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## A History of Swedish Experimental Film Culture : From Early Animation to Video Art

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**A History  
of Swedish  
Experimental  
Film Culture:  
From Early  
Animation  
to Video Art**

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9 that still need to be written.

# The Writing of a History of Swedish Experimental Film

## **Minor Histories of Minor Cinemas**

On 11 November 1956, the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, SR, devoted one hour to amateur and substandard gauge film or, ‘narrow film’ as it was called in Swedish.<sup>1</sup> The programme was hosted by the art critic, Ulf Hård af Segerstad, who chose to show both amateur and experimental work by established artists. Hård af Segerstad had promoted amateur and experimental film for a couple of years writing art criticism in one of Sweden’s leading newspapers, *Svenska Dagbladet*;<sup>2</sup> his arguments and visions were made in a vein similar to that of Maya Deren and, later, Stan Brakhage.<sup>3</sup> According to Hård af Segerstad history had shown that the true explorer of the art of photography had been the amateur, thus the amateur filmmaker was an essential figure in the evolution of film art as well. Besides that the amateur was characterized by his or her disinterest for film as business, as he or she was driven by the sheer passion for the medium and, therefore, could experiment unreservedly. Thus, according to Hård af Segerstad, the amateur was in many ways the true artist of this modern and transient medium.

Also, however, the production side had its own interests and visions. Arne Lindgren, a dentist by profession and the secretary and leading figure of The Independent Film Group, Sweden’s first organized film workshop, wrote a letter to Hård af Segerstad days before the programme was to be broadcasted in order to clarify a few points.<sup>4</sup> Lindgren’s actual intention of the letter was to make clear to Hård af Segerstad that the workshop had nothing to do with either amateur or substandard gauge filmmaking. According to Lindgren the only common denominator was that due to economical reasons the filmmakers at the workshop used the same format. Thus the right name for the work produced at the workshop was ‘free film’ as the films were non-commercial and made without any consideration of profit making. Hence, the films produced were – following Lindgren – neither amateur films nor experimental ones. Peter Weiss, who at the time had not yet made his international breakthrough as a writer, was an exception according to Lindgren; Weiss was the only real experimental filmmaker at the workshop. Yet Lindgren added another characteristic as well because he was obviously not comfortable with a purely materialistic definition of their practice: the films produced at The Independent Film Group were to be characterized by the intention to make films that were artistic and personal.

## **Minor Cinemas and Experimental Film**

The letter to Hård af Segerstad from Lindgren aptly displays the problems with defining the practice and the products of what David E. James has coined

11 “minor cinemas”, a term that he suggests as an “expanded summary term” for

“experimental, poetic, underground, ethnic, amateur, counter, noncommodity, working-class, critical, artists, orphan, and so on”.<sup>5</sup> The term ‘minor cinemas’ was originally introduced into film studies by Tom Gunning who used it as a denominator for those experimental filmmakers who in the late 1980s criticised both Stan Brakhage’s monumental position and structural film for having become the metonym for avant-garde film (this despite the fact that Brakhage and structural film were distinctively different). Gunning in turn had adopted the term from Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s modern classic *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986).<sup>6</sup> James rightly points out that there is no sense in calling Kafka ‘minor literature’ in the common use of the words, but as a relational concept, signifying minor in its marginal position to dominant, the term makes sense.<sup>7</sup> Another benefit is that ‘avant-garde’ loses its romantic and modernistic connotations, associations that make the concept more problematic and inaccurate when we are moving into the late modern era of hybrid audiovisual cultures.<sup>8</sup>

Yet if we look at the various historical discourses in Sweden, one term introduced in the 1930s persists throughout the twentieth century, namely ‘experimental film’ (*experimentfilm*). Although Lindgren shuns the label in his letter to Hård af Segerstad, he later returns to it. Since the beginning of the workshop in 1950 the issue of how to define and name the practices and the products was constantly discussed at the annual meetings of the board. Perhaps Lindgren’s hesitation in 1956 was caused by the harsh critique of the workshop’s earlier output. The films had been criticised severely in major newspapers for being pretentious and bad copies of the earlier avant-garde masters: Luis Buñuel, Jean Cocteau and Maya Deren in particular.<sup>9</sup> The Film Group had not been modest either when they chose their name *Svensk Experimentfilmstudio*, that is, “Swedish Workshop for Experimental Film”.

Although critics such as Paul Patera questioned at the time if there was something like experimental film in Sweden, from the perspective of discourse analysis the sheer mention of ‘experimental film’ is proof of its existence. As Gunning has written regarding film, we may never succeed in defining film, but the practices, products and the discourses show that “film is”, even to such an extent that if “there may be an end to film history, the theory of film will also be an ongoing story, always ‘to be continued’”.<sup>10</sup> This is, perhaps, even more accurate for experimental film; 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 a constant flux and change.

## **Discourse Analysis and Historiography**

The discourse detectable in the letter from Lindgren to Hård af Segerstad – where Lindgren tries to find a position between commercial and amateur filmmaking – shows in a very explicit manner the problems with a film historiography that is strongly teleological or looks solely at the artefacts in question. For example, David Bordwell has shown in his critique of what he calls the Standard Version of film history,<sup>11</sup> that is, how film develops according to an evolutionary logic with the birth of a complete language and its exemplary artefacts as the final outcome, that such an approach is, in fact, based upon a historiography which singles out a very narrow selection of films in order to support the established picture. The outcome is a neatly constructed story consisting of a sample of exemplary ‘works’ that, so to speak, both represent and refer to themselves as *the* film history.

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

The most famous example in the history of Swedish experimental film is without any doubt Viking Eggeling’s *Symphonie Diagonale* (“Diagonal symphony”, 1925). If Eggeling’s pioneering work had to be integrated into a teleological historiography the history of Swedish experimental film would begin and end at the same moment. Eggeling made only one film, but a work that is usually considered to be both one of the first abstract films ever made and the only Swedish artistic effort as such in the twentieth century that had substantial international impact.<sup>12</sup> After such an endeavour there is consequently no space left for Swedish experimental film to develop progressively, nor is there a preceding story consisting of filmic work that would have led to *Symphonie Diagonale*. From a teleological perspective Eggeling’s 6-minute silent film – which consists of moving white geometric shapes set against a black background – becomes the black hole of Swedish experimental film history. Its gravitational pull annihilates all other efforts.

Accordingly, as Patricia R. Zimmerman has argued concerning amateur film, experimental film is one of those areas that truly call for a Foucauldian way of reasoning regarding historiography.<sup>13</sup> The history of Swedish experimental film culture is simply a history of Foucauldian ruptures and changes, of small histories, of personal and accidental trajectories.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, there

garde film, considered as belonging to the cultures of the marginal or of other partisan phenomena, often defined in relation to a dominant, to what is considered to be the centre or the norm. Such a relational view of film history turns the early history of film and the moving image in Sweden into a history of cinema as such. This because it is only when a grammar is established for commercial filmmaking that we receive counter movements and articulated calls for a practice that is sometimes called experimental, sometimes simply 'free film'. This desire for an alternative grammar is kept alive among different individuals, groups and organizations throughout the history of Swedish cinema. It is that history on which we focus in this book.

Clearly, historiography is always a dual relationship between object, or material, and the various concepts that shape the objects. This is particularly evident in such a marginal practice like experimental film culture. Furthermore, 'minor', 'counter', 'alternative' etc., also presupposes a socio-historical category constantly on the move while it is determined in the relation to a presupposed centre. For this reason a film history of experimental film – of the marginal, minor and momentary – brings almost by itself acute historiographical problems to the fore. This not only because the notion 'minor' refers to a relation of power, to a vertical dimension in which the negation is what determines the field. When Tom Gunning introduced the concept in film studies he alluded to the critical legacy of the notion. David E. James' own elaboration of the concept, on the other hand, stresses directly the geographical or spatial meaning, what is minor is minor both within and outside the dominant modes and institutions of filmmaking. Thus, a minor cinema is not, by definition, antagonistic but an inherent part of any film culture.

### **New Film History and Emergent Film Histories**

It is evident that there is a growing need to write a more diverse film history. If film really was just "a brief interlude in the history of the animated image", as Sean Cubitt puts it following Lev Manovich, or "an intermezzo" in the history of "audiovisions" as Sigfried Zielinski has claimed, then, the history has, of course, to be rewritten.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the various studies of the history of early cinema and amateur film culture have shown that film has always been part of a diverse and vast media culture. An observation that has become the current premise and point of departure in various approaches and versions of "media archaeology".<sup>16</sup> The new situation may, of course, be viewed as a break and a problem, but also as an opportunity. Thomas Elsaesser has stressed the latter in his essay, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology".<sup>17</sup> According to Elsaesser film history of the twenty-first century has finally reached a stage where the ideology of teleology and models of simple causal-

ity may at last be abandoned and, instead, different and parallel histories can be written and created.

Accordingly, a history of experimental film culture lends itself pertinently to what Michel Foucault called ‘general history’. One of the aims of Foucault’s juxtaposition of “total” and “general history” was to make a distinction between history as a closing discourse and history as a space of possibilities and critical interventions. Whereas a total history reduces everything (all phenomena) to a central core or centre, a general history “deploy[s] the space of a dispersion”, as he puts it.<sup>18</sup> Thus, an appropriate historiography – a general history – must bring together all components: producers, products, practices, concepts and cultures, but not in order to reduce those relations down to an essence – ‘experimental film’ – rather, in order to study the relations, connections and interplay between the producers, products, practices, concepts and cultures. This is in particular true of such a minor form as experimental cinema while it never had an apparent nexus for production, distribution or exhibition compared to mainstream feature film culture.

It is not surprising though that the Swedish discourses on amateur and experimental filmmaking during the 1950s were saturated with teleological arguments; this was, after all, the decade when an experimental film culture and production was established. The discourse was part of the attempt to make film into an integral part of the art world and to distinguish part of the filmic tradition from the commercial mainstream.

Hård af Segerstad, for example, argued how important the amateur, as an agent, was for the development of film and film language. Lumière and Méliès were key examples in this, by now, familiar story of how amateurs working as home-movie producers gave birth to and developed the seventh art.<sup>19</sup> Such discourses also display how there is a constant negotiation about the signification of film and film production. How not only cinephilia, amateur and

**“Apropå Eggeling”, the avant-garde film festival that opened Moderna Museet in 1958.**



experimental from time to time constitute an alternative public sphere in relation to the mainstream and the norm, but also how these minor cinemas, or versions of “cinematic alterity” as David E. James has also called it, interact with the mainstream.<sup>20</sup> One Swedish example would be the short film production unit at Svensk Filmindustri during the 1930s and 1940s. The unit became a notable space for divergent production that enabled filmmakers like Gösta Hellström and Arne Sucksdorff to explore a film language that was not restricted to a conventional film grammar. In the 1960s the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, that is, public service television, would make significant contributions to Swedish experimental film by building studios for experimentation with electronic music and images. But after the 1930s and 1940s the film industry made no significant efforts when it came to experimental film culture.

### **Practices of Closure: Culture and Memory**

In short, a history of experimental film has to be a history of the *culture* of experimental film if the aim is not simply to establish a list of canonical works and artists or of closing the field into a reserve for exclusive experimentalists. Minor cinemas and independent production has always taken place with an intricate dialectical relationship to dominant practices. Connections that are even more complex in social democratic welfare states like Sweden in which most of the culture produced is publicly funded and therefore officially sanctioned. The relation between production centre, norm and institution vs. marginal, alternative and minor grew even more complex and blurred when the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), a compromise between industrial interests and that of public cultural policy, was founded in 1963. The institutional constellations and the premises for a national film politics became further convoluted when new and cheaper technologies and ‘media’ began to enter film culture continuously since the 1970s.

From the point of view of the first workshop in Stockholm, The Independent Film Group, and the various individual filmmakers, the question of the label, ‘free’, ‘experimental’ or ‘art-film’ was of huge importance. The act of naming the practice was a significant and important way of indicating the attitude to film production and, thereby, also of making claims upon the audience. While the filmmakers and the workshop often concentrated upon actual and material issues such as the relation between visual and aural rhythm (for example, Björn Lüning’s *Study in Optical Rhythm*, 1953), the decisions were, and became, always part of extended connections; of concepts of art, of film, of film aesthetics and the institution of film as such. Furthermore, when the ideas, ideals and piecemeal reasoning had materialised into a finished film,

the artefact was available for appropriation into other discourses. It was not rare either that the films fell into oblivion. Many of the films produced never attained any regular distribution or exhibition although they were of significant interest. Two such examples from early Swedish film history are the artist Reinhold Holtermann and the architect and artist Hans Nordenström. Holtermann was an established artist from a wealthy background who made his films only for private use. Nordenström collaborated closely with Pontus Hultén in the 1950s but also made films on his own.

Holtermann's work is unique in a Swedish context while Nordenström's films are at least as interesting as the regularly screened films he collaborated upon: *En dag i staden* ("A day in the city" 1956, with Hultén) and *Enligt lag* ("According to the law" 1957, with Peter Weiss). Apparently the films by Nordenström have hardly been shown in public or outside the art schools where Nordenström taught. Are all the individual rolls by Holtermann and Nordenström that consist of footage which are studies in cutting, composition and landscape to be considered as films? Are they part of the history although they probably never entered the public sphere? It would, of course, be highly problematic if that part of Nordenström's production was excluded from a history of Swedish experimental film. Consequently, a history of experimental film also questions the established notion of film as such, a notion that is problematized further when new technologies like video and digital media entered film culture, changing minor into major in terms of output, and influence and creating new forms for distribution and exhibition.

The discourse on free or experimental film is, of course, only one way of writing history. Foucault's essentially anti-humanist historiography – because the agent is not only subordinate to structure or discourse but also caused by them – may not cover individual efforts like Nordenström's, or views and visions that made Holtermann create two abstract film experiments, *Arabesk I & II* in the 1920s. Holtermann's two films were, in fact, forgotten but re-discovered by The Independent Film Group in the 1950s. *Arabesk I & II* were distributed by the company Artfilm and, therefore, entered the discourse of experimental film at the time. Almost certainly the films were destroyed and have been expunged from a living film culture. However, Holtermann shot several other films in the late 1920s and early 1930s that were never shown in public but which are preserved. Unfortunately they were never able to influence the emerging Swedish experimental film culture of the 1950s.

A history of experimental film culture has to cover such short-lived and hidden events as well, artefacts of which there are no remnants today or work that has not reached an audience until now. Thus the history we write is also a work of memory, a politics of collecting, saving, commemorating and acknowledging producers and products for both the present and the future. This

restoring, archival and conservational aspect is always part of film historiography since film is an extremely fragile medium.

Discourse studies is a method used in this book in order to detect discussions, opinions and ideologies, the culture of experimental film. The benefits of a discourse studies approach is that the method enables one to study how a cultural form functions as an institution, how structure and ‘episteme’ – that is, logic, values and forms of understanding – work and are reproduced. Experimental film, in particular, is placed in a complex relation; situated between mainstream and margin, film and the art world, challenged and driven by a persistent technological change. The approach of discourse analysis also implies the application of an external perspective that may easily lend itself to what Robert F. Berkhofer has criticised as the tradition of “the Great Story”; that is, a pretentious historiography that “not only orders the past and interprets the present but also predicts the future”.<sup>21</sup> However, our aim in writing the history of Swedish experimental film culture is to single out and to pay tribute to significant films and individual filmmakers too.<sup>22</sup> This is not only because of an essentially humanistic respect for specific persons and particular artefacts – and in making a counter gesture towards an all too orthodox Foucauldian methodology – but also because some of the specific films address concrete and current film theoretical and film aesthetic issues. Films that simply stand out as unique objects in the history of Swedish experimental film and which, therefore, so to speak, point beyond themselves. Such films are of interest beyond their position as sign or signifier in the narrative of film history.

Reinhold Holtermann, “Stockholmsbilder – experiment” (late 1920s)

Hence, the interpretational grids used in order to structure the history we write are based both on an external perspective – discourse analysis – and an internal perspective – the aesthetic analysis of particular films. Our aim is to treat the subject as liberally as possible when it comes to aesthetic analysis. One of the problems in the field of experimental

film is that because it is placed between disciplines, essentially between fine art and film studies, its history has been ‘closed’ according to either of these subject’s academic boundaries. Therefore, it is worth bearing in mind Michel de Certeau’s words regarding history: “History thus vacillates between two poles. On the one hand it refers to a practice, hence to a reality; on the other, it is a closed discourse, a text that organizes and concludes a mode of intelligibility”.<sup>23</sup> The obvious dangers with discourse analysis and a rigid and narrow definition of experimental cinema is that it may exclude interesting and, therefore, important work. For discourse analysis the grammar of the culture in question is the focal point and the individual works are considered primarily as metonymical signifiers in a greater story.

Recent changes in the media landscape have further complicated the historiography of film. In the context of the moving image, film has recently undergone significant changes that affect all the various aspects of what may be understood to constitute the concept of cinema. Even inside the mainstream everything starts to be out of focus. What is standard and what is exceptional becomes blurred. Elsaesser has reminded us that we should always be prepared to question the notion of a norm or of ‘classical cinema’ forming a trans-historical model:

**The assertion that early cinema is closer to post-classical cinema than it is to classical cinema also reverses the relation of norm and deviance. Now early cinema appears – flanked by the powerful, event-driven and spectacle-oriented blockbuster cinema – as the norm, making the classical Hollywood cinema seem the exception (or ‘intermezzo’).<sup>24</sup>**

The question of norm and deviance, of setting limits and what to include or exclude is vital for every historiographical act while it encompasses a set of choices that may never only be justified by referring to an object, fact or something else that may be put in an external relation to the organizing text. There is, of course, no escape from canon building when writing the history of an art form; it is an integral part of historiography. There is no escape, either, from what Berkhofer has called “Reflexive (con)textualization”, personal judgement, interpretation and evaluation in relation to the external evidence collected.<sup>25</sup> What is so intriguing with experimental and minor cinema is that the concept and culture in itself forces one to a constant reflexive contextualization.

### **Experimental Film and Intermediality**

19 The technological and cultural changes since World War II have also put the media concept into question; is it still possible to speak of different media

forms and media technologies in an age that seems imbued by hybridizations and transgressions?<sup>26</sup> Can a term like ‘intermediality’ be meaningful in cases where all media forms are in fact intermedial, dependent on several sources, several technologies? We cannot ignore fundamental intermediality in a post-media age, but at the same time it is, in fact, possible to speak about intermediality in a specific sense when it comes to experimental film culture. The intermedial understanding of culture is possible to gain if you study the different media forms as historical and social contexts, where artists are connected to one media form or another through a discursive practice; Viking Eggeling was a painter who started to make films. In a very trivial sense he transcends the media boundaries, but the point is that when such a boundary is crossed as fundamentally as in the way of Eggeling, you cannot return to your old media form; new forms have been created through the transgression, and that seems to be a permanent condition for experimental film. A. L. Rees argues in his pivotal *A History of Experimental Film and Video* that cinema is not the only context for avant-garde film. “Surrealist and abstract film from the 1920s, like much film and video installation art today, flowed from the artistic currents of the time.”<sup>27</sup> Rees makes a point of the fact that avant-garde film has also taken over the traditional genres of art, and claims that the idea of experimental or avant-garde film itself derives more directly from the modern or post-modern contexts than from film history proper.<sup>28</sup>

In other recent histories and surveys of European and international avant-garde film culture you find arguments in the vein of Rees, for example, when Michael O’Pray in his introduction to avant-garde film claims that especially the 1920s avant-gardes were characterised by “the cross-fertilisation of art forms – ballet, painting, poetry, music, sculpture, fashion, literature”:

**These high-art sources are matched by an avant-garde fascination with and love of the popular “low-arts” of circus, vaudeville, Hollywood silent comedies and puppetry. Thus in many ways, the avant-gardes saw their role as being both in opposition to high art and attempting to displace it, to become a new “high art” so to speak.<sup>29</sup>**

In the following we argue that this intermedial aspect of the avant-garde is not just a historical condition for the understanding of the 1920s; when it comes to Swedish experimental film culture the intermedial aspect is a salient feature over the following years.

As has been indicated our use of the concept ‘experimental film’ is principally inclusive. *Symphonie Diagonale* by Viking Eggeling was a film, projected on a screen, but is nowadays distributed mostly on VCR or DVD. Is it still a film when we look at it on computer screens? Some of the works we are dealing with have never been films in the strict sense; they were recorded on

video or digitally. The most common denominator seems to be that we are dealing with moving images, produced and distributed through various technologies within a minor cinema. Sometimes we are dealing with moving images that are lost – probably forever – and sometimes we have to discuss things that primarily were meant for another reception context. And sometimes – and, in fact, very often – it is not the film *per se* that is at the centre, but the culture surrounding it with its hierarchies, values and rituals.

There are two main factors to be aware of which together form a paradox:

1. That media have changed over the years, and that it is now hard to distinguish one media form from another, due to technological and cultural change.

2. That this historical condition makes us aware of the fact that it has always been difficult to distinguish one media form from another.

This paradox parallels a claim made by Fredric Jameson:

**It is because we have had to learn that culture is a matter of media today that we have finally begun to get it through our heads that culture was always that, and that the older forms or genres, or indeed the older spiritual exercises and meditations, thoughts and expressions, were also in their very different ways media products. The intervention of the machine, the mechanisation of culture, the mediation of culture by the consciousness industry, this is now everywhere the case, and perhaps it might be interesting to explore the possibility that it was always the case throughout human history, and within even the radical difference of older, precapitalist modes of production.<sup>30</sup>**

These intermedial dimensions of experimental film, based on both internal and external norms indicate that we must treat the films we are dealing with in connection with all the other art forms that are involved. This may seem to be axiomatic, and something which involves all films, not only experimental ones, but besides the aesthetic fact of film as a hybrid art form, there is also a sociological or institutional fact. The production and the distribution of experimental film cannot be reduced to something within a confined cinematic institution. Most of the filmmakers within the Swedish experimental film movement came from environments other than film culture: they were art students, musicians, poets, architects, photographers, critics, teachers, performers; they made their films within a very eclectic institution of art, and their films were often distributed through galleries, art museums, happenings, artist's clubs etc.

When speaking of experimental film and avant-garde cinema in general  
21 terms, it is necessary to try to define the kind of tradition dominant within

Swedish experimental film culture. In the literature on American and European avant-garde cinema you find a divide between the film cultures of, respectively, America and Europe, where the American experimental film, be it marginal and independent, still belongs to film culture while the European experimental film culture functions within the art world with its galleries, exhibitions and critics.<sup>31</sup> The same applies to Sweden; almost all important experimental filmmakers from Viking Eggeling to Gunvor Nelson are connected to the art scene, several of them trained as painters. Very few individuals, Gösta Werner in the 1940s is a rare example, had connections with the studio system, and it was mainly through the intervention of the Swedish Film Institute that some feature films were possible to produce during the 1960s and 1970s. When the two cultures are finally made to cohere is rather when the political avant-garde tries to confront the film industry through organisations such as the Film Centre and political documentarists such as Carl Henrik Svenstedt and Stefan Jarl.

A history of Swedish experimental film and video art cannot be reduced to one segment of the cultural sphere, for example, film culture. Experimental film art is not only film; it is also important not to reduce art experience to simply art or aesthetics, hence experimental film art is not only art. It is also economy, sociology, politics, questions of power and cultural change. The history of experimental film in Sweden is also and always a history of something else too, and that something – art, economy, politics etc. – is the context which defines what film is in each historical moment.

Some of the intermedial perspectives are more important than others. The concept of ‘expanded cinema’ is crucial for the understanding of what happens in the 1960s. Gene Youngblood and his pioneering study *Expanded Cinema* published in 1970 is, of course, a point of departure, but there has also been substantial written contributions on the subject by artists like Jackie Hatfield and Valie Export.<sup>32</sup> The modes of film-practice in the avant-garde includes several strands of film art, where the most important division is between film made for cinema screening, and video art made for gallery exhibition (even if they can be fused). This has been discussed by, among others, Jonathan Walley and Alexander Alberro.<sup>33</sup> But the intermedial concepts are not only historiographic tools which can be used in order to depict and understand the past or different artistic practices; they are also possible to use in a wider discussion on society and its need for memories, archives and new modes of communication. Lev Manovich, D. N. Rodowick and Ryszard W. Kluszczyński in their works offer several useful perspectives on this complex question.<sup>34</sup> Kluszczyński makes a conclusive remark on the hypertext, which can be transferred to the experimental film: “the ultimate object of analysis is not the work itself, regardless of the definition, but the field of interactive ar-

tistic communication, where the work, along with other elements (the artist, the recipient/interactor, the artifact, the interface) becomes entangled in an intricate, multidimensional complex of communication processes.”<sup>35</sup>

### **National or International Cinema?**

In an article from 2003, Malcolm Le Grice argues that experimental film – “this other cinema” – has roots closer to modern art than to the history of cinema.<sup>36</sup> It could, however, equally be argued that its roots are close to the history of early cinema, when film was nothing but experiment. But early cinema, to continue this comparison, was also international in many respects, and the parallel thus evokes the question of national versus international so central to experimental cinema. When looking into the history of experimental film, the films seem to oscillate not only between art and cinema, but also between their national context of production and the avant-garde movement, which tends towards internationalism. Here, Sweden offers a clear example, given both its very limited production within certain nationally specific conditions and the existence of a specific Swedish discourse on experimental film, which at the same time remains closely interrelated to both European and American avant-garde movements.

The concept of national cinemas is a much debated issue within cinema studies. Whereas in the 1960s, with the establishment of the discipline, it was considered as a relatively unproblematic, descriptive concept, in the late 1980s, Andrew Higson – one of the main theorists within the field – would claim that national cinema can only be understood in terms of crisis and conflict, resistance and negotiation.<sup>37</sup> Some ten years later, in a critical anthology on cinema and nation, he even questioned the usefulness of the concept of national cinema, arguing that Benedict Anderson’s now generally accepted definition of the nation as an imagined community is less valuable within film culture, and that the concepts of local or transnational communities would be much more productive in this context, to be able to describe or define both cultural specificity and cultural diversity.<sup>38</sup>

One of the questions to be raised from the study of experimental film in Sweden is, thus, whether it is possible at all to speak of a Swedish history, a question which, of course, is as valid for any national experimental cinema. First of all, many of its most well-known practitioners have worked mostly outside Sweden, like Viking Eggeling in 1920s Germany or Gunvor Nelson from the 1960s onwards within the American West Coast avant-garde. Or, in the cases of Peter Weiss, Mihail Livada or Kjartan Slettemark, they have come to Sweden from abroad. Also, a venue like Filmverkstan (The Film Workshop) in the 1970s became a central place for foreign directors visiting Swe-



den. Particularly interesting in the Swedish case, however, is that the Nordic context, so often relevant as a broader framework than the exclusively national even within film culture, turns out to be irrelevant in the case of experimental cinema, with the exception of Denmark.<sup>39</sup> In Norway, there has not been an experimental film scene, and in Finland only a marginal one.

But even in considering a 'national' artist like Claes Söderquist, who has mostly worked in Scandinavia, the frame of reference is clearly more broadly international. His travels in the USA and meetings with the American avant-garde form an integral part of his work. Thus the question, whether the fact that the soundtrack for Peter Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer* (1960) might be taken from Swedish Radio by Pontus Hultén would make it a Swedish film, or at least a less Austrian film than it would else be, is also highly relevant in the questioning of the concept of the national, not least in the context of experimental film culture.

In any case, it could be argued that experimental film, video or digital art generally are 'international' to a much higher degree than several other art forms. That ideas and inspiration are derived from an international context is, of course, quite frequent within the art world in general, but, in addition, the film medium has been a globalised form of expression from its very beginning. International avant-garde film and later art video have both served as a general frame of reference and plays important roles in the reception (or non-reception) even of national works. The reception of the international avant-garde in Sweden – Maya Deren's work, or *Lot in Sodom* – or the phenomenon of Swedish modernism which lingers between national and international are thus equally important aspects of Swedish experimental film history that are dealt with in the following.

Still, the early attempts which have been made writing Swedish experimental film history seem to share one common assumption: that Swedish culture was very isolated and provincial during the twentieth century, that the Swedish experimental film scene between 1920 and 1970 was to a high degree a national movement, and that the few works that might be related to European or American art movements, like Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* from the 1920s or Pontus Hultén and his circle in the 1950s were rather exceptions confirming the rule of national provincialism. In 1956, French film critic Edouard de Laurot published an article in *Film Culture* called "Swedish Cinema – Classic Background and Militant Avantgarde".<sup>40</sup> In spite of his enthusiasm for individual works or directors such as Rune Hagberg, Arne Sucksdorff, Gösta Werner, Mihail Livada, Rut Hillarp or Peter Weiss, he pointed to the lack of a theoretical basis in Swedish experimental film in general and criticized its eclectic tendencies. This may seem to confirm the critical standpoints referred to above, and it is quite symptomatic that film historian Henrik Orrje concludes

that Laurot's conclusion seems natural for us today when comparing the isolated modern art scene in Sweden during the 1950s with the corresponding cutting edge development in Europe and the USA.<sup>41</sup>

It may be equally true that Sweden lagged behind in international comparison, and even that the relatively intense experimental period of the 1950s Swedish film culture knew of no real succession in the 1960s. However, this latter decade also contained a series of events that contributed to defining Swedish experimental film history. On the institutional level, Konstfack (University College of Arts, Craft and Design) introduced film into their schedules, and Mihail Livada, himself a filmmaker of Romanian origin who had made films with others such as Rut Hillarp, started to work there as a teacher. During this decade Moderna Museet (The Museum of Contemporary Art) in Stockholm also introduced new American underground cinema within exhibitions and scheduled a series of screenings, which functioned as inspiration for a new generation of Swedish artists and filmmakers. The 1960s also saw the foundation of the Swedish Film Institute which – despite the limited interest it has shown over the decades in supporting experimental cinema – nevertheless did finance some noteworthy films. An example to be mentioned here is Öyvind Fahlström's *Du gamla du fria* (*Provocation*, 1972) with its original title quoting the Swedish national anthem. Fahlström had the ambition to capture the political developments in France and the rest of Europe in an experimental mode, a project that took four years to complete. In several respects, he could be studied as a case in point concerning the relation between national and international. Like him, most experimental filmmakers in Sweden have in some sense or another been solitary figures, more individual artists than part of any avant-garde movement. If there have been movements in Sweden, they have often been too small to become anything more than loose networks between individuals. But Fahlström is exemplary also in another respect. When distributed within the framework of a commercial national cinema, his experimental feature had no chance of finding an audience. Therefore, earlier historians who have discussed Swedish experimental cinema as narrow, provincial or isolated may be right if they talk about film culture in general and the possibility of finding an audience to share the references of an international avant-garde tradition. But it is misleading to discuss the films themselves with such arguments. That the distribution circuits for experimental films, however, are different to the commercial ones is quite clear, just as the fact that they have developed internationally in a radical way with the introduction of new screening formats which have actually redefined the field. Finally, Fahlström's work, has to be studied in both a national and international perspective. Firstly, there is the Swedish context, where Fahlström enjoyed a central position on the art scene. Secondly, there is also the European

context, evoked by his ambition to portray a European political movement and by defining his work as a European project. Thirdly, the American context must also be considered, as Fahlström was also part of the pop art scene in New York. The history of experimental cinema in any small European country can thus never be written independently. It would then be reduced to attempts toward an avant-garde movement or to a few front figures. But above all, these local histories open up a very complex field of interrelations which connect them to international movements, and reach beyond the European context. This perspective becomes all the more important when dealing with films that often have defined themselves in opposition to existing boundaries, be they geographical or cultural.

But the question of national versus international within the history of experimental cinema could also be approached from the opposite angle. When considering international audiences, the name that first comes to mind when it comes to experimental Swedish filmmaking is clearly that of Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007). Though never an experimental filmmaker in the sense defined here – working within minor cinemas – several of his films were experimental in another sense of the word. While experimenting with the conventions of the film medium itself, they have also contributed to redefining the very field and the limits of art cinema. The dream sequences of *Smultronstället* (*Wild Strawberries*, 1957) or the prologue of *Persona* (1966) could then be counted among the internationally most well known Swedish film experiments ever. But are they part of experimental film history? In the international reception, the answer would definitely be yes; these sequences undoubtedly belong to the history of the international film avant-garde. From a national viewpoint, however, the answer would probably be negative, as the ‘experimental’ – as will be shown in the following – has often been defined as that which institutionally cannot be included in commercial cinema, which is clearly not the case with Bergman. His colleague and friend Vilgot Sjöman (1924-2006) has equally been considered as an important front figure for the avant-garde in the international reception.<sup>42</sup> Earlier, the Swedish silent classic directors – Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller – had also been defined as forerunners within art cinema by several critics and historians.<sup>43</sup> The national experimental Swedish film canon thus differ significantly from the international.

In this connection, the more general question of a national or international experimental film canon is thus inevitably also evoked. Lauren Rabinovitz has argued that the avant-garde cinema, particularly open to women because of its marginal status in the art world and film world alike, also offered new possibilities for women as filmmakers, organizers and critics. In any case, a critique of traditional canon standards within experimental as well as other cinemas has been delivered by feminist critics since the early 1970s.<sup>44</sup> David

E. James, in his book on Jonas Mekas, also seems to argue that “freeing the cinema” implicates a critique of established film cultures and canons. “For the first time an entire generation – haunted by images of childhood already preserved on celluloid – was able consciously and realistically to harbor the ambition to become ‘moviemakers’, believing this epithet to be both inherently progressive and open to myriad redefinitions”.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, the fact that the history of experimental film has hitherto mostly been written by critics or filmmakers has largely contributed to the establishing of canonical works.<sup>46</sup> It has thus been “driven by some implicit goals: the idea of the single ‘work’ as the primary object and a presumed negation of the avant-garde vis-à-vis mainstream film”; an agenda that turns out to be not at all that innocent: “the ‘essential cinema’ established in 1970 in New York has become the history that is being reproduced whenever the history of experimental film has been actualized in a national setting, complemented with local films of course”.<sup>47</sup> Writing a national film history, like the following, also inevitably contributes to this canonising process. Choosing the nation as a framework to organise the material always implies an assessment and a selection: a certain amount of material has to be excluded.

Still, in the following study the concepts of national and international are not dealt with as oppositions, as in Higson’s earlier article. Rather, the intersection between the two is considered as a possible meeting point, be it in Paris where Eivor Burbeck and Rut Hillarp found inspiration for their work, or where Pontus Hultén and his contemporary circle took part in the development of the international avant-garde, or in the USA where Carl Henrik Svenstedt as well as Claes Söderquist found points of reference for their work, or at the Film Workshop in Stockholm in the 1970s. The concepts of local and transnational film cultures that Higson proposes in his later article seems more relevant in the present context; the local corresponds well to the concept of minor cinemas, and the transnational seems to be a more adequate way of describing the continual exchange between Swedish and international experimental scenes.

**Swedish**  
**Experimental**  
**Film until the**  
**1950s: The**  
**Pre-History**  
**from Cartoon**  
**to Feature Film**

## **Film Culture and Experimental Cinema**

The first films were all experimental. The history of experimental film is as long as the history of film in general, since cinema from the beginning was an experiment; there were no internal conventions, no norms regarding film as such. But, of course, film remediated the norms and traditions from other art forms like photography and painting. As has been noted, the anomalous devices of the early cinema “usually resulted from the exploration of a new medium rather than from an effort to set up an alternative to the commercial cinema”.<sup>48</sup> The concept of the experimental must also be understood in a very broad, inclusive sense when it comes to the early years of cinema. After a while ‘the experimental’ tends to be connected to more specific currents, as ‘modernism’ and ‘avant-garde’. The words are not synonymous, but the terms tend to merge, and sometimes justly so.

In this chapter we aim to deal with the early Swedish culture of experimental cinema, which includes traits that can be described as modernistic and belonging to the avant-garde, but also covers fairly conventional modes of production and reception. The history of experimental cinema is uneven in the sense that there are several histories; continental development was faster than the development in Sweden. And the quantities are unevenly distributed; even with generous definitions you can only talk about very few films during the 1920s and 1930s in Sweden which can be said to belong to the experimental realm. But still, even if the quantities are low, there is a culture, there is a reception of international film, there are film journals, and there are the expanding circles of cinephiles, for example in the student film clubs which together define a cultural field that can be labelled ‘experimental’.

The Swedish artists during the first half of the twentieth century tended to use the term ‘experimental’ – in important manifestos and theoretical writings – instead of avant-garde. Noteworthy examples which will be related to later on in this account were written by Gösta Werner and Gerd Osten during the 1940s and 1950s. The terminology has, among other things, probably to do with the belated advent of modernism in Swedish art and the conditions within film culture at the time. As we will show, Swedish artists’ films and videos are produced and distributed within the institutions of art rather than within film industry spaces.

After a brief mapping of the European context and the specific Swedish conditions, the history starts with early animation film and its connections to cartoon art. The Swedish reception of continental modernism will be addressed as the pivotal role for Viking Eggeling and the early debates concerning film as an art form. Some other contemporary experiments with film form, and the theoretical and aesthetical contexts of the 1920s, will be sketched

out. Then the new generation of politically engaged writers of the 1930s and the cinephile movements will be discussed, which leads up to the post-war situation where a sparse production of experimental films can be found. The movie magazines and the growing theoretical debates are focused, and the chapter concludes with the advent of young Peter Weiss, later to be the leading figure in the Stockholm-based Independent Film Group, and a symbol for the actual start of Swedish experimental film production.

## **The European Context and the Swedish Condition**

In his historical account, *Moving Forward, Looking Back*, Malte Hagener provides some new aspects of the European context.<sup>49</sup> He pays particular attention to the growing film culture with screenings, festivals and embryonic archives. His main thesis is that avant-garde film culture made it possible for film culture *in general* to be accepted as an art form:

**Even though the avant-garde is often seen as something that ultimately failed, one can also conceptualise the development that set in around 1929 as the ultimate triumph: it did not bring about a transformation of the kind it had hoped for (i.e., a social, political and cultural revolution), but it clearly had a visible impact in many different areas. The avant-garde achieved the naturalisation of the documentary as a genre and the foundation of film archives in various countries, it helped introduce large-scale government support for cinema in virtually all European countries, it was decisive in the establishment of film theory as a field of its own, and it stimulated the emergence of art house cinemas. The cultural acceptance of cinema as an artistic form and cultural force leads us invariably back to the avant-garde and its wide-ranging activities. Thus, what counts as a defeat from one perspective, can be rephrased as a success story when using a different focus.<sup>50</sup>**

In the following we will show how an experimental film culture is established in Sweden, based on a general acceptance of cinema and a growing interest in the modern art forms. Even though the domestic production of experimental film is small in quantity, it is inscribed in a dynamic system of film clubs, film journals and general film culture.

The experimental film culture in Sweden has hitherto only been described by brief sketches in the margins of the established Swedish film history.<sup>51</sup> In international surveys on cinema in general there are mentions and short chapters on Viking Eggeling.<sup>52</sup> In several British and American presentations of avant-garde and alternative filmmaking there are lengthier chapters devoted to Eggeling.<sup>53</sup> Sometimes Peter Weiss is mentioned and when dealing with more contemporary filmmaking Gunvor Nelson is the common example.<sup>54</sup>

The first Swedish book-length account of the avant-garde cinema was published as early as 1956 by filmmaker Peter Weiss, *Avantgardefilm*, and includes some notes on early Swedish attempts.<sup>55</sup> Then there was a lengthy hiatus in research, with the exception of general textbooks and introductions to Swedish film history and a thesis on post-war production.<sup>56</sup> In Swedish there are monographs written on Viking Eggeling and several essays and articles on Gunvor Nelson.<sup>57</sup>

Peter Weiss has been researched within Swedish film studies, but most of the Weiss reception has been international. However, most of the critical and scholarly works devoted to Weiss have focused on his stage productions and novels, his life and letters.<sup>58</sup> Autobiographical books and memoirs with information concerning the life of Peter Weiss have been written by former wives and partners and members of the family. There are some studies devoted to the experimental films by Weiss, and a valuable annotated filmography was presented at the annual Scandinavian film festival in Lübeck in 1986.<sup>59</sup>

There are several alternative routes when mapping out the early Swedish attempts. One way could be to trace the early film d'art of Svenska Bio in Kristianstad in the beginning of the twentieth century. Another path returns to cinema as attraction in the world of amusement parks and entertainment culture. The conventional way of conceptualising the history of Swedish experimental film is to start with the screening in 1925 of *Symphonie Diagonale* by Viking Eggeling. Here we are trying to start a bit earlier, in the region of animated film during the First World War. Through this choice the first work will be *Trolldrycken* ("The magic brew"), made in 1915 by the cartoonist and artist Victor Bergdahl.

It is necessary to point out that we have chosen the experimental rather than the avant-garde as a point of departure. This is motivated since the formal and technical experiments generally have a primacy in the Swedish discourse of experimental film and experimental as a category for describing the production is established at a quite early stage. It is also a fact that the films of Victor Bergdahl, much later in the 1960s, were included in experimental film culture through festival screenings and writings.

### **Animation Culture: Victor Bergdahl and Early Animation**

The cartoonist and painter Victor Bergdahl (1878–1939) became famous when he started to experiment with moving images. According to film critic Torsten Jungstedt this happened after watching an American animated film in 1912, probably Winsor McKay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1909).<sup>60</sup> Bergdahl made some sketches and tried to get leading Swedish film producers Svenska Bio to manage the project, but it was considered too expensive. In the autumn of



1915, however, the producer Charles Magnusson at Svenska Bio let Bergdahl make *Trolldrycken* which was the first animated film in Sweden.

This short film was advertised as “Amusing cartoons”. It was briefly mentioned in reviews of the main attractions of the film programmes, and was obviously popular. One copy of the film was later exported to the United States.<sup>61</sup>

The film, which was drawn directly on paper, is 3.5 minutes long. It shows a fat man with a cigar, drinking and smoking. His liquor bottle transforms into a baby which grows into a grotesque monster which consumes the man and then drinks what is left in the glass. Then the monster baby explodes, and the fat man emerges again, once again with a full glass and a cigar. This deliric fantasy is just a brief sketch, but is important in two aspects: First, it is an experimental film. Victor Bergdahl experimented with the new medium, and tried to develop a new technique. This aspect makes the film the point of departure for Swedish experimental cinema. Second, it was the beginning of a short but successful era of Swedish comic animation. This can be considered as another story to be told, but the fact is, much later, in the 1970s, several avant-garde filmmakers, like Gunvor Nelson and Olle Hedman, worked with animation, and animation flourished at the Film Workshop in Stockholm during the 1970s and 1980s. The magic brew is served anew.

Victor Bergdahl made some brief sketches about “Circus Fjollinski” which later have been compared with Norman McLaren’s *A Chairy Tale* (1957) and *Opening Speech* (1960).<sup>62</sup> After that he started to make his serial about Captain Grogg, a rough sailor, exploring foreign countries but mostly exploring new drinks. The character was inspired by the cartoons of American artist Charles W. Kahle and his character “Captain Fibb”.<sup>63</sup> *Kapten Groggs underbara resa*, 1916 (“Captain Grogg’s wonderful journey”), was the beginning of a short but successful career within the film business for Bergdahl; some of the films were even exported. In 1922 Bergdahl directed his last short in the series, *Kapten Grogg har blivit fet* (“Captain Grogg has become fat”). He then left film production, except for a few commercials. One of the problems Bergdahl had with filmmaking during his last years related to the fact that he wanted to continue with the cut-out technique, ignoring the development of cell film animation. His last film was an educational film, an animated documentary about human reproduction, *Från cell till människa*, 1936 (“From cell to human being”), produced as a silent film, a symptom of how Bergdahl, who once was in the forefront of artistic and technical development, was now lagging behind.

In the 1960s some of Bergdahl’s film were restored by the Swedish Film Institute, and screened at international festivals. The films appeared at the film festival of Montréal in 1967 where Bergdahl was compared to American John R. Bray.<sup>64</sup> At the short film festival in Tours, 1970, five of Bergdahl’s films were screened and the French critics were enthusiastic. Martin Couste



said: “His ascetic graphic style makes him into a unique modernist, the abundant Disney style could not go further”.<sup>65</sup>

Some other cartoonists contemporary with Bergdahl, as Paul Myrén (1884–1951) and Arvid Olson (1886–1976), did develop the animated film in Sweden, mostly commercials, or as credit sequences for feature films. They made very popular films, deeply connected with mainstream concepts and Swedish folklore. When the experimental phase was finished they stayed within this culture of affirmation, far away from any ideas of avant-garde or cultural change.

### **Reluctant Modernism: The Swedish Artists and the European Modernist Movement**

Swedish modernism is hesitant. Most of the Swedish contributions to the modernist movement seem to be the ones delivered outside Sweden, but they are, on the other hand, significant ones from an international perspective. It is, for example, impossible to ignore Viking Eggeling, but there are several others to mention. One can in fact speak about a sort of imaginary Swedish film avant-garde, situated in Paris and Berlin and having very limited influence on Swedish film or art culture until long afterwards.

An important agent in the modernisation of Swedish art, and a forerunner concerning Cubism, is Gösta-Adrian Nilsson (1884–1965), a.k.a. GAN. GAN, born in the southern university town of Lund, by tradition culturally close to Denmark and Germany, did not make films, but his paintings concerned the condition of modern urbanity where the movie experience was a recurrent model of interpretation. GAN was a fan of Charlie Chaplin – as so many artists and intellectuals were – but he was not only interested in cinema as such; he was aiming for an art which could capture the movement of modern space, be it railway stations or sports arenas. The interest in movement, colour and urbanity – pointing towards the art movements of the 1960s – was a common denominator for many of the young artists who tried to find ways of expression outside Sweden. One of them was Otto G. Carlsund (1897–1948). Through the help of GAN he was introduced to Fernand Léger in Paris 1924, and was accepted at Académie Moderne together with two other Swedish artists, the surrealists Erik Olson (1901–1986) and Waldemar Lorentzon (1899–1984). Carlsund’s most famous contribution to film art is that he assisted Léger in making *Ballet mécanique* 1924.<sup>66</sup> *Ballet mécanique* belongs to the European canon of avant-garde films, a hymn to modern technology: “Everything in *Ballet mécanique* is caught in machine-like, contrasting rhythms, from the slow movements of the girl in the swing to numbers, geometric figures, machine parts, Christmas ornaments, and the washerwoman climbing

stairs”, as Rudolf E. Kuenzli has put it.<sup>67</sup> Sheldon Renan points out that Léger with this film belongs to the third phase of the French avant-garde, and more specifically to the group of filmmakers that “made strictly non-commercial works”.<sup>68</sup> The film has had a pivotal importance for other filmmakers. Susan McCabe labelled it a “sampling of avant-garde aesthetics”.<sup>69</sup> As such it obviously attracted some contemporary Swedish artists, like Carlsund, but it was not acknowledged in Sweden until the 1930s and 1940s when it was screened at the various cine clubs.

Carlsund was important in the introduction of modern art into Sweden, and he later became an influent art critic in Sweden. He never produced any other film work, though he designed decorative details for a cinema in Paris in 1926, planned by Le Corbusier but never built.<sup>70</sup> In the 1930s he designed some decorations for a cinema in Stockholm, Regina, but his involvement in film culture ends there.

Another significant Swede in Paris during the early 1920s was Rolf de Maré (1888–1964) and his Ballet Suédois, which produced over twenty ballets in close cooperation with contemporary artists, painters and filmmakers.<sup>71</sup> Two of the main artists in the troupe were Jean Börlin (1893–1930) and Carina Ari (1897–1970). Börlin was a successful dancer who made a career for himself in Paris, while Ari was one of the stars at the Royal Opera in Stockholm and among other things, was responsible for the choreography of the feature film, *Erotikon* (1920), by Mauritz Stiller (1883–1928).<sup>72</sup> In Paris they joined under the guidance of de Maré. This group of artists was criticised by the Swedish tabloids; they were portrayed as traitors, and the homosexuality of de Maré was ridiculed in severe attacks. Like Carlsund they found a refuge in Paris. Together they formed an exile culture of sorts where they could perform, cultivate and create contemporary art. In Paris it was possible for this Swedish minority culture to incorporate and develop the new film medium in a way that had been impossible in Sweden. Several of the ballet productions were integrated with or inspired by film as *Skating Rink* (1922) with its resemblance of Chaplin’s *The Rink* (1917).<sup>73</sup> One of their productions was *Relâche* (1924) with choreography by Börlin, music by Erik Satie, decorations by Francis Picabia and – as an integrated part – a film by René Clair, *Entr’acte*.<sup>74</sup>

*Entr’acte* is sometimes categorised together with *Ballet mécanique* as a Dada film, consisting of “unconnected, wildly irrational scenes”.<sup>75</sup> Several of the dancers of the Swedish troupe appeared in the film, most notably Jean Börlin.<sup>76</sup> De Maré and his troupe returned to film in the production *Ciné-Sketch*, a celebration of New Year’s Eve 1924, where Picabia and Clair collaborated in order to get the pace and rhythm of cinematography to appear on the stage. In 1925, however, the Swedish Ballet was dissolved by its manager, de

## **Viking Eggeling and the Quest for Universal Language**

Otto G. Carlsund, GAN, Jean Börlin and the Swedish Ballet of Paris, functioned as a kind of mobile Swedish avant-garde in exile, performing briefly on the European art scene, but still close to important events and figures. Another artist from Sweden who contributed to the experimental film and avant-garde culture of the 1920s was Viking Eggeling (1880–1925). As discussed in the Introduction, Eggeling would in a teleological historiography represent the beginning as well as the end of Swedish experimental film. His contribution is an anomaly in Swedish film and art history, and at the same time ‘the most typical avant-garde’.

Viking Eggeling was born in Lund in 1880.<sup>77</sup> His father was a German immigrant who probably left his home village in Niedersachsen during 1848. In Lund he established himself as a musician, opened a music shop in 1881, and edited a popular song book. Viking was the youngest of the Eggeling children, altogether they were twelve. Young Viking was mostly interested in music and sports, and left school with mediocre skills. At the age of sixteen he left his home in Sweden for Germany, in order to train as a book-keeper. He stayed for a while in Germany, then moved to Switzerland and after that to Italy. He studied art history and was later appointed as a drawing teacher in Switzerland. In 1911 he went to Paris where he engaged in the art life, and met, among others, Jean (Hans) Arp and Amadeo Modigliani. Modigliani painted his portrait in 1916.<sup>78</sup>

During the First World War his life was nomadic; he lived in Italy and Switzerland. He was involved in the Dada movement, and exhibited at Cabaret Voltaire in 1916. Later, in 1919, Eggeling became member of the group “Das neue Leben” together with, among others, Arp and Marcel Janco. He was one of the founders of the group “Radikale Künstler” in Zürich in 1919. He met several new friends and colleagues; Raul Hausmann was probably the most important among the Dadaists for Eggeling.

Hans Richter met Viking Eggeling in 1918. Richter’s role in the Eggeling saga is contentious, but it can be valuable to consider his own version, since it gives a snapshot of the young Swede by one of his contemporaries:

I spent two years, 1916–1918, groping for the principles of what made for rhythm in painting. [...] In 1918, Tristan Tzara brought me together with a Swedish painter from Ascona, who, as he told me, also experimented with similar problems. His name was Viking Eggeling. His drawings stunned me with their extraordinary logic and beauty, a new beauty. He used *contrasting* elements to *dramatize* two (or more) complexes of forms and used *analogies* in these same complexes to *relate* them again. In varying proportions, number, intensity, position, etc., new contrasts and new analogies

were born in perfect order, until there grew a kind of 'functioning' between the different form units, which made you feel movement, rhythm, continuity... as clear as in Bach. That's what I saw immediately!<sup>79</sup>

During the years 1915 to 1917 Eggeling had started to work with the picture scrolls *Horisontal-vertikal orkester* ("Horizontal-vertical orchestra") and *Diagonalsymfoni* ("Diagonal symphony"). Richter accompanied him and later recalled: "In these scrolls we tried to build different phases of transformation as if they were phrases of a symphony or fugue".<sup>80</sup>

The ambition of Eggeling and Richter was to create an abstract visual language, universal and boundless. In 1920 they drafted the proclamation "Universelle Sprache", ("Universal language"). No copy of this manifesto has survived, but Richter later published a summary:

**This pamphlet elaborated our thesis that abstract form offers the possibility of a language above and beyond all national language frontiers. The basis for such language would lie in the identical form perception in all human beings and would offer the promise of a universal art as it has never existed before. With careful analysis of the elements, one should be able to rebuild men's vision into a spiritual language in which the simplest as well as the most complicated, emotions as well as thoughts, objects as well as ideas would find a form.**<sup>81</sup>

Eggeling developed, inspired by contemporaries like Kandinsky, Malevitch and Hausmann, a theory of his own, which he formulated in some brief articles and notes. Another source of inspiration was French philosopher Henri Bergson whose *L'evolution créatrice* (1907) was published in 1912 in a German translation. Amongst Eggeling's posthumous notes there is a manuscript, "Film", which consists almost solely of quotations from Bergson. It was the hope of Eggeling to recreate "*la durée*", the flow of the present, through the cinematic medium. Through reduction he wanted to create a unique language: "Artistic richness is not to be found in an arbitrary innovation, but in formal transformation of the most simple motifs."<sup>82</sup>

Eggeling and Richter at last found some financial support from Ufa in Berlin in 1920, and Eggeling made a first version of a film based upon *Horisontal-vertikal orkester*. These experiments were described by Théo van Doesburg in an article in *De Stijl*, and were also discussed by Eggeling himself in an article, "Theoretical presentations of the art of movement", which he published 1921 in the Hungarian journal *MA*.<sup>83</sup> A Swedish journalist, Birger Brinck-E:son (1901–1937), describes the film in an article in *Filmjournalen*, 1923, as about ten minutes long, consisting of two thousand drawings, and characterises the film as a "symphony of lines".<sup>84</sup> The musical analogy is found

in Eggeling's own writings, and it is obvious that his aim was to create a visual counterpart to music.

*Horisontal-vertikal orkester* is lost and was never shown in public. The support from Ufa was withdrawn after a while, and Eggeling had to produce his next film by himself, together with his assistant, Erna Niemeyer. At the same time he broke with Richter. He suffered from illness as well as financial problems, but was able to finish his work. The film which was to become *Symphonie Diagonale* ("Diagonal symphony"), was made with a simple cut-out technique where he used shapes of tin foil, filmed frame by frame.<sup>85</sup> On 5 November 1924 Eggeling had a private screening of the film, and on 3 May 1925 the film had its first public screening at Ufa Palast in Berlin, together with films by Richter, Léger, Ruttman, Clair and others, under the banner "Der absolute Film". Sixteen days later Viking Eggeling died from septic angina, weakened by infection and a hard life.

Several different copies of *Symphonie Diagonale* exist, and it is difficult to ascertain which version was screened at Ufa Palast. The tragic story of the different versions and the part played by Hans Richter is told by O'Konor and others. This basic material problem leads to questions concerning the interpretative level. O'Konor sees the film in the light of the artistic philosophy of Eggeling where his quest for a universal alphabet of sorts is essential. Another analysis is presented by film historian Gösta Werner and musicologist Bengt Edlund, based on a restoration of the film. Werner describes the film as a sonata:

*Diagonal Symphony* starts with an 'exposition' in which several episodes establish the various pictorial themes or motifs, and in which the dialectical opposition between the determined first and weaker second theme, basic to sonata form, is replicated by means of angular and rounded shapes. Then follows a 'development' characterised by complex, multi-motivic pictures undergoing several changes simultaneously, a kind of visual polyphony. The material of the exposition reappears in condensed form as a 'recapitulation', and finally there is a fairly extended section with further metamorphoses of complex pictures, corresponding to the 'coda', the (optional) closing part of the sonata scheme.<sup>86</sup>

Malin Wahlberg combines the different perspectives in a discussion concerning the concept of 'pure visual rhythm', which she traces in the experimental cinema of the 1920s.<sup>87</sup> The work of Eggeling is, according to her, an important example of the "visualization of musical rhythm".<sup>88</sup>

*Symphonie Diagonale* was acknowledged with great acclaim within the contemporary European avant-garde. Eggeling is often considered with Richter, whose *Rhythmus 21* (1921) was made with the help of Ufa. The difference between the two of them has been formulated as that "the screen was a blackboard





to Eggeling and a window to Richter”.<sup>89</sup> A way to interpret this is to claim that Eggeling was, in fact, more interested in language than the world depicted; the interface was the world. Michael O’Pray sees Eggeling’s geometric shapes as “complex imaginative abstractions reminiscent of both hieroglyphs and at times, mundane objects like combs and jugs, as if they were ‘symbolic traces’ of existent objects”, but without “Kandinsky’s compositional overallness.”<sup>90</sup> Malcolm Le Grice argues that these qualities make Eggeling a forerunner of computer film art.<sup>91</sup> *Symphonie Diagonale* is, according to Le Grice:

**[...] in many respects eminently suitable to have been made by a computer. It is largely linear and composed of simple abstract elements which are put together in a gradual formation of a single complex abstract unit. Not only is the image one which could be output on present computers, but, more importantly, the kinds of relationships and animated developments could have been analysed and programmed.**<sup>92</sup>

A. L. Rees points out that *Symphonie Diagonale* “bridges the two kinds of cine-poems of the 1920s and 1930s, the camera-eye films of Chomette and Dulac and the fully abstract films of the German group”.<sup>93</sup> Rees makes clear that the film is truly intermedial or interartial in its nature: “*Diagonal Symphony* is a delicate dissection of almost art deco tones and lines, its intuitive rationalism shaped by cubist art, Bergson’s philosophy of duration and Kandinsky’s theory of synaesthesia, all of which are referred to in Eggeling’s written notes.”<sup>94</sup>

*Symphonie Diagonale* is now part of the avant-garde canon and acknowledged as an essential element in Swedish film history. But it was a long process becoming part of a Swedish heritage; in fact first, after World War II, when Eggeling became a symbolic figure for the young cineasts and filmmakers. This can be exemplified with the important exhibition and festival “Apropå Eggeling” which was the opening event of the museum of contemporary art in Stockholm, Moderna Museet, in May 1958. In the exhibition catalogue Eggeling was described as the main character of the Swedish film avant-garde.<sup>95</sup> Some years earlier Peter Weiss had published his seminal book on avant-garde cinema, but he treats Eggeling somewhat harshly, mainly noting that his film was the first animated and abstract work, and putting a lot more emphasis on Clair and Léger, not to mention the German expressionists.

Otto Carlsund and Viking Eggeling were two artists who left Sweden for the continent where they were acknowledged, at least Eggeling, while they were forgotten or marginalized in the culture of their native land. They were not outcasts, but they were not admitted into the circle until later. There are several reasons for this delay of the cultural modernisation process; it is partly due to the lack of an urban culture in Sweden, at least in comparison with Berlin and Paris. Certainly it also has to do with the ethnic homogeneity of

Swedish culture and its protectionist strategies towards influences from the rest of the world.

When studying popular Swedish film journals from the beginning of the twentieth century, one can trace a specific ironic mode when confronting modernism. American mainstream film culture was soon the matrix for the understanding of the film medium, and in cartoons and columns the filmic avant-garde of Europe was ridiculed in a harmless but still negative way. ‘Cubism’, ‘Expressionism’ and ‘Futurism’ were terms that were easily attached to everything incomprehensible and foreign.<sup>96</sup> This kind of context turned artists like Carlsund, Eggeling and de Maré into foreigners, and expelled them from the national public sphere.

### **The Lost Arabesques of Reinhold Holtermann**

There is always another history to be told about blind alleys and unfulfilled dreams. The artist Reinhold Holtermann (1899–1960) represents the possibilities of a richer Swedish experimental film culture during the 1920s.

As early as 1922 Holtermann, born in a wealthy family, is said to have been making pictorial collages in the same vein as the ones by contemporaries GAN and Erik Olson, but he probably destroyed these works.<sup>97</sup> He was given a substandard gauge film camera as a gift during this time, and made several home movies.<sup>98</sup> For an event at Konstnärsklubben (“The artists’ club”) in Stockholm, 1928, he edited two reels, *Arabesk I* and *Arabesk II*. The films have been described as “associating elements” in a “half-mechanical rhapsody”.<sup>99</sup> Unfortunately, no copies of the films seem to have survived, and there are no stills to rely on. The films were re-edited into a single work in 1956, probably by art historian and writer Hans Eklund (b. 1921) who assisted producer and filmmaker Lennart Ehrenborg at Artfilm, using one of the few existing optical printers in Scandinavia in that day. The 5 minute version, *Arabesk I & II*, was it seems, destroyed or lost when the production company, Artfilm, was somewhat later sold.<sup>100</sup> There are no physical traces left of the film, not even reviews, but viewers who remember the screenings mention Holtermann’s use of city footage: streets, facades, windows, combined in a collage, often very abruptly edited, with style as parameter rather than narration.

In the Holtermann estate there are several home movies and other films. Reinhold Holtermann shot three types of films. First, he made conventional home movies, portraying his family in Stockholm and on journeys; second, he made short comedies and puppet animations, most of them only a few minutes long, often with a twist of bizarre humour. The ‘features’ involved his family, for example, the little crime comedy “Klockan” (“The watch”) shot at the end of the 1920s.<sup>101</sup> Third, he shot films mostly during his travels as a

sort of sketchbook or film diary which he afterwards used as a painter. In 1934 he shot the short documentary, “Trål” (“Trawl”), portraying fishermen at sea, and several of the motifs afterwards returned in his paintings and drawings. As a painter he was fairly conventional, mostly interested in the Nordic landscape and the human face, but his filmic sketches very often concentrate on the repetition of form and the play with light; seen in isolation the filmic sketches depict an artistic mind much more modern than the completed paintings or drawings reveal.

Two fragments of the latter type are of specific interest here, both without dates, but probably from the end of the 1920s or the very beginning of the 1930s, “Utsikt” (“View”) and “Stockholmsbilder – experiment” (“Stockholm images – experiments”). In both films Holtermann depicts the urban settings of Stockholm, focusing on architectural details which together form nonfigurative patterns in a fast montage. They are, according to contemporary viewers, similar to the Arabesques in the use of patterns and montage. “Stockholm images” adds another dimension since it was a sketch for a planned film about August Strindberg and his images of “The growing castle” from *Ett Drömspel* (*A Dream Play*). Holtermann shot pictures of the roof of the house where Strindberg lived between 1901 and 1908. Through repetitive shots he wanted to create the illusion of the house growing. (From the apartment, Strindberg was able to see the barracks of the Royal Guards which inspired him to the notion of the growing castle in *A Dream Play*.) According to the artist’s son, Holtermann planned to combine these shots with shots from Milan cathedral, and shots depicting growing ivy which occur at the end of “Stockholm images”.<sup>102</sup>

Reinhold Holtermann, “Stockholmsbilder – experiment” (late 1920s)

Holtermann’s general interest in experimental film is documented through recollections of his family and friends, and through notes he made in connection with the reading of journals and books, about modern art and film, for example, the journals

*Experimental Cinema* and *La révolution surréaliste*. His friend Hans Eklund pointed out his interest in photographic art, and mentioned Holtermann's colleague Olle Nyman (1909–1991) as a possible source of inspiration; Nyman is foremost known as a painter and decorator, but in the late 1920s and early 1930s he was involved in photographic experiments, both with photograms and collages.<sup>103</sup> Nyman and Holtermann were both interested in film, and visited the film clubs in Stockholm.<sup>104</sup> Sten Holtermann remembers that his father had a specific interest in optics: “the magic lantern, the episcopo, the parallax phenomenon, the refraction of light”.<sup>105</sup> This optical imagination, so central to the film medium, and by the urban theme also close to the core of modernity, is an enigmatic force in the otherwise conventional aesthetic universe of Reinhold Holtermann.<sup>106</sup> Some of his films are very similar to films made in the 1950s by the young artists of The Independent Film Group, as Hans Nordenström's unfinished Stockholm film, based on the same type of architectural imagery. But as far as we know, none of Holtermann's films except *Arabesk I & II*, were ever shown in public. He worked in isolation in a marginal film culture, and when he was acknowledged in the 1950s, he himself had left film as a medium entirely.

Thus, what we know, through archival findings and personal recollections, is that Holtermann as early as 1922 was engaged in visual experiments, and in 1928 completed the first experimental non-narrative film made in Sweden with a public screening, and that he for some years planned a film about Strindberg, with an unconventional filmic language based on rhythmical editing. Reinhold Holtermann's filmic aesthetics points forward to post-war film experiments and the abstract imagery of artists in the media age, but similar to Eggeling, the way he chose was a blind alley.

### **Early Film Criticism and Theory**

The history told hitherto has been a story of individuals: Bergdahl, Eggeling and Holtermann. Given the sparse conditions for experimental filmmaking in Sweden during the 1920s, there is, however, also an institutional level to take into account. There were journals and magazines, film clubs, and above all, a continuing expansion of the field of cinephilia, something which could be called an art film discourse.

The point of departure is not the question whether there is experimental film art; it is the question whether film is an art at all. The story of the expanding film art discourse, and the clash between diverse cultural structuring systems, has been told before. For the Swedish conditions the most important contributions are works by art historian Elisabeth Liljedahl and film historians Jan Olsson and Leif Furhammar.<sup>107</sup> Some guidance has also been given

The emergence of a Swedish art cinema institution can be sketched as a narrative where film culture grows in importance and legitimacy. The first films to be produced, besides early documentaries and attraction films, are attempts in the spirit of film d'art by production company Svenska Bio in Kristianstad, dating back to 1909 with adaptations of some Swedish literary classics. There was some competition by independent producers like Frans Lundberg (1851–1922) and N. P. Nilsson (1842–1912); the latter produced the first adaptations of August Strindberg, *Fröken Julie* (*Miss Julie*) and *Fadren* (*The Father*), both in 1912, directed by the first female director in Sweden, Anna Hofmann-Uddgren (1868–1947).

The ambitions within the growing film industry to gain acceptance within the high literary culture of the time was, in fact, helped by the establishment of a governmental board for film censorship in 1911, Statens Biografbyrå. Film censorship meant that standards were set for film production, something which was to support the industry and its need for legal norms in the field, and it also meant that a discourse of art film was beginning to find its form.<sup>109</sup>

The film as art form made a symbolic entrance into the public sphere in January 1917, when *Terje Vigen* (*A Man There Was*) premiered, directed by Victor Sjöström with a script based on a poem by the Norwegian poet and playwright, Henrik Ibsen. In a leading newspaper in Stockholm, *Dagens Nyheter*, the film was reviewed by Bo Bergman (1869–1967), distinguished poet and critic (he became a member in 1925 of the Swedish Academy). This review has been interpreted as a significant breakthrough for Swedish art cinema.<sup>110</sup>

Svenska Bio, later to be known as Svensk Filmindustri, opted for a new strategy.<sup>111</sup> Dominated by directors Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller, the company produced several literary adaptations, especially from novels and stories by Selma Lagerlöf; some of the most successful were *Herr Arnes pengar* (*Sir Arne's Treasure*, 1919) by Stiller and *Körkarlen* (*The Phantom Carriage/Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness*, 1921) by Sjöström.<sup>112</sup> In Swedish film historiography this period has been labelled 'the national style' or 'the golden age'.<sup>113</sup> Even if this label is contested, it is obvious that Swedish film production, incarnated by Svenska Bio and its *dioscuri* directors, together with film critics and film censorship structured an art film institution.<sup>114</sup>

That film culture in general had been institutionalised was evident from other phenomena such as film journals, most of them popular or trade papers, but to some extent developing a field for discussion concerning film as art, and problems concerning film and politics, film and school, film and religion, film and science. Much of this was to be retold and summarised by Julius Regis and Edvin Thall in their book-length study, *Filmens roman*, the first Swedish history of film in general as early as 1920.<sup>115</sup>

The field of experimental film, or avant-garde film culture, was not institutionalised in the same way, but there were some critics who made efforts to introduce new ideas, and present new filmmakers. Sven Stolpe (1905–96), who much later (in the 1950s) became well known as a highly conservative writer and literary critic, was amongst the most enthusiastic film critics during the 1920s. In the trade paper *Filmnyheter* he introduced Jean Epstein, and also wrote an article where he announced “film as art of the future”.<sup>116</sup> Stolpe then started to write regularly in *Filmjournalen*, one of the most popular film journals in Sweden. He wrote some general articles on film and cultural value, introduced René Clair, argued for a film school in Stockholm, and introduced the new Soviet cinema.<sup>117</sup> His partner at *Filmjournalen* was Gerda Marcus (1880–1952), a journalist with close ties to the women’s rights movement.<sup>118</sup> She wrote about Béla Balázs and *Die Sichtbare Mensch*, and was, for a while, based in Berlin, where she wrote about *Bronenosets Potëmkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*) in 1926, as well as *Berlin, die Symphonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*) in 1927.<sup>119</sup> A colleague of maybe less importance was Ture Dahlin who, however, became famous, or notorious, for a while when he published an interview with Jean Epstein where the French director was very sceptical about Swedish film calling it “photographed theatre” with the exception of one scene in *Sir Arne’s Treasure*!<sup>120</sup> The article created an intense discussion concerning the qualities, or lack of qualities, of Swedish contemporary film, something which was to be repeated for decades.<sup>121</sup>

The continental avant-garde ended the decade with the meeting in La Sarraz. As Malte Hagener puts it: “the avant-garde seemed to be on the verge of a breakthrough to a mass movement. Yet, the opposite was the case: the avant-garde fell apart and petered out.”<sup>122</sup> Despite this evaporation of the avant-garde it survived and was sustained by the culture of cinephilia.

The Swedish film avant-garde had been split into two parts, one consisting of the practice in exile personified by Viking Eggeling, and another consisting of a growing theoretical and critical discourse in the homeland. The output in terms of film production was to remain modest during the following years, in fact until the end of World War II, but experimental film culture did grow at the same time, with film clubs, critics, and a more and an increasingly conscious relationship to international developments. And the ‘avant-garde of the avant-garde’ consisted, in turn, of the young writers, a new, urban generation which formed the vehicle for a belated modernism.

### **Young Writers, Early Cinephilia and the Cinema**

45 “The avant-garde attitude” – to use a term coined by Deke Dusinberre – was to a great extent carried by the young writers.<sup>123</sup> Artur Lundkvist (1906–91),

Vilhelm Moberg (1898–1973), Erik Asklund (1908–80) belonged to a new generation of writers from the working class, together with several others forming a heterogenous literary school, “Arbetarlitteraturen” (“Workers’ literature”).<sup>124</sup> They had no common manifesto, no programme, but most of them were autodidacts, many of them earned their living as reporters, they were often oriented towards the labour movement, and they were eager agents for modernism and modernity. For these young intellectuals cinema was indeed the new art.

Artur Lundkvist was the most eloquent of these cinephiles. He was involved in the journal *Fronten* (“The front”) which under editor Sven Stolpe (and the distinguished publishing house, Albert Bonniers) was to be an important stronghold for the new generation. As a subdivision of the journal a book series was created, *Frontens bibliotek* (“The front library”) where Lundkvist in 1932 published a collection of criticism, *Atlantvind* (“Atlantic wind”). *Atlantvind* contained introductory articles on American poetry, fiction and drama, a section on Swedish modernism, and a large section on cinema, “The new art form”, where Lundkvist over five essays wrote a brief history of film, introduced American and Soviet cinema, discussed the problem of the talkies, and reflected on cinema and its audience. In “Från kinetoskopet till avantgardefilm” (“From the kinetoscope to avant-garde film”) he claims that “the just position of cinema in the culture, as a manifestation of the contemporary creative and spiritual life, can no longer wait”.<sup>125</sup> But he moves on from general cinephilia, to a position where the important historical progress within European cinema is dependent on the avant-garde. Without explicitly mentioning psychoanalysis (which at this time was *on dit* among Scandinavian intellectuals), Lundkvist ends his essay by praising French Surrealism and films by Buñuel and Dulac, “all of them characterised by dynamic intensity, subconscious contact and a liberated, creative imagination. They are directly inspired by dreams and the life of instincts, and do maybe signify a new line of the coming art of cinema”.<sup>126</sup>

Svensk Filmindustri, by then the leading the production company, established in 1932 a division for the production of short films, mainly documentaries.<sup>127</sup> One of the most popular directors was Prince Wilhelm, a member of the royal family, who developed the ethnographic documentary. But just before this adventure began, Svensk Filmindustri supported two experimental shorts which together form the total output of experimental film production in Sweden during the 1930s except for home movies and marginal experiments within mainstream cinema.<sup>128</sup>

One of these shorts, *Gamla Stan* (“Old town”), was co-written and co-directed by a writers’ collective, consisting of among others, Artur Lundkvist; the other one, *Tango*, was made by a young cinephile, Gösta Hellström. These

Stig Almqvist, Erik Asklund, Eyvind Johnson and Artur Lundkvist, *Gamla Stan* (1931).

two shorts represent two lines of evolution within cinema, but neither of them had any successors until many years later.

The story, as it has been told, is that Eyvind Johnson (1900–76), Artur Lundkvist, Erik Asklund and Stig Almqvist (1904–67), by that time well known as modern artists and critics, went to the office of Svensk Filmindustri and told the manager Olof Andersson (1884–1958) that they wanted to make a short film. Fearing trouble from the angry young men, he allowed them use of the facilities of the company.<sup>129</sup> Johnson wrote the script, while Almqvist, according to Lundkvist, was responsible for the direction.<sup>130</sup>

*Gamla Stan*, shot mostly in the medieval part of Stockholm, was made in the spirit of the continental urban film, with Ruttmann's Berlin movie as the emblematic pattern.<sup>131</sup> Music (Eric Bengtson, 1897–1948) and cinematography (Elnor Åkesson, 1890–1962) was handled by professionals, and it resulted in *une pièce bien faite*, not as norm-breaking as the working group intended maybe. The film was screened at the art movie theatre, Sture, together with Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928). The film

47 starts with a poem, and Lundkvist remembers:



Asklund did recite the poem, in a shirt in proletarian fashion, open by the neck, and with a make up that made him as beautiful as Gösta Ekman. We felt that our film experiment had rather failed, but we learned a lot. We had gained knowledge about how far it was between the poet's imagination and the shooting of a film, how difficult this journey was and how blurred the vision was bound to be.<sup>132</sup>

The poem, in the film read by Asklund, was co-written by Asklund and Lundkvist, and is an invocation to the "Old town" which is compared to a woman in different guises:

Old Town –  
 you are like an old woman:  
 your memories are all your beauty.  
 We have seen your stained walls,  
 your tramps, your shady hotels  
 where shadows of men stumble over the  
 worn-out thresholds,  
 the deep wells of your alleys  
 where the sheet metal rusts and the mould crawls  
 green over the walls.<sup>133</sup>

The film portrays this old lady over a day and a night, picturing the life of tramps, fishermen, salesmen and streetgirls, but also focuses on a young couple and their fragile love story. Continuously modern city life breaks through, with cars and shop windows and running feet. The documentary or realist aspect of the film is sometimes very dominant, for example, when the street sweepers clean the alleys in the morning, the shots are conventional depictions of a recognisable reality.<sup>134</sup>

The film language of *Gamla Stan* is mostly conventional, but sometimes there are experiments with camera angles and steep perspectives. A recurrent device is to create non-figurative patterns from everyday details: puddles, raindrops, clouds and reflections of the sun. Many of the symbols and characters that fill the short narrative are also congruent with the vitalistic tendency within 1930s Swedish literature, where the sailor and the girl in the window are among the most obvious icons for a new urban sensualism. *Gamla Stan* had fairly good reviews, and it is noteworthy that one critic, in the Labour paper *SocialDemokraten*, later defined the film as avant-garde.<sup>135</sup>

*Gamla Stan* is a film about Stockholm, mainly the medieval area close to the Royal Castle, and it is possible to trace a specific interest among film-makers in these environments. Some years later Arne Sucksdorff directed his short film, *Människor i stad* (*Symphony of a City*, 1946), in the same settings, and

Peter Weiss does the same, both in his feature film *Hägringen* (“The mirage”, 1959) and in his documentary short *Ansikten i skugga* (“Faces in shadow”, 1956). And, clearly inspired by the carnevalesque humour of René Clair, Pontus Hultén and Hans Nordenström return to the Old Town and the Royal Castle in their *En dag i staden* (“A day in the city”, 1956). These films can never be city symphonies in the same way as Ruttmann’s and other works, but they are metropolitan essays or sketches in a culture which met the urban experience at a relatively late hour, still cherishing the agrarian heritage.

When The Independent Film Group was founded in Stockholm in 1950, several of the films the group produced during the early 1950s portrayed Stockholm, especially the central areas around the old city and the castle. Within the tradition of Swedish experimental film there is an obvious discourse on Stockholm as the Metropolis, while other cities, like Gothenburg or Malmö, are seldom used as a location. Stockholm is the City. This tradition – which starts with *Gamla Stan* or maybe with Reinhold Holtermann’s metropolitan imagery – is characterised by a modernist dialectic between old and new; the settings are old houses, the Royal Castle, well-known silhouettes of church spires and towers, but the internal force is projected towards the future, and the escape from the old and the traditional patterns. In some of the films of the 1950s, and to a greater extent in the late 1960s, the scope is at last widened, and other urban environments in Sweden are depicted. In a way it can be said that the experimental film culture follows the customs of the literary institution where the Stockholm narrative is close to a genre in its set of conventions.

The second experimental short to be launched by Svensk Filmindustri was *Tango*. At a first glance it seems to be the absolute antithesis of *Gamla Stan*; instead of documentary impressions of an anonymous collective in the proletarian alleys we are furnished with a melodramatic morality play in a high society setting, staged by popular theatre actors of the day. Most interesting is maybe the director, Gösta Hellström, who is a representative for early cinephilia in a different way to the young writers who wrote and directed *Gamla Stan*.

Gösta Hellström (1908–32) was one of the reporters of *Filmjournalen*, well known for his interest in the new Soviet cinema (but also reporting on the animations of Lotte Reiniger).<sup>136</sup> He started out as a journalist for the newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten*, reporting from Hamburg, Paris and Moscow. He was appointed chairman of the student film club of Gothenburg University College in 1929, and soon organised the film imports for all film clubs in Sweden. In Moscow he met Eisenstein and his entourage, and was wildly influenced by the new film theories. Svensk Filmindustri hired him in 1931 as assistant director for Gustaf Molander (1888–1973) on the feature film, *En natt*

**Production still from *Tango* (1932). Gösta Hellström and Elsa Lundqvist.**

(“One night”). It is commonly assumed that he had a great influence on the film and its ‘Soviet style’, and he wrote with great enthusiasm about the production of it.<sup>137</sup> He argued for a montage view of the sound track. He loathed “the synchronic devil” and wanted to get away from a conventional naturalism in the handling of the sound.

Hellström was then appointed to direct the short *Tango*, based on his own script. Before the film had been screened he was assigned as the director for the popular comedy *Sten StenSSon Stéen från Eslöv på nya äventyr* (“New adventures with Sten Steenson Stéen from Eslöv”, 1932). In December 1932, one month after the public screening of *Tango*, he died of tuberculosis. The obituaries were plentiful, and many regretted the great loss that Hellström’s death meant for Swedish film culture – at 24 years old he was considered a sparkling hope for Swedish film.<sup>138</sup> His friend, the writer Stig Almqvist, had even hoped for a Swedish Billy Wilder or Robert Siodmak...<sup>139</sup>

*Tango* is an extraordinary film within a Swedish context, and points out directions that were never followed in Swedish film aesthetics. The story deals with a, not disturbingly faithful, married couple and a burglar. The twist of the plot is that the burglar is hired by the husband... The setting is a func-

tionalistic apartment with high windows and steel furniture. A bird's-eye view is used, sometimes in extreme. Details of the interior design and exterior architecture are sometimes framed in close-ups that isolate them from the narrative and turn them into decorative elements. There are no classical views of Stockholm as in *Gamla Stan*; *Tango* is shot in a studio, it is staged.

The most intriguing formal element, though, is not the perspectives or the framing but the use of the sound track. According to Hellström's sceptical views on 'the synchronic devil', but also in an attempt to make the film saleable internationally and easy to dub, you never see the person who talks, but rather the one who listens. This device creates, at least for modern audiences, an almost bizarre syncopation of the sound track, a veritable but non-intended defamiliarization effect of sorts.

There were more films received during the interwar years than *Tango* and *Gamla Stan*, but in a kind of unintentional symmetry, these two works contain two complementary tendencies within the international avant-garde: the hunger for reality and documentary as well as the lust for stylistic innovation, both in an urban setting. *Gamla Stan* and *Tango* were exceptions in a production climate dominated by popular genres. The marginal conditions for the production of domestic experimental film during the 1930s can be explained in many ways. One important factor was the conservative views vis-à-vis modern art in general, another was the cost connected to film equipment and it was not until after World War II that camera equipment and film stock were available for use on a larger scale for amateurs and experimentalists outside conventional film production circuits.

## **The Film Society Movement and the Film Journals**

An essential part of film history is the history of film reception. Some of the most important works in a specific period may not be produced within the local or national culture in question, but still belong in a cultural context. This is evidently the fact with Swedish experimental film culture during its formative years. The domestic production of experimental film was marginal, but the experimental film discourse was thriving around a kernel of international works that gained in importance, and was discussed at film clubs and in film journals. It was in this public sphere that discourses were shared, launched and reproduced.

The reception is only at hand as a reconstruction based on a spectre of fragile evidence and ephemeral memories.<sup>140</sup> The dominant historical facts are the institutional traces such as screening programmes, legislation, film reviews and remnants of discussions and debates in journals and newspapers. With respect to these facts and suppositions it is possible to make a preliminary mapping.

The general discussion of film in the public sphere was, however, not orientated toward questions of new forms of filmic modernism; the main debate still concerned whether film could be considered as an art at all, and focused on the alleged low standards of Swedish film production. Writers like Vilhelm Moberg and Artur Lundkvist were engaged in the discussions in favour of film art, but highly critical towards the dominant trends within Swedish genre films. During the 1930s burlesque comedies and melodramas constituted the bulk of Swedish film production. The debate culminated at a public meeting in the concert hall in Stockholm in 1937, arranged by the Swedish Writer's Union under the headline, "Swedish film – a threat against the culture". The meeting was directly connected to the Swedish comedy *Pensionat Paradiset* ("A boarding house named Paradise", Weyler Hildebrand, 1890–1944) that had premiered some days earlier. The comedy was highly popular, but considered to be of particularly bad taste.<sup>141</sup>

The result of these discussions was primarily a higher degree of involvement in the film industry by professional writers; during the 1940s established novelists and poets were engaged as screenwriters. This can be understood as phases in the formation of a Swedish art cinema which finally got its prominent iconic figure in Ingmar Bergman who, from the 1950s and well into the 1990s, personified the Swedish art film as an institution.

But even if the promotion of experimental film art seems to be invisible in this more public agenda, the avant-garde film culture was discussed and advanced in the cinephile context based on the film society movement. The Swedish film clubs, often called 'filmstudios' constituted a network of local organizations which made it possible to import film and screen it at closed meetings, thereby avoiding censorship regulations. The first film clubs were constituted within the academic context, often in close cooperation with students' unions. Film clubs were established in Stockholm, Uppsala, Gothenburg and Lund during the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, inspired by the French *Ciné-Clubs*.<sup>142</sup> A new branch of the movement started after World War II, when film clubs not connected to the student organizations were established all over the country, especially in the provinces, creating the national union Sveriges Förenade Filmstudios ("Swedish federation of film societies") which was to play a significant role in the formation of Swedish experimental film culture in the 1950s.

The student film clubs screened the new films and created a critical context. A good example is the American film *Lot in Sodom*, directed by James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber in 1933. The works of Watson & Webber are amongst the earliest in the American film avant-garde. Even if their films were produced within a context that can be categorised as amateur, they had a great impact on European film culture.<sup>143</sup> Their films were screened together

with work by Clair, Buñuel, Eisenstein and Vigo, and became a part of a loose canon formation of avant-garde films. Webber & Watson were both involved in the literary avant-garde; Webber as a poet, and Watson mainly as critic and co-owner of legendary journal, *The Dial*.<sup>144</sup>

*Lot in Sodom* is based upon the story from *Genesis* of Sodom and Gomorrah, and its reputation is partly due to experimental montage techniques, especially superimpositions that are frequently used, partly in response to the overt depiction of “gay male desire and heteronormative prohibition”.<sup>145</sup> In the American context it has been labelled as “surrealist poetry of the image”.<sup>146</sup> The explicit sexual imagery and the tantalizing, hallucinatory style of the narrative have made the film into a canonical work within experimental cinema. This is also the first distinguished sound film in this tradition.

The film was examined by the Swedish governmental censorship board in August 1935, and was prohibited for public screenings according to a clause in the Cinema Ordinance which states that examiners at the censorship board

**[...] shall not approve cinematic pictures, the showing of which is contrary to law or morality or is otherwise liable to have a brutalising or agitating effect or to cast doubt on the concept of legality. Therefore, pictures depicting scenes of horror, suicide or serious crimes in such a manner and in such a context as to have such an effect shall not be approved.**<sup>147</sup>

But through the loophole of closed screenings, *Lot in Sodom*, as well as several other prohibited films had a Swedish reception, mainly at the student film clubs.<sup>148</sup> *Lot in Sodom* was thus screened, received and discussed over the years, and later on, in the 1940s, two essays were written about the film in the seminal film magazine, *Biografbladet*.<sup>149</sup> Gerd Osten, writing under her *nom de plume* “Pavane”, wrote an apology for the film, defending and explicating it as a masterpiece, and critic Paul Patera (b. 1917), several years later, continues Osten’s argument, praising the imagery of the film: “these fantastic beautiful pictures from a terrifying, foreign world, accompanied by a musical score which seems to emanate from another planet”.<sup>150</sup> *Lot in Sodom* was thereby imported not only as reels to project in the cinema, but foremost as an example of what domestic experimental film style could offer, if it was allowed to flourish. Thus, it illustrates some of the aspects that were established in our introductory chapter on national cinema.

The Swedish reception of *Lot in Sodom* is in many ways typical for the interwar and war film culture. Through the film club movement and later the film journals, it was possible to see and discuss modern filmmaking and put it into an avant-garde context. Slowly an experimental canon emerged. In spite

of poor conditions for the production of film, a discursive field was established where it was meaningful to discuss film in terms of ‘avant-garde’ and ‘experimentalism’.

An illustrative example is the list of films screened by the film society in Lund (founded by Gösta Werner, amongst others) during the spring semester of 1930: *Rien que les heures* (*Nothing But Time*, Cavalcanti 1927), *Un chapeau de paille d’Italie* (*An Italian Straw Hat*, Clair 1927), *Oktyabr* (*October*, Eisenstein 1928), *Turksib* (Turin 1929), *Chelovek s Kinoapparatom* (*Man with ta Movie Camera*, Vertov, 1929), *Le jardin du Luxembourg* (*The Garden of Luxembourg*?, Franken 1929), *Le pont d’acier* (*The Bridge*, Ivens 1928) and *Regen* (*Rain*, Ivens/Franken 1929).

Many of the screenings in Lund and elsewhere were accompanied by introductions or lectures. Independent and amateur filmmakers visited the film clubs, screened their work, and joined the discussions. Several of them were to become established filmmakers (like the omnipresent Gösta Werner or, later, Peter Weiss). One of the most successful industry filmmakers and commercial photographers, Emil Heilborn (1900–2003), often visited the Stockholm film club, screening films and showing uncut, experimental versions of what were to become commercials or information films for Swedish industry.<sup>151</sup> When looking at some of the earlier versions of his industrial films, it is obvious that he was deeply influenced by Soviet cinema. He frequently experimented with light and montage; devices that had to be downplayed in the final edits prepared for another circuit than the one of the cinephiles.<sup>152</sup> Heilborn was born in St. Petersburg where his father was a businessman, and was brought up in a highly cosmopolitan environment in which cinema and photography constituted the essentials of modern art.

There were also ambitions among some of the young film buffs to make films themselves. Such efforts were made especially in Stockholm and Uppsala. In Uppsala, it resulted in the ‘substandard gauge classic’ *Imperfektum* (1941), a melodramatic horror story set in the university campus of Uppsala, directed by Lars Swärd (1918–95).<sup>153</sup> Lack of funds for investment in technique did, however, constrict this kind of filmmaking.

Another cinephile organisation was Svenska Filmsamfundet (“The Swedish film society”), founded in 1933 in Stockholm with the objective of creating a national film archive. Its collections were later to be integrated with the archive of the Swedish Film Institute (1964). The Swedish Film Society was important, as it published an annual exposé over film both in Sweden and internationally, and arranged lectures and screenings.<sup>154</sup> In 1935, this film society published a booklet on avant-garde directors written by Arne Bornebusch (1905–73) who was on his way to become an established film director and screenwriter.<sup>155</sup> The book contains portrait of ‘film poets’ like Clair and Eisenstein, and is symptomatic of the cultural agenda within the cinephile

movement. Together with the film club movement, The Swedish Film Society offered a public sphere for the experimental film even if the aims were often more general in scope.

There were also other institutions, as the aforementioned cinema Sture or Sturebiografen in Stockholm, a part of the movie house division of Svensk Filmindustri which was characterized as an art movie cinema. The expression ‘Sturefilm’ was associated with art film, and many of the art films and experimental films that had a public screening during the 1930s had their first (and often only) performance there.<sup>156</sup> (After the war this role was taken by the cinema Terrassen, where several of Peter Weiss’s films were premiered.)

*Filmjournalen* was during the 1930s the most influential film journal, with writers like Almquist and Stolpe introducing foreign films and even discussing film theory and film aesthetics. Stolpe introduced Béla Balázs and *Der Geist des Films*, and there were articles on animated experiments as well as Soviet montage cinema. Outside the film journals *per se* there was some kind of reception of the avant-garde, for example, in the magazine *NU – Världshändelserna inför världsoptionen* which was launched by the publishing house Bonnier in 1934. The magazine had the style of *Reader’s Digest*. The editor responsible for film writing in a weekly column, “The white screen”, was filmmaker and producer Knut Martin (1899–1959) who became director of the newsreel, *SF-Journalen*, in 1941.<sup>157</sup> In *NU* issue 52, 1936 his column was dedicated entirely to experimental film under the heading, “Orchids in the garden of film”, an ambitious and well-informed overview of the continental avant-garde.<sup>158</sup>

### **“Experimental Film is Dead, Long Live Experimental Film!”**

The war, of course, affected Swedish film culture, and there is a story to be told about the complex Swedish relationship to the Third Reich, and the shift in perspective, which led to a gradual Americanisation of Swedish trade and culture.<sup>159</sup> Due to the film clubs, films that were prohibited by Swedish government could still be shown during these winters of discontent. If we return to the film club in Lund, we note that the programme of 1942 offered propaganda and fiction films from both sides of the war, and during the autumn of 1943, *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin, 1940) was screened. The film was not examined by the governmental censorship board until after the war, since it would have been banned according to an amendment to the Cinema Ordinance made 1914 declaring that films or parts of films which could be considered unsuitable for Sweden’s relations to foreign powers must not be passed by the board.<sup>160</sup>

Billy Klüver, the Swedish-American artist and engineer who co-founded E. A. T. (Experiments in Art and Technology) in 1966, was during his school years an eager member of the Stockholm film club:



At the Film Society we took on the censorship issue and used it to our advantage. In fact, we were able to increase our membership from its usual 80–100 to 500 by the well publicized showing of films like *Un Chien Andalou*, which were banned. We held open debates on the pros and cons of censorship, and showed an hour or more of scenes that had been cut from films. [...] Our programming became more aggressive and controversial as we showed contemporary and classic films and discussed the (anti-) social, psychological, and political issues they raised.<sup>161</sup>

The domestic production of experimental film was still confined to home movie experiments, like the substandard gauge film experiments made by the Uppsala students, but it seems that experimental film culture at least had access to a public sphere of sorts. The university film societies grew in importance after the war, and the general student unions were also focused on modern film, especially in Stockholm where the magazine of the students' union, *Gaudeamus*, published articles on avant-garde film and even arranged competitions for film scripts and essays.<sup>162</sup>

The Swedish Film Society continued its book publishing; the yearbook of 1944 containing several essays on film from diverse angles was very ambitious.<sup>163</sup> But there were also other book-length studies on the art of film. Åke Rydbeck and Olle Wedholm published the handbook, *2 timmar om film* ("Two hours about film").<sup>164</sup> Bengt Idestam-Almquist (1885–1993) – one of Sweden's most prolific film critics and essayists during the first half of the century who was born in St. Petersburg – wrote several introductory articles on film as art, for example, in *Filmårsboken*, and the book-length study, *Filmen som konst* ("Film as art").<sup>165</sup> Idestam-Almquist writes about film as art in general, but rarely connects to avant-garde film or experiments of the day.<sup>166</sup>

The single most important agent here is, however, the magazine *Biografbladet*. The journal was founded in 1920, and lasted until 1952. It was originally a journal for film professionals dealing with film business and technology, but was gradually transformed into one of the leading film journals in Scandinavia, containing aesthetical discussion, polemical reviews and statements, and – especially during the editorship of Gösta Werner – offering young cinephiles an arena where they could enter into the public sphere. Gerd Osten and Peter Weiss – the forerunners of a new generation of cinephiles – did turn *Biografbladet* into the mouthpiece for a new generation. In 1947 *Biografbladet* was even acknowledged in a review article in *Hollywood Quarterly* by Harry Hoijer, who saw *Biografbladet* as a "serious film journal which should be of considerable interest to readers in the United States".<sup>167</sup>

In *Biografbladet* there were, over the years, several articles introducing the international avant-garde.<sup>168</sup> Of particular interest are the principal articles which addressed the questions of what the modern film could or should be.

Painter Lennart Rodhe, who also was involved in some filmmaking, published a widely discussed essay on the relationship between painting and still photography, and Jan Thomæus (1918-91), in another article, complained about the superficiality of contemporary Swedish film.<sup>169</sup>

Gerd Osten lamented in an article in 1945 over the conditions of experimental film; one reason for its difficulties was, according to Osten, a poor and insular film culture:

**Swedish film production right now is tremendously isolated. Two things are needed: a relevant import of interesting novelties from Europe after the war, and an improvement of the economic conditions for the production of experimental film in Sweden. [...] But how to achieve the latter I really do not know. A special interests movie house? New legislation conditioning the economy of filmic shorts? Kind patrons among the producers? A government supported film school with scholarships for the production of experimental film? Well, there are certainly things to do, I am, however, afraid that they are as unrealistic as the foundations for the existence of the experimental film we hitherto have seen. Experimental film is dead, long live experimental film!**<sup>170</sup>

Osten's modest or ironic proposal concerning a national film school will return over the years, but is not fulfilled until the 1960s. This is also an example of a practical/technical philosophy within experimental film culture. There is a need for education and engineering, something which may be understood in the context of the development of the Swedish welfare state and its rationalist credo.

The term 'experimental film' is in frequent use early in Sweden, but it is definitely coined and established as a discourse by Gerd Osten and Gösta Werner in several articles and statements, and when The Independent Film Group comes into focus during the 1950s, they adopt the term and foster the discourse. A reflection to be made is that when several Swedish film critics and filmmakers use the term 'experimental' they often refer to formal and technical experiments which are needed in order to develop film art, but they don't necessarily claim that this is part of an avant-garde culture. Swedish experimentalists are – with some exceptions – in general more close to cinephilia than to modernist practices.

### **Gerd Osten: Interlude with Dance**

Gerd Osten (1914-1974) entered film production herself with some shorts. In the feature film *Mamma* ("Mother", 1982), her daughter Suzanne Osten (b. 1944) the prolific film and stage director, tells the tragic story of Gerd Osten's life with sad love affairs and mental illness. An important element of the sto-

ry is the wish to make a feature film and become a director instead of a critic. Her few attempts as a film director were, in fact, promising. She made, for example, two parts of the compilation film, *Tre danser* (“Three dances”), in 1948; *Antonius och Cleopatra*, based on Verdi’s opera with choreography by Birgit Cullberg (1908–99) and danced by Cullberg and Julius Mengarelli (1920–60), and *Zigenardans* (“Gypsy dance”), choreographed by Lilian Karina (b. 1907) and danced by Topsy Håkansson (b. 1926). The third part, directed by feature film and stage director Alf Sjöberg (1903–80), consists of a dance by Birgit Åkesson (1908–2001) of her own choreography, *Fruktbarhet* (“Fertility”).

*Tre danser* had – as far as we know – no public screenings, but the production of it shows that there was a connection between avant-garde dancers (like Åkesson, a former pupil of Mary Wigman) and the young critics and filmmakers (like Gerd Osten). As Lauren Rabinovitz shows in her study *Points of Resistance*, dance films seem to develop into a women’s genre. *Tre danser* is thus a prologue to the endeavours of the 1960s and 1970s when female directors and choreographers were enabled to use the television medium in order to express themselves. It is also a forerunner to the corporeal poetics and politics that several Swedish artists developed towards the end of the twentieth century, especially within performance and video art.

The dance episodes are shot with minimal mise-en-scène, with a tableau framing, but with rather dynamic camera action, moving with the dancers. *Antonius och Cleopatra* and *Zigenardans*, directed by Osten, are modern dance fragments, but the most radical dancer and choreographer is, by all means, Birgit Åkesson whose episode, *Fruktbarhet*, directed by Sjöberg, points towards an aesthetics that was to make its breakthrough much later. This specific production was early even compared to international standards; Maya Deren directed her *A Study in Choreography for Camera* in 1945, and Shirley Clarke made

Gerd Osten, *Zigenardans* (1948).

her *A Dance in the Sun* in 1953.<sup>171</sup> *Tre danser* was, however, never distributed, and the possible development of a Swedish women's cinema in connection with modern dance was halted until the eve of television and video.<sup>172</sup> Of specific interest, as we see later on, are the practices of Filmverkstan ("The film workshop") which was inaugurated in 1974, which enabled several female filmmakers, for example Helena Lindgren, Gunvor Nelson and Maureen Paley, to make films in Sweden that together form an alternative discourse, framing the female experience in new political terms.

### **Gösta Werner: Cinephilia and the Art of the Craft**

Gösta Werner (1908–2009) was one of the founding members of the student film society in Lund in 1929. He soon moved to Stockholm, writing, editing, translating and directing films. He made several shorts within the field of information film. He was editor of *Biografbladet* 1945–47, and wrote several books and pamphlets on film and film production. Later he became one of the most important researchers within the field of early film, and his doctoral dissertation on Mauritz Stiller was the first to be accepted as a scholarly work within the new discipline, Cinema Studies, at Stockholm University in 1971.<sup>173</sup> The dissertation was followed by several volumes and articles on predominantly Swedish film, but also on authors like Joyce and Proust and their connection to cinema. Werner continued to make film in old age, and his last short film was *Spökskepp* ("Ghost ship", 1998).

Werner is an important figure in the history of Swedish experimental film for several reasons. In essays and articles he explored the nature of experimental film art; as editor of *Biografbladet*, he encouraged a new generation of film critics – mainly with avant-garde aspirations – and he directed a pioneering work *Midvinterblot* ("Midwinter sacrifice" or "Sacrifice") in 1946. His own criticism is primarily instructive in scope; his aim was not to write manifestos or to promote an avant-garde view of society. Experimental film was, for Werner, formally innovative, characterized by good craftsmanship and technical skill. A formal principle which is often repeated in his writing is the importance of a coherent and powerful pictorial vision – that film is a language which must work independently of the spoken word.

Werner made some shorts of a more traditional documentary style before *Midvinterblot*. *Morgonväkt* ("Early morning") 1945 is especially noteworthy since it was made as a 'study in contrasts' and, therefore, an element in Werner's pedagogical programme where the formal elements of cinema language are analysed.

*Midvinterblot* was filmed during the spring and winter of 1945 in Stockholm and its surroundings. Werner produced it independently with some fi-

financial help from the small production company, Kino-centralen.<sup>174</sup> Werner, who was interested in the history of religion, had been inspired by the classic study, *The Golden Bough*, by J. G. Frazer. He wanted to depict schamanism, human sacrifice and rites in a Northern setting. He consulted archaeologist Holger Arbman (1904–68), who had written extensively on the Scandinavian Iron Age and Viking Age, and the film indeed has an anthropological perspective. The voice-over places the story in a historical context: “Harsh, cold, unfriendly was Sweden a thousand years ago”. The story is about a tribe which is forced to sacrifice one of its members in order to survive the hard winter. The film culminates in the sacrifice and its ecstatic climax when the women of the tribe let their bare breasts be covered in human blood.

This short film, 12 minutes long, was a professional production with cinematography by Sten Dahlgren (1918–78), and voice-over by dramatic actor Olof Widgren (1907–99). The role of the chief of the tribe was played by the prominent actor Gunnar Björnstrand (1909–86), later to become one of Ingmar Bergman’s leading players. The film was widely acclaimed in Sweden and had a certain success on the international festival circuit. Its first screening was at the Uppsala student film society, which shows that the network of filmclubs of the interwar years was still intact.

*Midvinterblot* has no dialogue, just a sparse voice-over introducing the theme of the film. The overall aesthetic device is an expressive use of light and rhythmic montage, closely connected with the dramatic score, composed by Björn Schildknecht (1905–46). The use of close-ups is frequent, even if the short narrative is framed within panoramic views of woods and mountains covered in snow.

*Midvinterblot* is one of few experimental Swedish films that have been presented in Swedish film historiography; it is obviously a part of the canon and has a long history of exhibition. The critical reception of it in the 1940s was fairly positive, and it has seldom been put in a more analytical context. This can seem a bit odd; in the film we are confronted with winter images of the Scandinavian landscape and its mythical representations; the accentuation of the hard climate, the bloodstained rituals and the collective ecstasy are usually connected with the ideology and iconography of *Blut und Boden*. Several contemporary critics, however, distinguished an anthropological understanding of the past. Eivor Burbeck, on the other hand, placed the film in a psychoanalytical framework in an essay in the stencilled bulletin *Svensk Experimentalfilmstudio* in 1952, and discussed it in connection with that of the destructive drives of modern man. That could, according to Burbeck, explain the “theoretical traits” of the film; she claimed that the film was a kind of representation of a general psychological problem rather than a picture of a mythical past.<sup>175</sup>

Werner directed several films after *Midvinterblot*; some feature films and a lot of information shorts. He continued to work within experimental film

culture together with painter Lennart Rodhe (1916–2005). Rodhe was one of the most important young artists to emerge during the war years.<sup>176</sup> Through his friendship with Werner he was commissioned to write an essay in *Biograf-bladet* about the need for a new realism.<sup>177</sup> In the essay Rodhe claims that naturalism is a problem in modern cinema; it had created a cinematic style without a centre. He builds his arguments on photographic stills from a lot of films, and promotes the idea that modern film must be a *cinéma pur*; he seeks the abstraction and organisation of light and darkness which was found in modern painting and in French avant-garde film. These ideas were similar to those that Werner wanted to establish in his theory and practice. They had the opportunity to collaborate in 1946. Werner had been asked to make a film for the Swedish Railways, and he asked Rodhe to create a storyboard. During the preparatory work they discussed Eisenstein and his principles of composition, and some of this dialectical montage can be evidenced in the short film that was the outcome of their cooperation, *Tåget – En film om resor och jordbundenhet* (“The train – a film about travels and being earthbound”, 1948). The film lacks dialogue and narrative; it depicts railways and people travelling in a “slow, pulsating rhythm”.<sup>178</sup>

The collaboration between the two artists continued for a while. They planned to make a film, based upon a script by the young writer Lars Ahlin (1915–97). Ahlin wrote a script during 1946, *Förvandling* (“Transformation”), and Rodhe drew hundreds of storyboard sketches, where he planned to explore his ideas of a pure cinema, encouraged by Werner. But the production company refused the script and the film was never made. Rodhe abandoned filmmaking, and Werner left experimental filmmaking for mainstream feature films and commercials. His most acknowledged film by popular audience is the adaptation of a short story by Stig Dagerman (1923–54), *Att döda ett barn* (“To kill a child”, 1952), about a car accident. This expressive short is part of the canonic Swedish film history (and has been used for decades in schools to teach the importance of road sense), but has no connection with contemporary experimental film. Werner eventually returned to the experimental tradition when, fifty years later, he made the short film, *Den röda fläcken* (“The red spot”, 1996), but his days as an influential filmmaker were over.

### **Arne Sucksdorff: Documentarist in a Poetic Mode**

One of Gösta Werner’s many essays on experimental film art was titled “Short Film, Experimental Film, Documentary Film”, the long title of which illustrates his efforts to evaluate the concepts.<sup>179</sup> It is indeed no coincidence that he treated experimental film alongside documentary; often there are connections between these two traditions. Sometimes they are intertwined, and

when considering some of the continental filmmakers like Joris Ivens and Humphrey Jennings, you must conclude that the documentary very often is the spearhead of the avant-garde. One way of trying to solve this problem of definition has been, for example, Bill Nichols' suggestion to talk about a "poetic mode", a mode that has affinities both in time and in structure with the modernist avant-garde movement.<sup>180</sup> The experimental and poetic mode becomes obvious when we reach the 1960s and the documentaries that are made within television, for example, by Eric M. Nilsson, but the poetic documentary is introduced much earlier, and can be said to establish itself as an acknowledged norm and tradition in Sweden with the arrival of the filmmaker Arne Sucksdorff (1917–2001). Sucksdorff became an important mentor for someone like Stefan Jarl.

Sucksdorff is best known as a wildlife filmmaker, but it is through the urban documentary *Människor i stad* (*Symphony of a City*, 1946) that he was to be canonised as an important experimentalist. *Symphony of a City* is sometimes categorised as a documentary in the poetic mode. In his classical account of the documentary, Eric Barnouw classifies Sucksdorff as a poet together with, amongst others, Dutch filmmaker Bert Haanstra.<sup>181</sup>

Like his forerunners, Artur Lundkvist and Erik Asklund, Sucksdorff filmed a portrait of the old parts of central Stockholm. He was appointed by the Swedish Institute and the union for the Swedish tourist business to make a film about the Swedish capital. His way of dealing with this was to make an impressionistic study of the city with its blend of modern, urban life and old traditions. In the film he makes use of bird's eye perspective, superimposition, and sometimes a montage dependant on the analogy of motion; a circular movement in one specific context can, for example, lead to another circular movement, not by analogy of the content but of the movement itself. Throughout the film Sucksdorff creates a dialectic between more objective and neutral long shots, and more dramatic sequences of close-ups. There is no dialogue and no voice-over, but nevertheless we are able to follow several narratives in the film; some boys who play and run into the cathedral of the Old Town, and a love story between a man and a woman who happen to shelter from the rain together, and then in later sequences are seen together as a couple.

It is possible to seek a frame of reference within neo-realism, especially when considering other films in Sucksdorff's oeuvre, but the dominant aspect is the experimental view of filmic language; to try to find a new way of filmic expression against the backdrop of dynamic and ever changing modernity. The formal consciousness of the film can be seen in details, as when an old fisherman realises that an artist is portraying him; the old man adjusts his hair and combs his moustache, and for a moment, *Symphony of a City* is also a self-reflective film dealing with the nature of seeing and being seen.

One of the specific qualities of the film is the use of sound; it is integrated in the montage, and sometimes the sounds are more important than the imagery itself.<sup>182</sup> Arne Sucksdorff stressed the importance of the soundtrack on several occasions, and evidently saw it as a means of capturing the diversity of the urban environment where the dominant emotions may be confusion and estrangement.<sup>183</sup> Mauritz Edström, who wrote a pioneering study of Sucksdorff, claims that wildlife photographer Sucksdorff is a stranger in the modern city, which partly makes him see things more clearly, but also creates a sense of homelessness.<sup>184</sup>

Sucksdorff was never fully satisfied with the Stockholm short, although it gained a strong reputation as a city symphony on the lines of Ruttman. It has been claimed that the film was influential for French director Julien Duvivier and his *Sous le ciel de Paris* (*Under the Paris Sky*, 1951).<sup>185</sup> Bjørn Sørensen has noted that Sucksdorff in his use of light and shadow is reminiscent of Joris Ivens, and that his foremost strength was his ability to portray individuals – something which is rare in interwar city films.<sup>186</sup> Arne Sucksdorff won the Academy Award for best short subject in 1949 for this film, which makes him one of the few internationally acknowledged artists in Swedish experimental film culture.

### **Rune Hagberg: Film Noir and Post-War Angst**

Werner and Sucksdorff both worked with the filmic short. Generally the short film format has been the vessel for experimental film art. In the institutionalised short film, such as industrial films, commercials, information films, it was possible to be formally innovative and try new ideas. Many of Gösta Werner's films were made for informative and commercial purposes, but could also function as artistic recreation. There are several other examples, such as the director Alex Jute (1914–86) who made lots of shorts for different institutional producers; one of his shorts is *Stanna en stund!* (“Stay for a while!”, 1948) which was produced for information purposes by the Swedish General Post Office. (In an early attempt to sketch out the history of Swedish experimental film, Arne Lindgren includes Jute since this information short is “unconventional”.)<sup>187</sup>

But in 1947 the feature film format was introduced by Rune Hagberg (1918–2006) with ... *och efter skymning kommer mörker* (“... and after dusk comes darkness”). Hagberg grew up in a family of filmmakers and actors, and started out as an assistant at Europa Film. He directed some information shorts during the war, and around him gathered a group of professionals and amateurs with film dreams. The camera was operated by Rolf Maurin (b. 1920) who later became a professional cinematographer. The score was composed by Karl Otto Westin (b. 1913), and the leading female role was played by young actress Amy Aaröe (b. 1925). Hagberg's father, John Wilhelm Hag-



berg (1897–1970), a popular film and stage actor, played a minor role. Thus this feature film was a semi-professional enterprise; most of the production must however be characterised as amateur, but at the end of the production (which took three years), the independent producer Lorens Marmstedt (1908–66) financially supported the post-production of the film, including the soundtrack. (Marmstedt was the owner of the independent film production company Terrafilm which later became an important resource for the upcoming Ingmar Bergman.)

The film was considered an experiment by Hagberg himself, and he made a short introduction, which was supposed to be shown as a prologue to the film where he explained the specific conditions of it. He was specifically interested in time parameters, and wanted to slow down some of the events in the film in order to underline their importance. He also, which he later regretted, experimented himself; he played the main character of the film who is under heavy stress. In order to create verisimilitude, the actor-director exhausted himself to the brink of a mental breakdown.<sup>188</sup>

... *och efter skymning kommer mörker* is a Kafkaesque thriller influenced by Alfred Hitchcock and his likes. The story evolves around a young student, who is deeply stressed, and is tormented by what he supposes is a hereditary madness which will turn him into a murderer. He ends up killing his fiancée. His story is told in dark images and sharp angles updating the style of expressionism and film noir with a dissonant electronic soundtrack. Especially noteworthy is a long sequence where he is accidentally locked out of his apartment, and must climb over the roof to reach a window where he can break into his own home. This nightly adventure above Stockholm's roof tops points towards a similar scene Peter Weiss directed in his feature film, *Hägringen*, which also has some striking similarities with the Dadaist spectacle *En dag i staden* that was filmed ten years after Hagberg's film. Film historian Leif Furhammar points out the affinity with 'the post-war *Angst*' within Swedish art film, and groups Hagberg together with Ingmar Bergman and Hasse Ekman (1915–2004) as well as with Gösta Werner and Arne Sucksdorff.

Edouard de Laurot hailed the film as an "outstanding Swedish experimental production" in his survey of Swedish experimental cinema in 1956.<sup>189</sup> It had a long and serious reception in France, where the critics discussed the surrealism of the film rather than its expressionist traits, but where it was also labelled "le film psychiatrique" and "le film psychanalytique", putting its clinical dimension more in focus. Through the French reception of the film, Hagberg was invited to work in France, and was involved in several projects, among them a documentary on the Algerian oasis Beni-Abbes, which, however, was never completed, even if a preliminary version seems to have been screened by The Independent Film Group in 1952.<sup>190</sup> Hagberg became friends

with Jean-Pierre Melville and Nicole Stéphane and co-directed the short film, *La dernière nouvelle*, with Georges Patrix in 1949. This film as well as... *och efter skymning kommer mörker*, is preserved at the Cinémathèque Française. Hagberg returned to Sweden, and was soon employed by the company Husmors Filmer ("The housewife's films") where he directed information films and commercials until his retirement. In 1973 he collaborated with artist Hans Viksten in his *Nuvisioner* ("Visions of now"), but apart from that film he considered himself as a plain filmmaker without any experimental agenda. He did, however, in a way return to artistic filmmaking much later, when he returned to France and assisted his daughter Thérèse Hagberg produce a couple of art videos, *Reality Show* (1994) and *Karaoke* (1994), while she attended École des Beaux Arts in Paris. He started to make his own video art then, but none of these videos have yet been screened in public.

... *och efter skymning kommer mörker* was greeted by several young Swedish filmmakers and critics as indicating a new multi-dimensional cinema. But the film also received negative criticism. In *Biografbladet* there was a discussion consisting of four lengthy articles by young critics, a discussion that also had more general implications on the views of experimental film culture. Hugo Wortzelius (1918-91), an important film critic of the time, saw several failures and was disturbed by the ironic mode of the film, but as many others, he praised the sophisticated use of the soundtrack, underlining the inner pains of the main character.<sup>191</sup> Peter Weiss, not yet a filmmaker, instead known as painter and writer but with a growing interest in film, was negative concerning several details, but was interested in the ambitions of the director. According to Weiss, the film pointed towards a new kind of film art: "it tries to provoke thoughts, it ignores the demands of the realistic drama, and tries to reach under the surface, where a mental chain of events is staged in a wealth of associations and impulses."<sup>192</sup> The two other critics writing on the installment of Hagberg's film, Nils Peter Eckerbom (1922-85) and Stig Ossian-Ericson (b. 1923), were generally more positive than Weiss, but exactly as Weiss they interpreted the film as an expression of a counter aesthetics. In his book-length account, *Avantgardefilm*, 1956, Weiss returned to the film and called it the best experimental film ever made in Sweden.<sup>193</sup> Filmmaker Eivor Burbeck of The Independent Film Group discussed the film in an argument against conventional naturalism; through the logic of the dream and the surrealist experience a closer contact with the self can be achieved, something which Hagberg apparently was able to do with his film.<sup>194</sup>

... *och efter skymning kommer mörker* meant that the young Swedish experimental film culture had produced its first feature film. In an article, written in 1966 when Hagberg was rediscovered by a new generation of cinephiles, critic

as much as it should have done: “The film and its director were swallowed by the shadows. There is an exciting mystery, reminiscent of Rimbaud, over this rediscovered Swedish film and the eruptive inspiration and sudden silence of its creator.”<sup>195</sup>

### **The Aporias of Early Experimental Film Culture in Sweden**

Malte Hagener considers the *aporias* of the avant-garde, and lines up some important contradictions and tensions within the film movement of the 1920s. Those aporias are “issues of independence (in terms of money and organisation), of commercialism (in terms of audience address), of abstraction (film style) and of politics (the idea of progress)”. Hagener claims that the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s “was constantly shaken” by these four aporias, and formulates an argument where these inherent contradictions were the wedges which made the film movement lose energy and finally come to an end in a certain sense.<sup>196</sup>

Rune Hagberg, ... *och efter skymning kommer mörker* (1947).

These polarities which, of course, have been discussed in connection with the avant-garde several times before, are potentially applicable to the Swedish situation. The experimental film culture from around 1915 to the beginning of the 1950s was, due to Sweden’s marginal position and its specific social and cultural conditions, very fragile. Production in terms of numbers is small, and very few were publicly acknowledged. The question of independence is constantly of great importance, and is impossible to solve as long as production costs and distributive access were in the hands of a few mainstream film companies, such as Svensk Filmindustri. It is later, in the 1950s with The Independent Film Group, that a cooperative workshop model was possible to enforce. The filmmakers of the 1920s and 1930s, Reinhold Holtermann, or Gösta Hellström, were either amateurs or professionals hired by the established film companies. The question of com-

mercialism – which is intertwined with the question of independence – was constantly present, but not as controversial maybe as in other film cultures since the experimental filmmakers in Sweden were often established within other professional spheres, such as the arts and the academy. In some ways Swedish experimental film culture has been privileged: Since it was marginal from the beginning, it has never really been threatened by commercial film production. Very soon the experimental film culture did address an audience, a growing class of intellectuals and cinephiles, who were interested in the phenomenon, even if they did not support it financially in any substantial way. The commercial film journals, for instance, were rather tolerant towards the experimental filmmakers, and experimental film had no need for journals or specialised magazines until later. The experimentalists could often count on some help from the trade and mainstream culture, a fact that was relevant until the 1970s. This is an aspect of general cinephilia which may be typical of a small film culture in a relatively prosperous and peaceful setting; it is at least crucial in the Swedish context.

The question of film style is intriguing, even if it does not constitute an aporia in Hagener's sense during the early Swedish period. The output of films during the early years is not enough to create a more complex rivalry between styles and genres. There is the Holtermann-Eggeling line with non-figurative patterns or non-narrative style, there is the impact of surrealism as we can see when Hagberg finally arrives, and there is a tendency towards poetic documentary in the vein of Sucksdorff and the workshop behind *Gamla Stan*. These tendencies were reinforced and developed further in the 1950s and 1960s, and eventually led to the fourth aporia, the question of politics. Swedish experimental film culture was in its formative phase basically naïve in a political sense; the modernity which is hailed tends to be very general and without any specific ideological markers. The situation is different in the 1960s when aesthetic form connects to political commitment. Thus, the Hagener matrix can be used to describe Swedish experimental film culture, but above all, it helps us to see how marginal and belated this culture was compared to the continental avant-garde.

Peter Weiss, the multifarious European refugee who was to become one of the most important figures in The Independent Film Group during the 1950s, established a bridge between the important phases in this history. In 1947 he published a short story in *Biografbladet*, or rather an outline for a film, "Början. Skiss till en kortfilm" ("Beginning. Sketch for a short film").<sup>197</sup> Elements of this prose sketch were later developed and used in his surrealist shorts and in his feature film, *Hägringen*. Metaphorically it can also be seen as the beginning of a new independent avant-garde culture: "A shrill, all permeating cry out of the darkness: the birth".<sup>198</sup>

# The Emergence of Experimental Film

## **Arbetsgruppen för film/The Independent Film Group**

In February 1950 The Independent Film Group, Svensk Experimentalfilm Studio/SEFS, literally the “Swedish workshop for experimental film” was founded in Stockholm. Its prehistory was found in the production of the film “Vision” during the autumn of 1949. While it was difficult to finance the production, an association called “Swedish experimental film” (Svensk Experimentärfilm) was founded by two film enthusiasts, Henry Lunneham (1924–2000) and Nils Jönsson (1925–2006). When they met the Romanian refugee Mihail Livada (1908–92) in February the following year – Livada was an engineer by profession who had made both commercials and experimental shorts – SEFS was inaugurated.

At this time 8mm was the preferred format due to its low cost. The French 9.5mm format was not particularly common although it was affordable and of better quality. The first films of the Film Group were consequently shot on 8mm, but soon 16mm became dominant, due to its superior quality and increasing availability. In general the early 1950s are considered the heyday for substandard gauge film formats; the market grew rapidly because of the steady rise in the standard of living and the introduction of television.<sup>199</sup> 16mm became the recording and reproduction format for television, further secured by Kodak’s high-speed, low-grain black-and-white reversal stock that was introduced to the market in 1955. In the late 1950s 16mm had a solid infrastructure and was both an available and affordable technology that was in diverse use. By 1951, a majority of the films shot by The Independent Film Group were on 16mm.

From a European perspective the founding of the Stockholm workshop was early; in 1956 they were launched in English as The Independent Film Group. In most European countries the era of the workshops was in the 1960s and the 1970s. Austria was, as so often, one of the exceptions. Vienna already had in the 1950s an emergent scene of artists working with film, for example, Peter Kubelka, Kurt Kren, Marc Adrian and Ferry Radax. Post-war Vienna saw major avant-garde movements emerge, the most famous being Wiener Aktionismus (“Viennese actionism”) which encompassed experimental filmmaking as well, most notably Kren and Ernst Schmidt Jr. The explanation commonly offered for the birth of the Viennese avant-garde and a versatile experimental film culture was the Austrian suppression of its past. The collective amnesia regarding National Socialism provoked a birth of radical counter movements.<sup>200</sup> The cultures and acts of opposition were, on the other hand, also able to continue an established tradition of critique, negation and transformation that had characterized Vienna since the *fin de siècle*. In Sweden the situation was quite different. Because Sweden did not actively take part in the great European wars and conflicts, it was one of the few peaceful regions and

a safe station in the violent geography of 1940s Europe. Sweden had neither a haunted past nor a turbulent present and was able to host refugees from neighbouring countries at war, expatriates who sometimes were (or would become) significant cultural figures. Some of the most famous foreigners in Swedish exile who remained in Sweden until their death were the authors Kurt Tucholsky (1890–1935) and Nelly Sachs (1891–1970), the artist Endre Nemes (1909–85) and as previously mentioned, Peter Weiss. Weiss became an important leading figure for Swedish experimental film during the 1950s and made his cultural breakthrough world-wide with the play *Marat/Sade* which premiered in Berlin in the spring of 1964. Weiss was one of a few influential figures who linked the 1940s with the 1950s, connecting The Independent Film Group with the experimental film culture of the 1940s.

There was not any indigenous radical culture of negation or discontent at the time; post-war Sweden was a peaceful, progressive and prosperous country. Consequently, it was quite natural that an organized experimental film culture came into being out of sheer pragmatic and peaceful reasons; from the desire to make films independently and – according to the minutes of the first meeting of 23 February – for “artistic and experimental reasons” only.<sup>201</sup> The founders of SEFS were neither artists like their Austrian counter-parts nor did they create very significant artistic contributions to Swedish experimental film culture. They were simply dedicated people who played a significant role as grey eminences in the Swedish culture of minor cinemas. In particular, Livada became an influential mentor for many young filmmakers.

Another peculiarity is that the people behind The Independent Film Group never became influential voices in Swedish film culture. The turn to film art that took place with the establishment of international (European) art and auteurist cinema never made room for their experimental minors. Thus, the filmic avant-garde that Alexandre Astruc had envisioned in his famous essay *La caméra-stylo* in 1948 paved the way for the La Nouvelle Vague and the tradition of the semi-commercial art-cinema.<sup>202</sup> Also in Sweden Astruc’s vision was used as support for the art cinema of Ingmar Bergman and Bo Widerberg (1930–97), for example, and not that of contemporary experimentalists like Åke Karlung or Weiss.<sup>203</sup>

The Film Group that was founded in 1950 continued, however, the tradition of the cinephilia of the film clubs. The aim was to produce and show films, but also to organize public lectures. Because of the ambition to reach a broad audience the workshop collaborated with other film clubs, amateur film organizations and cultural societies in general. The British and French Embassies, in particular, played a major role due to their activities in film distribution and exhibition; both provided the workshop with classical films and contemporary documentaries.





Film programmes from the early years of the workshop also indicate the openness of experimental film culture at the time. Besides their own production and classical works by filmmakers such as Robert Flaherty, Fritz Lang, Norman McLaren, Jean Mitry and Basil Wright, documentaries by less known figures were screened too, for example, Jacques Cousteau's *Les épaves* (1945) and Stuart Legg's *Wonder Jet* (1950). Along the ideals of the welfare state the workshop also had plans for working with film in schools and in collaboration with different public associations and unions.

During the autumn of 1950 one of the first films produced at The Independent Film Group, *De vita händerna* ("The white hands") that was made by the writer Ruth Hillarp (1914-2003) and Livada, won the first prize in the annual competition for substandard gauge filmmaking.<sup>204</sup> Hillarp, one of the most significant Swedish post-war female poets, did not make any other major contributions to film after collaborating with Livada on *De vita händerna*, although she remained a key member of the Film Group.

The success of Hillarp's and Livada's film encouraged the board of the Film Group to narrow the scope of its activity the following year. The workshop was changed into an 'elite' association, open only to people who were actively engaged in the Group. Yet they continued having public screenings, the members took a formal decision that the foremost aim from then on was to produce films. The shift in policy and practice is understandable because the overall situation was promising. Even commercial agents showed interest in the production of the workshop, partly because of the publicity that followed from the success of Hillarp's and Livada's film. Both Belgian Gevaert, producer of film stock, and Svensk Filmindustri subsidized the efforts of the Film Group during 1951,<sup>205</sup> action that indicates a continuing expansion of film culture during the early 1950s and that there were hardly any conflicts between the different groups and interests.<sup>206</sup>

The early 1950s was also characterized by a steady increase in cinema attendance with 1956 being the peak year. Thus, it is not surprising that the workshop managed to complete seven productions during its first full and stable year of activities. The Film Group was ambitious; four out of seven films finished during 1951 were shot on 16mm, another indication of the optimism that characterized film culture at the time.

The broad and heterogeneous interest that was a typical feature for the film clubs characterized the public sphere of film as well. All activities and efforts were, so to speak, part of the same culture and there seemed to be no end to the need and desire for moving pictures. It was also at this time that Arne Lindgren (b. 1924) joined the workshop. Lindgren became the secretary of The Independent Film Group, a post that he held for almost 30 years. Occasionally Lindgren simply was the Group.

## **Eivor Burbeck and Råland Häggbom: Early Film Production at The Independent Film Group**

Discursively experimental film was established by The Independent Film Group as equivalent to film produced with the aim of being ‘artistic and experimental’. That the description allowed a broad variety of films to be made is obvious. What is characteristic of the early production is the diversity, the blending of existential, symbolic and (male) melancholic meditations, for example, *Vision* (1950) or *Under en mask* (“Under a mask”, 1951); explorations of film material or language (*Study in Colours* 1951, *Study in Optical Rhythm* 1953); or poetic documentaries of urban and modern Stockholm like *Slussen* (“The lock”, 1951) or *Odjuret* (“The beast”, 1953).<sup>207</sup>

*Slussen* is an ambitious film depicting Stockholm’s urban centre named “Slussen” that is situated on the lock between Lake Mälaren and the Baltic. *Slussen* follows the tradition of experimental films that immerse the viewer in a big-city experience, establishing an urban “Kino-eye”.<sup>208</sup> The references to Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City* and Dziga Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera* are also apparent; the editing is mostly stylistic, motivated by graphical or rhythmical parameters.<sup>209</sup> The exception to the non-narrative structure and that of the editing strategies is the narrative ending of the film: the camera that has been absorbed in the pulse of urban movement for three minutes leaves the city and drifts out into the sea and into nature, thus stressing one of the fundamental positions of Nordic culture: that nature is the true place of sincere values and a genuine life.

Two early films that stand out due to their aesthetics are Eivor Burbeck’s *Iris* (1954) and Råland Häggbom’s *Tema* (“Theme”, 1951). The multi-talented Burbeck (1926-65) wrote both poetry and art criticism, and was married to the artist Lennart Rodhe who is considered to be one of the foremost

Lennart Johansson and Lennart Arnér,  
*Slussen* (1951).

Swedish exponents of concretism. Burbeck was also a friend of Hillarp, both wrote as well as worked with film and photography, dwelling for a period in Swedish post-war literary circles in Paris. Häggbom (1923–2008) had a background in fine art as a painter, although he never received any formal education.<sup>210</sup>

Eivor Burbeck, *Iris* (1954).

In *Iris* Burbeck uses stop-motion animation in order to create a burlesque and sensual collage; Häggbom, on the other hand, creates a study in motion where the camera records different carousels and spinning vehicles in an amusement park. Burbeck's film is rare because of her semiotic play with words, using them as both linguistic signifiers and as pure visual representations; a letter may transform into a figure or what appears to be a word may also turn out to be a direct, material representation. An example of the latter is when Burbeck is filming letters forming the word for floating "*flyta*" and suddenly they begin to move, but not because they are animated, the letters are plainly objects floating on the surface of water. In the same vein Häggbom's *Tema* – a three-minute short silent film shot on 8mm – is not merely a way of portraying motion or an attempt to follow different moving objects.<sup>211</sup> Häggbom's strategies of cutting at the beginning of the film downplays both representational space and the representation of movement so the viewer occasionally experiences a non-figurative rhythm. For example, a cut that shows a wagon of a spinning wheel entering the image space is followed by an identical but much shorter cut, thus the representation of a moving object is transformed into a depiction of tempo and pace, abstract qualities that outplay any representational function.<sup>212</sup> Häggbom's intentions, however, were not to create 'an abstract film', he strongly opposed the juxtaposition of the 'abstract' and the 'concrete'. Instead, he was interested in depicting movement as a "decentred experience" in which the whole image, so to speak, was in movement, something that he called, inspired by the

Råland Häggbom, *Tema* (1951)

Swedish artist Olle Bonniér, “progressive concretization”.<sup>213</sup> The aim of the film was simply to depict movement in its totality by showing moving objects, by moving the camera and by rapid cutting. The most original feature, however, is the carefully planned compositions which force the viewer to scan the whole image without submitting to a given or a stable perspective. Thus Häggbom already acknowledged the legacy of cubism, of making a distinction between the depiction of movement and the creation of a kinetic experience.

Burbeck, Hillarp and Häggbom did not produce a consistent series of filmic work and the early work of the workshop did not result in any remarkable production either. The early films were eclectic experiments and tests marked by a curiosity and freedom to make what one simply wanted to do. It was not until Weiss joined the workshop that they received a leading figure, an eloquent critic and established artist as their spokesman.

### **The Discourse on Amateur and Experimental Film**

Although the output of the workshop had been modest, a controversy on experimental film broke out in the press during the summer of 1953. The debate is proof of the fact that experimental film was a well established term albeit a contested concept. Several of the established critics accused the filmmakers at the Film Group of producing pretentious work and of copying an outdated aesthetics that belonged to the historical avant-garde.<sup>214</sup> It is likely that the critique led the workshop to exclude ‘experimental’ from its Swedish name, Experimentfilmstudio, changing it into Arbetsgruppen för film, literally “The Workgroup of Film”. At the same time, the objective of the Group was redefined as “being a group that works with making, screening and studying artistic film in general”, that is, not only experimental film as it was reported in earlier statements.<sup>215</sup> It is, however, obvious that the establishment of an internal discourse and self-image regarding how to name the practice was troublesome. In most working papers since 1956 the output is described as “free film that is artistic-experimental in character”.

The discursive struggle must also be understood in relation to one other major independent film producer, amateur organizations.<sup>216</sup> At first the Film Group collaborated with amateur organizations while the filmmakers considered themselves as amateurs, at least when it came to the material conditions of production. The amateur organizations were also attractive to the experimental filmmakers while they received a lot of publicity through the Nordic annual competition that was sponsored by major Scandinavian newspapers. The workshop’s own publicity work was not that successful. At first the modestly stencilled journal, *Svensk Experimentfilmstudio*, was launched and followed later by the established film society journal, *Filmfront*. The latter was

sent to all organized film societies throughout Sweden, and many of the provincial organizations reacted against writing that they considered as high-brow mumbo-jumbo.<sup>217</sup> The discursive struggles may also be viewed as indicative of how the film institutions and organizations tried to establish a Bourdieuan ‘field’ around minor cinemas, free film or experimental film.<sup>218</sup> Thus, part of the struggle was not only to make space and investment for your own production, but also to decide upon the rules of the field. It is doubtful if the different groups succeeded in establishing a field in Bourdieu’s sense, but the ground was at least settled in terms of a discourse and a public sphere for experimental film. There is no doubt that everyone who took part in the discussions and actions had an interest to pursue. For example, Ulf Hård af Segerstad (1915–2006), art critic at *Svenska Dagbladet* promoted amateur film vigorously albeit theoretically. His foremost Swedish amateur was always Weiss, who was excluded by the national jury when competing for being one of the Swedish filmmakers whose work would be shown at the Nordic amateur competition in Oslo 1956. The actual reason for banning Weiss was, however, the controversial films: they were considered either pretentious, hard to understand, or pornographic. At a mutual meeting in 1952 with the National Amateur Organization (Riksförbundet Sveriges Filmamatörer) and the Film Unit of the Photographic Society one member appealed against the decision to nominate two films by Weiss as candidates for the annual substandard gauge film competition. One of the jury members, an engineer by profession, wanted to prevent Weiss from taking part in any competition.

The reaction of the member of the jury is quite typical of how the amateur organizations began to understand their practice. As Patricia R. Zimmerman has shown in her *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (1995), the amateur clubs in 1950s US tended to copy established models of film aesthetics. There was also in Sweden a swift increase in available amateur equipment during the 1950s and, unsurprisingly, the group that had the economical means of matching the situation was the middle class.<sup>219</sup> One of the ‘types’ that embodied both the economical growth and the technical interest was the engineer, a category that was gendered as well. The early heterogeneous film culture of the different societies and clubs was primarily a male affair, but also female filmmakers took part in the activities. In particular Gerd Osten, Hillarp and Burbeck were dynamic members; they shot films and screened them at the film societies and wrote film reviews in the established journals. The amateur film clubs, on the other hand, were exclusively male spheres based both economically and culturally on the middle-class model of the time. But, when these middle-class ‘engineers’ took positions behind the camera, they usually focused on what was considered and constructed as nature: landscapes, animals, children and women.

Consequently, in the mid-1950s there emerged a struggle about film practice and aesthetics among those agents who made up the field of minor cinemas. Film culture was at its peak at this time. Never before had so many attended the cinema, the film society movement was booming and amateur filmmakers were well-to-do, both technically and financially. The workshop's persistent secretary Lindgren pointed out that the experimental filmmaker found himself in a paradoxical situation: the commercial sphere was out of question due to its dependence on external rules and norms, but the amateur sphere had become increasingly limited as well due to the demand that a 'pure' amateur filmmaker should never accept payment or professional help. Thus the position of the amateur had been turned into a privileged place implying someone who could afford to make and distribute films by themselves. Lindgren titled his contribution to the debate in 1955 in a congenial and apt manner: "Who can afford to be an amateur?"<sup>220</sup>

The heterogeneous public sphere that had emerged from the film clubs – where theory and practice, mainstream feature films, comic shorts and amateur pieces were part of the same culture – seemed to fade away during the mid-1950s. At least the amateurs' open hostility towards experimental film is evident. Weiss was the recurrent target, and at a meeting in 1956, the newly reorganized national organization for the Swedish film amateurs (Sveriges Filmamatörers riksförbund/SFR) decided that Weiss' film *Studie IV* ("Study IV") was not an amateur film and he should therefore be excluded from the annual venues and competitions. This marked a decisive break between the two organizations that were supposed to be the major collaborating institutions in the Swedish culture of minor cinema. Although the minutes of the meeting state that the decision was made regardless of the aesthetic qualities of *Studie IV*, it is obvious that the engineers at the amateur club resisted experimental work. In 1955, at the annual competition for the award in best substandard film, Gerhard Minding, who chaired the national amateur organization, harshly criticized *Studie IV* and Eivor Burbeck's *Iris*. In the competition the following year his advice to the filmmakers behind *Slussen* was to "save film", and he wrote that the film had no merits whatsoever.<sup>221</sup>

The split was, of course, caused by diverging opinions about film aesthetics but it is also likely that it was provoked due to the publicity the amateurs received. The annual Nordic film competitions were sponsored by the prominent newspapers *Svenska Dagbladet* (Sweden), *Aftenposten* (Norway), *Berlingske Tidende* (Denmark) and *Helsingin Sanomat* (Finland). Thus the amateurs received publicity that the Film Group could only dream of, and when they received publicity it was mostly negative. When the amateur organization was reorganized in 1955, Lindgren and Livada, representing the Group, tried to consolidate the position of experimental film. They even suggested the no-

tion ‘free film’ as a substitute for ‘amateur film’ while the latter – according to Lindgren and Livada – implied dilettantism, privacy and provincialism.<sup>222</sup> The concept of ‘free film’ would, on the other hand, merge both experimental and amateur.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that a debate took off. By 1955 the amateurs were worried about the international reputation of Swedish amateur film and called for a reaction against films that only depicted “anguish and misery” or were “experimental and abstract”; “international success demanded technical skills and well designed sound effects” and – above all – that there is “a story to be told”, claimed the amateurs.<sup>223</sup> Ironically it was exactly the work marked by anxiety and misery that received international attention. Edouard de Laurot wrote his enthusiastic article for *Film Culture*, published in 1956, titled “Swedish Cinema Classic Background and Militant Avantgarde”, in which especially Weiss received a lot of coverage. Later on SFR and its most critical advocate, the engineer Minding, received letters from other amateur film clubs that asked for assistance in contacting the Stockholm workshop for experimental cinema.<sup>224</sup>

In terms of public spheres (*Öffentlichkeit*) the organized amateur club represented typical liberal (bourgeois) public spheres at the time.<sup>225</sup> Filmmaking was a hobby for well-to-do males who could cultivate their subjectivity. The early film clubs were, on the other hand, interesting as a more utopian kind of public sphere, heterogeneous and open spaces for cinematic activities. The workshop was perhaps the most systematic attempt to create a culture and public sphere from artistic interest in – and passion for – film. However, whenever that ideal was realized, into films, into memoranda, into programmes and so forth, clashes emerged and the group became marginalized. This is also evident in relation to the emerging film society movements which literally exploded into highly popular movements during the 1950s.<sup>226</sup>

The Independent Film Group made several efforts in the 1950s to find an audience for their own productions, but the response was often indifferent or even hostile, especially at regional film societies and clubs. Usually the films were considered simply hard to understand and unpopular, but also as being pretentious and high-brow. Towards the late 1950s the film society movement became primarily another way of re-running exceptional films that had limited or brief national release. In 1959 the chairman of the board of the film society at Stockholm University College wrote resignedly that running a film society was nowadays like taking care of any other business.<sup>227</sup> In the same year the Film Group decided to end its activities due to lack of money. Unexpectedly, the Group received a small grant in 1962 from the city of Stockholm, support that would turn into an annual allowance, enabling The Independent Film Group to keep up its work for years to come.

## Peter Weiss: Resistance and Underground

Peter Weiss (1916–82) was a unique artist in Swedish experimental film culture, and the single one most important agent in the development of a Swedish filmic avant-garde. To a wider international audience he is known as a German novelist and playwright, with works like *Marat/Sade*, *Die Ermittlung* and *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*.<sup>228</sup> Weiss did, however, also play important roles in the expanding film culture in Sweden during the 1950s, directing several films, and writing and debating on avant-garde film as well as political matters. Maybe his most important role was as a transgressor, linking different strands of film culture together.

He was born in Germany but lived in Sweden since the start of World War II. We know little about his first encounters with film art, except for the accounts that are transmitted in his autobiographical novel, *Fluchtpunkt* (“Vanishing point”), published in 1962. At least in the autobiographical fiction, the influence of cinema seems to have been of importance in his early years:

**In Jackie Coogan I saw myself rushing across the street, clambering up walls, in patched trousers several sizes too large, and with long hair and a rakish sports cap set askew. [...] Two years later I came across Douglas Fairbanks in *The Thief of Baghdad*. I opened the book full of sketches of episodes from this film. [...] Later, when I had already discovered books, painting and music, I saw Murnau’s film *Tabu*.<sup>229</sup>**

These childhood memories, fictionalised and transformed over the years, form recurrent patterns in the art of Peter Weiss; in paintings, sketches, prose poems, film scripts and collages. He often describes his childhood in terms of images and imagery, sometimes mediated through the cinema or devices like a panorama peep show: “I sat on a chair in front of the big black drum and pressed my eyes against the greasy glass behind which stereoscopic scenes appeared in glaringly lit stiffness.”<sup>230</sup>

Somewhere along the journey Weiss established a more intellectual, conscious relationship with modern film, especially the avant-garde. In *Fluchtpunkt* he reflects how late he came to understand the avant-garde:

**Only now did I realize what the authorities had been hiding from me; I discovered Dadaism, found out about Huelsenbeck, Ball, Arp, Schwitters, studied the works of Picabia, Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, Max Ernst, read about the films of René Clair, Eggeling and Richter, saw Schlemmer’s figures for the Triadic ballet, read Klee’s essays and diary, Tollers’ and Kaiser’s drama, engrossed myself in the paintings of Kandinsky, Chirico, Miró, Dali, Tanguy, Magritte and in the poems of Jarry and Apollinaire. [...] Everything that had been attacked during that one decade**



still existed today, just as vigorously as ever. The pictures and sculptures, the plays, dances, films, fiction, and music were not isolated but embodied values which one could continue to develop.<sup>231</sup>

As an immigrant he tried to establish himself as a painter and a novelist. He presented his first Swedish art exhibit in Stockholm, March 1941, and was appointed guest student at the Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm in 1942. He wrote several books in Swedish but had difficulty being integrated into the insular intellectual culture of early post-war Sweden. He was luckier, though, when he turned to film.

Weiss was in touch early with the cinephiles of Stockholm, and became a member of the students' film club in Stockholm; slowly his film interest came into focus. In 1947 he started to contribute to *Biografbladet*. He published, among other things, a script for a planned short film, "Början" ("Beginning"), an account of the German post-war film industry, and a review of *Day of Wrath* by Carl Th. Dreyer. At the same time he started to lecture at the night classes organized by Stockholm University College. He taught courses in painting, art history and film, a position which he held until 1958.

Together with friends he made his debut as film director with the short *Studie I* ("Study I", 1952) which was the first of a series of surrealist shorts that became more and more technical and artistically complex. Between 1952 and 1961 he made five more surrealist films – now produced within The Independent Film Group – and also some documentaries on juvenile prisons, drug abuse, and other social topics, and finally the experimental feature film, *Hägringen* ("The mirage", 1959).

He wrote several articles and essays on experimental film, for example, in the new film magazine *Filmfront*, but also in daily papers. The articles were revised and collected in the volume *Avantgardefilm* published 1956.<sup>232</sup> Short German versions of the text were published in the journals *Akzente* (1963) and *Filmkritik* (1981), and an unabridged version was published 1995.<sup>233</sup> A short extract in English was published 1970 and in 1989 a French translation was published.<sup>234</sup>

In *Avantgardefilm* Surrealism is rendered a privileged role. As Yvonne Spielmann puts it:

At stake for Weiss is the conviction that film allows a visual concept of poetics conceived through Surrealism, and his comments throughout the book highlight two major issues: the poetics of cinema as the visual language of film and the interrelationship or shifting relationship between dream and reality, paradigmatically expressed in surrealist film form.<sup>235</sup>

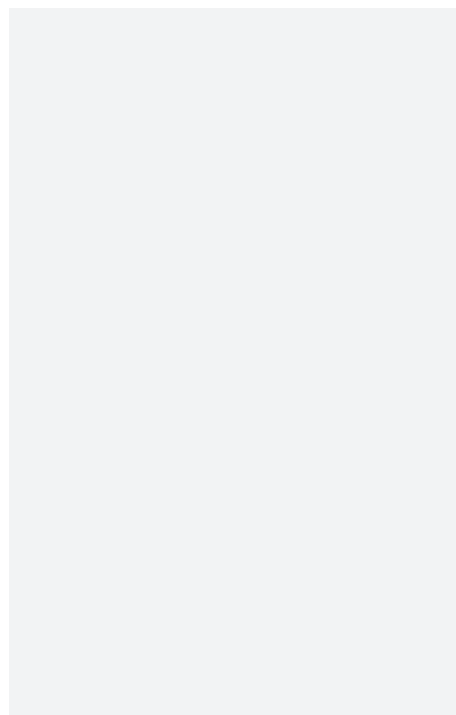
The poetics that Weiss formulates in *Avantgardefilm* is a *Ding-Dichtung* of sorts, a way of liberating reality with all its spots and marks and scratches, and to conceptualise the historical unconscious of the photographic image; the cinematographic medium cannot escape to document our world.<sup>236</sup> In his book Weiss portrays the great masters in his version of film history: Buñuel, Cocteau, Vigo, Peixoto, Eisenstein and Dreyer. He devotes two chapters to American avant-garde cinema, discusses film and music, and observes some new experiments in France. In a thematic chapter he studies the city theme, and the first lines can be seen as a way into his own filmic universe:

**The contradictory and rich life of the great city, with its pulse and the human condition passing by, has often been depicted in film. There is a vast amount of work that relies on the imagery of architecture, the rhythm of industry, traffic and machines, the movement of people and the change from morning to night. The theme is inexhaustible; every day the city offers new views for those who can see.<sup>237</sup>**

The first film Weiss directed, *Studie I*, also titled *Uppvaknandet* (“The awakening”) was made with almost no money at all, filmed in Weiss’s own flat at Fleminggatan 37, with himself and a female friend as actors. The couple wake up in the morning, and the common rituals of waking and washing are repeated, as well as shots of the woman’s naked body. The film was acknowledged at the Swedish annual competition for substandard film, *Årets Smalfilm*, in 1952, and was awarded a prize.

The second short, *Studie II* (“Study II”, 1952), sometimes titled *Hallucinationer* (“Hallucinations”), was as short as the first one, 6 minutes, but much more complicated, and made with the help of many friends; some of the actors became important Swedish intellectuals later on, for example, the poet and playwright Lars Forssell (1928–2007); some of them

81 belonged to the group around the workshop, as



Peter Weiss, *Avantgardefilm* (1956).  
On the cover an image of Étienne-Jules  
Marey's *La marche de l'homme*.

Gunnar Hyllienmark (b. 1927) and Jan Thomæus and, of course, Gunilla Palmstierna (b. 1928) who later married Weiss (and who during his period as playwright produced his stage designs). Arne Lindgren was responsible for the cinematography, as in the following one as well. *Studie II* is composed around a series of surrealistic *tableaux* with naked bodies against a dark background. The intention was, according to Weiss, to evoke the hallucinatory and dreamlike in a suite of images.<sup>238</sup>

*Studie II* is one of the Weiss shorts that is most often screened, and so it was even in the 1950s, but there was – as we have noted – criticism from home movie filmmakers and amateurs who several considered the film as being both incomprehensible and pornographic. *Studie II* is very close to the style of the paintings and collages of Weiss, while the next film, *Studie III* (“Study III”, 1953), is more connected to his work in prose in a thematic way. The film works with repetition as a primary aesthetic device, and Weiss himself plays the leading part as a young man, trying to carry away a human body, and visiting an old couple in a bourgeois setting, maybe a first visual draft of the autobiographical novel, *Abschied von den Eltern*.<sup>239</sup> The same themes and techniques are repeated and developed in the other surrealistic shorts, *Studie IV* (“Study IV”, 1954), also titled *Frigörelse* (“Liberation”), and *Studie V* (“Study V”, 1955), also titled *Växelspel* (“Interplay”). It is obvious that Weiss in his early film style – as has been remarked by Yvonne Spielmann – connected “visually to the realm of static imagery” where the “exposure of the human body on display reminds us of surrealist painting”.<sup>240</sup>

*Studie IV* was awarded a prize in the national competition *Årets smalfilm* and was invited to the Photographic Society of America and its Movie Division.<sup>241</sup> One of the actors in *Studie IV* was the artist Carlo Derkert (1915–94) who, later, was to become one of Sweden’s most prominent art pedagogues with a position at Moderna Museet in Stockholm; Derkert was to act the only part in the one colour film Weiss ever made, *Ateljéinteriör/The Studio of Dr Faust*” (1956). The distorted images – fractured through prisms and mirrors – show Dr Faustus in a labyrinthine, chaotic laboratory. For this film, as for some of the earlier films, Weiss composed a score, consisting of highpitched dissonances and mechanical noise.

The fact that Peter Weiss during these years lived night and day with his films is underlined by artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd in an autobiographical notice. He tells how he and his friend Öyvind Fahlström used to visit Peter Weiss in his home:

**Peter was cutting one of his films, and sat there like a mummy, covered with film strips, he was unable to greet us, he just nodded; over his shoulders were rolls of film, 2 to 3 metre of them, out of his jacket filmstrips showed up, on the chairs, yes,**

even on the lamps, all over the place were metres of film, waiting for their right context!

Öyvind and I stood there in silence for a couple of minutes until the mummy was released from his “story”.

Afterwards we had tea.<sup>242</sup>

Together with the celebrated Swedish photographer Christer Strömholm, he turned to other subjects and made *Ansikten i skugga* (“Faces in shadow”, 1956), a documentary on some tramps in the old town of Stockholm, and with Hans Nordenström, Weiss directed a short on the juvenile prison in Uppsala, *Enligt lag* (“According to the law”, 1957) which caused a debate concerning the Swedish censorship board that cut a scene showing a young prisoner masturbating. These two documentaries are now part of an alternative documentary canon. *Ansikten i skugga* is very modest in its approach, and seems to simply register the old drunken and poor men of the Stockholm slum. The images have their acoustic counterpart in the soundtrack, which contains voices and laughter. But in fact, the sound recording was not synchronously shot at the actual filming. The film was hailed by several Swedish critics, and was distributed throughout the European festival circuit. *Enligt lag* combines documentary shots with dreamlike sequences. The film has been seen as a forerunner for the politically-engaged documentaries by Stefan Jarl.<sup>243</sup> Both films blend documentary practice with discrete fiction devices, and stand out as extraordinary pieces in the Swedish film climate of the 1950s.

The *Study* films were thus screened at festivals and competitions, and Amos Vogel distributed them through his avant-garde ciné-club in New York, Cinema 16. The most important outcome of the festival screenings of Weiss’s films was that Edouard de Laurot and Jonas Mekas at *Film Culture* acknowledged his work and supported the feature film project, *Hägringen* (“The mirage”, 1959). *Hägringen* derives from prose sketches and poems dating back to the 1940s; the first more lengthy treatment was the Kafkaesque novel, *Dokument I* (“Document I”, 1949).<sup>244</sup> The plot is simple: A young man (Staffan Lamm, b. 1937) with no name and no past arrives in a big city, in fact Stockholm, where he meets people, and becomes involved in absurd conversations and acts. During his walks through the city he meets a young woman (Gunilla Palmstierna) and the two of them fall in love. Some parts of the film are very documentary in their style, for example, scenes from the old slum blocks of Stockholm, while some sequences are dreamlike, almost hallucinatory in their visual nature. The dialogue parts are often absurd, mostly consisting of questions, more literary than typical of everyday speech.

The production team was in constant need of money; notable support  
83 from Mekas was important, as well as minor funding from individuals and

film clubs, for example, the film club of Helsingborg, which had an avant-garde profile, offered Weiss a small grant.<sup>245</sup> Gustaf Mandal (b. 1929) was responsible for the cinematography and was duly acknowledged for the contribution.

*Hägringen* is sporadically discussed in the international literature on avant-garde and experimental cinema, but it is mentioned by Parker Tyler in his classic *Underground Film: A Critical History* (1969). He compares it to *Nicht mehr fliehen* (“No more escaping”, 1955) by Austrian director Herbert Vesely, and registers that both films “use fantasy and both are basically allegories of modern life with social-protest implications”.<sup>246</sup> In his short analysis he traces some intertextual relations, both to Kafka and Chaplin: “Actually, Weiss’s hero is as much a fugitive as a criminal would be”. The plot of the film is seen as a “long initiation rite turned inside out in conformance with the pessimistic alienation mood of our times”. Tyler is, however, ambiguous about the aesthetic value of the film. The style is not really sharp enough and the inventions are unoriginal: “Yet it has some excellent scenes, is densely cinematic [...] and [...] states an authentic view of life.”<sup>247</sup>

*Hägringen* is in Tyler’s view a surrealistic work of art through its oneiric logic; the dream fantasy is “the dominant imaginative rule”. Yvonne Spielmann discusses along the same line in an essay on Weiss’s approaches to film: “Where Weiss cinematically unfolds multiple realities and emphasizes visual thinking together with the assertion of inner vision, he reinforces the essential concern in independent film making imposed by surrealist style”.<sup>248</sup> She continues:

[...] the black-and-white images primarily support the strong contrast between the human figure and the urban surroundings. As a result, the film’s expressive power derives mainly from the visual style rather than narrative elements. Devices such as contrast lighting, key lighting, deep focus, and the preference for tableau images, including immobile framing, shape a film form that corresponds on the level of content to immobility and related motifs of distortion, isolation, and alienation. The tableau character of the images mediates inner feelings of uncertainty rather than change. As a result, stasis rather than mobilization is effected through the dynamics of the moving images.<sup>249</sup>

The Swedish reception of *Hägringen* was austere. Some positive aspects of the film were noted, but as a whole it was rejected, mainly because of what was seen as an outdated use of surrealistic imagery. The poet and critic Artur Lundkvist was rather solitary in his appraisal of the film. Later the film was established as a part of the Swedish experimental film canon, and it has been claimed that it is a work of “a true *auteur*”.<sup>250</sup>

**Peter Weiss, *Hägringen* (1959).**

When considered retrospectively there are many things that are noteworthy in the film. Among them we can point out the documentary traits; there are many images in *Hägringen* which have less to do with Vigo or Buñuel than with a documentary tradition, for example, the views of Stockholm, the inhabitants of the slum, as well as the construction of Stockholm City. These bare, silent and unaccompanied images do, of course, clash with the more traditional surrealist imagery, but together form a mapping of something which is salient in Weiss's work: the urban situation. Here, in his view of the modern metropolis, he is back in classic modernism, and the cityscape of *Hägringen* can be recognized from some of his earlier shorts, but they also remind us of his early paintings as "Menschen in der Strassenbahn I II" (1934), "Berlin Friedrichstrasse" (1935), and, of course, the Brueghelesque "Die Maschinen greifen die Menschen an" (1935).<sup>251</sup> These depictions of the urban condition return in the surrealist shorts and documentaries, and can be seen as sketches for the city scenes in *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* where Berlin, Paris and, again, Stockholm are described as veritable jungles, mazes of streets and underground alleys, filled with horror and with life.<sup>252</sup>

The principal actor in *Hägringen*, Staffan Lamm, continued to work with Peter Weiss on diverse projects, and directed a documentary about his friend and father figure in 1987, *Strange Walks in and Through and Out*, a sensitive and suggestive portrait which underlined the feeling of alienation that governed Weiss through his early years.

Peter Weiss directed some short films after *Hägringen*, and shot fragments of what was planned as a film about other artists and friends, among them Öyvind Fahlström. Together with Barbro Boman (1918–80) he wrote a script and directed a feature film, *Svenska flickor i Paris* (*The Flamboyant Sex*, 1961), an impressionistic view of some young Swedish women in Paris. He was credited as ‘visual director’ and claimed that he was solely responsible for the imagery of the film. In fact, he was later to ban the entire film after a conflict with the producers, and in several biographies and accounts this film is erased from his filmography. *The Flamboyant Sex* has, however, probably more to do with Weiss than he himself acknowledged, and there are scenes that deserve to be noted, for example, a parade through Paris with the sculptures of Tinguely which ties this film to the works of Hultén as well as to Breer. This film, however, was his exit as film director; his next enterprise was to reform European drama.

In 1972 Weiss began to work on what would become a novel in three installments, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (*The Aesthetics of Resistance*). His last years were dominated by this work in progress. A common view of his career is that he left film for good when he made his breakthrough as a writer in German, but there are, in fact, many references to film art and the politics of the avant-garde in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. The novel blends political accounts, historical descriptions, aesthetical interpretations and moral discussions in a story of the antifascist resistance, from the Spanish Civil War to the horrendous executions in the Plötzensee prison of some of the most famous the martyrs of Die rote Kapelle. There are also connections to Weiss’s Swedish experiences, and images from Stockholm that we can recognise from *Hägringen* and the workshop shorts. The narration of the novel has been labelled as cinematic; instead of a linear account we are introduced to a montage of impressions and facts, and several of the crucial events of the novel are narrated with techniques inspired by the cinema, and with several allusions to an avant-garde heritage. The work on *The Aesthetics of Resistance* was exhausting for Peter Weiss. He was able to finish the novel, but tormented by a bad heart condition he suffered several heart attacks and died 10 May, 1982 in Stockholm.

Considered as a filmmaker, Peter Weiss had a short career spanning over a decade, and in biographies and international research he is primarily regarded as a playwright and novelist, but in many ways his filmmaking is prismatic for his oeuvre; important themes and devices are prepared in films. In a lecture, transmitted by the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation in 1952, Peter

Weiss spoke about the art of cinema and compared it with “an unobtainable woman who continually gets away in crucial moments”.<sup>253</sup> Another metaphor he uses is “the underground”; film seems to be his last hiding place where he can deal with his dreams in a cruel and grey world based on political and economic facts. As he put it in 1958: “If you want to work with film as an artistic means of expression you have no choice: you have to go underground”.<sup>254</sup> Both the explicit connection to a classical heterosexual desire – with the cinema as a desired woman – and the concept of the utopian underground points to the conventional interpretation of the avant-garde artist as a romantic and an outsider. But there is more to it. Understood in a Swedish context, Weiss brought the imagery of the international avant-garde cinema to post-war Sweden. He is thus the most important character in the belated Swedish introduction of filmic modernism, and one of the individual driving forces behind the discursive formation of a Swedish experimental cinema.

Weiss never distanced himself fully from Surrealism, the modernist avant-garde and the world of dreams. In his last novel he returns to these topics through an argument, made by one of his characters:

**And just as our political decisions were based on fragments, dissonances, hypotheses, resolutions, and slogans, all borne by a conviction deriving from our own life experiences, so too we could not conceptualize art without including its ruptures, fluctuations, and oppositions. And if it were deprived of its contradictions, then only a lifeless stump would remain.**<sup>255</sup>

These “ruptures, fluctuations, and oppositions” were preserved and researched in the filmmaking of Peter Weiss and maybe most fulfilled in the one feature film he completed on his own, *Hägringen*, or, as it was planned to be called, *Fata Morgana*. And symbolically, so was his fate in Swedish experimental film; like a mirage he was there and all of a sudden he disappeared.

## **Kinetic Art and Moderna Museet**

In terms of production and aesthetics, The Independent Film Group was not the only venue for Swedish experimental cinema in the 1950s, but it was the Group that defined and defended the discourse on experimental film. For the artists the naming of the practice was of secondary signification.

A handful of individual artists were working with film in the late 1950s and early 1960s who remained outside the established or emerging cohorts. Göte Hennix (1902–97) was the oldest of these, an established artist who had taught at the University College of Art and Design since 1947. He made several shorts of which some were experimental. His most widely-known film,



and the only one that appears to be preserved, is *Piff, paff, bluff* (1961), a rapidly edited photomontage that entails a broad range of common gimmicks: cut-out animation, painting and drawing directly on the celluloid. The film received several awards, and because of its amusing tone was one of the very few experimental films screened on public television which received largely favourable reviews. The artist Leo Reis experimented with mirrors and prisms creating abstract films that were hardly ever shown outside his studio in the castle of Torup in Southern Sweden. Carl Gyllenberg (b. 1924), architect and artist, made extensive experiments with film creating both abstract shorts and several feature films of which only one was fully completed: *Som i drömmar* ("As in dreams", 1954), shot on 35mm and produced with funding from the film producer Lars Burman (1924–70). All of Gyllenberg's unfinished experimental shorts have vanished despite the fact that they were regularly shown at the time, even abroad. Gyllenberg was also an unashamed self-promoter, and figured widely in Swedish media and public life in the 1950s and the 1960s.

The film society at Uppsala University also acted as an important meeting place for experimental film in the 50s by both hosting the established Swedish avant-garde filmmakers at the time (Weiss, Hagberg and Gyllenberg) and producing a couple of experimental shorts.

Besides The Independent Film Group it was the culture and people around Pontus Hultén that affected Swedish experimental film the most. During the early 1950s the up-and-coming versatile Hultén, and later director of Moderna Museet in Stockholm, spent extensive time in Paris nurturing his interest in kinetic art and cinema, an engagement that would culminate in the exhibition "Le Mouvement" at Galerie Denise René in 1955.<sup>256</sup> The exhibition which was curated by Hultén was also documented on film by Robert Breer and Hultén, the former one of several American artists who had stayed in, or travelled to, Paris after the World War II on a so-called G. I. Bill. Both Breer and Robert Rauschenberg became good friends with Hultén who was essentially a supreme art producer and entrepreneur. In Paris at the time it was as natural for artists to visit art galleries as attend film screenings at Henri Langlois' famous Cinematheque. Breer witnessed how he became part of an actual film community only after his return to the USA in the 1960s.<sup>257</sup> Breer also made another film with Hultén, *Un Miracle* (1953), that is presented in a separate chapter on Hultén's filmmaking and his collaboration with Breer and Hans Nordenström.

The art community in Paris was vibrant, international and intermedial. Besides American artists and the Swiss, Jean Tinguely, Hultén spent time with his fellow Swedish artists Hans Nordenström, Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd and P. O. Ultvedt. They were also visited by the Swedish photographers Christer Strömholm (1918–2002), Rune Hassner (1928–2003) and Tor-Ivan Odulf

**Frame enlargements from Tor-Ivan Odulf, *Filmsmälten* (1966).**

(1930–88) all three of whom would later become not only established professionals and professors in their field but also significant contributors to Swedish film and father figures of Swedish documentary photography. Strömholm, photographed Peter Weiss' documentary classic *Ansikten i skugga*, and played the leading part in Rune Hassner's and Jan Myrdal's (b. 1927) controversial feature, *Myglaren* ("The wangler", 1966), a Swedish classic in the genre of the semi-documentary. In the late 1960s and the 1970s Hassner made a series of films for Swedish Television on photography and the history of photography. Odulf made a significant experimental short on dissolving film, *Filmsmälten* ("The film dissolver", 1966), that depicts a small company specialising in dissolving and recycling old film. *Filmsmälten* is a visually stunning reflection upon the material of film and the transient nature of what is man-made. Odulf traces how film strips filled with meaning are dissolved into chemical substances and reused as pure physical material. The 20-minute poetic and experimental documentary is also one of the few films made in Sweden that belong to the genre of found footage films.

Odulf tried his luck as well in the feature film business with a new wave inspired film called *Stockholmsommar* ("Summer in Stockholm", 1970) about a young photographer. Like all of Odulf's work it is meticulously photo-

graphed in an overt documentary mode. Moreover, the leading part was played by Anders Petersen (b. 1944) who later became one of Sweden's most successful photographers, adhering to the documentary tradition that was established by Strömholm.

When it comes to filmic means and modes, Nordenström was the one who played the major role out of all the Swedish artists who were close to Hultén. Nordenström was, in fact, Hultén's closest friend at the time, and they both shared a profound interest in the moving image. Nordenström's technical knowledge of film also made him into a necessary collaborator for Hultén, the one from the 1950s whose films are most well known. Yet, Nordenström made a few works by himself which have been rarely screened. Reuterswärd was more of a trickster; in a way, conceptual, pop and postmodern before the categories had been invented. Reuterswärd, the youngest of the four Swedes, welcomed everything innovative and new. Ultvedt who celebrated the contingency and anarchy in life would build his whole career on the aesthetics of kinetic art. Later, Nordenström, Reuterswärd and Ultvedt would take up positions as art school professors; Hultén made a significant international career as director of major art museums and institutions. He was appointed in 1973 as the first director of Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

Film and Moving Image Studies have usually ignored the tradition and connection with kinetic art. One exception is Malcolm Le Grice who in his influential book *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977) traces the tradition of experimental film to the aesthetics of visual abstraction in early modernist painting beginning with Paul Cezanne. More recently, Peter Weibel, in his short essay, "It is Forbidden Not to Touch: Some Remarks on the (Forgotten Parts of the) History of Interactivity and Virtuality", has argued for how kinetic artworks in the early twentieth century (Naum Gabo, Marcel Duchamp etc.) created an aesthetics of movement where the act of representation was substituted with actual movement creating virtual and illusory effects.<sup>258</sup> It is, therefore, no surprise that Hultén, Nordenström, Reuterswärd and Ultvedt became so fond of animation. The stop-motion technique was a way of bringing movement into the pictures and paintings that they had been working on as artists; a technique that became Robert Breer's trademark who regularly met – not only Hultén – but also Nordenström and Reuterswärd. Scott MacDonald has described Breer's early work as "an attempt by a painter to add motion to his work", a characterization that obviously fits most of the visual artists that moved into film at the time.<sup>259</sup> Breer's own comment from 1962 is perhaps more to the point while it points to the fact that animation, as film in general, is in fact rooted in the tradition of the fixed image: "I like to cross back and forth between cinema and the fixed image. I like to take properties of one into the world of the other and to never get caught. I also like being an artist."<sup>260</sup>

## **Pontus Hultén and his Companions: Chance and Play**

Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd (b. 1934) made a handful of films during his early career as an artist, but it his two first films that overtly display connections to contemporary aesthetics of kinetics. *Försvinnaren* (“The disappearing man”, 1957) is a witty comment upon the cinematic institution and how movement in mainstream cinema is always instrumental, dominated by narrative. For Reuterswärd & co the beauty of kinetics was in the adherence to the principle of contingency. *Försvinnaren* lasts for five minutes and depicts an animated figure which moves around inside the picture frame accompanied by Beethoven’s *Yorkscher Marsch*. The movement of the figure is interrupted, and disappears, when a pause takes place: the music stops and the word, “Paus” (“Pause”), appear on the screen. Soon the music and the figure reappear and the film continues until the figure disappears into the right corner of the image space.

Reuterswärd has often been interpreted as a precursor of the art movements of the 1960s, conceptual art and Fluxus, pop-art and so forth, and he was also a good friend of the multi-media pop artist Öyvind Fahlström.<sup>261</sup> Both wrote experimental or concrete poetry since the early or mid-1950s and Reuterswärd in particular made ironic comments on established norms and genres. All these multi-medial strands are present in *Försvinnaren*, whereas it is also an early example of conceptual cinema, being a metacritical joke about the fundamentals of the cinematic institution. The movements of the figure stress the limits of the image space while the silhouette moves along the borders of the screen, but *Försvinnaren* also deals with the intertwinement of narrative and movement. Hence, the film may be interpreted as a simple narrative, a man disappears and we follow his disappearance with excitement (when? where to?). But it can also be seen as a critique of how the unbound aesthetics of movement is often transformed into that of narrative, into rational and identifiable content that suppresses the non-instrumental and sensual time-based experience, one of the essential features of the film event. In fact, most of Reuterswärd’s later visual art production is an attack on the institution of art, its economy and conventions; furthermore, he has always questioned the romantic concept of the artist as such, the mythology of the single and coherent *auteur*.

When Edouard Jaeger, who was one of Reuterswärd’s promoters in Paris, wrote about the early works in 1957, he saw the cinema as the context for Reuterswärd’s visual art. Jaeger even refers to filmmakers like Eggeling and Richter, a somewhat odd connection as Reuterswärd was not making abstract rhythmic films in search of a unique language for the moving image. On the other hand, Jaeger’s claim is indicative of how immense the interest in film and kinetic art was at the time in Paris.<sup>262</sup> Reuterswärd’s second film, *Buffalo Bill in*

*27 Forms* (1957), is more in line with Jaeger's argument. The film is, in contrast to *Försvinnaren*, based on paintings by Reuterswärd. For a period he painted directly onto acrylic glass with the intention of capturing movement and light. In *Buffalo Bill* such paintings are placed in layers upon each other and moved around, the camera simply records the moving paintings, a technique and solution that was quite similar to Leo Reis' experiments a few years later.<sup>263</sup>

Fahlström and Reuterswärd also wrote concrete poetry; thus, Reuterswärd approached the written language in a liberating vein, paraphrasing established genres, creating nonsense poetry or treating the written words as distinctive objects that could be arranged in different series and constellations as in his, perhaps, most remarkable publication of the period, *På samma gång* ("At the same time", 1961). The work consists of 40 unnumbered pages where every page presents 80 words arranged into five columns with four words in each. A page may be read according to a horizontal or vertical logic combining the words as semantic, sonic or visual units. As in his filmic aesthetic, Reuterswärd's literary work deals not so much with the idea of putting a certain aesthetic into effect as questioning and criticizing a set of rules. Like *Försvinnaren*, the law of a mode or genre is questioned and, especially, the tyranny of linearity and of establishing a stable, single perspective from where to look, listen or read is persistently put under attack.

Another important source of influence and force for Reuterswärd was music, and together with Weiss and Fahlström – who all were part of the group of people who regularly gathered together at their studios in Stockholm – shared an interest in concrete music. Fahlström was well informed; he had written about Pierre Schaeffer's experiments with recorded sounds making music from everyday material. Such an aesthetic had great impact at the time; it influenced, for example, Weiss in his work with the *Study*-films from the early 1950s. Reuterswärd expressed in his autobiographies how important contemporary jazz and concrete music was for him, and how the evenings at Weiss' or Fahlström's studios constituted spaces that were exceptionally international and liberal in an otherwise quite provincial 1950s Sweden. Thus, what the new music enabled and envisioned was not only that of a free temporal experience and the liberation from an enclosed culture, but also an aesthetic of the ordinary. These characteristics became very important for Ultvedt's artistic production, including those few films he actually finished and those numerous rolls of footage that were never carried to completion.

P. O. Ultvedt's (1927–2006) *Nära ögat* ("Near the eye", 1958) has become something of a Swedish classic when it comes to experimental film.<sup>264</sup> It is an animated abstract composition that may be either seen as a play with foreground and background and basic geometric shapes (squares, rectangles and circles) or as a narrative. The film exists with two different soundtracks, one

in mono and another in stereo. The sound from one of the channels in the stereophonic version consists of Ultvedt's family talking, but the soundtrack is played backwards. The chirpy and chatty sound transforms the abstract and geometrical shapes into anthropomorphic figures, and the film may, therefore, be read as an adventure story about a couple of circles in the land of other geometrical shapes. The other version stresses the infinity of abstract composition, but also playfulness and contingency; forms are born and disappear, there is no grammar and the combinations are endless. Ultvedt later became famous for his mobiles, moving sculptures and installations. They were all, as *Nära ögat*, a celebration of anarchism in movement: where there is movement you never know what will happen next, everything becomes saturated with opportunities. This tribute to chance – and, therefore, to life as well – is something that is very characteristic of Ultvedt's art, and it also occurs in all those fragments that were never finished as proper films. It is not unlikely that Ultvedt, on the other hand, resisted the act of closure because it would partly have been against the grain of his philosophy of art.

Of all the film fragments that Ultvedt left behind the rolls shot in Iolas gallery in New York 1963 are of special interest (he edited the material but never finished the film). The footage is both a documentation of the exhibition (an installation that is a maze of incomplete spaces, false doors and moving furniture) and a depiction of the experience of a confusing space. The camera follows a figure, the dancer Steve Paxton, who moves around trying to make his way through the room(s) and we are shown sudden glimpses of Ultvedt and Hultén embedded in the installation, or 'environment' as it was called at the time, filming Paxton. Although a storyboard is preserved it is unclear what the actual intent of the film was. But the footage displays clearly Ultvedt's fascination for the anarchy of things and objects that the medium of the moving image had an exceptional ability to portray and to bring alive.

The aesthetics of the concrete, of solitary things and artefacts and their unruly character, was something that united Ultvedt and Pontus Hultén (1924–2006). Hultén wrote at an early stage short theoretical essays on the aesthetics of the artefacts, collage and kinetics.<sup>265</sup> In one of the first essays published in the review *Kasark* in 1954, Hultén claims that contemporary art has to be an object in itself because the act of representing belongs to the past. This thingness of art leads, on the other hand, to an embracing of the external world and, thereby, Hultén writes, chance “enters as a symbol for the tie to reality, the external reality in which contingency rules”.<sup>266</sup> This aesthetics is strikingly coherent with Breer's version of animation. Breer was uninterested in creating animation, that is, to bring life to dead objects, to make them anthropomorphic; instead he was intrigued by the potential in film of metamorphosis. When Breer made *Un Miracle* (1953) together with Hultén in Paris, he

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was obsessed by Franz Kafka's short story, "The Metamorphosis", and planned to make a film out of it, not in order to illustrate the story though, but because he wanted to explore metamorphosis. For Breer this transformative aesthetics of the moving image was a tribute to spontaneity, to life. Hultén agreed, in 1955 he wrote an essay published in the review *Kasark* that was titled, "Den ställföreträdande friheten eller om rörelse i konsten och Tinguelys metamekanik" ("The substitute for freedom or on movement in art and the metamechanics of Tinguely"):

**For 50 years movement has been one of the main topics of art. Compared with the past, art is nowadays revolutionary. The artist is no longer a servant of society and is no more occupied with the depiction of the making of civilization. Thus the central perspective is played out as the method for the artist. When the aim of the artist is not to depict an already-existing world, he can't any longer constitute a focal point of a perspective. There is no model for the one who is seeking that which he has never seen. The pictures that are symbols for the reality he wants to construct cannot be restricted to space or time. The symbols for his freedom have to be even more liberated than he himself has the power to be.<sup>267</sup>**

Hultén's characterisation is close to what Sean Cubitt has characterized as the "vector", one of the dynamic elementary aspects of cinema which is typical for many animated films in which an "art of curiosity" is explored.<sup>268</sup> Regardless of whether one agrees with Cubitt's distinction between the elementary elements of cinema, his description of the vector and its relation to metamorphosis is apt as an account of the aesthetics of animation and its privileged position in film aesthetics. Animation stresses the "meta" in metamorphosis while according to Cubitt, it is an "aesthetics of becoming":<sup>269</sup> we don't know what to expect and at the same time that we experience a drawn line on adventure, we become aware of the fact that animation is a pure signifying practice enabled by the interaction between man and the machine. There is, so to speak, no referent outside the relationship between man and machine. Such an interface is not a rational or instrumental one, on the contrary, everything is possible and transformable, hence, an opportunity for endless exploration or, as Cubitt puts it: "The vector does not tell us what to expect: it requires us to think".<sup>270</sup>

According to Hultén and his allies, machines were toys, agents of magic and marvel, too fantastic in order to put in the hands of engineers. This strand would constitute an inherent part of the practice of Hultén & co and the quintessential cinematic form for such an explorative aesthetic was animation.<sup>271</sup>

Hultén's passion for kinetic art and the machine fostered his dadaistic aesthetic and the liberating anarchistic spirit, a strand that is evident in the



collective film project *En dag i staden*, (“A day in the city”, 1956), a film that is frequently screened. Although the setting is much the same as in previous Swedish experimental films that depicted modern, urban Stockholm, the sentiment is totally different. Hultén and his allies were disciples of the dadaist and surrealist vein that had created films like *Entr’acte*, they were not heirs of modernity as such, which most influential works were Vertov’s or Ruttmann’s futurist and expressionist visions of Leningrad and Berlin.

The length of *En dag i staden* is quite substantial, 19 minutes, and is mostly shot in Stockholm, although some of the footage is from Paris. Besides Hultén and Hans Nordenström (1927–2004), the architect Gösta Winberg (1928–2005) collaborated on the script. The film is an anarchistic collage that parodies various institutions: the king, the army, the Nationalmuseum (where Hultén began his career), administration and bureaucracy in general. Both Ultvedt and Tinguely act in the film creating a manifestation of the struggle against a rigid and conservative society. The film is also collage in terms of structure, a lot of different footage is reassembled, sometimes according to parameters of editing, sometimes according to rudimentary story lines. In sum, the film is both an anarchistic joke and a humorous attack on Sweden where Hultén and Nordenström always returned after their emancipatory dwellings in Paris or Nordenström’s beloved Greece.

Evidently most of the footage was shot by Nordenström. In a later film that he shot and edited by himself, part of the footage from *En dag i staden* reappears. It is likely that Nordenström’s untitled seven-minute film was never shown in public. It is a silent short and, in contrast to *En dag i staden*, lacks any overt story line. Still, there is a kind of framing: after an introductory shaky tracking shot in which the camera moves towards Stockholm Cathedral, alternating shots of Hultén and Nordenström follow. After this ‘introduction’ the film begins: an extensive number of shots which are images of Stockholm and its urban life follow each other generating an expressive collage of a city. Some of the footage is ordered into rhythmically-edited segments, other shots have a more expressive and realistic function, for example, footage taken from driving cars which immerse the viewer in the life and movement of a vibrant city. Occasionally, Nordenström plays with juxtaposition. Recurrent motifs are the Royal Castle, or footage of its main guard, as well as pictures showing Elizabeth II on her official visit to Sweden during the summer of 1956. Hence, the film is made in the same spirit as *En dag i staden* but with the significant difference that Nordenström’s own study also displays liberation of film language. Conventional footage alternates with rapid cutting, tilting and the camera spinning around 360 degrees. It is as if the vision of the film is to create a totally liberated experience, both content-wise and in terms of film language. A very telling image of the content of the film is a shot that displays

#### Frame enlargements from Hans Nordenström's unfinished Stockholm-film (1956).

the contrast between a mother walking on a hot summer day dressed in a heavy overcoat with her daughter beside her, walking joyfully, half-naked, wearing just a pair of trousers. This shot is one of the rare, ordinary composed segments in the film in terms of both composition and duration, which indicates that it is chosen because of the symbolism in the scene, contrasting the conservatism in adulthood with the anarchy and bliss of childhood.

As a filmmaker Hultén favoured animation. For him, animation was an extension of his interests in both kinetic and abstract art. He made only one film on his own, *X* (1954), all other filmic works were collaborations.

Hultén shot *X* in Paris in December 1954 borrowing Breer's camera. The film is a simple animation in which "X" refers to a pair of scissors which are introduced in the prologue of the film. *X* is a seven-minute tribute to editing, the motor of animation and the key to metamorphosis. Compared with Hultén, Nordenström preferred to use the camera for its ability to record and express, although he only made a few animations himself. Because Nordenström was originally an architect, his interest in environment, both as a liveable and aesthetic space, is quite consequential. One of his grand projects in which he aimed for a fusion of concrete or liveable space with that of formal and compositional beauty is an unfinished film about the Greek island

97 Mykonos, *Den vita staden* ("The white city"). In 1954, when he shot material

for the film, the island and the city were still untouched by tourism, and Nordenström treated it as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a place that constituted a unity integrating pure compositional qualities with concrete social values.

Besides the vast material that Nordenström shot – from which only a few films were finished – *Motto* is the most interesting. It was made together with some of his students at the Royal College of Art in the mid-1960s and is both a study in geometrical forms and of the architecture of the Royal Castle in Stockholm. The film alternates around the axis of the classical dichotomy of film aesthetics, that of editing and photographic representation. The castle is investigated through either cutting, by creating compositional relations and movement out of static objects such as statues, or by moving the camera, panning or tracking the space of the castle.

Whereas Breer, Hultén, Reuterswärd and Ultvedt were interested in the capability of film to create movement and metamorphosis, Nordenström embraced all the qualities of film, perhaps his eye for architecture made him especially sensitive to the realistic strand in film. It is evident in *Motto* that the aim is to display a whole space, both its formal characteristics and its social dimension. For Nordenström it is not limiting the film to an aesthetic experience of space: the extensive passages with a moving camera in and around the castle expand into a representation of architectural space as a site of power and social control. *Motto* ends with a critical depiction of the arrangement of a public reception due to the King's birthday.

Although Hultén, Nordenström, Reuterswärd and Ultvedt were friends their films were quite different. They were also all members of The Independent Film Group but they were not as dependent on it as other filmmakers. Hultén's institutional affiliations made him quite independent; and he was also the one who was in a position to secure a space for film as an art form among the Swedish art institutions. Discursively, what the workshop called experimental film was for these artists only one part of the contemporary art scene. They considered themselves, above all, as multi-media artists. However, when referring to the film material in letters, experimental and avant-garde film were used as synonyms, and they described their own films as non-commercial.<sup>272</sup>

### **A New Venue for Film: The Opening of Moderna Museet**

Before Moderna Museet opened in May 1958 – with an avant-garde film festival named “Apropå Eggeling” – screenings of various film programmes had taken place regularly for two years. One of the visions behind Moderna Museet was to establish a film collection, and film was considered as one of the cornerstones of modern art.<sup>273</sup> The screenings organized during 1956 and 1957, a film series that included work of Luis Buñuel, Joris Ivens and Georges

Franju, were run by the film society at Moderna Museet. It is telling that the new museum already had a film club before it actually opened. The plan was that in this way, the audience of the film society would constitute the first public target for contemporary art when the actual museum opened. This was an ideal choice because of the attractiveness of film in general and non-commercial or off-beat cinema in particular. Consequently, the first event at the new venue was a film festival, and in the editorial for the catalogue, Hultén pictured a promising and abundant future for film:

**In a couple of years probably no one will talk about film in the way they are doing it now. The concept of film will disappear. Film will be used in the same way as the printed word. The simple fact that the moving image is projected by an optic-mechanical apparatus will be no more of a common denominator than that all printed letters are printed on a printing press. There will be as many kinds of film as there are novels, newspapers, brochures, secret reports, essays and poems. And every kind will be considered as something separate in itself.<sup>274</sup>**

This vision of film beyond any established category and merging with art as such – an art that was not separated from everyday life – was an ideal that would develop during the early years of the activities and exhibitions at Moderna Museet. The museum's film society, run by Nils-Hugo Geber (b. 1924) and Hultén's wife Anna-Lena Wibom (b. 1933), organized extensive film programmes consisting of early film, classics of the historical avant-garde, contemporary film from all over the world and, of course, a special programme of Breer's films. Two extensive programmes of New American Cinema were arranged in 1962 and 1964. From a European point of view, this was early and well before the grand tour of New American Cinema in 1968 that covered most of the European countries and several university cities in each country.<sup>275</sup>

The 1950s was the most important decade for establishing Swedish experimental cinema. A peculiarity is that despite the fact that at the time when the so-called art cinema was born, there were no transgressions between the two spheres. While the film world of Ingmar Bergman became established as an international signifier of both Swedish film and international or European art cinema, the experimentalists received international recognition as well, albeit in different and miniscule venues. That Swedish minor cinema held an international position in the 1950s is also evident when browsing the catalogue for the competition in experimental film at the Brussels World Fair in April 1958. Out of ten Swedish films submitted six were accepted for the competition; only the USA, UK, France, Germany and Poland had more titles that were accepted by the jury. From a European perspective the Swedish scene seemed well established.

# **The Art Move- ments of the 1960s: Film and the Art Scene**

## **Billy Klüver and the New Art of the 1960s**

Among critics and artists the 1960s is considered as the decade when provincial Sweden opened up to the rest of the world.<sup>276</sup> The event that became a symbol for the change was the exhibition “Rörelse i konsten” (“Movement in art”) that had its grand opening at Moderna Museet in May 1961. The director of the museum, Pontus Hultén, had calculated with controversy and chose, therefore, to place the initial exhibition in Amsterdam at the cutting edge Stedelijk.<sup>277</sup> The first catalogues, therefore, were printed in Dutch in Stockholm, but despite the precautions taken, the exhibition created a fierce debate when it finally reached Sweden. Movement in Art was questioned both by the cultural establishment and the general public, and was defended foremost by the elite of the Swedish vanguard, for example, Öyvind Fahlström and the leading critic, Ulf Linde (b. 1929). As expected, the controversy raised the interest further of the audience, turning the exhibition into a must-see for those who were either interested in it as such or in the discourse and scandal around the show.<sup>278</sup>

One of the key collaborators behind the exhibition was Billy Klüver (1927–2004), an old friend of Hultén and a former member of the board of the significant film club at Stockholm University College. Klüver left Sweden for the USA in 1954, and after remarkable promotion at Berkeley, moved to the Bell laboratories in New Jersey in order to work as an engineer. Klüver assisted Hultén at Moderna Museet throughout the 1960s with extensive and popular exhibitions or events on contemporary American art which brought people like Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Jonas Mekas to Stockholm. Klüver also made a name for himself in the New York art scene. Originally encouraged by Hultén, he engaged with emergent artists in New York as soon as he moved to New Jersey and assisted a number of significant artists in their use of new technology: Rauschenberg, Yvonne Rainer, Jasper Johns, and Cage among others.

According to Anne Collins Goodyear, Klüver never aimed at merging science and art. He considered himself to be an engineer who could inspire, create and form meeting places in which scientists familiar with current technology could get together with artists who had an eye and an ear for what was happening in contemporary society and culture. But, Klüver was convinced that the actual world of the scientist and that of the artist, were distinctively separate spheres.<sup>279</sup> When it came to concepts and ideas though, Klüver envisioned a common agenda. In a modest but innovative and unconventional catalogue, which Klüver edited together with Allan Kaprow for the exhibition “Art 1963/A New Vocabulary”, Klüver wrote that “I am afraid of the consequences of a science which is built on concepts like symmetry, invariance, uniqueness, time and beauty. I would love it if the purpose of science was to create surprise, nonsense, humour, pleasure, and play”.<sup>280</sup> The statement is

worth noting. While it not only concurs with Jean Tinguely's artistic project, one of Hultén's all-time favourites (Klüver was one of the assistants on Tinguely's project "Homage to New York" at MOMA in 1960 that was also filmed by Robert Breer), Klüver's vision is an expression of that playful, anarchistic and buoyant ideal that had brought together the different people that gathered around Hultén in the 1950s, a spirit and stance they could both share and develop.<sup>281</sup> Klüver's entry on "embrace" from *Art 1963/A New Vocabulary* is, therefore, telling:

**[...] to accept all possibilities that come up; to use them to their advantage or yours. No thing, theory, method, chance, accident is a priori unacceptable in music, art, sculpture, happenings. Everything can be used, even the 'accident' (do not see accident) [which in the entry refers to Billy Klüver]. Everything is allowed. But in the end the artist chooses and you choose.<sup>282</sup>**

It was also this attitude, then, that would find its primary place of production and creation in the activities at the Moderna Museet. The unconventional environment and open-minded attitude soon fostered numerous art movements that were characterized by multi-medial realization. In terms of the discourses used it is significant that the diverse art scene made the characterization 'experimental film' redundant. Art was now suddenly experimental as such, and every film that was projected as part of the events was thus simply art.

### **Venues of the Avant-garde: Fylkingen, Pistolteatern and Marionetteatern**

One of the established Swedish organizations that soon began to collaborate with Moderna Museet was Fylkingen, originally founded in 1933 in order to offer an opportunity for young and non-established musicians to perform (in order to guarantee that the society remained dynamic and innovative you were not allowed to be a member of the board for more than ten years).<sup>283</sup> Fylkingen had already stirred up Sweden's music life in the 1950s by playing Schönberg, Stockhausen and Webern, and began to promote electronic music in the late 1950s (Fahlström lectured at Fylkingen on electronic music in 1957). It was not until the early years of the 1960s that the board decided to endorse an experimental attitude in full, a period when composers and musicians like Ralph Lundsten and Jan W. Morthenson became interested in film. The change in policy at Fylkingen resulted in an interest to include diverse media performances in its activities, not only to focus on traditional instrumental music. Performances in 1960 and 1961 by John Cage and Nam June Paik, respectively, were influential pointers. In 1962, Bengt af Klintberg (b.

1938), a leading figure in the miniscule Swedish Fluxus scene, made a happening where he showed a looped film strip.<sup>284</sup> The film was projected on a black canvas and the image slowly emerged while Klintberg painted the background white. The following year, 1963, Fylkingen screened their first film programme under the title, “Films with electronic sound”, and in 1964 Sweden received its first permanent venue for open theatre and performances, Pistolteatern in Stockholm.<sup>285</sup>

Both Fylkingen and Pistolteatern became important sites for the Swedish avant-garde, introducing happenings and pioneering sound poetry by authors like Åke Hodell (1919–2000) and Bengt Emil Johnson (b. 1936). One of the hallmarks of Pistolteatern were film projections which were integral to the plays or happenings performed. Most of the film material used was shot by Anders Wahlgren (b. 1946) or Carl Slättne.

Another vanguard institution at the time was the puppet theatre in Stockholm, Marionetteatern, founded in 1958 by the Polish-born Michael Meschke (b. 1931). In terms of aesthetics, the puppet theatre had a lot in common with film; although being a live performance the stand-ins for actual people, the puppets, created a fundamental distance to what was being depicted, hence the focus on technological means of representation such as lighting and sound as well as a dramaturgy that facilitated the tableaux and visual composition. Meschke developed on a parallel track similar to Peter Weiss; a background in continental culture and a personal integrity that cohered better with audience expectation of continental Europe than that of Sweden. Meschke also had a profound interest in film and documented several of the plays of the puppet theatre on 16mm. The short films are usually carefully edited and photographed, and constitute both glimpses of the actual play and works in their own right. For the staging in 1964 of one of Marionetteaterns biggest international successes, Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*, Meschke collaborated with Franciska Themerson. Franciska and Stephan Themerson were also born in Poland and had made significant experimental films in Poland and England in the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>286</sup>

Meschke made a few films by himself, most notably the surrealist and violent short *Luogo Candido* and a memorial to the twentieth-century history of Prague in an impetuously edited short named *Prag69* (both from 1969). *Luogo Candido*, showing a group of nuns clashing and fighting in the ancient Roman town of Sperlonga in Italy, has a highly innovative soundscape composed by Karl-Erik Welin (1934–92). Welin was throughout the 1960s one of the key figures of the Swedish vanguard music scene closely allied with Moderna Museet, Fylkingen and the electronic music studio, EMS, at the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. Welin also performed in different Fluxus settings in Sweden and abroad.



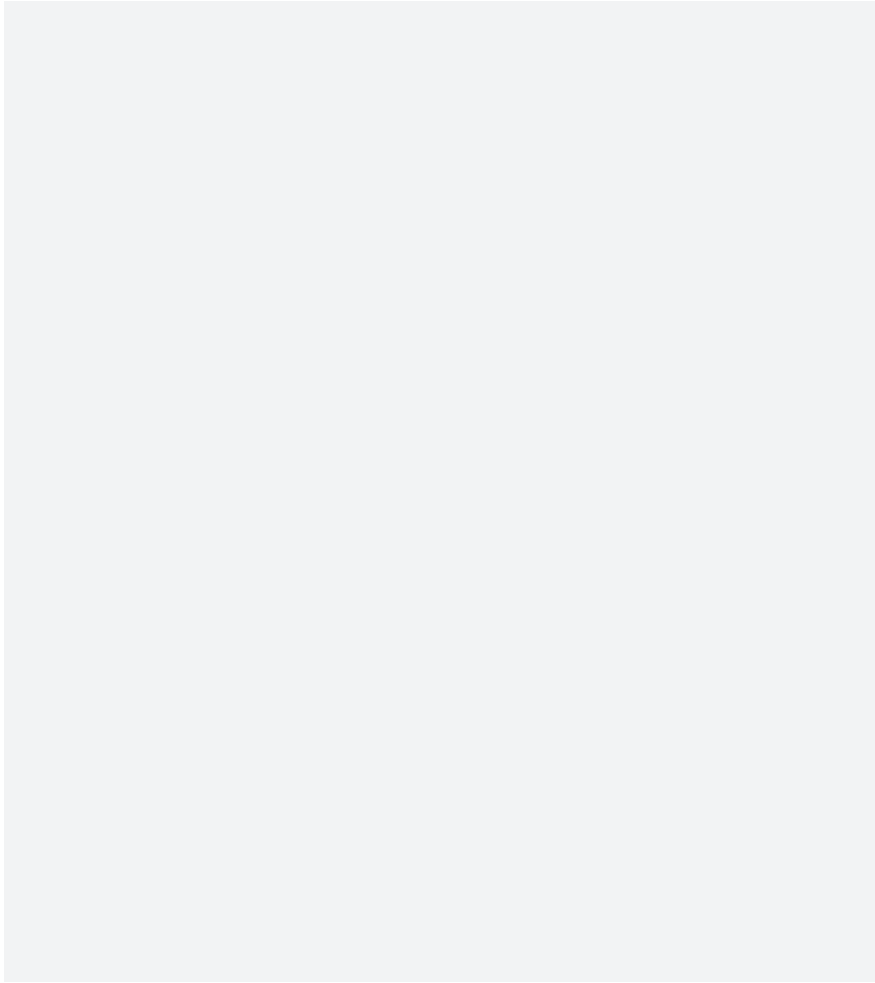
Like Welin's personal trajectory, the venues of Fylkingen, Pistolteatern and Marionetteatern never made any consistent contribution to Swedish experimental film culture. They were sites for different events to take place and momentarily film used the space, but there was never any continual commitment to film. In fact, in that way they were rather typical, supporting the view that the history of Swedish experimental film culture was a history of ruptures and changes, of different small histories that have their own chronology and time span.

### **Regional Avant-garde and Beyond**

The Fluxus and Situationist movements had a certain stronghold in southern Sweden. Waves of modern art had paved the way. The regional avant-garde of Skåne within painting and sculpture had its breakthrough in the final years of the war, when the young artists Max Walter Swanberg (1912–94), C. O. Hultén (b. 1916) and Anders Österlin (b. 1926) constituted the imaginists, a movement influenced by Danish and Swedish surrealism.<sup>287</sup> Another important marker was the exhibition “Skånsk Avantgardekonst” in the city of Malmö in 1949.<sup>288</sup> Many artists had personal or professional connections with the Danish scene, and through the post-war period, the artist's contacts between Denmark and the region of Skåne were substantial, for example, in the Cobra-group.<sup>289</sup>

The Danish painter Jørgen Nash introduced Situationist ideas and the Fluxus movement into Sweden, and in 1961 started a collective workshop in the Skåne village Örkelljunga called Drakabygget.<sup>290</sup> The Situationism of Nash developed autonomously in relation to the French movement, but was not an insular Scandinavian endeavour. Several international artists worked together with Nash and his group, for example, the Japanese Fluxus artist, Yoshio Nakajima.<sup>291</sup> Nash and Drakabygget functioned as an impressive, dynamic centre for a regional and, at the same time, transnational art movement with exhibitions and happenings in Örkelljunga as well as in the Danish capital, Copenhagen.

The Scandinavian Situationists were intermedial in their approach, producing performances, paintings, sculptures, poetry and, to some extent, films. Their journal, *Drakabygget*, commented continuously on films and happenings with film shows involved, and there were drafts for planned film productions.<sup>292</sup> Film was a given topic when the new art was discussed, and film was often used as an example of new forms of communication and expression, but the actual output, in terms of edited and distributed film reels, was not overwhelming. Jørgen Nash and his Danish friend Jens Jørgen Thorsen made some shorts, and there were other films made, but when reading the docu-



Poster for the Situationist festival in Örkelljunga 1964 announcing Jörgen Nash's *Det gådefulde smils kavalkade* (1964).

ments and manifestos it seems that the cultural contexts were more important than single film projects.

Some of the films were screened at the two Situationist festivals that were held in Örkelljunga in 1964 and nearby Halmstad in 1965, most notably, *Det gådefulde smils kavalkade* (“The cavalcade of the enigmatic smile”, 1964) by Nash and Swedish artist Sture Johannesson (b. 1935), an ironic exposé of mail order catalogues. When accused of banality, Nash replied: “Our films are a conscious effort to take care of our most common, intimate banalities”.<sup>293</sup>

105 Several loosely classical Danish avant-garde films were also screened at the festivals, for example, films by the surrealist artist Wilhelm Freddie and his

companion, documentary filmmaker, Jørgen Roos, who co-directed *Det definitive Afslag paa Anmodningen om et Kys* (“The definitive rejection of a proposal for a kiss”, 1949) and *Spiste Horisonter* (“Eaten horizons”, 1950). Freddie was prosecuted for pornography in Denmark, and was, therefore, a heroic figure in the Situationist circles. It is no accident that one of the festival films that attracted most attention was *Pornoshop* (1965) by Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Niels Holt and Novi Maruni. When it was shown in Halmstad, the police made a raid. “But”, as Thorsen later told the story, “when they were on their way to the movie house, we exchanged the film for a reel of Donald Duck, which they confiscated”.<sup>294</sup> The critical reception of the films was not overwhelmingly enthusiastic, and even among more positive reviews, there was scepticism, especially concerning the gap between the rhetorically-expressed ambitions of the films and the actual results.<sup>295</sup>

Lunds Konsthall, the municipal art gallery of Lund, near Malmö, was an important venue for new art and media forms at the time. At the exhibition “Människa nu” (“Human now”) in 1967 there was an ambitious film programme with works by contemporary experimental filmmakers, both Swedish and foreign. In 1969 a new exhibition of underground art was proposed, but the poster designed by Johannesson, which showed a naked girl smoking cannabis, was so provocative, that the director of the gallery was forced to resign, and the exhibition never opened.<sup>296</sup> The debacle around the underground exhibition was in a paradoxical way a great success, but at the same time, it meant that the opportunity to exhibit and receive an audience was closed. The end of the 1960s also meant that the art happenings of groups like the Situationists were overshadowed by new political movements. Even if Drakabygget and their film practices survived for several years after 1968, they were out of focus in the public sphere.

Besides the Drakabygget workshop, there were several individual artists in southern Sweden who made original contributions to experimental film, such as Åke Arenhill and Leo Reis. Another noteworthy filmmaker is the writer and musician Sture Dahlström (1922–2001) who wrote several novels influenced by the beat writers but with a clearly individual touch. Together with his wife, painter Anna-Stina Ehrenfeldt (1927–2003), and his son, sculptor Håkan Dahlström (b. 1952), Sture Dahlström made a series of shorts, “Hög-hastighetsfilm” (“High velocity film”), from 1968 onwards, marked by dark humour, often with open references to the early avant-garde.

### **Carl Slättne and the Poetry of Politics and Place**

The southern Swedish filmmaker Carl Slättne (b. 1937), working within public service television as well as within avant-garde workshops, is a transgres-

sive artist. He has articulated regional as well as global problems, making political and controversial documentaries in an experimental form, in many ways an *auteur* but almost unknown to the public.<sup>297</sup> Slättne grew up on a farm outside Kristianstad, and went to Lund to study natural sciences, but soon moved to Stockholm where he was accepted as a student in the pioneering film editing school at the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. During training, and after graduation, Slättne worked as an editor at the television news desk, and from 1968, was a producer in public service television until he left in 1982 and started a film production company of his own, mainly producing documentaries.

Slättne was one of the filmmakers working with Pistolteatern and its multimedial projects. He was influenced by the Fluxus movement, and especially the American, Ken Dewey, who made several happenings at Pistolteatern, but his interest in formal and stylistic experiments was always connected with political concerns. He was one of the founding fathers of FilmCentrum (“Film Centre”), the organisation which functioned as an arena for politically radical and experimental filmmakers, and gave opportunities for independent production and distribution. As a television producer, Slättne promoted a left-wing perspective, and made quite a scandal with an historical account of the Swedish labour movement, which was considered as far too radical and critical, *Från socialism till ökad jämlikhet* (“From socialism to enhanced equality” 1970–71, 8 parts) together with Hans O. Sjöström (b. 1939) and a group of independent Marxist scholars.<sup>298</sup> He produced several films that caused debate within the Left, and several films and programmes which were never broadcast, for example, in 1973 when he researched the famous and much discussed registration of political opinions which the Swedish Social Democratic party performed together with the Swedish secret police, and in 2002 when he returned to television in order to direct a documentary on

**Carl Slättne, *En film – En AntiFilm*  
– *En FilmFilm* (1964).**

forestry and environmental policies in Sweden, *Några bilder bara i väntan på mörkret* (“Just some images while waiting for darkness”). His view of domestic forestry was so dark and almost apocalyptic that the project was stopped.

As a filmmaker Slättne worked with a kind of intellectual montage, editing found footage together with new material, and always adding a complex soundtrack often elaborating with an ironic and distanced voice-over commentary. The narrative is unpredictable, with a Brechtian openness, an epic theatre of sorts for the screen. He made his breakthrough at the Drakabygget festivals where his *AntiFilm* was hailed, and where he also screened *Amen* (1964), a film for two unsynchronized projectors.<sup>299</sup> His filmography is heterogeneous, multifaceted, and sometimes enigmatic, containing forbidden or banned projects as well as great successes. His most well-known short is *AntiFilm* or, as it was originally called, *En Film – En AntiFilm – En FilmFilm* (“A Film – an AntiFilm – a FilmFilm”) in 1964. The film, inspired by the contemporary American avant-garde, was produced by the independent group Svenska Filmliigan (“The Swedish film mob”) and has been interpreted as an attack on the film establishment, especially of Harry Schein, head of the Swedish Film Institute. The 5-minute long *AntiFilm* shows a young woman running across a muddy field, while several voices on the sound track talk about the TV bourgeoisie and deliver nonsensical information about film and politics, echoing Gertrude Stein with the motto, “A film is a film is a film”. The images of the barren field are reminiscent of the end of *Hägringen* by Peter Weiss; the desperation within modern society seems to drive the protagonists out to the deserted margins of the cities. In the case of Slättne, the relation between urban and rural is a recurring theme. Several of his later films deal with life in the countryside of Skåne, and he produced some more traditional films documenting rural and working life, for example, *I träets tid* (“In the age of the wood”, 2005) and *Kätting* (“Chain”, 2005), several of them co-directed by his wife, Karin Slättne (b. 1942).

Maybe the film which is most emblematic of his oeuvre is the satirical short *Protokoll fört vid studiet av ett sönderfallande system – något om Sveriges Radios förhållande till staten* (“Protocol from the study of a decaying system – something about Swedish Broadcasting Corporation and its relationship to the state”, 1971) which is a poem about Sweden and its rulers and, at the same time, in its associative flow, a reflection on the ontology of film within consumer society: “Illusion is nice. And moreover: It is useful”.

### **Music and Film: Jan W. Morthenson and Ralph Lundsten**

The music scene and electronic experiments, in particular, proved to be significant for Swedish experimental film culture. It was mainly electronic music that finally stimulated musicians and composers to take up filmmaking, most-

ly because the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation (SR), provided a setting in which music and image could meet. Fylkingen had built an electronic music studio in 1961, and in 1964, SR built its own studio and hired people from Fylkingen in order to run it. SR had significantly bigger budgets and offered an environment in which the artists were allowed to explore and experiment. Thus there was no reason why the musicians and composers would not begin to work for television.

The economical and institutional resources at SR enabled experiments by both young musicians as well as established composers. The electronic music studio, EMS, became a place that produced interesting and groundbreaking Swedish work.<sup>300</sup> It was also because of EMS that composers like Jan W. Morthenson (b. 1940) began to work with film, and although much of the work done encompassed electronic manipulation of the image, it was filmic in a definite sense as 16mm was the major film format used by television throughout the 1960s.

In 1964 Morthenson was commissioned to compose music for three art works by Olle Baertling (1911–81), *Kompositioner för television* (“Compositions for television”), a 12-minute programme in which Morthenson’s non-figurative music and a moving camera accentuates Baertling’s compositions.<sup>301</sup> In *Kompositioner för television*, the camera never shows the art objects in total, it thus denies the act of representing. Instead, the camera follows lines and grains, foregrounding qualities in Baertling’s work, showing the intrinsic dynamics. Moreover, the close-ups and the non-figurative music stress the depiction as being, foremost, a temporal experience in which you listen to the music for its own qualities while following a line, a form or seeing the texture of a painting.<sup>302</sup> In this sense, *Kompositioner för television* differs from Morthenson’s later films which approach both image and music from a meta-perspective. Although *Kompositioner för television* is also a negation of the representational function of the image, it is not as clearly a meta-reflection as Morthenson’s later works. His meta-music, music about music, found its equivalent in the use of found footage, a common feature of the films he made in the 1970s, especially *Musik till en filmscen* (“Music for a film scene”, 1971) and *Variationer över en filmscen hos Visconti* (“Variations on a film scene by Visconti”, 1972). Both are explicit re-appropriations. An interesting transitional piece in this regard is *Distanser* (“Distances”, 1969), a film made for television in which pictures of a sterile landscape fade in and fade out changing between being in focus or blurred. The work is pioneering in its critique of the medium; it is a broadcast film that is an overt attack on the popular genre of nature documentaries, alienating both viewer and listener from the ordinary TV experience. Morthenson’s work is also a symptomatic piece, a work from the era of early public service television, the decades of state enlightenment and education.

The anti-representational aesthetic in *Distanser* is perhaps more evident in Morthenson's later work such as *Musik till en filmscen*. The film consists of stills and scenes from classical silent movies that are represented as projected images on a screen. The camera moves consistently in relation to the screen, tracking forward, tracking backwards, changing focus and occasionally making awkward movements, horizontally, back and forth, or, even spinning round distorting the projected image. The continuously moving camera is accompanied by Arnold Schönberg's *Opus 34* (1930), the complete title of which is "Accompaniment to a Film-Scene". The film may be considered both as a critique of filmic representation and as a tribute to silent film history. The anti-representational stance is stressed by the use of recycled clips, clichés and glimpses of a bygone film world, momentarily interrupted by sections of black leader.

In *Variationer över en filmscen hos Visconti*, Morthenson uses a high-speed camera shooting a sample of seconds from Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* (1971) using the original score, Mahler's popular Adagietto from the Fifth Symphony. The effect is both meta-reflective and melodramatic; the content of the film becomes 'stolen' by the music, but the movement in slow motion stresses the sheer (melo)drama. Whereas the original music accompanied the melodramatic film and, therefore, supported the narrative, Morthenson re-appropriates the music from the film, stressing its own structure, temper and feeling while also returning a more sincere melodramatic content to the original scene. The effect is that of a close analysis of the film, but in sound and pictures only.

Perhaps, because of these playful exercises, the most traditionally filmic of all Morthenson's works is *Camera Humana* (1972). It is subtitled "Fragments for a consciousness of space", and is an overt, yet associative, study in space and depth that encompasses sound and timbre, radio sampling and diversely mixed footage of visual representations of space. The film which departs from relations between pure geometrical forms and untainted sounds ends with depictions of staged spaces of a consumer society, images that finally lead to pictures of the famous Capuchin crypt in Rome, stressing the absurdity of much of man-made space and culture. In contrast to Morthenson's earlier work, *Camera Humana* does not establish sound or music as the obvious master discourse. The film displays a constant change between the visual and the auditory, and the associative editing encourages the viewer to make his own choices. The footage is also overtly indexical while the film is a reflection on visual representations of space.

Compared with Morthenson, Ralph Lundsten (b. 1936) is quite the reverse. Both his music and films are based on intuition, and convey a romantic, expressive world-view. His first film, *Främmande planet* ("Alien world", 1963),

was co-made with Rolf Nilson (b. 1939) who drew or painted directly on the film strip. The storyboard was based on a music score that Lundsten had composed in 1960. The film is a colourful and joyful exploration of sound and vision that receives its full force from the hand-painted celluloid. The film is with, D. N. Rodowick's words, made into a "painterly object" that stresses succession, projection and duration, and reaches beyond the act of representation while the film in fact is not camera produced.<sup>303</sup> In fact, such an aesthetic is well in tune with music; the drawings are mere direct traces, not depictions, a constant extension in time of material lines, compositions and figures that become envisioned on the screen. The time-based experience is stressed even further by the electronic score that always finds new tracks and paths to explore. *Främmande planet* was followed by *Kontrast* ("Contrast", 1965) and *Transcendent Variation I* and *Transcendent Variation II* (both 1966), all co-made with Nilson and very similar in scope and structure to their first film.

Lundsten's joyful and optimistic early films stand in stark contrast to Morthenson's negation of the exploitation and trivialization of nature and scenery on television in *Distanser*. However, the material freshness of *Främmande planet* is lost in Lundsten's later and more well-known films *EMS 1* (1966), a futuristic audio-visual piece, and *Hjärtat brinner* ("Burning heart", 1967), an expressive, even kitschy, collage of controversial footage of love-making and death. Both films were highly revered at the time, and received awards from the Swedish Film Institute.

Lundsten's familiarity with both film and music technology made him an important figure during the 1960s, although he later broke with the composers at the electronic music studio. He did, however, edit and create the image effects in the film, *Altisonans* (1966), made by one of Sweden's most influential post-war composers, Karl-Birger Blomdahl (1916-68). The idea behind *Altisonans* is simply that

Ralph Lundsten and Rolf Nilson,  
*Främmande planet* (1963).



“everything sounds” (“Allt-i-sonans”), and Blomdahl wanted to create a film that envisioned such an experience. The music consists of taped recordings of birds singing and signals from space satellites. Blomdahl never regarded his work for television as a film but as a “composition of sounds and pictures which is connected in its entirety to the world of radiation”.<sup>304</sup>

The most important individual artist to emerge from the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation is Ture Sjölander (b. 1937), a prolific and multifaceted photographer, painter and filmmaker. Together with Bror Wikström (b. 1931), Lars Weck (b. 1938) and Sven Inge (1935–2008), he was a pioneer in electronic art and new media in Swedish Television.<sup>305</sup> Sjölander is mostly remembered for the two short films or ‘electronic paintings’, *Time* (1966) and *Monument* (1968), and the ‘space opera’, *Space in the Brain* (1969).<sup>306</sup> *Monument* was widely recognised and distributed. It is based on clippings and slides, recorded on videotape and then processed onto film. Gene Youngblood, who sees the film as a breakthrough for video art, describes the technical process and its thematic implications in *Expanded Cinema*:

**[...] the frequency and amplitude of the flying-spot deflection was controlled by applying tones from the wave-form generators. Thus image distortions occurred during**

the actual process of transforming original image material into video signals [...] The result is an oddly beautiful collection of image sequences unlike any other video art. We see the Beatles, Charlie Chaplin, Picasso, the Mona Lisa, the King of Sweden, and other famous figures distorted with a kind of insane electronic disease.<sup>307</sup>

There was a book-length study published on *Monument* with images and comments.<sup>308</sup> In the book one can read a statement by Ture Sjölander and Lars Weck where they made clear that the aim of the film was to “demonstrate the relativity in man’s perception of pictures, images, and symbols, framed by an outlining of the director’s conception of human communication in modern society.”<sup>309</sup> Youngblood makes a point of this aspect: “More than an experiment in image-making technologies, *Monument* became an experiment in communication. *Monument* became an image-generator: newspapers, magazines, posters, record albums. . .”<sup>310</sup>

The experiments performed by Sjölander and his contemporaries were, in retrospect, less influential for experimental film and its visual language than for electronic art, including holograms and diverse forms of computerized visual technologies. The electronic rays of *Monument* were indeed projected into the future.

### **Lennart Ehrenborg and Eric M. Nilsson: The Creative Producer and his Director**

When the Swedish Broadcasting Company, SR, started to produce television in the 1950s, it had an educational, almost didactic approach. There were ambitious plans for several kinds of cultural project.<sup>311</sup> One strand was the reviewing and introduction of contemporary film.<sup>312</sup> Another was financial and artistic support for new filmmakers. In both aspects Lennart Ehrenborg (b. 1923) was important as a creative producer, generously opening his office for young talent and new ideas.

Ehrenborg was involved in the first television broadcasting tests at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm in 1954, and was, for some years, a production assistant at the film company, Artfilm.<sup>313</sup> In 1956 the television branch of SR established a film department with Ehrenborg as head. Ehrenborg turned out to be an innovative and informal producer, finding new ways of reaching an audience, and also with a deep interest in film as art and art as film. One device was competitions, open for both professionals and amateurs, for new experimental scripts and films.<sup>314</sup> More important, however, was how he turned his department into a workshop for young aspiring directors.

There were many individuals, projects and different departments that were involved in this pivotal moment in Swedish experimental visual culture.

Morthenson and Lundsten are inevitable names, but also important are the pioneers Lia Schubert (1926–99) and Hans Lagerkvist (1923–91) who as early as 1963 made sophisticated experiments with the television screen space using special effects in the remarkable *Electronics. Dansmönster i Folkviseton* (“Electronics. Dance patterns in folk music key”). Producer and photographer Måns Reuterswärd (b. 1932) was involved in most of the productions at SR, at the time, that encompassed cutting edge technology, for example, Morthenson’s *Distanser* and *Electronics*. In many ways Reuterswärd was the equivalent to Ehrenborg at the film department.

Eric M. Nilsson (b. 1935) was the most prolific among the young directors at the SR film department, and his work presents quite another profile, transforming other aspects of cinematic language, most of them connected to the documentary tradition in film history. Nilsson was born in Brussels where his father was a director at the Belgian branch of a Swedish industrial firm; therefore French was to be his first language. He graduated from IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques) where he studied film direction, and was one of the young documentarists supported by Ehrenborg. Ehrenborg hired him in his film department at SR where Nilsson functioned as producer and director for some years, until he left in 1967 to become freelance. Nilsson has over the years directed well over 100 films, most of them shorts, several of them provocative and controversial, some of them rather original. He also contributed to linking experimental film culture with the Film Centre movement where he was one of the main figures during the formative years at the end of the 1960s.<sup>315</sup> He was awarded a prize by the Swedish Film Institute in 1978 for his efforts to “widen the borders of the documentary”.

Eric M. Nilsson is constantly occupied with the problems of communication and understanding. His visual language is often clear and modest – his first impulses were from *cinéma vérité* – but the images and sequences are put together in a montage that effectively disrupts conventional narrative unity, a process which is underpinned by the voice-over which, at times, is contrasted with the visual and sometimes confirms it, almost to the point of redundancy. This creates an unstable cinematic universe where the question of truth is in focus but never answered. His first shorts, for example *Kök* (“Kitchen”, 1963) and *Om en cirkus* (“About a circus”, 1965) are efforts to approach a physical reality and the interaction between individuals. Some of his films have been portraits of loners, solitary individuals, like *Hos Georges* (“At Georges”, 1966), which documents everyday life in a bookshop, or *Profeten* (“The prophet”, 1984) which deals with a catholic priest working in the most protestant part of France. In *Eleonoras testamente* (“The testament of Eleonora”, 1967) Nilsson created an early ‘mockumentary’ where he made a parody on cultural journalism in television. Some of his films have been openly autobiographical

like *Kameliapojken* (“The camelia boy”, 1983) and *Dubbla verkligheter* (“Double realities”, 1995). In the latter, he returns to his childhood in wartime Belgium and the experience of fear and hiding.

There is in Eric M. Nilsson an affinity with the works of, for example, Chris Marker; he turned the documentary into an intellectual and ironic stream of consciousness, reflecting human memory and human language, but never codifying his efforts into a coherent style. Nilsson seems to remain ‘the thin man’ of Swedish film, jumping from one position to another, refusing to stand still.

### **The Expanded Field of Experimental Film**

The films by Karl-Birger Blomdahl, Ralph Lundsten and Jan W. Morthenson are discursively and conceptually interesting. Most of their films would never have been produced without the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation and its music department. The films by Blomdahl and Morthenson were also primarily considered as music programmes, or art programmes, not as films – at least not as experimental films – although *Altisonans* was shown at the Knokke festival in 1967–68. Also Ehrenborg considered himself foremost as a producer of artfilms, of films about art or films that were artworks in themselves. Lundsten’s *EMS 1* won a prize at the art biennale in Paris in 1967 thus stressing that the art scene was the discursive field for that practice. On the other hand, Lundsten’s more popular and accessible work was encouraged by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) that saw his films as first-rate examples of ‘artistic short films’. It is also because of the Film Institute, then, that a discourse on the ‘short film’ enters the cultural public sphere and more or less incorporates that of the experimental discourse. The Film Institute began to handle all film that was not of feature length as simply short film. The result was that ‘experimental’ became marginalized while ‘short film’ emerged as the dominant category. SFI provided special funding and awards for short film and the Institute’s film school produced mostly short films that were widely reviewed in the film journals.

The way the films by Blomdahl, Lundsten and Morthenson were considered is without doubt indicative of the fact that experimental film was becoming a very marginal concept at the time in Sweden. Thus, it hardly constituted a field in Bourdieu’s sense, despite the efforts of The Independent Film Group. Later the concept of art cinema and short film subsumed most of the experimental discourse, treating it as part of an *auteur*’s oeuvre or as one sub-genre of short film. The discourse on minor cinemas in the 1950s led into the emergence of a field of experimental film but, when the influential institutions, that is, the Swedish Film Institute and Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, entered the scene, the field changed again and was redefined. The growth of

the art scene further challenged experimental film culture, and the Film Group with its marginal resources became even more marginalized. Another fact that changed the situation from the 1950s is that during the 1960s artists, key figures like Ultvedt, Nordenström and Livada began to teach at art schools and therefore had less time for their own filmmaking. Although film never made it into the regular curriculum, film became one optional medium among many to choose from. Still, it was the most underrated medium and the least used.

One interesting film, though, that came out of these new crossovers is an early performance piece, *N* (1967), that has been dedicated to Anne Robertsson (b. 1942) but it is mostly Livada's own work. The film was probably shot in 1963 or 1964 and was inspired by a short story written by Robertsson when she was a student at The University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. Livada, who was teaching part-time at the school, decided to make a film based on the short story after Robertsson had shown it to him. The narrative expresses both the desires and wishes of a young woman, and Livada wanted Robertsson to perform in the film. The film consists simply of one shot of Robertsson making a bed. The sound is based on two tracks, one with Robertsson reading the original story while the other track is played in reverse. When the bed is finished, the film is finished too. The effect is that of creating both an early feminist performance showing the stark contrast between the story and the act (the setting is plain and dull, the work done routinely) and a male fantasy: peeping into the mind of a young girl while she is preparing a bed. The contrasting soundtracks underscore this double bind. The film was finished later and not screened until 1967; and then without Livada ever notifying or showing the final cut to Robertsson.

**Mihail Livada and Anne Robertsson, *N* (1967).**

Livada continued working at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design and Ultvedt at Kungliga Konsthögskolan, (Royal University Col-

lege of Fine Arts). Whenever students who were interested in film turned up, Livada and Ultvedt used their network to support and encourage the filmmakers, and from time to time work materialized. Ultvedt also installed facilities for making animation at the College of Fine Arts but, film and film teaching was never an integral part of the studies at the school or in other fine arts institutions in Sweden at the time.

Livada continued being an important supporter and link for different groups and people. Because of his position at The Independent Film Group, he was able to help in co-financing films like *Rondo* (1967) by Peter Blomberg (b. 1947), Bodil Johansson and Erik Rathie (b. 1944), and *Flirr* (1967) by Eva Delving (b. 1936). *Rondo* is a funny live-action capture of a brush painting a moving turntable while Delving's film is a poetic and romantic film depicting the feelings and discoveries of a girl, a film that in an interesting way echoes Gunvor Nelson's seminal *My Name is Oona* (1969).<sup>316</sup> Ultvedt's own workshop at the College of Fine Arts encouraged students to work with film. For example, the animated footage that is used in the controversial political documentary *Rekordåren 1967, 1968, 1969* (1968) was made by Ultvedt's students. And two students at the Royal College of Art, Jan Håfström (b. 1937) and Claes Söderquist (b. 1939), who both studied painting, later made significant contributions to Swedish experimental film.

### **Jan Håfström and Claes Söderquist: Matter and Memory**

Jan Håfström is foremost known as a painter and sculptor, one of the most important of his generation. In an autobiographical statement he explains why he turned for a while to film:

[...] I was interested in *time*, the complicated feeling that arises when you travel in time and lose the contact with your own present, swallowed by the stream of time. Time as representing something supra-individual, something like the "system" of Foucault with causes and effects beyond the human.<sup>317</sup>

As an art student and painter, Håfström worked with time and representations of the past, and started to collect old photographs and magazines. He found some stacks of the French *fin de siècle* journal, *Le génie civil*, which was the starting point for a film he made together with his friend, Claes Söderquist, during the spring of 1967. Söderquist operated the camera, and they edited the film together. The film consists of stills portraying technological wonders from an era of great expectations: railway stations, factories, machines, scientific instruments, bridges. It had a TV screening on the public service channel in March 1968, and was later distributed by Film Centre. Håf-

ström then made *Orientalen* (“The orient”) on his own, a new attempt to understand and illustrate the processes of time and memory. Håfström’s grandmother had suffered a brain haemorrhage, and his views of her loss of memory inspired him to seek representations of memory and its decay in museums and old journals. The film ends in an encyclopaedic overview of eurocentric imagery of nature and culture, where the Other, the Orient, turns into a haunting image. *Le génie civil* and *Orientalen* won critical acclaim for the critique of Western civilisation and technology, and stand out as highly original works in a semi-documentary vein, classics in an unstable canon.

Jan Håfström then co-wrote the feature film, *Den magiska cirkeln* (“The magic circle”, Per Berglund 1970), and returned to filmmaking in 1976 with a short fiction film he wrote and directed with Anders Wahlgren. *Dömd till dårhus* (“Condemned to madhouse”) is a story about the Swedish painter Carl Graffman (1802–62) and his sad life. Håfström has become one of the most important painters and sculptors of his generation. He no longer works with film, but his art is still woven into the intertextuality of popular culture, film magic and dreams of science and technology.<sup>318</sup>

Håfström’s companion Claes Söderquist is prominent, both as an artist in his own right and as a vital curator and promoter of experimental film in Sweden. He studied at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design as well as at the Royal University College of Fine Arts during the 1960s in order to train as a painter, but was soon involved in filmmaking, and made his debut with the short, *I frack* (“White tie”), in 1964. The film won a competition arranged by the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, and was made on a small budget together with friends Curt Hillfon (b. 1943) as cinematographer and Arne Högsander (b. 1940) as actor. The film deals with the planning of a theatrical performance. A puppeteer makes his dolls, arranges the stage, dresses in tails, but seems filled with inertia or melancholy and we never see him perform. The little pantomime is accompanied by improvised jazz music. This light and ironic divertimento has been screened at several festivals over the years, and was an early forerunner of performance art that was to come.

In 1964 Söderquist followed the screenings of new American films at Moderna Museet, works by Warhol, Brakhage, Anger. Several years later he recollected:

**Here was something new and poetic, which stood closer to poetry and graphic art. Here were films of incredible intensity. Films with movement and films without movement. Long films and short. A rich accumulation of all that the medium is capable of. [...] These bewitched filmmakers had another way of seeing. They wanted to give us a different cinema, another image of the world.**<sup>319</sup>

The films were distributed by Jonas Mekas and Anthology Film Archives in New York. The contact with Mekas was of great importance for Söderquist as a curator; in 1980 they collaborated on the great American film exposition at Moderna Museet, “The Pleasure Dome”, and in 1990-91, Söderquist curated the mobile retrospective “Swedish Avantgarde Film 1924-1990” which toured the United States. The tour was an ambitious endeavour, and through a comprehensive catalogue, stimulated interest for Swedish experimental film abroad.<sup>320</sup> It was also mentioned as an example of promoting cultural heritage in the parliamentary discussion concerning the Swedish film archives. Söderquist continued to work for the distribution and promotion of Swedish experimental film culture through his long engagement in the Filmform foundation, where he has served as chairman for several years.

The American films were a source of inspiration when he and Håfström made *Le génie civil*. An obvious theme in *Le génie civil* is human memory and the interplay between truth and fiction, something which Söderquist was able to develop further in later works. His most well-known film is *Travelogue* or *Porträtt – Bilder från en resa* (1969) commissioned by Ehrenborg at SR after Söderquist returned home with the footage. *Travelogue* is a diary film of sorts, maybe influenced by Mekas, documenting a journey through the United States where a group of American artists are portrayed, among them Alfred Leslie, Robert Nelson and Edward Kienholz. Leslie, well-known for his beat film *Pull my Daisy* (1959), was represented at the exhibition “Four Americans” at Moderna Museet 1962 which was of great personal importance for Söderquist.

The artists in *Travelogue*, all of them belonging to a new, political generation, are not described in any systematic way, and as audience you need to recognise them in order to make sense of the film. Some of them present themselves and their careers, as Robert Nelson who humorously tells about a failed film production, while others are represented only by their works or installations, as Edward Kienholz, whose classic “The State Hospital” is shown while “God Bless America” roars on the sound track. There are no voice-overs or commentary, but the portraits are nevertheless connected to each other, functioning as stations on a trip westwards, from New York to San Francisco and Los Angeles. It all turns in to a road movie with a vague political commitment, critical against Western civilisation, and clearly critical against the United States at the end of the film when Joseph McCarthy interrogates Bertolt Brecht on the sound track.

In 1979 Söderquist began the production of *Epitaf* which premiered in 1981. In *Epitaf* he returns to the American context, but also to his own biography, accentuated by a short fragment at the beginning of the film, an authentic home movie with the director as a child together with his father and sister. Then a narrative develops around a naked man climbing up from the



Claes Söderquist, *Travelogue* (1969). Portrait of Alfred Leslie.

sea and seeking shelter under the rocks. We never know who he is or what he is doing, but the images of the man from the sea recur throughout the film, while other images are edited together in a collage, mixing exterior shots from urban environments (Stockholm and New York) with enigmatic images of a nude woman, a dead man under a sheet on a roof (Jan Håfström), pictures of a landscape, an empty chamber . . . with no commentary, but an active soundtrack, with noise and voices. It is like pictures and notes from a scrapbook of dreams, mysterious and still recognisable.

*Le génie civil* is structured upon stills that seems to move, and in a paradoxical way *Epitaf* contradicts by using moving images which appear to be still. Together they reflect the dialectics of cinematography and the nature of illusion. The same theme is exploited in *Landskap* (“Landscape”, 1988) and *Brev ur tystnaden* (“Letters out of the silence”, 1989). *Landskap* depicts a brook in southern Sweden, and follows its course, focusing on the flowing water. The Estonian poet Ilmar Laaban (1921–2000) who since 1943 had worked in Sweden as an important critic, described the film: “Finally nothing remains but the flow”.<sup>321</sup> In *Brev ur tystnaden* the main aesthetic device is again a long, winding tracking shot which creates a flow, but this time through a house, representing the home of the German refugee Kurt Tucholsky who lived in Sweden for a while in the 1930s before he committed suicide. On the soundtrack an actor reads from Tucholsky’s desperate letters to his friends, and the serene beauty of the camera movements collide with the frenzy and the agony that emanates from Tucholsky in his exile.

Söderquist claims that his films are all about space and spatiality, which can be related to the fact that Söderquist always depicts a landscape that he transgresses by using camera movements and by playing with our sense of time. With his sharp and suggestive images of human dreams and memories, he is with no doubt one of the more sensitive filmmakers in Swedish experimental film culture.

# The Extension of Independent Film Production

## **A New Form of Support: State Funding and the Swedish Film Institute**

The 1960s and the 1970s were characterized by an increasing production of audiovisual artefacts. The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, SR, launched its first public TV channel in 1956, and in 1969 the second channel, TV2, was formed. State TV had enabled film production (while the medium at the time was predominantly 16mm) that was not dictated by economics and had a coverage that the film industry could only dream of.<sup>322</sup> In 1963 another Swedish public institution for non-profit film production was founded, namely the Swedish Film Institute, SFI. The aim of SFI was to guarantee national film production and to maintain an infrastructure for film culture. Thus, the Institute was a marriage between trade and public cultural policy, a somewhat uneven matrimony that would characterize SFI as creating regular and fierce debates.<sup>323</sup>

The benefits of generous public funding assured continuous production of a fair number of new films. The shift from market to public economy also made it possible for fresh filmmakers to enter film culture. SFI was not the sole reason for this change; state intervention and public funding had gradually entered Swedish film culture and by 1961, a government body, Statens filmpremiénämnd, had been founded with the aim of awarding what was labelled ‘quality films’, that is, films that were not primarily serving commercial interests. During the first year of the board a short film by the artist Leo Reis, *Metamorfoser* (“Metamorphoses”) received a major prize, 100,000 crowns, a decision that led to fierce criticism because Reis was considered to be an amateur and not a real filmmaker.<sup>324</sup> The reaction from the critics was another indication of how separate the art cinema institution was from that of experimental filmmaking. Nevertheless, the decision was proof of the fact that a new era in film culture was taking place in Sweden, characterized by a considerable amount of ingenious thinking and unprejudiced decision-making.

**Leo Reis, *Metamorfoser* (1961).**

## **Leo Reis and Optical Architecture**

Leo Reis (1926–2001) trained as painter at Valand School of Fine Arts in Gothenburg, and his career was mainly within graphics and painting, but he produced two films of his own that stand out as original in a Swedish context: *Metamorfoser*, which premiered in 1961, and *Räta vinklars puls* (“Pulse of right angles”), which was finished around 1977 but never distributed. As a filmmaker, Reis was solitary; he was an established and well-known painter, but was not part of any film community, and had no contacts with, for example, The Independent Film Group. He worked on his own, and his first film, *Metamorfoser*, was produced in a studio he had at the old castle Torup in Skåne.

The films of Leo Reis mimic abstract animation, building on principles reminiscent of those which governed the works of Eggeling and Richter that are principles of a universal language. In articles and scripts Reis developed the concept of ‘optical architecture’ which he applied to his films as well as his paintings and photographs. Reis was a thorough student of classical painting, and was engaged in the optical and geometrical principles found in works of masters such as Rembrandt, for example, the golden section.<sup>325</sup> Art was for Reis a way of finding new knowledge about nature without depicting it: “Everything exists in nature”, as he put it in an interview concerning his later pictorial works.<sup>326</sup>

*Metamorfoser* is a 15-minute colour film which shows geometrical shapes evolving out of each other to a musical score by composer Sven-Eric Johanson (1919–97). Reis built several optical installations that he recorded with his camera, creating an optical play that might be mistaken for animation. What is intriguing with his filmic poem is that it forms a missing link between the early animation of Eggeling and the computer and electronic art that was to be developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The film had a handful of public screenings, for example, at Moderna Museet and at the Seattle World’s Fair in 1962.

The attention *Metamorfoser* received was, however, not followed up by Reis himself or the experimental film culture of the time. Reis simply saw his film as one of many ways to work with optical architecture and a new, scientific art, and during the 1960s mainly concentrated on graphics and painting. The building of an optical environment implied a slow and arduous mode of production, even if the recording process was facilitated by mechanical devices that Reis invented. In the 1970s Reis returned to the film medium, and in his workshop in Malmö, where he now lived, he made *Räta vinklars puls* which builds on the same type of principles as *Metamorfoser*. This time, however, he used the length of the feature film to mimic the language of animation. *Räta vinklars puls* is silent and is a recording of two geometrical surfaces. On top is a black stencil with cut-out squares under which a painted roll of paper moves

diagonally. When the roll of paper with the coloured fields is set in motion, an illusion is created that is similar in effect to that of digital morphing. It is uncertain if Reis' symphony of moving bright colours was ever screened in public. It was never passed by the censorship board, and there are no records verifying any distribution, even though the film exists in a copy that was prepared by Reis as the final cut.

Reis, as for example Reinhold Holtermann much earlier, regarded himself as a painter, and the cinematic works were applications of a more general visual theory. Like Holtermann, Reis was never a member of any formal or informal network of filmmakers, and there is almost no critical reception of his films. *Metamorfoser* is mostly recorded because of the money that was awarded by the national board of film grants, but no contemporary critic interpreted or described the work except for the promoters of the art cinema discourse who openly despised the film. In retrospect Reis stands out as one of the most original figures in the history of Swedish experimental filmmaking.

### **Bo Jonsson and His Contemporaries at the Film School**

SFI was a major force from the beginning, and its policies affected experimental film culture. Particular funding for short film production was inaugurated, and in 1964 Sweden's first film school was founded. It was run by SFI throughout the 1960s until Dramatiska Institutet, the University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre was founded in 1970. The model for the Film Institute's film school was not that of the industry; instead it was built on the conviction that the director was the true author of the film. The students were given a free hand, and the first years resulted in the production of a considerable quantity of short films which contributed to the new non-profit oriented film culture. Some of the early output was clearly experimental in character and spirit, a fact that was not always appreciated by the critics and especially not by the industry that wanted more trade-minded people and functional films. Most of the filmmakers who started out as experimental explorers at the film school never made it into the industry either. One of the more innovative students at the film school was the poet Bo Jonsson (1939–82). He finished a few films at the film school before moving to SR continuing shooting in his distinct style, mostly collaborating with his photographer Inge Roos (b. 1940) who he had worked with since film school.

Bo Jonsson made his first film in 1965, *Boxaren* ("The boxer"). He was then 26 years old and had entered the film school the same year. The 4-minute film on boxing is not despite its title a portrait of a person but, an intensively paced and edited film that establishes its own logic merging documentary and fiction (the part of the boxer being played by his brother). There is no overt

**Leo Reis, collage of *Räta vinklars puls* (1977).**

linear narrative or movement, what is shown are different moments and components which make up the world of boxing: the fighter, the equipment, the ring, the audience and so forth. The editing stresses the tension, power and expectation while the camera depicts both the world that is being shown and the transgression of that same world. An example of the latter is a lingering shot of a speedball that moves so fast that the motion stops, the ball stands suddenly almost still. This mode of transgressing established boundaries, the distinctions between representation and abstraction as well as fact and fiction, became something of a hallmark of Jonsson's oeuvre and is a distinct feature of his poetry as well.<sup>327</sup> Poetic metaphors and images are constantly blended with the ready-made material of language: proverbs, onomatopoeic expressions, idiomatic utterances in other languages and so forth.

Like all other films by Jonsson, *Boxaren* ends abruptly. His most well-known film, *Dokument fångvård* ("Prison document", 1966), ends as well – after 18 minutes – in the middle of a scene stressing the duration and mundane experience of time. The film starts as a semi-documentary about two prisoners who are brought by force into isolation cells in a prison. The drama suddenly changes when the camera is left on one of the prisoners in his cell, the dramatic time and the story-line are finished and a sudden shift to an ever-present takes place. The rest of the film is nothing but a depiction of time passing. After a significant amount of time has passed – with the camera focusing on the prisoner and nothing happening – the film ends suddenly as if someone had turned the projector off.

Jonsson's play with duration, the unfettered stream of time, unstructured events and purposeless action is carried out with full effect in the 56-minute film *Revansch i hästar* ("Revenge in horses", 1968). The film consists of two men's endless discussion about horse racing at a race track (Jonsson was in fact a passionate gambler). Their on-going but pointless dialogue, continuous wandering and playing at the racetrack is only interrupted by a series of beautiful and impressionistic shots of a room in which one of the two protagonists plays a liberating jazz melody on a piano. This scene establishes a musical theme that Jonsson uses throughout the film.

What makes Jonsson's work exceptional from a Swedish point of view is the highly conscious play with time and duration. It is as if Jonsson strives for an ethics of time along the lines of Siegfried Kracauer's idea of the potential of film to refamiliarize us with the surrounding world. This desire for realism has been described by Kracauer as: "What we want, then, is to touch reality not only with the fingertips but to seize it and shake hands with it".<sup>328</sup> For Jonsson the crucial act of refamiliarization is the moment when a film has transformed into a complete flow of time, a regular motion that cannot be divided into distinctive, measurable units. Such heightened experiences reconnect us with the surrounding world; as one of the protagonists says in *Revansch i hästar*: the charm in gambling is to be totally focused, so immersed in the moment that the rest disappears. To reach such an instant is equal to being in a state of timelessness, of being not aware of the fact that time is passing in the present; the ultimate proof of your reconnection with the world. It is a common trait in Jonsson's films that such moments appear when music is played, especially improvised music which is unfettered.

In 1969 Jonsson shot a documentary with Inge Roos for Swedish Television that depicted a trip to Paris for a group of disabled people, *Handikappsresa till Paris*, ("Tour for disabled to Paris"). The film

Bo Jonsson, *Dokument fångvård* (1966).



ends with a series of long takes showing buskers playing in the dark. The musicians are hardly visible, the casual light and the fleeting moments when figures become visible foregrounds the music and the ‘haptic’ character of the footage. Thus the last shots of the film are typical of Jonsson’s idiom. The footage becomes another attempt to display a moment of reconnection with the surrounding world in such a manner that nothing is submitted to a distinct external order, to that of common visual representation and the rationality of the eye, or the linear order of the narrative that is commanded by the cut. Also *Handikappsresa till Paris*, the only film Jonsson made for SR that has not been lost, ends suddenly as if the material were of such importance that it may only be interrupted because of external interference, hence simulating that the film stops when the actual strip of celluloid is used up.

The film school produced a considerable number of experimental works that hardly received any public acclaim. This is quite understandable while many of the films from the mid-1960s, like Sverker Hällén’s (b. 1939) *Den vita duken* (“The white cloth”) or Ulla Ginsburg’s (b. 1945) *Vi som vill upp* (“We who are striving upwards”) have the characteristics of a typical student film, in Hällén’s case a joke and pastiche of silent film or, as in Ginsburg’s, a short narrative based on simple symbolism. But, besides Bo Jonsson’s original films, a few overtly experimental films were made, such as Bertil Sandgren’s (b. 1942) play with filters in his audiovisual collage *Extensions* (1966) or Per-Åke Dahlberg’s (b. 1929) poetic documentary, *Människor i stad* (“People in the city”, 1965), meticulously photographed by Lennart Malmer (b. 1941). As original as Jonsson but without his sensitive aesthetics, was Torbjörn Säfve (b. 1941), who made two hilarious films, *Montebello* (1967) and *Masturbationsdrama* (“Masturbation drama”, 1968) at the film school. Both films are accurate, critical and comical comments upon the young left and its cultural idiom.

In the same year that the film school started, the Swedish Film Institute took over what was Sweden’s most important film journal at the time, *Chaplin* (founded in 1959). SFI was generously funded and granted, for example, substantial prizes – so-called quality awards – to films that were not primarily made for the established trade. The quality scheme included short films as well and both industry films and experimental shorts were given some of the annual awards. Ralph Lundsten received a couple of the very first awards for his collaboration with Rolf Nilson; Åke Karlung was a regular receiver of the prizes, and in 1968 the artist Erling Johansson’s (b. 1934) 14-minute *Anima Mundi* (1965–67) was one of only two shorts that was given the largest amount granted that year, 50,000 crowns.<sup>329</sup> *Anima Mundi* is a symbolic work that, like so many early films made by artists, builds upon the filmic tradition of the historical avant-garde, presenting a set of *tableaux vivants* that are repeated and manipulated. What is innovative in Johansson’s film is the use of anima-

tion and the imagery that localizes the film in a far northern and mythological setting, the very North that was Johansson's birth place. The overt kinship with the historical avant-garde turned the film into a metonymy for Swedish experimental cinema at the time.

### **Multimedia and Performance Art: Åke Karlung, Öyvind Fahlström**

The only real underground artist to be found within the history of Swedish experimental film would be Åke Karlung (1930–1990). He had studied Oriental art and philosophy, but he was entirely self-taught as an artist, and by his own choice remained a total outsider throughout his career, refusing to identify with or even connect with any established movement or official art scene, sometimes characterized as a one-man, anti-movement phenomenon in Swedish experimental film. This strong anti-establishment tendency also reoccurred in Kjartan Slettemark's art films.

Nevertheless, during the 1960s, Karlung played an active role on the alternative Fylkingen scene where he became one of the forerunners of Swedish electronic and concrete music, with performances such as *Anti-happening* (1962). He worked with several forms of expression; apart from sound composition and film (where he generally used 16mm), he was also a painter. Thus, Karlung appeared as a multimedia artist before the concept was even invented. Technologically he was at the forefront, with his broad insight into new technologies and the possibilities they opened up. But ideologically, he rather propagated a "poor man's technology" throughout his career, availing himself of material generally seen as the left-over scraps of the modern welfare society, and managing to produce his films on almost non-existing budget.<sup>330</sup> Most of his films, though, were shot in colour. All in all, Karlung left behind around twenty completed films, some of which appear never to have been screened in public, and additionally a certain amount of unclassified film material without titles, but in the spirit of the material that he had previously presented for the public. Karlung's animation technique was as innovative as his art in general, not least the sound testifies to his originality. In a review of a record with Fylkingen forerunners, Leif Carlsson notes that Karlung's way of using voice and sound is less characteristic of its time than that of most of his colleagues, and thus also more universal in its approach.<sup>331</sup>

His early film *Generalrepetition för självmord* ("General rehearsal for suicide", 1963), only 3 minutes long, has become a classic despite its short format and limited distribution. On one level, it documents one of the most well-known happenings within Swedish art history which took place at Moderna Museet. While pianist Leo Nilson played a grand piano, his colleague, pianist

Åke Karlung, *Generalrepetition för självmord* (1963).

and composer Karl-Erik Welin, attacked the instrument with a chainsaw which led to his being accidentally injured, but he still continued the performance which concluded by the sound of the sirens of the arriving ambulance. On a more general level, Karlung's film also deals with the double-sided pop art, on one hand, a new high-profit art business, and on the other, a freedom to work both within low and high culture. The surrealist montage in the film not only attacks pop culture or modern society in general, but also the spectacle of the art world in particular. In Karlung's own description: "The last gasp New Roman arena spectatrix applauds the Merry-go-round of ARTformisms and confOrm-gasms, where a victim, K. E. Welin, turns up with a chainsaw in his leg instead of in the old piano, whereby the Devil in Music saws off his POP – Coca Cola PRICK, howling from the wheel."<sup>332</sup> The film displays ancient masks, sculptures and arms from so-called 'primitive' art that are in constant rotation. These objects are accompanied by pictures of a saw and scissors, also rotating, as well as the piano, flags, text fragments with word plays – and pianist and composer Karl-Erik Welin who appears briefly a couple of times. Towards the end of the montage, every object seems to have been dissolved into a single, flickering and rotating form.

Karlung's films have attracted particular attention for their combination of a harsh cultural and societal critique on the one hand, and on the other, a more traditional, high art approach to contemporary phenomena where these remain "under observation" but are never really questioned. Even aesthetically, though, the films must be regarded as highly personal and outstanding for their kind, with their peculiar mixture of technique, their contrast of animation and photography and their particular rhythm, often hectically increased, creating a total effect without any real counterpart in Swedish experimental cinema.<sup>333</sup>

*Det värdelösa leendet* ("The worthless smile", 130

1965), is a 7-minute short where Zen and Eastern philosophy, which remained a continuing source of inspiration for Karlung, mark the starting point for a condensed philosophical search, dealing with the magic power of money, but also with alchemy's attempt to make gold. Thus the film generally comments upon the relation between different kinds of value. Originally it was made as part of a general exhibition context. Just like the former film, *Aliena Kadabra* (1969), which was made as part of an exhibition or show, a version of which was exhibited at Moderna Museet in 1972–73, with an explanatory subtitle *Fragment från ett pornopuritanskt misslyckande* ("Fragments from a porno-puritan failure") which was further elaborated in the catalogue for the Moderna Museet festival on Nordic Cinema, where *Aliena Kadabra* was characterized as: "ON UNFREE TECHNOPORNOPIGS IN THE ANCIENT OPPOSITION-EXCHANGE BETWEEN ANARCHOPATHIC SENSUALITY AND FRUSTRATED DISCIPLINARITY". Here, the 11-minute *Homo Ludens* (1964–65) was also screened, as part of an event aiming at freeing the actor from prejudices about acting, and hence also liberating the spectator. As one of the programmes states: "In between redskins and cowboys there is Homo ludens, the playing man".<sup>334</sup> On a more serious note, the film has also been described as dealing with general themes such as the evolution of mankind, oppression and forced situations of choice. In 1979, Karlung also made an exhibition at Moderna Museet, "Glo-Babels torn" ("The tower of Glo-Babel"), a fierce attack on contemporary society's materialism and capitalism. The event was documented by his colleague, filmmaker Olle Hedman, for whom Karlung was also a long-time mentor and friend.

In spite of his self-willed role as an outsider, which led to his remaining relatively unknown as an artist in Sweden, Åke Karlung's films have nevertheless been screened in international contexts. Karlung participated in the exhibition "Sextant: six artistes suédois contemporains" at Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris 1981, together with Lennart Rodhe, Torsten Andersson, Kjell Ohlin, Petter Zennström and Göran Hägg. In 2008, *Homo Ludens* was also screened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, together with a number of other experimental shorts under the general label, "Swedish Outsiders". In retrospect, Karlung also stands out as a solitary artist within Swedish experimental film history simply because, on one hand, his films remain a consistent body of work with a strong aesthetic unity of expression, and on the other hand, they are quite unlike every other *oeuvre* within experimental filmmaking at the time; not least because he also incorporated his films into multimedia performances, a form of expanded cinema *avant la lettre*.

If Karlung, however, is little known outside of Sweden, the opposite is true of Öyvind Fahlström (1928–1976) who acquired great international fame but still curiously enough has remained relatively little known in his home

country. At the Venice biennale of 1964, Fahlström participated with a separate exhibition. Forty-five years later, in 2009, curator Daniel Birnbaum re-introduced Fahlström's art in a retrospective at the Venice biennale, arguing that "Fahlström is a key figure, a source of inspiration, an artist of artists".<sup>335</sup>

Fahlström led an international life from the start. Born in São Paulo, he came to Sweden at the age of 11. Here, he studied archeology and art history, and worked as a writer, critic and translator during the early 1950s. During this decade, he was also part of the experimental film movement in Sweden as a friend of Hultén and Weiss, among others, though he did not turn to film-making until the 1960s. As an artist, Fahlström was self-taught, inspired by his travels to Paris and Rome and meetings with other artists. *Opera*, his first art work from 1952, is a room-sized drawing where he used a felt pen. In 1954, Fahlström also wrote a provocative manifesto for concrete poetry, *Hätila ragulpr på fåtskliaben* (in which only the preposition "on" is a semantic word), arguing for a language and writing that did not create a hierarchy between semantics, visual representation and performance.<sup>336</sup> Between 1956 and 1959, Fahlström lived in Paris, and moved to New York in 1961, to Robert Rauschenberg's former 128 Front Street studio, where he became closely related to the pop art scene and worked with other artists and took part in happenings and performances. He remained based in New York until his premature death. Working within an international context completely changed the conditions of Fahlström's art. Now, he was right at the centre of the international art scene, not only being inspired from a distance, but taking part himself in its development. Consequently, his art was also exhibited internationally (France, Italy and the USA) from the start.

Fahlström made 'character-form' paintings and variable paintings; the former required long scenarios which approached his mode of expression in art to cinematic devices. Movement became a prerequisite of his art; he wanted its parts to be moved within the space of the art work. He also made experimental sound compositions, such as the 'tape-event' *Fåglar i Sverige* ("Birds in Sweden", 1963), *Den helige Torsten Nilsson* ("Holy Torsten Nilsson", 1966), a five-hour audiophonic novel, or *Cellen* ("The cell", 1972), a radio theatre collage, all three broadcast by Swedish radio. Typical of Fahlström's work is its constant circulation between different media; thus, radio plays were turned into books and performance art into radio or film.

What has been defined as Fahlström's first film in retrospect, the 4.5-minute *Mao-Hope March*, was shot in New York City on 1 September 1966.<sup>337</sup> Using 16mm and shot in black and white, it was originally made to become part of Fahlström's happening performance *Kisses Sweeter than Wine*, staged in October 1966 during the theatre festival at the Armory Hall in New York called "9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering". This event was organised by the art-

ists themselves, with Billy Klüver as a driving force, together with Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer and others, and led to the founding of E.A.T. (Experiments in Art and Technology). These performances, united by a common electronic modulation system (TEEM), aimed at exploiting the full range of the live aspect of electronic art, as loud speakers were activated or deactivated in reaction to movement by means of photo-cell technique. Thus, the artistic potential of performance art was explored in new ways, and the event has been, consequently, regarded as one of the milestones of media art. For instance, independent curator Catherine Morris produced an exhibition at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006 called “9 Evenings Reconsidered: Art, Theatre and Engineering, 1966”, using among other things the few remaining filmed documents. Like most of the film material included in the event, *Mao Hope-March* was filmed and edited by Alfons Schilling (b. 1934), an action painter of Swiss origin who lived and worked in New York for several years. The dialogue was performed by the radio personality Bob Fass, whose regular programme was among Fahlström’s favourites, and who conducted the interviews in the film.<sup>338</sup> There is a slight absurdity to their tone:

**Wait a second! Let me see. I don't know. That isn't Bob Hope but I don't know who he is. I like Bob Hope, that's for sure.**  
**Are you happy generally?**  
**Oh yes, I love the television.**  
**What makes you happy?**  
**Television, because I'm very lonesome without...**  
**Are you happy?**  
**Very tough question. Up and down.**  
**How about you, sir? Are you happy?**  
**Yes, I just came back from Mexico. Why not? I went all through the States to Mexico, why shouldn't I be happy? [...] And with this Bob Hope thing, I think it's a publicity campaign because he was on TV the other day and probably his book that he did or something about Russia.**  
**And what's the connection with Mao Tse Tung?**  
**The connection? That I wouldn't know now. Let's say he's in town for some sort of publicity, that's all.**  
**Is Mao in town?**  
**Bob Hope.**  
**Oh, I thought you meant that Mao Tse Tung was in town.**  
**No. Well not that I know of.<sup>339</sup>**

133 Later, Fahlström decided to present *Mao-Hope March* as an independent art work at solo exhibitions in New York and Philadelphia (1973). By this time,

it was also available to rent from Film Centre, together with his second film, the 25-minute documentary *U-barn* (“U-child”), the latter produced by Stefan Jarl for the Swedish Film Institute in 1968. This short, combining black and white with colour, includes cinéma vérité-like shots from schools and hospitals, dealing with genetic versus social determination, as well as with self-realization through meditation or through action, in street theatre sketches about Swedish disarmament as well as the Crown Prince. Among the participants were cultural celebrities like Sören Brunes, Björn Granath and Carlo Derkert.

1968 was a prolific year for Fahlström within moving images as he also directed two documentaries in New York for Swedish television: *East Village* and *Revolution Now*. Peter Davis photographed both films, the former together with Ray Steiner, the latter with Staffan Lamm. *East Village*, an almost 40-minute documentary shot in black and white, was produced with Lennart Ehrenborg, and portrays John Giorno, Alex Hay, Steve Seaberg and Robert Rauschenberg. The hour-long *Revolution Now*, also in black and white and deals with the anti-war movement among other things, was written, directed and produced by Fahlström himself, financed by the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation.

In 1968, Fahlström also embarked on another film project, this time with funding from the Swedish Film Institute, which 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, and hence the support had turned out to be quite arbitrary.

Fahlström’s new project, *Provocation*, took four years to complete. This was partly due to the difficulty of finding a distributor willing to take up a work that – as the title may reveal – turned out to be politically quite controversial, but partly also due to Fahlström’s own difficulties in completing the work within the commercial filmmaking system which he, as an artist and experimental filmmaker, had never become used to.<sup>340</sup>

Fahlström’s vision for the new project was to capture the political developments in France and the rest of Europe, using documentary footage but turning the film into a subjective experiment reflecting the new social and political awareness of the time. The result, a 100-minute colour film shot by Hans Welin and Roland Sterner, with a number of the most central figures within radical Swedish art participating – Marie-Louise de Geer, Björn Granath, Lars Hillersberg, Carl Johan de Geer, Håkan Alexandersson and many others – mixes documentary and fiction. The fictitious story is about a street theatre group which tries to develop new ways to transmit their revolutionary message to the workers, whether by protesting against one of the largest banking companies, smeared with faeces, or by a giant water demonstration in the middle of Stockholm city. During the development of these ac-

Öyvind Fahlström, *Provocation* (1972).



tions, a breach occurs in the group as some of its members distance themselves from all the practical jokes while some of the others persist, convinced that the ultimate method to gain political success is to attract maximum attention. Personal conflicts take over the political, and the group is finally split. A spirit of resignation dominates the last part of the film; one is captured by the police, another becomes a housewife, a third a chanteuse, and another, a factory worker. The political visions of 1968 no longer seemed possible.

When the film was released in cinemas in 1972 on 35mm, it was too late to find an audience. After the film was restored in the late 1990s, however, it has been re-evaluated and reached completely new audiences both nationally and internationally, eager to rediscover the spirit of the late 1960s. What, in retrospect, has appeared to be particularly interesting with Fahlström as an experimental filmmaker is that he, from the very beginning, worked and defined himself both within, and as part of, the institutions as well as being outside them. Throughout his career, he continued to move freely between different art forms: poetry, music, painting, sculpture, film. He consequently tried to launch art through alternative media and exhibition contexts, but also made a feature film within the industry and the commercial distribution system. If Fahlström remains something of a solitary figure in the history of Swedish experimental film, even though recognized internationally as an artist to a rare extent, this is partly due to the fact that he had no real context in his home country in which to work. If there were movements in Sweden, they were often too small to become anything else than a loose network between individuals. Still, his case is exemplary to the extent that he relates to a number of different contexts: 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. However, Fahlström's way of consequently crossing boundaries turned out to be taboo in his home country. As a minor film country, Sweden strived to develop a specific national profile, mostly with distinct boundaries established between art and literature, music, cinema and media.

Throughout his whole career, Peter Weiss testified to these clear-cut boundaries and divisions of the Swedish art scene. In retrospect, this also seems to be the main reason why Fahlström, in his life, never made any real breakthrough in his home country. As an emerging cult figure on the margins, Fahlström shares important aspects of his artistic profile with Weiss. Both worked in the background rather than at the forefront of the art scene, both chose to work within several different media or forms of artistic expression, and both became equally strong forces of inspiration for new generations of artists. It might be added that Fahlström also appears in Weiss' films; a short

portrait filmed in Fahlström's studio in the old town of Stockholm, intended to be the first film in a series of artist portraits. Weiss and Fahlström also share the quality of being the two strongest representatives of a political turn within Swedish experimental film art.

### **Pre- and post-1968: Peter Kylberg and the Making of Experimental Features**

Although 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 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 triad 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. Several essays of the time also called for a national politics of short film and complained about the neglect of the format.<sup>341</sup>

Director and composer Peter Kylberg (b. 1938) started making his first experimental short in 1960. *Kadens*, financed by Svensk Filmindustri which premiered in 1962, was screened at the Cannes festival, and awarded a quality bonus from The National Board of Film Grants (the same quality award that Leo Reis had already received). Kylberg also composed the music for his first short, and has continued to do so throughout his career; the films are musical experiments just as much as they are visual ones. Kylberg's next film, laconically titled *En kortfilm av Peter Kylberg* ("A short film by Peter Kylberg"), portrays a lost young man in the middle of a static crowd. This film, financed by Sandrews, was released in 1963, and once again was awarded a quality bonus. Svensk Filmindustri then again chose to finance his third short, released in 1964, *Paris D-moll* ("Paris D minor"), this time also awarded a quality bonus from the Swedish Film Institute. After these three successful shorts, Kylberg became part of established film production, and thus got the chance to make another experimental feature film financed by the Swedish Film Institute together with Sandrews and Svensk Filmindustri.

In his feature film, *Jag* ("I", 1966), Kylberg tells the story of a young man in search of an identity. He meets a woman, and they start a new life together, but their relationship soon enough becomes increasingly disharmonious. The meeting with another woman from his past connects him to deeper layers of feelings. However, this also brings about a crisis in his relationship with his wife. In a surrealist dream sequence, he confronts his own anguish during a midnight mass and a bus ride amongst other things. As he wakes up, nothing seems certain. Perhaps his anguish has been dissolved; perhaps he has at last found himself, or found a much longed-for community with others. Kylberg's film delivers no clear answers, but opens for different, albeit vague possibilities.

The film aligns with the many portrayals of Stockholm in Swedish experimental film history. As 'I' wanders about, the film seemed – according to Gösta Werner – to turn into an urban variation of a mythological passage through death over the river Styx.<sup>342</sup> The film is also a radical experiment in colour, probably the most important within Swedish feature cinema at that time. It was shot on location, the interiors mostly in houses due to be demolished. Thus, they could be painted and repainted according to the demands of the film, in an attempt to carry out subjective use of colours throughout the film. Two aspects – the portrayal of urban space and the experimental use of colour – are intertwined throughout the film. The protagonist, who works as an architect, views his boss as being caught like a cog in machinery. The boss, after having marked out the famous Klara quarters in Stockholm as a square on a map (a neighbourhood that was demolished shortly before the film was made, and which caused a huge debate on architecture in Sweden), sits on the floor like a child, playing around with models of houses as if they were his building bricks, sweeping them away in a sudden bad mood, caressing them lovingly shortly afterwards.<sup>343</sup> These bricks also bear a resemblance to 'the five trumpets', the controversial blue apartment blocks being built next to Hötorget (the market place of Stockholm city), when the film was shot. In addition to the coloured interiors, a sequence in sepia shows a building being demolished from an exterior perspective, perhaps one of those torn down in the Klara neighbourhood, to make space for the 'trumpets'. The film could be said to take part in the contemporary architectural debate, on the old making room for the new, for better or for worse. This theme also metaphorically corresponds with the general theme of the film for the search for identities, old and new. Not only the protagonist, but also old Stockholm turns out to be in search of a new identity. Kylberg's own musical score for the film is also used originally, with, for example, only a few bars to introduce a new sequence, whereas long parts of the 'action' remain silent. Just as the visual style is fragmented with freeze frames slowing down or arresting the flow of images, so too is the soundtrack with abrupt breaks and sudden silences.

Kylberg's film received largely excellent criticism, and was awarded with both the prize of the film journal, *Chaplin*, and another quality bonus from the Swedish Film Institute. But in spite of this, it never reached a large audience. This also meant that he, at the time, did not get a chance to make a second feature film; a testimony to the specific difficulty of the SFI in relation to experimental film, as the institute in its very function balances on the verge between commercial production and public authority. Following the excellent criticism, however, there was also a public debate on the exclusive character of the film, that was considered as potentially problematic. In the issue of *Chaplin* immediately following the release of the film, apart from Stig Björkman's review and the publication of the synopsis – which testifies to its being considered as culturally important – there was also an editorial by Leif Krantz arguing that cinema is above all an art for the public, and that box office success should be considered in the first place. Thus, he criticised *Jag* not for being artistically insignificant, on the contrary, but for its individualism that made “only those interested in Kylberg's spiritual life” pay for their ticket.<sup>344</sup> In the first issue of *Chaplin* in 1967, the producer Bertil Lauritzen commented, on the general press debate caused by the film, which was accused of being too ‘private’. Lauritzen was quite severe in his condemnation of the film: film is a way of communicating, but the artist should, according to Lauritzen, always set the agenda. He refers to Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Deserto Rosso* (*The Red Desert*, 1964) as an inferior attempt to achieve the same colour effects as Kylberg, a remark also made by Bernardo Bertolucci and cited by Stig Björkman in his review.<sup>345</sup> Two months later, in March, *Chaplin* also published a dossier on film music where Kylberg freely developed his thoughts; he declares himself as only paying attention to different states of mind where music and images have to cooperate to create this general impression of a particular state of mind.<sup>346</sup>

In spite of the criticism, Kylberg made another short with Svensk Filmindustri in 1968, *Konsert för piano, två ansikten och en fortsättning* (“Concert for piano, two faces and a continuation”). Like his previous films, music plays a central role whereas character identities are reduced to anonymity: “He” and “She”. But after 1968, it took almost twenty years until Kylberg returned to filmmaking in Sweden, with another short film: *Du* (“You”, 1987), this time with support from several partners and distributed by the Film Institute.<sup>347</sup> The film, in all, 45 minutes, is a play with actors – but like as always with Kylberg, it appears as an abstract film. Where music and visual patterns take over, the film turns into a meditation on the limits of thought and the condition of humanity within the universe. Kylberg describes it as an “Experiment with distorted rhythm and proportions, quite unsuitable for entertainment. Was unfortunately 139 ly shown in cinema”.<sup>348</sup> In spite of this, Kylberg continued the same path of ex-

ploration with his next short film, *F-42* (1991), this time both produced and distributed by the Swedish Film Institute. The film goes one step further by turning into total abstraction; a 23-minute abstract animation which, according to descriptions, aims at exploring the possibility of life without violence.

In 1996, however, Kylberg returned to making a feature film, *I stället för ett äventyr* (“Instead of an adventure”), with the working title *F 44 B*, which marks the continuity from his previous, abstract film. The film stages a meeting between a Swedish business man and his cleaning woman of Arabic origin. It was received as an experimental feature, positively by some critics but with more scepticism from others. Handheld camera, unclear focus and sudden pans mark the limits and the uncertainty of the narration from the beginning. By introducing animated memory sequences, Kylberg also seems to bring video art into narrative cinema. With Kylberg’s music for piano and cello on the sound track, his universe remains similar to the one he created in his early films. His themes have remained constant: the relation between body and identity, and in particular estrangement. His aesthetics have become more clear-cut. If it is an adventure after all, it is a rhythmical and optical one, composed with musical rigour in its exploration of different impressions.

Beside the relatively rare examples of Öyvind Fahlström or Peter Kylberg, however, a few other film directors leaning towards experimentation have also, in spite of the obvious difficulties, chosen to make feature films within the institution of commercial cinema. Håkan Alexandersson (1940–2004), who studied at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, turned to filmmaking, working as director together with artist and writer Carl Johan de Geer (b. 1938), who photographed, made scenography and occasionally wrote the scripts for their productions. de Geer was also active within a number of other forms of expression: photography, acting, music, design or cultural journalism. Alexandersson and de Geer started by creating an experimental TV series for children, *Tårtan* (“The cake”), in 1972, which enjoyed public success and soon became a TV classic, followed by *Doktor Krall* (“Dr. Krall”, 1974) and *Privatdetektiven Kant* (“Private detective Kant”, 1983). They also started their own production company, Alexandersson & de Geer Bildproduktion HB, and directed several feature films, like *Tvätten* (“Laundry”, 1985), which was launched as a children’s film, albeit quite unusual, as well as films for adult audiences: *Spårvagn till havet* (“Streetcar to the sea”, 1987) on a film director in crisis, or *Res aldrig på enkel biljett* (“Never travel on a one-way ticket”, 1987), a dystopia from the future. Alexandersson’s and de Geer’s films consequently combined an absurd humour with existential questions. The experimental quality mostly lies in the form which, ironically, was positively contrasted to “the hectic pulse of videos” with its long takes and elaborate scenographies.<sup>349</sup> The critics, however, were divided concerning their feature films; whereas the

aesthetic originality of the films was generally praised, some critical voices were raised against what was considered a pretentious or intellectual tendency in the stories. Should their films have been considered as belonging to the art scene, however, the question would probably not even have been raised. Later their careers took separate paths, Alexandersson continued to make uncompromising shorts while de Geer became a popular persona within film, literature and the fine arts.

Another artist who gained considerable experience within filmmaking is Marie-Louise Ekman (formerly de Geer Bergenstråhle, b. 1944) who made her first solo exhibition in 1967. She turned to film for the first time in 1976, as scriptwriter and actress in *Hallo Baby*, directed by Johan Bergenstråhle, and she started directing herself in 1977 with *Mamma, pappa, barn* (“Mummy, daddy, child”). She continued making a number of features: *Barnförbjudet* (“For adults only” aka “Elephant walk”, 1979), *Moderna människor* (“Modern men”, 1983), *Stilleben* (“Still life”, 1985), *Den hemliga vännen* (“The secret friend”, 1990). Her films were produced by the independent company HB Hinden. She also directed several TV series – *Duo Jag* (“You and I”, 1991), and *Vennerman & Winge* (1992). She returned to the feature format with *Nu är pappa trött igen* (“Now daddy is tired again”, 1996), *Puder* (“Powder”, 2001) and *Asta Nilssons sällskap* (“In Asta Nilsson’s company”, 2005). Ekman shares with Alexandersson and de Geer a preference for the absurd. Her focus, however, is mostly on gender or generational clashes or, in critic Eva af Geijerstam’s words: “the endless self-pitying childishness of adulthood and the exposed position of children that results from it”.<sup>350</sup> Ekman’s aesthetic is original both in its upheaval of traditional narrational patterns and its visual playfulness, as she succeeds in combining slapstick with family drama. Her work also remains unique in its theatrical character, which all of a sudden reveals “reality as the most cruel of theatres”.<sup>351</sup> When commenting upon her filmmaking colleagues, the director claims that she cannot identify with their work: “they do not deal with art. [...] Why be an artist, if you don’t do what you really want to do?”<sup>352</sup> Beside filmmaking, Ekman has also pursued a general artistic career within painting, sculpture, poster art, scenography, as well as several other forms of expression.

In spite of their important contributions to art cinema, however, neither Alexandersson and de Geer nor Ekman have been considered a part of Swedish experimental film history. This is due to the fact that they have been producing their films within commercial cinema. Still, from the point of view of the art scene, and as artists who have turned to filmmaking, their films could clearly be considered as belonging to art cinema or the genre of artists’ films. Within the public sphere of cinema in general, on the other hand, they have often been considered as outsiders, having trouble in reaching broader audiences. Ekman’s *Asta Nilssons Sällskap* is a significant example: it was given a 5

million crown grant by the Swedish Film Institute, but was seen by only 1108 spectators, and thus each ticket was sponsored to approximately 4,500 crowns.<sup>353</sup> Still, Alexandersson and de Geer's as well as Ekman's series for television have been quite popular with audiences and critics alike. It thus seems as if cinema as a public sphere was haunted specifically by the same problem that also, paradoxically, remains its potential from the first days, namely, the public character, which also brings about a necessary appeal to the general public. The technological changes, however, have also opened up new possibilities within the old medium, now redefined as that of moving images.

### **The Swedish Reception of New American Cinema**

Experimental films, on the other hand, received favourable reviews by the film critics as long as the films followed some of the characteristics of the established styles and norms: narrative realism, documentary reportage or fantasy animation. Standards that are familiar from the policy of the amateur organizations and the debates around the lack of narrative or technological proficiency in Swedish experimental film from the 1950s. Stan Brakhage, for example, often received negative criticism because of his 'dilettantism', and the screenings at Moderna Museet during the 1960s were often labelled elitist. Such criticism is rather surprising while Moderna Museet was a success among the audience in 1960s Stockholm; on the other hand, it indicates that there were real tensions between the art scene and the cinema. Film was without doubt the most inferior art form and, therefore, the chief agents of film culture wanted to promote cinema as an art without losing the historical ties to the popular and the public. Hence a common critique against the films made by New American Cinema group was that they were private, dilettante or exhibitionistic though the critics were in general intrigued by the movement as such.<sup>354</sup> When Moderna Museet was denied permission to show Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* in 1964, the decision was supported by the journal *Chaplin*, not because of moral reasons, but simply because the film was considered to lack any merit whatsoever.<sup>355</sup> There were critics who favoured New American Cinema, most notably Hans Pensel, and Louise O'Konor (b. 1931) who both introduced American avant-garde films in the leading film journals, *Chaplin* and *Filmrutan*. Yet the most vigorous supporter and public introducer of the movement was author and critic Carl Henrik Svenstedt (b. 1937). He was influenced both by how the co-ops in the USA were organized and the expressive aesthetics of Brakhage, Baillie and Mekas. Svenstedt turned to filmmaking later on, and became one of the core figures in organizing FilmCentrum, Sweden's first major co-op for the distribution of independent film.

**Carl Henrik Svenstedt and Stefania Börje, collage of *Soundtrack* (1968).**

In the increasing politicized culture of the early 1970s the USA became depicted in a very negative manner and, therefore, lost its position as the centre of attention of the cultural sphere. The change was radical whereas in the early 1960s the USA was depicted as the land of progressive, innovative and anarchistic cultural forms. The inventive and revolutionary spirit of American culture was hailed by Öyvind Fahlström and Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd when they introduced the happening as concept and event in 1962 in one of Swedish Television's most popular talk shows, "Hylands hörna". Vanguard American culture was reproduced and captured in several influential film programs and exhibitions at Moderna Museet, and embodied in the celebration of free jazz and audiovisual technology in Ture Sjölander's and Bror Wikström's groundbreaking experiments with a video synthesizer in *Time* that was broadcast in 1966 on Swedish Television.

The alternative film culture of the early 1970s shifted focus to third world film production whereas the cinema of the European auteurs held its position.

143 Not much was written on experimental film though. Even American avant-



garde cinema became marginalized although the influence of the major American co-ops (Filmmakers Co-op in New York and Canyon Cinema in San Francisco) had been significant. The dynamics of the great country of modernity had made lasting impressions on the filmmakers Svenstedt and Claes Söderquist resulting in two of the finest Swedish experimental documentaries of the late 1960s depicting the USA: Svenstedt's and Stefania Börje's (b. 1934) *Soundtrack* (1968) and Claes Söderquist's *Travelogue* (1969). *Soundtrack* is an experimental documentary of the USA that juxtaposes popular and official rhetoric with that of American everyday life, and ends in an expressive, structural editing of images of the American landscape accompanied by The Doors' "The Music is Over". Some of the imagery in *Soundtrack* is almost identical with Söderquist's *Travelogue* although the temper and attitude is completely different. Whereas Svenstedt uses image, sound and cutting to create contrasts and highly expressive moments, Söderquist is obtrusive, stressing time and duration, allowing the viewer to spend time, to watch and listen carefully. In terms of film aesthetics, Söderquist is the Bazin of Swedish experimental cinema whereas Svenstedt is the impatient and manipulative Eisenstein. It was also the latter ideal that would rule much of the 1970s in minor political cinema in Sweden.

Because of the increasing focus on politics the influential movement of 1970s experimental film, structural and structuralist film passed by receiving hardly any attention in Sweden. The only local filmmaker who proved to have affinities with the trend that would conquer academia in the UK and the USA in the 1970s was Olle Hedman. It is symptomatic of the situation that he, due to his interests, worked mostly in isolation from the rest of the minor cinemas, supported financially by the already marginalized Independent Film Group, technically by the open-minded Film Workshop and in spirit by the equally solitary artist, filmmaker and friend Åke Karlung.

Experimental film divided the cultural public sphere of cinema in the 1960s in which art cinema had rapidly become the mainstream.<sup>356</sup> The art cinema was vigorously promoted by leading film critics and in Sweden's leading film journal, *Chaplin*. Therefore experimental work clearly had its main advocates in the art scene, predominantly among the people around Moderna Museet and at The Independent Film Group that felt its position, somewhat paradoxically, even more marginalized in the expanded culture of free film production. Hence, in Sweden there was no shift from the underground into the art scene, a change that was embodied in the establishment of Anthology Film Archives' *Essential Cinema* by P. Adams Sitney, Jonas Mekas, Peter Kubelka, Ken Kelman and James Broughton which opened in 1970.<sup>357</sup>

Experimental film never became an underground movement in 1960s Sweden, mostly because it was too closely tied with either the art scene or with publicly funded organizations. Some of the films that in spirit were heirs

of the underground are, for example, Säfve's *Montebello*, Tommy Tommie's (b. 1941) short portrait of Taylor Mead from his visit to Stockholm in the mid-1960s, *En film med Taylor Mead* ("A film with Taylor Mead"), and Svenstedt's home movie shot on 8mm during the summer of 1968 with the topical title *I've Got a Hippie on my Front Lawn*.

## **The Changing Landscape of Independent Film Production**

The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, SR, lost its role as a major institution in Swedish experimental film culture when TV2, the second channel, was founded in 1969. The inauguration of the new channel implied a reorganization that made it more difficult to pursue with the experiments that had characterized the 1960s.<sup>358</sup> It is quite remarkable that out of the four films that were accepted for the Knokke festival in Belgium 1967-68, three were produced by SR: Åke Arenhill's (b. 1920) *Besöket* ("The visit", 1965), Karl-Birger Blomdahl's *Altisonans*, and Ralph Lundsten's *EMS Nr. 1*. The first two gained awards in Knokke and Lundsten's film at the Biennale in Paris (1967). It is evident that all three films were noted because of their technical merits, foremost because of the electronic manipulation of the image that at the time seemed impressive, but the use of electronic music raised interest as well. The image manipulation in Arenhill's film is quite modest by today's standards; it was simply utilized in order to create distinctive graphic effects and stark contrasts. On the other hand, moving images that were an overt negation of the plain representative function of filmic depiction and especially such imagery which was broadcast on public television in the 1960s made it into a vanguard act. Compared with Arenhill's film, Blomdahl's *Altisonans* is more radical and in tune with the time. The film is a direct tribute to technology, presenting a vision that does not situate technological process and unspoiled nature as opposites. The sound of the natural world and of high-tech satellites which accompany the abstract imagery, portray a man-made visual environment that symbolizes a cosmos in total unity and harmony.

Lundsten who also created the image manipulation for Blomdahl's film used video technology in order to create a unique, sounding landscape for the mentality of a new world. Lundsten's *EMS 1* is also a homage to man and man-made technology, although the film stresses the possibility of creating new worlds, new images and sounds out of the most up-to-date technology. In that sense, Lundsten's film is more directly aimed towards the future; he creates visions not seen or heard before and does not actually bother about integrating the present and the future with the past.<sup>359</sup> Another film that raised interest because of technological advances was Jan W. Morthenson's

145 *Supersonics* (1968) made for Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk in Cologne. The elec-

tronic score is accompanied by computerized animation created by Göran Sundqvist (b. 1937), engineer and artist working in the Swedish industry.

### **FilmCentrum/Film Centre: A Political Avant-garde**

FilmCentrum (“Film Centre”) was one of many centres that were founded in the spirit of the 1960s. The objective was both to reach the audience directly and to be in control of the means of production and distribution, hence being able to work independently from all major companies and institutions.<sup>360</sup> Film Centre added more turmoil to the relations between the institutions supporting free film but in addition reacting both against what was considered ‘art’ and regular feature filmmaking.<sup>361</sup> The Centre aimed at breaking any categorization of film; short, documentary, feature, experimental and so forth, a stance that did not make the organization’s mission and work easy because the genres and the politics of funding at the SFI was quite rigid at the time. Many of the films distributed by Film Centre were denied support or quality awards because they simply did not fit into the established regulations which primarily served the trade: the commercial producers, the established distributors and the owners of the theatres.<sup>362</sup>

Although Film Centre had no money for production it could at least guarantee – in theory – distribution of a great variety of films. In that sense the Centre was significant for Swedish experimental film culture. Production-wise the only option for experimental films to receive money from the SFI was to compete in the category of short film. Thus, it was not uncomplicated to create a fertile culture for the followers of those Swedes who were considered to form the older and already established avant-garde, namely Peter Weiss, Rune Hagberg and Carl Gyllenberg. Further obstacles were formed by the hegemony of international art cinema that was well guarded by the critics and developed into a market of its own that lasted for a couple of years.<sup>363</sup> This relation within the field of film culture would not break up until the politicization of Swedish film culture; a change that began to take place on a general scale in 1965 and really took off in 1968, turning the label ‘cineaste’ from being a hallmark into an insult.<sup>364</sup>

The rise in the standard of living, the availability of novel and cheaper technology and the arrival of a new and numerous generation who had to make space for themselves fostered activism, interest groups and cultural movements that benefited from the energy of the political turmoil that emerged towards the late 1960s.<sup>365</sup> Film Centre was an emblematic child of its time, founded in 1968 with San Francisco’s Canyon Cinema taken as one of the models.<sup>366</sup> As Duncan Reekie has showed in his book, *Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (2007), the American underground and

the American co-ops inspired, influenced and acted as a model for the European workshops. Though Film Centre was from the beginning an organization aimed solely at the distribution of independent film, it affected production as well; either by raising a demand for different films or more directly by creating a community for film projects that broke new ground. Without doubt the Centre enabled independently made films to reach an audience, and part of the mission of Film Centre was to bring both filmmakers and the audiences together.<sup>367</sup>

Characteristic of the early years of the Centre was the openmindedness; film was part of a social space for things to happen and a lot of different work was taken for distribution: domestic films such as Lars Westman's (b. 1938) political newsreel *Sanningen om Båstad* ("The truth about Båstad", 1969); Åke Karlung's experimental performance piece *Bildtrumma* (which demanded the renting of the filmmaker as well), Fernando Solanas' *La hora de los hornos* (1968) and films by the American avant-garde like Robert Nelson's *Super Spread* (1967) and Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966). The Centre became an important distribution nexus for artists, amateurs and students at the newly-founded film school, and it worked extensively with international contacts.

The film programmes that the Film Centre toured with during the first years were very diverse. It turned out that the response of the audience was unpredictable, at one place a Swedish documentary would prove to be the most successful film; at another, Nelson's entertaining *Super Spread* could be the hit of the evening.<sup>368</sup> Film Centre was also openly propagandistic in its activity, and declared overtly where its political affinities lay. This complicated the tours and the relation to the audience, especially if the setting was unbiased. Because of explicit political stance, the Centre clashed with the SFI and its director Harry Schein (1924–2006). Schein personified (and was to a large extent, the established power of) national film culture, but he also turned into a symbol of the close alignment between social democracy and big-scale industry in Swedish society. In that sense both Schein and Swedish film industry became depicted larger than they in fact were.<sup>369</sup> Besides, Film Centre was never denied support from the Institute; obviously the board of the Centre was quite conscious of what it was doing. In order to become more powerful the board of Film Centre strongly supported the act of organizing the Swedish film workers into a union so the film workers were able to be represented in vital institutions. The price paid for this tactic was that much of the focus and energy became concentrated on hardcore political questions and, therefore, artists, amateurs and filmmakers in general who were not considering themselves as professionals left the organization.

The increasing stabilization of the Centre did not decrease the tensions  
147 inside Swedish minor cinemas. The Independent Film Group ran into con-

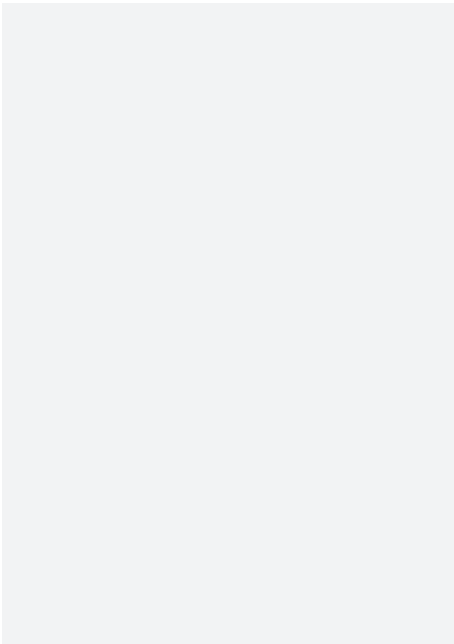
flicts with the Centre, supporting the opinion of the SFI that all films could not be included in the distribution catalogue of the Centre, and accusing the organization of being mostly involved in (leftist) political activism. The dispute was also a clash between generations; the veterans of the Group found it more and more difficult to receive new members while the other organizations and institutions were expanding both in terms of economy and creativity. Moreover, some of the people on the board of the Centre were reluctant to experimental film and they feared that experimental film would become the dominant form in distribution. Clearly the political orientation favoured the form of direct documentary.

The first conflict that emerged between the Centre and the SFI was officially around which films to include in the catalogue. SFI director Schein wanted only to incorporate what he considered to be work of high quality while the Centre defended publicly the right to open admission and free distribution, a characteristic standpoint of the different workshops and co-ops at the time in Europe and North America.<sup>370</sup> Nevertheless, when reading the first minutes of Film Centre it is evident that the board was aware of the problem of the dialectics between inclusion and exclusion. In a memorandum from 27 June, 1968 the core aim of the Centre is described as creating a contact with the audience and that films that won't reach an audience will be excluded but, to this was added as well that the audience had to be fostered while it had been misled by the current politics of film culture.<sup>371</sup> Accordingly, experimental work in particular was questioned and therefore had quite a marginal position at the Centre's politics of distribution.<sup>372</sup> Ralph Lundsten's reaction in 1974 is, therefore, consequential. He felt that Film Centre had become highjacked by politics in such a way that he wrote an open statement in the Centre's journal, *Film & TV*, in which he called for a focus on distribution of all independently made films, that is, also films made by those filmmakers whose political stances were either controversial or indifferent in relation to the dominant views of the co-op.<sup>373</sup> The Independent Film Group felt that things were developing in a direction where experimental film became more marginalized. The Group's secretary, Arne Lindgren, wrote letters to different members of the board at Film Centre that directly displays his view of the current situation: the new generation was demanding and blind to the favourable financial situation compared with the conditions of the 1950s.<sup>374</sup>

Without doubt the Centre was a significant institution in the history of Swedish experimental film culture. The first years were characterized by a liberal, enthusiastic and expansive attitude. Also the culture at the time was supportive; the major publishing houses published books by key members from Film Centre and even the film industry supported the production of films with political and experimental content that were close to the agenda of the

Centre. Film Centre had its own series of publications, for example, Stan Brakhage's *A Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* was translated into *Liten hjälpreda för filmmakaren* and published in 1970. The open, dispassionate and liberal climate would change, however, due to increasing politicization during the 1970s. One of the outcomes was that experimental film and filmmaking became questioned. It was obvious that overtly political films became the preferred form. The open character of Film Centre was finally closed when professionally-educated filmmakers entered the centre. While film was their full-time occupation union politics was put in focus. Thus most of those that had chosen Film Centre in order to find an audience for their films and who primarily wanted to explore the aesthetics of film, or those who just lacked an overt political agenda, left the Centre. The professional filmmakers had other interests to defend; they wanted to be able to control the means of production, to receive positions at the Film Institute and to influence governmental bodies. When the professionally-oriented filmmakers began to use Film Centre as an instrument for securing positions in the Swedish film establishment the history of the experimental film culture at Film Centre was brought to an end. Lundsten's protest from 1974 is one indication of that.

Consequently, the promises of a flourishing experimental film culture did not really take off. Whereas the political turn affected experimental filmmaking in the same way throughout Europe and North America, marginalizing traditional experimental film, in contrast, a reservation was created at the universities and art schools for the filmmakers, at least in the UK and the USA.<sup>375</sup> Especially structuralist film became a form and a concept that fitted well into academia both as theory and practice.<sup>376</sup> Duncan Reekie and Grahame Weinbren have argued that the structural film ideology became the way for experimental film and avant-garde cinema to enter academia, and with the cost of turning a diverse anti-



**Stan Brakhage, *A Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book* translated into Swedish by Carl Henrik Svenstedt for Film Centre, *Liten hjälpreda för filmmakaren* (1970).**

establishment phenomenon into both a university subject and a commodity, and object for the art scene. According to Reekie the final consequence was, therefore, that in the 1980s both the underground and avant-garde were given up and that, for example, in the UK these different strands of minor film culture were turned into “artist’s film and video”.<sup>377</sup> In Sweden things were different. Neither movement grew strong enough or managed to create its own reserve inside academia or the art scene (not until the entrance of video art did the condition of experimental film change as well). If there ever was a strong anti-establishment film culture in Sweden that reached the status of an independent field it was that of radical political filmmaking. Stephen Dwoskin’s dismissive conclusion regarding Swedish experimental film, written in 1975, is therefore consequential. In his book on ‘international free cinema’ he begins the chapter on Sweden with the following sentence: “Sweden does have a film co-operative, Filmcentrum, but it is hampered by paternal socialism”.<sup>378</sup> According to Dwoskin the only institutions that had major impact on Swedish experimental film were Moderna Museet, SR and The Independent Film Group. When P. Adams Sitney toured Sweden during the spring of 1968 with the large New American Cinema programme he was surprised that “there seemed to be much less avant-garde film activity in Sweden (and all Scandinavia) than in many of the other countries I visited”.<sup>379</sup>

Even though Film Centre started off as a minor but explorative enterprise it was not really as marginalized as it usually claimed itself to be. The Centre received money from both the SFI and the Ministry of Culture though the amount was never close to that which was applied for. There was no lack of confidence. The board of Film Centre declared boldly from the beginning that its activities were in the interest of the public and had, therefore, the right to receive state funding, which they in fact received, also through the SFI and its controversial director Harry Schein. Thus, the Centre was significantly different from the American co-ops that had originally inspired Svenstedt and others. The Swedish, or Scandinavian, model implied an integration of the activities into the state apparatus and were dependant on public funding. For example, the British co-ops and organizations were beginning to move into a similar situation and finally chose a way that, according to Reekie, meant that “the movement developed as semi-autonomous industrial sector which was almost totally dependent on state funding and which had key agents and agencies within the authority and institutions of the state”.<sup>380</sup> The consequence was that the faction never reached the independence of their initial role models, the American co-ops. Therefore, how radical Film Centre ever wanted to be, it was still firmly anchored at the SFI and in public cultural politics. In an interesting interview from 1976 in which leading figures of the Centre discuss the previous and following years, Eric M. Nilsson states that





the Centre was never strongly opposed to the state authorities; on the contrary, the co-op received general support from the establishment as long as they stuck to the conventional discourses when pitching for new projects.<sup>381</sup> When Lorenz Olsson from Film Centre took part in a conference in London on non-commercial distribution in May 1969, he reported how surprised the British delegates were when they heard that the Centre in Sweden received financial support directly from the government.<sup>382</sup>

What is striking when looking at the various minor cinemas at the time is that the SFI was distributing money to almost everyone and to a range of very diverse activities. Even such minor events as the film festivals arranged by the Scandinavian enclave of the Fluxus' group, Drakabygget, received money for happenings that questioned film and culture in a very fundamental way. That, for example, Carl Slättne's *AntiFilm* – described as an attack on film in general and on Schein in particular – was screened in such a setting and that the event received money from the SFI is telling how the funding worked. Slättne, in turn, was a member of The Independent Film Group that at the time was financed both by the SFI and the city of Stockholm.

Another characterization of the different organizations of Swedish minor cinemas at the time is how surprisingly poor they were at co-operating, one of the main reasons why the minor cinemas never grew into a major movement. A further cause was the repressive tolerance that a system of generous – but minuscule in quantity – funding created. Small sums were distributed widely which made it difficult for the counter movements to either be really marginal, gaining energy because of the subaltern position, or to have enough money in order to create something more substantial and significant. Hence, the field of minor cinemas and experimental film culture remained shattered even though it had significantly more resources than in the 1950s.

The case of a filmmaker like the autodidact, amateur filmmaker and full-time industrial worker Sven Elfström (b. 1929) is telling. He started off in the amateur clubs of provincial Swedish industrial towns like Uddevalla and Nynäshamn, and was one of the founding members of Film Centre. When he began to shoot his first films on 16mm he was already an experienced 8mm filmmaker. Although he made almost a dozen films on 16mm, out of which most are experimental shorts mixing existentially surrealistic stories about personal liberation with overtly political standpoints, he remained quite isolated, despite the fact that he was technically very competent and had a good eye for composition and rhythm.<sup>383</sup> Elfström never got to know The Independent Film Group either.

It is evident that the increasing professionalized culture around Film Centre made the organization more distant. Hence, when Filmverkstan ("The Film Workshop") was launched in 1973, it filled a gap but was immediately

criticized by Film Centre. The Centre was critical of the Workshop foremost because it simply was an invention by – and therefore in the hands of – the dominant institutions, the SFI and SR. Yet, it is also evident that the founding of the Workshop implied another fight over money and resources.<sup>384</sup>

Thus, the initiation of the Film Workshop stirred fundamentally the field of independent, or non-profitmaking film production. Never before had there been so many organizations and opportunities for minor cinemas; a new situation that questioned both any categorization of filmmaking but in particular traditional organizations like The Independent Film Group that until then had persistently covered the field of experimental film. As in other European countries, independent filmmaking expanded enormously fusing avant-garde, experimental, political and regular short filmmaking into one culture, and even succeeding in securing public money and grants for these activities.<sup>385</sup> However, the increasingly politicized cultural sphere was also a threat to exclusively experimental filmmakers. The board of the Film Group felt that their name gave the wrong associations, and wanted to keep a distance to the growing politicized culture of filmmaking. At the end of 1969 the Group considered that independent film had moved too far towards “social realism and political content”, and as first measures, they changed the name into Arbetsgruppen för experimentell film (“The working group for experimental film”, 1970).<sup>386</sup> Shortly after they changed the name again, now into Filmform (January 1972). Today Filmform is still alive, being foremost an archive and distributor of Swedish experimental film and video art, and a significant programmer and producer. In 1999 the Ministry of Culture decided that Filmform would act as the national organization for archiving and distributing experimental film and video.

### **The (Re)Turn to Documentary**

As in other countries Swedish independent film production became more politicized which resulted in an increasing output of documentaries and news-reel-type reports. Even though these films were not considered experimental in the same way as the work by the contemporaneous Åke Karlung, or Olle Hedman, they occasionally constituted an interesting mix of modes and cross-over of established genres. In that sense the aesthetics of Film Centre films made a significant contribution to Swedish film culture. The Centre also aspired to be part of an avant-gardist tradition, but not only in aesthetical terms – art began now to be a term with negative associations – but as an “avant-garde for radical film, both in form and content”.<sup>387</sup> That the documentary had turned into a trend was a new phenomenon even if the tradition of documentary filmmaking had always played a major role in the history of Swedish

experimental film, most notably through the work of Arne Sucksdorff and Peter Weiss. The former was also an important mentor for Stefan Jarl (b. 1941), one of Sweden's most prolific documentary filmmakers who made a sensational breakthrough with his naturalistic depiction of two juvenile dropouts in *Dom kallar oss mods* (*They Call Us Misfits*, 1968) co-directed with Jan Lindqvist (b. 1941). Jarl and Lindqvist soon became key figures at Film Centre and the main driving force behind organizing the Swedish filmmakers into a union.

The documentary work by Sucksdorff and Weiss was not as radical in its formal characteristics though as, for example, Elfström's agitational and aggressive but sensitively edited and composed films, or Bo Jonsson's naturalistic blending of fiction and documentary in which duration had a value of its own. Both Elfström and Jonsson proved in their films that the documentary mode could encompass the fictitious and the staged, as well as formal devices such as rapid structural cutting and sovereign duration, means that were used beyond the rationale of the diegesis or the document.

The documentary trend became a major force in Swedish cultural life as such and affected the established film institution as well. Regular feature filmmaking, financed by public money, had already taken significant steps in that direction. A key example is the huge success of Vilgot Sjöman's *Jag är nyfiken – gul* (*I am Curious – Yellow*, 1967) and *Jag är nyfiken – blå* (*I am Curious – Blue*, 1968) two of Sweden's biggest box office successes ever in the USA. Both films are usually considered by American critics and scholars as belonging to the tradition of the avant-garde. The late 1960s, furthermore brought a range of feature-length films to regular theatres that were partially produced by the traditional industry or by the SFI, and that built on the emerging tradition of fusing documentary and fictive modes into a new political form and style, for example, the feature-length films: *Made in Sweden* (1969), *Deserter USA* (1969), and *Misshandlingen* ("The assault", 1969), which dealt with politically controversial issues such as global capitalism, pacifism and the policy and politics of mental health services.

### **Filmverkstan/The Film Workshop: Film as Public Sphere**

In 1973 the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation (SR) founded Filmverkstan, "The Film Workshop". It was directly inspired by the Danish equivalent, Filmworkshoppen that had been founded in 1970. As in Denmark the workshop was financed by state television and the national foundation for film production, that is, in the Swedish case, by the two public channels, TV1 and TV2 at SR, and by the SFI.<sup>388</sup> Later on the local county council co-financed the workshop with minor subsidies. The Swedish government already initiated in 1972 an inquiry into film production that –

among other things – suggested the establishing of seven film workshops around Sweden. Partly encouraged by this and the preparations for a new national cultural policy (taken by Parliament in 1974), SFI and SR decided to set up a local film workshop in Stockholm by 1973. The regionalization of film production was not a completely new idea; it had been promoted and organized by Film Centre as well while local production and direct documentaries and newsreels were part of the ideology of radical film politics.

The SFI and SR were interested in the workshop because it could act as training and testing ground for established filmmakers. The institutions were, however, prepared to allow newcomers to make films as well, in this way new people or fresh projects could later on make their way up to the major national institutions. The workshop model was, therefore, not as anarchistic or free as its equivalent in London, for example, financed and led as it was by major public institutions. Hence, the workshop was led by two boards, one steering committee that had overall responsibility and an acting committee that was directly involved in the process of funding and supporting individual projects. The steering committee had members from the financial institutions only, while the acting committee consisted of members who were actual partners in minor or non-commercial filmmaking: TV1 and TV2, Film Centre, Filmform and the national associations of film directors and substandard gauge filmmaking.

It was stated in the first policies for the Film Workshop that the intention was to “primarily create a workshop for such projects that filmmakers could not realize in their regular production environment”.<sup>389</sup> To this was added that the purpose was as well to “offer artists and professionals the possibility to experiment with image and sound in order to expand cinema’s means of expression”. Both the policy and the organization of the workshop was a direct copy of the Danish one; and as in Denmark, surprisingly few experimental works were made. Instead, most of the films that were made during the first years were documentaries. The reason for this, according to the experimental film historians Krarup and Nørrested, was that at the Danish workshop the infrastructure was built around super-8, a format that was not attractive for professionals.<sup>390</sup> In Stockholm, on the other hand, both super-8 and 16mm were in use, with the aim of financing the production of distribution copies out of the best films on 16mm. For example, the annual report for 1978 shows that 101 applications were received, 69 received support, 40 were inaugurated and 27 were carried to completion out of which 11 received distribution copies. The statistics demonstrate as well how the Film Workshop functioned in reality: it wanted to foster new filmmakers, encourage experiments and finance the finalization of copies into 16mm to enable visibility and distribution of the best works. That the filmmakers did not embrace experimental cinema

at the Swedish workshop was consequential to the organization. The Film Workshop was an open one and due to the liberal attitude, most of the film-makers wanted to express themselves, tell their stories, an approach that encouraged personal narratives and documentary modes.

Another similarity between the Danish and Swedish workshops was that although experimental film was encouraged, most of the films made – and that people wanted to make – were documentaries. Especially during the 1970s it is evident how political documentary became the preferred form, an outcome that was not without controversy while the two workshops were subsidized in total by public money. In Denmark the conservatives even succeeded in having the workshop close down for a period during 1976 due to the large output of political activist's films. It was exactly that which Film Centre had warned against when a workshop was under control of established political structures such as parties or governmental bodies.

The Swedish workshop proved to be important as a public sphere in Oskar Negt's and Alexander Kluge's sense, that is, as a "social horizon of experience" or ways of creating social spaces for marginal but collective experiences to come true.<sup>391</sup> It is estimated that out of more than 2600 proposals that the Film Workshop received during its operation (1973–2001), more than 700 projects were started, out of which, about 200 films received distribution copies. In sum, the last catalogue from the workshop entails more than 400 titles.<sup>392</sup> In terms of a public sphere, as means for people to come together in order to produce cultural interventions in direct connection to their life-world, the Film Workshop had an important function. A significant number of films were made by immigrants and women filmmakers, thus the workshop constituted an important channel for marginalized groups and individuals to articulate and transmit experiences on terms other than those controlled by dominating media or institutions. It is worth noting that whereas Film Centre was overtly political in its strategies, it was the largely un-political Film Workshop that in its practice became more political in a pragmatic sense. Film Centre had concentrated upon the hardcore of film politics, distribution, organization and publicity while the Film Workshop simply opened the doors for people to come and make films. Accordingly, the Centre became geared towards professionalism; it hosted filmmakers who already had a voice and made their say, while also the silenced or marginalized voices could be heard at the workshop.<sup>393</sup> Film Centre aspired to change Swedish film politics; the Film Workshop aimed simply at giving people the opportunity to make films.

Kjell Grede (b. 1936), a prolific filmmaker in Sweden, was the workshop's first director. He left the position quickly and was followed by Jan Bark (b. 1934). Bark ran the Film Workshop until 1999; the workshop was finally closed down in 2001. When another significant figure of the workshop, Maja Sylvan

(b. 1936), retired in 2001, the SFI's decision to reorganize the workshop into a regional film centre for Stockholm seemed to be an apt decision, but this only from the perspective of the SFI. In fact, in the beginning the Film Workshop had been created due to a political suggestion to found several workshops throughout the country. This does not, however, counter the argument of Bark and Sylvan, namely that the reorganization in 2001 was simply a way of closing down the Film Workshop, especially when the SFI had signalled that they would not pay for the activities of the workshop in the future. Bark and Sylvan found out later that the Film Institute had, since 1999, tried to persuade both the local county council and the city to take over the workshop. Thus, for the core group at the Film Workshop, the decision to merge the workshop with a regional film centre and film office was the same as closing down the activities of the workshop. Many filmmaker protested against the decision but in vain. When the Film Workshop was closed down no-one was surprised; the workshop had been questioned almost from the beginning by the financial institutions of the SFI and SR, a recurring critique was that the films produced were not professional enough and hence of no use.

It looks as if both the Film Institute and public television never really understood what they had launched when they founded the workshop. At first the SFI funded the workshop by allocating money reserved for short film production and SR used money from their funds for research and development. Thus, the money used was surplus, hence the activities as such were not highly prioritized. When the financial situation grew harder the workshop was, at first, made into a foundation in 1982, and thereafter, the budget cut with the argument that a foundation had the opportunity to apply for other funding. The decision to form a foundation was also an act that demonstrated how both the SFI and SR had changed their attitude regarding the original objectives of the workshop. At first the aim was to foster experiment and creativity, now the workshop was obliged to have clearly-defined rationales in order to attract external funding. The workshop was now by itself, as it was written in one of the memos from the Film Institute: "SFI has no asserted assignment to run the Film Workshop".<sup>394</sup> The same institution that had inaugurated the workshop declared 26 years later that they had no responsibility whatsoever regarding part of their previous work.

The long-term driving force at the workshop, Jan Bark, belonged to a slightly different generation than those of 1968 (he had made his debut in the early 1960s as a musician and composer), and he held on to the idea that the workshop should constitute an open space for people to use and make use of. The policy enabled individuals and groups to tell their own stories, to shoot their own footage and, thereby, realize themselves through the use of film and, later, video. Compared with the Film Workshop, Film Centre acted more

as a platform for a number of mostly politically oriented and established filmmakers whereas the former hosted a very mixed group, professionals, interest groups, students, artists and amateurs. It was precisely that attitude which created tensions in relation to the SFI and SR which clearly wanted more professional work. According to the key funding bodies what characterized the workshop were that people preferred to be 'free' rather than 'filmmakers' proper. From the floor of the workshop the situation was interpreted in a totally different manner. In the spring of 1974, the director, Grede, called for more improper and radical films but when he wanted to implement such a policy for the workshop the board decided to defer the decision.<sup>395</sup>

Consequently, the Film Workshop did not work in the way that the SFI and SR wanted; hence it was an organization that was persistently questioned. However, it managed to last until 2001 when it was finally closed or transformed. At that time the Film Workshop was outdated in many respects, technologically being the main one. The decision to mainly use 16mm isolated the output of the workshop. But, the SFI signalled an overt change in policy too, striving to promote professional and commercially successful filmmaking while the regional film centres that were established since 1997 would promote local film culture partly in the manner of the Film Workshop. It is, of course, a fact that the funding to the workshop had always been small and the view that the activities, therefore, were slowly starved to death can hardly be considered controversial.<sup>396</sup> The workshop did not receive substantially more funding since changing it to a foundation in 1982.

Without doubt the Film Workshop functioned as an important station for people who were not part of the established film culture, ranging from amateurs and immigrants to young filmmakers. For example, Hedman's early career was totally dependant on the workshop. It was also at the Film Workshop that non-residents in Sweden could stop by and work on or finish films, for example, Gunvor Nelson and the now successful gallerist, Maureen Paley. A new generation of filmmakers like Jon Karlung (b. 1964, Åke Karlung's son), Mårten Nilsson (b. 1962), Max Andersson (b. 1962) and Boel Simouni (b. 1963) also made their early significant work at the workshop.

### **Films and Filmmakers at the Film Workshop**

When looking at the production of the Film Workshop it is evident that its general cultural significance outweighed that of Swedish experimental film culture. Most of the work were direct documentaries and narrative short films. The few experimentally oriented pieces that were made during the 29 years of the workshop's activity were mainly characterized by a need for personal expression. The 1980s generation had close links to both the music scene

and film culture, most notably people like Andersson, Karlung and Nilsson. The increasing number of film schools created a new generation that was eagerly looking for opportunities to make films and the apparent choice was to approach the workshop. This generational shift meant as well that those modes embraced at the beginning (documentary and experimental film), became more marginalized while most of the young filmmakers had learned the language of the trade. A majority of the films produced during the last years of the workshop were, therefore, narrative shorts. The open character of the workshop meant also that it was not only a permanent site for production but also a station for support. That support could be financial or material, in part or in whole, and when the field grew and became more diverse the workshop became used in corresponding ways.

Nelson was, of course, a very distinct voice and not part of the local context at all. Paley was another outsider who was theoretically highly sophisticated; she managed to finish three films at the workshop in 1977 before moving to London and becoming a successful gallerist. Especially Paley's *Interference* sheds light on Swedish experimental film in the late 1970s. No other work at the time was that clearly influenced by theoretically refined experimental film movements. There is, for example, no direct trace among Swedish filmmakers of the structural film tradition that dominated the academic and theoretical fields of the 1970s. Thus, whereas Paley's *Interference* is typical of a European or North-American perspective, from a Swedish point of view, the film is exceptional.

*Interference* consists of three different segments. At the beginning there is a series of shots depicting a fragmented interior while a voice-over introduces the film by repeating the statement "this film is a souvenir, I will show some pictures, I will photograph my hair, I will tell a story, I will show a film". This is followed by a segment that displays hair on a film strip while a voice-over tells the story promised in the beginning. The third and last segment shows a horizontally split screen displaying Paley's feet and a flickering TV screen. The last shot envisions that interference between subject, apparatus and object are part of any act of filmmaking but that this fact is actually denied by mainstream cinema.

The strength in Paley's film is that she is not just applying mainstream apparatus theory, but – as so often when it comes to women filmmakers – includes herself in the act as a concrete and corporeal human being. When the third segment starts Paley states: "I'm looking at my feet, I'm looking at the TV, I'm looking at myself, I'm looking at a film, the movement on the TV is similar to the movement of my feet, one is personal, one is impersonal, I am looking at both, I am looking at them in a film, I am looking at them outside



era, it is not abstract, it is concrete". Accordingly, the split or interference is not reconciled; instead, Paley underlines that the act of filming is an act of interference and not that of interaction.<sup>397</sup>

A mutual international context that did exist was, on the other hand, the rise of women filmmakers that resulted in a handful of feminist films made in the 1980s. One of the most interesting ones is Helena Lindgren's (b. 1951) ...*det skall vara så här* ... ("...this is the way it shall be...", 1985) on menstruation. The film was one of many pieces that were shot and edited at the workshop with Mihail Livada as mentor. ...*det skall vara så här* ... received favourable reviews at the time, and enabled Lindgren to continue working at Swedish public television, although none of the films she made at SR would follow the legacy of her first film. In ...*det skall vara så här* ... Lindgren blends both documentary footage with staged scenes and bursts of expressive and rapid cutting. Without doubt the film deserves a position as a Swedish feminist classic, a position that it has never received due to the fact that it was made well before the moving image had re-entered the art scene because of the rise in interest in video art that did not take place in Sweden until the mid-1990s.

### **The Rise of Animation**

The genre that enabled work in an experimental vein without limiting the options according to established genres and modes was that of animation. Animation as such forms a complicated web of crossroads in which short film, narrative, experiment, commercial and children's films converge. The transgressive character of animation is one explanation for why visual artists, in particular, have always been so fond of animation. It is rather the rule that Swedish artists who became interested in film chose precisely to work with animation (Eggeling, Hedman, Hennix, Hultén, Karlung, Lundsten, Nordenström, Reuterswärd, Ultvedt etc.), whereas those who had a background in literature or theatre seemed to be more fond of the idea of capturing real life (Jonsson, Meschke, Svenstedt, Weiss). What makes animation even more interesting is that it is the form that turned hierarchies of gender upside down. Experimental film culture in Sweden was predominantly a male affair but since the 1970s animation became the quintessential female format and reserve for women filmmakers. There had, of course, been important predecessors: the previously mentioned Eivor Burbeck; Margit Ogebratt (b. 1927) who, for example, made a painterly animation with music by Ralph Lundsten in 1965 called *Vision*; and Åsa Sjöström who studied film at Central Saint Martins in London in the 1970s where she made her most wellknown film, *Mass or Monument for a Capitalist Society* (1976).

In terms of discourse analysis it is worth paying attention to the fact that 160

Helena Lindgren, frame enlargements from *...det skall vara så här...* (1985). (Original in colour.)

the animations produced at the Film Workshop are hardly ever classified or considered as experimental; they are foremost narrative shorts or films that are supposed to be aimed at children. However, many of the animations made at the workshop do pose fundamental questions regarding film aesthetics and conventions of film language.<sup>398</sup> A good example is the film *Skåpmat* (“Left-overs”, 1993) made by one of the most productive animators of the workshop, Lilian Domec (b. 1922), who studied at Royal College of Art. In the film, a 6-minute story of a man looking for his lost love, Domec plays with the relation between background and foreground, constantly surprising the viewer regarding which part of the image will suddenly be turned into a site for action, thus expanding the space of the frame and twisting narrative space too.

Domec’s animation echoes in interesting ways that of Reuterswärd’s *Försvinnaren*; both Domec’s and Reuterswärd’s films point to the evident fact that animation is often a metafilmic genre due to the tendency to stress the apparatus of cinema, that is, the speed of the camera and the act of projecting still images at a certain speed. Reuterswärd’s moving figure and Domec’s shifting of focus and action counter both the regime of central perspective

and the dichotomy between still and moving images. Thus, both Domec and Reuterswård interfere in the institution of cinema suggesting that, as Noël Burch put it, “things could have been otherwise”.<sup>399</sup> It might even be said that whereas structuralist film developed highly sophisticated theories regarding film and filmmaking animation embodied the materialist aesthetics as such, always stressing that film is the result of projecting a series of still images at a certain speed. Hence, animation never privileges the value of live action or supports the realist promise and impulse that is so often considered to constitute the essence of cinema.

One of the most successful animations ever produced with support from the workshop – and that challenged established conventions – is Birgitta Jansson’s (1944–85) *Semesterhemmet* (“The holiday resort”, 1981), a clay-animated documentary about a resort. For the film Jansson taped the sound from a holiday resort and moulded characters and settings that were straight portraits of both the people and the place. The effect is a film that turns the established dichotomies in formalism and realism on their head, stressing the point that the power of film lies not in the capacity to capture reality nor in the attempt to create a unique formal filmic language but, rather, that the objective of the cinematic is in the recovery or heightened awareness of our surroundings, enabled by the means of the man-made machinery that is called cinema. The puppets and the setting amplify our awareness of the way people act and how the objects and things that surround us are, thus, transgressing the old dichotomy between fiction and documentary that often haunts film studies. The film ends suggestively with shots displaying the inhabitants of the resort checking and commenting upon the figures and the settings that have been used as their visual stand-ins in the film.

### **Experimental Animation and the Aesthetics of Immersion: Olle Hedman**

Olle Hedman (b. 1940) stands out as one of the big exceptions when it comes to Swedish experimental film culture. Hedman had a solid background in advertising and graphics before commencing his studies at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in 1966. The screenings of New American Cinema and Claes Söderquist’s teaching at the University College helped foster Hedman’s interest in the moving image. He began to make films on 8mm (which all are lost today) and finished two films in 1973–1974; *Aforism* (“Aphorism”, 1974) and *En semiotisk studie av icke-logiska kodifieringar i bild* (“A semiotic study of unlogic figure-codification”, 1973), the latter made together with fellow artist H. P. Andersson and the only Swedish film that qualified for the fifth Knokke festival in 1974–75. These two films were followed by several



films made between 1975 and 1979: *Dialogue* (1975), *Oremus* (1976), *Metro: Means of Conveyance* (1977), *Phantom Conception* (1978), *Instant Movie*, *Keep Shooting*, *Amazing Maze* and *Glo-Babel* (all from 1979). Hedman's early films are pure animations, either playing with the line as in *Dialogue*, or studying metamorphosis through the drawing of different figurative shapes of which *Oremus* and *A Semiotic Study* are examples of the latter. Hedman never tells a story; instead, he wants to create intense audiovisual experiences.

The early work by Hedman places him as one of the few Swedish heirs to the legacy of Eggeling because of his sheer interest in movement and the use of abstract animation. But Hedman's films are also significantly different because of their expressiveness, ranging from sensual and poetic modes to aggressive outbursts and standpoints. *Dialogue* is a play with the painted or drawn line, turning it into a 'pure vector', albeit Hedman also anchors his line in expressive symbols, primarily through the ways he uses sound. The sensual voice-over of a woman who is talking, laughing and using the full register of her voice, creates the effect of a physical and sometimes even erotic encounter between image and sound. The utopian and liberating (audio)vision in *Dialogue* has a preceding, dystopian view in *Semiotic Study*. The subtitle of the film is "Scenes from a marriage" ("Scener ur ett äktenskap"), and it presents black and white figures in antagonistic relations, intertwining and splitting apart in a perpetual struggle. After these early works, Hedman finished a series of short films that are all exceptional from a Swedish point of view. After 1980 there was a break in the production, but finally Hedman finished the incomparable and enigmatic 6-minute *Coca Strip* in 1985.

The period from 1975 to 1979 covers both animation and live action footage – all made at the Film Workshop – that is characterized by the focus on what could be described as the essentials of cinema's visuality: the relation between light and darkness, movement and the importance of the cut as both an interfering device and as an instrument for creating a pace for the viewer. Yet, Hedman never limits himself to just the visual, he has always had a profound interest in sound, and most of his soundtracks are highly expressive and enigmatic. Usually it is impossible to localize the source of the sound or to identify it.

The growing interest for plunging the viewer into the audiovisual experience led Hedman to abandon animation and to work with the recording of live-action events instead. The starting point is Hedman's most well-known work, *Metro: Means of Conveyance*, a tribute to movement and the play with light. The soundtrack is recorded in the Paris Metro whereas the footage shows different movements, foremost a pendulum moving back and forth envisioning a heavy and slow rhythm. The stark contrast between black and white and the highly diffuse image make the film into a complete experience of light and darkness that is moving through time, determined and guided by

the pendulum. Thus the film may be seen as a demonstration of the poetics of film as an apparatus of recording, and not that of transformation which was where Hedman began in his quest for audiovisual motion. Towards the end of the film, a close-up of an eye is intercut, suggesting a meta-perspective on what has been shown. The eye is, of course, the very premise for the experience to take place, but the eye embodies as well a limit because it cannot cover the experience in full. The latter is stressed by the last shot of the film, a close-up of the eye now highly contrasted in black and white so it is impossible to see anything but the pupil moving restlessly as if desperately trying to see and understand what is happening.

The other films that Hedman made during these years are characterized by a similar drive to create intense audiovisual experiences in which the viewers' senses are activated or even attacked.<sup>400</sup> The 4-minute *Phantom Conception* is one of the few Swedish flicker-films ever made; *Instant Movie* and *Keep Shooting*, furiously edited attacks on capitalism that lasts less than a minute.<sup>401</sup> These early animations were followed by a 5-minute film shot in colour on 35mm, *Amazing Maze*, that follows a pinball in a pinball machine. Hedman filmed by hanging from the roof swinging back and forth, immersed in the action. This expressive aspiration to plunge oneself into events and feelings is also detectable from Hedman's documentation of Åke Karlung's exhibition "Glo-Babels torn" ("The tower of Glo-Babel") at Moderna Museet in 1979. In the 4-minute document Hedman chose to shoot with modest lighting, blurring the pictures. The vague and hazy images are edited at a frantic pace as if Hedman was trying to simulate the sense of being actually present at the exhibition, denying the possibility to simply watch as an external observer. *Glo-Babel* is, in fact, in many ways similar to Kurt Kren's transformed documentations of the performances by the Viennese Actionism.

One of the masterpieces in Hedman's aesthetics of immersion is *Coca Strip* (1985). The film starts showing an enigmatic figure, a man wearing a Mickey Mouse mask carrying a doll or teddy bear. The figure is moving but the image is so sharply contrasted in black and white that you only see the outline of the shape; the surroundings are either black or white. The strip of film envisions an uncanny experience in which Mickey Mouse is clearly a threatening figure, haunting the viewer who never finds a safe position from where to watch and interpret what is actually taking place. *Coca Strip* creates a dystopian view that has interesting affinities with some major strands in Swedish comics, for example, Joakim Pirinen who also made his breakthrough in 1985, and Max Andersson, comic creator and filmmaker who made a name with the film, *Spik-Bebis* ("Spike-babe", 1987).

While Hedman proved to be a quite unique character in Swedish film culture at the time, he managed to get money for a larger production, at least



compared with his other films that were all very short, low budget work. In 1990 SFI financed a 24-minute documentary about Rome, *Roma*. The beautiful and impressionistic depiction of Rome in which the sound of the city and images merge into intense audiovisual events, became Hedman's last finished work on celluloid. For Hedman the format of the production was too much, he felt that it was absurd to put so much money into a film. Obviously he was so bound to the small intense and expressive format that a 24-minute black-and-white film shot on 16mm felt like a waste of time and money, a big scale production that was difficult to defend because of moral reasons.

Hedman's expressionistic style and attention to sound found another form and channel in digital video that has been his medium of choice since he moved to Mexico in the late 1990s. Now Hedman uses video to record performances in which he reads his own onomatopoeic poetry, stressing the sound and material of language. This time Hedman immerses the viewer in the material poetics of language, in rhythm and resonance; however, he does not completely ignore the semantics of language, but it is never allowed to dominate the movement and the material of the utterance.

### **Gunvor Nelson and the Unboundedness of the Moving Image**

In 1980 Gunvor Nelson (b. 1931) approached the Film Workshop with a request to use their facilities in order to work on a film based on a series of 'flashes' ("glimtar").<sup>402</sup> The film in question would prove to be *Frame Line* (1983), a key work in Nelson's oeuvre in many regards. When finishing the film in 1983 she had already directed or co-directed ten films and made nine more before changing to video in 1998.

Before moving to California and the USA in 1953, Nelson studied at the University College of Art, Craft and Design (1950–51) and at Beckmans College of Design (1951–52) in Stockholm. Nelson who had been painting since she was twelve years old first chose to take a BA in Fine Arts at Humboldt State College (1957) before moving to San Francisco Art Institute (1957) and later on Mills College (1957–58) in order to study painting. Among the teachers Nelson had at Mills College were the established painters Clyfford Still and Richard Diebenkorn both of whom were associated with abstract expressionism, the major American art movement of the 1950s. In 1958 she received her MFA, married fellow artist Robert Nelson, and spent the following year in Spain before moving back to California and building a house at Muir Beach, north-west of San Francisco.

When building the house the Nelsons borrowed a camera from a neighbour in order to document the construction, the outcome was Gunvor and



Robert Nelson's first film *Building Muir Beach House* (1961). Inspired by the shooting, they finished another film one year later, *Last Week at Oona's Bath* (1962), a parody on Alain Resnais' *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) which starred their new-born daughter Oona. The work on the early films followed the regular gender division; Robert operated the camera for the most part and Gunvor did the editing, a skill she had learned when working at a local TV station while studying at Humboldt State. These formative years familiarized Gunvor Nelson with the medium of film but she did not yet consider it as her medium of expression. Robert, on the other hand, was smitten and finished a number of films during the years 1963–65: *Plastic Haircut*, *Kung Ubu*, *Oh Dem Watermelons*, *Sixty Lazy Dogs*, *Confessions of a Black Mother Succuba*, *Thick Pucker* and *Oiley Peloso the Pump Man*. It was also during this time that Bruce Baillie arranged screenings at his home in Canyon, a venue that led to the founding of Canyon Cinema in 1966. The screenings at Baillie's was an important gathering of like-minded people but Gunvor and Robert Nelson had plenty to choose from. The Bay Area encompassed a vast register of cutting-edge activities and artists, out of which many had not yet made themselves a name. Among friends and collaborators of the Nelsons were people like Dorothy and William T. Wiley, Ron Davis from the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the composer Steve Reich.<sup>403</sup> This versatile milieu was an ideal context for approaching image, sound and performance in an unprejudiced way, but according to Gunvor Nelson, the crucial moment which opened her eyes to the possibilities of film was when she saw Baillie's work screened at his home in Canyon: "Well, this is it, this is what I want to do".<sup>404</sup> In 1965 Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wiley borrowed a camera from a neighbour and set out to shoot their first own film *Schmeerguntz* that premiered officially the same year on New Year's Eve at the Gate Theater in Sausalito.

*Schmeerguntz* is together with *Take Off* (1972) Nelson's most successful overt contribution to the feminist agenda. Nelson who has always shunned the label 'feminist' clearly made something new when she, in her first film together with Wiley, aimed the camera towards the facts of the everyday life of a young mother: vomit, diapers, tampons and dirty dishes. The naturalistic footage is cross-cut with found footage of beauty contests and other material of ideal womanhood reproduced by mass media. The hilarious film was an instant success and collected awards at the film festivals of Ann Arbor, Kent State and Chicago Art Institute. Ernest Callenbach wrote enthusiastically in a review for *Film Quarterly* that: "A society which hides its animal functions beneath a shiny public surface deserves to have such films as *Schmeerguntz* shown everywhere – in every PTA, every Rotary Club, every garden club in the land. For it is brash enough, brazen enough, and funny enough to purge the soul of every harried American married woman".<sup>405</sup>

Although *Schmeerguntz* differs significantly from Nelson's later work it introduces some characteristics that may be found in the rest of her oeuvre. According to Steve Anker:

**Its [*Schmeerguntz*'s] rough, out-of-control energy was very uncharacteristic for Nelson, but the fact that she and Wiley drew solely on their own intimate experiences for primary inspiration, in this case as home-bound mothers, remained the starting point for all of Nelson's subsequent work. It also established her central themes, how the female body is observed and portrayed, as well first evincing her ability for creating strongly tactile, though ephemeral, elements [...] within each work. Stylistically, it had more in common with the early films of Robert Breer and Stan Vanderbeek than it did with other more doctrinaire feminist films that were about to be created.<sup>406</sup>**

Thus the themes in Nelson's films are never 'external', applied from without, but arise from personal experience, curiosity and concern. Hence the great paradox that her audiovisual work seems to be both sincerely personal and material at the same time: "everything seems to start in the concrete".<sup>407</sup> For Nelson this has always been a self-evident fact; she simply makes "personal films", as she has put it in an interview, while her work 'stems from one person'.<sup>408</sup> This truism becomes instructive and profound when looking at her total production that covers so many different films, ranging from underground, surrealist, expressionist to animation, fiction and even documentary. It is, therefore, the material and unbiased means of investigation that becomes her trade-mark, a way of proceeding that is rooted in "an ethics of otherness" while it is the material in a double sense that guides her work; material being both the means and that which is focused by the means used.<sup>409</sup>

*Schmeerguntz* was a great success and proved to Nelson and Wiley that they could be proper filmmakers and was followed by *Fog Pumas* (1967), a film that has not caught so much attention. Whereas Nelson's and Wiley's debut was a funny, yet feminine attack on (male) society, *Fog Pumas* was more of a gimmick, a play with the audiovisual means of film and with the conventions of surrealism. Those who expected a follower to *Schmeerguntz* were perplexed. *Fog Pumas* indeed fools around with filmic means and methods and is also a parody on the devices of surrealism. Nevertheless its quality lies in playful associative editing, in the imagery created and the stark segments of rhythmical editing and camera movement. *Fog Pumas* introduces some other Nelsonian characteristics, that of the dynamic interplay of a flow of juxtapositions that are never turned into argumentative attractions in Eisenstein's sense, and of a preference for the absurd.<sup>410</sup> The latter is, for example, personified in one of the recurring characters in the film, a woman screaming, haunted by something that is never shown, an image that might be considered as an anarchistic and amusing comment upon

the deadpan serious surrealist portrait of a particular haunted woman, namely the protagonist in Maya Deren's *Meshes in the Afternoon*.

When the Wileys moved to Europe, Nelson finished *Fog Pumas* by herself and her next film, *My Name is Oona* (1969), became her final breakthrough. One of the inspirations of the film was the experience Nelson had at an exhibition and performance by Steve Reich in which he taped comments and utterances by people who arrived at the gallery. Reich assembled the taped material into sound works breaking the dichotomy between semantics and structure, meaning and music in language. The sound on *My Name is Oona* consists of Oona repeating the names of the days of the week and of her saying "my name is Oona", the latter is edited into an expressive rhythmical structure that accompanies the film that plunges into the experience of a child, a world that acknowledges no dichotomies, and in which experience becomes a state with an absolute quality; you are either in or not. Nelson's highly acclaimed expressionist film opened the doors to a teaching career, and she was offered a job at San Francisco State College (that was later turned into San Francisco State University). After teaching two semesters at the College 1969–70, she moved to the San Francisco Art Institute where she remained until leaving the USA in December 1992. Thus, Nelson entered the institution during the era of the expansion of film studies and the institutionalization of experimental film in the USA that took place during the transition from the 1960s into the 1970s.<sup>411</sup>

The portrait of her daughter from 1969 introduced a recurring theme in Nelson's filmmaking that she explored and depicted in a series of films that revolve around family relations in general and her own position in particular in the two-fold relation of being both mother and daughter: two of her most psychologically strongest and touching films, *Red Shift* (1983) and *Time Being* (1991), as well as *Trollstenen* (1976), a two-hour documentary that tells the story of her family in Sweden in a manner that is a blend of reportage and home movie. Nelson also finished another film in 1969, *Kirsa Nicholina*, a straight forward depiction of a home birth that she originally made on someone else's request. Steve Anker's comprehensive comparison between Nelson's film and the well-known birth film in experimental film history, Stan Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), is worth quoting in full:

**Other mostly male filmmakers followed Brakhage's lead in succeeding years by filming their children's births, and it makes sense in hindsight that Nelson would enter the territory and offer a woman's perspective of this most profoundly female and physical activity. *Kirsa Nicholina* is almost diametrically opposite to *Window Water Baby Moving*: while Brakhage almost exclusively employs fragmenting closeups, *Kirsa* consists primarily of uninterrupted, moving shots connecting the participants (including friends, this being a home-birth) in unified space. Brakhage creates a highly aestheticized and**

symbolic weave that transitions fluidly between past and present, and that portrays his pregnant wife and their idealized love in contrast with the more abrupt recording of the subsequent clinical birth procedure. By comparison, Nelson's responsive but objective hand-held camera uses natural light to record the actions leading up to and including the birth in linear sequence. Nelson's empathy with the mother is palpable, even as the filmmaker struggles to convey the wonder of what she is seeing. This kind of camera-work remains unique in Nelson's oeuvre, and though the film's differences from Brakhage's may have resulted to some extent from [other] circumstances, *Kirsa Nicholina*, is remarkably singular and articulate in the forces it conveys.<sup>412</sup>

In fact, when Nelson got the print back from the laboratory she noticed a flaw in the colours in one of the shots but chose to keep it on the print both because she liked the colour effect and wanted to interfere as little as possible. This respect for the object and the material as well as a persistent awareness of her own position, being the one who is observing and participating at the same time, received its most overt depiction in *Time Being*, an 8-minute film about her dying mother. In *Time Being*, which was also her last film about her family, the hand-held camera is marked by the same objectivity as in *Kirsa Nicholina*, but this time there is a repeating movement towards Nelson the filmmaker herself. A series of three shots follows the same structure: beginning with a static shot of her mother lying in a bed in a hospital after which the camera suddenly withdraws moving towards Nelson, envisioning both the bond between Nelson and her mother that will be cut off and her own ambivalence towards the act of recording these last moments that encompass both the brutality and beauty of life.

*Kirsa Nicholina* and *My Name is Oona*, Nelson's first solo films, are paradigmatic for many reasons. They establish a common ground for Nelson's films of the 1970s; both are in congruence with the experimental film scene at the time, and they are also part of, and contribute to, the institutionalization of experimental film that during these years reaches its most expansive phase. *Kirsa Nicholina* was screened at several women's festivals and was also the first film by Gunvor Nelson that was screened in Sweden, whereas *My Name is Oona* turned into a canonized work in the making of the history of American avant-garde film, constituting both the sign and the referent in the proud history of American minor cinema.<sup>413</sup>

The following years Nelson collaborated on two films, with Dorothy Wiley on *Five Artists BillBobBillBillBob* (1971) and with Freude Bartlett on *One & the Same* (1973), and finished the successful *Take Off* (1972) and her personal *Moons Pool* (1973). *Take Off* is an amusing portrait of a stripper, beginning with a depiction of a professional mature stripper performing her act. After having removed her clothes, she starts to undo her body parts as well. The film ends

with the stripper kicked out into space. Despite the uncomplicated idea and narrative, the film has a unique voice due to its immediacy, a quality required through the use of plain animation technique, a driving music score, moving camera and flicker effects.<sup>414</sup> The real strength of the film, however, is to be found in Nelson's treatment of her object. The stripper, Ellion Ness, is performing her act with professionalism, dignity and distance, and this force is hailed by the camera. Thus, the film is not a critique of the act or of the subject performing; hence the stripper is never turned into that object of fetishization that is often the premise of mainstream narrative cinema. Nelson has made, together with Valie Export, one of the most convincing cinematic complements to Laura Mulvey's highly influential theory of the objectification of women on film.<sup>415</sup>

The explicit body politics in *Take Off* receives another twist in Nelson's highly personal *Moons Pool*. Whereas the former may be still considered to bear upon the dualism in relation to the body, in the latter Nelson appropriates the body itself and turns it into an embodied site for self-reflection and self-observation. This in a manner that echoes the quote by R. D. Laing that Export uses in her film, *Syntagma* (1984): "The body clearly takes a position between me and the world. On the one hand this body is the center of my world and on the other it is the object in the world of others". It might be that *Moons Pool* at the time was far too complex regarding its body politics, so the 15-minute colour film never became a paradigmatic example for analyzing and exploring the body in film.

*Moons Pool* begins with cascades of water followed by shots of Nelson after which the real matter of the film starts to unfold. Firstly, shots of a naked female body in a bath; secondly, male and female bodies swimming naked underwater in a transgressive, weightless space. The initial pondering of a voice-over during the shots of a female body in the bath "I don't know why we are given these bodies to care for, anyway"; "I dreamt through my body"; "I see you see me through my body" etc., are uttered while the camera shows a fragmented body and leads, thereafter, over to a segment with footage of complete bodies, male and female, whirling around in water free and unfettered. The second part of the film is also almost totally liberated from speech, and has a dreamlike, complex soundtrack consisting of sounds of waves, voices, water and music woven together into a seamless web of sounds.

Whereas the early films always pictured the body as an object, albeit strongly and independently as in *Kirsa Nicholina* and *Take Off*, now, in Anker's words "Nelson clearly abounds with pleasure from the sheer sensuality of the immersion and abandon of her spatial limits" liberating the body into a subject and a place for experience and exploration.<sup>416</sup> Thus, *Moons Pool* appears as the fulfilment of the trajectory of Nelson's personal filmmaking, hence a paradox that it

never received as much attention as her earlier films. This may be explained by the fact that her first two films, *Schmeerguntz* and *Fog Pumas*, clearly belong to the tradition of the underground while *Kirsa Nicholina*, *Take Off* and *My Name is Oona* have been seen as typical of the general trends of so-called West Coast filmmaking. The neglect of *Moons Pool* can also be explained by the fact that the American experimental film culture at the time was predominantly a male affair and that when female filmmakers were acknowledged, it was according to Lauren Rabinovitz, because they made overtly feminist films:

**Although the First International Women's Festival [1972] included Gunvor Nelson and Storm de Hirsch, it primarily featured the work of a younger generation of women filmmakers, women who had recently graduated from art or filmmaking schools. The films – both experimental and documentary – incorporated personal elements of autobiography or dealt with gender issues for the purpose of consciousness raising and social transformation. They were part of the broader movement that emphasized the political as personal by documenting how social events and beliefs affect individual women's lives.<sup>417</sup>**

Thus, the place reserved for Gunvor Nelson in the history of American avant-garde film was that of the filmmaker behind *Schmeerguntz*, *Kirsa Nicholina*, *My Name is Oona* and *Take Off*.<sup>418</sup> In that sense *Moons Pool* may be viewed as a prediction of what would follow: Nelson's highly personal films which did not seem to fit into the current trends and traditions of the movement.<sup>419</sup>

In 1973 Nelson began work on *Trollstenen* which was finished three years later, being the first film shot entirely in Sweden. In 1979 she finished *Before Need*, another lengthy film in colour co-made with Dorothy Wiley that centres upon an elderly woman and her thoughts presented in a stream of consciousness manner in which images, colours and sounds are associatively cut together forming an endless web of relationships between mind and matter, consciousness and external reality. *Trollstenen* and *Before Need* were, due to their privateness, not favourable films on the American scene that at the time was also losing ground.<sup>420</sup> The shift to Sweden was, therefore, consequential. The two films from the late 1970s cohere with a transitional period. There is a decline in the American scene and Nelson begins to use a more complex technique as Scott MacDonald rightly points out in an interview with Nelson: "*Trollstenen* is where I first see your 'mature' approach to structure: your use of a set of visual and sound motifs, parallel worlds that come and go, woven together serially to explore a certain perceptual/psychological/spiritual domestic terrain. After *Trollstenen* even the shorter films incorporate that organization."<sup>421</sup>

173 Nelson had heard of the Film Workshop in Stockholm and her decision to begin to work there with *Frame Line* proved to be decisive as the workshop

Gunvor Nelson, *Moons Pool* (1973).

had appropriate facilities for working with animation. The form was, of course, nothing new for Nelson; she had used animation in *Take Off* in the sequences where the stripper removes her body parts as well as inserting clear and black frames in order to create an expressive flicker effect. In *Frame Line*, however, the cinematic language created is totally different. The previous films were firmly anchored in a practice in which the camera was registering, however stressing, the transformative capacity of film, that whenever something was shot it turned into something else: beauty, grotesque, absurd and so forth. Now, on the other hand, film was for the first time primarily a medium that Nelson used in order to reflect upon images. This is underscored by Nelson's technique to create 'imperfect animation', that is, not being interested in making smooth and clean transformations or 'pure' animation. Instead, animation by Nelson was turned into a 'vectoral' strategy, into the technique of the sign and the signifier, not of the referent (of what was referred to) or the signified (of what was represented). The way images worked and could be reworked became the focal point.

*Frame Line* is an ambivalent depiction of Stockholm and Sweden, and of Nelson's return to her home country. At the beginning hands kneading a dough-like pulp appear and a voice-over whispers, alternating between "ja" ("yes") and "nej" ("no"). After the epilogue and the title "Frame Line", the film follows a journey into sound and black-and-white images which are remarkably rigorously edited but openly associative at the same time. Content-wise there is a constant reflection upon images and imagery, images of Stockholm, Sweden and Nelson intercut with hands or brushes working and reworking material and images. For the first time Nelson clearly subordinates the camera as a recording device to the material signification process of film itself, thus marking clearly the exploration of new territory in her filmmaking; a change in which animation played a crucial role due to its distancing effect as Nelson spells it out in one of the many inserted texts that appear in *Frame Line*: "All remote, random"; "and in harmony".

*Frame Line* was followed by four similar films: *Light Years* (1987), *Light Years Expanding* (1988), *Field Study # 2* (1988) and *Natural Features* (1990). In between Nelson finished *Red Shift*, one of her most admired films, a dense fictitious film about family relations in which the various roles were played by members of her family. After *Time Being* Nelson finished two films about her home town, Kristinehamn, *Kristina's Harbour* and *Old Digs* (both 1993), and re-edited, at home together with Dorothy Wiley, *Before Need* into *Before Need Redressed* (1994). All these films draw upon the more complex structure that characterizes Nelson's work since the late 1970s, and most of the films from the 1980s were also partly made at the Film Workshop in Stockholm.

175 Nelson's move to video happened due to several reasons. It became in-



creasingly difficult to find decent processing laboratories and good projection facilities, and 16mm started to become obsolete. The prints wore out and it was costly to print new ones. Digital video, on the other hand, had improved; the equipment was light and easy to use and when it came to sound there were many more opportunities. Yet the most important reason for the shift of medium was that working digitally meant that Nelson was not dependent on film laboratories anymore; she was from now on able to be in full control of the whole process.

The first two videos, *Tree-Line* (1998) and *Snowdrift* (2001) are clearly video works. Both are investigations of the new medium and especially *Snowdrift* plays with digital software and imagery in which the image is established as the primary object for elaboration. Thus, *Snowdrift* is characterized by image transformation and by establishing the image as an object in itself and not being a transparent window on the world, two of the main characteristics of digital imaging according to Gene Youngblood in his essay, "The Cinema and the Code".<sup>422</sup> *Tree-Line* is a play with different techniques too; it is based upon sound and image material that accompanied Premiere's software at the time. Nelson simply began to play with the programme when learning how to work digitally. The only inserted image is a photograph of a tree.

The starting point of the video is the soundscape and afterwards movement and the image of a tree appears. From this follows an exploration and elaboration of the material presented. What is different compared to her collage-like animations from the 1980s is that the live action of brush movement or photographs is now replaced by commands run by computer software. The video does not consist of pure image manipulation though; after the image of the tree has been introduced, a digitally animated train appears running through the image field allowing glimpses of the tree to be displayed. The movement simulates the act of shooting the image of a tree while being disrupted by a passing train. In this manner *Tree-Line* is turned into a reflection on the intersection of two different media, film and video, photographic (indexical) media vs. electronic media. In fact, *Tree-Line* challenges some of the basic assumptions Youngblood makes in his essay from 1989, showing, for example, that the arrival of electronic media does not necessarily constitute a break between new and old traditions, rather, that there is interplay between continuity and discontinuity, or remediation in which previous techniques or modes are preserved and appropriated into new forms. It is also as if Nelson felt that she had to explore the new technique in *Tree-Line* and even more so in *Snowdrift*, much in the same way as *Fog Pumas* was an opportunity to play with filmic expression.

In her two last videos, *Trace Elements* (2003) and *True to Life* (2006), Nelson has returned to the aesthetics of capturing and recording. Playing, as in

the former, with the idea of actually being able to catch something at all by using a camera, or, as in the latter, using the lightness of the video camera for dragging and pushing it through her garden, capturing images and moments that otherwise would have been impossible to record. Hence, *True to Life* meant a return to that which was one of her first attractions to the medium:

**I discovered how beautiful things *look* through the camera. Seeing a neighbor's dirty kitchen in reality, and then seeing how through the camera it became beautiful gave us a kind of euphoria. A melon or dirty dishes, seen with a lens in close-up, were translated into something else. We had so much fun looking at the world in that way. [...] The camera became like binoculars: you zero in on a small area and isolate it, and it becomes more precious *because* it is selected. That process of selection is what makes a film. I started to understand all this through *Schmeerguntz*.<sup>423</sup>**

Consequently, new media offered new possibilities but it did not necessarily lead Nelson into abandoning certain means or methods. On the other hand, the expansion of the filmic language that Nelson had elaborated upon since her seminal *Frame Line* prefigured the digital liberation of the moving image, showing that what, according to Youngblood, characterized the digital was already possible if you forgot about the established grammar of the moving image and treated it as an unbounded structure.<sup>424</sup> Thus, Nelson was able to show that image transformation, parallel event streams, temporal perspective and the act of establishing the image as an object were not necessarily an outcome of digital technology. What, on the other hand, did change was that Nelson began to receive more attention in Sweden, due to the rising interest in video art since the mid-1990s and the accessibility of her work when she changed into the cheaper, more popular and accessible format of digital video.

The Swedish reception of her work culminated in a retrospective at Moderna Museet during the autumn of 2007 that also encompassed screenings of American experimental film from the 1960s and 1970s. In this way Nelson's work could be re-discovered without being subordinated to a current trend. Her career was made possible because of the vibrant American avant-garde film scene in the 1960s, but she found herself soon being out of tune with the main trends of the time, not making the right kind of women's films in the 1970s and expanding the cinematic language in the 1980s before the digital revolution reached full effect. As Steve Anker has aptly put it in a comparison between Stan Brakhage and Gunvor Nelson: "Brakhage's work is paean to subjectivity as a heroic quest, and his vision is quintessentially late twentieth century with one eye fixed firmly on the past. Nelson's denies the validity of a single, authoritative perspective or understanding of the world; hers is a vision solely of its time."<sup>425</sup>

# The Expanded Field of the Experimental Moving Image

## **The Emergence of Video Art**

From an international perspective, video art saw its origins in the mid-1960s. Within the Fluxus movement, artists had started to use the medium of television as a new kind of apparatus loaded with cultural significance; a development that went hand-in-hand with the introduction of the first portable video recorders on the market. In Sweden, however, video had its somewhat belated breakthrough on the art scene only in the 1980s, in spite of pioneers in the field like Ture Sjölander and Sven Inge. Swedish video artists Gunnel Pettersson and Måns Wrangé, who have also written a short history of the development of Swedish video art, have pointed to several reasons for this delay. They note that conceptual art – the most common international framework for video art – did not really gain any terrain in Sweden until the 1990s. Neither did performance art within the dominant institutions, apart from a few already-mentioned experimental scenes, like Pistolteatern and Fylkingen, and some artistic forerunners like Karlung and Reuterswård.<sup>426</sup> Installation art has also generally been quite rare in Sweden, and the new media turn is no exception to the rule. It is equally striking that the film medium remains almost completely absent from Bengt af Klintberg's record of the Swedish Fluxus movement, of which he was also part himself; in fact, he only mentions his own experiment within film.<sup>427</sup> Secondly, Pettersson and Wrangé mention the lack of production facilities as well as the absence of relevant education at art schools. Artists who wanted to explore the new video medium thus had to orient themselves towards different international contexts.<sup>428</sup> But apart from the opening carried about by technological innovation and the institutional context that in spite of these innovations may have limited the expansion of cinema in Sweden, the theoretical discourses on cinema and its expansion must also be considered, which in the long run could not afford to ignore the significant media changes within an increasingly complex culture of moving images.

The development of performance art in the introduction of video art also actualizes Peter Wollen's distinction between the two avant-gardes that identified, loosely, with the co-op movement on the one hand, and filmmakers such as Godard or Straub-Huillet on the other hand. Wollen argues that:

[...] though a simple convergence is very unlikely, it is crucial that the two avant-gardes should be confronted and juxtaposed. History in the arts goes on, as Victor Shklovsky long ago pointed out, by knight's moves. During the first decade of this century, when the historic avant-garde embarked on its path, the years of the coupure, the cinema was still in its infancy, scarcely out of the fairground and the nickelodeon, certainly not yet the Seventh Art. For this reason – and for others, including some economic reasons – the avant-garde made itself felt late in the cinema and it

is still very marginal in comparison with painting or music or even writing. Yet in a way, the cinema offers more opportunities than any other art – the cross fertilization, so striking a feature of those early decades, the reciprocal interlocking and input between painting, writing, music, theatre, could take place within the field of cinema itself.<sup>429</sup>

And Wollen concludes that: “cinema, because it is a multiple system, could develop and elaborate the semiotic shifts that marked the origins of the avant-garde in a uniquely complex way, a dialectical montage within and between a complex of codes”.<sup>430</sup>

The establishment of video art generally carried a renewed interest in experimental film and its history. However, in Sweden, this has seldom implied any revival for 16mm or 8mm film within the institutional field of art. If a video artist should turn to using film formats, this would also immediately imply a change of field from the art institution to cinema. From an international perspective, this appears as an exception: in Vienna, Toronto or Helsinki, artists have regularly explored film formats alongside video. It remains somewhat paradoxical that Sweden appeared as a pioneering country within experimental cinema during the 1950s, but that the interest in cinematic forms apparently disappeared completely during the 1970s and 1980s.

An important exception to this rule is the artist Charlotte Gyllenhammar (b. 1963), originally trained as a painter but increasingly turning to film or three-dimensional installation art. Her most well-known installation may be the suspension of a 120-year-old oak tree upside down above Drottninggatan in Stockholm in 1993: *Die for you*. Between 1996 and 1998 and later, however, she also made several loops on 35mm film, which were then transferred to 16mm: *The Unlikeness I and II* (1996), *Disobedience* (1997) and *Belle* (1998). In 1999 she made the installation *Fall*, on Beta SP video, with sound transferred to DVD. As Sinziana Ravini observed: “Trees hung upside down, falling women, duplicated rooms and identities – these are but few of the details that make up the rich web of Charlotte Gyllenhammar’s art”.<sup>431</sup> In 2003 she returned to 16mm film with *Obstacles and Disguises*, which shows German policemen, armed and in disguise, moving over the rooftops of the Olympic village in Munich, where Palestinian terrorists were holding Israeli athletes hostage. But the attempt to free them ends in total disaster. The same year, she filmed *The Spectators* in 16mm. Again, according to Sinziana Ravini, “Gyllenhammar focuses on hero worship and the idealisation of lost innocence, the sadism of seeing something beautiful fall apart, and an ever-present yearning to enter into the story and the image”.<sup>432</sup> In *Ohne Titel* (2004) and in *Blindbock* the same year, she worked with video, as well as in *Nachsagen*, *Ich und Meinhof* with 24P HDCAM and in *Night* with DVCAM: all transferred to DVD, like *Hang*

(2006), originally on 24P HDCAM. In the exhibition *Deformation* (2009), film is again used as one element among others. Again, in Ravini's words:

**Gyllenhammar demonstrates how participation can turn into paralysis, how life can turn into death, but she also shows the opposite – how dead forms may be animated by being duplicated or deformed, how seemingly hermetically isolated works can be activated by the movements of bodies in space and ongoing social games. The big question is: Can mankind ever free itself from its many subjective prisons? Or are we forever doomed to a voyeurism that is nourished by the image of the other?**<sup>433</sup>

Gyllenhammar's films and installations have been shown both nationally and internationally. The films are technically quite advanced, and the film technique used as a sculptural element. Thus, within the Swedish context, a few artists working with film can still be found, whose works overlap with the breakthrough of video art. Recently, Gyllenhammar's fascination with the dop-pelgänger could be seen as illustrative of the contemporary media situation:

**This combined promise and threat can also be found in our contemporary fascination with the "promise of sameness" associated with pairs of twins, the life extending technologies of genetic manipulation or self-obliterating virtual avatars, indeed everything that might secure the dialectic between the self and its transformations.**<sup>434</sup>

However, D. N. Rodowick's concept of moving images as a new 'supergenre', replacing Christian Metz's earlier concept of fiction films as a supergenre within cinema, indeed offered an agenda for the new millennium in spite of technological divergences, in Sweden as well as internationally. With its lack of medium specificity, this term did in fact seem more apt to cover a rapidly-changing culture of very different kinds of images in movement.<sup>435</sup> This broadening of the concept of cinema has, consequently, been followed by a shift from attention to media-specific details towards a more general concern with images in movement, regardless of the specific medium in which they are transmitted. Not least within the experimental field, this tendency has also been efficiently demonstrated in practice by a number of individual artists and filmmakers. While starting their career in one specific medium, they have generally in the end turned out as multimedial artists. Thus, today, everyone seems aware of the existence of a new field, but not always clear about the appropriate way of naming it, be it art film or art video, media art or moving images. In discourses on moving images, 'film' and 'video' are often used synonymously, regardless of the medium actually used by the artist, and 'art film' has become a common term to designate video art. The terms that have gained

181 general acceptance today, however – video art or art film – both emanate from

the art scene, which appears to have taken over completely from the discourse of experimental film traced earlier. ‘Artists’ film and video’ would appear to be an inclusive term that has been suggested to cover the field, but which still remains in strong opposition to certain perspectives, such as that of Duncan Reekie who has instead argued for the preservation of the concepts of underground or avant-garde.<sup>436</sup>

From the 1960s onwards, however, and in Sweden in particular from the 1980s, the film medium as such was questioned to an increasing degree, and in particular its supposed specificity. Whereas ‘expanded cinema’ in the 1960s meant – in artist and theoretician Valie Export’s words – “the expansion of the commonplace form of film on the open stage or within a space, through which the commercial-conventional sequence of filmmaking – shooting, editing (montage), and projection – is broken up”, the concept has been widened today, and – still in Export’s words – refers to “the electronic, digital cinema, the simulation of space and time, the simulation of reality”.<sup>437</sup>

On several occasions, Fredric Jameson has also argued that experimental film should preferably “be inserted into a kind of ideal genealogy of experimental video rather than of mainstream cinema”.<sup>438</sup> The risk of a teleological argument in this connection is obvious. But still, Jameson’s argument may be true to a certain extent if considered from the viewpoint of reception history, insofar as experimental video in practice has to a large extent tended to appropriate experimental film history, and thus by definition also turning it into a prehistory of its own development. In the Swedish context, this becomes particularly clear, as there has never existed a clearly defined avant-garde tradition or any unified experimental film waves. With the emergence of video on the art scene, however, experimental film history has been retraced and rediscovered as a prehistory of video art. What happens, then, with experimental film culture within expanded cinema? What are the changes, where are the challenges?

Unlike the earlier chapters, the following does not aim to cover the development chronologically or encyclopaedically. With the breakthrough of video art, the field becomes far too complex and disparate to allow for any such ambition, let alone its almost explosive progression. Rather, it aims at discussing the question of the expanded field of experimental moving images on a more general level, as a matter of principle, though at the same time trying to capture a few lines of development and mentioning a few exemplary individual works.

### **Institutional Frames for a New Art Form**

The institutional aspect of video art both resembles and differs from that of experimental film culture. The most striking fact is the clear break between **182**

the two, where film experiments of the 1960s or 1970s seemed to be completely ignored by, or unknown to, emergent video artists. In both cases, however, the development of the art has largely been depending on relatively small and informal associations. The association Video Nu (“Video Now”) was initiated by the artist Ture Sjölander in 1979. In 1984, Föreningen elektronisk bildkonst (“Association of Electronic Visual Art”), was registered which took over from Video Now. Not unlike the former Film Group, the association organized screenings, courses, seminars and lectures, and a video studio was also established. In 1985, the association had become sufficiently established to receive a grant from the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. For the first time, video art was recognized by the institutional art world. But the excluding tendency that, at times, had characterized The Film Group (and indeed other artists associations or workshops in the 1980s) was entirely absent here. There were no specific requirements to join in, and thus most members were unestablished artists or people with backgrounds in other arts, like dance or electroacoustic music. However, due to lack of funding, the studio had to close down in spite of their enormously popular courses in video technique and video art. In Gothenburg, a scene for video art developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s around the video festival Monitor and Frölunda kulturhus – a venue for theatre and culture – together with local television. Many of the established artists today – Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Ann-Sofi Sidén, Johan Söderberg (b. 1962) and others – emerged from this scene. This period, when the VHS-camcorder came into common use, is also the only period within Swedish experimental film history when there is something close to an underground movement, where video art started to be shown in small festivals, mostly for short film, as they had not yet made their entrance into museums and galleries.

In the mid-1990s, with the final breakthrough of video art in Sweden both within art schools and other institutions, a new association for digital art was founded, which also financed a new workshop: Crac – Creative Room for Art and Computing – with an enormous influence during the years to come.<sup>439</sup> The situation had thus changed completely in only a few years. Video art and technology had become established, so that not only the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, but also The Knowledge Foundation and The Foundation for the Culture of the Future all offered substantial grants in order to create a technologically advanced laboratory for video production, with renowned artists acting as warrants of quality, and thus contributing to the development of video as artistic medium in a Swedish context. However, a question that remains is that of the relationship between video art and television. Crac never got any real counterpart within Swedish television, which could have been the case given the early history of the medium. Already in the 1970s and 1980s, radio



producer Peter R. Meyer (b. 1949) had made a series of experimental radio programmes, aiming at crossing over between different forms of art, and in this connection he also introduced American video art for television. In the 1990s, there were also a few attempts to broadcast video art, mostly without any specific framing of the works. Instead, the very idea was that they should appear un-introduced, as surprises within ordinary programming. In this connection, a couple of international as well as Swedish video artists were screened. However, these examples remain exceptions to the rule. Not only have Swedish video artists seemed unaware of their forerunners within film, but also of early video art made already in the 1960s for television, such as the work by the pioneer Karl-Birger Blomdahl. Whereas in England, an experimental series like *A TV Dante* (1989), directed by Tom Phillips and Peter Greenaway, was produced directly for television, Swedish television has not played a very active role in the development of experimental film or video art. The experiments that were made during the 1960s was the exception to this rule. However, many of these experiments were never shown on television. An example that could be mentioned is Ture Sjölander's first production for TV, *Har ni tänkt på att foto...* ("Have you thought about that photography...", 1965) which was apparently considered too controversial and only shown privately at Swedish Television as well as on one occasion at Fylkingen. It consists of a 16mm TV report, shot in Stockholm, as well as a documentary shot in a studio, where the role of photography is discussed. But apart from these exceptions, video art has been left almost entirely to the art scene.

Whereas experimental film has its roots within a general avant-garde art context, as well as within the institution of cinema, video art has from the beginning been presented exclusively within an art context, its public screenings and events often being initiated by individual artists. With a new medium, there was a need for new venues, or at least for adapting old venues for new needs. Fylkingen became for several decades established as an important experimental scene, a scene for the introduction of video art. Screenings of works by Roland Nameth and Ted Weisberg in 1976 was followed in 1977 by a public debate on video art and an exhibition of video sculptures by Nameth and several other artists. Nameth also documented an Andy Warhol performance from 1968, *andy warhol's exploding plastic inevitable*, which has received considerable international attention when introduced on the Internet. During the 1980s and 1990s, works by Nameth, Teresa Wennberg (b. 1944), Ann-Sofi Sidén, Antonie Frank (b. 1955) and many others were screened and contextualised in different outlooks towards international video art. But Fylkingen has also traditionally opened for interartial and intermedial performances, and engaged in the development of new interfaces between different media, such as the introduction of the electronica scene around the turn of the

millennium, where moving images usually form an integrated part of the musical performance. When Filmform started collecting work from video artists, and created its honorary award for experimental film and video in 1995, which was first awarded to video artist Antonie Frank, this also marked a clear shift in the institutional framework for emerging video art.

If many avant-garde art forms historically have started as anti-establishment movements, this may be particularly true of video art, which partly emerged as a reaction to the increasing commercialization of galleries. The fact that video artists in general “created their own platforms with production, education, theory, presentation, archives and distribution” granted a relative independence, and at the same time favoured new forms of networking on a global level.<sup>440</sup> The lack of cultural prestige in the new medium may, to a certain extent, have meant exclusion from traditional art circuits, but it also included a potential for openness towards controversial themes. Thus, for example, a postcolonial critique appeared within video art a decade before its general inclusion in the art establishment. But there was also a new openness towards artists from continents that otherwise would have remained absent from the USA or West European art scenes. However, as Gunnel Pettersson and Måns Wrangé have also pointed out, the relation towards institutional art has always been ambivalent for video artists; at the same time, the strive for recognition also led to a struggle for getting out of cinema screenings and into museum installations.<sup>441</sup> Only if exhibited within an installation context, the works would enter the art institution and thus noted by critics as well as a larger general public.

Thus, video art did not for long remain limited to screenings on experimental scenes. Moderna Museet, the most prestigious institution within Swedish modern art, has hosted video screenings in their cinema since 1979. In the early 1980s, Kulturhuset in Stockholm also hosted several exhibitions of video art. “Ikaros” in 1982 explored the new technique and the market, but also contained a section on international video art. In 1984 “Video art” explored the national scene, followed by “Video/Art/Video” in 1985 where international pioneers were screened. The same year, Video Art – Stockholm International Festival took place, with both an international and a historical scope. The same year, at the festival Video Open, international video art was screened for the first time in a big cinema.

With the separate Bill Viola retrospective in 1985 at Moderna Museet, video art also entered the museum space in the stricter sense of the word. And even though the new screenings must remain untouched, the awareness of the presence of video works in museum collections doesn’t really have any counterpart in the film medium. Another video installation by Klaus vom Bruch was shown in 1989, as well as the exhibition “Interface”, produced by the As-

sociation for Electronic Visual Art. The same year, Moderna Museet also arranged a seminar called “Sweden: a developing country of video art?”. These events together marked the admittance of a new art form into the museum also in Sweden; a change that, in retrospect, appears as more significant than it might have seemed at the time. Today, Moderna Museet has indeed offered proof of its renewed interest in moving image cultures. With the Jonas Mekas exhibition in 2005, the Gunvor Nelson exhibition in 2007 with screenings of an international moving image avant-garde chosen by Nelson, and the highlighting of cinema within the 50th jubilee of the museum, it has become clear that Moderna Museet has rediscovered the importance of cinema in the history of its own development, and is now ready to take on its responsibility for the future within the general domain of moving image art. When asked in an interview about the most important event ever in art history, Ann-Sofi Sidén answered without hesitating that it was the introduction of high technology into art, a development that reached its peak with video art.<sup>442</sup>

The general breakthrough of the new medium, however, was marked by a number of significant changes rather than by any single, spectacular event. At Norrtälje konsthall, however, a Dara Birnbaum retrospective in 1995 gained a certain symbolical significance as groundbreaking. At Stockholm Art Fair the same year, the “Ana’logos” exhibition – curated by Elisabeth Haitto – presented both national and international video art, and Moderna Museet also made a general inventory of Swedish video art: “Blått snitt”. Now, film festivals also started to integrate video art as part of their programming, and independent video art festivals had already become established. Several of these festivals have become recurrent events, for example, those in the regional cities of Jönköping and Örebro. Within art schools, it had finally become possible to apply with video works, and within a short period of time, the development took a completely new direction. Professors of video art were now for the first time engaged in teaching. A decade later, video had not only become a dominant mode of expression within Swedish art schools, but these institutions have also played a crucial role for the development of video art. The publication of the anthology *Black Box Illuminated* in 2003, with contributions from film scholars and artists, also marked the entrance point of the new medium in Swedish public debate. And in 2006, the yearbook of the Swedish Art Association was for the first time devoted to moving images.

Internationally, however, for example in England, there has been a more continuous process of transition between media, so that many artists working with film did change to video.<sup>443</sup> In Sweden, however, with a few exceptions – like Gunvor Nelson, who has reworked earlier films in the video medium – this transition is rather characterized by a break, where artists in general have come to video without any previous experience in film.

In Sweden, the Filmform foundation – in fact one of the world’s oldest archives of its kind – has also gained new and more specific importance in its role as “dedicated to promotion, distribution and preservation of Swedish art film and experimental video”, with an increasing influence following the expansion of cinema. Expressions like ‘art film’ or ‘art video’ might seem to be known by anybody today – which is true insofar as there is a general knowledge about the developing field – but still, a central institution like Filmform has tended to remain quite anonymous. By Filmform’s regular newsletters, however, as well as by the screenings and events that they organize, they contribute continually both to the definition and the development of the field. Two major events in this connection organized by Filmform were the video festivals “Moonlights & Highlights” and “Old School vs New School”, the latter celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation. Filmform also offers an annual honorary award to “a person who has distinguished him- or herself in the domain of experimental film and video art”, thus highlighting its own role as one of the most important canonizing instances within expanded cinema in Sweden.

### **From Documenting Technique to Art Form**

When trying to capture the expansion of cinema in Sweden, Norwegian-born artist Kjartan Slettemark (1932–2008) appears in many ways as an exemplary figure, who also received the Filmform award in 2003. With a background in art schools in Norway and Sweden, he started working within experimental film using super-8 and 16mm. In *Nixon Visions*, a film that Slettemark made with Hans Esselius (b. 1948) in 1971, using cut-and-paste aesthetics, pictures of Nixon are put together, and fractures and interfaces in the medium are explored. But Slettemark’s profile from the beginning was also that of a multimedia artist. He was one of the key figures in the introduction of happening and performance art in Sweden. Several of his actions, like a performance as a poodle at Malmö konsthall in 1976, have become legendary. But unlike Joseph Beuys, the international leading figure of performance art, he never strived to found any movement or ‘school’. Rather, he has been characterized as “a one-man movement” in himself, an outsider much like Åke Karlung, or even *enfant terrible* of art taking up “an indefatigable Don Quixote fight against the windmills of the art world”, be it within body art, trash art or moving images.<sup>444</sup> The political dimension of his art is as obvious as is his playfulness, though not without a satirical dimension, in dealing with new technologies. In the early 1980s at Video Now, Slettemark combined performances with video art, working together with Karin (b. 1950) and Marie Grönlund (b. 1952). In these performances, the audience was also involved, as several video

Kjartan Slettemark, documentation  
of the performance *Killing Time –  
världspolitisk avloppsrensning* (2004).

cameras registered both audience and performance. After mixing the video recordings, the final result was projected on a large screen, thus revealing the performative aspect of video art and, at the same time, mediating the performance as such by video. Appearing repeatedly in the role as Dr Video, Slettemark also acted as a kind of ‘technological therapist’. He announced the creation of a medical centre for video treatments – his own gallery, rebaptised for this purpose to Maria Videopool – and argued for compulsory video treatment of the managers of Swedish television, in order to cure them by video from the one way violence transmitted through the TV medium. But he also worked within television himself, with *In the Videohead of an Artist – Individeohead*, an experimental video work produced directly for TV 2 in 1983. A work entitled *Video or Not to Be*, 1985, gives an obvious ironic twist to the new pretensions of the medium, and with the concept of “videovoodoo”, he also introduces the spectator into a world of black video magic. To Slettemark, the permanent rebel, video represented a possibility to renew art as long as it remained a ‘dirty’ medium, connected to heated debates on violence rather than to fine art in any conventional sense. He used it to create new interfaces between artist and spectator, but also as a kind of incantation to capture a new audience. But as soon as video art became institutionalised, his critical regard was also turned towards this potential new art establishment. Above all, however, an aesthetical shift following the turn from film to video is revealed in Slettemark’s artistic development: from working on the raw material in *Nixon Visions*, where the work of art could still be identified with the film as object, to an art where video appears as part of a wider context of installations, performances and events, and where the border between art and life has become obscure.

Within emerging video art in Sweden, it was generally considered as a virtue that art to an increasing degree became ‘dematerialised’ with video, 188

thus removing art from its function as market commodity. In comparison with the film medium, video took the moving image one step further in the process of de-objectification. Video art also appeared as a possible alternative to television, with its risk of rendering the spectator passive. With video, a new horizon of understanding the work of art was born, with the appearances of video screens in new and unexpected environments, both in museums and galleries and within urban spaces. But the role of video as documenting performance art, together with dance, was also a crucial step in the development of video art as a new form of expression. This development is true to the maxim that less is more: the poorer the technique, the more true the image was considered to be.

Choreographer Margaretha Åsberg (b. 1939), a pioneer of performance art and experimental dance in Sweden, founded the experimental group Pyramiderna in 1979 and The Modern Dance Theatre in 1986, a stage where film or video has often played an important part in the performances. She had already made an experimental film, *The Night of 19 November* (1978), based on *Skaldens natt* (“Night of the poet”) by the Swedish classic author, Carl Jonas Love Almqvist. But her work has also regularly been documented on video, like a new premiere of Pyramiderna in 2004. Her work “-skap – IN THE SHADOW OF P” (2003) was produced in a special, filmed version for television 2004. And in *A Thousand Years by God* (2006), an experimental dance-theatre-opera-work based on texts by author Stig Dagerman and by researchers in astrophysics and cognition psychology, the two latter also taking active part in the event, the composer Åke Parmerud (b. 1953) also contributed with pieces of film and music which were integrated into the performance, and the whole project, in between art and science, was video documented.

This also points to another characteristic feature of video: that apart from playing a role as an independent form of expression, it may also appear in different combinations where its role is subordinate. None of the works mentioned here are considered as video works, but still, video forms an integral part of their conception. Here, a line may be drawn back to choreography and dance pioneer Birgit Åkesson, a leading figure within the European dance avant-garde, who early on seems to have considered dance and moving images to be part of the same context: a culture of movement. Of particular importance, not least symbolically, was the fact that Åkesson participated in *Ballettprogram*, a Swedish film for television, being broadcast during the film company Sandrews’ week of test broadcasting in the Stockholm area in May 1954, preceding the introduction of television in the country later the same year. Thus, Åkesson’s art highlights the close historical connections between movement in modern dance and moving images. Lauren Rabinovitz, as mentioned earlier, also points out the close historical connection between dance and film

in the particular history of the New York avant-garde, with artists such as Maya Deren or Shirley Clarke. However, her observations are of more general value from the point of view of gender history. The dance scene has clearly been a point of entrance for female artists into the expanded field of moving images.<sup>445</sup>

In a way similar to Åsberg's work with performance and video on the Fylkingen scene, Katrin von Rettig (b. 1959) also worked with choreographer Björn Elisson (b. 1956) in *Vilande köthjärta* ("Resting heart of flesh", 1993). But several choreographers, like Cristina Caprioli (b. 1953) or Claire Parsons (b. 1962), have also turned to video themselves, contributing to the development in Sweden of dance video as a genre. Parsons made a dance- and video performance with Tore Nilsson (b. 1956) and Gunnel Pettersson (b. 1960), *Weight Thrown Falling*, at Fylkingen in 1994. Since 1998, Parsons has also collaborated with the artist Ztsu on different video and film installations, and her home page contains quick time films with her performances, like *Mouse – A Rokoko Tale*, or *Hello Robert: a visit to the Robert Rauschenberg exhibit Combines*, guided by a dancer. Among Caprioli's works are *Vit lycka* ("White happiness"), taking petroglyphs from Tanum on the Swedish west coast as point of departure for her exploration of movement. It can be shown as a video work only, or used in performances together with live dancers.<sup>446</sup> Her own company, ccap, produces primarily stage performances, but also film, video- and digital installations.

Together, these dance video works may be seen as highly relevant in pointing to some ways in which video art in Sweden has generally related to film. On the one hand, the classical idea of film as a recording device has here come to new life, with the return to an 'old' aesthetics that this has brought about, where the registration of what is in front of the camera has gained new significance. On the other hand, these videos also explore another classical idea of film, namely, as movement. Here, they draw on ontological conceptions of the medium as movement, frequent not least within early film theory, but they also contribute to expanding the medium in a new direction, where movement is no longer only a prerequisite, but also one of its most important means of aesthetic expression.<sup>447</sup>

### **Ann-Sofi Sidén: Explorations into the History of Mentality**

"The moving image", writes curator Cecilia Widenheim in an essay on Ann-Sofi Sidén (b. 1962), "is a visual magnet for modern man, and it is becoming a more and more regular feature in everyday life". She argues that film has often served as an "instrument of rebellion against the narrative structure" within the art world, providing examples from dada to Bruce Nauman, and she concludes that "the work of many contemporary artists reveals a strong

Ann-Sofi Sidén, *QM, I Think I Call Her QM* (1997).



link to both experimental film-making and the Hollywood genre".<sup>448</sup> This becomes apparent not least in Sidén's art. As one of the most influential video artists, she is exemplary in her way of integrating different forms of movement in her work and of engaging with space in complex ways.

According to Widenheim, Sidén's "portrayals of the human mind resemble research projects into the history of mentality, where the recurring themes are vulnerability, exposure, surveillance and control. She seeks out the hidden conflicts and frictional twilight zones of our contemporary power structures".<sup>449</sup> With Sidén, video has thus been placed within the political strand of contemporary art, where place and space have become commonplaces from which to investigate politics and society, and where the artist's own performance or participation in the work forms a determining part of its structure. Sidén's art also illustrates the complexity of contemporary screen culture; she projects on screens or on walls, onto gallery windows, in booths, in cubic monitor spaces.

With *QM*, *Queen of Mud*, Sidén created a character whom she has impersonated during a 10-year period by photographing or filming her own body covered with mud in several different contexts: as a sculpture at the perfumery section of a department store, at an art fair, in a fictitious TV show, or in a number of different city scenes. In the film *QM, I Think I Call Her QM* (1997), a meeting between *QM* and American psychiatrist Alice E Fabian is staged, where Fabian (or Ruth Fielding, as Sidén calls her) – whose fate has also inspired many of Sidén's installations – captures *QM* and submits her to a number of experiments in a laboratory: the test chamber. Among other things, *QM* is confronted with a playboy and with an iguana, while the psychiatrist observes her reactions through a surveillance camera. The work explores the medium as an instrument for control, but it also uses the spatial metaphor of the test chamber to explore the relations between physical and psychical limits. In *Who Told the Chambermaid?* (1998), Sidén elaborates further on the voyeuristic aspect on the surveillance camera, by showing different, seemingly arbitrary one-hour scenes from a hotel, all of them supposedly observed by the invisible chambermaid, who controls the whole hotel, both its public spaces and the private spaces of the hotel rooms, through her gaze. The work is presented through 17 coordinated monitors, displayed on a two-metre tall storage shelf, together with blankets, cleaning materials, toilet paper and towels – the equipment of the chambermaid. To a certain extent, the spectator is allowed to share the exercise of power of this all-seeing eye by choosing what to look at. But the work also serves as a reminder that the spectator is also simultaneously being watched by the surveillance cameras of the museum. This is further emphasized by the fact that one of the monitors shows current takes from the exhibition site.

Cecilia Widenheim argues that the politicisation of the body is the most predominant theme of Ann-Sofi Sidén's art. This theme which has dominated her oeuvre for two decades has also led to many feminist interpretations.<sup>450</sup> It is explored in depth in her work *Warte mal* (1999), an exploration of prostitution along European Highway 55, on the border between Germany and the Czech Republic, "the longest red-light district in Europe". Through 13 channels of DVD film, Sidén projects a number of interviews with the prostitutes. But her work also gives voice to the local policeman, to a former customer who now lives with one of the prostitutes, or to the owner of the hotel that serves as headquarters for prostitutes and pimps, and where Sidén herself stayed while filming. In Widenheim's words:

**The plethora of parallel voices gives the work a kaleidoscopic quality. It does not present an unequivocal division into good and bad, victim and exploiter. Instead, a complex weave unfolds, a portrait of a structure that everyone is part of, and where trafficking is a dark metaphor for the migration flows in the gap between two systems in the post-communist era.**<sup>451</sup>

The work also engages with exhibition space. It contains small booths where the spectator can watch, evoking pornographic peep-shows, but at the same time being watched, as the booths are transparent. But it also contains large projections, open areas evoking the feeling of standing at the roadside with the prostitutes, waiting for clients among those who drive by. Though Sidén works like a documentarist, or even as an ethnographer, she leaves most of the interpretation to the viewer, not least because of the spatial complexity of the work. Still, by focusing on the women and by the simple fact that the film gives them voice, the political dimension of the work becomes apparent.

In *3 MPH – Horse to Rocket* (2003), Sidén documents an almost 400km ride that she undertook during 25 days from San Antonio, Texas to the NASA headquarters, the Lyndon B Johnson Space Center in Houston. Though the result, a 35-minute DVD installation, may be less complex spatially as an installation than several earlier works, its contents nevertheless open towards numerous images and spaces contained in the cultural memory of cinema. Her slow ride through the landscape on an Appaloosa horse, the breed of North American Indians, may be seen as referring back to the panorama genre of early cinema, celebrating the glory of the American landscape, but also to the western genre with its cowboy culture, or to the American dream in general, which has found some of its most significant expressions within Hollywood cinema. Sidén's road movie explores a space with heavy mythical connotations, but also a social space: from urban spaces to suburbia, from the vast prairie into the research station – in

In a video installation, *Vid sidan om (In Passing)*, shown for the first time in Sweden at Bonniers Konsthall in 2008, Sidén portrays a young mother who leaves her new-born in a “baby throw-in” at a Berlin hospital. From the point of view of the objective surveillance cameras in black and white, following the child, as well as with subjective camera in colour following the mother, Sidén explores the mechanisms of separation and exposedness. She thus also confirms her role as one of the most important Swedish video artists whose art both turns out to be formally innovative and thematically urgent, exploring in depth the aporias of postmodern society. Her use of a vast number of materials and formats only underlines the inbetweenness suggested by the earlier catalogue, which not only seems to include the worlds portrayed, but just as much the different media that form her oeuvre.

### **Returns and Openings**

Thus, within the expanding field of moving images, old technologies are constantly combined with new, just like old aesthetic strategies are turned into new. Gunvor Nelson’s turn to video, already dealt with at length, is also exemplary in this respect with its intersection between media. That she received the special award by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee in 2006 – the first time a filmmaker was awarded this significant prize – also testifies to the fact that moving images for the first time had become established in the Swedish art world. The fact that most video artists today not only work in film or video, but that they often combine still photography, installation art or architectural work with different kinds of moving images, also implies an idea of intermedial exchange, or of a general mediatization. An artist like Carl Michael von Hausswolff (b. 1956), constantly challenges the definitions and limits of art and media. Since the early 1990s, he has been active as composer of electronic music as well as visual artist with a penchant for the architectural and the urban. He turned to moving images in two films made together with Thomas Nordanstad (b. 1964), where they explore empty places, with only traces left of human presence, in a kind of audiovisual minimalism: *Hashima, Japan* (2002) and *Al Qasr* (2005). Several Swedish video artists, such as Johanna Billing (b. 1973) with her *Project for a Revolution*, based on a scene from *Zabriskie Point* (1970) by Michelangelo Antonioni, also confirm the general tendency to appropriate film material within the new medium of video art.<sup>452</sup> Media historian Susanne Saether has suggested that “an aesthetics of sampling”, an expression generally reserved for the domain of music, could also serve as an adequate terminology to describe the manifold ways in which contemporary video art engages the media.<sup>453</sup> The media, according to Saether, can be manifested either as technology, as material record or through the mediascape; in

either case, they can be understood as ways of either 'doing' or 'living' the media, and thus as manifestations of sampling central to the process of mediation which, in turn, could be said to describe the general media appropriation of formerly defined fields of art like film. The radically intermedial perspective adopted by Saether is of particular interest in this connection; it is clear that contemporary video art indeed seems to function by sampling, and not least material from 'old' media like experimental film.

But also thematically, there are several recurrences that indicate that the turn to new media may still imply the return of old media themes and formats. The fact that female artists have largely dominated the domain of video art has sometimes been related to the emergence of the theme of the body, or of bodily experience, within the new medium. A connection could then also be made to the earlier mentioned feminists active at the Film Workshop. But this bodily dimension could just as well be connected to the physical, tactile dimension of the medium as such. Its immediacy seems to make it more apt to communicate bodily experiences, and thus to explore new territories within both old and new media. At the same time, the technical evolution seems to go hand-in-hand with a looking back to old forms of expression.

Early video artists, like Bruce Nauman or Vito Acconci, also made body performances; whereas the former started as a student of William T. Wiley's, filming on 16mm, the latter has become an important source of inspiration for Valie Export.<sup>454</sup> The work of several contemporary male video artists, like Magnus Wallin (b. 1965), whose "short intense three-dimensional animations projected in pitch-black rooms" only appear to leave room for "participation, seduction and the melodramatic gothic romance of horror", thus reveal the same obsession with bodily narratives like his earlier feminist counterparts or, rather, with the even more general question "how the body is understood and portrayed in Western modernity", to borrow Sara Arrhenius' words.<sup>455</sup> Maria Friberg (b. 1966), who works with photography and video, deals with questions of masculinity, power and identity. The men in her images, portraying solitary or isolated individuals, "are signs for men, trying to find their place in times of turmoil".<sup>456</sup> The work by Pål Hollender (b. 1968) is physical in quite another sense, as they engage with violence and trauma, such as sexual violence against children. In the words of curator Maria Lind, "Hollender makes work which is permeated with discomfort and pain, both physical and mental. Most of his videos are autobiographical. They push the boundaries of what he could, as the performer, possibly endure and you as the viewer can stand watching".<sup>457</sup> Hollender also pushes the limits of the art scene in an interesting way, as he has produced several segments for commercial infotainment or lifestyle/entertainment television shows, such as

docusoap, *Expedition: Robinson*. For Hollender, the art scene could be situated anywhere.

When Moderna Museet showed its exhibition “Play – Film och video” in 2009, it was a massive testimony to the fact that film had entered the museum; not only Eggeling, but also an artist like the American Alexander Calder (1898–1976), best known for his moving sculptures, were included here in the prehistory of art video. But there is also a movement in another direction which partly seems to have occurred in reaction to the previous movement out of the cinema and into the gallery or the museum. In a newsletter (2009) from KonstBio, an initiative from art curators Sofia Curman and Paola Zamora, it is proclaimed that video art has moved out of the art institution and into the cinema.<sup>458</sup> Three cinemas in the Stockholm/Uppsala region regularly screen a number of art videos as introduction to the ordinary feature film of the evening. The theme for the semester, “Occupants!”, may suggest that the art institution is now about to occupy a space generally reserved for cinema. An internal report (2008) from film commissioner Tove Torbiörnsson at the Swedish Film Institute points in the same direction, though in a slightly different connection. She notes as a general tendency that a number of well-established Swedish video artists during the last years have turned to documentary film as a new mode of expression; Torbiörnsson even talks about new “documentary screening windows” for video art.<sup>459</sup> Not only documentaries, however, but also short film is turned into art when artists are the authors. Danish artist Jesper Just, who was also presented at the “Play” exhibition at Moderna Museet in 2009, makes films that appear as ordinary shorts, loaded with references to film history, but shown in the museum instead of in the cinema. In Nathalie Djurberg’s (b. 1978) short clay animations, the critique against bullying and injustice is obvious, but also the attitude that is inspired by her humour, that “avoids being captured, categorised or controlled”.<sup>460</sup> Djurberg was awarded the Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale in 2009 for her “worrying fairy tales, fantasies and black pedagoga”.<sup>461</sup> Thus, video art today, to a certain extent, seems to have returned to its cinematic origins in early cinema animations.

Still, the circle may never be fully closed. The history of Swedish experimental film culture appears throughout the decades as strikingly heterogeneous; there are no film waves, no simple histories of succession, no unified groups forming clear tendencies. The expanded cinema in Sweden today, just like its early experiments with ‘narrow film’, indeed turns out to be as local as it is transnational, taking part in the minor histories of minor cinemas.



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# Endnotes

1. The programme was called *Mambo i filmrytm* ("Mambo in filmrhythm") and received very disparaging reviews.
2. The columns and reviews on film were written mainly during the years 1955–1957.
3. See, for example, the chapter "The Idea of the Amateur" in David E. James. *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
4. Letter from Lindgren to Hård af Segerstad, 8 Nov. 1956. Filmform archive.
5. James 2005, p. 13.
6. Tom Gunning. "Towards a Minor Cinema: Fonoroff, Herwitz, Ahwesh, Lapore, Khlar and Solomon". *Motion Picture*. 3: 1–2 (1990).
7. James 2005, pp. 446–447.
8. For a discussion of the notions of avant-garde and/or experimental see, for example, Lauren Rabinovitz's chapter "The Meanings of the Avant-garde" in *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943–71*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991; Anne Friedberg's brief but apt treatment in *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 162–168, as well as John Sundholm's chapter "Avant-Gardes and Modernisms" in *Gunvor Nelson and the Avant-Garde*. Sundholm (ed.). Frankfurt am Maim: Peter Lang, 2003.
9. For example, Paul Patera in a commentary titled "Experimentfilm är mest slentrian" ("Experimental film is mostly routine") in the daily *Expressen* 10 July 1953.
10. Tom Gunning. "Film ist. A Primer for a Visual World". [http://www.sixpackfilm.com/archive/texte/01\\_filmvideo/filmist\\_gunningE.html](http://www.sixpackfilm.com/archive/texte/01_filmvideo/filmist_gunningE.html) (4 Jan. 2007).
11. David Bordwell. *On the History of Film Style*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
12. For example: Malcolm Le Grice. *Abstract Film and Beyond*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978;
- Emmanuelle de L'Ecotais and Mark Levitch. "Dada Films", *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*. Dickerman, Leah (ed.). Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2005; Hal Foster et al. *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2004.
13. Patricia R. Zimmerman. "Morphing History into Histories: From Amateur Film to the Archive of the Future". *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* Ishizuka, Karen L. and Zimmerman (eds.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
14. Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1972, p. 9.
15. Sean Cubitt. *The Cinema Effect*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004, p. 97. Siegfried Zielinski. *Audiovisions*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999. See also Patricia R. Zimmerman's call for "film histories" in Ishizuka and Zimmerman (eds.).
16. For example, Friedberg; Zielinski; Lev Manovich. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001.
17. Thomas Elsaesser. "The New Film History as Media Archaeology". *Cinemas*. 14: 2–3 (2004).
18. Foucault 1972, p. 10. The best description of such a general history is Mitchell Dean's: "such a history seeks series, divisions, differences of temporality and level, form of continuity and mutation, particular types of transition events, possible relations and so on. [...] one which specifies its own terrain, the series it constitutes, and the relations between them", Dean. *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault's Methods and Historical Sociology*. London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 93–94.
19. For example Hård af Segerstad in "Amatörer med filmkamera" ("Amateurs with film-camera") *Svenska Dagbladet* 11 March 1957.
20. James 2005, p. 13.
21. Berkhofer. *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1995, p. 42. A. L. Rees. *A History of Experi-*

- mental Film and Video*. London: BFI, 1999, may be considered as a typical example of the Great Story. David Curtis approaches the problems by creating a canonical mapping with the artist as focal point in his *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain 1897–2004*. London: BFI, 2007. An interesting example of a 'general history' of a significant movement is Hans Scheugl's book on the Austrian avant-garde from the 1960s. Scheugl. *Erweitertes Kino: Die Wiener Filme der Goer Jahre*. Wien: Triton, 2002.
22. Lauren Rabinovitz and Paul Arthur have also both shown how organizations like Maya Deren's Creative Film Foundation and Jonas Mekas' Film-Makers' Cooperative were associations which more often served Deren's and Mekas' own personal agenda than that of the group of filmmakers whose interests the Foundation and the co-op was meant to serve in the first place. Rabinowitz 1991; Arthur. *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film since 1965*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
23. De Certeau. *The Writing of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 21.
24. Elsaesser, p. 10.
25. Berkhofer, p. 243.
26. The most eloquent representative of the post-media turn is Lev Manovich, see for example, *Language of New Media* and his essay "Post-media Aesthetics" (2004), <http://manovich.net/>.
27. A. L. Rees 1999, p. 2.
28. Ibid.
29. Michael O'Pray. *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions*. London: Wallflower Press 2003, p. 8.
30. Fredric Jameson. "Reading without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-Text". *The Linguistics of Writing. Arguments between Language and Literature*. Fabb, Nigel et al. (eds.). Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 199–200.
31. Rees 1999; Curtis 2007; James 2005; David E. James. *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; Duncan Reekie. *Subversion. The Definitive History of Underground Cinema*. London: Wallflower Press, 2007; Kerry Brougher. *Art and Film since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1996.
32. Gene Youngblood. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970; Valie Export. "Expanded Cinema as Expanded Reality". *Senses of Cinema*. 28: 3 (2003) [http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/28/expanded\\_cinema.html](http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/28/expanded_cinema.html) (4 March 2009); Jackie Hatfield. "The Subject in Expanded Cinema". *Filmwaves*. No. 2 (2004); "Expanded Cinema – and 'cinema of attractions'". *Filmwaves*. No. 1 (2005).
33. Jonathan Walley. "Modes of Film Practice in the Avant-Garde". Leighton, Tanya (ed.). *Art and the Moving Image. A Critical Reader*. London: Tate, 2008; Alexander Alberro. "The Gap Between Film and Installation Art", Ibid.
34. Manovich, 2001; D. N. Rodowick. *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007; Ryszard W. Kluszczyński. "From Film to Interactive Art: Transformation in Media Arts". Grau, Oliver (ed.). *MediaArtHistories*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007.
35. Kluszczyński, p. 223.
36. Malcolm Le Grice. "Three Strands of Experimental Cinema: Abstraction, Symbolism and Existentialism". Sundholm (ed.). 2003, p. 15.
37. Andrew Higson. "The Concept of National Cinema". *Screen*. 30: 4 (1989), p. 37.
38. Andrew Higson. "Limiting Imagination of National Cinema". *Cinema & Nation*. Hjort, Mette and Scott Mackenzie (eds.). London: Routledge, 2000.
39. Tytti Soila et al. *Nordic National Cinemas*. London: Routledge, 1998.
40. Edouard de Laurot. "Swedish Cinema – Classic Background and Militant Avantgarde". *Film Culture* 2: 4 (1956).
41. Henrik Orrje. "New Beginnings: Swedish

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42. Parker Tyler. *Underground Film: A Critical History*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1969, 1972, 1995.
43. Léon Moussinac. *Naissance du cinéma*. Paris: J Povolozky & Cie, Éditeurs, 1925; G Charensol. *Panorama du cinéma*. Paris: Éditions Kra, 1930.
44. Rabinovitz, 1991.
45. David E. James (ed.). *To Free the Cinema, Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
46. Sitney 1974, 1979, 2002; David Curtis. *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution*. London: Studio Vista, 1971; Curtis, 2007.
47. Miguel Fernandez Labayen and John Sundholm. "Quoting and Creating History, or, Institution and Organization: Film Collections at Major European Art Museums". Unpublished paper, March 2008.
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49. Malte Hagener. *Moving Forward, Looking Back: The European Avant-Garde and the Invention of Film Culture, 1919–1939*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007.
50. Ibid., p. 240.
51. Leif Furhammar. *Filmen i Sverige. En historia i tio kapitel*. Höganäs: Bra Böcker, 1991; Gösta Werner. *Den svenska filmens historia: en översikt*. Stockholm: PAN/Norstedts, 1970.
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53. Rees 1999; O'Pray (ed.) 1996; Sitney 1974 (2002).
54. Parker Tyler, 1995; Wheeler Winston Dixon. *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of 1960s American Experimental Cinema*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
55. Peter Weiss. *Avantgardefilm*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1956.
56. Henrik Orrje. *Svensk experimentell film 1945–1990. En kronologisk och biografisk studie av några filmskapare och deras verk*, unpubl., Stockholm: Stockholms universitet. Institutionen för Teater- och filmvetenskap, 1994 (in an abridged version as "Film som konst – en modernistisk rörelse", Widenheim, Cecilia and Eva Rudberg (eds.). *Utopi & Verklighet. Svensk modernism 1900–1960*, Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2000).
57. Sundholm (ed.), 2003; Louise O'Konor. *Viking Eggeling: Modernist & Filmpionjär*. Stockholm: Atlantis 2006 (partly based upon O'Konor's doctoral thesis in art history: *Viking Eggeling 1880–1925 – artist and filmmaker life and work*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis/Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971); Gösta Werner and Bengt Edlund. *Viking Eggeling Diagonalsymfonin: Spjutspets i återvändsgränd*. Lund: Novapress, 1997.
58. For example: Jan Christer Bengtsson. *Peter Weiss och kamerabilden – från en undflyende kvinna till tredje världens ansikte*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, Institutionen för Teater- och filmvetenskap, 1989; Arnd Beise. *Peter Weiss*. Stuttgart: Reclam 2002; Robert Cohen. *Peter Weiss in seiner Zeit. Leben und Werk*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992; Jens-Fietje Dwars. *Und dennoch Hoffnung. Peter Weiss – Eine Biographie*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2007; Jost Hermand and Marc Silbermann (eds.). *Rethinking Peter Weiss*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000.
59. Martin Rector. "Peter Weiss' Experimentalfilm Studie IV: Befreiung". *Peter Weiss Jahrbuch* 10 (2001); Yvonne Spielmann. "Theory and Practice of the Avant-garde: Weiss's Approaches to Film", Hermand and Silbermann (eds.); Ulrike Weymann. "Zur Semantik räumlicher Strukturen in Literatur und Film. Das surreale Prosastück *Der Fremde* und dessen filmische Adaption *Hägrin-*



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60. Torsten Jungstedt. *Kapten Grogg och hans vänner: Om Victor Bergdahl, Emil Åberg, M R Liljeqvist och Paul Myrén, som alla var med om den tecknade svenska stumfilmen*. Stockholm: Sveriges Radios Förlag/Svenska Filminstitutet 1973; Adam Marko-Nord och Claes Jurander. *Om animation*. Göteborg: Filmkonst 2002; Gunnar Strøm. "Caricatures, Cartoons and Advertisements: The Pioneers of Nordic Animated Film". Fullerton, John and Jan Olsson (eds.). *Nordic Explorations: Film Before 1930*. London: John Libbey, 1999.
61. Jungstedt p. 44.
62. Bo Heurling. "GROGG på film". *Filmrutan*. No. 1 (1971).
63. Jungstedt, pp. 62–66.
64. Nils-Hugo Geber. "Film i alla vrår". *Chaplin*. No. 77 (1967).
65. Martin Coute in *La Nouvelle République* 2 Feb. 1970, quoted in Heurling, p. 30.
66. Anders Wahlgren. "Otto G. Carlsund – ett konstnärsliv", Wahlgren, Anders et al. (eds.). *Otto G. Carlsund 11.12.1897–25.7.1948. Konstnär, kritiker och utställningsarrangör*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Arena, 2007, p. 52. The significance of the cooperation between Léger and Carlsund is disputed. In Swedish accounts Carlsund is always mentioned as an important collaborator, but in international film literature he is more or less invisible. In a very thorough analysis of the production by Judi Freeman the name of Carlsund is absent; instead she discusses the more well-known collaborators Ezra Pound and Man Ray; Judi Freeman. "Bridging Purism and Surrealism: The Origins and Production of Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*". Kuenzli, Rudolf E. (ed.), *Dada and Surrealist Film*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996. Furthermore, the most important person besides Léger is, of course, co-director Dudley Murphy.
67. Kuenzli. "Introduction", *ibid.*, p. 4.
68. Sheldon Renan. *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1967, pp. 62–66.
69. Susan McCabe. *Cinematic Modernism. Modernist Poetry and Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 198.
70. Oscar Reutersvärd. *Otto G. Carlsund i fjärrperspektiv*. Åhus: Kalejdoskop Förlag, 1988.
71. Erik Näslund. *Rolf de Maré. Konstsamlare, balettleddare, museiskapare*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Langenskiöld, 2008.
72. Margareta Sörenson. "Sverige och Svenska baletten". Forser, Tomas & Sven Åke Heed (eds.), *Ny svensk teaterhistoria*. vol. 3, Hedemora: Gidlunds förlag, 2007.
73. Näslund, p. 292.
74. *Svenska Baletten/Les Ballets Suédois 1920–1925. Ur Dansmuséets samlingar*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet 1969; Erik Näslund et al. *Svenska Baletten i Paris 1920–1925. Ballet Suédois*. Stockholm: Dansmuseet, 1995; Bengt Häger, *Ballet suédois*, Stockholm: Streiffert, 1989.
75. Bordwell and Thompson 1994, p. 195.
76. Börlin's career as a dancer was beginning to fade, and he wanted to start anew as a film actor. In *Le voyage imaginaire* (Clair, 1925), he was promoted to a lead role as a clerk who travels in his dreams. He was also – together with other members of the Swedish troupe – engaged in *L'inhumaine* (1924) by Marcel L'Herbier, but he never succeeded to establish himself in this new branch.
77. Peter Wollen. *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film*. London: Verso 2002; O'Konor 1971; Werner and Eklund.

78. Leone Piccioni and Ambrogio Ceroni. *I dipinti di Modigliani*. Milano: Rizzoli Editore, 1970, p. 95. In his biography of the painter, William Fifield gives his view of the relationship: "Viking Eggeling, who was virgin to them, Modigliani corrupted with drugs", Fifield. *Modigliani. The Biography*. London: W. H. Allen, 1978, p. 191.
79. Hans Richter. "Avant-Garde Film in Germany". Manvell, Roger (ed.). *Experiment in the Film*. London: The Grey Walls Press, 1949. Manvell's anthology became one of the important introductions to the field in post-war Sweden.
80. Ibid. p. 221.
81. Hans Richter. "My Experience with Movement in Painting and in Film". *The Nature and Art of Motion*. New York: George Braziller, 1965, p. 144, here cit. after Justin Hoffmann. "Hans Richter: Constructivist Filmmaker". Foster, Stephen C. (ed.). *Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998, p. 76.
82. Fragment no 6 from "On the Spiritual Element in Man. On Different Methods of Composition", in O'Konor 1971, p. 96. See also R. Bruce Elder. "Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling: The Dream of Universal Language and the Birth of The Absolute Film". Graf, Alexander and Dietrich Scheunemann (eds.). *Avant-Garde Film*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.
83. Théo van Doesburg. "Abstracte filmbeelding". *De Stijl*. 4: 5 (1921) – see also Ansje van Beusekom. "Theo van Doesburg and Writings on Film in *De Stijl*". Beekman, Klaus and Jan de Vries (eds.). *Avant-Garde and Criticism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007; Viking Eggeling. "Elvi fejtegetések a mozgóművészetről", *MA*. 6: 8 (1921).
84. Birger Brinck-E:son. "Linjemusik på vita duken. 'Konstruktiv film', ett intressant experiment av en svensk konstnär". *Filmjournalen*. No. 4 (1923).
85. The French title of the film is of Eggeling's origin.
86. Gösta Werner. "Spearhead in a Blind Alley: Viking Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphony*". Fullerton and Olsson (eds.), p. 234. See also Elder.
87. Malin Wahlberg. *Documentary Time. Film and Phenomenology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
88. Ibid. p. 69.
89. Frank Stauffacher. *Art in Cinema. A Symposium on the Avant-garde Film Together with Program Notes and References for Series One of Art in Cinema*. San Francisco: Art in Cinema Society/ San Francisco Museum of Art, 1947, p. 50.
90. O'Pray 2003, p. 16.
91. The argument is supported by A. L. Rees. "Frames and Windows: Visual Space in Abstract Cinema", Graf and Scheunemann (eds.).
92. Malcolm Le Grice. *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age*. London: BFI, 2001, pp. 224–225.
93. Rees 1999, p. 37.
94. Ibid.
95. Also in Denmark Eggeling was used in order to promote experimental or avant-garde film culture. In 1951 Gallery Tokanten had an exhibition on Eggeling including film programmes with work by Richter and Norman McLaren. The event was arranged by an association called "International Experimental Film" (in fact the only event that the organization ever organized) and had Hans Richter as Honorary President. Helge Krarup and Carl Nørrested. *Eksperimentalfilm i Danmark*. København: Borgen, 1986, p. 30. An anecdote concerning the Eggeling heritage was told by Jonas Mekas: In 1979 a pencil drawing by Eggeling was given by donation to Anthology Film Archives: "The sale of this drawing, graciously arranged by another great Swede, Pontus Hultén, paid for one half of the purchase fee for the Second Avenue Courthouse, Anthology Archives' present headquarters", Jonas Mekas. "A Word from the curator". in Mekas et. al. (eds.). *Swedish Avantgarde Film 1924–1990*. New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1991, p. 2.
96. See, for example, Gust. Magnusson. "Futuristiska biograftryck". *Biografen* 2: 22 (1941) where a cartoonist makes fun of the search for meaning in modern film, or the editorial comments to some

ENDNOTES

- collage-like drawings by artist Erik Aaes under the headline "Expressionistiskt" in *Filmjournalen*. No. 6 (1927) where the editor ridicules "this all to self-assured expressionism".
97. Main facts from a typewritten note by Arne Lindgren. "REINHOLD HOLTERMANN" (without date and based on Hans Eklund's recollections who was a friend of Holtermann). Filmform archive, Stockholm. According to, Eklund, in old age Holtermann dismissed his films as "rubbish". Interview 28 Oct. 2008.
98. 8/16mm Ciné Kodak, model BB, c. 1928.
99. Lindgren. "REINHOLD HOLTERMANN". At Moderna Museet Stockholm, there is stored a portrait of GAN, made by Holtermann.
100. Orrje 2000, p. 280. Interview with Lennart Ehrenborg 30 May 2007.
101. The reels have been stored in the family archive and were given titles by Holtermann himself, or working titles by his son, Sten Holtermann, who deposited digital copies in the Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images in 2008.
102. Letter from Sten Holtermann 28 May 2008.
103. Interview with Eklund, 23 Jan. 2009. See also Hans Eklund. *Olle Nyman. Saltsjö-Duvnäs med utblickar*. Stockholm: Silander & Fromholtz, 1998, p. 12; Bo Lindwall. *Olle Nyman*. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1985, p. 43, p. 88; Rolf Söderberg (ed.). *Stockholmsfotografer 4: Olle Nyman*. Stockholm: Stockholms Stadsmuseum 1980. Introduction by Hans Eklund.
104. Interview with Eklund, 3 March 2009.
105. Letter from Sten Holtermann, 28 May 2008.
106. It is also close to the type of kinetic-optic imagination that August Strindberg himself worked with when he encountered the modern age. See Vreni Hockenjos. *Picturing Dissolving Views. August Strindberg and the Visual Media of his Age*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmensis, 2007.
107. Elisabeth Liljedahl. *Stumfilmen i Sverige – kritik och debatt. Hur samtiden värderade den nya konstarten*. Stockholm: Proprius/Svenska Filminstitutet, 1975; Jan Olsson. "I offentlighetens ljus – några notiser om filmstoff i dagspressen". Olsson (ed.) *I offentlighetens ljus. Stumfilmens affischer, kritiker, stjärnor och musik*. Stockholm: Symposion, 1990; Furhammar, 1991.
108. Orrje 1994; 2000.
109. According to Annette Kuhn in *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality 1909 – 1925*. London: Routledge, 1988, film censorship helped to create a public sphere for cinema, and also to create a discourse of the forbidden.
110. Olsson (ed.), 1990, p. 268; Furhammar 1991, p. 68.
111. Gösta Werner. "Svenska Bios produktionspolitik fram till 1920". Furhammar (ed.). *Rörande bilder. Festskrift till Rune Waldekranz*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1981.
112. *The Phantom Carriage* and especially the dream sequences by cinematographer Julius Jaenzon, have in retrospect been seen as important steps in the development of an avant-garde aesthetic. See Carl Henrik Svenstedt. "Halva historien". *Film & TV*. No. 1 (2007).
113. See Bo Florin. *Den nationella stilen. Studier i den svenska filmens guldålder*. Stockholm: Aura, 1997.
114. For a critical view of the concept of "Golden age", see Tommy Gustafsson. *En fiende till civilisationen. Manlighet, genusrelationer, sexualitet och rasstereotyper i svensk filmkultur under 1920-talet*. Lund: Sekel, 2007.
115. Julius Regis and Edvin Thall. *Filmens roman. En världserövrarens historia berättad i korta kapitel*. Stockholm: Gebers, 1920.
116. Sven Stolpe (Serge). "Jean Epstein – en pionjär". *Filmnyheter*. 6: 31 (1925); "Filmen är framtidens konst". *Filmnyheter*. 6: 33 (1925).
117. For example, Sven Stolpe. "Modern film och

- gammal". *Filmjournalen* no. 25–26 (1925); "En filmhögskola i Stockholm?". *Filmjournalen*. No. 15 (1926); "Den ryska filmen". *Filmjournalen*. No. 2 (1927).
118. Eva Kaijser. "Gerda Marcus – 'den stora tiggerskan' på Svenska Dagbladet". Lönnroth, Ami (ed.). *Empati och engagemang. En kvinnolinje i svensk journalistik*. Enhörna: Tusculum Förlag, 2008.
119. Gerda Marcus. "Den synliga människan eller filmens kultur". *Filmjournalen* no. 36 (1924); "En rysk film som gör sensation i Tyskland". *Filmjournalen* no. 9–10 (1926); "Storstadens symfoni". *Filmjournalen*. No. 17 (1927).
120. Ture Dahlin. "Svensk film – fotograferad teater...". *Filmjournalen*. No. 3 (1925). See also Karl Hansson. *Det figurala och den rörliga bilden. Om estetik, materialitet och medieteknologi hos Jean Epstein, Bill Viola och Artinfect*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2006, p. 59.
121. For commentaries, see Mats Björkin. *Amerikanism, bolsjevism och korta kjolar. Filmen och dess publik i Sverige under 1920-talet*. Stockholm: Aura, 1998; Liljedahl.
122. Hagener, p. 34.
123. Deke Dusenberre. "The Avant-Garde Attitude in the Thirties". O'Pray (ed.) 1996.
124. The case of Vilhelm Moberg is interesting; he wrote scripts for film (and several of his novels were adapted into films), and it is claimed that he wrote an incomplete script for an experimental film, "a real film", as his friend director Per Lindberg put it. See Bengt Forslund. *Vilhelm Moberg. Filmen och televisionen*. Stockholm: Carlssons, 1998, p. 37., and Anna-Karin Carlstoff Bramell. *Vilhelm Moberg tar ställning. En studie av hans journalistik och tidsaktuella diktning*. Stockholm: Carlssons, 2007, pp. 130–133. This script is, however, not found in his archive at Royal Library, Stockholm, and probably never left his desk.
125. Artur Lundkvist. *Atlantvind*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1932, p.119.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 127 Karl-Ola Nilsson. "Om SF-kortfilmer: 'Enbart utländskt tal blir sövande'". *Film & TV*. No. 2 (1986).
- 128 Furhammar, 1991; Carl Anders Dymling et al. (eds.). *Svensk Filmindustri. Tjugufem år*. Stockholm 1944.
- 129 Artur Lundkvist. *Självpporträtt av en drömmare med öppna ögon*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1966, p. 87. For a study of the production context, see Mikael Askander. *Modernitet och intermedialitet i Erik Asklunds tidiga romankonst*. Växjö: Växjö University Press, 2003.
- 130 Eyvind Johnson. "En film om Gamla stan. Förslag I. (stumfilm)". *Pequod*. No. 31–32 (2002); Lundkvist, 1966, p. 88.
- 131 For an account of the City Symphony subgenre, see Alexander Graf. "Paris – Berlin – Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony Films of the 1920s". Graf & Scheunemann (eds.).
- 132 Lundkvist 1966 p. 88, our transl. Gösta Ekman (1890–1938) was a very popular stage and film actor, who was internationally acknowledged in *Faust* (F. W. Murnau, 1926).
- 133 Erik Asklund and Artur Lundkvist. "Gamla stan". *Stockholmstidningen*. 25 Oct. 1931, our transl.
- 134 Some decades later Peter Weiss used the same alleys and the same setting, but with buñuelian absurdism Weiss let the brooms sweep away the old tramps who lay in the gutter.
- 135 Moje Gren [Nils Edgren]. "Filmpubliken kultiveras". *SocialDemokraten*. 3 April 1933.
- 136 Liljedahl, p. 271; an example of Gösta Hellström's criticism is: "Djärva teorier som blivit glänsande praktik! En översikt av ryska filmen idag". *Filmjournalen*. No. 20–22 (1929).
- 137 Gösta Werner. "En natt". *Svensk Filmografi 1930-1939*. Stockholm: Svenska Filminstitutet, 1979. See also Gösta Hellström. "En natt – banbrytande?". *Filmjournalen*. No. 11 (1931).

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138. For example, Stig Almqvist. "En brinnande entusiast. Gösta Hellström död – En verklig förlust för svensk film". *Filmjournalen*. No. 51 (1932); Ragnar Allberg, "Gösta Hellström i vänernas krets. Några personliga minnen". *Biografbladet*. No. 4 (1947).
139. Stig Almqvist. "Gösta Hellström – en ungdomsentusiast. Till 15-årsminnet av hans bortgång". *Ibid.*
140. Janet Staiger. *Interpreting Films. Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
141. Per Olov Qvist. *Folkhemmets bilder. Modernisering, motstånd och mentalitet i den svenska 30-talsfilmen*. Lund: Arkiv, 1995; Carina Sjöholm. *Gå på bio. Rum för drömmar i folkhemmets Sverige*. Stockholm: Symposium, 2003; Soila et al.
142. Gösta Werner and Per Olof Wredlund. "Den svenska filmstudiorörelsen. Från pionjärar till studiecirkelsrutin". Wortzelius, Hugo and Nils Larsson (eds.). *Filmboken: En bok om film och filmskapare*. Uppsala: Orbis, 1952; Bengt Bengtsson. "Vad suckar gästboken? Uppsala Studenters Filmstudio som arena för konstfilmsinstitution och filmdebatt". Vesterlund, Per (ed.). *Mediala hierarkier*. Gävle: Högsolan i Gävle, 2007; Hagener.
143. James, 2005, p. 142; Hagener, p. 231.
144. Lisa Cartwright. "U. S. Modernism and the Emergence of 'The Right Wing of Film Art' – The Films of James Sibley Watson, Jr., and Melville Webber". Horak (ed.).
145. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
146. Parker Tyler, quoted in James, 1989, p. 29.
147. *Förordning angående biograföreställningar*, 1911. English translation available at <http://www.biografbyran.se/home.htm>.
148. Gösta Werner. "Kortfilm, experimentfilm, dokumentärfilm". Wortzelius & Larsson (eds.) p. 352.
149. Gerd Osten (Pavane). "Funderingar kring Lot". *Biografbladet*. No. 3 (1945); Paul Patera. "Än en gång: 'Lot in Sodom'". *Biografbladet*. No. 4 (1949–50).
150. Patera, p. 278, our transl.
151. Jan-Erik Lundström et al. *Emil Heilborn*. Stockholm: Raster, 2003.
152. Vinzenz Hediger. "Die Maschinerie des filmischen Stils: Innovation und Konventionalisierung im Industriefilm". Hediger, Vinzenz and Patrick Vonderau (eds.). *Filmische Mittel, industrielle Zwecke. Das Werk des Industriefilms*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2007. Hediger discusses the industrial film as a space for stylistic creativity; something which is proven by the case of Heilborn. Heilborn himself wrote several articles in photographic and technical journals, discussing aesthetics in terms of film and photographic technique. For a general introduction to Swedish industrial film, see Mats Björkin. "Industrial Greta: Some Thoughts on an Industrial Film". Fullerton and Olsson (eds.).
153. Bengt Bengtsson. "Filmstudion och drömmen om den stora uppsalafilmen: Uppsala Studenters Filmstudio som filmproducent och plantskola". Hedling, Erik & Mats Jönsson (eds.). *Välfärdsbilder. Svensk film utanför biografen*. Stockholm: SLBA, 2008.
154. Anon. "Tio år – en cavalcade". Allberg, Ragnar et al. (eds.). *Filmboken. Svenska Filmsamfundets årsskrift 1944*. Stockholm: Svenska Filmsamfundet, 1944.
155. Arne Bornebusch. *De lever ett rikt liv. Filmdiktare*. Stockholm: Svenska Filmsamfundet, 1935.
156. Kjell Furberg. *Svenska biografier*. Stockholm: Prisma, 2000, p. 63; Kurt Berglund. *Stockholms alla biografier*. Stockholm: Svenska Turistföreningen, 1993; Bjärlund, p. 170.
157. He also wrote a book on King Gustav V and his screen personality. *Kungen kommer* ("The King arrives"). Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1943.
158. Knut Martin. "Den vita duken: Orkidéer i filmens örtagård". *NU — Världshändelserna inför världsoptionen*. No. 52 (1936).

159. The Swedish relation to the German Reichsfilmkammer is, however, dealt with by Jan Olsson. *Svensk spelfilm under andra världskriget*. Lund: Liber, 1979.
160. Arne Svensson. *Den politiska saxen. En studie i Statens biografbyrås tillämpning av den utrikespolitiska censurnormen sedan 1914*. Stockholm, 1976, p. 66.
161. Billy Klüver. "Gå på bio (Going to the Movies)". Mekas et al., (eds.).
162. Gerd Osten. "Filmproblem efter kriget". *Gaudeamus*. No. 7 (1949). The young critic and poet, Eivor Burbeck, who was engaged in experimental film making during the 1950s, was the winner of such a script competition; her script, "Komisk dissonans", was published in *Gaudeamus*. No. 2 (1948).
163. Allberg et al., 1944.
164. Åke Rydbeck and Olle Wedholm. *2 timmar om film*. Stockholm: Forum, 1945.
165. Bengt Idestam-Almquist. "Filmens framtid". Allberg et al. 1944; Bengt Idestam-Almquist. *Filmen som konst*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1946.
166. Idestam-Almqvist was – as Emil Heilborn – born in Russia, and was very early in his introduction of Russian and Polish film.
167. Harry Højjer. "Our Swedish Contemporary". *Hollywood Quarterly*. 3:1 (1947). Some of the issues that were reviewed by Højjer were bilingual, but the great bulk of articles over the years were only in Swedish.
168. Typical examples from the most successful year, 1950, are Forsyth Hardy. "Michael Powell – experimentfilmaren". *Biografbladet*. No. 1 (1950) and Hugo Wortzelius. "Maya Deren – En presentation". *Ibid*.
169. Lennart Rodhe. "Mot en ny realism. En målare ser på stillbilder" ("Towards a new realism. A painter looks at still images"). *Biografbladet*. No. 4 (1945); Jan Thomæus. "Filmens ansvar" ("The responsibility of film"). *Biografbladet*. No. 3 (1945).
170. Gerd Osten (Pavane). "Den stackars experimentfilmen" ("The poor experimental film"). *Biografbladet*. No. 1–2 (1945), pp. 24–25, our transl.
171. See Rabinovitz 1991, pp. 92–149.
172. In this area Birgit Åkesson became important much later, for example, she delivered a lecture on the relationship between dance and television as late as 1990, "Scen – TV – TV – Scen", at a video festival in Copenhagen, reprinted in Birgit Åkesson. *– att ge spår i luften –*. Lund: Propexus, 1998. Several of her choreographies from the 1940s and 1950s were televised, especially in the 1960s.
173. Gösta Werner. *Mauritz Stiller och hans filmer: 1912–1916*. Stockholm, 1971.
174. Gösta Werner. *Eros & Thanatos. Ett personligt porträtt av Gunnar Bjurman*. Malmö: Victor, 2008, pp. 21–22.
175. Eivor Burbeck. "René Clair, Rune Hagberg och lite Gösta Werner", *Svensk Experimentalfilmstudio*. No. 8–9 (1952), p. 13.
176. Thomas Millroth. *Rum utan filial? "1947 års män"*. Lund: Cavefors, 1977, and *Lennart Rodhe*. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1989.
177. Lennart Rodhe. "Mot en ny realism. En målare ser på stillbilder". *Biografbladet*. No. 4 (1945).
178. Millroth, 1977, p. 30.
179. Gösta Werner. "Kortfilm, experimentfilm, dokumentärfilm". Wortzelius & Larsson (eds.), 1952.
180. See, for example, Bill Nichols in *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 102
181. Eric Barnouw. *Documentary. A History of Non-Fiction Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, second revised ed., 1993, pp. 186–190.
182. Arne Sucksdorff. *Gryning. Strövtåg med filmkamera*. Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1950, p. 117.

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183. Arne Sucksdorff. "Arne Sucksdorffs 'Människor i stad' – Ett knippe bilder, förstorade från filmremsan". *Biografbladet*. No. 3 (1947).
184. Mauritz Edström. *Sucksdorff – främlingen i hemmaskogen*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1968, p. 49.
185. Bertil Lauritzen. "Saga utan slut. Några anteckningar om Arne Sucksdorff". Bergström, Lasse et al. (eds.). *Filmen 1958. Svenska filmsamfundets årsbok*. Stockholm: Gebers, 1958.
186. Bjørn Sørensen. *Å fange virkeligheten. Dokumentarfilmens århundre*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2003, p. 174.
187. Arne Lindgren in a letter to researcher Jan-Christer Bengtsson, 5 Oct. 1968, copy in the Filmform archive.
188. Hagberg in a letter to Henrik Orrje, 1993 (without exact date), copy in the archive of Thérèse Hagberg.
189. Laurot, pp. 18–20.
190. Rune Hagberg about the unfinished film in a letter to researcher Henrik Orrje, 1993 (without date), copy in the archive of Thérèse Hagberg. In the Filmform archive there is preserved a flyer, announcing two films of Hagberg, ...och efter skymning kommer mörker and *Beni Abbas*, to be screened at the cinema "Athena" in Stockholm, 19 Oct. 1952.
191. Hugo Wortzelius et al. "Debatt kring en experimentfilm: Rune Hagbergs '... och efter skymning kommer mörker'". *Biografbladet*. No. 3 (1947).
192. *Ibid.*, p. 167, our transl.
193. Weiss, 1956, p. 136.
194. Burbeck, 1952, p. 11.
195. Jonas Sima. "Sveriges Orson Wells [sic]. En återupptäckt". *Stockholms-Tidningen*. 6 Feb. 1966, our transl.
196. Hagener, pp. 44–61.
197. Peter Weiss. "Början. Skiss till en kortfilm". *Biografbladet*. No. 2 (1947).
198. *Ibid.*, our transl.
199. See, for example, Zimmerman 1994, or Leo Enticknap. *Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital*. London: Wallflower Press, 2005.
200. See, for example, Peter Tscherkassky's essay "The Light of Austrian Avant-Garde Cinema". Arnold, Martian and Peter Tscherkassky (eds.). *Austrian Avant-Garde Cinema. 1955–1993*. Vienna: Sixpack Film, 1994.
201. Statutes for Svensk Experimentalfilmstudio 23 Feb. 1950. Filmform Archive.
202. Originally published in *L'Ecran français* 144 (1948) as "Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: La camera stylo". For a translation into English see "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo", Graham, Peter (ed.). *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1968.
203. For example, film critic Jonas Sima – although including both Jonas Mekas and Peter Weiss in his essay – uses Astruc's concept as a way of promoting *cinéma d'auteur* and the French New Wave and Anotini, Godard and Bergman in particular: "Filmen som 'skrivkonst': Om den moderna filmens estetik" ("Film as writing: On the aesthetics of modern film). *Chaplin*. No. 38 (1963).
204. Harry Schein, future director of the Swedish Film Institute, wrote a highly favourable review in *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*, one of Sweden's most prominent literary journals at the time. Schein saw in *De vita händerna* the promise of a totally different, personal and engaging, Swedish film culture. Schein. "Filmkrönika". *BLM* 20: 1 (1951) p. 81.
205. Gevaert at the time was most famous for its development of X-ray film stock, whereas Agfa developed colour film stock.
206. For example, Pontus Hultén managed to raise money from Sandrews, the second largest film producer in Sweden, in 1957 for the film club run by Moderna Museet.
207. *Under en mask* was directed by Gunnar Hyllienmark, *Study in Colours* by Livada and *Odjuret* by Per-Olov Grönstrand and Nils Olsén.

208. The film was made by Lennart Arnér (b. 1925) and Lennart Johansson (1928–2002), active members of the Student's Film Society at Stockholm University College during the late 1940s. Johansson became one of the core members of SEFS.
209. The film exists in two versions and is unclear when the second version was screened. The first version is somewhat longer and is not as tightly paced as the second version. It was Johansson who worked on the later version adding sound and creating the stiff tempo of the film. Arnér who was the photographer did not take part in the post-production process at all.
210. During the years 1965 to 1988 Häggbom worked part time as film censor for the Swedish agency for film censorship, Biografbyrån.
211. Häggbom preferred to screen the film to Count Basie's "How Long Blues", and the score has been added to the recently restored print.
212. There are also some overt similarities with Léger's and Murphy's *Ballet mécanique*, which was screened at clubs and societies in Stockholm at the time.
213. In a short essay published in the workshop's modestly stencilled magazine *Svensk experimentalfilmstudio*. No. 3 (1952). In the essay he describes Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21* as an interesting 'attempt' that is the result of 'intuition' and not of a carefully planned approach. A progressive concretization was a composition that moved through the whole field of the image without privileging any perspective or offering a stable vantage point, hence the movement was in a constant progression. Olle Bonniér. "Naturavbildning, abstraktion, konkretion: En begreppsutredning". *Prisma*. No. 2 (1948).
214. For example, the film critics Torsten Manns and Paul Patera in the Swedish tabloid *Expressen*, 16 July and 10 July 1953.
215. Description of the Workshop from 1954, written by Arne Lindgren. Filmform Archive.
216. For a more thorough analysis of the relation between experimental and amateur filmmaking see Lars Gustaf Andersson and John Sundholm. "Amateur and Avant-Garde: Minor Cinemas and Public Sphere in 1950s Sweden". *Studies in European Cinema* 5: 3 (2008).
217. For example, the film society in Östersund. Letter to Lindgren, dated 1956. Filmform Archive.
218. In order for a field to appear a culture of production that encompasses power struggle, position and cultural capital is required. For Bourdieu, see *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge, 1984.
219. The early history of amateur film in Sweden is a history of those in power. The nationally organized amateur film society was run by Count Lennart Bernadotte, a member of the Royal family. The association was founded in 1940. Zimmerman refers in her book to market research by Bell and Howell from 1956 that stated how "the European amateur market was primarily tooled up for upper-class markets with disposable leisure incomes, their cameras appealed to the advanced amateur and semiprofessional", Zimmerman, 1995, p. 120.
220. In *Filmfront*. No. 2 (1955).
221. Records of the jury, SFR collection, the Municipal archive of Norrtälje.
222. PM, written by Lindgren and Livada from a meeting with the amateur association 1 Sept. 1955. SFR Collection.
223. See Olle Törnblom in "Vart går svensk smal-film" ("What will happen to Swedish substandard gauge film?"). *Foto*. No. 12 (1955).
224. For example, in a letter from the substandard gauge film club in Kolding, Denmark, 31 Aug. 1958. SFR Collection.
225. For theories of the public sphere see Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge. *Public Sphere and Experience*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Miriam Hansen. *Babel and Babylon*:



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- Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.
226. This was partly because the screenings at the film societies were closed and therefore not under censorship.
227. Peter Ohlin [editorial] *Stockholms student-filmstudio*. 25:3 (1959).
228. Peter Weiss. *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964 (*The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of The Marquis de Sade*. transl. by Geoffrey Skelton, Longegrove: Waveland Press, 2002 (1965)); *Die Ermittlung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965 (*The Investigation*. transl. by Jon Swan & Ulu Grosbard, New York: Atheneum 1979); *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands I–III*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975, 1978, 1981 (*The Aesthetics of Resistance, vol I*. transl. by Joachim Neugroschel, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
229. Peter Weiss. *Fluchtpunkt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1962, here cited after *Exile*. transl. by E. B. Garside, Alastair Hamilton, Christopher Levenson, New York: Delacorte Press, 1968, pp. 109–110.
230. Weiss 1968, p. 55. There is an obvious similarity with the late Ingmar Bergman, and the fetishism for the cinematic apparatus that he enjoys in several autobiographical pieces and film scripts.
231. *Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.
232. Weiss, 1956.
233. Peter Weiss. *Avantgarde Film* (aus dem Schwedischen übersetzt und herausgegeben von Beat Mazenauer). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995.
234. Peter Weiss. "Avantgarde Film (1955)". Ian Hilton. *Peter Weiss. A Search for Affinities*. Oswald Wolff, 1970. Peter Weiss. *Cinéma d'avant-garde* (traduit du suédois par Catherine de Seynes). L'Arche, 1989.
235. Spielmann, p. 84.
236. Andersson et al., 2006, p. 65.
237. Weiss, 1956, p. 88, our transl.
238. Peter Weiss commenting on his films in *Nordisk Tidskrift för Fotografi*. No. 2 (1953).
239. Peter Weiss. *Abschied von den Eltern*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961 (*The Leavetaking*, transl. by Christopher Levenson, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962).
240. Yvonne Spielmann. "Theory and Practice of the Avant-garde: Weiss's Approaches to Film", in Hermand and Silbermand (eds.), p. 80.
241. The Swedish jury was, however, rather sardonic in its award statement, pointing out that the film had a great debt to Jean Cocteau, and that the psychology seems to belong to earlier decades. Records of the jury, "Årets smalfilm 1955". SFR Collection. Norrtälje.
242. Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd. *Alias Charlie Laven-del. 1952–1961*. Stockholm: Gedins, 1996, our transl.
243. Esping, pp. 58–70.
244. Peter Weiss. *Dokument 1*. Stockholm 1949.
245. The Archive of the Film Club in Helsingborg.
246. Parker Tyler, p. 186.
247. *Ibid.*, 186–187.
248. Spielmann, p. 78.
249. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
250. Sverker Ek. "Att vidga vår förmåga att uppfatta tillvaron". *Film & TV*. No. 4 (1982), p. 20.
251. Raimund Hoffmann. *Peter Weiss. Malerei. Zeichnungen. Collagen*. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1984; Ingo Bartsch et al. *Der Maler Peter Weiss*. Berlin: Verlag Frölich & Kaufmann, 1982.

252. The city theme in *The Aesthetics of Resistance* has been analysed in a Swedish context by Magnus Bergh. "Via Herkulesgatan. Stockholms-tyver i Motståndets estetik" in Palmstierna-Weiss, Gunilla and Jürgen Schutte (eds.). *Peter Weiss. Målningar. Teckningar. Collage. Filmer. Teater. Litteratur. Politik*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet 1991.
253. Peter Weiss. "Inför den nya filmsäsongen". 3 Aug. 1952, quoted from Bengtsson, 1989, p. 2.
254. Peter Weiss. "Att gå under jorden". *Apropå Eggeling*. Moderna Museet: Stockholm, 1958, p. 22.
255. Peter Weiss. *The Aesthetics of Resistance. Vol 1*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 63,
256. According to Hal Foster et al. in *Art since 1900* the exhibition launched kineticism, pp. 379–384.
257. Hultén's friendships in Paris – that included not only Breer and Rauschenberg, but also Jean Tinguely – would become a decisive reason why Moderna Museet was one of the most exciting European art institutions of the early 1960s. On the G. I. Bill and its consequences for post-war American culture see Edward Humes. *Over Here: How the G. I. Bill Transformed the American Dream*. New York: Harcourt, 2006. For Breer see Scott MacDonald's interview in *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
258. In Grau (ed.). Both Gabo and Duchamp exhibited at "Le Mouvement" in Paris.
259. In MacDonald, 1992, p.16. For example, the Danish filmmakers Albert Merz and Jørgen Roos shot a film of the Danish artist, Richard Mortensen's paintings in 1944, *Richard Mortensens bevægelige maleri* ("The moving painting of Richard Mortensen") which was later re-edited by Hultén.
260. Entry on Breer in Allan Kaprow and Billy Klüver. *Art 1963 – A New Vocabulary*. Catalogue for the exhibition at Art Council of YM/YWHA in Philadelphia, 1962, unnumbered.
261. For example, Thomas Millroth. "Tidiga arbeten". *Stil är bedrägeri": Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd*. ("Style is deception: CFR"). Arena: Stockholm, 2004.
262. Jaeger's essays on Reuterswärd are reprinted in Millroth, 2004.
263. *Buffalo Bill in 27 Forms* was distributed by the Swedish company Artfilm in the 1950s and had a notable circulation.
264. The title is a play with words. *Nära ögat* means literally "close to the eye" and is the idiomatic expression for "close shave" as well.
265. His MA in Art History was published in French in 2002 as *Vermeer et Spinoza*. Paris: Échoppe.
266. Hultén. "Förverkligad i konsten". *Kasark*. No. 1 (1954), p. 2, our transl. The number of the issue was titled "Objekt eller artefakter – Verkligheten förverkligad" ("Object or artefacts – reality realized").
267. Hultén. *Kasark*. No. 2 (1955), p. 2, our transl.
268. Cubitt, p. 85.
269. Ibid.
270. Ibid.
271. From such a perspective the exhibition "The Machine" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York 12 Nov. 1968–9 Feb. 1969 that was curated by Hultén may be seen as his grand manifesto: See also Hultén's introduction to the catalogue. *The Machine*. New York: MoMa, 1968. Billy Klüver was, as so often, one of the key collaborators behind the exhibition.
272. For example, in letters from Hultén to Amos Vogel (Cinema 16), 1 January 1958 or, Roger Manvell (BFI) 12 Feb. 1958. Archive of Moderna Museet.
273. There are several memos and letters in the archive of Moderna Museet which display that film was considered one of the major art forms and that film would play a substantial role when the museum was inaugurated. A film archive was already planned in 1957. Peter Kubelka, who met Hultén in 1958 in Brussels at "Expo 58" the first World's Fair in post-war Europe, spent the winter of 1959 in Stockholm (in fact Moderna Museet

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- screened Kubelka's first films in February 1959) and claimed in an interview that Hultén planned to let him establish a film collection at the museum. A task Hultén gave to Kubelka when he became the director of Centre Pompidou. Interview with Kubelka, 9 Jan. 2007. *En dag i staden*, Kubelka's *Mosaik im Vertrauen* (1955) and *Adebar* (1957) were screened in Brussels 1958. It was Hultén that arranged the tape of white noise for *Arnulf Rainer* (1960) he took it from the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation without permission.
274. Hultén. "Inledning". *Apropå Eggeling*. p. 7, our transl.
275. P. Adams Sitney directed the screenings in 1964 and 1968 in Europe. According to Sitney the 1968 tour travelled through Italy, Poland, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, England and Spain. In each country several places were visited, in Sweden additional screenings were arranged in all university towns too (Gothenburg, Lund, Umeå and Uppsala). The latter was a deliberate strategy; in the UK as many as twelve university towns were visited. E-mail interview with P. Adams Sitney, 12 Sept. 2005. The first American workshops were not founded until 1962–63 and according to Paul Arthur the institutionalization in the USA took place during the years 1970–1973. Arthur. "The Last of the Last Machine?" in Arthur 2005, p. 77, originally published in *Millennium Film Journal*. No. 16/17/18 (1986–87). A well needed study is that of the production and reception of New American Cinema during the European tour in 1968.
276. Leif Nylén. *Den öppna konsten*. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1998. Olle Granath. *Another Light: Swedish Art since 1945*. Stockholm: Swedish Institute, 1982. See also Per Ringby's study on Swedish avant-garde theatre at the time, *Avantgardeteater och modernitet*. Gideå: Vildros, 1995.
277. Pontus Hultén. "Fem fragment ur Moderna Museets historia". *Moderna Museet 1958–1983*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1983.
278. It is estimated that about 70,000 visited Moderna Museet during the four months of the exhibition, *ibid.*
279. Anne Collins Goodyear. "Gyorgy Kepes, Billy Klüver, and American Art of the 1960s: Defining Attitudes Toward Science and Technology". *Science in Context*. 17: 4 (2006).
280. Kaprow and Klüver. The quote is from the entry on Klüver in the unnumbered brochure.
281. *Homage to Jean Tinguely's Homage to New York* (1960).
282. *Ibid.*
283. In 1994 Fylkingen published a document that covered its 60 year history *Fylkingen: Ny musik & intermediakonst*. Stockholm: Fylkingen förlag, 1994, the book contains a summary in English. The name "Fylkingen" is derived from "fylking", a formation with a clear point that is leading forward. The meaning that inspired the people behind Fylkingen was the formation of cranes flying, *ibid.* p. 8.
284. Bengt af Klintberg has written a bi-lingual survey of Swedish Fluxus. *Svensk Fluxus/Swedish Fluxus*. Stockholm: Rönnells Antikvariat, 2006.
285. The screenings consisted of works by the French Gérard Patris and Jacques Brissot, and the Polish Włodzimierz Haupe, Jan Lenica and Kazimierz Urbanski.
286. For a history of the Themersons see, for example, Curtis, 2007.
287. Ragnar von Holten. *Surrealismen i svensk konst*. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1969, p. 126.
288. Erwin Leiser et al. *Skånsk avantgardekonst*. Malmö: Image, 1949.
289. Beate Sydhoff. *Sveriges konst 1900-talet. Del 2. 1945–1975*. Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 2000.
290. Elisabet Haglund et al. *Jørgen Nash, Lis Zwick og Drakabygget – Frihedens værksted/Jørgen Nash, Lis Zwick and Drakabygget – The Workshop of Free-*

- dom. Silkeborg: The Art Center Silkeborg Spa, 2000; Lars Morell. *Poesien breder sig: Jørgen Nash, Drakabygget & situationsterne*. København: Det kongelige Bibliotek 1981; Howard Slater. "Divided We Stand – An Outline of Scandinavian Situationism". <http://www.infopool.org.uk/2001.html> (8 Oct. 2008); "Bauhaus Situationist". *Lund Art Press*. No. 3 (1992); Carl Magnus et al. *Situationister i konsten*. Edition Bauhaus Situationiste, 1966.
291. Totte Wiberg et al. *En japansk gigant/A Japanese Giant: Yoshio Nakajima*. Sävedalen: Warne förlag, 2000.
292. Bengt Rooke. "Scenario för 10–12 minuters kortfilm". *Drakabygget*. No. 4–5 (1966).
293. Jonas Sima. "Banalt i Örkelljunga". *Chaplin*. No. 48 (1964), p. 242.
294. Krarup and Nørstedt, p. 38. For the Danish situation, see also Tania Ørum. "Danish Avant-garde Filmmakers of the 1960s: Technology, Cross-aesthetics and Politics". Graf and Scheunemann (eds.).
295. Carl Slättne. "Bland maskar & encelliga kritiker". *Filmteknik*. No. 4 (1965).
296. Nacking, Åsa (ed.). *Sture Johannesson*. Lund: Lunds Konsthall, 2004; Gary Svensson. *Digitala pionjärer. Datakonstens introduktion i Sverige*. Stockholm: Carlssons, 2000.
297. Bo Bjelfvenstam. "Den svenska dokumentärfilmen. Del XXI". *Film & TV*. No. 1 (1987). Also interview with Slättne 16 Sept. 2008.
298. Leif Furhammar. *Med TV i verkligheten. Sveriges Television och de dokumentära genrerna*. Stockholm: Stiftelsen Etermedierna i Sverige, 1995.
299. According to Slättne, *Amen* has never been screened with double projection.
300. For the history of Swedish electronic music in the 1950s and 1960s see Per Olov Broman. *Kort historik över Framtidens musik*. Stockholm: Gidlunds, 2007. The book contains a summary in English.
301. It was this film that opened the doors for Morthenson at Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne where most of his films were made.
302. Thus the film is very similar to the experience of the body of Michael Snow's work that essentially strives for creating a physical, or 'real', experience. See, for example, the interview with Michael Snow "Weathering the Creative Storm: An Interview with Michael Snow". *Offscreen*. 6:11 (2002). [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/snow\\_interview.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/snow_interview.html) (27 Nov. 2007).
303. Rodowick, p. 59.
304. "Altisonans". *exprmntl 4*. Knokke film catalogue 25 Dec. 1967–2 Jan. 1968.
305. Sven Inge is also known as Sven Inge Höglund and Sven Inge de Monér. Their work together has, above all, been documented by Svensson, pp. 64–65; pp. 104–113, and in Söderbergh Widding (ed.), 2006.
306. Sjölander's first TV production was *Har ni tänkt på att foto...* ("Have you thought about that photography....", 1965) which was stopped by SR, it has only been shown publicly at Fylkingen.
307. Youngblood, 1970, pp. 331–333.
308. Ture Sjölander. *Monument*. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1968,
309. Sjölander (unnumbered).
310. Youngblood, 1970, pp. 333–334.
311. Malin Wahlberg. "Från Rembrandt till *Electronics* – konstfilmen i tidig svensk television". Dahlberg, Leif and Pelle Snickars (eds.). *Berättande i olika medier*, Stockholm: SLBA, 2008. Dag Nordmark. *Finrummet och lekstugan. Kultur- och underhållningsprogram i svensk radio och TV*. Stockholm: Prisma, 1999.
312. Per Vesterlund. "Filmkrönika – filmkritik i ljud och bild", Edin, Anna and Per Vesterlund (eds.). *Svensk television – en mediehistoria*. Stockholm: SLBA 2008.
313. Malin Wahlberg. "Inledning: Filmavdelningen – en historisk överblick". Janson, Tobias and Malin Wahlberg (eds.). *TV-pionjärer och fria filmare. En bok om Lennart Ehrenborg*. Stockholm: SLBA, 2008; Björn Bjelfvenstam. "Den svenska dokumentärfilmen.

- Del XVII". *Film & TV*. No. 1 (1986). Ehrenborg's work for Artfilm is noteworthy; he produced and directed several educational shorts on contemporary and classic art, and singularly and together with art historian Hans Eklund he wrote several articles on the relationship between art and moving images, for example, Lennart Ehrenborg & Hans Eklund. "Om tarmvred i närbild och jätteruggande cirklar. En dialog". *Biografbladet*. No. 3 (1950). Much of the ideas concerning art, film and television came from the documentation of the symposium "Art in Cinema", held in San Francisco 1947: Frank Stauffacher (ed.). *Art in Cinema*. San Francisco: Art in Cinema Society & San Francisco Museum of Art, 1947. Important was also the UNESCO series of catalogues, concerning "Films on Art". Interview with Ehrenborg 30 July 2007.
314. Anon. "Kortfilmspristävling. TV öppnar forum för experimentfilm". *Röster i Radio*. No. 40 (1956); Anon. "Tre filmmanuskript nu prisbelönade". *Röster i Radio*. No. 11 (1957), p. 17. For a discussion concerning the relation between amateurs and professionals and substandard gauge film production, see Andersson and Sundholm, 2008.
315. Carl Henrik Svenstedt. "En viss tendens i svensk filmpolitik". *Victor*. No. 17–18 (2008); Love Svensson. "Den store svenske filmpoeten". *Film & TV*. No. 3 (2004); Jonas Sima. "Jag vill göra film som utmanar makterna!". *Chaplin*. No. 80 (1968).
316. Another film worth mentioning produced at The University College of Arts, Craft and Design is the animation *Ögat* ("The eye", 1967) by Thomas Frisk.
317. Jan Häfström, notice in *Filmkatalog 1*. Stockholm: FilmCentrum, 1969, p. 39, our transl.
318. Martin Sundberg. *Tillvaratagna effekter – om Jan Häfströms konstnärskap och konstnärroll*. Malmö: Makadam, 2005.
319. Claes Söderquist in the catalogue 'The Pleasure Dome', *American Experimental Film 1939-1979*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1980, p 19.
320. Mekas et al (ed.).
321. Ilmar Laaban. "Swedish Experimental Film after World War II". Mekas et al (ed.), p. 21.
322. Filmmaker Eric M. Nilsson, who worked almost exclusively for television, claimed in an interview that because of the greater freedom and vast exposure he preferred to stay in television where short films were not considered a different format and you were guaranteed a large audience, *Chaplin*. No. 59 (1965), pp. 430–434.
323. Another peculiarity was that the inauguration of SFI was substantially one man's work, the highly controversial, Austrian engineer Harry Schein who had close ties with the social-democratic establishment. Schein ran SFI through the 1960s.
324. See, for example, the editorial in *Chaplin*. No. 5 (1959), p. 114.
325. Unpublished, undated script by Leo Reis in the Reis family archive.
326. Introduction by Teddy Brunius in Leo Reis. *Optisk arkitektur*. Malmö: Bernces, 1980, p. 5.
327. Bo Jonsson's books of poetry are *Med en själ på jakt och fiske; Gamen* (both 1964); *Måltiden* (1971); *Utanför det krökta rummet* (1974), all four published by Bonniers.
328. Sigfried Kracauer. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 297.
329. In comparison: when Sony's Portapak was introduced in Sweden in 1968 the prize was about 6,500 crowns.
330. See <http://www.ica.org.uk/>.
- 331 <http://www.tidningenkulturen.se/index.php/kritik-mainmenu-52/musik-mainmenu-36/3392-musik-karlung> (7 July 2009)
332. As a nonsense sentence, this is impossible to translate; however, "ARTformisms and confOrm-gasms" ("KONstformism och konfOrm-gasmer") reads better in Swedish.
333. Orrje, 1994/2000.

334. Sometimes, the film is also called *Homo Ludens I*.
335. [Interview by Clemens Poellinger] *Svenska Dagbladet*. 14 March 2009.
336. Fahlström took the sentence from Brita af Geijerstam's translation of a birthday card in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (the original being "Hipy papy bthuthdth thuthda bthuthdy"). In his manifesto for concrete poetry, published in 1953, Fahlström called for a poetry that was as liberated as abstract art and called for a rhythmic and material aesthetic like that in jazz and Pierre Schaeffer's concrete music. Fahlström: "Håtala ragulpr på fåtskliaben: Manifest för konkret poesi". Originally published in the review *Odysseé*, no. 2–3 (1953). Reprinted in the volume *Bord Dikter 1952–1955*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1966.
337. Fahlström's films as well as his other works of art are presented in detail by Sharon Avery-Fahlström at <http://www.fahlstrom.com/>.
338. *Ibid.*
339. *Ibid.*, transcription by Sharon Avery-Fahlström.
340. The Swedish title, *Du gamla du fria*, quotes the national anthem.
341. For example editorials in *Chaplin*, no. 13 (1960) and no. 27 (1962). *Filmrutan*, the ambitious journal of the national organization of Swedish film clubs regularly covered Swedish short film, and also those made by the students at the SFI's film school.
342. Entry on *Jag* in *Svensk Filmografi 6*. Stockholm: SFI/Almqvist & Wiksell 1977, p. 259.
343. The transformation of central Stockholm took place from the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1970s; the demolishing of the old parts of the city is a recurrent theme in Swedish cinema, from the short documentary *Odjuret* (1953), produced by The Independent Film Group, and Peter Weiss' *Hägringen* (1959) to the controversial satire *Myglaren* (1966) by Rune Hassner and Jan Myrdal. The old, worn out buildings were replaced with the first Swedish skyscrapers.
344. Leif Krantz. "Oskuld och publik". *Chaplin*. No. 65 (1966), p. 211.
345. Bertil Lauritzen. "Kylbergs färgopera". *Chaplin*. No. 69 (1967); Stig Björkman [review of *Jag*]. *Chaplin*. No. 65 (1966).
346. Peter Kylberg. "Jag ser bara tillstånd". *Chaplin*. No. 71 (1967).
347. Kylberg made the teleplay *Opus 25* in Switzerland in 1978.
348. <http://peterfilm.blogspot.com/>. (5 June 2009).
349. Anders Ahlberg in *Expressen*, 17 Oct. 1985.
350. [review] *Dagens Nyheter*. 22 Dec. 1985.
351. Margareta Norlin. "Verkligheten som grym teater. Marie-Louise Bergensträhles filmer". *Chaplin*. No. 202 (1986).
- 352 [Interview by Gunilla Bergman]. *Göteborgs-Posten*. 16 Feb. 1986.
353. The fact that this makes the film one of the biggest commercial failures within Swedish film history has caused certain critical comments; the same debate that occurred in 1966 following the release of Kylberg's *Jag*.
354. *Chaplin* had a comprehensive introduction of New American Cinema by Hans Pensel in 1963 under the title "Beatniks upptäcker kortfilm" ("Beatniks discover shortfilm"). No. 34 (1963); a typical negative critique is that of the critic Torsten Manns in *Chaplin*. "Kameran som dammsugare" ("The camera as vacuum cleaner"). No. 41 (1963), p. 289. Manns reviewed a screening at Moderna Museet programmed by P. Adams Sitney and Jonas Mekas in October 1963.
355. See Sven E. Olsson's presentation of *Film Culture's* summer issue of 1963, "Navelskåderi" ("Navel-gazing"). *Chaplin*. No. 43 (1964) and the editorial comment in no. 46 (1964), p. 131. Olsson was also highly critical of Andy Warhol, see for example, his remarks on *Sleep*, *Filmrutan*. No. 2 (1965), p. 101. A member of the editorial collective, Lars Olsson wrote regarding Brakhage in 1968 that he couldn't see that New American Cinema would

- influence film art in any substantial way. "Tankar tänkta om New American Cinema en regnig dag" ("Thoughts on New American Cinema on a Rainy Day"). *Filmnutan*. No. 2 (1968), p. 102.
356. The hegemony of art cinema in the 1960s and early 1970s is probably also one reason why someone like Peter Kubelka hated it so much, especially the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard that he considers to be false and a fake revolt, see the interview with Kubelka by Gabriele Jutz and Peter Tscherkassky published in *Peter Kubelka*. Jutz, Gabriele and Peter Tscherkassky (eds.). Wien: PVS Verleger, 1995.
357. For a critique see Reekie pp. 143–145; Lauren Rabinovitz. "Wearing the Critic's Hat: History, Critical Discourses, and the American Avant-Garde Cinema". James (ed.) 1992. For the list of films that constituted the essential cinema see, for example, Jutz and Tscherkassky (eds.).
358. However there were extended experiments with colour TV, conducted by Gyllenberg, Reuterswärd, Sjölander and Wikström among others, as well as with video synthesizers. Few of which were broadcast.
359. According to Stephen Dwoskin Sweden's foremost merits in the field of experimental cinema in the 1960s was exactly that of technological experiments and innovations. *Film is: The International Free Cinema*. Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1975, p. 73. Lundsten also collaborated with the Finnish futurologist Erkki Kurenniemi, one of the Finnish experimental film pioneers. Kurenniemi built both Finland's first electronic music studio at Helsinki University in 1962 and Lundsten ordered one of Kurenniemi's first synthesizers, the so-called "Andromatic" in 1963.
360. For example "Författarcentrum" ("Writers Centre") and "Teatercentrum" ("Theatre Centre"). The former was the first one, founded in 1967.
361. This is evident in Svenstedt's history of the founding of Film Centre, published as a pamphlet in 1970, *Arbetarna lämnar fabriken: Filmindustrin blir folkrörelse* ("Workers leaving the factory: The film industry becomes a people's movement"). Stockholm: Norstedts, 1970. See especially the interview with the filmmakers Lena Ewert and Lars Westman.
362. One of the most controversial cases developed around the documentary *Rekordåren 1967, 1968, 1969* ("The record years", 1968) – a film about the politics of urban planning. It was shot on 16mm by students at the film school. Although the film was feature length it was not distributed commercially in theatres and could, therefore, not receive any quality awards despite receiving the quality points required.
363. During this period so-called art cinema theatres were founded in major cities throughout Europe. Sweden received its first ones in Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg in 1963. They all opened with a comprehensive Ingmar Bergman retrospective.
364. According to Swedish historians 1965 marked a significant political change that brought an end to the period of liberalization and paved the way for the politically turbulent period of 1965–1970. See, for example, Kjell Östberg. *1968 – när allting var i rörelse: Sextiotalsradikaliseringen och de sociala rörelserna*. Stockholm: Prisma, 2002.
365. A significant technological film invention was the Swiss made Nagra III NP magnetic tape recorder that was introduced in 1962. Rune Hassner stated in an interview that it was, in fact, the Nagra that brought him into film as it enabled one to work with film in a more immediate and documentary manner. Portrait of Hassner made in 1995 by the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, TV1, broadcast 10 March 1995.
366. For a history of Canyon Cinema see Scott MacDonald's *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributor*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
367. This was a very hard job and Svenstedt estimated that only about a dozen filmmakers actually acted according to the mission (interview with Carl Henrik Svenstedt, 1 May 2008). Amateur film-

maker Sven Elfström partly quit touring in 1972 because of the harsh work and adverse conditions (interview 28 April 2008).

368. A report from one such journey was published by Jonas Sima in *Chaplin*. No. 99 (1970): "Film ända in i Hälsingland – resa med Film-Centrum", and by Sima, Nilsson and Ulf Berggren in *Rapport från FilmCentrum*. No. 9 (1970).

369. Schein was a very argumentative person and published several books on film and cultural policy, in return he was often lampooned and one of the recurring substrands in Swedish film history is the character of Schein itself, see for example, Torbjörn Säfve's novel *Filmfursten: en cinematografisk roman* ("The film prince: a cinematographical novel"). Stockholm: Prisma, 1982.

370. This was, of course, under debate in those countries as well. In the USA Jonas Mekas always supported no selection whereas Brakhage famously withdraw his films for a short period in 1967 from the New York Co-op because it refused selection and therefore "advertised violence, hatred, dope, self-centred love, nihilism". Arthur, p. 15.

371. Memo from Film Centre 27 June 1968, Filmform Archive ("Redogörelse för arbetet med en icke-kommersiell filmkatalog avsedd att ligga till grund för ett FILMCENTRUM" 4 pages).

372. In a taped interview from the annual meeting, published in the Centre's reports, *Rapport från FilmCentrum*, Svenstedt expressed the opinion that Film Centre would become marginalized if it confirmed the picture given by their opponents, namely that the Centre was the mouthpiece for a small group of experimental filmmakers. No. 11 (1970), p. 21.

373. Lundsten's open letter was published in *Film & TV*. No. 1–2 (1974), p. 59 ("Brev till Film&TV").

374. For example, letter to Sven Frostensson, 13 June 1968; letter to Ulf Berggren, dated 1970. Filmform Archive.

375. For the relationship between the North American avant-garde and the university see

Michael Zryd. "The Academy and the Avant-Garde: A Relationship of Dependence and Resistance". *Cinema Journal* 45: 2 (2006).

376. For a critique of the academization of experimental film and P. Adams Sitney's strategies in particular see Grahame Weinbren. "Post Future Past Perfect", *Experimental Film and Video*, (ed.) Hatfield, Jackie. Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006; Reekie.

377. Ibid., p. 158.

378. Dwoskin, p. 78. In an article published the same year, Olle Sjögren, film scholar and co-director of the film *Deserter USA* (1969) claimed that Film Centre had become dogmatic, concentrating on warfare against the SFI. He estimated also that only 1% of all substandard gauge film that was in distribution came from the centre. The failure, according to Sjögren, was due to lack of money and the 'private' and 'experimental' character of the films. Olle Sjögren. "Filmpolitik och filmstrategi". Tjäder, Per Arne (ed.). *Klasskamp och kultur*. Stockholm: Arbetarkultur, 1975.

379. E-mail interview with P. Adams Sitney 12 Sept. 2005.

380. Reekie, pp. 157–158.

381. "FilmCentrum bildades 21 maj 1968" interview with Svenstedt, Nilsson, Ulf Berggren, Jan Lindkvist and Stefan Jarl, *Film & TV*. No. 7–8 (1976).

382. "Londonkonferens", *Rapport från FilmCentrum*. No. 4 (1969). When the Centre was set up it received facilities from Sweden's largest film company, Svensk Filmindustri.

383. Elfström's most widely shown film was *Cykel* ("Feedback", 1967), that received a prize from the SFI, and his most ambitious work was *Den förtvivalade intellektuella och hans borgerliga komplex* ("The desperate intellectual and his bourgeois fixations", 1970), which he submitted to Oberhausen short film festival.

384. The Danish filmmakers Nils Vest and Jannik Hastrup, published a critical article on the Danish workshop in the first issue of *Film & TV* that was



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- accompanied by an editorial comment stating that the intent behind the establishing of the Workshop was simply to calm down the biggest discontent among independent filmmakers, "Samma här som där? – Bl.a. om workshoppen". No. 1 (1973).
385. The situation was much the same in UK, see, for example, Reekie pp. 2–3.
386. The Annual report of The Independent Film Group, 1969. Film Form Archive.
387. Annual report from Film Centre 1968–1969, *Rapport från FilmCentrum*. No 1 (1969), p. 1.
388. For a history of Danish experimental film and the workshop, see Krarup and Nørrested.
389. Letter from the SFI to Filmform, Film Centre, the national association for substandard gauge filmmaking and the association of film directors. 13 Dec. 1972.
390. Krarup and Nørrested, p. 112.
391. Negt and Kluge. See also Loren Kruger's review of the book in *Modernism/Modernity*. 1: 3 (1994) for a German contextualization of the work.
392. *Filmverkstan: Skeppsholmen: 1973–2000*. Stockholm: Filmverkstan, 2000.
393. In fact this was a critique that Eric M. Nilsson expressed against Film Centre in the interview from 1976. According to Nilsson it was obvious that most of the filmmakers at the Centre had a voice; they were able to express themselves and had the power to address people. See *Film & TV*. No. 7–8 (1976), p. 10.
394. Memo regarding the Film Workshop dated 11 June 2000, SFI Archive.
395. Minutes of the Film Workshop's working committee, 18 March 1974. SFI Archive.
396. This according to producer Lisbeth Gabrielsson who was on the board of the working committee representing SFI during the years 1975–1979. Interview 13 Oct. 2008.
397. In a short but dense essay by Paley published in *Undercut*. No 1 (1981) she writes that what has characterized her film work since 1974 is "the role and place of the spectator" and "a specific consideration of the spectator's relationship with the camera and the act of cinematic recording", "Photo Quiz", p. X. Reprinted in *The Undercut Reader*. Danino, Nina and Michael Mazière (eds.). London: Wallflower Press, 2003.
398. Another artist worth mentioning who worked with animation at the Film Workshop is Håkan Wennström (b. 1951), especially *Träd* ("Tree", 1988) and *Noshörning* ("Rhinoceros", 1989).
399. See Elsaesser.
400. Thord Norman collaborated on *Glo-Babel* and *Coca Strip* and made, for example, the film *Penguins Cry in Minor Sea* (1979) that was meant to be projected onto the ceiling in order to free the audience from fixed frontal projection.
401. Besides the lost work on 8mm, Hedman made and co-made (together with Lilian Domec for example) other shorts that are difficult to date. For example, the one-minute *Film No. 9* (together with Nina Jouchims) that consists of only black and clear leader.
402. Letter from Nelson to the Film Workshop, dated 22 May 1980. The Film Workshop collection, SFI Archive.
403. For a depiction of the vibrant place and time see, for example, *Looking for Mushrooms: Beat Poets, Hippies, Funk, Minimal Art San Francisco 1955–1968*. Köln: Museum Ludwig/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2008.
404. "'Not Evident When You First See the Object': An interview with Gunvor Nelson". by Drake Stutesman, *Framework*. 48:2 (2007), p. 143.
405. Callenbach. [review of *Schmeerguntz*]. *Film Quarterly*. 19:4 (1966), p. 67.
406. Steva Anker. "Gunvor Nelson and the American Avant-Garde Film". Sundholm (ed.). 2003, p. 112.
407. Astrid Söderbergh Widding. "The Material World Transformed: Gunvor Nelson's Video-works". *Ibid.*, p. 125.

408. Anders Pettersson. "Interview with Gunvor Nelson". *Ibid.*, p. 147.
409. John Sundholm. "The Material and the Mimetic: On Gunvor Nelson's Personal Film-making". *Framework*. 48:2 (2007), p. 171.
410. Anders Pettersson stressed in a published MA thesis on Nelson's filmmaking – that draws upon a vast array of interviews and first-hand material – that critics and scholars seldom pay attention to all the various comic strands in Nelson's filmmaking. Anders Pettersson. *Gunvor Nelson: Om avantgardefilm i allmänhet och 'personal film' i synnerhet*. Karlstad: Karlstad University Studies 29 (2002).
411. As stated earlier Paul Arthur considers the latter to take place between the years 1970–73, whereas Michael Zryd extends the period to 1965–75 with a significant change or boom taking place after 1968. Arthur p. 77 and Zryd. According to Krarup and Nørrested the peak years in Danish experimental film production was 1968–1972 when 141 films were produced, Krarup and Nørrested, p. 8.
412. Anker, pp. 114–115.
413. *Kirsa Nicholina* was screened at Moderna Museet in 1969 and mentioned as the highlight of the programme in a review by Inga Lovén for the film society journal *Filmrutan*. No. 4 (1969). At this time both Svenstedt and Söderquist had visited the Nelsons at Muir Beach and Robert Nelson was one of the seven artists that was portrayed in Söderquist's *Travelogue* (1969).
414. The music was made by Patrick Gleeson, at the time a member of Herbie Hancock's band and a pioneer in electronic music, Gleeson had also assisted Nelson on the soundtrack for *My Name is Oona*. For *Take Off* Gleeson made four tracks that Nelson mixed for the final film.
415. Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Screen*. 16: 3 (1975). In particular Valie Export's *Mann & Frau & Animal* (1973)
416. Anker, p. 117.
417. Rabinowitz, 1991, p. 191.
418. In MacDonald's interview with Nelson these are the films that receive most of the attention. *Moons Pool* is never mentioned. Scott MacDonald. "Gunvor Nelson". *A Critical Cinema* 3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998
419. For the relation between Nelson and the canon of experimental film history, see for example Sundholm, 2007. Gunvor Nelson is, for example, not included in P. Adams Sitney's seminal *Visionary Film* (third edition in 2002) subtitled "The American Avant-Garde 1943–2000". According to Diane Kitchen Nelson's oeuvre was of crucial significance when it came to number of rentals at Canyon Cinema: "it was clear that without Gunvor Nelson, and Bob Nelson, and Brakhage, and Bruce Baillie, and a few others, it would have been very difficult to keep things going", interview with Kitchen by Scott MacDonald in MacDonald, 2008, p. 180.
420. A general assumption among experimental film historians is that the late 1970s and the 1980s faced a decline in film rentals in the USA, driving the experimental film scene into the universities. See, for example, Paul Arthur "The Last of the Last Machine?". Arthur; Zryd, p. 30 and Larry Jordan's depiction of the condition in 1979 in "Survival in the Independent—Non-Commercial—Avant-Garde—Experimental—Personal—Expressionistic Film Market of 1979", in MacDonald, 2008, originally published in *Cinemanews*. No. 2/3/4 1979. The decline in film rentals did not necessary imply a decline in sales figures, see for example, MacDonald, 2008, *ibid.* pp. 433–434.
421. MacDonald, 1998, p. 193.
422. Gene Youngblood. "Cinema and the Code", Shaw, Jeffrey and Peter Weibel (eds.). *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003. Originally published in a supplemental issue of *Leonardo: Journal of the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology*, 1989.
423. MacDonald, 1988, p. 186.
424. Youngblood, 2003.
425. Anker, p. 123.

ENDNOTES

426. Gunnel Pettersson and Måns Wrangle. "Video-konst i Sverige: från alternativ till institution". Söderbergh Widding (ed.), 2006.
427. Bengt af Klintberg. *Swedish Fluxus*. Stockholm: Rönnells antikvariat, 2006.
428. Examples mentioned by Pettersson and Wrangle are Teresa Wennberg, who went to Centre Pompidou in Paris in the mid-1970s, and Antonie Frank who studied at the Jan van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht as late as in the mid-1980s. Pettersson and Wrangle, p. 135.
429. Peter Wollen. "The Two Avant-Gardes". *Readings and Writings, Semiotic Counter-Strategies*. London: Verso, 1982, p. 104.
430. Ibid.
431. Sinziana Ravini, August 2009, Paris, <http://www.christianlarsen.se/flash.html> (11 Nov. 2009).
432. Ibid.
433. Ibid.
434. Ibid.
435. Rodowick.
436. Reekie, p. 158.
437. Export.
438. Fredric Jameson. *The Cultural Turn, Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*. London: Verso, 1998, p. 158.
439. Among a number of possible examples, it may be noted that Gunvor Nelson made *Tree-Line* at Crac, where she went to learn to use computer software.
440. Pettersson and Wrangle, p. 144.
441. Ibid.
442. Clemens Poellinger et al. "Spolbar". *Svenska Dagbladet*. 22 Feb. 2009.
443. See Le Grice, 2001, or Curtis, 2007.
444. Sinziana Ravini. "Det avpolitiserade fältet, de mentala revolutionerna och de nya medierna". *Tänd mörkret! Svensk konst 1975–1985*. Åstrand, Ola and Ulf Kinander (eds.). Göteborg: Göteborgs konstmuseum, 2007, p. 115.
445. Rabinovitz, 1991.
446. Maria Carlgren, "Dans på museum – ett möte mellan konstater". *Nutida dans*. No. 23 (2004).
447. Gilles Deleuze develops this idea in his *Cinema 1, The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
448. Ann-Sofi Sidén *In Between the Best of Worlds*. Widenheim, Cecilia (ed.) Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2004, pp. 88–89.
449. Ibid, p. 76.
450. Ibid., p. 105.
451. Ibid., p. 106.
452. Annika Wik. *Förebild film. Panoreringar över den samtida konstscenen*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2001.
453. Susanne Ø Saether. *The Aesthetics of Sampling, Engaging the Media in Recent Video Art*. Oslo: Oslo University, 2008.
454. *Looking for Mushrooms*.
455. Sara Arrhenius. "Bodies in Motion". *NU: The Nordic Art Review*. 3: 3–4 (2001).
456. <http://www.mariafriberg.com/> (30 Sept. 2009).
457. <http://www.hollender.se/> (28 Aug. 2009).
458. "KonstBio presenterar Tema: Ockupanter", collective e-mail 12 March 2009.
459. "Underlag för beslut om produktionsstöd". SFI 15 Dec. 2008, unpublished. The artists mentioned are Mats Hjelm, Bigert & Bergström, Jonas Elfdahl and Måns Månsson.
460. "PLAY – Film och video" 7.2-19.4 2009.
461. <http://www.sr.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=478&artikel=2886599> (15 Oct. 2009).



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