



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Björklund, E. (2019)

Realism or 'grotesque clichés': Jan Halldoff's *The Corridor* and the Swedish debate on abortion in the 1960s

Journal of Scandinavian Cinema, 9(1): 117-130

https://doi.org/10.1386/jsca.9.1.117_1

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-379575>

Realism or ‘grotesque clichés’? Jan Halldoff’s *The Corridor* and the Swedish debate on abortion in the 1960s

Elisabet Björklund

Uppsala University/Linnaeus University

elisabet.bjorklund@idehist.uu.se, elisabet.bjorklund@lnu.se

© Elisabet Björklund, 2019. The definitive, peer reviewed and edited version of this article is published in *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*, volume 9, issue 1, pages 117–130, 2019, doi: 10.1386/jsca.9.1.117_1.

Abstract

Swedish filmmaker Jan Halldoff’s fiction film *Korridoren* (*The Corridor*) premiered in 1968 to a mainly positive Swedish reception. Shot at Karolinska Hospital and criticizing the Swedish healthcare system, the film became much debated and can furthermore be seen as a turning point in Swedish film history regarding the portrayal of medical institutions and professionals. In this article, the film and its reception are analysed in relation to the Swedish debate on abortion at the time. While the film is clearly critical of Swedish welfare society, the way it depicts abortion is more conservative. Highlighting this as well as the role of actual medical professionals in the film, the article demonstrates how the film relates to representations of abortion in the past and discusses connections between the film industry and medicine at this historical moment.

Contributor details

Elisabet Björklund is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of History of Science and Ideas at Uppsala University, Sweden, and senior lecturer in Film Studies at Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her research is focused on sexuality and reproduction in Swedish film and television, and she earned her Ph.D. from Lund University in 2013 with a dissertation on sex education films in Sweden. Recent publications include the co-edited volume *A Visual History of HIV/AIDS: Exploring the Face of AIDS Film Archive* (2019, with Mariah Larsson).

Keywords

The Corridor

Jan Halldoff

abortion

Swedish cinema of the 1960s

cinema and medicine

foetal research

Realism or ‘grotesque clichés’? Jan Halldoff’s *The Corridor* and the Swedish debate on abortion in the 1960s

In the 1960s, public opinion on issues related to sexuality and reproduction changed significantly in Sweden, as in many other countries. At the beginning of the decade, substantial sex debates initiated by young liberals and social democrats started on issues such as school sex education, abortion, sexual minorities, censorship and pornography, which triggered the appointment of a number of public inquiries, a wave of liberalization and eventually reformed legislation in many areas (Lennerhed 1994). Among these issues, abortion was the one that was given the most attention, and also the one that would see the most drastic change of attitudes. While the opposition towards abortion had been strong and united in the 1950s, this shifted considerably during the 1960s, eventually leading to the introduction of abortion on demand in Sweden in 1974 (Swärd 1984; Lennerhed 1994: 141–152).

Abortion was thus an issue with great media visibility. In spite of this, abortion is a rare theme in Swedish film production of the 1960s and 1970s. This is noteworthy, as Swedish cinema during this era was characterized by a liberalization of censorship allowing for an increasing openness in representations of sexuality, which contributed to Sweden’s already established reputation as a progressive country in sexual matters, and a new generation of filmmakers who turned their cameras to problems in Swedish welfare society (see, e.g., Björklund and Larsson 2016; Mörner 2000). Moreover, abortion had previously been a common theme in the Swedish cinema repertoire. In the 1940s in particular, the ‘abortion film’ was a genre with commercial appeal (Lennerhed 2008: 134–140; Björklund 2012: 126–150). In the 1960s and 1970s, the theme was also present in various forms through television – news reporting, TV theatre productions, medical programmes and studio debates highlighted the issue from different perspectives. Abortion would thus be an expected topic in the cinema as well, but is instead surprisingly absent in both fiction and documentary film.¹

Among the few films that thematized the issue was Jan Halldoff’s *Korridoren* (*The Corridor*) from 1968. The film was the most successful Swedish film during the 1968/1969 season and generally very well received by critics (Donner 1977: 422–23). Shot at Karolinska Hospital and appearing at a time when Swedish healthcare was seen as being in crisis, the film caused much debate because of its negative portrayal of the medical establishment. Interestingly, while typical of its time in its overt criticism of Swedish society, the film’s depiction of the abortion theme is quite conventional. Rather than presenting a liberal

argument about women's freedom to choose – as might have been expected in a film by a director in the young, radical generation of 1968 – *The Corridor* can be seen as advocating a conservative view by linking abortion to what is understood as the inhumanity of Swedish hospital care and to medical experimentation on human foetuses.

In this article, I examine the film with the purpose of discussing the role of cinema in the construction of meaning around abortion and the relationship between cinema and medicine at this particular historical moment. These two issues are closely intertwined. Historians have shown that abortion and women's reproduction in general were areas that became medicalized during the twentieth century (Lennerhed 2017: 13–15). This is clear when one studies Swedish 'abortion films' of the 1940s and 1950s, as this was a genre that largely depicted physicians and hospital environments. Moreover, films on reproductive health make up a large share of all Swedish medical films. Apart from psychiatrists, gynaecologists and obstetricians were actually the most common type of medical doctor represented in Swedish cinema from the 1940s onwards (Weiner 2001: 1815). However, Lena Lennerhed emphasizes that the idea of abortion on demand in the 1960s meant that the issue was politicized and de-medicalized. The existing abortion law – introduced in 1938 – had meant that women's prospects for getting legal abortions were dependent on a medical and psychiatric diagnosis. Abortion on demand, on the other hand, meant that women would no longer be subordinated to this type of medical authority, but could decide for themselves (Lennerhed 2017: 135). Internationally, the relationship between medicine and the media also changed in the 1960s. With, among other things, the rise of investigative journalism, a growing number of patient organizations and the general increase in political engagement during the era, medicine started to be viewed more critically (Nathoo 2009: 49–50). *The Corridor* is thus a significant film to study as it addressed the abortion theme in a context where ideas about abortion and attitudes towards medicine were undergoing change.

My point of departure is that the media play a significant role in shaping conceptions of medicine, medical professionals and institutions as well as perceptions of illness and health. However, the prerequisites of different media forms and their particular contexts of production have a bearing on how certain issues come to be represented. Hence, my argument is that to fully understand the representation of abortion in *The Corridor*, one needs to take into account both the tradition of collaboration between cinema and medicine in Sweden and historical representations of abortion. In the following, I will begin with an analysis of the film's production and its relationship to earlier medical films, proceeding to a longer discussion of the film's representation of abortion and its reception.

‘A Swedish anti-Kildare’

From the very beginning, *The Corridor* drew considerable attention in the press. For instance, the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published a series of articles following the film’s entire production, put out over a period of almost eight months (Donner 1977: 423). These and other articles create the image that the film was to a high degree the result of close cooperation between the filmmakers and the medical community.

The manuscript was written by Halldoff in collaboration with dramatist Bengt Bratt and producer Bengt Forslund at Svensk Filmindustri, but a number of other people clearly had an influence on the film as well. In interviews, Halldoff claimed that the whole idea for the film came about when he and Forslund had attended a crayfish party where they had begun talking to a group of young physicians. Later on, they started doing research by, among other things, interviewing physicians and establishing contact with Karolinska Hospital, where the film was eventually shot (Leander 1968). A number of medical professionals also participated in the film itself. The most prominent example is heart specialist professor Gunnar Biörck, at the time working at Serafimerlasarettet (Seraphim Hospital) in Stockholm, who played himself. Biörck was an active participant in the public debate of the time, not least in matters regarding Swedish healthcare and medical ethics. Before acting in *The Corridor*, he had published, among other titles, the books *Sjukvårdens villkor* (‘The conditions for medical service’) in 1966 and *Journal 67: Etik och politik i medicinen* (‘Journal 67: Ethics and politics in medicine’) in 1967 (Biörck 1966, 1967). Politically, Biörck was clearly a conservative, and he was critical of a liberalization of the abortion legislation. When the public inquiry on abortion was presented in the early 1970s, he would, for example, make a reservation to the Swedish Society of Medicine’s statement on the issue (see Biörck 1972). Later on, he would become a member of Parliament for the Swedish Conservative Party.

That Biörck had an influence on *The Corridor* is clear as he was given ample space to talk about the film and his views in the press. Moreover, a central scene in which he appeared had largely been shaped by him, and he had made many changes to the manuscript (Rundberg 1968; Holm 1968). Biörck was not, however, the only medical professional who took part in the film. One article noted that the crew had talked to 60–70 physicians and medical students (Veronika 1968). In another instance, actor Per Ragnar – who played the protagonist Jan – mentioned that around 100 physicians had been interviewed (Ragnar 1968b). A third article stated that ‘[e]verybody stood by’ (Kaj 1968),² giving the impression that Halldoff and his crew had firm support from the entire medical establishment.

The Corridor is thus an example of a film representing a medical institution produced with the guidance of medical professionals. This was, of course, nothing unique at the time. Internationally, films portraying physicians and other health personnel have a very long history (see, e.g., Glasser 2010; Paietta and Kauppila 2000), and the film and television industries have cooperated with medicine for a long time. Leaslie A. Reagan, Nancy Tomes, and Paula A. Treichler argue that medical moving pictures is a singular genre because of 'its unique relationship to the medical profession and science' (Reagan, Tomes and Treichler 2007: 2–3). In Sweden, many sex education films of earlier decades were produced in collaboration with gynecologists, venereologists or well-known sex educators, and the names of physicians were often used to create respectability in the marketing of both imported and domestic films of this kind (Björklund 2012: 105). What makes *The Corridor* particularly interesting in this respect, however, is that it clearly meant a break with a long tradition in Swedish cinema of representing medical doctors in a predominantly positive way (Weiner 2001: 1816). As such, the film is a forerunner to more critical representations of medicine in Swedish audiovisual fiction, not least the television series *Babels hus* ('The Tower of Babel') (Cornell, 1981), based on the best-selling novel by P.C. Jersild from 1978.

In reviews and other press material, this shift in representation is one of the most central aspects that are put forward. Many critics mention that the film is a clear departure from other films about 'men in white' and the clichés associated with that genre (e.g. Edström 1968; Andréason 1968). A telling example is the heading for film critic Jan Aghed's review in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, which called the film '[a] Swedish anti-Kildare', referring to the long row of American films, television series and other media productions about the fictional physician Dr. James Kildare. Instead of reproducing representations like these, many critics agreed that *The Corridor* was characterized by realism. Mauritz Edström, for example, wrote: 'In his portrayal of a reality that has been surrounded by so much false and beautifying romanticism of "men in white", Halldoff takes us back to reality' (Edström 1968).

Realism was a clear trend in films by the new, radical generation of filmmakers who debuted in the 1960s. In historiographical accounts of Swedish cinema during this era, Halldoff is often mentioned as part of this group, together with, among others, Bo Widerberg, Jan Troell and Vilgot Sjöman. Accordingly, *The Corridor* is seen as an example of the new aesthetic trends and tendencies employed by these filmmakers, most notably realism and a focus on society's problems (Björkman 1978; Furhammar 2003 [1991]: 292–94, 301–307; Mörner 2000). Indeed, there are many reasons to see the film as part of this group, as several stylistic devices aiming at realism are used. Cecilia Mörner has discussed how these choices

become part of the film's argument as 'inartificial proofs' – although the film is fictional, its use of actual environments and social actors becomes an assurance for the audience that the film's argument holds validity (Mörner 2000: 173–80).

The film's realism is thus not only a means to create counter-representations of a certain profession, but also a device to reinforce an argument about the reality that it aims to portray. One can thus conclude that the collaboration between cinema and medicine filled a number of different functions in this case. Medical experts were interviewed as the filmmakers did research for the film, and they consequently influenced its content. Later on, certain experts participated in the production in different ways, further shaping the film's argument but also supporting this argument through their on-screen presence. While most critics agreed that the film accordingly moved away from earlier representations of medical institutions and professionals, there was nevertheless one segment that diverged from this pattern: the part about abortion.

Narrative conventions in films about abortion

The law regulating abortion in Sweden at this time had been introduced in 1938 and only allowed abortion under certain – very limited – conditions. As mentioned, however, the 1960s meant a dramatic and quick change in direction of official attitudes in the matter. In the early 1960s, liberal and social-democratic youth and student organizations had started to advocate abortion on demand. This generated debate, and after the so-called 'Poland affair' in 1965 – when prosecution was planned against a large number of Swedish women for having travelled to Poland to have abortions – the issue was given centre stage in the news and a public inquiry into the matter was eventually appointed. Alongside this development, medical praxis became more permissive, and the number of legal abortions grew. Ultimately, abortion on demand was legalized in 1974 (Lennerhed 1994: 141–45). Lennerhed stresses two contextual factors for why opinions on abortion could shift so dramatically: the sexual liberal movement, which emphasized the freedom of the individual in sexual matters, and the debate on gender roles in the early 1960s, which contributed to a weakening of the strong connection between womanhood and motherhood (Lennerhed 2017: 130–33).

By 1968, when *The Corridor* was produced, opinions and attitudes concerning the abortion issue had thus already changed significantly, and women's right to make decisions about their bodies was of core importance in the public discussion. New types of fictional abortion stories had also appeared. For instance, in 1967, Swedish television aired the play *Förrädare, mördare* ('Traitors, murderers') (Ersgård, 1967), based on the novel with the same

name from 1965 by author Clas Engström, which criticized the restrictive abortion legislation of the time through a narrative of the bureaucratic and humiliating procedure of applying for legal abortion. In marked contrast, *The Corridor* presents a conventional storyline about an ignorant young woman who changes her mind about abortion after having seen a medical doctor. Abortion is not the main topic of the film; rather, the theme is interwoven into a larger narrative about the crisis of a young medical doctor called Jan who works at a large Swedish hospital. Jan's unmarried sister Maria, played by Ann Norstedt, has become pregnant and seeks his help. She wants an abortion, to escape the ire and rejection of their authoritarian father, a Christian minister, played by Åke Lindström. Jan, who opposes this, explains abortion procedures and argues that the choice is only hers to make; Maria eventually decides to continue the pregnancy in spite of their father's position. The plotline incorporates a theme of rebellion: when Maria in the final sequence at the parents' home insists that she does not want an abortion and tells her father to 'shut up', he slaps her in the face which triggers Jan to confront him and his conservative Christian ideals.

This narrative development has many similarities with representations of the issue in the past. Abortion is a theme with a very long cinematic history, going back to the earliest decades of the twentieth century and films such as the US feature *Where Are My Children?* (Weber and Smalley, 1916). In Swedish film production, feature-length fiction films on the abortion issue first appeared in the 1930s, and the theme became quite common in the cinema repertoire of the 1940s and 1950s, when numerous films appeared that constructed abortion as something negative and dangerous, in line with official attitudes on the matter. The most influential film during this period was *Gula kliniken* ('Yellow Clinic') (Johansson, 1942), which triggered a major debate and was followed by several other films on the issue (Lennerhed 2008: 134–40). The Swedish abortion films clearly followed narrative conventions of films produced in other countries. For example, as many of these films were sex education films, their narratives were often constructed around a theme of ignorance and knowledge and featured a stereotyped gallery of characters (Kuhn 1988: 51, 53–56; Schaefer 1999: 30–31). Many Swedish sex education films of the 1940s and '50s revolve around an unfortunate young pregnant woman who initially contemplates abortion, often because of shame or financial concerns, but reconsiders after contact with a medical doctor or a social welfare officer who enlighten her about the help offered by society (Björklund 2012: 140–41).

The story around Maria fits quite well with these conventions. Throughout the film, Maria's behaviour and the way she dresses depict her as a very naïve and innocent young woman. For example, when she visits Jan at the hospital, she avoids looking him in the eye,

lowers her head towards the floor, bites her fingernails and starts to cry when Jan raises his voice. Although this is a personal rather than a professional meeting, their conversation can still be seen as educational: Jan tells his sister about abortion, thus bringing her from ignorance to knowledge. Moreover, the portrayal of their father as a condemning and violent man who is more concerned with his reputation within the congregation than with helping his daughter is also in agreement with stereotypically negative depictions of representatives of Christianity seen in many Swedish films on sexual themes. While opposition to abortion is often associated with Christian values, the choice of making the Christian father an advocate of abortion is in line with historical representations. In Swedish films of the 1940s and '50s, repressive and conservative attitudes towards sexuality before marriage – sometimes associated with Christianity – were seen as guilty of pushing young women to seek out illegal abortionists (one example of this can be seen in *Kvinnor i väntrum* ['Women in Waiting Rooms'] [Folke, 1946]). Not having an abortion was thus constructed as a modern choice in these films, aligned with medicine rather than with backwards ideas about the importance of abstinence before marriage.

Abortion, foetal research and the representation of medicine

While *The Corridor* makes use of narrative conventions of earlier abortion films, there are differences in the content of the enlightenment and the type of argument about abortion being made. The most central scene in this respect is Maria's visit to Jan at the hospital. This scene follows another sequence in which Jan and his colleagues have tried but failed to save the life of a man with cardiac arrest. After a smoke, Jan meets his sister, whose pregnancy has now been confirmed and who is determined to get an abortion. Apparently still upset and exhausted after the death of his patient, Jan angrily starts to explain to Maria how an abortion is carried out in order to convince her to reconsider. In medium close-up, the camera frames Jan from the side or slightly over the shoulder and Maria from the front, creating a pressing atmosphere and allowing the viewer to follow Maria's reactions through her facial expressions. 'What do you really know about abortion?' Jan asks, and when Maria does not answer, he starts to tell her about different abortion methods in different weeks of the pregnancy, speaking in a loud voice and stuttering on the words, which reveals his state of distress. When Maria tells him not to shout, he lowers his voice, but continues:

Between the seventeenth and the twenty-second week, we can inject a salt solution which means that, after thirty-six hours approximately, then a foetus comes out which,

in the best-case scenario, which is five to six centimetres long, a miniature child, this child, we know this, it lives for approximately five to ten hours, we use it here to experiment with. Then sometimes we can, unfortunately, inject so badly that, whatever we call her, the woman or the mother, unfortunately doesn't survive the whole thing. Do you think we should continue to talk about abortion?

While the meeting between a woman and a doctor or social worker in films about abortion in the 1940s and '50s often emphasized information about how society could help her go through with her pregnancy, Jan's focus is on ethics and risks – his explanation indicates that an abortion is wrong because it means a violation of a 'miniature child', and furthermore might endanger the mother's life. The scene's placement after a scene of a CPR is also significant. Having just exhausted himself trying to save a life, Jan's fierce reaction to the suggestion of an abortion is psychologically motivated. Another difference lies in the view of motherhood. In earlier films, the happiness of becoming a mother was central to the storylines and women who changed their minds were often portrayed as full of joy when finally becoming mothers. Maria's change of mind implies that she has defied her father's authority, but she is not depicted as happy in the end. The procedure rather than the woman's psychological development is thus at the core in the film, and the focus has shifted from the woman to the foetus. Another difference concerns Jan's rhetoric. The scene quoted above can be construed as in line with the film's overall realistic style. Telling Maria in a detailed manner how an abortion is carried out and mentioning that the aborted foetus might become the object of medical experimentation while still alive is intended to shock her with its graphic reality and make her change her mind. Although verbal and not visual, Jan's argument is thus similar to the strategy of using images of fetuses to make a case against abortion (see, e.g., Petchesky 1987; Stabile 1998 [1992]; Jülich 2018).

However, the biggest difference between *The Corridor* and earlier abortion films lies in the view of medicine. In earlier films, a strong convention was the negative representation of the illegal abortionist in contrast to a positive representation of medical doctors. In her study of cultural representations of abortion in Weimar Germany, Cornelia Osborne notes that all directors, writers and artists who dealt with the abortion issue during this period portrayed lay abortionists in a stereotyped and negative light and represented abortion as such as a negative experience for women (Osborne 2007: 53). The same can be said for the Swedish films of the 1940s and '50s, in which abortionists were often portrayed in horror-like ways, in marked contrast to the idealized depictions of medical doctors (Bengtsson 1998: 142; Björklund 2012:

131–34; Lennerhed 2008: 142). Here, abortion was thus located outside the domains of established medical practice – it was quacks who performed abortions, in dark and shadowy places, with dangerous tools and for money. Bengt Bengtsson notes that the purpose of this type of depiction was to connect abortion with a Sweden of the past, which modern medicine and the welfare state had superseded (Bengtsson 1992: 142). In contrast, when Jan tells Maria about abortion, he does not refer to dangerous abortions performed by charlatans, but to procedures carried out at a large Swedish hospital. Rather than creating a connection between abortion and a less enlightened era in Sweden's history, abortion is thus connected to modernity and to the film's general target – the critical state of Swedish hospital care, which has turned doctors into 'body engineers' (as it is expressed in the film) with no time or energy to relate to their patients and incapable of dealing with difficult questions concerning life and death. If Jan uses foetal research as an argument against abortion, the film uses abortion itself as an example of what is understood as the callousness of modern medicine and science.

Reception and repercussions

The storyline about abortion in *The Corridor* is thus reminiscent of a longer tradition of abortion narratives, while there are also significant differences. In 1968, however, the film's representation of abortion did not accord with public opinion. This is evident in the generally negative critical reception of the film's abortion narrative. In an otherwise very positive review in *Svenska Dagbladet*, Hanserik Hjertén wrote that it was 'dangerously close to being a stereotype' (Hjertén 1968). In *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, Jan Aghed called the scenes from Jan's family home 'almost grotesque clichés' (Aghed 1968). The political implications of the representation were also discussed. In an article in the magazine *Vi*, Carl-Erik Nordberg highlighted the abortion theme:

The question of abortion or not is of course a sensitive problem in every single case. But that is exactly why one would have wished an objective and unprejudiced account. Instead, Halldoff's position on the abortion issue is a deplorably one-eyed and reactionary one, which would probably have been applauded by the Pope (Nordberg 1969).

Some critics also saw the sequences about the abortion issue as a problem for the film's argument. The family conflict introduced a psychological dimension that individualized Jan's problems rather than constructing them as emanating from a system, it was argued (e.g.

Håkansson 1968; Aghed 1969; Franzén 1969). Jan's description of an abortion procedure in the scene quoted above was also criticized. Aghed, for example, called Jan's arguments 'scare propagandistic' (Aghed 1969), and others used words such as 'brutal' and 'hysterical' to describe his explanation and views (Håkansson 1968; Alexandersson and Åsberg 1969; Franzén 1969).

One detail in Jan's outburst about abortion nevertheless did have some after-effects – his statement that an aborted foetus lives for about five to ten hours and that it is then used for medical experimentation. The use of human embryos and foetuses in medical research is still a quite unknown area in Swedish history of medicine, and the statement thus warrants some comment. While the Swedish abortion law of 1938 was strict, it was at the same time more liberal than in other countries and using tissue from aborted foetuses for certain research purposes – for example in vaccine research – was accepted in the medical community in the post-war period. Since this was a sensitive issue, knowledge about such research was surrounded by secrecy, but information about it nevertheless seeped out and, when it did, caused heated debate (Jülich forthcoming 2018). Solveig Jülich has demonstrated that *The Corridor* had some impact in these debates. Jan's indication that living human foetuses were used in medical experiments at Karolinska Hospital actually triggered television journalist and later futurologist Eskil Block to write a report to the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) demanding an inquiry into the matter, and as he sent his report to various newspapers, questions about medical experimentation on living human foetuses grew in proportion. When JO presented its report in 1970, the conclusion was that no measures were necessary in the matter. However, the issue continued to be a topic of debate and further examination in the 1970s (Jülich forthcoming 2018).

Although *The Corridor* is a fiction film, Block thus obviously treated Jan's comment as a piece of evidence that experiments on living human foetuses took place at Karolinska Hospital. How this piece of information ended up in the film is difficult to ascertain. Some of the people involved in the production did, however, have a critical view on abortion. Per Ragnar wrote the following in an article reporting from the film's production:

In the evenings, I study facts about abortion. Scraping, vacuum scraping, salt solution injection (in the 17th – 20th week), small Caesarean section. I will not forestall the scenes about the abortion problem in the film, which we have only been able to illuminate in fragments. But those who have started to study the problem and the

questions it raises around the concept of LIFE, are careful not to talk too confidently about ‘legal’ abortions as something indisputable. (Ragnar 1968a, original emphasis)

Ragnar furthermore referred to a section in Biörck’s book *Journal -67*, in which the author discussed the borderline between life and death and perceptions of human life in relation to, among other things, issues of contraceptives and abortion (Biörck 1967: 27–30).

It is possible that the sections about abortion in the film were influenced by Biörck or other medical professionals who were interviewed, and that Jan’s comment about experiments on human foetuses was based on information leaked from persons within the medical community. In any case, the different reactions to the abortion sequences illustrate a central point in theory of film reception: that films are interpreted differently by different audiences (e.g. Staiger 1992). While established film critics regarded the abortion sequences as clichéd, Block obviously interpreted Jan’s statements as truthful and realistic. The case illustrates the impact of cinema as a medium – even though the representation of abortion in the film was in general disregarded as outdated, a small comment by the main protagonist still had a political aftermath.

Concluding discussion

As mentioned initially, during the 1960s public attitudes towards abortion changed quickly and drastically in Sweden. Appearing in 1968, the representation of abortion in *The Corridor* is nonetheless a bit unexpected. While the film clearly accords with new tendencies in Swedish cinema of the 1960s by taking a critical approach to a social issue and by employing realism, the film’s abortion narrative can be interpreted as quite conservative. It should be stated that there is of course a difference between a protagonist’s opinion and the argument of a film, and Jan is definitely not portrayed as a winner in the end – the final scenes show him having escaped his problems by starting to work with some sort of research on animals. One could thus claim that the film does not take a clear stand in the abortion matter.³ In fact, a recurring opinion among critics was that the message of the film was in general hard to grasp (e.g. Båge 1968; Franzén 1969). However, I argue that comparing the film with earlier abortion films clarifies the meanings produced. While the theme of a young, ignorant woman who changes her mind after seeing a medical doctor is reminiscent of a long tradition of abortion narratives, Jan’s explanation of abortion procedures differs from earlier representations, not least because it locates abortion within the medical establishment. As such, the abortion issue and the crisis in Swedish healthcare are connected to one another,

which creates a rhetorical double function in the film. The argument that abortions are ethically wrong is underlined by linking them to problematic aspects of Swedish hospital care and to medical experimentation on living human fetuses. At the same time, the argument about a dysfunctional Swedish healthcare system is supported because Jan's account functions to exemplify the cruel effects such a system can generate.

One can only speculate about why more radical standpoints on the abortion issue were not present within Swedish film production during this era of political engagement. Male dominance in the film industry is hard to ignore here. At the same time, this is not in itself an explanation as women's voices were actually quite absent in the abortion debate in general until the late 1960s (Lennerhed 2013). The impact of political conviction among the individuals in the network involved in the production should not be underestimated. It is a general assumption that many cultural expressions of the late 1960s were characterized by left-wing ideas. But as Mörner correctly points out, what it means to be critical of society is not self-evident, and social criticism can be carried out from numerous perspectives and political standpoints. She also claims that a clear socialist position is not as dominant as might be expected in the films she is studying (Mörner 2000: 24). My analysis of the representation of abortion in *The Corridor* underlines this point and thus nuances the perception of Swedish cinema during the late 1960s as politically radical.

Another hypothesis is that the argument of the film is related to the relationship between the film industry and medicine at this historical moment. As mentioned, many abortion films of the 1940s and '50s were made in collaboration between the film industry and certain physicians who were engaged in the matter. As has been made clear, *The Corridor* was also the outcome of close collaboration with medical expertise. While the film is in itself an example of how representations of medicine were changing during the 1960s, it is notable that the film can be characterized as criticism from the inside – it was the testimonies of numerous medical doctors and other health professionals that provided the foundation for the criticism, rather than, for example, the voices of patients. Hence, the tradition of cooperation between cinema and medicine may have resulted in a relationship characterized by trust and dependency between the filmmakers and the specific medical professionals engaged in the production of *The Corridor*, some of whom had a critical view of abortion. A final explanation for the film's depiction of abortion could be that the theme is actually not the most central, but subordinate to the larger agenda of exposing the problems of Swedish healthcare and to the theme of Jan's revolt against his authoritarian father. This interpretation, however, indicates in itself that while abortion was a topic that was given great attention in

the media in general in the 1960s and 1970s, it was at the same time treated as of secondary importance in the cinema.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Solveig Jülich for her comments on the text and Bengt Forslund for kindly answering my questions about the film. The article was written within the research programme Medicine at the Borders of Life: Fetal Research and the Emergence of Ethical Controversy in Sweden, financed by the Swedish Research Council, Dnr 446– 2014–1749.

References

- Aghed, Jan (1968), 'En svensk anti-Kildare', *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 12 December
- (1969), '"Korridoren" & ny Losey', *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 21 January.
- Alexanderson, Balzar and Åsberg, Marie (1969), 'Film och verklighet', *Aftonbladet*, 1 January.
- Andréason, Sverker (1968), 'En ung läkares kris', *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, 27 December.
- Båge, Christer (1968), 'Läkaren – tekniker eller ideolog', *Läkartidningen*, 65: 52, pp. 5180–81.
- Bengtsson, Bengt (1998), *Ungdom i fara – ungdomsproblem i svensk spelfilm 1942–1962*, Diss: Stockholm University.
- Biörck, Gunnar (1966), *Sjukvårdens villkor*, Stockholm: Natur och kultur.
- (1967), *Journal 67: Etik och politik i medicinen*, Stockholm: Natur och kultur.
- (1972), 'Vad är rätt till abort?', *Svenska Dagbladet*, February 18.
- Björklund, Elisabet (2012), *The Most Delicate Subject: A History of Sex Education Films in Sweden*, Diss: Lund University.
- Björklund, Elisabet, and Larsson, Maria (eds) (2016), *Swedish Cinema and the Sexual Revolution: Critical Essays*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Björkman, Stig (1978), *Nya bilder och dagsljus – Tio svenska regissörsporträtt*, Stockholm: Bokförlaget PAN/Norstedts.
- Donner, Jörn (ed.) (1977), *Svensk filmografi 6, 1960–1969*, Stockholm: Svenska Filminstitutet.
- Edström, Mauritz (1968), '"Korridoren": Det sjuka samvetet och det sjuka samhället', *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 December.
- Forslund, Bengt (2018), email to Elisabet Björklund, August 28.

- Franzén, Lars-Olof (1969), 'Korridoren', *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*, 2, pp. 122–23.
- Furhammar, Leif (2003 [1991]), *Filmen i Sverige – en historia i tio kapitel och en fortsättning*, third edition. Stockholm: Dialogos förlag.
- Glasser, Brian (2010), *Medicinema: Doctors in Films*, Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing.
- Hjertén, Hanserik (1968), 'Jan Halldoffs film en koncentrerad mognad', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 12 December.
- Holm, Annika (1968), 'Professor Biörck spelar läkare i Halldoffs film "Korridoren"', *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 July.
- Håkansson, Birgitta (1968), 'Läkare kommenterar', *Expressen*, 12 December.
- Jülich, Solveig (2018), 'Picturing Abortion Opposition in Sweden: Lennart Nilsson's Early Photographs of Embryos and Fetuses', *Social History of Medicine*, 31: 2, pp. 278–307.
- Jülich, Solveig (forthcoming 2018), 'Fosterexperimentens produktiva hemlighet: Medicinsk forskning och vita lögnen i 1960- och 1970-talets Sverige', *Lychnos*.
- Kaj (1968), 'Korridoren – en film av Jan Halldoff', *Göteborgs-Posten*, 24 August.
- Leander, Gun (1968), 'Det började på kräftskiva – debatt med läkare födde filmidén', *Dagens Nyheter*, 17 April.
- Lennerhed, Lena (1994), *Frihet att njuta: sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet*, Stockholm: Norstedts.
- (2008), *Historier om ett brott: Illegala aborter i Sverige på 1900-talet*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Atlas.
- (2013), 'Sherri Finkbine's choice: Abortion, sex-liberalism and feminism in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s', *Women's History Magazine*, 73, pp. 13–18.
- (2017), *Kvinnotrubbel: Abort i Sverige 1938–1974*, Möklinta: Gidlunds förlag.
- Mörner, Cecilia (2000), *Vissa visioner: tendenser i svensk biografisk fiktion 1967–1972*, Diss: Stockholm University.
- Nathoo, Ayesha (2009), *Hearts Exposed: Transplants and the Media in 1960s Britain*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Nordberg, Carl-Eric (1969), 'Hurra, vad vi är bra! Eller är vi inte?' *Vi*, 1, 4 January.
- Paietta, Ann, and Kauppila, Jean (2000), *Health professionals on screen*, Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow.
- Petchesky, Rosalind (1987), 'Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction', *Feminist Studies*, 13: 2, pp. 263–92.
- Ragnar, Per (1968a), 'Vem skall vi rädda?', *Expressen*, 7 July.
- (1968b), 'Korridoren en film om k-r-i-s-e-n', *Expressen*, 14 December.

- Reagan, Leslie J., Tomes, Nancy and Treichler, Paula A. (2007), 'Introduction: Medicine, Health, and Bodies in American Film and Television', in Leslie J. Reagan, Nancy Tomes and Paula A. Treichler (eds), *Medicine's Moving Pictures: Medicine, Health, and Bodies in American Film and Television*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Rundberg, Arvid (1968), 'Gunnar Biörck spelar sig själv i filmen: Sjukvården behöver en kulturrevolution', *Expressen*, 12 December.
- Stabile, Carole (1998 [1992]), 'Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance', in Paula A. Treichler, Lisa Cartwright and Constace Penley (eds), *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, and Science*, New York and London: New York University Press.
- Staiger, Janet (1992), *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Swärd, Stefan (1984), *Varför Sverige fick fri abort: ett studium av en policyprocess*, Diss: Stockholm University.
- Schaefer, Eric (1999), *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!" A History of Exploitation Films 1919–1959*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Usborne, Cornelia (2007), *Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Veronika (1968), 'Janne Halldoff i stan', *Göteborgs Handels- och sjöfartstidning*, 24 August.
- Weiner, Gena (2001), 'Hjälte, bov eller förförare? Läkarens roller på bioduken stereotypa men fascinerande', *Läkartidningen*, 98: 15, pp. 1814–20.

Film and TV references

- Axelmann, Torbjörn (1968), *Het snö*, Sweden.
- Cornell, Jonas (1981), *Babels hus*, Sweden: Sveriges Television
- Ersgård, Håkan (1965) *...då ska du få en gungstol av mig – en blå*, Sweden.
- Ersgård, Håkan (1967), *Förrädare, mördare*, Sweden: Sveriges Radio.
- Folke, Gösta (1946), *Kvinnor i väntrum*, Sweden.
- Halldoff, Jan (1968), *Korridoren*, Sweden.
- Johansson, Ivar (1942), *Gula kliniken*, Sweden.
- Weber, Lois, and Phillips Smalley (1916), *Where Are My Children?* USA.
- Wickman, Torgny (1971), *Kärlekens XYZ*, Sweden.
- Widerberg, Bo (1969), *Ådalen 31*, Sweden.
- Zetterling, Mai (1968), *Dr. Glas*, Denmark.

¹ Films from this period in which abortion is part of the narrative are: ...*då ska du få en gungstol av mig – en blå/Anna my Darling* (Ersgård, 1965), *Het snö* ('Hot Snow', Axelman, 1968), *Dr. Glas* (Zetterling, 1968, produced in Denmark), and *Ådalen 31* (Widerberg, 1969). Abortion is also discussed in the sex education film *Kärlekens XYZ/XYZ of Love* (Wickman 1971). The theme is not, however, the main topic in any of these films.

² All translations into English from Swedish sources are by the author.

³ In correspondence with the author, Bengt Forslund claims that the intention of the film was not to take a stand on the abortion issue, and that neither he nor Halldoff were opponents of abortion as he recalls it (Forslund 2018).