

## 5 The Filmmaker as Useful Social Animator

### National and Transnational Perspectives on Stefania Börje and FilmCentrum around 1970

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During the fall of 1969 and the spring of 1970, Sweden's major newspapers reported on an unusual film project, "the first experiment of its kind in Sweden" (Edberg 1969). Co-created by 22 children from Gårdesskolan elementary school in Stockholm, headlines about the project read: "The City of Stockholm invests in ten-year-old film directors" ("Stockholms stad" 1969) and "Nine-year-olds film moon landing" (Edberg 1969). In 1970 and 1971, the children's films were shown on Swedish National Television and became known as the Gårdesskolan-project. Funded by the Information Committee of Stockholm City and the non-governmental lobbying organization the Committee for Children's Films, the project was led by a collective of documentary and experimental filmmakers from the non-profit organization FilmCentrum. FilmCentrum was founded in 1968 with the intention of establishing direct communication between filmmakers and society, and to build a network for non-commercial film production and distribution. The founding was primarily motivated by a perceived need to augment the prerequisites for non-commercial filmmakers since the official Swedish body of cultural policy-based support for film, the Swedish Film Institute (SFI), established in 1963, mainly catered to commercial narrative feature-length cinema.

Stefania Börje, a documentary and experimental filmmaker active in Sweden from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, spearheaded the Gårdesskolan-project. Despite her productive career, which includes around 20 films made in close collaboration with her partner Carl Henrik Svenstedt, Börje remains an unresearched character in Swedish film and television history. Born Stefania Lopez in Italy in 1934, she moved to Sweden in 1956. There, she launched a successful modeling career that made her "one of Sweden's most photographed women," until she left the industry to relocate behind the camera (Klevard 1975; "I Sverige finns" 1966). Turning to filmmaking in 1967, she helped found FilmCentrum a year later, becoming the organization's ombudsman and official spokesperson with respect to educational issues.

Even though news media framed the Gårdesskolan-project as the spectacle of children-as-filmmakers, the undertaking was, according to Börje, not only about giving children ways and means to express themselves through film, but

also helping them interpret an audiovisual language with which they are confronted daily (Holm 1970). In January 1969, Börje released the statement “Communication sociology?” Adorning the cover of the second issue of FilmCentrum’s *Rapport från FilmCentrum*, it reads:

It’s not only about film [...] Let us [...] firstly, analyze how “manipulable” people really are when they get an honest chance to speak. Secondly, we must expose ourselves to the demands of the receivers. Thirdly, we must expand our sensibility towards other people’s need to formulate and communicate their problems, on their own, or, for example, through us.  
(Börje 1969)

This conviction permeated the Gärdesskolan-project. Filmmakers should embrace a societal function as enablers of marginalized voices. They were to reject artistic pretensions and only provide the children with enough knowledge and technology to help them define their own realities through film. The aspiration was for the children to find an audiovisual voice and learn to engage with an information-dense modern society outside the traditional classroom setting.

This mode of participatory filmmaking was further developed by FilmCentrum members Ulf Berggren, Svenstedt, and Börje in a similarly pioneering project in 1971—the prison project. Together with media historian Fredrik Norén (Diurlin and Norén, 2021), I have previously demonstrated how the prison project was constructed according to a Canadian communication model called Challenge for Change (CFC), initiated in 1967 by the National Film Board of Canada/Office national du film (NFB/ONF; “Filmarutbyte” 1969; “Till Kanada” 1970). CFC was essentially a state-funded effort using participatory filmmaking to enhance participatory democracy, opening channels of communication in marginalized communities. This demonstrates that corresponding ideas and media practices were emerging among governmental policy actors and socially engaged filmmakers on both sides of the Atlantic. However, even if the aspiration to utilize the film medium and filmmaker permeated both Swedish and Canadian policymakers, the strategies for such objectives differed significantly, which this study will show.

This chapter aims to study the audiovisual and discursive practices of Börje in relation to the national production prerequisites and transnational relations regarding FilmCentrum. This is justified as FilmCentrum was intertwined with national non-cultural governmental policy contexts and related actors, in, for example, education policy, civic health, and foreign aid (Diurlin and Norén 2021, Diurlin and Mohammadi Norén 2024). It attempts to answer the following research questions: What role did Börje play as an ideologue in FilmCentrum, and how can we understand her audiovisual and written contributions to the emerging 1970s discourse regarding the use of the film medium as a tool for progressive social change, especially in the educational policy field? How was the relationship between FilmCentrum and the Swedish welfare state formulated discursively by Börje and other initiators behind FilmCentrum? Analyzing FilmCentrum’s connections to the strategies and

objectives of CFC, how can we understand the transnational flows of influence from Canada onto the practices of FilmCentrum, and the Gårdesskolan-project in particular?

To trace and analyze the discourse and collaborations surrounding the project, I used the National Library of Sweden's archive of digitized newspapers. Another source was the FilmCentrum bulletin *Rapport från FilmCentrum* (1968–1972), where the organization published agendas and meeting minutes. This is valuable, since few traces of the project can be found in public archives (Figure 5.1). FilmCentrum has no archive available to researchers, and much of their material from the 1970s has been lost. In the archive of the Information Committee of Stockholm City there is a gap for the years during which the project was in operation. The Committee for Children's Films (1948–1975) also lacks a cohesively collected archive. The archive of the Stockholm School Direction has furthermore been explored, and *Säg det med film!* ('Say it with film!'), a 1971 TV broadcast on the project, has been supplied by the Swedish Media Database.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter is structured as follows: I begin by touching upon historiographic concerns regarding writing women's film history. Using the case of Börje as a starting point, I argue for a further expansion of calls to "decenter" feminist film studies by focusing on historical media categories that have hitherto garnered little attention from feminist scholars. In the next section, I will offer a new perspective on FilmCentrum's cultural function in the Swedish welfare state, as well as from a transnational viewpoint, challenging traditional understandings of the organization as an independent, counter-cultural group working in opposition to dominant actors of the welfare state. In the final section, I will return to Börje delving deeper into her approach toward the Gårdesskolan-project and exploring the project's ideological transnational relation to the CFC method of participatory filmmaking.

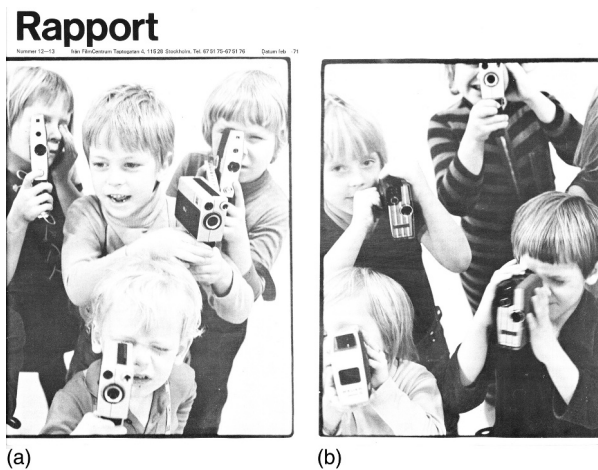


Figure 5.1 The cover of *Rapport från FilmCentrum* (issue 12–13, 1971) showing children with 8 mm film cameras.

### Writing Stefania Börje into a History of Swedish Useful Film Culture

The Gärdeskolan-project emerged within a context when filmmakers were shifting focus away from themselves toward underrepresented voices in society. Such self-effacing eradication comes with historiographic consequences when writing women's film history. As noted by Christine Gledhill and Julie Knight, many women filmmakers have left few historical traces (2015, 4). Their roles in production or film culture are often concealed behind collective or collaborative practices, such as partnerships and experimental multimedia work. Women have thereby been disregarded or marginalized in a film historiography that favors male *auteurs* and narrative feature films (Larsson 2006, 10; Ryberg 2019, 167; White 2015, 7). This poses a series of methodological challenges regarding authorship and the film object. Nevertheless, as feminist scholars undertake the task of identifying women's agency and autonomy in film history, they have tended to fall back on the traditional key methods. Namely, individual authorship, which, according to Gledhill and Knight, is often "irrelevant to the ways many women work" (2015, 8). The period's shift in filmmaking practices compounds with women filmmakers' historical erasure and methodological inadequacies, hampering scholars' ability to identify women's influence on film history.

Regarding Börje, these issues are exacerbated since she not only primarily worked within collectives but also made most of her films in collaboration with Carl Henrik Svenstedt. Adding to the challenge of establishing Börje's cultural influence, the empirical sources and historical accounts sometimes cloud her contributions to the couple's works, and, to an even greater extent, her role at FilmCentrum. For example, in an issue of the Swedish film journal *Victor*, commemorating the organization's 40th anniversary, Börje is mentioned once by Svenstedt as "Stefania from the fashion industry" (2008, 4). In another text she is mentioned twice but only in relation to other men (Von Strauss 2008, 34). Such treatment is in line with Gledhill and Knight's point that women's roles in production or film culture are often obscured by more publicly visible or self-promotional male partners (2015, 4; see also Brunow's chapter in this volume).

A study of Börje's contributions to Swedish film culture is not a self-evident undertaking for scholars inclined to reconceptualize and expand the field of women's film history and locate the impact of women within that history. As Karen Hollinger notes, feminist *auteurist* critics need to address whether every female filmmaker should be studied and their work considered part of women's cinema, or should scholars limit themselves to women whose work can be clearly designated as feminist (2012, 234)? Adhering to such limitations would keep Börje in the margins, and, as Larsson points out, also risks obscuring women not directly involved in feminist issues (2006, 194). Importantly, it is impossible to illuminate Börje's accomplishments if it requires explicit feminism on her part. Börje refuses to put any significance on her gender in relation to her life-long film cultural practice, refuting obligations to make films for, or about, women (Diurlin 2024).<sup>2</sup>

This chapter observes the call for a “decentering,” or centrifugal expansion, of feminist film studies, as addressed by Kristin Lené Hole among others (2017, 4). While Hole’s decentering ambition is found in a move beyond dominant Western and cis-gendered perspectives, the mode of decentering practiced here is grounded in the conviction that scholars should apply feminist perspectives on historical media categories that have yet to be thoroughly examined from such angles. As an example, this chapter focuses on material stemming from non-commercial, and most often non-theatrical, minor film practices found in the wide spectrum of what Haidee Wasson and Charles R. Acland name “useful cinema” (2011). Useful cinema involves scholars studying audiovisual practices funded by “institutions seemingly unrelated to cinema” wherein the film medium is utilized as a tool to, for example, instruct, persuade, educate, or change the behavior of the viewer (Wasson and Acland 2011, 4).

If, as Robin Blaetz has argued, avant-garde and experimental film practices have been marginalized by feminist scholarship, particularly feminist film theory’s focus on mainstream cinema, film practices in the spectrum of useful cinema are ignored to an even greater extent (2007, 5). The reason is very likely that such films are rarely associated with feminist issues or individual political agency. It is therefore no surprise that in the rare instances of scholars studying Swedish useful films, the commissioned or useful nature of the films, along with the informational objectives of the commissioning body, is downplayed (Ryberg 2019, 2022). Instead, focus has been placed on the authorship and political intentions of the individual filmmakers. Rather, film scholars should acknowledge the co-dependent relation between funder and filmmaker as reciprocal, and that funding structures tended to intertwine cultural and non-cultural policy goals (Diurlin and Mohammadi Norén 2024, 153).

### **New National and Transnational Perspectives on FilmCentrum’s Usefulness**

Following David James, alternative modes of filmmaking—short, essay, documentary, avant-garde, amateur, collective and experimental films—can be labeled *minor* film practices, as opposed to major—narrative, commercial, feature-length film (2005, 13). Historical studies on Swedish minor filmmaking focus largely on experimental cinema and the aesthetic and socio-political objectives of the associated artists and movements (Andersson et al. 2010; Andersson and Sundholm 2014, 2019). As with feminist historiography, less attention has been given to the potentially “useful” relations that Swedish minor filmmakers established with institutions from non-cultural areas in need of audiovisual material. This study attempts to fuse what James labels *minor* with Wasson and Acland’s conceptualization of what can be discussed as *useful* to demonstrate that in a Swedish film cultural context, the two fields encircled by the terms are not isolated from each other, but rather critically intertwined.

In Sweden’s 1960s and 1970s film cultural context, filmmakers working in minor fields saw it necessary to circumvent not only the commercial film

industry, but also the SFI, the body of cultural policy-based support for film, as it was directed toward the same kind of major cinema that the industry already nurtured (c.f. Andersson and Sundholm 2014, 68; Diurlin 2016, 177). Minor filmmakers, therefore, often pursued patronage from public agencies seemingly unrelated to cinema.

This shift toward what can be defined as a “non-cultural” sphere of public welfare state administration was not merely done for economic reasons. It was also due to an overall radicalization of society around 1970 when many artists perceived art as a tool for social change, emphasizing new forms of contact between artists and citizens (Bergman 2010). Moreover, scholars of the Swedish welfare state’s communication practices have concluded that the 1960s and 1970s were the most expansive decades for governmental information aimed at changing behavioral patterns and opinions (Kjellgren 2002; Söderlind 2009; Diurlin and Norén 2021). Information was perceived as a key instrument to steer society in desired directions. To achieve this, some state agencies made use of an “information-by-proxy” strategy where funds were channeled through the infrastructure of civil society but also to cultural workers—filmmakers, poets, theatre groups—functioning as proxy-creators of artistically enhanced information, deemed to have a greater emotional and personalized impact on the receiving end (Diurlin and Mohammadi Norén, 2024). This suggests that the alternative route was made possible because public institutions needed to renew their communicative methods and media aimed at the Swedish citizenry.

The Gärdeskolan-project, as well as the subsequent prison-project, was funded by, and realized in collaboration with, state or regional bodies tasked with educational, informative, or attitude-changing undertakings. Both projects stand as representative examples of how the ideologues behind FilmCentrum, including Börje, saw the organization as an integral part of the welfare state with the intention of making their members useful to society. However, scholarly writings on FilmCentrum have understood the group as an oppositional organization, with “the objective [...] to work independently from all major companies and institutions” (Andersson et al. 2010, 146), “counter to hegemonic and state-mediated cultural norms” (Ramstedt 2016, 111), and “a way for left-wing radical artists to mark their distance from institutional culture” (Esping 2007, 130). Scholars have been content to read the organization in relation to a narrow film cultural context, thereby automatically positioning it as a “radically different” (Ramstedt 2016, 102) Other in relation to major cinema, epitomized by the industry-friendly SFI. This is not a faulty deduction as much as it is a dead-end if one wishes to understand FilmCentrum’s cultural significance and function in the Swedish welfare state. Swedish film policy not only isolated itself from media categories other than the major narrative film but also essentially detached itself from the area of welfare state cultural policy, including non-commercial minor film practices (Diurlin 2021). A result of the corporatist agreement between the state and the film industry (i.e., the SFI). Although embraced by non-cultural welfare state bodies, FilmCentrum’s goals were simultaneously concomitant to the overall development of Swedish

cultural policy discourse around 1970, which came to emphasize culture's social function, new forms of contact between artists and citizens, and institutional recognition for cultural workers (Duelund 2008). Such views of cultural balance and participatory outreach permeated the development of 1960s Swedish cultural policy and constituted the foundation behind the new cultural policy of 1974 (Larsson and Svenson 2001). The cultural democratic objectives of FilmCentrum echoed the cultural policies being simultaneously elaborated by the incumbent social-democratic government.

The initial objective of FilmCentrum was to print a distribution catalogue for non-commercial films. To finance the catalogue, the founding group, including Börje and Svenstedt, courted the Ministry of Education, which, at the time, also handled cultural policy issues. For an anti-establishment counter-culture organization, such a move seems inappropriate. However, understood as a conscious attempt to establish a political economic bond with principal representatives of the welfare state and initiate a cultural/information policy solution that was lacking in Sweden, it makes perfect sense. In fact, it was stated by the founders that creating FilmCentrum was "an issue of cultural policy" ("Verksamhetsberättelse 1968/69" 1969) and that "the general information activities" were considered "the main task of the organization" ("Verksamhetsberättelse 1969/70" 1970). Since FilmCentrum's activities were of "public interest," it was seen as self-evident by the organization that it should be "publicly financed" ("Filmcentrum söker" 1969; cf. Sörenssen 1969).

It became clear as the catalogue took form that FilmCentrum's inclusive policy of no quality or format directives stood in opposition to the matrix of quality-assessed feature films propounded by the SFI. Accordingly, the catalogue became the topic of film culture debate. As one of several spokespeople for FilmCentrum, Börje articulated the organization's principles in news media, saying that it did not "have the pretention to tell people what kinds of film they should see, or which films they should make...Quality valuations only tend to inhibit progress or even actively counteract it" (1968). Furthermore, she asserted that of the 25,000 catalogue copies, 22,000 were already pre-ordered by "organizations, associations, clubs, and individuals across the country." Börje underscored the societal function that the catalogue was expected to hold and its link to the widespread people's movements and NGOs that constituted the backbone of the Swedish welfare state.

News articles reporting on FilmCentrum's formative outreach activities pointed to how the organization's views of the medium differed from the dominant matrix of theatrical art cinema impelled by the SFI. As a cultural critic in the daily *Dagens Nyheter* wrote, "The intention is that the films...should be *used* not evaluated, graded. Used as a basis for discussion, as information, as pedagogical tools...There is a real opportunity for the short film to acquire a *function* in society" (Jönsson 1969). FilmCentrum evidently aspired to reach outside of both minor and major film culture and make their films *useful* for the masses—for adult education, political organizations, schoolchildren, retirement homes, and beyond. After swaying the ministry, FilmCentrum established

information collaborations with agencies in policy areas such as foreign aid, employment, health, environmental protection, and traffic safety. The *Rapport-bulletin* functioned as an intermediary for agencies to announce their informational needs, with calls such as: “Make a film on narcotics! FilmCentrum has initiated a partnership with the Child Welfare Board. FilmCentrum’s objective is to serve such institutions with non-commercial films” (“Gör en narkotikafilm!!” 1969).

Early on, the organization also established a close collaboration with the semi-governmental international relations organization, the Swedish Institute (SI), to promote Swedish minor film culture abroad (“Avtal...” 1969). The international promotion of Swedish film was at the time supposed to be handled by the SFI (c.f. Diurlin 2016). However, since SFI locked itself into a major and purely commercial narrative feature film matrix, the diverse field of minor film and its international relations were of little interest. FilmCentrum could therefore obtain the useful position of representing an official national selection of minor films to be promoted internationally under the auspices of the SI. The visit by FilmCentrum members to the NFB/ONF in 1969, which most certainly affected the development and CFC influences on both the Gårdesskolan and the subsequent prison project, should be viewed within this useful context as the trip was funded and arranged as part of an SI–NFB/ONF production collaboration (“Filmarutbyte” 1969).

CFC was a state-funded effort that utilized participatory filmmaking to enhance participatory democracy, opening communication channels in marginalized communities. The filmmaker was to reject artistic pretensions and become a “social animator” in the service of society, providing people with knowledge and technology and helping communities define their problems and solutions, while documenting and observing themselves (Winton and Garrison 2010, 411f; Marchessault 1995, 139). In essence, it was an experiment in communication between state agencies and citizens, exemplified by the official title of its most well-known project, 1967s “The Fogo Island Communication Experiment” (Low 2002, 163; Crocker 2003, 130).

In his study of the NFB/ONF, Gary Evans states that the CFC’s “main purpose was to promote greater interaction between the government and those governed” (1991, 175). Notably, the CFC was managed by an interdepartmental committee consisting of key state agency players in areas such as health, welfare, manpower, and agriculture, with each project co-funded by the agency linked to the issue at hand. Commonly, scholars on CFC uphold this funding relation between socially engaged filmmakers and the state as “unique within Canadian—and indeed world—film history” (Baker, Waugh and Winton 2010, 31; c.f. Walton 2019, 172). This is an exaggeration, as we find a similar situation of publicly funded initiatives in Sweden. It demonstrates a similar credence, shared by the authoritative powers of two welfare states on opposite sides of the Atlantic, in the useful potentials of the film medium and its practitioners when employed to educate, persuade, and facilitate interaction between the government and those governed, to paraphrase Evans as quoted above. Yet, in

Sweden, this interaction was less direct and characterized by ambiguities, discontinuity, and ad hoc solutions, as no designated production agency existed. In its place, an organization such as FilmCentrum could be utilized to fill that void.

Research on the transnational impact of NFB/ONF's CFC methods has been conducted regarding US-based projects (Charbonneau 2014) and experimental endeavors in India and Bangladesh (Crocker 2003). Research remains scarce regarding Scandinavian–Canadian entanglements, with Diurlin and Norén's (2021) study on the prison project being an exception. Prior to that study, the scholarly consensus was that FilmCentrum, when placed in an international context, was part of a larger counter-cultural movement founded with San Francisco's Canyon Cinema and other American and British filmmaking cooperatives as models (Andersson et al. 2010; Ramstedt 2016). FilmCentrum members sustain this view by taking it upon themselves to shape the historical memory of the organization as alternative and anti-establishment (Svenstedt 2008; Lindqvist 2008). The current study problematizes such understandings, arguing that when discussed from an international perspective, and particularly when juxtaposed to the CFC, FilmCentrum's distinctly instrumental function in the welfare state only becomes more evident.

### **The Gärdesskolan-Project: The Useful Filmmaker and the Untutored Eye**

Between 1968 and 1971, one policy area was seen as particularly urgent for FilmCentrum: education. They aimed to use film and filmmakers in the education system. This was logical considering the Ministry of Education financed the organization's catalogue. In December 1968, a committee was elected with Börje as convener, tasked to "activate schools," "make use of film as a pedagogical aid," and persuade filmmakers to create educational films accompanied by pedagogical material ("Synpunkter" 1969). At the time, a new curriculum dictated the integration of film into the Swedish language subject, recommending the employment of freelance filmmakers as supervisors (Skolöverstyrelsen 1969, 25). Börje closely followed this development and, as the policymakers, saw the potential for a beneficial reciprocal exchange (Börje 1970). Moreover, in 1969, the Stockholm School Direction commissioned an investigation into how schools could employ cultural workers for "concrete experimental activities" to strengthen children's cultural creativity (Protocol 1969). Consequently, the Gärdesskolan-project became the first collective long-term undertaking of FilmCentrum. The Stockholm School Direction asserted that the project would further the proper integration of the film medium into Swedish schools, not only as a pedagogical tool used to teach other subjects, but also as a theoretical and practical teaching area ("Små filmskapare" 1970).

What made the Gärdesskolan-project unique was its emphasis on active child participation. Rather than passive reception of films for children, the project resulted in 8mm films made *by* children. This bottom-up method was crucial for Börje, as she was critical of the commercial children's films of the

day, deeming them “sanitized” and “simplified” (Börje 1970; Holm 1971). She claimed that children had no use for more theatrical films produced “for them.” Instead, one should give children a chance to formulate their own audiovisual language free from the conventions of major cinema.

FilmCentrum held that “consciously working with amateur film equipment” contributed “to critical awareness of the massive information we receive through film.” They acknowledge this as “identical to the thoughts behind the introduction of the subject of film studies into the school curriculum” (“Kommentar” 1969). However, the 8mm end-products were not the primary goal. According to Börje, focus was on *the process* and FilmCentrum’s obligation within that process was, as she had stated in her “Communication sociology”-text, to “expand our sensibility towards other people’s need to formulate and communicate their problems, on their own, or...through us” (1969). This certainly echoes Peter K. Wiesner’s statements on the transformation of the contemporary CFC filmmaker’s role as “a departure from an attitude glorifying the filmmaker” since their films “were not merely *about* the groups they portrayed but *on behalf of* them” (2010,76). Along with her enthusiasm for issues concerning children and media democracy, Börje held that film should empower politically and socially disenfranchised people rather than elevate the individual filmmaker’s visions, forming the basis for the Gårdesskolan-project.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the overt rejection of authorship, artistic influences permeated the experiment. Börje and Svenstedt drew inspiration from American experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage. As such, Börje saw the project as a quest for a “purer” cinema unaffected by the restraining conventions of the narrative commercial film (1971b). It could only be achieved by eyes not yet affected by the modern media landscape. Children, stated Börje, “have so much to teach us. They are our unspoiled eyes at the same time as they are a constant reminder of our incomplete imagery” (1971b; cf. “Stockholms stad” 1969). Such an “untutored eye” of raw perception was a key aspect of Brakhage’s influential text, *Metaphors on Vision* (1963). Brakhage thought this to begin with the urge to “imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective...An eye which soon learns to classify sights, an eye which mirrors the movement of the individual towards death by its increasing inability to see” (quoted in Keller 1985, 186). Echoing Brakhage, Börje believed that the younger the child, the greater the visual sensitivity, and, as children adapt to established visual patterns, the potential decreases. Yet, as Majorie Keller has argued, Brakhage’s goal was to—albeit through the eyes of children—mainly explore himself. The untutored vision was merely “a metaphor for the filmmaker at his best moments” (Keller 1985, 186, 229). Börje, on the other hand, was genuinely set on elevating the child’s vision above the “unpure,” literary, and conformist imagery of any adult filmmaker, as it was too late to unlearn “80 years of illustrative and narrative image use” (Börje 1971b).

In September 1969, several FilmCentrum members, excluding Börje, partook in the NFB/ONF–SI symposium in Montréal, where they likely developed ideas for the project. During the visit, Svenstedt interviewed John Kemeny

and Colin Low, CFC's initiators, including a report of the encounter in his book *Arbetarna lämnar fabriken* (1970). The inspirational entanglement is further enmeshed as the book's first chapter, titled "Film is not important," clearly resonate with Börje's statement from January 1969 that "It's not only about film. This is becoming more and more clear to us." If the "us" should be read as the FilmCentrum collective or the filmmaking couple, is of lesser importance than the message that artistic value as an end in itself is irrelevant and the process of filmmaking is more important than the films produced.<sup>4</sup>

Just as essential to the Fogo- and the Gärdesskolan-experiment was that filmmakers relinquish control and as social animators engage the topical group as partners in a democratic filmmaking process, seeking to eliminate the idea of an outside looking in (Marchessault 1995, 135). The concerned group held the privilege of controlling the camera eye. During the process, collectively and self-reflectively re-watching their filmed material, engendered an interactive and critical use of media over a long period of time (Börje 1971a; see also Wiesner 2010). Therefore, the films were initially of little value outside the context of the situation.

Nevertheless, the documentary material played a central role at a later stage. It could be used as information aimed at society, but only with the approval of the participating group. As Wiesner argues in relation to the CFC: "In the end what you get are two different film/video forms, each with its own integrity—the auteur documentary for mass audiences and community media for local use" (2010, 102). Both the Gärdesskolan-project and the subsequent prison-project shared this central aspect regarding how the filmed material could be useful *after* it fulfilled its initial community development function.

Where the last phase of the prison project saw the production of Börje's and Svenstedt's documentary *Bovar och Banditer* ("Robbers and Bandits", Sweden, 1972), the school project stayed closer to the initial utilitarian use of the material and rejection of artistic individual pretension than the final phase of the prison project. The 30 8 mm films made by the children were edited together by Börje and other FilmCentrum members into the TV program *Vi har gjort film* ("We have made films", Sweden) broadcast on Swedish National Television in 1970. This program remains lost today, but the material was reworked in 1971 and re-broadcast as *Säg det med film!*, which was later struck on 16 mm as *Kalle Anka-skräck och bilism* ("Donald Duck-Horror and Motorism," Börje et al., Sweden 1972) and included in FilmCentrum's distribution catalogue. *Säg det med film!* melds clips from the children's films with scenes of classroom discussions about the works, creating a meta-observational communication loop of collective self-reflection that was imperative also to the Canadian CFC-projects.

Likewise, the program connects to what Janine Marchessault (1995, 133) identifies as a rallying slogan for CFC termed "media demystification," which involves the deconstruction of film language as a critical consciousness-raising exercise. *Säg det med film!* centers around one such exercise which Börje (1971a) named "the polarization method." In Börje's exercise, the class was divided into two groups with the task to create two opposing films from the same

material, one against heavy city traffic and one in favor. Here, adherence to the new school curriculum is especially overt, as the curriculum states that exercises and discussions should “illuminate the relationship between objective facts and the communicator’s subjective choice of images and sounds—which reflect his own interpretation of the facts—and how images and sounds give the recipient a new experience or insight” (Skolöverstyrelsen 1969, 24).

The Gärdeskolan-project was only one—albeit by far the most publicized—of several smaller educational projects managed by FilmCentrum members around 1970, in total activating 1000 children across Sweden (Börje 1971b). In a 1971 special edition of *Rapport* (issue 12–13), which Börje edited, she compiled experiences from the numerous projects. Considering the close collaborations between FilmCentrum and key policymakers in the educational field and studying the discussions on the Gärdeskolan-project and Börje’s special edition of *Rapport*, it is evident that these achievements decisively impacted contemporary Swedish discourse at the nexus of children, film, and education. The daily *Arbetet*, for example, upheld Börje’s *Rapport*-issue as the “most comprehensive investigation of the cinematic knowledge found in the Swedish school system, from pre-schools to the academic institutions...It should motivate a benevolent attitude on the part of the relevant state and municipal school bodies” (Olsson 1971). Still, impact from representatives of minor cinema, such as Börje and FilmCentrum, is largely neglected by historical research on film pedagogy and children’s films in Sweden, which has, similar to feminist film research, traditionally focused on major commercial feature-length cinema (Janson 2019; Lindgren et al. 2011; Åberg 2023).

One could argue that the Gärdeskolan-project calls not only for a decentering refocus of feminist film scholarship, but also for a refocusing of children’s film research onto the minor and useful fields. Such a change might call for redefinition of what we as scholars mean when we talk about children’s films: films *about*, *for*, or *by* children? Such questions become particularly pregnant when children’s agency and representation are discussed in the context of the Gärdeskolan-project and the Canadian NFB/ONF productions. Although undoubtedly influenced by CFC methods and, despite the many similarities, the Gärdeskolan-project thematically differed regarding this crucial aspect compared to anything the NFB/ONF had produced, or would produce, during the 1970s and 1980s.

As noted by Brian J. Low in his study of children in NFB/ONF films from 1939 to 1989, there is a “democratizing” divide after 1967 where “control over representational voice is yielded to previously voiceless ‘cultural communities’” such as indigenous cultures, the poor, and women (2002, 21). Connected to this, Low sees a simultaneous progression toward child-centered narratives. Equating these two developments is problematic since it leads to the misconception that children were given a representational voice as “cultural communities” were via the CFC program. This cannot be deduced from Low’s investigation since the studied films merely remain portrayals *of* and *about* children, not *by* children. Apparently, in the NFB’s aim to reallocate representational voice to the voiceless, children were only allowed the positions of diegetic

characters or passive recipients of information. They were not cinematically heard, that is, where a voice originates from the subjects of the film itself. Thus, Börje's aim to produce more authentic and untutored children's film was pioneering not only in a Swedish context.

### **Concluding Remarks**

By applying an inclusive feminist approach, not limited to studying filmmakers whose work can be clearly designated as feminist, allowed this chapter to investigate Stefania Börjes' hitherto unresearched role as co-founder of and key ideologue in the organization FilmCentrum. Additionally, the chapter strove to expand the call for a "decentering" of feminist film studies by incorporating the realm of useful cinema and developing the theoretical concept of minor film to also include the useful. I argue that if we strive for a better understanding of any of the fields involved, it is imperative to consider the entanglements and interdependencies between them. Even if the approach of illuminating the commissioned or useful nature of feminist or minor filmmaking, which from an *auteurist* perspective might be seen to compromise aesthetic and socio-political intentions of individual artists, the reverse risks obscuring the numerous "useful" relations that Swedish minor filmmakers established with institutions from non-cultural areas. My approach has not encumbered this study's potential to uncover Börje's personal artistic influences which permeated the Gårdesskolan-project, her vision of the child's "untutored eye," and her quest for a "purer" unaffected cinema.

The study presented new national and transnational perspectives on FilmCentrum. From a national viewpoint, FilmCentrum should not be seen merely as an oppositional organization marginalized by the central monolith of SFI, but rather as a useful collaborator with welfare state institutions outside of the cultural sphere. Additionally, FilmCentrum's activities were a consensual effort that aligned the emergent cultural policy objectives of the Swedish welfare state with the social objectives of minor filmmakers, jointly instituting a more culturally democratic, inclusive, and broader audiovisual media policy which the industry-friendly SFI had no intention of establishing.

The transnational perspective made it possible to compare how two welfare states, in similar and disparate ways, sought to instrumentalize cultural workers to fulfill societal goals outside of the cultural sphere. The analysis has shown a clear difference in how Swedish and Canadian policymakers sought to instrumentalize the film medium. Where the Canadian solution relied on a designated film policy agency (the NFB) distributing support to minor filmmakers to obtain non-cultural goals, the Swedish film policy equivalent (the SFI) merely catered to major cinema. Swedish minor filmmakers such as Börje and welfare state agencies in need of artistically enhanced audiovisual material were therefore dependent on short-term ad hoc solutions. This substantial distinction in governmental communication strategies, I argue, has, in the Swedish case, had unfortunate consequences that scholars of minor Swedish film need to consider. Compared to the abundance of curated historical material digitally accessible today through the NFB's websites (films, meta-data, paratexts etc.) drawn from

one cohesive, albeit immeasurable, document archive, the results of similar Swedish government–filmmaker collaborations are today scattered across agencies and NGO archives with little continuity regarding preservation and accessibility. Combined with the inconsistency and funding ambiguities of the information-by-proxy strategy, the Swedish minor film landscape is fraught with scholarly challenges, not least from a feminist perspective since the ratio of women filmmakers undoubtedly was higher in the minor field. Importantly, this ratio was also visible in Canada, but in this case the presence of a media format-inclusive film policy agency gave women radically better productional requisites, such as the world’s first publicly funded feminist film production unit, Studio D, initiated in 1974 (Brinton and McGowan 2020, 255). Inevitably, such national historical differences in policy implementation influence the (im)possibilities for today’s scholars of identifying women’s agency and autonomy in the film histories of Canada and Sweden.

## Notes

- 1 An interview with Börje (today Svenstedt) was carried out in May 2024, but as she was hesitant to talk about her FilmCentrum years, the interview contributed little to this study.
- 2 Still, when asked about her former modeling career Börje displayed both awareness and zeal for feminist issues, noting her unionizing achievements within, and later denunciation of, the modeling industry (Kleveland 1975).
- 3 This was upheld as a preferred *modus operandi* in the CFC circles as well.
- 4 This conviction was central to the so-called “Fogo Process,” which encapsulated the aforementioned seminal CFC project “The Fogo Island Communication Experiment” of 1967 (Crocker 2003).

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