CHAPTER 8

Managing Constraints and Stories of Freedom: Comparing Cinema Memories from the 1950s and 1960s in Sweden

Åsa Jernudd and Jono Van Belle

"What was cinema?" is asked in an article by Robert C. Allen (2010), alluding to a famous series of essays published by film critic André Bazin between 1958 and 1962. If Bazin asked, "Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?" inviting reflection about the ontological status of cinema, Allen proffers that cinema be *historicized*. Allen's article promotes the importance of documenting and theorising the historical experience of cinema, that is, of pursuing research to discern, "what has cinema been understood to be and by whom?" This is a central question in New Cinema History research, and it also highlights the importance of acknowledging possible simultaneous heterogeneity regarding (cinemas) spatial identity and changes of its identity over time (Massey, 2005). During the years in which Bazin wrote the essays that became famous for contemplating cinema as an art form, cinema as an institution underwent a metamorphosis in Sweden. Ciné clubs appeared in university towns, several domestic feature films with "high art" production values won prizes at international film festivals, auteur director Ingmar Bergman won international recognition with films that contemplated existential-religious-philosophical issues, and The Swedish Film Institute (*Svenska Filminstitutet*) was founded to secure continued production of domestic quality film (Bengtsson, 2007). Research about this period has disclosed important aspects of the Swedish film institution and its politics

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(Björklund & Larsson, 2016; Ilshammar et al., 2010; Jönsson & Snickars, 2007; Vesterlund, 2015, 2019a, 2019b), and minor cinemas (Andersson & Sundholm, 2009, 2019), while the bulk of research about this period has centred on film auteurs (e.g.: Dunås, 2001; Esping, 2007; Gustafsson, 2017; Hedling, 2021; Koskinen, 2008; Koskinen & Wallenberg, 2022; Larsson, 2019; Mörner, 2000; Steene, 2005; Stjernholm, 2018; Van Belle, 2019, 2022; Åberg, 2001). With a few exceptions (Bengtsson, 1998; Qvist, 1986; Åberg, 2023) which we will come back to later in this chapter, popular films from this period have not triggered academic interest to the same extent. Furthermore, studies that investigate what cinema meant to audiences—involving practices, preferences, memories—are exceptionally rare (cf. Sjöholm, 2003; Van Belle, 2019, 2022).

One reason for this bias towards an institutional-political and auteur perspective in Swedish film studies about the 1950s and 1960s could be that while cinema was gaining in cultural prestige (Andersson, 1995), it was ebbing in popularity and seemed to lose its centrality and importance in a cultural, everyday life perspective. Cinema-going peaked in 1956 after which box-office figures took a deep dive. By 1963, attendance had decreased by half, and a decade later, it had dropped to merely 2.8 visits per capita (Furhammar, 2003, p. 249; SOU 1973:53, p. 97). If in the mid-1950s, cinema in Sweden was an institution that appealed to large audiences across ages and social categories, by the end of the 1960s, it had fragmented into segregated practices, many of which we know very little about.

In a pioneering study of cinema-going in rural Sweden in the 1940s and 1950s, ethnographer Carina Sjöholm contends that youth as a category became more firmly constituted, not least through the construction in political discourse of the "problem" of youth and leisure. In a government report (SOU 1945:22), the claim is made that cinema-going was the most frequent pastime for contemporary adolescents, and "a cultural force" of particular significance to this group (Sjöholm, 2003, p. 222). Sjöholm argues that there was a new sense of cultural choice among post-war youth. Rather than relying on tradition, adolescents were oriented towards the future and can be described as pioneers of social change, as carriers of modernity. Cinema was key to this experience and process.

Picking up where Sjöholm's study ends, in the late 1950s, the history of cinemas' waning popularity is briefly described in the standard account of Swedish film history, *Filmen i Sverige* (Furhammar, 2003). Film professor Leif Furhammar claims that the adult population abandons cinema for television which started regular broadcasting in 1956. In response to this change in audience constitution, he says, film exhibitors adjusted the programmes to accommodate the "simpleminded taste" of the audience group which remained faithful to the cinemas: adolescents. This in turn led to a "spiritual as well as physical decay of many cinemas, particularly in rural areas" which further alienated other audiences. In the cities, the big cinemas increasingly showed films featuring more violent content, while pornographic films became more

common on the repertoire of the smaller city cinemas. More than half of the country's cinemas closed between 1955 and 1975 (Furhammar, 2003, p. 314).

In this chapter, cinema memories are consulted in pursuit of answering the question posed by Allen: How was cinema understood and by whom? Memories from the time when cinema-going in Sweden peaked are compared with memories from a decade later when attendance dropped, and cinemas closed. The analysis investigates cinema memories as remembered in the context of the respondent's life cycles (Langhamer, 2000), in relation to other entertainment (Treveri Gennari et al., 2021, pp. 51–54), as well as in relation to broader sociocultural contexts. The results document and theorise cinema-going in Sweden over the two decades as obstinately gendered and as significant for the construction of youth as social category and as carriers of modernity.

Understanding Cinema-going in Context

In this study we understand the significance of cinema as embedded in everyday life, extending beyond the duration of viewing a particular film (Kuhn, 2002, p. 2, 2022, p. 36; Treveri Gennari, 2018; Treveri Gennari et al., 2021, pp. 51–54). Cinema-going involves negotiations with family and friends, reading and talking about stars and films, being a Tommy Steele or Elvis Presley fan, listening to pop music on the radio, creating whistles out of tickets and making noise during the film screening, travelling to and arriving at the cinema venue, buying sweets, keeping diary notes about the experience of cinema, dating, and so on. Inspired by Sjöholm's study (2003), we understand cinema-going in all its relational complexity as a means for the audience to cope with and train their senses as a part of ongoing processes of modernity. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sweden was experiencing intense urbanisation, economic prosperity, an increase of welfare standards, as well as a transformation over the two decades of work-leisure-family relations, which has been described as a revolution regarding changing gender politics. If the 1950s is known as "the last nineteenth century decade," with its homogenous conservative values regarding gender and other social relations, radical change awaited in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s (Hirdman et al., 2012, pp. 577–586).

While the metropolis has been central to research and theory in film history, this study accords with the recent geographical reorientation in historical cinema research which includes the study of cultural life also in rural areas (Meers et al., 2010; Thissen & Zimmermann, 2016; Treveri Gennari et al., 2018). The perspective is regional which means that experiences of life in communities and towns of different sizes are regarded as equally important, as are relations between geographical nodes. Modernity has effects on a continuum between urban and rural spaces. In this study, modernity is understood as complex and including contradictory tendencies, fragmentation, and partial coherence; to speak with James Clifford, it is composed of a "polyphony of voices" (Clifford, 1986).

Studying Cinema-going as Memories

The material for the following analysis is provided by 40 oral history interviews with people who lived in the region of Bergslagen[1] in the post-war period and who were born between 1934 and 1954. In our sample, we have an equal division of participants in the two age cohorts and within the cohorts, an equal division of men and women. The participants come from varying social backgrounds, as identified through consideration of the occupation of the participants' parents and the participants' level of education. Furthermore, the participants lived in locations in Bergslagen with different degrees of population density, to capture geographical variations in access to cinema, and experiences of different kinds of cinema (Jernudd & Lundmark, 2020).

Traces of the cultural shift we are seeking was revealed as integrated in a web of changing relations, not easy to single out as analytic entities. The shift is disclosed by observing what is emphasised in the memories, what is narrated with vivid details and clarity; recurring motifs, as well as salient tropes; and sensitivity to that which seems to be taken for granted in the individually narrated life trajectories. The observations are then analysed in dialogue with research about ongoing sociocultural transformations. Sometimes experiences are shared among several of the participants, and at other times they are singular yet indicative of changes in the larger context. To allow for variation and attention to detail, we have adopted a method of working with micro-perspectives in the analysis, thus resisting the desire to attempt, indeed challenging the very idea of, "a total history" of the baby boom generation's experiences of cinema (Burke, 2004/2019).

The approach obviously diverts from the traditional text-oriented mode of film historiography, and less obviously, it steers away from a historiography which only focuses on cinema or cinema-going (Maltby, 2006). While cinema memories are the pre-announced and main subject of the interviews, the oral history method used to collect the memories had the intention of capturing cinema memories in the context of everyday life. Inspired by Carlo Ginzburg (1993, 2007), we seek out and pay attention to seemingly insignificant details in the memory narratives. According to Ginzburg, attention to details can build more general phenomena such as social class or a world view. Our ambition here is to search for pointers which reveal new or different ways of narrating the experience of cinema of the 1960s compared to the 1950s. The findings are analysed in dialogue with research about aspects of Swedish, gendered, socio-economic, cultural, media, and cinema history.

[1] A special feature of this region is its industrial base. Mining and steel industries made this a particularly expansive region in the 1950s and 1960s and one of the strongholds of the workers' movement. This in turn is important to the study as local grassroots societies of the worker's movement as well as the temperance movement managed cinemas in their multipurpose venues, upholding a widespread infrastructure for cinema also in rural and more remote areas (Jernudd & Lundmark, 2020).

In the section which follows, we offer a summary of the socio-economic conditions of life at the time. The history includes the areas of work, education, housing, and leisure, with an emphasis on women's and gender historical perspectives. The account highlights youth as a historically specific culture as well as important shifts that took place over the two decades which in turn affected youth, gender relations, and leisure. We then briefly present research about Swedish cinema of the period and discuss it in relation to research about the media landscape of the 1950s and 1960s, drawing from media scholar Birgitta Höijer's (1998) social history of radio and television in Sweden and film scholar Leif Furhammar's (2003) standard account of Swedish film history. At this point, we are ready to disclose the results of the cinema memory analysis.

The 1950s and 1960s in Sweden

In the 1950s, married women were expected to work as housewives. A record number of 1.5 million housewives were registered in the 1951 census, reflecting a strict division of labour with male-public, wage-earning work on one side and female-domestic, non-wage-earning work on the other. The gender regime was excruciating, seemingly "cast in cement" (Hirdman et al., 2012, p. 580). However, beginning in the 1960s, the demand grew for women to join the workforce to meet the needs of the expanding industries, and the family ideal with segregated gender roles came increasingly under pressure from young politicians and intellectuals. Furthermore, sexual liberation was widely discussed. The number of marriages decreased, and the number of divorces increased. The transformation of gender roles has been described by historians as a revolutionary process; it accelerated thanks to secularisation, increased welfare, and political resolutions which supported single mothers (Hirdman et al., 2012, pp. 582–586).

The balance between work and leisure underwent a series of shifts in the two decades. In 1951, a third week of holiday per year became statutory and roughly a decade later it increased to four weeks. Normal working hours for a full-time employee was regulated to 45 hours per week, and by the end of the 1960s, to 40 hours per week. Leisure, in turn, became politicised and commercialised in the Swedish welfare state, "which demanded its own infrastructure of swimming pools, camping sites, tennis courts, playgrounds, soccer fields, sports grounds and ski jumping hills" (Hirdman et al., 2012, p. 576). Taking the car for holiday trips became an option as society became increasingly motorised and roads were improved. Entering the 1950s, Sweden topped the European list of cars per capita. In 1955 Sweden had 87 cars per thousand inhabitants, and 15 years later: 283. The moped, introduced in 1952, became a popular alternative to owning a car, especially among urban youth (Hirdman et al., 2012, pp. 570–571) (Image 8.1).

Beginning in the mid-to-late 1950s, young people came to spend more years in school. By 1962, primary school education had extended from six to nine years and fees for second level and higher education had been abolished.

Image 8.1 Private photo courtesy of respondent BE, male, b. 1943, Hällabrottet

Consequently, not only was the period of youth elongated, but better opportunities for social climbing and gender crossing were created; consequently, women broke into hitherto closed realms of academics, work, and politics (Hirdman et al., 2012, pp. 605–606).

In this era of economic growth and expanding welfare systems, dysfunctional buildings in city and town centres were demolished and substituted with shopping centres and modern suburbs. Nonetheless, there was a shortage of housing throughout the two decades and living quarters were crowded (Hirdman et al., 2012, p. 575). An effect of the crowded housing was that children and youth spent their leisure time out of the house.

While youth as a category between childhood and adulthood had existed earlier, it had been reserved for the affluent social classes who could afford to postpone adulthood. In the 1950s, youth culture became more democratic. With increased welfare, urbanisation, and better opportunities for longer

education, the period of youth extended upwards in age. Furthermore, working class youth earned more and could afford to embrace the new cultural impulses that were imported mainly from the United States but also from Great Britain, and which offered means for creating new identities tied to a novel and expanding youth culture. Popular music was at its heart. Jazz had dominated youth culture of the 1930s and 1940s, and though jazz did not disappear, it was surpassed in popularity by rock music which was introduced in the mid-1950s. Rock music appealed to a broader populace in social terms, and the class distinctions became less obvious in the 1960s (Bjurström, 1980, pp. 51–84; Hirdman et al., 2012, pp. 592–593).

Changing Contexts of Audio-visual Mass Media Consumption in the Post-war Period

Domestic film production in the early 1940s reveals a new interest in stories with a modern youth-oriented appeal. Up until the Second World War, most domestic films were produced and marketed to attract a broad audience in terms of age, and comedies dominated. In the post-war era, the youth culture was large enough to influence topics of film production and to allow for youth to be increasingly targeted as an audience category (Bengtsson, 1998, pp. 50–51). Domestic films in the 1940s and 1950s had a thematic preoccupation with rural life which in different ways addressed concerns about urbanisation and ongoing social changes, offering comfort in some while exposing dangers in others (Qvist, 1986, pp. 121–125, 312). While domestic children's films of the 1950s and 1960s typically represented the nation as a pastoral and nostalgic idyll (Åberg, 2023, pp. 100–101, 218), social-problem themes in adult films about contemporary issues became common at the expense of lighthearted comedies. With this reorientation of genres and themes, cinema gained new social and artistic prestige (Furhammar, 2003, pp. 199–280). Furthermore, at this time, Sweden had more cinemas per capita than most countries in Europe, and they were dispersed throughout the country. Cinemas followed patterns of exhibition which were common at large in Western Europe which is to say that films from Hollywood dominated (Furhammar, 2003, p. 221).

Other mass media, such as radio, was important to the construction and expansion of youth culture in the 1950s. Listening to the radio was a daily habit for many Swedes. Having had a largely informational and educational ambition, the state-run radio increased the portion of entertainment and easy-listening programmes in the post-war period. This appealed to a new kind of family-listening as well as attracted new audience segments: women, youth, and children. With the introduction on the market of the transistor radio, listening became mobile and more democratic (Nordmark, 1999, pp. 86–110). In Höijer's study of radio listening and television viewing, respondents remember how they as teenagers would listen to popular music being broadcast late at night on the long-wave channels (Höijer, 1998, pp. 151–155).

When television was introduced, it had a domestic aura, and a family-oriented appeal. Research of viewing habits from the 1960s confirms that television was an evening activity which gathers the family—save for the teenagers (Höijer, 1998, pp. 177, 198).

Memories of Leisure in a Life Cycle Perspective

The cinema memories in our sample often follow a life cycle pattern as a structuring principle. The concept of the life cycle as a crucial context for leisure is borrowed from Claire Langhamer (2000). Examining the way English women remembered leisure in their passage through the life cycle in the years 1920 to 1960, Langhamer shows how these women enjoyed particular forms of leisure at different stages of their lives. Recollections of cinema-going and dancing, common from the period of youth, are constructed by the women in Langhamer's sample as legitimate and empowering because experienced as a "reward" for paid labour. Moving into adulthood, out-of-the house leisure was replaced by home-based, family-oriented activities and social life.

In our study, we found a recurrence in the cinema memories of a similar pattern of life cycle narration. This can be explained by the structure of the interviews. At the beginning of an interview, the respondents were asked to present themselves in the context of their family situation and recall what their life was like where they grew up, back in the 1950s and 1960s. After this introduction they were asked to share their first experience of a film screening. This setup most likely encouraged them to structure their memory narration according to a chronological order of consecutive stages, beginning in childhood. Three stages of the life cycle can be clearly discerned as each stage involves major changes in the remembered leisure activities. The first stage is childhood, which does not have a clear beginning at a specific age, followed by a period of youth which our participants entered at the age of twelve to fifteen, after which comes adulthood. Among our participants, the third stage of adulthood is strongly associated with wedlock which they, in most cases, entered when they were in their twenties.

The transition from childhood to youth in a Swedish historical context is marked by several coinciding events: the completion of grade school and thus either becoming a wage earner or entering the next level of education. For many, this involved moving to a larger town. Around the same age one was expected to be confirmed into the protestant-Lutheran state church through a coming-of-age ritual. Furthermore, at age 15 you were free to attend any public screening and no longer had to submit to censorship at the cinema. For most of the male participants in our study, their memories of cinema in childhood are rich and vivid. Among the female participants, memories of cinema in childhood are few and when they occur, they are narrated in a less confident manner. If only a few women spoke of childhood cinema memories, recollections of cinema in youth are more prominent in the interviews with women and include many variations, especially when remembering the 1960s. Stories

of courtship at the cinema repeatedly recur across the genders. Once married, however, cinema-going receded into the background of recollections of everyday life also for those to whom it had been a quotidian habit before marriage.

Pleasurable Memories of Boyhood Matinées

When comparing the childhood cinema memories of the two age cohorts, speaking of the 1950s and the 1960s respectively, we could not detect significant change over time in the narration. Rather, we found a strong gender difference in the cinema memories of the first stage of the life cycle indicating that men easily and vividly recall going to the matinées while women do not. This echoes the results from Annette Kuhn's pioneering study of cinema memories of the British 1930s generation. Kuhn reports that

> The most striking differences in "growing up" memories are between men and women. Male informants, generally speaking, offer memories from childhood rather than from adolescence. (…) Women, on the other hand, have relatively little to say about their preadolescent cinemagoing, but overall offer more 'growing up' memories and explore a wider range of themes in them. (Kuhn, 2002, pp. 100–101)

Most of the men in our sample, whether they lived in small communities or larger towns, preferred to speak of their matinée experiences which were often recalled as an unrestrained and animated space. Among the female respondents, memories of childhood cinema differ depending on whether they lived in a small community or a large town. Habitual cinema-going as a child and a girl was reserved for those who lived in towns where there would be more than one cinema in relative proximity to the home. For some of our female participants, even so, and more commonly in the older age cohort, childhood cinema-going is remembered as tainted by different forms of constraint, and this was for some of the respondents carried into the recollections of their cinema-going in youth.

Close to all male participants in our study have pleasurable memories of cinema as a child. The male matinée memories confirm the proposition that "the primary relationship with 'cinema' has not been with individual movies-as-artefacts or as texts, but with the social experience of cinema," (Maltby, 2006, p. 85) as they re-present a bodily engagement that involves both social and sensory aspects of cinema-going (Allen, 1990, pp. 352; Treveri Gennari, 2018, pp. 45–47). Male respondents joyfully remember going to the week-end matinées on a regular basis and, as in this example, recall how they would battle their way into the cinema. The theatre was perceived as an anarchic space with little, if any adult, supervision:

> It was crowded even before you had entered the cinema … I have never understood why the seats weren't marked with numbers. It could have reduced that

panic! First, you had to make your way in, to the box office, and pass through a huge crowd, to get in, and then the ticket booth was here (showing with his hands); It was chaotic to get hold of that ticket! Then, you could relax a bit and buy some.... There was a small candy stand where you could buy some candy. Candy was the thing to get, there was no popcorn at the time. And then came the next throng, when it was time for everyone to enter the cinema salon. Grab the attractive seats! You did not want to sit all the way up at the front (showing with your hands), the fifth or sixth row was good … it depended on the cinema but, in the centre was best. Everyone ran down the aisle like this, and then in! And this is how it happened: someone who made it first—inside—he would hold on to the chairs, and you fended the others off (shows with his hands), "No, these are for my friends!". You can imagine the buoyant liveliness in there, and this was *before* the show even had begun! (KR, male, b. 1946, Örebro)

When the lights had dimmed, the curtains were drawn and the films started rolling, the next phase of social and material interaction set in with the images and stories projected on the screen, and with the fellow children in the audience.

Resp: There were a lot of adventure films, of course, that we liked to see. Lots of Errol Flynn, Robin Hood, and Zorro, and so on. They were very popular at the time.

I: Was it with a bunch of guys?

Resp: Yes. Sometimes girls would come along, but not very often. What I remember from that time was that we made whistles [from the tickets], at the matinées. As soon as something happened [on screen] that you didn't like, such as a romantic scene, you would blow (shows). You folded the movie ticket and made a hole in it so you could blow into it. There was a terrible noise in there! It was hard on the cinema proprietor, I guess. (CL, male, b. 1952, Örebro)

At a Tarzan movie, a matinée, everyone was my age. There were no moms or dads there. Everyone was my age and there was a lot of rollicking in the room before the film began and… all these caramel papers and scraps of paper flew around in the air up until it … ehm the moment the film began. […]

Then there were these, in the first years of the 50s, during the matinee period, so to speak, there were these family films … Astrid Lindgren's *Master Detective Blomkvist*[2] and *Pippi Longstocking*,[3] maybe the Lassie films too, now and then. There would be moms and dads in the audience. That is, moms and dads, parents, who brought their children to the cinema. Those who attended Tarzan films, they didn't need their moms and dads to come along. They went on their own. (TM, male, b. 1943, Filipstad)

Several male respondents recall, many from a lower-middle-class and working-class background, how they rarely spent time with their parents. In their leisure

[2] Kalle Blomkvist is an amateur detective, a boy, in a series of novels for children written by Astrid Lindgren. The first film made from the series is *Mästerdetektiven Blomkvist* (Rolf Husberg, 1947), after which came *Mästerdetektiven och Rasmus* (Rolf Husberg, 1953).

[3] *Pippi Långstrump* (Per Gunvall, 1949).

time, they remember instead how they roamed freely, outdoors, often with other children.

> Resp: It was like a small square there. It was … all the children in Kvarntorp gathered there, and they were quite spread-out age-wise. I imagine, the youngest were probably twelve, thirteen and the oldest were probably seventeen, eighteen, but they kept together anyway. It was quite nice.
>
> I: How many were you?
>
> Resp: Uff, 25 to 30, I'm sure. And there was playing going on in the evenings, yes, there certainly was … there was so much to do, there [in Kvarntorp], everything was possible, it was like … There, you could do just about anything.
>
> […]
>
> It differed at different ages, but you would play outdoors, certainly during the six months that were not white [with snow], we were outside every afternoon and every evening, playing. And in the winter, there was a lot of skiing. (PGW, male, b. 1946, Kvarntorp)

This childhood independence and peer-oriented lifestyle can be gleaned from the recollections of preparing for the matinée visits, deciding on which film to see, and securing the money needed for tickets and candy. These decisions and activities were made without intervention from parents, either on your own or with peers.

> I: And how often did you go, do you remember?
>
> Resp: Eh, whenever I had the money to go (smiles, laughs). That's what determined the visit, you see.
>
> I: Yes, and how did you get money to go?
>
> Resp: Oh yes, it was like, at that time you see, on Spantgatan when the lorry selling soda pop and beer arrived… The women went out on their balconies and shouted: "We need half a crate of light beer and then some Loranga,"[4] and so on. And us kids, we carried the crates up the stairs, and were tipped. Yes, things like that. We did this a lot, on the whole. It was the best source of income. We'd run some errands, but the soft drink lorry was special. It really was. And the one who could run fast, he could run several times, you see. (CF, male, b. 1946, Västerås)

> Sunday mornings were spent in search of ten empty, returnable bottles, which you took to the kiosk in town where you could exchange them for money. One kroner, that covered a cinema ticket and sweets. (CG, male, b. 1943, Arvika)

> For us, the matinées, it was a big thing when I grew up, around the age of maybe ten, eight to ten. At the time you would find some work to do, deliver papers and things, on Sundays to make enough money for the matinée tickets. And if you were lucky, then you had earned a lot, then you could see two films on a Sunday. The first would be at one o'clock and the next show was three o'clock and you had to run between the cinemas to catch the next show. (CL, male, b. 1952, Örebro)

[4] Loranga is a kind of soft drink which tastes of orange.

Many memories reveal a sense of layered experience, or indistinct boundaries, between the matinée show and outdoor play with peers. Childhood cinema-going and its associated street-culture was not entirely constricted to male homo-sociality. While most of our female respondents do not recall attending matinées other than on rare occasions, one group of women among our participants did. The women that did recall going to the matinée as quotidian event lived in towns with three or more cinemas within walking distance from home. From their memories as well as the male respondents' memories we know they could join in on the games and play that would follow. But not on equal terms.

> One thing that I remember that was a lot of fun, it was when I saw *Kalle Blomkvist* at the cinema, because then there were a lot of Kalle Blomkvist [going on] in the green, leafy pastures with beds of flowers and the like. There were very good hiding places and yes. We had a lot … we would be playing with the boys. It was very exciting and when playing you felt almost like you were in a film. (AMG, female, b. 1943, Lanna)

> We played it out, maybe not every time, but very often, I remember. We created our own dramatisations of the westerns. We'd disappear to *Jungfruberget* [the Virgin Mountain], brought bread from home and this would have been eaten even before we had crossed the railway at *Norra station* [a train station] and we'd return home starving. As I was saying, we decided how to go about the staging, the rules and such. And I, this happened when I was in first grade or so. I believed, watching Robin Hood and the [Cowboy and] Indian films and so on, I believed it was for real. This is what it was like in England! Robin was actually there and fought the sheriff! And the Indians had a hard time. So, I started a money collection to go there to help him, and I had figured out it had to be in foreign coins, (laughs) and I found this coin collection after my mother's death. (…) It was foreign coins, quarter dollars. I don't know where they came from, money from England and Finland and Germany. It was logical that it had to be foreign money to go abroad. (JW, male, b. 1946, Falun)

> And then, when we were boys, after we came home [from the cinema], we would often dramatise the films we had seen. We would—somehow—'play-through' the film. Decided who to cast and sometimes there'd be a girl, someone's sister who would be a part and play 'Jane', or an Indian wife. There'd be a sense of intimacy when you got hurt [in the game] and a little girl would tend to your bloody wounds by applying leaves to them (laughs). (JW, male, b. 1946, Falun)

> As I remember, the matinées were very much focused on boys for some strange reason. As I've said before, there were different genres at the time, I can imagine that … because … it was perhaps a good thing that there were no girls, as it could get damn rowdy (laughs). (…) I have heard of girls who have said they were a bit scared of going, actually. I can understand this. (KR, male, b. 1946, Örebro)

For the most part, in the women's memories of attending matinées as a child, it was their parents or siblings who paid for the ticket and took them to the cinema. Even when girls passed the age of going to matinées, cinema-going was more restricted for girls, as the following quote suggests:

> I cannot remember that I had been to the cinema before high school. We had one cinema, *Stjärnan*, in Torsby. And I would sometimes be allowed a visit. But it was only very rarely… and I never had any money. One time, I remember, I saw, like, a little … not a porn movie, because it was not, but some characters were scantily dressed, I remember. And mom was not happy. (IB, female, b. 1950, Torsby)

If parental constraints and lack of money were obstacles for the female participants to visit the cinema, social constraints existed for both male and female respondents who were raised in families which belonged to the so-called "free churches," the protestant congregational denominations which were independent in relation to the Lutheran-protestant state church. Members of free church denominations formed communities in the countryside, in smaller towns or villages. One of our respondents recalls:

> A decisive factor was that my parents were deeply religious and belonged to a free church. So, to see a film was a great sin, you were not allowed to do that. I had friends at the time who—whose parents did not belong to a congregation—they came every Sunday and nagged that we should go to a matinée for children. It was the same answer every time, I was not allowed to go but … it was awful really, when you think about it now, that one was not allowed to go and see a children's film. But that's how it was. (BE, male, b. 1943, Hällabrottet)

Cinema-going, Gender, and Mobility in Youth

Turning 15 meant leaving the age of matinées behind and the coming of an age which gave full access to the evening programmes, including those which screened censored films. Yet, as was the case with the memories of childhood cinema-going, our study reveals that experiences of cinema-going even in youth would depend on intersecting factors such as gender, religious belonging, and whether you lived in a city with easy access to many cinemas or in a small village or town which could require travelling by bus or car to reach a cinema. A recurring narrative trope in cinema memories is the story of overcoming geographical and social barriers, having reached an age of increased independence, and living in a time of an expanding welfare society. The section concludes with a reflection of the novel cultural choices available to young people in the 1960s as a bridge to the final section of analysis in which differences in memories of cinema-going and leisure in the 1960s compared to the 1950s instead are emphasised.

Among our respondents living in small communities rather than towns, several challenged the idea that cinema-going was an everyday experience. Some testified that going to the cinema was a non-activity in the sense that it simply

was not something family and friends commended. This was common for participants of both genders who were raised in families that belonged to the communities of the free churches. Furthermore, several of the female participants born during the war and who lived in a rural location yet were not members of a religious community spoke of cinema-going as a special event. It reflects a reserved attitude toward "having fun," common in conservative discourses that associated mass media culture and consumption with hedonism (Lagerkvist, 2001).

> I: So, you had to think twice about going to the cinema?
>
> Resp: Yes, it was a luxury. It was expensive and I do not remember what it cost. At that time the men paid, and my fiancé invited me to the cinema, when we went. Otherwise, you had to pay for it, so it was not like …
>
> I: So, you couldn't go every week?
>
> Resp: No, no! At the time you could not … you couldn't have fun every week! (laughs) […] I don't know if I should say this, but in the invitation for the interview it said something about it being "everyday" to go to the cinema. That is not my experience, at all! It was like, it was fantastic to go to the cinema!
>
> I: Was it special?
>
> Resp: Yes! I think for us living in the countryside, it was not every week but maybe it was once a month that we went to the movies. (GA, female, b. 1941, Hällabrottet)

One female participant (SV, b. 1943, Sköllersta) recalls how jealous she was of her older brother; of the independence and freedom a moped had granted him at this age. They lived on a small farm situated a few miles south of the regional urban centre, Örebro. Occasionally there were film screenings in the local community hall, run by a temperance organisation, but when she was in her late teens, our respondent preferred attending the cinemas in Örebro. She could take the bus into town in the afternoon on her own or with a friend. However, her parents would not allow her to travel by bus home in the late evening, after the show. Furthermore, our respondent resented having to ask her brother to join her as a chaperone or having to ask her parents to pick her up with a car after the show. When she heard of the film club screenings offered at a cinema in Örebro on Saturday afternoons, she felt that this was the perfect solution! She could decide to go or not, and travel there and back, on her own accord. The idea of cinema as a treat, a special event, does not occur in the men's memories. Neither do memories involving constraints on cinema-going, not counting the experience of growing up in a free church community.

In an emphasis on memories of cinema-going as a means of courtship, recollections of men and women correspond. Stories of cinema-going as a form of dating remain constant throughout the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s. However, as revealed in the quote above (GA, female, b. 1941, Hällabrottet), the procedures for going to the cinema on a date are obviously gender-coded. The male part invites and pays for the courted woman. Several of our male respondents remember how they would choose a film for the first date which

they thought would be romantic and please the girl, while many female respondents recall that it was the man who would choose which film they would see. Often this would be an action-oriented kind of film such as a western, gangster, or thriller; particularly westerns and films from the James Bond series recur in the memories.

Experiences of mobility are common in the participants' narration. Many remember moving as children from small, remote communities to more urban locations. Two men in our sample with middle-class backgrounds remember moving to a new town to study and feeling lonely in the new context. Cinema provided comfort. Several female respondents recall moving to a larger town to study or work when they came of age. In this quote, a woman who was raised in Filipstad remembers how her mind was set to leave her hometown when she got the chance. Moving to a larger town would give her greater personal independence:

> Resp: I didn't want to live in Filipstad, so that was on my mind all my adolescent ... so when I became an adult ... not when I was a child, but when I became a teenager and older, I thought, no. I'm not going to live here. So, when I met someone from Örebro, I thought, this will be good (laughs), it wasn't, of course, but still, it brought me to Örebro then (laughs).
>
> [...]
>
> I: How did you feel when you came to Örebro, did the city meet your expectations? And what was it, what were you looking for?
>
> Resp: (sighs) well ... I guess it was that there weren't a lot of relatives everywhere, who would keep track of me, because that's how it was [in Filipstad]. There'd be phone calls home, to my mother, about what I was doing. It felt too ... (shakes her head) lame, like being under surveillance, you know. (VL, female, b. 1937, Filipstad and Örebro)

One of our younger participants, born 1951, who spent her childhood in a small industrial town and moved to the larger town, Karlskoga, as a teenager to attend high school, reflects on how her early-life cinema-going trajectory neatly followed changing cultural trends in film exhibition and distribution at the time:

> If I think about it, I've grown up with these different, shall we say, evolutions of how film reached the countryside, inland, in central Sweden, the small towns. From [going to the cinema in] "the red barn" to *Folkets Hus* [Peoples' House] in Degerfors, to *Folkets Hus* in Karlskoga and, later, the student clubs, and then when I started studying, when I moved to Canada, it got more intense. In a way it was Swedish film culture because that is where I discovered that, discovered Bergman. That's when I started to understand that Bergman was big out in the world, and I discovered his films through foreign eyes, so to speak, and it was very interesting because there were film history courses and stuff there, and when I came back to Lund University, and I really got into film clubs and stuff. (MK, female, b. 1951, Degerfors and Karlskoga)

The respondent goes on to praise the rich film culture that was available in a remote, small industrial town such as Degerfors in the 1960s, and reflects on the historical context, speculating that this was a moment in Swedish history that was especially culturally rich, that offered opportunities for social change (Image 8.2).

> I mean Degerfors, it's crazy, and I saw *Soldier Blue*[5] there, I still can't take that in, really, and I saw some, well … I wonder if I saw *Easy Rider*[6] there too. It's very possible that I must have seen *Easy Rider*, it came out in 1969, and the strange thing was that the films either arrived the same year or the year after, to Degerfors. So yes, there was a circulation that gave … for those who were interested, eh, a lot to dig into, quite simply. I was very privileged indeed! I mean, if I had arrived as a Finnish … an immigrant kid who actually speaks Finnish as a first language at home, I learnt how to speak Swedish afterwards. If I had come to Sweden in any other period, for example the 70's, it would have been harder, more difficult. More complicated. Now it was at the same time that it [society] was rich, ehhh so it was still protected in its way. (MK, female, b. 1951, Degerfors and Karlskoga)

Besides cinema, reading fashion magazines was a favourite pastime, as well as going to concerts and keeping track of the expanding pop culture.

> I jumped on the bus to Örebro at the age of fifteen, sixteen. […] I have seen Tina Turner, The Cream, […] Jimmy Hendrix at Marieberg and in Karlstad. Yes, I mean this did happen. Cultural events came to the more rural areas of Sweden, to

Image 8.2 Excerpt from private photo album courtesy of respondent MK, female, b. 1951, Degerfors and Karlskoga

[5] *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970).
[6] *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969).

> Degerfors and to the cities, Örebro and Karlstad. […] there was a great wealth of culture, even for us out in the rural areas. And once a month I could, in the newspaper shop, pick up these glossy, thick paper, rock music magazines … from England. […] I started buying them at the age of eleven, twelve when I got bit by the Beatles. I belong to that generation. (MK, female, b. 1951, Degerfors)

An infrastructure of *Folkets hus* (Peoples' Houses) and *Folkets Park* (Peoples' Parks), often located close to the larger industries, provided a varied set of entertainment across Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s. The entertainment was family-oriented and had a cross-generational appeal up until the mid-1960s, after which rock and pop musical performances came to dominate and youth were increasingly targeted as the primary audience (Bjurström et al., 2005). Furthermore, as is exemplified in the quote, young people became increasingly mobile as public transportation developed. Several of our male participants spoke of how their life changed when they bought a car, giving them a greater sense of independence and freedom. Several of the female participants recall riding with a boyfriend or date, sometimes to or from the cinema, and one remembers hitch-hiking as a means of getting around.

Decentring Cinema: Cinema-going in an Expanding Youth Culture

Among the female respondents in the younger age cohort in our study, we could observe a disinterested attitude towards cinema and cinema-going, which was not present in the memories of the older respondents. While our sample includes memories of cinema-going as a special event, expressed by women in the elderly age cohort, several respondents in the younger age cohort and living in larger towns recall that cinema-going was accessible and cheap. Not very special at all, and certainly not the first choice for a night out.

> Resp: One went to the cinema when one couldn't afford to do anything else.
>
> I: Yes, okay.
>
> Resp: That's how I remember it. It was very cheap. Well, I remember [it cost] seven kroner. It must have been … in the early '60s. Everything else was more expensive, and the cinema was cheap.
>
> I: And what else did you do, apart from cinema?
>
> Resp: It could have been going to this dance for youth, "Skutt" as it was called back then: "Teknis-skutt" at Rudbecksskolan [a high school]. There were a few things like that, music, well, disco. I don't think that's what we called it then, but that's what it was. It was disco. No, otherwise it was well. … There were "gillestugor" [a get-together at someones' home], there were also parties like that.
>
> […]
>
> Resp: No, so cinema, it was, it was, so it was something you would do when there was nothing else to do.
>
> I: Yes.
>
> Resp: It's a bit sad to have to say this, but that's how it was.
>
> (BE, female, b. 1948, Örebro)

Stories of a youth culture beyond the cinema develop in the memory narratives among the younger female participants, for example, memories of getting together with their friends and listening to the radio or to music on record players (Image 8.3).

> Resp: By the end of the '60s I don't think I went to the cinema as much. There were other things to do. We went "på skutt" [dancing], the schools had school dances and activities like that. There was not so much film, but it was … we were a bunch that hung out together and we still do … 6 of us. We went home to each other to dance. I popped popcorn and we made some salad and stuff, and we had a record player. We played and danced, and then of course we invited some guys, too. (AMG, female, b. 1943, Hidinge)

In this group of younger respondents, we could observe signs of a new, media-integrated youth culture in which cinema-going was fused with an

Image 8.3 Tommy Steele with The Ken-Tones performing in Linköping, Sweden in 1958. Photo: Arne Gustafsson, Östgöta Bild, Östergötlands museum (CC BY-NC)

interest in jazz and rock 'n' roll, which in turn was integrated in the consumer-based, expanding culture surrounding the music. Next to all participants in our study mention rock 'n' roll and Elvis Presley while especially the women also remember the pleasures of going dancing and mention new modes of dress and hair styles, inspired by film. The chequered Bardot dress is a repeated reference. Several respondents recall the culture war between Elvis Presley fans and Tommy Steele fans. Either you appreciated the American, mainstream youth culture represented by Presley, or the British represented by Steele. A few of our female respondents recall attending a Steele concert in Örebro in 1958 (cf. Nygaard, 2022).

At the cinema, our participants enjoyed films that exploited the new popular music styles and their stars, teenage fashion, and generation-specific attitudes. This pop culture was supported and expressed at the cinema, but also at concerts, on the radio at home, in cars, at dance halls and concerts, on the jukebox in a local café, and on what is now called vinyl—on your very own record player. It was furthermore discussed in magazines, glossy ones as mentioned in a memory quote, and in the domestic, illustrated magazines *Bildjournalen* and *Fickjournalen*. *Filmjournalen*, a Swedish magazine which had been exclusively devoted to films and film stars, closed in 1953, itself a symptom of a new, music-and-film integrated, youth culture on the rise.

One of our male participants who himself played in a band as a teenager remembers how feature films about jazz musicians such as Glenn Miller (*The Glenn Miller Story* aka *Moonlight Serenade*, Anthony Mann, 1954) and Benny Goodman (*The Benny Goodman Story*, Valentine Davies, 1956) were important sources of inspiration to him and his peers. He saw these films repeatedly when they were shown in the cinema at the temperance lodge in the remote town where he lived.

> I: Did you see them several times then too, did you go several nights in a row?
>
> Resp: Yes, I did. Can you imagine! It's well, it's well, the same phenomenon that exists today with people who become interested in music, you find (shows hands) your role models and … now you find them on Spotify or on YouTube. Back then the cinema was important because there we could actually *see* them. In life, and not just listen. I had vinyls (smiles) with these music idols, but now you could *see them*. So, it was…
>
> I: It was special?
>
> Resp: Yes, it was very special, actually.
>
> (LB, male, b. 1943, Orsa)

Concluding Discussion

There is a strong emphasis in our study on memories of cinema-going in childhood and youth. However, we can assume that cinema-going was an activity regularly enjoyed across age-groups in the 1950s, judging from the total number of tickets that were sold in these years. Indeed, cinema-going peaked in the

late 1950s only to plummet in the 1960s. A few of our participants in the older age cohort recall that family members from the older generation, typically one or both of their parents, in one case a grandmother, would enjoy going to the cinema. Among the participants in the younger age cohort, born after the war, memories of parents going to the cinema are rare. These differences in cinema-going between generations align with Furhammar's proposition that the historically large group of teenagers continued going to the cinema even after television was introduced, while the older generation stayed at home to be entertained, informed, or perhaps merely distracted, by television.

Furhammar (2003, p. 314) notes that the teenage cinema audience around this time is largely male. No evidence is given in our study to support this claim. The results in our study are ambiguous as to the remembered frequency or significance of cinema-going among the men who were adolescents at the time. The pleasurable memories from the matinées outshine later cinema-going practices with their intensity and passion. However, the change in memory discourse among our female respondents in the younger age cohort in comparison with the older age cohort suggests that cinema loses its exceptional status as preferred leisure activity for this group when popular culture expanded and gender roles changed. The cinema memories of the younger female respondents are entangled with other cultural forms. Many expressed a disinterested attitude toward cinema, others a preference for other recreations—going to a dance was a favourite.

Furthermore, Furhammar writes that cinema proprietors chose to adjust the film programmes to the tastes of the young men whom he assumes were continuously loyal to cinema at this time of its crisis. This led to a "degeneration of many cinemas, particularly in rural areas" (Furhammar, 2003, p. 314). Cinemas deteriorated into "disreputable dens occupied by an increasingly arrogant, territorially protective and rowdy youth culture" (Furhammar, 2003, p. 314). While for the younger female respondents, cinema-going became less centred, and was reduced to one in a range of entertainment options on offer, our study does not support this description of an intimidating cinema culture, whether in urban or rural locations. From a few respondents who grew up in religious communities we learn that cinema was not approved of in some religious groups, but the rejection in these cases is rather based on religious grounds intrinsic to the denominations and part of a larger set of ethical and moral codes of conduct. In large cities, Furhammar continues, a few cinemas which were specialised in newsreels turned to screening pornographic film (Furhammar, 2003, p. 314). One cinema in the city of Örebro, *Bio Rio*, is remembered by several respondents to have had a sleazier repertoire than other cinemas though it is unclear if this was in the 1960s or later.

It is curious to note that neither Furhammar (2003) in his overview of Swedish film history nor Sjöholm (2003) in her ethnographic study of cinema-going in rural Sweden in the 1940s and 1950s acknowledges matinée cinema culture. Our results reveal that going to matinées remained a regular leisure activity for boys throughout the 1950s and 1960s and was remembered by

most of the men in our sample with passion, vivid detail, and great pleasure. In an analysis of focus group interviews with Swedish and Estonian participants, media scholar Göran Bolin (2016) theorises how passion and nostalgia are produced through recollections of childhood media use. Bolin argues that passion is activated in the memories through nostalgia, the bittersweet remembrance of media technologies and habits which are lost. Film scholar Treveri Gennari (2018), on the other hand, proposes, while speaking about cinema memories in an Italian context, that cinema memories have a specific quality which dovetails with the emotion of happiness and can be understood through the concept of "memories of pleasure" (cf. Hyman, 2014). If Bolin in his study emphasises the dialectic nature of nostalgia as involving both pleasure and pain, Treveri Gennari (2018, pp. 11–12) finds that the participants in the Italian cinema audience study were inclined towards more positive recollections which "seem to partially—or momentarily—obliterate the sadness associated with a lost past." Rather, for the Italian participants, she writes: "Pleasure and beauty as well as enrichment and self-esteem are all associated with cinemagoing memories, producing optimistic thoughts and positive feelings" (Treveri Gennari, 2018, p. 11). Clearly, the male participants in our study take pleasure in recalling matinées as part of a peer-oriented, street culture of play and make-believe. If there is pain and suffering attached to the act of reminiscing, this is difficult to ascertain. However, we would like to add an emphasis on changes in the broader socio-economic context as crucial to understanding the pleasurable recollection of the matinée memories. Generally, the male respondents in our study describe a boyhood which was carefree, exciting, happy, and full of opportunities. Indeed, they grew up in a patriarchal and booming welfare society. Furthermore, while the participants at the time of the interview could easily attend an evening programme at a nearby cinema and recognise key aspects of the experience when compared to memories of cinema-going in youth, the adult-free and largely homo-social matinée culture of their childhood is in fact no longer around.

If the matinée memories are male-dominated, exceptionally vivid, and resilient throughout the two decades, respondents of both genders recall going to the cinema in their youth. Cinema-going as an act of courting was, for example, common in the memories of both men and women, as were recollections of cinema-going subsiding after marriage. These memories, and others from the time of youth, are not narrated with the same kind of explicit joy and detail as the boyhood matinées and they include greater variation depending on gender, the geographic location of the respondents and their class background.

We would like to highlight two salient features in the memories narrated by women in our sample. The first concerns women living in remote rural locations and smaller towns. For them, cinema-going was not easily available and often required planning, negotiations, and overcoming obstacles of different kinds. The women convey a gender-specific dependency on others, usually other family members, and of being watched upon and controlled. They recall the problem of not having money of one's own to spend, of not being allowed

to take the bus at night to get home after a show, of neighbours who would report to parents about one's doings outside of home. Because of the obstacles involved when attending the cinema, it is remembered by this group as a special event, rather than as quotidian. The second feature concerns cinema memories from the 1960s told by the younger female respondents. The men's memories can be clearly separated in a category of childhood matinées and a later category of less intense recollections of cinema-going in youth, yet do not differ much in a comparison between the two decades. The women's memories, however, do differ depending on which decade is being recollected. Cinema memories as told by women in our sample about the 1960s differ from the women's memories from the 1950s. They stand out because they are entangled with other competing and overlapping amusements and activities in an expanding youth culture of dancing and music, attending concerts, listening to pop music, taking an interest in pop stars and fashion.

In the study of women's leisure in England between 1920 and 1960, Langhamer (2000, p. 190) found that women engaged in different ways and forms of leisure at different stages in life, yet the period of youth stands out as especially significant. The women were wage earners in their youth which provided economic independence as well as gave the hours of leisure a clear sense of definition. While the female participants in the younger age cohort in our sample were just as likely to study as to work in their youth, we recognise that this period stands out as particularly significant in their lives as well, when speaking of cinema memory and leisure. We could observe changes in the women's opportunities for the consumption of leisure over the two decades. If cinema-going was remembered by our female participants as a special event in the 1950s it became a more subdued and decentred part of youth culture in the 1960s. Cinema was but one option in an array of competing and interrelated amusements. With these changes came a greater sense of independence, freedom, and choice. This process of liberalisation should be understood as part of the gender revolution that took place in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s as an effect of increased social and geographic mobility, women entering the workforce, better opportunities for continued education, and higher standards of living in general.

Our analysis confirms that processes of modernisation of which cinema plays a crucial part, are complex and include contradictory tendencies, fragmentation, and partial coherence. For the male participants, memories of matinée cinema-going in childhood through the 1950s and the 1960s are cherished memories of pleasure. Going to the cinema in youth, however, is not remembered as vividly whether they were talking about the 1950s or the 1960s. Cinema competed with an array of other activities. Among the female participants we noted a disinterested or distracted attitude toward cinema and cinema-going which was not as pronounced in the 1950s as it was in the memories from the mid-to-late 1960s. While the experience of cinema-going was more continuous over the two decades for the men in our sample, for women the cinema memories bear witness of changing opportunities, experiences, and

increased independence. In the introduction to this chapter, we claimed that the standard account of Swedish cinema history of this period has a focus on art-house films and auteurs. Indeed, this was part of the expanding youth culture and several women in our sample spoke of attending “art-house” films and ciné-clubs in the 1960s.

Our analysis also corroborates the idea of generational coherence. In our study of “what cinema has been understood to be and by whom” in Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s, matinées are represented as a space free from adult supervision and few participants recall elderly people as part of the audience at the evening shows. Cinema-going, if decentred by becoming increasingly entangled with other cultural expressions targeting youth, contributed to an identity and an experience that reinforced generational differences. This idea comes into clearer relief in a comparison with research on the more family-oriented reception of radio and television (Couldry, 2003; Höijer, 1998; Sjöholm, 2003, pp. 28–29, 32, 230–231). Memory narration of cinema-going in childhood and youth is key to understanding social, cultural, and experiential dimensions of modernisation (Jernudd, 2018), all the while addressing one of cinema-going’s “most striking features,” according to Allen, “its sociality” (Allen, 2011, p. 44). It is, however, important to recognise that this sociality is crucially, indeed always, gendered.

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Filmography

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