is if you live as you learn [...] This vexing, partly funny and sometimes very beautiful film should be urgently shown in cinemas, without cowardly censorship cuts and stupid police reports".¹⁵⁷

In addition to the hardships of the marketing of *Du gamla, Du fria* and the eventful pre-publicity, Harry Schein left his position as director of the SFI in 1970. Schein was replaced by Bo Jonsson, who despite not being as invested in the project as his predecessor, felt that the feature indeed was to be shown in a fashion that suited Fahlström's original idea.¹⁵⁸ After some public lull and a small notification in *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Du gamla, Du fria* finally premiered at the Eriksberg cinema in Stockholm on the third of April 1972.¹⁵⁹

The critical reception was bad, sometimes even devolving into pejoratives as the critics were divided into three camps: the first criticising Fahlström for diminishment and ridicule of

back to the US at the time. Letter from Staffan Hedqvist to Öyvind Fahlström 1/3 1971. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹⁵⁵ Card of Inspection no. 110312. Censorship; cleared for public showing 14/9 1971. The Swedish Film Institute Archive.

¹⁵⁶ See: Elisabeth Sörensson, "Avtal träffat: Fahlströms film klar att visas i Stockholm", in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25/2 1972. See further: Disa Håstad, "I dag avgörs ödet för Fahlströms film", *Dagens Nyheter*, 23/2 1972; "Ny SF-strid om Fahlströms farliga film", *Dagens Nyheter*, 15/2 1972; "Biograferna säger nej till Fahlströms långfilm", *Dagens Nyheter*, 19/10 1971; Alf Montán, "Filmen som ingen vågar visa: Den sanna bilden av maktbalansen", *Expressen*, 19/1 1972.

¹⁵⁷ Jonas Sima, "Visa 'Du gamla, du fria' snarast – ocensurerad!", *Expressen*, 14/2 1972 (my translation).

¹⁵⁸ The SFI correspondence on Jonsson is scarce. In a letter to Dyfverman in 1971 and to Fahlström 27/7, however, he expressed his opinion on the final cut before release: "I do not think that the Film Institute, at this stage, should step in and 'have opinions' about a lot of things". His final remark in the letter became an internal joke between him and Dyfverman, perhaps in an attempt to bringing some relief to the overall stressful situation: "With hope of a premier before the end of the century". Letter from Bo Jonsson to Tomas Dyfverman, 28/7 1971; Letter to Öyvind Fahlström from Bo Jonsson, 27/28 1971. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation). See also: Jonas Sima, "Visa 'Du gamla, du fria' snarast – ocensurerad!", *Expressen*, 14/2 1972.

¹⁵⁹ "Fahlström på Eriksberg", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 4/3 1972. The final resort for the Film Institute in distributing the film was to rent a cinema on its own, as well as assign the future distributional rights to Fahlström and Profilm.

the left; the other for *Du gamla, Du fria*'s messy form; and the last for both. Although Hans-Erik Hjertén at *Dagens Nyheter* promoted a visit to the Eriksberg cinema because of its “refreshing imagery-joy” and “intellectual alertness that you are otherwise not spoiled with in Swedish cinema”, others, such as Kent Häggglund “could only find one thing that is good with ‘Du gamla, Du fria’, and that is, that it is so bad in being a film”.¹⁶⁰ The more profound analyses of *Du gamla, Du fria* resided within the political sphere Fahlström had evoked and explored in his feature. Gunnar Rosengren turned some of Fahlström's own filmic metaphors against him to describe the mistreatments of political substance: “DU GAMLA DU FRIA starts with showing a man suspended from a helicopter. Far beneath him, the residents of Stockholm walk and demonstrate on the first of May. This image captures the director Öyvind Fahlström's relationship with his audience rather well. Floating in the blue sky, high above and alone, and separated from what is really going on among the masses far down below him”.¹⁶¹ The political protests of 1968 had faded away, and as *Du gamla, Du fria* belatedly premiered, its sincerity was questioned and exposed as a display of the leftist movement's final failure, instead of being perceived as an actual document of current counter-cultural acts.¹⁶² The domestic discourse showed that the possibility of political agitation as art was conceivable; it certainly agitated, but not in the way Fahlström had initially intended.

In a last attempt to liberate the potential of Fahlström's feature debut internationally, the Film Institute submitted it to the Venice International Film Festival, where the signature “Hawk” reiterated the Swedish reactions: “It's amazing how rapidly so-called revolutionary films, perhaps via overexposure and /or sameness has palled on the international film marts, and here is another (already) old-hat example, a look at provocative goings-on in the Sweden of today or, perhaps, yesterday”.¹⁶³ Fahlström did not attend either the national or the international premiere of *Du gamla, Du fria*, as he had already left Sweden and travelled back home to New York. In a phone interview with *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* (“The Gothenburg Journal of Commerce and Shipping”), prior to the first public showings of the *Du gamla, Du fria*, he rather sadly summed up the three-year struggle: “As far as I am concerned,

¹⁶⁰ Hans-Erik Hjertén, “Fahlströms ‘Du gamla, du fria’: Frisk och sevärd men budskapet snävt”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 4/4 1972 (my translation); Kent Häggglund, “Du gamla du fria”, *Ny Dag*, 29/4 1974 (my translation).

¹⁶¹ Gunnar Rosengren, “Du gamla, Du fria”, *Filmrutan* no. 2, 1972, p. 75 (my translation).

¹⁶² See: Marianne Zetterström, “Fahlströms tafatta teatergrupp”, *Vecko-Journalen* no. 16, 1972; Jurgen Schildt, “Öyvind Fahlströms film – en ledsam loppcircus”, *Aftonbladet*, 4/4 1972.

¹⁶³ Hawk, “Du Gamla, Du Fria (Provocation) (Swedish-Color)”, unknown journal, 13/9 1972. The Swedish Film Institute archive. An unfounded rumour appeared in *Kvällsposten*, stating that the film was to be shown in the directorial-section in Cannes, also alluding towards Fahlström being the new face of Swedish cinema; KvP, “Du gamla du fria till Cannes”, *Kvällsposten* 3/4 1972.

this is now a historical film. It reflects the intense and confused situation of the political Left in Sweden after the year of revolt in 1968”.¹⁶⁴

As in the many fates of the avant-garde, Fahlström’s filmic progression was lost in the self-devouring of Swedish cinema history, ossified already in its infancy. His feature constitutes a unique example, and perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy, of how the industry tried to create a new type of reciprocity between the minor and the major – where the free artist eventually was defined outside the institution, rather than within the logics of its practice.

4. Experimental Features and Institutional Practice

Du gamla, Du fria, is from a historiographical perspective often placed in a specific cinematic genre of the late 1960s, namely the political film, and when discussed as a result of its time, Fahlström is attributed as the disheartening finisher of the époque.¹⁶⁵ But when ascribed as a part of the experimental film movements in Sweden, the discourse on his filmmaking can find differentiated readings regarding the reciprocity between minor and major film cultures. The coincidental nature of the Film Institute’s policies regarding experimental films, or rather its systematic lack thereof, adds a peculiar dimension to the discussions of a conceptually inconceivable institutional avant-garde, which in turn makes available a discussion that aims at the difficulties of a cultural and practical reciprocity between different socio-economical modes in filmmaking.

When the SFI occupied a producing role in the late 1960s, thus departing from its primary function as financial patron, other experimental filmmakers got to make their feature debuts within the commercial apparatus and institutional practice. Together with Fahlström, artist and composer Peter Kylberg and puppeteer Michael Meschke depict these rare examples of artists with affinities for aesthetic experimentation. On the one hand, the commercial industry invested in them, but on the other hand these attempts, as argued by Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, testified “to the specific difficulty of the SFI in relation to experimental film, as the institute in its very function balances between commercial production and public authority”.¹⁶⁶ Notwithstanding the tangible difficulties, these filmmakers constitute rare

¹⁶⁴ Sverker Andréasson, “Öyvind Fahlström om Du Gamla, Du Fria”, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, 1/4 1972 (my translation). Sverker Andréasson after a phone interview with Fahlström.

¹⁶⁵ Leif Furhammar, *Filmen i Sverige*, Stockholm: Dialogos (1991; 1998), 2003, p. 307; See also Cecilia Mörner, *Vissa visioner: Tendenser i svensk biografdistribuerad fiktionsfilm 1967-1972*, Edsbruk: Diss. Stockholm University; Akademitryck, 2000, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 139.

examples on how the SFI broke through the supposed insularities of cultural modes and distributional circuits on different occasions.

Despite their significant differences regarding artistic means of production, practices, and disciplines, Fahlström, Kylberg, and Meschke shared common ground when speaking about the advents of experimental features within the publicly rationed institutional practice; they were all feature film debutants with different types of pilot projects as regards the SFI's permanently changing terms of production policies. Kylberg's *JAG* was the first co-production of the Film Institute in 1966; Fahlström's *Du gamla, Du fria* was the first venture where the Institute took the sole production onus, in 1969; and Meschke's *Skärseld* was the first feature awarded means out of the Institute's newly formed production fund, in 1973.¹⁶⁷

In addition to the unique circumstances of these films' production contexts, their creators also share positions in the minor film cultures of Swedish cinema, making them comprehensive examples of how two, supposedly distinct forms of cultural practice with their own autonomy – the commercially viable and the experimental – fused together, and tried to bring forth artistically progressive prestige products. This following chapter aims, in a comparative manner and in dialogue with film scholar Lars Diurlin's research, to broaden the theoretical horizon on Fahlström as a maker of experimental features, by correlating *Du gamla, Du fria* with similar historical events, where the avant-garde was absorbed in an institutional mode of production.

4.1 The Dilemma of *JAG*

The similarities between Öyvind Fahlström and Peter Kylberg go beyond the fact that they were both granted means by the SFI to produce provocative and unconventional feature films. Both Fahlström and Kylberg worked in other aesthetic disciplines and evoked intermedial idioms within their separate artistic universes; Fahlström interleaved poetry with visual arts as well as theatre, happening and performance with moving images, trying to create a correlating artistic flora without boundaries; Kylberg, in addition to being an unusual filmmaker, painted and composed music, trying via the film medium to bring forth a pure kinetic experiment. As artists they were both perceived as avant-gardists and formalistic innovators by their

¹⁶⁷ In February 1972, the existing film agreement was subjected to a slight revision. The difference was that the 10% fee presented by the cinemas now went to the prospects of the SFI's own film production. See Furhammar, *Filmen i Sverige*, pp. 317-318, 326.

contemporaries, and as for the cultural politics formulated by Harry Schein, they fitted the dictums of progressiveness and revivification.¹⁶⁸

JAG and *Du gamla, Du fria*, in spite of being radically different in form and content, retrospectively share the same marginal position in Swedish historiography, and are both also exemplifications on the contradictory relationship between dominant and experimental film cultures. When touching upon Kylberg's experiment in the surveying chapter "I skuggan av spelfilmen: svensk experimentell film", Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding suggest that the *JAG*-project exemplifies how the SFI "on the one hand dissolved the presumptive contradictory position of the experimental film in relation to the prevailing film climate", but at the same time "proved that such an antagonism is continuously present".¹⁶⁹ This applies to Fahlström's case, when the financial fiasco finally asserted itself, thus prohibiting the filmmakers from a second attempt at feature filmmaking. Kylberg's and Fahlström's projects highlight the precarious position of the SFI and its institutional practice, residing in the interstices between the commercial and non-commercial, which in extension led them to being discounted as mere "attempts, which the SFI, in spite of financing them, did not want to defend in the long run".¹⁷⁰ This proof is also notably present in the filmographies of the two experimentalists, post- their feature film debuts: *Du gamla, Du fria* being the frustrating conclusion of Fahlström's film production, as Kylberg did not return to the feature format until thirty years after *JAG*.¹⁷¹

However, there are some principal differences between the two. Using the features as starting points and, according to the institutions and trade, as attempts at the "real thing", we can see how the two artists' training grounds, i.e. their presence within the short film format, had distinct variations in scope and style but also in regard to their involvement in the established industry.¹⁷² Fahlström's collected filmography is characterised by an openly tentative and rather untrained approach to the medium, which extends to him moving freely between different exhibition- and national contexts: the alternative and the conventional distribution systems, the American and the Swedish etc. He used film as he used painting and linguistic figurations, as aesthetic substitutes, but tending to its mass-medial properties, trying

¹⁶⁸ Harry Schein, *Har vi råd med kultur?*, 1962, p. 31; *I själva verket*, 1970, p. 128.

¹⁶⁹ Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm, Astrid Söderbergh Widding, "I skuggan av spelfilmen: svensk experimentell film", *Konst som rörlig bild – Från Diagonalsymfonin till Whiteout*, Lidingö: Bokförlaget Lagenskiöld, 2006, p. 68 (my translation).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 76 (my translation).

¹⁷¹ Kylbergs second feature *Istället för ett äventyr* ("Instead of an Adventure"), had its world premiere in 1996 at the Gothenburg Film Festival. See: Diurlin, p. 284.

¹⁷² See: Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 137.

to portray art as a continuous event with permanency and participation for both actor and viewer. Kylberg on the other hand operationalised a more introvert and pure approach, when speaking in film-aesthetical terms, as the starting point for him according to Diurlin was “The experimental approach, and wishing to set his paintings to music, making them a synthesised Gesamtkunstwerk”.¹⁷³ If Fahlström wanted to dissolve the boundaries of artistic mediums, Kylberg wanted to unite them.

Diurlin’s work on Kylberg is extensive and elaborate. He approaches the filmmaker from two different perspectives and problem areas: Kylberg as an experimental filmmaker taking part in the film industrial culture and practice, but still with an “separate” (minor) posture within this culture; and Kylberg as a modernist, continuously envisioning and revitalising virtues from the historical avant-garde, thus taking an essentially different position within the commercial production context.¹⁷⁴ Similar to the case of Fahlström’s filmmaking, Diurlin shows that it is problematic to lodge Kylberg in a specific film cultural context, as he took a solitary stance throughout his career with the continual experimental nature of his filmic work, in spite of being part of the established industry.¹⁷⁵ The question whether Kylberg should be read as an experimental filmmaker bound by the industry, an auteur, or simply a free artist, leads Diurlin to discuss Kylberg’s position within the framework of major and minor film cultures offered by James.¹⁷⁶ In comparison to Fahlström it is interesting to see how *JAG*, and how the “separateness” of the experimental feature film format, relates to the practical and cultural hybridity of *Du gamla, Du fria* and its failed reciprocity between a commercial logic and the avant-garde.

After three successful attempts in the short film format, which all were embraced and monitored by the industry – *Kadens* (Svensk Filmindustri, 1960); *En kortfilm av Peter Kylberg* (“A short film by Peter Kylberg”, Sandrews, 1963); *Paris D-moll* (“Paris D minor”, Svensk Filmindustri, 1964, awarded with a quality bonus from the SFI) – Kylberg had, in spite of his rare style within the prevalent film climate, challenged the establishments of Swedish cinema. This rapidly led him to the real thing, a feature film debut produced not only

¹⁷³ Lars Diurlin, “*Filmreformens första avantgardist*” – *Experimentfilmaren Peter Kylberg*, Lund: Mediehistoriskt Arkiv (no. 37), 2017, p. 35 (my translation).

¹⁷⁴ Diurlin, pp. 20-41.

¹⁷⁵ Kylberg started out as a sketch artist at Filmstaden, which led to his first film production *Kadens* (1960), financed by the short film section at Svensk Filmindustri. The film, an animated experiment in colour and music, found domestic as well as international attention, as *Kadens* was selected to be screened before Akira Kurosawa’s *The Bad Sleep Well* (*Warui yatsu hodo yoku nemuru*, 1960) at the 1961 Berlinale. See: Diurlin, pp. 15, 59, 63.

¹⁷⁶ Diurlin, pp. 25-34.

by two commercially established companies, Sandrews and SF, but also by the official arbiter of the industry, the SFI.¹⁷⁷

When focused on its restricted scope, Kylberg's training ground within the field of filmmaking is tangent to that of Fahlström. The main difference, however, is that Kylberg came from within the logic of an established film production, and had already publicly profiled himself as an exciting and experimental filmmaker. When it was clear that the production of *JAG* was to be carried out, the critical discourse on Kylberg fortified him as an experimental and avant-garde filmmaker. The borrowed title of Diurlin's dissertation "Filmreformens förste avantgardist ("The Film Reform's first avant-gardist")", derives from an exclamation of Kylberg's peer experimentalist Carl Henrik Svenstedt, who reviewed the film: "Finally we have received the avant-garde film experiment some of us have nagged about since the inception of the Film Reform, the reform that was also to provide space for artistic ventures".¹⁷⁸ With Kylberg, a hopeful outlook on a diverse cinematic climate was temporarily realised. His implementation of an experimentalist, essentially non-commercial, temperament within the capitalist market was celebrated, as he continuously was publicised as a rising film star and highly gifted debutant.¹⁷⁹

JAG is the story of a young man (Christer Banck), the film's "I", whose existential journey through the cityscape of Stockholm combines the many modernistic expressions Kylberg revisited throughout his short films.¹⁸⁰ Just like Fahlström's method and style generate a chaotic and obscure form, both in regard to mixing the documentary with the fictitious happening-like structure and the unorthodox production conditions, Kylberg's film, in spite of being unconventional compared to the contemporary fashions of social-minded depictions, gives an impression of being more consummate as a cinematic product. And when further comparing *JAG* to *Du gamla, Du fria* within the framework of experimental features and institutional practice, some peculiar differences appear. The most obvious distinction concerns the budgets. Fahlström's million, compared to the final and deficient calculation of Kylberg's 322,810 Swedish crowns, again reveals the contradictory assessments the SFI

¹⁷⁷ The SFI undertook half of the financial burden, as SF and Sandrews took a quarter each. Diurlin, p. 155.

¹⁷⁸ Carl Henrik Svenstedt, "Filmreformens förste avantgardist", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 17/5 1966 (my translation).

¹⁷⁹ See for example: Mauritz Edström, "Centrallyrisk jag-film av begåvad debutant", *Dagens Nyheter*, 17/5 1966; Göran Börge, "JAG", *Aftonbladet*, 17/5 1966; Stig Arb, "Jag – en filmskapare", *Vecko-Journalen*, no. 26, 1/7 1966; Gunnar Tannefors, "Mästare i färg, Se, 26/5 1966; Gösta Hansson, "En ung filmbegåvning med lovande experiment", *Göteborgs-Tidningen*, 17/5 1966.

¹⁸⁰ Diurlin shows that Kylberg, despite never directly admitting to it, shared many filmic ideas with European and American experimental film traditions such as the trance film, the lyrical film, the city symphony, the diary film, but also when positioning himself within the Swedish art film institution through *JAG*, with the auteur concept. Diurlin, p. 36, 149-150; see further: P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*.

applied to experimental projects.¹⁸¹ But the more complex reality of the matter connects to the supposed field struggle that emerged between Harry Schein and Kylberg. As Diurlin points to, the policy of the SFI to support artistically valuable film, now converged with Kylberg, who at the time “actually held a position on the newly constructed film field”.¹⁸² An aspect that sequentially led him to initiate a field struggle with Schein.¹⁸³ This struggle was seemingly absent when Fahlström was to be given his chance, as Schein’s initial attitudes towards these respective SFI-projects differed widely. Retrospectively we can see how Fahlström was principally given a free hand as, from Schein’s point of view, it was interesting to see what this interesting artist “could accomplish with the camera”.¹⁸⁴ Kylberg’s project, on the other hand, was judged even before the film’s production, as Schein at the time gave his comment to the daily press, stating that *JAG* was “artistically unnecessary”, later on adding that the film was “hopeless from a public point of view”.¹⁸⁵ This animosity apparently lingered with Schein, when he contemplated Kylberg’s experiment and the SFI’s first co-production many years later:

an isolated young man, understood by no one and therefore likely to be gifted. His merits include the father’s name, the mother’s energy, and the so-called experimental short films. It went as one could expect. Even this first production harboured the dilemma that was to characterise the future production policies of the Film Institute. What was the Film Institute supposed to do if there was money, set aside for film production, but no good projects? This dilemma – rather bad film than none at all – applies only to public institutions. If we were to save funds for later, awaiting more interesting projects, we would be subjected to strong criticism. Against my inner convictions I caved in, then and later, under this pressure.¹⁸⁶

The distributional responsibility and exploitation rights of *JAG* were in the end ascribed to Sandrews. And similar to the septic case of *Du gamla, Du fria*, the company was now facing, as Diurlin points out, “the difficult task of selling an almost unsellable experimental product to the Swedish audience”.¹⁸⁷ *JAG* opened in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Uppsala, and in parallel to Fahlström’s provocation, with disastrous box office numbers. As the SFI, more

¹⁸¹ Diurlin, p. 155.

¹⁸² Diurlin, p. 153 (my translation).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Schein, *I själva verket*, p. 175.

¹⁸⁵ Anders Isacson, “‘Det blir nog ingen premiering’ Kortfilmare fick långfilmsnej: Konstnärligt onödig”, *Aftonbladet*, 18/1 1965 (my translation); Schein, *I själva verket*, p. 161 (my translation).

¹⁸⁶ Harry Schein, *Schein*, Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag AB, 1980, p. 419 (my translation).

¹⁸⁷ Diurlin, p. 198 (my translation).

specifically Harry Schein, now held significant influence over the international distribution of Swedish film, Kylberg's film poem was eventually, but solely through the care of Sandrews' Bo Jonsson, placed at a recently launched film festival in Pesaro, Italy.¹⁸⁸

Almost as an inverted paradox, mirroring the reactions to Fahlström in Venice several years later, Kylberg's work lacked the elements his successor offered in abundance, as Diurlin writes: "Similar to the situation back home in Sweden, the leftist-oriented film festival preferred a clear socially universal message above formalistic experiments, which also shone through in the jury's motivation".¹⁸⁹ As Fahlström's vision and universal pretence had grown out of their own temporal potency, Kylberg's was too individualistic and cinematically eccentric, dwelling in the domains of the Gesamtkunstwerk. In an avant-gardist sense they were both too late, and perhaps if Fahlström and Kylberg were to change places in time, the historiography of institutional experimental features would reveal more preferable outcomes in the supposedly reciprocal ecosphere of Swedish film production.

As the respective production- and reception contexts show, the films of Fahlström and Kylberg are of course perceived, and constructed, in very different critical, and discursive, states of cultural and institutional expressions. But yet, they both rather strikingly represent the arbitrary and contradictory discursive events that emerged when Swedish filmic experimentalists were subjected to an institutional practice and apparatus, as well as directly subjugated to the inconsistent attitude of Harry Schein regarding the prospects of an experimental feature film production. Fahlström was the internationally recognised provocateur that impulsively was given an institutional million, just as Kylberg was the sharp avant-gardist, an under-funded solitary figure undermining conventional and aesthetical norms. Still, the features share some discursive fates, as they were both considered to move away from and alienate their audiences, leading both filmmakers straight back to the margins of Swedish film production, ephemerally dethroned by the logics of commercialism.

4.2 Michael Meschke's Inferno

Polish-born puppeteer Michael Meschke (1931-) is perhaps even more marginalised in Swedish research on minor film cultures than Fahlström and Kylberg. The only study of his filmmaking takes place in *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, where the trio Andersson, Sundholm, and Söderbergh Widding briefly takes inventory of some of his few

¹⁸⁸ Jonsson was at the time in charge Sandrews' international contacts. Diurlin, p. 201.

¹⁸⁹ Diurlin, p. 202 (my translation).

short films. His puppet theatre Marionetteatern (founded 1958), together with Moderna Museet, Fylkingen, and Pistolteatern are mentioned as important “venues of the avant-garde”, although they, aside from Moderna, “never made any consistent contributions to Swedish experimental film culture”.¹⁹⁰ These vanguard institutions, except for Marionetteatern, were regularly frequented by Öyvind Fahlström, lecturing on his text-sound-compositions at Fylkingen, as well as shooting a short film fragment at Pistolteatern, consisting of his wife’s, Barbro Östlihn, foot slowly moving in front of an Yves Klein painting – a fragment that was used in the performance piece *Kisses Sweeter Than Wine*.¹⁹¹

Meschke’s artistry is intricate to pin down in relation to Swedish experimental filmmaking, which simultaneously makes him a rather typical agent in the heterogeneous ruptures of the minor film cultures. Similar to Fahlström and Peter Weiss, he adopted an inherently bilingual aesthetic, which recurrently challenged the expressions of Swedish provincialism. In one of the few comprehensive academic works conducted on Marionetteatern, the professor in comparative literature Sverker R. Ek writes: “Meschke obviously felt, through his family, a double loyalty, partly with a central European cultural tradition, partly with the Swedish milieu he grew up in. For him as a young puppeteer, it was essential to create a vital cultural exchange beyond borders”.¹⁹² The experimental sensibilities, the mixtures of traditions, themes, techniques and vision to broaden children’s visual culture made Marionetteatern an internationally renowned venue, and allowed Meschke to use his puppets “as avant-garde instruments in the Swedish performing arts”.¹⁹³

The origin of *Skärseld* however started with Meschke receiving a grant of 105,000 Swedish crowns by Bo Jonsson in 1972 for a short film, which was to adapt his own version of Dante’s poem “La Divina Commedia” performed at Marionetteatern two years earlier. The shoot commenced in Italy in July, and after ten days Meschke had gathered an extensive amount of material that did not fit the initial agreement. During this period of time, the SFI was subjected to re-organisation, leading to the establishment of a new section within the Institute that was solely dedicated to in-house production. Bengt Forslund became its supervisor, and crossed paths with Meschke’s, at this point, fragmentary material. On January 26, 1973, *Skärseld* became the first film to be guaranteed production means from the so-called

¹⁹⁰ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 102-104. The authors mention the surrealist short film *Luogo Candido* and *Prag69*, both made by Meschke in 1969.

¹⁹¹ Teddy Hultberg (ed.), *Fylkingen – Ny musik och intermediakonst*, Stockholm: Fylkingen Förlag, 1994, pp. 61-83; Anders Wahlgren, *Pistolteatern 1964-67*, Stockholm: Rönnells Antikvariat, 2003, p. 109.

¹⁹² Sverker R. Ek, Lennart Forslund, *Marionetten som avantgardist: kring Marionetteatern i Stockholm*, Umeå: Umeå University, 1984, p. 45 (my translation).

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 79.

H2-fund, and was remade as a feature.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the genesis of Meschke's feature fits the antecedents, further reifying the coincidental nature of the Institute's history of making experimental features.

Similar to Fahlström and Kylberg, Meschke's artistry illustrates a versatile and fundamentally intermedial mode of invention. And when including him in the context of the institutional production of experimental feature films in Sweden, it becomes even more conspicuous how the artists intertwine: the limited training ground in relation to format; the tentativeness regarding the production policies of the SFI in backing yet another debutant; and the outsider perspective juxtaposing the establishment. Like Fahlström, Meschke was considered to master his specific craft, but as a filmmaker he was evidently untested. In an interview with Lars Brusling, the feature film debutant got some attention: "'Divina Commedia', is Michael Meschke's feature film debut. He has previously only worked with theatre, and some short films", whereupon Meschke attested: "It is very hard [...] It is a whole new technique to learn".¹⁹⁵ In this context Meschke, in spite of receiving some praise for the short film *Luogo Candido* (1969), seems to be even less familiar with the medium, and in addition to not have exacted a work sample to the SFI, as was the case with Fahlström, as his "sample" was transposed directly into the feature format.

Yet another resemblance to Fahlström was that Meschke sought film due to its mass-media properties and ability to reach out to a wider audience. This preference was directly anchored in the original material of Dante and the prospect of its modernisation, a desire that was also shared by the foremost authority on the subject, the poet and literary scholar Olof Lagercrantz. When rumours of Meschke's approaching project emerged, Lagercrantz personally wrote to Bo Jonsson, arguing that the comedy could reach different interpretations through the film medium, despite its general highbrow inaccessibility, and that the "scenes and fates from it", in fact could "concern modern people".¹⁹⁶ Lagercrantz' wish was met with sympathy, not only by the realisation of a modern *Divina Commedia*, but also as he later got to make his acting debut on the big screen in the role of Cato.

As Meschke had already staged an adaptation of the divine comedy at Marionetteatern in 1970, he now hoped to expand his artistic visions in making it modern and contemporary: "As

¹⁹⁴ See: Lars Åhlander, *Svensk filmografi 7* (1970-1979), Stockholm: Svenska Filminstitutet/Nordstedts Förlag, 1989, p. 262.

¹⁹⁵ Lars Brusling, "Dantes 'commedia' blir långfilm om svensk nutid", *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 31/8 1973 (my translation).

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Olof Lagercrantz to Bo Jonsson, 2/5 1973. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation). Lagercrantz was at the time editor in chief for *Dagens Nyheter*, the largest morning paper in Sweden.

so many others, my dream is to paint with the camera. In film you can allow yourself abstract passage of events... at the same time I have now learnt that there must be a logic to the images. There are laws you cannot break. I have been dissuaded many times since starting working with film”.¹⁹⁷ In a very similar manner to that of Fahlström’s pre-production, Meschke’s original visions were tamed by the logics of which he speaks above, as well as by the austere professionalism of the trade. In the early synopsis, based on an image- and text script titled “Divina Commedia Fragments”, it becomes apparent that Meschke’s interpretation of the almost 700-year old text was a highly experimental approach, as he wanted the style of the film to depict “Dante’s contemporary and visionary world as a series of fragmentary frescoes”:

The fragmented dimension of the story should partly appear in the selection of subjects: literary, religious and historical extensions are rejected, in favour of accessible and universal depictions, which every man, despite educational predispositions, can refer to. This would partly take place in the technical method of a narrative: broken sequences of events, fragmentation of the emulsion on the film strip, corrosion or other “destruction” of the material, broken dialogues, and rapid imaging of key concepts from longer pieces of verse.¹⁹⁸

Forslund, executive producer of the film, supported Meschke’s presentation and emphasised his personal position “that all films need not address a broad – implicitly Swedish – audience, especially when it concerns the Film Institute’s own production”, continuing his statement by subtly attacking the recurrent terminologies of commercialism “Despite all, film art must live on through, for instance, investing in debutants and experiments – of all kinds and in all directions”.¹⁹⁹

Alongside Forslund’s anti-commercial notions, the venture was experimental to its core, both in terms of aesthetic intermediation and by the fact that Meschke had never written in the filmic language he now had in front of him. In contrast to this, the final product differs slightly from the original technical interventions proposed in the “Commedia Fragments”. In addition to granting Meschke production guarantee for a feature, Forslund hired Italian cinematographer and editor Silvano Agosti, who became the professional adviser and

¹⁹⁷ Elisabeth Sörensson, ”Danteinspirerad film görs för första produktionspengarna”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26/1 1973 (my translation).

¹⁹⁸ “Divina Commedia Fragments”, compiled by Bengt Forslund, based on Meschke’s text-image synopsis, supplied to the members of the H2-fund, 5/1 1973, p. 3. The Swedish Film Institute Archive (my translation).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 2.

supervisor of the project as well as the film's co-director. The final product displays a hallucinatory imagery and elliptical structure, as *Skärseld* transposes the infernal wandering of Dante (Jan Blomberg), portrayed as a struggling leftist writer in the modern society of Sweden in the 1970s.²⁰⁰ The mixture of archaic and modern – the text and the (mass) medium – experiences of the story's Dante make *Skärseld* a unique vision in Swedish film history, which in extension relates to the mode Meschke recurrently operationalised in his puppets – translating the essence of the existent material as well as the formalistic procedure.²⁰¹

At the premier of *Skärseld* in 1975 the reception was inherently mixed. Some criticism related to Meschke's inadequate handling of this medium that was new to him, whereas others welcomed the experimental approach. Despite of calling the film an "original experiment", and Meschke an indisputably talented man, Ingemar Åhslund was not convinced that film was something to pursue for the master of puppets.²⁰² The other factor was the supposed failure of handling the arcane original material, as the motifs and questions the film was meant to universalise fell into "the avant-garde film's nowadays well-known trapdoors".²⁰³ Others, such as Hans-Erik Hjertén were exclusively pejorative, calling *Skärseld* "an insane venture, that the Film Institute for some reason has poured money into".²⁰⁴

The undisputable non-commerciality of Meschke's debut led to a debate questioning the film-political aspects of SFI's own production, i.e. the fact that the Institute ventured in experimental and narrow projects, but at the same time denied them wider distribution. Lasse

²⁰⁰ Here I would like to note a parallel to the films of Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, particularly when looking at the notorious *Salò o le centoventi giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975). The films do not only coincide temporally, but also in Dante's use of the circuits of hell in the original text. Although Pasolini enables an additional framework, the book by Markis de Sade, he transfers the historical fiction to the contemporary milieu of Italian fascism. In a similar manner, Meschke re-verbalises and projects the wandering of Dante onto the frustration and tristesse in Swedish welfare society. Another operation that parallels Meschke with Pasolini is the "re-mythification" of the historical figure, as *Skärseld* wants to access the historicity of the poem, transforming it and making it comprehensible in a modern context – similar to what Pasolini does in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964), *Edipo Re* (*Oedipus Rex*, 1967), *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968) and *Medea* (1969). See: Lars Gustaf Andersson, *Ånglarnas barn – En studie i Pier Paolo Pasolinis filmer*, Lund: Boxbok Förlag, 1992, p. 56.

²⁰¹ Similar to Meschke's production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* at Marionetteatern in 1964, he now let Dante be the singular humanistic force, both in his nightmares/visions and in the malignity of his surrounding reality (capitalism, fascism, society as a machinery of power manifestations), letting a sole subject, as Sverker Ek writes: "form daydreams of banal wickedness", as an "expression for our absurd world of yesterday and today". Concerning the mixture of form, Meschke's production of *Antigone* serves as a good example of how he infused his avant-garde instrumentalism on Swedish art, here mixing a classic drama with the traditional Japanese bunraku-technique. See: Sverker Ek, *Marionetten som avantgardist*, p. 70, 79.

²⁰² Ingemar Åhslund, "Originellt experiment", *Uppsala Nya Tidning*, 4/3 1975. See further: Åke Janzon, "Dante trots allt?", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25/2 1975.

²⁰³ Sven E Olsson, "Visst måste vi ha en ny filmpolitik: Utbudet styrs av branschen", *Arbetet*, 28/1 1975 (my translation).

²⁰⁴ Hans-Erik Hjertén, "Vansinnigt företag", *Dagens Nyheter*, 25/2 1975 (my translation). See also: Bernt Eklund, "Skärseld", *Expressen*, 25/2 1975; C-E Nordberg, "Skärseld", *Hänt i veckan*, April 1975, p. 34; Lars Guth, "Marionetter – trots allt", *Östgöta Correspondenten*, 28/1 1975.

Jonsson at *Folkbladet Östgöten* argued that the film would probably not have been made without means from the Institute, as one had to look intensively for a film that was less commercial. Jurgen Shildt asked who the film actually addressed, the audience or the director himself.²⁰⁵ Sven E Olsson on the other hand focused on the poor distribution of *Skärseld*, calling it an “exotic guest in Swedish cinema, an experimental film”, and in extension exemplifying it as a symptom of the SFI’s dictatorial and unrealistic assessments of quality film: “The current situation means that the industry decides what is to be shown, and to whom. In the long run this also means that it will decide what is to be produced”.²⁰⁶ In hindsight this problematic relation between the experimental and the commercial not only exemplifies the contradiction, but also that these features were directly involved in affecting the film-political situation in Sweden.

Once more, a Swedish experimental feature, rather than innovating and pushing the boundaries for film quality, had made clear that the relation between art and commerce is intensely volatile and perhaps should be separated forever. *Skärseld*, like *Du gamla, Du fria* and *JAG*, failed miserably at Swedish cinemas, as they were dragged down to purgatory by both critical reception and distributional problems, beyond hope for commercial exploitation. Despite some international praise, primarily in America, Meschke returned to his puppets, leaving film production indefinitely.²⁰⁷ In a final interview regarding his again deferred dreams of painting with the camera, Meschke said: “Unfortunately, I don’t think that there’s anyone who wants, or can, defend me in a new film project right now. I had to wait fifteen years to make film and now I probably have to wait even longer”.²⁰⁸

5. Recapturing the Avant-Garde Feature

If we broaden the historical horizon of this concept, the Swedish experimental feature film, the “Foucauldian ruptures and changes” detected by Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh

²⁰⁵ Lasse Jonsson, “Märklig film om Dante som politisk svikare”, *Folkbladet Östgöten*, 28/1 1975; Jurgen Shildt, “En film för regissören”, *Aftonbladet*, 25/2 1975.

²⁰⁶ Sverker E Olsson, “Visst måste vi ha en ny filmpolitik: Utbudet styrs av branschen”, *Arbetet*, 28/1 1975 (my translation).

²⁰⁷ “Meschkes film ‘Skärselden’ hyllas i USA”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 8/1 1975; “Okänd svensk får beröm i USA!”, *Aftonbladet*, 7/1 1975. In the American trade magazine *Variety*, signature “Kell”, wrote Meschke’s unfulfilled prophecy: “Here is a feature film that may lie beyond all hope of general exploitation, but Michael Meschke’s and coworker Silvano Agosti’s ‘Purgatory’ is nevertheless sure of being widely shown and to be seriously debated on the highest of levels. Art houses and festivals will probably fight to get it on their programmes”. Kell, “Skaerseldan (Purgatory)”, *Variety*, 1/11 1974. Kell was right about *Skärselden*’s lack of domestic exploitation, but the film was only to be sold internationally to Finland, Norway and Mexico, and was unfortunately not debated on the highest of levels.

²⁰⁸ Stefan Mehr, “Michael Meschke ense med kritiken: ‘Min film var inte bra’”, *Expressen*, 26/2 1975 (my translation).

Widding reappear, and confirm the reality of Swedish experimental filmmaking.²⁰⁹ However, when studied comprehensively and comparatively, the experimental features reveal a combinatory mode of being both distinct forms of cultural practice and showing reciprocity between the minor and the major. However, if we adapt the experimental feature as a summary term, a separation between the commercial and the non-commercial reappears. From this viewpoint the experimental features made before the establishment of the SFI tend to nuance the supposed existence of hybrid film productions, as their means of production contrasts with the institutional practice.

In this final chapter, my intention is to recapture the ephemeral phenomena of Swedish avant-garde feature films by positioning the films made pre-SFI in juxtaposition with the discursive networks of *JAG*, *Du gamla*, *Du fria*, and *Skärseld*. The films made in the period pre-SFI offer different perspectives on the conditions of filmic experimentation in Sweden. In this case the feature films by Hagberg, Gyllenberg and Weiss, as opposed to the institutional projects, hypothetically manifest an antagonistic relation between free art and commercial production.

5.1 Introducing a New Format – Precursor Rune Hagberg

In his voluminous overview of Swedish film history, Leif Furhammar ascertained that the “fruitful chaos” in post-war Sweden unlocked new outlets for aesthetic invention as “Sweden got its first avant-garde film in the feature format, Rune Hagberg’s ...*och efter skymning kommer mörker* (1947)”.²¹⁰ Hagberg (1918-2006), who dwelt in a domain between amateur- and professional filmmaking, shot the film in his own apartment in Stockholm. He was welcomed as a pioneer and has been described as an introducer of a more modernistic approach to Swedish cinema.²¹¹ The film took three years to finalise, with decisive help from the funder Lorens Marmstedt, and Hagberg’s surrealistic and expressionistic experiment generated a fresh debate, both within the partisan experimental film culture at the time and on the arena of high art. In spite of not calling Hagberg’s film a complete work, fellow experimentalist Peter Weiss held it as “the future of film [...] a welcome opposition to the

²⁰⁹ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 13.

²¹⁰ Leif Furhammar, *Filmen i Sverige*, p. 201 (my translation).

²¹¹ Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm, “Reluctant Swedish Modernism: Transnational Trajectories and Domestic Applications”, in *Film and Literary Modernism* (edited by Robert McParland), Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2013, p. 69. See also: Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 63-64; Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, “I skuggan av spelfilmen: svensk experimentell film”, in *Konst som rörlig bild*, p. 40.

conventional film market”.²¹² The gratification within the yet undeveloped minor film culture was reflected by renowned poet Artur Lundkvist, who pointed out that the value of filmic art is not to be bound by expensive technology, as Hagberg “pierced through the standard conceptions, anxiously sustained by commercial film production”.²¹³ In a fundamentally important article on the state of Swedish experimental film, Edouard de Laurot offered an international perspective. In spite of criticising the “lack of native tradition in film aesthetics”, de Laurot hailed Hagberg’s film as “An outstanding Swedish experimental production”.²¹⁴

Within the context of Swedish experimental film culture, the activities of Svensk Experimenfilmstudio (SEF, “Swedish Workshop for Experimental Film”, later called Arbetsgruppen för film, “The Independent Film Group”) occupies a central role. Perhaps it occupies the “only role”, as the situation in a national context pre-1950, as argued by Andersson, Sundholm and Söderbergh Widding, cannot be viewed as anything but a “pre-history”, in both “qualitative and quantitative” terms.²¹⁵ As the group was formed in February, 1950, attracting a range of prolific agents on the emerging field, Öyvind Fahlström, Peter Weiss, Pontus Hultén and Harry Schein among others, a more cohesive discourse on experimental filmmaking emerged. The groundwork of Hagberg, however, was bound to be an irregular occurrence, as the group exclusively made shorts, and Hagberg stopped making filmic experiments.²¹⁶ His feature was an isolated anomaly, both in terms of production mode and aesthetical figures, but remained a forerunner within the new climate. In accordance with a SEF-screening of *...och efter skymning kommer mörker* in 1952, the author and experimental filmmaker Eivor Burbeck asked where the pioneer had gone: “It has now gone five years since AND AFTER DAWN COMES DARKNESS was finalised. Why has it not been followed up with a new film? A film that could give Hagberg an opportunity to confirm and underline the values of the first work? If he succeeded this well with primitive means, it is

²¹² Peter Weiss (Hugo Wortzelius, Nils Peter Eckerbom, Stig Ossian-Ericson), “Debatt kring en experimentfilm: Rune Hagbergs ‘... och efter skymning kommer mörker’”, in *Biografbladet*, no. 3, 1947, p. 167 (my translation).

²¹³ Artur Lundkvist, “Och efter skymning kommer mörker”, in *BLM (Bonniers Litterära Magasin)*, no. 5, 1947, p. 441-442 (my translation).

²¹⁴ Edouard de Laurot, “Swedish Cinema=Classic Background and Militant Avantgarde”, in *Film Culture*, no. 2, 1956, p. 19-20.

²¹⁵ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, “I skuggan av spelfilmen: svensk experimentell film”, p. 16. For a more extensive outlook on the cultural circuits of early Swedish experimental film, see: Lars Gustaf Andersson, John Sundholm, “Amatör och avantgarde: de mindre filmkulturerna i efterkrigstidens Sverige”, in *Välfärdsbilder – Svensk film utanför biografen* (ed. Erik Hedling and Mats Jönsson), Stockholm: Statens ljud- och bildarkiv, 2007, pp. 229-245.

²¹⁶ Between 1957 and 1976 Hagberg continued to make films in Sweden at the company Husmors Filmer (“The housewife’s films”), which made a sort of entertaining infomercials. See: Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 65.

natural to assume that he will succeed even better with standard equipment”.²¹⁷ Burbeck’s enquiry relates to the fact that funding for Swedish experimental filmmaking was overall continuously underprivileged, even more so when requesting films in feature format.

5.2 The Dreams of an Equilibrist – Carl Gyllenberg’s *Som i drömmar*

Seven years after the proliferation of *...och efter skymning kommer mörker*, artist Carl Gyllenberg took it upon himself to expand the concept of experimental features. Similar to Meschke’s approach in *Skärseld*, Gyllenberg recycled an ancient text, transposing the myth of Prometheus to a filmic depiction of the Swedish archipelago. Gyllenberg had been a part of the activities of SEF, making non-figurative short film experiments such as *Study in Colours* (1951, with Mihail Livada), *Opus 5204* and *Opus 5103* (1952), but his experimental feature *Som i drömmar* (“As in dreams”, 1954) was produced outside the context of SEF. The film was made possible by the agency of Lars Burman, benefactor and director of the Swedish record company Metronome. Burman backed Gyllenberg with approximately 100,000 Swedish crowns, as Sweden was to receive its first feature film experiment, distributed through regular venues.²¹⁸

Gyllenberg’s project was well received, due to his youthful expression and experimental imagery.²¹⁹ Critic Gerd Osten saw Gyllenberg’s contribution as a vital expression of the avant-garde cinema, as *Som i drömmar* had shown that “experimental film as such has a function to fill, even in our country. So far, you have to perceive the occurrence as rather unique – as the financial structure of film production hardly permits any deviations from the commercial programme”.²²⁰ Ulf Hård af Segerstad referred to Gyllenberg’s rare imagery and connected it to some of the filmic avant-garde’s greatest: “With admirable and strict consequence, Gyllenberg has weaved these elements to a whole, which definitely carries his own mark – perhaps you can in some ways track reminiscences from Cocteau to Deren, but they are not in any way a liability”.²²¹ With *Som i drömmar* Gyllenberg achieved what

²¹⁷ Eivor Burbeck, “René Clair, Rune Hagberg och lite Gösta Werner”, *Tidningen Svensk Experimentalfilmstudio*, 1952: no. 8-9, p. 8 (my translation). The Filmform Archive (Filmform The Art Film and Video Archive). *Tidningen Svensk Experimentalfilmstudio* was the organisation’s short-lived own stencilled journal.

²¹⁸ “Burman satsar 100.000 kr på experimentalfilm”, *Expressen*, 20/7 1953; Ketty Alatalo, “Han satsar gärna 100.000”, *Filmjournalen*, no. 32, 1953. See also Lars Åhlander (ed.), *Svensk filmografi 5* (1950-1959), p. 357. The budget is, in this context, fairly modest, and Gyllenberg used amateur actors, as well as no synchronised sound. Burman, however, got to play the role of Hephaestus, similar to Meschke’s homage to Lagercrantz.

²¹⁹ C. B – n, “Anglais: ‘Som i drömmar’”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 30/3 1954; Robin Hood, “Anglais: Som i drömmar”, *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 30/3 1954.

²²⁰ Gerd Osten, “Han styr efter stjärnorna”, *Vi*, no. 19 1954 (my translation).

²²¹ Ulf Hård af Segerstad, “Ensamhetens arkipelag”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 30/3 1954 (my translation).

Meschke failed to repeat in the 1970s, namely to expose the Swedish audience and critique to a consummate experimental work, and in offering a filmic equilibrium between experimentation, adaptation, commercial, and non-commercial.

5.3 The Mirage of Peter Weiss

Similar to the experimental features presented by Hagberg and Gyllenberg, Peter Weiss's (1916-1982) production *Hägringen* ("The Mirage", 1959) resided outside the commercial industry. Like no other avant-garde filmmaker in the history of Swedish experimental film culture, Weiss recurrently positioned himself antagonistically in relation to the conventional. In his book *Avantgardefilm* (1956), which includes studies of both *...och efter skymning kommer mörker* and *Som i drömmar*, Weiss wrote: "If Swedish film is not to stagnate completely, an institution where new abilities that have film as their artistic form of expression must be established [...] So far, there is a bottomless fear of anything that even smells of experiment within the 100% commercially oriented production in Sweden".²²² A notion he later elaborated on, as Moderna Museet organised the international exhibition on avant-garde film "Apropå Eggeling", in 1958: "If one wants to work with film as an artistic form of expression, there is only one choice: to go underground".²²³ If Weiss had been underground when he made his surrealistic shorts *Studie I-V* (1952-1955) and experimental documentaries *Ansikten i skugga* ("Faces in shadow", 1956) and *Enligt lag* ("According to the law", 1957), he certainly went further with *Hägringen* ("The Mirage", 1959).

Weiss had gained some international praise through festival screening of his *Study* films, and through the agency of Edouard de Laurot and Jonas Mekas at the American magazine *Film Culture*. Thanks to some small grants from minor Swedish film clubs, his only feature could be made.²²⁴ The production context of *Hägringen*, metaphorically residing underground, further extended into the actual historical writing of underground cinema, as Parker Tyler mentions Weiss' feature in his *Underground Film: A Critical History*, calling it "a long initiation rite turned inside out in conformance with the pessimistic alienation mood of our time".²²⁵ The film was distributed in Sweden by Nordisk Tonefilm ("Nordic Tonefilm"), and Weiss's mood of alienation, the collision between a surrealistic imagery and

²²² Peter Weiss, *Avantgardefilm*, 1956, p. 147.

²²³ Peter Weiss, "Att gå under jord", in *Apropå Eggeling: en samling korta uppsatser om film utgiven med anledning av avantgardefilmserien i Moderna Museet maj 1958* (ed. Pontus Hultén), Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1958, p. 22 (my translation).

²²⁴ Andersson, Sundholm, Söderbergh Widding, *A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture*, p. 83-84.

²²⁵ Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History*, New York: Da Capo Press edition, 1995 (1969), p. 186.

documentary expositions of urban Stockholm as a young man wanders through the city, was met with assorted and restrained critique. Weiss was greeted as a “film poet”, an auteur, who presented a proficient avant-garde film “which owns artistic finesses of a nature you only encounter in exceptional cases in Swedish cinema [...] When this film is at its best, it lets Peter Weiss – an incorruptible filmmaker – appear as the Jean Cocteau of Stockholm city”.²²⁶ But *Hägringen* was to the same extent still perceived as a weak and tentative attempt according to the general domestic reception.²²⁷

Similar to the case of Gyllenberg, Weiss’s experimental feature adheres to the avant-garde film’s supposedly “right” place within the cinematic flora – as an exciting and sporadic, non-commercial, exception. Bengt Forslund tried to explain the terms of condition for *Hägringen* in the journal *Chaplin*: “Hägringen is a pure experimental feature, an avant-gardist film poem, which is not only made with other film-technical resources than other features, but with totally different targets, motives, rhythms etc. Accordingly, the film cannot be judged along prevalent norms and values and does not address a wider audience”.²²⁸ Artur Lundkvist once more expanded his own personal film view, enthusiastically pronouncing: “Peter Weiss’s first feature ‘Hägringen’ is a pleasing surprise: hitherto the foremost Swedish avant-garde film”; something that film critic Robin Hood rejected emphatically, as he saw *Hägringen* as a recycling bin for an out-dated surrealism.²²⁹

Another parallel that connects Peter Weiss to Öyvind Fahlström concerns the fact that they were never really embraced, or fully accepted, by the Swedish art world, more specifically by the film culture. Although Weiss continued to make films after *Hägringen*, his feature, like *Du gamla, Du fria*, historically marks the “failed” conclusion of a seemingly unfinished filmography. In a recent interview conducted by Martin Grennberger and Stefan Ramstedt, Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss (married to Peter Weiss 1964-1982), expressed this hypothesis: “If Peter had received a different response after *Hägringen* and *Bag de ens facader*, it is possible that he would have continued with film. I really think that he would”.²³⁰

²²⁶ C. B – n, “Hägringen”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 24/11 1959 (my translation); Jurgen Shildt, “Experiment i Stockholm”, *Vecko-Journalen*, no. 49, 1959.

²²⁷ Olle Grönstedt, “Hägringen”, *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 24/11 1959.

²²⁸ Bengt Forslund, “Hägringen”, *Chaplin*, no. 3, 1959 (my translation).

²²⁹ Artur Lundkvist, “Hägringen”, *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 28/11 1959 (my translation); Robin Hood, “Artur Lundkvist tar fel!”, *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 7/12 1959.

²³⁰ Martin Grennberger, Stefan Ramstedt, “Samtal med Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss”, *Magasinet Walden: Tidskrift för filmkritik*, No. 3/4, 2016, p. 53 (my translation). Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss is a Swedish theatrical stage designer and artist. She worked with Peter Weiss on the play *Marat/Sade* (1964), among other productions. After *Hägringen*, Weiss set out to make *Anna Casparsson* (1960), a documentary portrait of Swedish textile artist Anna Casparsson. The same method was approached in the unfinished short *Tagning Öyvind Fahlström* (1961), in which Weiss filmed his friend and colleague, working in his studio in Stockholm. *Bag de ens facader*

Both *Hägringen* and *Bag de ens facader* (1961) are works that incorporate well with Weiss' collected filmography. The first is expanding upon the surrealist fiction he so adamantly mobilised in the early works, as the latter reported on the suburbs of modern society in the poetic-realistic style of his tactful documentaries. These films are in a sense both expressions of his avant-garde pathos, which is a distinct force within Weiss' artistic vision. But despite his pronounced view on cinematic art, Weiss were to try and commercialise himself as a filmmaker. Together with documentarian Barbro Boman (1918-1980), Weiss engaged in a production that resulted in yet another feature film called *Svenska flickor i Paris* (*The Flamboyant Sex*, 1961). The film was shot and takes place in Paris, and comprise the different perspective of three Swedish young women and their encounters with the big city life. As in Gyllenberg's case with *Som i drömmar*, Lars Burman was the initiator and producer of the project.

In contrast to the production process of *Som i drömmar*, which appear to have unfolded rather seamlessly, *Svenska flickor i Paris*, which were never intended as an avant-garde project, is filled with conflicts and peculiar interventions. According to Jan Christer Bengtsson's dissertation on Weiss' filmmaking, Burman had approached Barbro Boman with the prospect of wanting some images of Paris which were to involve some stories of Swedish "chicks".²³¹ This was a purely commercial endeavour, but still Boman saw an opportunity in Burmans funding to make an artistically adequate film. Boman then met Weiss in Denmark and rather coincidently asked if he was interested in shouldering the role of "visual director" in order to strengthen the visual qualities of the film.²³² Perhaps then Weiss saw an opportunity to rectify himself after the failure of *Hägringen* by commercialising himself as a filmmaker, as he and Boman went on writing the script and co-directing *Svenska flickor i Paris*.

Svenska flickor i Paris is, however, a very peculiar item positioned in Weiss' filmography. Already before its national and international distribution Weiss came to contest and deny his involvement in the project. He rather forcefully took a distant stance towards the production and the discourse it came to produce, claiming that his original ideas and visionary implementations was consistently overruled by Burman and the production team. A result of this, is that *Svenska flickor i Paris* within Swedish film historiography consistently has been

(1961) is a documentary reportage on the suburbs of modern society, shot in Denmark and produced by Statens Filmcentral.

²³¹ Jan Christer Bengtsson, *Peter Weiss filmer – från de korta små lekfulla kopparslagen till kommersiell långfilmsdebut: filmer – filmidéer – utkast*, Stockholm: Stockholm University Library, 2010, p. 198.

²³² Ibid, p. 199.

taken out of Weiss collected filmography. But as recent finding has shown, and as suggested by Lars Gustaf Andersson the film “has probably more to do with Weiss than he himself acknowledged”.²³³ This is also apparent in the film as a final product, as it shows many aspects which connects to Weiss’ cinematic imagery and documentary poetics: close-ups of statues and busts, the portrayal of the city, a parade through Paris depicting Jean Tinguely’s machine sculptures in which both Tinguely himself and Pontus Hultén takes part. Beside Weiss’ aesthetic interventions he also acts in the film, portraying the lover of the Madame who one of the leading female characters is employed by as an au pair. According to the research of Bengtsson, the core issue on Weiss’ behalf was that the producers, mainly Burman, wanted to expel some of these sequences in favour of explicit “pornographic” materials.²³⁴ And as the film was marketed in the US under the title *The Flamboyant Sex*, one could speculate that Weiss’ distancing was founded in a fear of being associated with the international cinematic phenomena “The Swedish Sin”.²³⁵

To stipulate that *Svenska flickor i Paris* is pornographic, is in hindsight a very hard thing to do. Although the film consists of some nudity, as one scene depicts Barbara (one of the main characters) working as a croquis-model, these sequences never become eroticised or unjustified. In contrast, they are perceived as being motivated and aesthetically balanced. And as the final cut of the films shows, the most prominent scene, the Tinguely-parade which according to Weiss was to be substituted with pornographic images, is still present. According to Bengtsson the existing script shows that the passages Weiss publicly disclaimed actually was well planned and, in concordance with the original design, also carried out cinematically.²³⁶ Still, the question remains why Weiss was so adamant in resisting the creative responsibility? Maybe his attempt on being part of the commercial ecology, unconsciously forced him to readjust and adhere to his personal demands on artistic freedom. Bengtsson suggests that Weiss had an imaginary perception regarding an unlimited artistic freedom, which in turn could relate to his personal animosity towards the monolithic nature of commercial filmmaking.²³⁷

Something that correlates *Svenska flickor i Paris* to Gyllenberg’s feature, in a broader context, is the involvement of Lars Burman. When comparing the two films some interesting

²³³ Lars Gustaf Andersson, “Peter Weiss: Underground and Resistance”, in *Swedish Film: An Introduction and Reader*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2010, p. 235.

²³⁴ Bengtsson, p. 201-202. Bengtssons discussion of *Svenska flickor i Paris* is based on letter correspondence between Weiss and other members of the production team.

²³⁵ See Bengtsson, p. 240-241.

²³⁶ Bengtsson, p. 236-237.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 233.

differences appear. Gyllenberg's *Som i drömmar* in spite of being rather pretentious, almost bordering to the corny, still constitute a consummate and whole filmic product. What Burman and Gyllenberg accomplished was a careful but evident commercialisation of high-brow artistic goods. But the story of *Svenska flickor i Paris* is a totally different one. The documentary elements which rather than tying the film together, consistently divides its narrative structure, giving it an unfinished character. In retrospect the failure of the film almost become constitutive for the overall problem, e.g. the conflicted relationship between commercial filmmaking and avant-garde filmmaking. Weiss involvement in the project, accordingly become representational for the complex of problems that surround the avant-garde, which he himself frequently addressed. With the Burman-project Weiss is no longer residing "underground". His solitary stance and absolute aesthetic argumentation were, with *Svenska flickor i Paris*, thus exchanged with a collective and profitable intent, in which Weiss' was reduced to a mere part of a whole. This divide is traceable in the film's final form and in Weiss' resistance towards it, but it is also noticeable in the ambivalent notion and prospect of avant-garde feature films, and the field struggles they produce.

Perhaps this struggle becomes most apparent with *Svenska flickor i Paris*, which initially was Weiss' attempt on commercial filmmaking. Still it is present, the everlasting ambivalence, in all of those other films presented in this text; which were all attempts on making commercial film in an avant-garde world. A world in which there is no money. The notion is quite oxymoronic and anticipates a doomed endeavour: to make commercial film, where there is no money.

Like Fahlström, Weiss finally abandoned film to continue working in other disciplines. Retrospectively his films have, however, become canonised within the history of Swedish experimental cinema, and Weiss is often recognised as the most prolific filmmaker of the minor film culture in Sweden, both domestically and internationally.

Conclusion

The accumulated body of films that forms the volatile concept of experimental features within Swedish film history and historiography constitutes of rare and insular cultural events. As a comprehensive genre, it lacks both legitimate venues and systematic policies for production. Rather than substantiating a revitalisation of experimental filmmaking within Swedish film practice, the institutional examples of Kylberg, Fahlström and Meschke confirm the commercial industry's coincidental and arbitrary relationship with the more venturesome

aspects of filmmaking. But still they were made, and in various ways they presumably expand the notions of the avant-garde. In the Swedish context, however, the theoretical framework regarding their production terms and cultural practice creates essentially dualistic circumstances. If we on the one hand borrow the assumption by A.L Rees that Swedish experimental feature film as a coherent concept is a “distinct form of cultural practice, with its own autonomy in relation to the mainstream cinema”, the features of Kylberg, Fahlström and Meschke both reject and confirm this model, in spite of trying to bridge certain distinctions between separate cultures.²³⁸

It is an intricate and contradictory endeavour to try and make sense of the Swedish experimental feature film. In order to sum up the films that constitute the body of this thesis, they rather than creating a distinct collection of films, express a deep-rooted ambivalence. What the features actually show us is that the dominating film culture in fact were willing to meet and invest in experimental projects. At the same time, the histories surrounding the Swedish experimental features consistently make visible paragon questions concerning the avant-garde.

The most obvious area of conflict is that which relates to the format and its significance. As pointed to before, the filmic avantgarde on an international basis has operated within the short film format which is further highlighted in the research on its activities.²³⁹ And perhaps this fact is the reason for the distinction between, on the one hand the experimental film cultures and the mainstream discourse, and on the other hand the feature film format and the experiment. An experimental film is perhaps just that: an experiment never meant to be “long”-lived. Accordingly, the short film format is that of a tangent to the effectiveness of the avant-garde’s purpose and ephemeral characteristics. This contraposition is evident in all of the above-mentioned filmmakers whose short films were consistently praised within the minor film culture, as well as being recognised by the major industries. When their activities eventually were transposed into the publicly more sacrosanct codes of feature film production, the experiments thus become hegemonized, almost perceived as examinations. They instantly become occasions of presumptive consecration within the hegemonic field.

In this case, the Swedish occurrences of avant-garde feature film making exhibits an unforgiving outlook on filmmaking in relation to the logics of the cinematic field, and to its standard; the commercially viable. All of the filmmakers addressed in this text mobilized a media reflective art, rather than perceiving film as a means of profit, with their projects. They

²³⁸ A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, p. xi.

²³⁹ Andersson, et al; Tyler; Sitney; Rees; O’Pray; James.

extended the aesthetic possibilities in relation to both production convention and form. With Fahlström as a point of departure, more or less traditional avant-garde complexes of problems emerges, as his filmography in consonance with the minor film culture in Sweden recalls the antagonism of its pathos: the media reflection, the cultural sabotage, the underground, provocations, and making art visible as political agitation. Hence, the struggles of the avant-garde are prominent. Together with Kylberg, Fahlström exemplified how an experimental film culture actually inhabited the officially sanctioned cultural industry. But as their use of the filmstrip was prolonged, in both metaphorical and literal terms, this reciprocal arrangement went astray. As Eric M. Nilsson initially reminded us of, moving images cost money, and this regardless of quality or innovative pretence. The attitude in Swedish film culture towards experimental filmmaking is perhaps the most pronounced example of the mediums ambivalent condition.

But again, as these filmmakers was to embark on “the real thing” they simultaneously substantiated an avant-garde posture within the major film culture. The avant-garde term is inherently problematic, and as Hans Magnus Enzensberger once noted the notion contains its own contradiction; it can only be defined “*a posteriori*”.²⁴⁰ Herein lay the awareness of historical trajectories. But the term also houses sociological dimensions. According to Enzensberger the main task of the “Garde” is the battle, in which the avant-garde reveals its true value; not regarding productivity, but in contending all sort of reconciliation.²⁴¹ This is also the condition of the Swedish filmic avant-garde in feature format, which indefinitely battled the prevailing norms, as well as giving rise to a range of discursive battles. What a cross-illumination of the experimental feature films retrospectively show, is how the avant-garde, when transposed in to commercial domains, make visible its own ambivalence, as well as the ambivalence embedded in institutions, industries, and public discourses. As Diurlin points to, it is through the feature film format Kylberg initiates a direct field battle with Schein, the prevailing authority, when the terms of conditions for *JAG* was to be negotiated.²⁴² This battle is, however, differently expressed when applied to Fahlström’s *Du gamla, Du Friä* as it indeed was defined *a posteriori*. In spite of being accepted by the industry, their pathos’s and in extension their struggles came to span over both socio-political and culture-political spectrums. The ambivalence then, the fact that the industry actually

²⁴⁰ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Avantgardets dilemma* (transl. Benkt-Erik Hedin), Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1962, p. 57.

²⁴¹ Ibid, p. 58.

²⁴² Diurlin, p. 153.

funded its supposed antagonist, goes in different directions: on the one hand it shows the institution's benevolence towards the experimental film, on the other hand when doing so it confirms and crystallise the classical role of the avant-garde.

These filmmakers and their features rather ironically validate the true idea of a filmic avant-garde as they contended all sorts of reconciliation and ultimately failed. The Swedish experimental feature film as a cultural phenomenon, its rarity, ephemeral, and sporadic rupture, hence confirms the historiographical avant-garde struggle: they came, they saw, but they never conquered.

As David E. James operationalises the term *minor cinemas*, he accentuates the concept, within the cinematic avant-garde traditions, as a “summary term” that “considers a rainbow coalition of demotic cinemas: experimental, poetic, underground, ethnic, amateur, counter, non-commodity, working-class, critical, artists’, orphan, and so on”.²⁴³ Throughout the history, theory, and use of the term, avant-garde film as a composite idea, and its alternative and peripheral status in relation to the monolithic air of capitalist and commercially valid institutions, has tended to consolidate the romantic image of the uncompromising and free artist – as the antithesis of the conformist. In many cases this is perhaps still a valid viewpoint, but when in dialogue with James, and with a slight recalibration of the historiographical instruments, the fluidity of the avant-garde, its reciprocity, emerges: “recognising that cultural movements typically migrate through a variety of social locations”.²⁴⁴

When we apply these models to the experimental features of Swedish film history, a recurrent mixture of social and cultural forms reappears, and the different perspectives presented by Rees and James are confirmed. But at times they are also rejected. As Fahlström, Kylberg and Meschke join the institutional practice, they simultaneously transpose their backgrounds onto the field of commercialism, creating a “cross-pollination in formal procedure” to speak with James.²⁴⁵ Their positioning within the minor – the filmmakers’ limited training grounds, interdisciplinary temperaments, specific aesthetic idioms, working on alternative venues, etc. – inherently creates reciprocal events when supported by the industry. When these filmmakers’ respective features were launched, however, their modes of creation ceased to be solely “experimental” or merely expressions of the minor film culture, as the domains of commercialism raised the stakes, both in financial and socio-cultural terms,

²⁴³ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, p. 13.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 14.

but also in regard to artistic freedom, as in the cases of Fahlström and Meschke. They were “becoming major” in opposition to the Deleuzian “becoming minor”, but somehow still trapped between the two.

In contrast the works of Hagberg, Gyllenberg and Weiss, resided outside the prevailing film culture and commercial logics. Their aesthetics and modes of production was carried out in consonance with the partisan aspects of experimental filmmaking, thus producing a traditional discourse on the antithetical relationship between the avant-garde and mainstream. Production-wise they mobilised the alternative route, thus “becoming minor” on their own terms, i.e. in relation to the dominant language.²⁴⁶ The fate of *Du gamla, Du fria*, *Skärseld*, and *JAG* however, and in extension the question of their originators’ future within filmmaking, is here quite dramatically put to its historical and discursive end. Rather than sustaining a reciprocity between minor and major film cultures, Kylberg, Fahlström and Meschke, constitute symptoms of the contradictory, arbitrary and volatile state of Swedish film politics post-SFI. To borrow a metaphor from Diurlin, applied primarily to Kylberg, Fahlström and Meschke additionally positioned themselves “as Trojan horses” behind the “wall [...] erected between the film industry, on the one hand, and the avant-garde artist on the other”.²⁴⁷

Swedish experimental feature film, studied herein as a summary term, simultaneously constitutes a distinct form of cultural practice, and a cross-pollination of minor and major cinemas. Their separate histories and fates recurrently intertwine, creating probing mechanisms, which envelop the large complex of the heterogeneous experimental film culture in Swedish historiography. With the benefit of hindsight, it is rather baffling that the presented films were made at all, especially due to their volatile production contexts. Still, they rest in the margins of Swedish film history, unfurling their arms as alien octopodes.

²⁴⁶ Deleuze & Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, p. 27.

²⁴⁷ Diurlin, “*Filmreformens förste avantgardist*” – *Experimentfilmaren Peter Kylberg*, p. 25.

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Primary Material:

Du gamla, Du fria. Production: the Swedish Film Institute, Profilm AB (1969-1971), Sweden, 1972. Production Manager: Tomas Dyfverman. Director: Öyvind Fahlström. Script: Öyvind Fahlström. Photography: Hans Wellin och Richard Sterner. Editing: Lars Haglund, Sten-Göran Camitz. Original Score: Träd, Gräs och Stenar. Actors: Marie-Louise De Geer, Björn Granath, Hans Mosesson, Ann-Charlotte Hult, Berit Nyman, Peter Wahlqvist, Anki Rahlskog, Svante Holmström, Robert Carleson, Jan Lööf, Lars Hillersberg, Carl Johan De Geer, Lena Svedberg, Olle Jeppson, Håkan Alexandersson, Kenta Gustafsson, Stoffe Svensson, Marianne Ahrne, Dan Nyman, Bo Montelius, Hans Nyberg. Duration: 100 min. Original Format: Eastmancolor, 35 mm. Other Film Types: Eastman Color 5254, 100 ASA; Aero Ektachrome Infrared; Kodak svartvit film Double X 5222, 250 ASA.

Secondary Material:

JAG. Production: the Swedish Film Institute, Sandrews, Svensk Filmindustri (1965). Sweden, 1966. Production Manager: Bertil Lauritzen. Director: Peter Kylberg. Script: Peter Kylberg. Photography: Peter Wester, Bo-Erik Gyberg, Albert Rudling. Editing: Per Krafft. Original Score: Peter Kylberg. Actors: Christer Banck, Tove Waltenburg, Agneta Anjou-Schrammel,

Ove Tjernberg, Börje Nyberg, Margaretha Bergström, Anders Näslund, Margaretha Krook, Sven-Erik Hööst, Gustav Jönsson, Robert Engström, Nils Almerantz, Gillis Roosvall, Tage Axelsson, Britt Marie Råberg. Duration: 83 min. Original Format: 35mm Eastmancolor.

Skärseld. Production: the Swedish Film Institute (1972-1975). Sweden, 1975. Production Manager: Bengt Forslund. Director: Michael Meschke. Script: Michael Meschke, Silvano Agosti, Dante Alighieri. Photography: Silvano Agosti. Editing: Silvano Agosti. Original Score: Pink Floyd. Actors: Jan Blomberg, Inger Jalmert-Moritz, Åke Nygren, Lilian Dahlgren, Lennart Mörk, Seth Nilsson, Olof Lagercrantz. Duration: 82 min. Original Format: colour/black and white, 35 mm.

... och efter skymning kommer mörker. Production: Rune Hagberg, Lorens Marmstedt (1944-1947). Sweden, 1947. Production Manager: Rune Hagberg. Director: Rune Hagberg. Script: Rune Hagberg. Photography: Rune Hagberg. Editing: Rune Hagberg. Original Score: Karl Otto Westin. Actors: Rune Hagberg, Amy Aarøe, John Wilhelm Hagberg, Christer Topelius, Rolf Maurin, Kurt Hammarborg. Duration: 85 min. Original Format: black and white, 35 mm.

Som i drömmar. Production: Lars Burman, Metronome (1954). Sweden, 1954. Production Manager: Carl Gyllenberg. Director: Carl Gyllenberg. Script: Carl Gyllenberg. Photography: Carl Gyllenberg. Editing: Carl Gyllenberg. Original Score: Jean Sibelius, Pjotr Tjajkovskij. Actors: Carl Gyllenberg, Birgitta Bergendahl, Barbro Björkdahl, Marianne Groth, Lars Burman, Göran Stenström. Duration: 91 min. Original Format: black and white, 35 mm.

Hägringen. Production: Svenska AB Nordisk Tonefilm, Peter Weiss, Gustaf Mandal, Helge Bylund, Edouard de Laurot (1959). Sweden, 1959. Production Manager: Peter Weiss. Director: Peter Weiss. Script: Peter Weiss. Photography: Gustaf Mandal. Editing: Peter Weiss. Original Score: Lennart Fors, Peter Weiss. Actors: Staffan Lamm, Gunilla Palmstierna, Birger Åsander, Lars Edström, Tor-Ivan Odulf. Duration: 82 min. Original Format: black and white, 35 mm.

Other Films (sorted alphabetically)

Anna Casparsson (Peter Weiss, 1960).

Ansikten i skugga (Peter Weiss, 1956).

Bag de ens facader (Peter Weiss, 1961).

Begotten (E. Elias Merhige, 1990).
The Blood of a Poet (Jean Coucteu, 1930).
Brutal (Eric M. Nilsson, 1980).
Chelsea Girls (Andy Warhol, 1966).
Diaries, Notes & Sketches: Walden (Jonas Mekas, 1969).
Dom kallar oss mods (Stefan Jarl, 1968).
Dreams That Money Can Buy (Hans Richter, 1947).
East Village (Öyvind Fahlström, 1968).
Edipo Re (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1967).
En kortfilm av Peter Kylberg (Peter Kylberg, 1963).
Enligt lag (Peter Weiss, 1957).
Fadern (Alf Sjöberg, 1969).
Head (The Monkees, 1968).
Il vangelo secondo Matteo (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964).
Istället för ett äventyr (Peter Kylberg, 1996).
Jag är nyfiken – blå (Vilgot Sjöman, 1968).
Jag är nyfiken – gul (Vilgot Sjöman, 1967).
Jänken (Lars Forsberg, 1970).
Kadens (Peter Kylberg, 1960).
L'Age d'Or (Luis Buñuel, 1930).
Luogo Candido (Michael Meschke, 1969).
Mao-Hope March (Öyvind Fahlström, 1966).
Medea (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1969).
Opus 5103 (Carl Gyllenberg, 1952).
Opus 5204 (Carl Gyllenberg, 1952).
Paris D-moll (Peter Kylberg, 1964).
Persona (Ingemar Bergman, 1966).
Prag69 (Michael Meschke, 1969).
Rekordåren 1966, 1967, 1968... (Lena Ewert, 1969).
Revolution Now (Öyvind Fahlström, 1968).
Salò (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975).
Skjutfältet (Lars Forsberg, 1963).
Sleep (Andy Warhol, 1963).
Slut (Lars Forsberg, 1966).

Smultronstället (Ingemar Bergman, 1957).
Studie I-IV. (Peter Weiss, 1952-1954).
Study in Colours (Carl Gyllenberg).
Svenska flickor i Paris (Barbro Boman, Peter Weiss, 1961).
Tagning (Peter Weiss, 1961).
Teorema (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1968).
Traité de bave et d'éternité (Isidore Isou, 1951).
U-BARN (Öyvind Fahlström, 1968).
Warui yatsu hodo yoku nemuru (Akira Kurosawa, 1960).