

Freedom to choose

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Women filmmakers and 'women's problems'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The complexity of reproductive choices

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Medicine and medical rooms

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Notes

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

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

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