



SCREENING FOR CHILDREN SEPTEMBER 2017

Seminar Report

On Wednesday 20 September, around 100 people were welcomed by organizer Per Eriksson in Stockholm for the ECFA seminar on 'Screening for children'. The seminar focused on a question pertinent for many people working with children's film: what to do after the screening, when you start processing the film with the young audience?

- * Do you open discussions on an academic level?
- * Do you focus on cinematography or on the socio-political content of a film?
- * Do you appeal to the highlights of film history, or opt for an artistic approach?

Various experts, including several ECFA members, shared their experiences on how to screen and discuss cinema for and with children so as to engage them with the medium.



CHILDREN, OBJECTS AND MOTION... BALLOONS, BIKES, KITES AND TETHERED FLIGHT

Keynote Speech - Karen Lury (University of Glasgow)



WISH YOU WERE HERE

It might have seemed like Karen Lury was simply sharing with us a bundle of memories on unforgettable movie scenes and characters, and on the presence of three significant objects in (children's) films: it was all about kites, balloons and bikes, and their relationships towards children. But this pleasant stroll through film history was driven by three main questions:

- Why do these three objects feature so prominently in films about children?
- How can we use these objects as devices?
- What do they say about children's mobility?

Every of these objects has its own materiality, and produces a different effect.

Kites

Kites often refer to relationships between children and fathers, for instance in a dialogue scene from *LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON*, making kite flying the symbol of a father-son bonding process. In *MARY POPPINS* the 'good father' is impersonated as a father who flies kites. "*Let's go fly a kite*" is what reunites the entire family at the end of the movie. In *THE KITE RUNNER* it's the kite that brings father and son together, even if 'kite fighting' has a different connotation than 'kite flying'. In *GATTUO* kites close the loop between generations.



THE KITE RUNNER



MARY POPPINS

Balloons

Balloons star in some of the most iconic children's film scenes, from probably the first children's film ever (LE BALLON ROUGE) up to the heart-breaking opening sequence in Disney's UP or the cruelly confronting flying mouse in RATCATCHER. It's remarkable to what extent balloons (often red) can be seen as travelling companions for a child. But balloons can be much more than that, they can be a kind of bomb, a device (like in M and THE SIXTH SENSE) because... *"balloons go bang"* (like in the 'family horror feature' IT). *"They are a mixture of power and fragility in constant flux. They offer a provoking combination of tranquillity and peril; of control and helplessness; of technology and horror."* They can be central, circumstantial, instrumental, imperial, symptomatic and / or wilful.



M



IT

Bikes

Bikes often feature as devices for boys, often in a suburban environment, offering opportunities for going elsewhere, everywhere, even to the moon, like in the most iconic scene from ET. It's different for girls: bikes can come as positive devices for emancipation (WADJDA), but remember that girls biking too fast will get punished in the end (WISH YOU WERE HERE). For girls, bikes are ambivalent: they can be positive or negative.

Bikes carry within them the combination of attachment and loss – what can a bicycle do for a boy and what does it say about his sense of being in the world? In THE KID WITH THE BIKE, the bicycle is the link between a son and his father, but also a proof of the father's betrayal. In the continuous alliance between a boy and his bike, the entire journey of childhood is depicted in aero-poetic pictures.

Among these three narrative devices, the kite is the atmospheric one that is drawn back to earth. Balloons are interesting in what they do or mean for children: just like bikes, they seem to offer endless opportunities to their young owners.



ET



THE KID WITH THE BIKE

THEME: WORKING WITH FILMS IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Classroom Discussions - Anna Söderberg (Zita Cinema)

The work of Folkets Bio's Zita Cinema, and the options for 45' discussions with children (aged 10+) immediately following a film screening were illustrated through two examples of films that have been used widely all across Europe. Since classroom discussions are usually related not only to cinematography but also to gender & identity, stereotypes, democracy, human rights; such films "*prepare the young audience to be adapted for life*".

* The cultural importance of WADJDA according to Anna Söderberg is obvious: the film comes from Saudi Arabia, is written by a woman and tackles the social injustices that are able to light a torch of fury among the audience. It's an engaging story about a lively character, Wadjda, who wants more than just a bike... Children can easily identify with her dream of freedom and independence.

Söderberg sums up what in her experience were the elements that kids remembered best after discussing WADJDA: the element of injustice, done to a girl in a faraway country, who is not free, and how this influenced her life. This was for them a starting point to discuss emancipation, freedom and also Islam, sometimes together with Muslim children, who were happy to finally see a film in a familiar sounding language.

* The discussions with SONG OF THE SEA were less drenched with socio-political debates, but often referred to elements of storytelling and imagination, and proved that animation is not something just for small children. In this story, closely related to the Nordic folk tales, the real and magic world do mirror each other. The children particularly liked to discuss the topic of emotions, and what does it mean to live a life that doesn't permit them.

These examples reflect two different thematic approaches, that both have proven themselves successful.

More on [Zita Cinema](#).



WADJDA



SONG OF THE SEA

2. Study guides – Heta Mulari (Finnish Youth Research Society) & Marjo Kovanen (Koulukino)

Study guides were presented by Heta Mulari as documents with a social and historical relevance. Mulari: "*Study guides are embedded in their own historical, political and social context. Therefore it's useful to ask questions like: which are the key themes in study guides? What subjects on the other hand are silenced? What are the blind spots? Who is addressed in the study guides? What could be their role in the upbringing of young people? How can study guides link film into our society and what*

do they tell about power structures? What is the interplay between societal filmmaking and socially oriented study guides? And therefore: what is the relationship between the film industry, media education and young people?" Some themes and subjects appear again and again in numerous study guides, which is a clue of the importance given to that theme in young people's democratic upbringing.

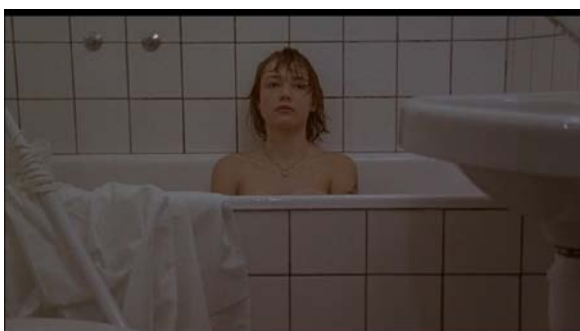
Mulari has specialized in the theme of new feminism, and gender in power structures in 'Swedish girl films'. The social debate about sexual harassment and women trafficking opened in Sweden in the early 21st century, with films like THE KETCHUP EFFECT and LILJA 4-EVER. The gender-egalitarian perspective in a sexualized society was reflected in those particular study guides.

Koloukino uses study guides as a pedagogical tool for audience development. Their goal is to integrate film and film language in every school subject. On their websites www.kouloukino.fi you'll find study guides not only in Finnish, but also in Russian and English language.

Study guides are usually written by teachers, researchers, experts. It's their voices that are being heard. But how to get children and young people engaged in the production of study guides? For the film LITTLE WING, Koloukino makes teachers and pupils work together, to get authors in direct contact with their target group. In the future similar methods will be explored. Trying to embed global education (for example human rights education) in these study guides, Koloukino calls in the help of expert organisations.

But does Koloukino operate also to the benefit of the film industry? Marjo Kovanen: *"It's difficult to find a balance between these roles. We maintain certain values in what we're offering to teachers. But at the same time production companies and filmmakers count on us to find new audiences."* For instance: the film UNKNOWN SOLDIER (Tuntematon sotilas) deals with national history in its depiction of the Finnish independency war. But the tone is outspoken nationalistic, and so is the approach of director Aku Louhimies, who's aiming to *"bring this national icon closer to our young audiences."* Trying to create a critical understanding of national history among youngsters through a film with a patriotic tone, is a big responsibility on the shoulders of Koloukino.

More on [Koloukino](http://www.kouloukino.fi).



LILJA 4-EVER



TUNTEMATON SOTILAS

3. Reality is a difficult subject matter – Miriam von Schantz (Örebro University)

Documentaries can be used in a film pedagogical method, through children watching them as well as through children making them. You can't teach someone to be critical, you can only offer tools to develop a critical mind-set, by helping young people realize that:

- all stories (also the ones that make claims on the truth) are told from a particular perspective.
- all stories (also the ones that make claims on the truth) are told with the aim to effect an audience.

After showing THE QUIET ONE, a short film about the first months of an Iraqi child in a Swedish classroom, crucial questions in the discussions with children were: what would have happened if the camera didn't film her? What is the effect of the presence of a film crew? How would it feel to be filmed? Miriam van Schantz: *"I offered a magnifier through which pupils could focus on different aspects. But they had to decide about the perspective. How would their classroom appear when seen through that same magnifier?"*

This film shows the perspective of two grown-up filmmakers (not the perspective of the child, even if that is what the film seems to suggest). Thus important questions to ask with students could be:

- Who is speaking?
- What is their agenda?
- What is it they want us to believe?
- How do they want to make us believe?

If you want to have children to tell their own story in a documentary, they should realize how crucial the perspective is for that story.



Miriam von Schantz

THEME: MAKING MORE OF THE FILM EXPERIENCE

Presentations on three unique cinema theatres illustrated how screenings for a young audience can be upgraded into a unique experience.

1. Cineteca di Bologna – Elisa Giovanelli

For a cinemateque, the aim of preserving films goes along with the aim of promoting their cultural value and the social value of watching movies together in a theatre. Film history is not a list of dates, authors and periods, but is in a constant and lively dialogue with society.

The Cineteca's educational department 'Schermi e Lavagne' supplies young audiences with activities that make them realize how films are part of cultural and social life. For instance:

- The 'Cinnoteca': playful creative activities aiming at 2 - 5-year-old children, sometimes organised in cooperation with other associations (librarians, musicians, providers of quality nutrition). There are screenings of thematic short film compilations, shadow-theatre or sand drawing, and there's room for free expression through music, drawing and other art forms.
- In the Kids' Filmclub, contemporary and classic films are screened in original or restored version.
- The festival 'Il Cinema Ritrovato' has a special section dedicated to children.
- In summer camps, children work together as a film crew.
- In the ABCinema Project (co-funded by the MEDIA programme), specific actions and activities were developed for every age group.

More on [Cineteca di Bologna](#).



2. Kinodvor - Petra Slatinsek

With one brand for children (Kinobalon) and one for youth (Kinotrip) the Kinodvor cinema in Ljubljana turns screenings for children into special events: inviting directors, dressing up parties, inviting dogs or horses for theme screenings, going out on the streets with a 'travelling cinema' that screens films made by children.

Why is this so important? Petra Slatinsek: *"A cinema is a unique place that can inspire the love for film. Reaching out to everybody is our mission as a public cinema. We want to make children feel that they're special by providing them special event programmes. We want to do more than just 'entertain', we want to inspire! Cinema should offer children ways to express themselves and help them to express their thoughts."*

Kinodvor organizes audience events year round, for example celebrating the 100th anniversary of Tove Jansson with a special 'Moomins Day', serving pancakes with strawberry marmalade and creating Moomins puppets. THE RED BALLOON is on the programme every year (with a new twist). For OWLS & MICE the Natural History Museum organized a workshop in deconstructing pellets.

All this has caused a film education renaissance in Slovenia and stirred the political debate. Kinodvor is successful in fulfilling its mission: out of the 120,000 yearly admissions, 36,000 tickets are sold to children, which is about 100 tickets per day.

More on [Kinodvor](http://kinodvor.org).



Petra Slatinsek

3. Studio des Ursulines - Florian Deleporte

The old cinema Studio des Ursulines (Paris), built in 1912, was the cradle of the French arts & essay cinema: it was literally born here. But with more than 400 available screens in Paris, the cinema needed a more specific profile to survive. They chose to become a 'young audience cinema'. Not an easy option for programmer Florian Deleporte: *"Parents come to ask you why art house cinema for children would be needed."*

In the programme of Studio des Ursulines is a wide range of films, from Pixar and French animations to foreign films screened in original (subtitled) version. Deleporte: *"I'm shocked by the cinema owners' 'fear for the empty seat', which launched a tendency of screening football, opera, video games, etc. in cinemas. I'm not competent to do that, and I don't want to be. Cinema is a place for films, not for football."*

Studio des Ursulines has been in existence for 13 years now and some young people in the neighbourhood grew up really close to the cinema and its team. *"With our film club we want the cinema to feel like a 'home' for them, a place of their own."*

More on [Studio des Ursulines](#).



Florian Deleporte

THEME: FOSTERING CREATIVITY

De Taartrovers – Remke Oosterhuis & Tessa van Grafhorst

For De Taartrovers (The Cake Robbers), an artistic collective that operates in museums, schools and film & art festivals, the most important element is: playing with children's imagination. Tessa van Grafhorst: *"When children watch a film, read a book, hear a story, they want to become an active part of it. We create places where they can dive into that story."*

De Taartrovers start up projects from scratch, sometimes – not always – with film as a starting point: preferably fantastic films, set in imaginary worlds. Projects are combined in a theme-driven festival, travelling around with 8 or 9 installations based on the ideas of Tessa van Grafhorst and Remke Oosterhuis, executed by theatre set designers, all together providing in one big 'playground for the imagination'. In January 2018 another festival edition starts touring film theatres in 11 Dutch cities, with 'books' as this edition's main theme... not only the stories, but also the letters, the printing process, the smell of ink, the tangibility of the paper.

Three elements are at the basis of De Taartrovers' work:

- Wondering: shaping a place of wonder where kids discover that simple, daily objects can be used in new and different ways.
- Exploring: kids come up with ideas too, there is no right or wrong way to do things, the inspiration is mutual.
- Creating: by using all your senses and your entire body.

Remke Oosterhuis: *"Although all this sounds pretty wild-and-with-no-boundaries, still at the basis is the profound introduction we want to offer our young audience to the world of film, by making cinema a small and personal experience. Playing is the main part of our film literacy."*

There's two extra goals that steer the work of De Taartrovers in a clear direction:

- Cultural goals: Offering a platform for artistic films that surprises children and often parents by their unique beauty.
- Social goals: Reaching out to children (target audience: 2-9 years old) that have a restricted access to the cultural life. Extra efforts are made through schools and social organisations to reach out to children with special needs. Among the Taartrovers' recent projects is a permanent hub (film lab) in a refugee asylum in Amsterdam.

More on [De Taartrovers](#).



THEME: BEYOND THE IMAGE

1. Whose perspective – the truth and the camera - Linda Sternö (Göteborg University)

In the Valand Academy at the Gothenburg University, students and teachers started a film school for children and developed a set of exercises. Linda Sternö: *“Children were learning how to read and write, and at the same time learning how to handle a camera. But there is no alphabet for the camera. So we decided to invent one.”* This ‘alphabet of the camera’ is an attempt to develop a film pedagogy from the practitioners’ point of view. It’s a work in progress (they’ve only reached half way through the alphabet) but the texts have recently been translated and are now available online. For the use of everyone: www.kameransabc.com.

This set of exercises makes you aware of the influence of images and raises awareness about your way of seeing them. They aim at understanding your own attitude towards what you see, so that this point of view can be expressed and discussed with other people.

When talking about film pedagogy and cinema literacy, it’s important to precisely define the element ‘film’ in a broad sense. *“Through these years of working with and learning from children, I have come to the conclusion that film pedagogy and cinema literacy should be about finding an attitude towards the camera and the image, both moving and still. I think cinema literacy and film pedagogy should not be about film as a product, but as a method, a way to understand (or attack) the world.”*



Living in a digital era adds a troublesome aspect to the word ‘film’. Film always was an analogue technique. With the coming of the digital technique, new work flows and processes have developed in making and screening films. If we continue using the word film in an analogue sense, while actually talking about a digital technique, we risk carrying on old assumptions and methods which might not be relevant today.

The camera can be used as a tool for knowledge production, like in the examples shown of pre-schoolers using a camera to capture the things they do. Cameras are there for young children whenever they want them, and can be used however they want to. They do not work with film - they work with a camera. The word ‘film’ here would feel as limiting them. Do teachers and film pedagogues really see the full possibilities in the tools that we are using? Do we see the full potential of the camera today?

There is one thing about the camera: it never lies. It captures what is in front of it. It tells the truth of a certain moment, from a certain distance. But even if an image is 'true', it never tells the whole truth. The aesthetics of the camera also define the ethics. Every time you frame an image, there are things you exclude. That is the essence of cinema: every time you see an image, you're able to imagine what is outside the frame, what is left out.

The best way to train critical thinking regarding cinema and images, is through practice: using the camera, not to tell a story, but as a method to understand things. Like understanding 'what makes people happy'. Answering that question, people often used an image. Like a young girl showing a picture taken while horse-riding, or an old lady showing pictures of a public toilet ("at my age, clean toilets, free of charge, allow me to go out and take part in city life"), or a young refugee showing a picture of a bed "in which he can sleep without fear tonight". Such pictures show you fragments of truth, different elements in life, various perspectives that otherwise you wouldn't have access to. Such images strongly differ from the ones you usually see in the media. Being surrounded by a massive flow of images, every day, wherever you go, still sometimes it feels like we're seeing the same images over and over again.

One of the questions dominating our work with children is: what images are lacking? In this massive flood of images in which we live today, what images and perspectives do not come through? The American analyst Bell Hooks writes about the representation of black people in photographic history. How to live with the visual heritage of images we have today, in which black people are either invisible and absent or disrespected? And what images should we produce today, not to end up in a similar situation? And on the other hand: what is it like for children growing up today, being so frequently photographed? How does that influence the image they have about themselves. Those images are always taken by adults, from an adult perspective, but when children themselves produce such images, you might get surprised by the results.



We see different things; we value different things. Every individual has an unique, personal perspective on the world. Nevertheless some people want us to unite and gather around one shared perspective. Through visual practice, we can take part in each other's perspectives and experiences.

In a democratic society we must be able to make visible a diversity of perspectives, to make the image of our society complex and nuanced.

To read and write a text is a democratic right today. To read and produce images should be equally considered a democratic right. Everybody should be able to understand how images are produced in order to become a critical consumer.

Check out [the ABC of the Camera!](#)

2. Dangerous Film – The child and difficult subject matter – Malena Janson (Assistant Professor in Film Studies & Film critic)

Do we 'send children out into the great dangerous world much too early'?

Who determines exactly what is a child? The UN, defining 'child' as 'a human being under the age of 18'? The concepts of both 'children' and 'childhood' differ in time and space.

On an academic level, discussions about childhood are dominated by two colliding visions:

- Children as competent creatures with a capacity to take part in the decision-making process.
- Children as vulnerable creatures that need our protection.

How much these two visions differ from each other is clearly shown when the topic 'sex' is under discussion:

- In the 1970's Sweden was known for its progressive approach towards sexuality: books about 'how babies are made' were best sellers for a 5-11-year-old audience, children were encouraged to be nude in kindergarten and explore their bodies. In children's films like HUGO AND JOSEPHINE, nakedness was not exceptional.
- Nowadays even in biology courses at school, physical characteristics of both sexes are no longer shown or illustrated.

So kids are considered even more fragile and to be more protected than in the 70s.

All those complicated subject matters seldom seem to be difficult for children, who understand them as an inherent part of their daily lives. The problem mainly seems to be: how to talk about it with adults?



HUGO AND JOSEPHINE

In a closing panel, Kim Bruun (DaBuf), Julia Jarl (BUFF Festival) and Florian Deleporte looked back upon today's topics.



From left to right: Per Eriksson, Florian Deleporte, Julia Jarl & Kim Bruun

Annex

ON STAGE INTERVIEW WITH SANNA LENKEN ABOUT HER FILM 'NIGHT GIRL'

NIGHT GIRL (aka NATTBARN), short film by Sanna Lenken, Sweden, 2017, 38'.

One day 14-year-old Iggy stands face to face with the young school photographer. No more than a casual contact, it feels as if he truly understands her. Iggy tries to contact him again, thus treading on dangerous ground. Made for Swedish television by Sanna Lenken (*MY SKINNY SISTER*), *NIGHT GIRL* (based on a graphic novel by Hanna Gustafsson) is a daring short film that breathes down the neck of a young teenager and reads the despair in her eyes. During the ECFA conference in Stockholm, Sanna Lenken was interviewed by Malena Janson. "Iggy fantasizes about sex, not yet knowing how things would be like in reality."

Today films about sexuality are often more restricted than in the seventies. Did you force any self-censorship upon yourself?

Lenken: The film starts with an animated pornographic scene of two men having sex. At first we thought about doing it as a live action scene, but starting the film with such raw images would have scared off the audience. Now the animation adds a humorous tone. The script follows Iggy in all her interests, like how she is curious about penises. From Swedish TV there was no pressure whatsoever to censor that.



NIGHT CHILDREN

What about the audience's reaction?

Lenken: At the cinema premiere, some 14-year-olds seemed a bit embarrassed about watching it with their mums and dads. Afterwards it was broadcasted on Swedish late night television, not exactly a moment when youngsters are watching. But now that Filmcentrum will distribute the film, reaching out towards a young audience, I hope there will be chances to discuss it with them.

When asking the expert audience today, most of them would be keen on screening the film for a 12+ audience.

Lenken: That was the age when I started thinking a lot about sex, asking myself questions and trying to find answers in books. The book *NATTBARN* was very popular among young adults, libraries started promoting it towards teenagers. I would have loved to read a book like that when I was 14.

How was it for Mimmi Cyon to play the role of Iggy?

Lenken: Difficult. Iggy stands very far from Mimmi's own extroverted character. In training, we gave her tasks, like trying to behave as if she had a secret to hide. I find it very important to make actors feel secure with me. But there is this fantasy scene in which she kisses a girl, and I told Mimmi: I want it to be a real kiss. As she was already 16 and very mature, I thought she knew... Afterwards she was shocked: "I didn't know tongues were involved!" I felt embarrassed as apparently we agreed on something she didn't understand, which was a tough lesson for me to learn.

After MY SKINNY SISTER, again you're indulging in a different subject matter.

Lenken: Sometimes producers send me scripts about young detectives, but those do not appeal to me. As a child I loved reading emotional stories. Suzanne Osten was one of my first idols.

What are you working on at the moment?

Lenken: I'm writing two films. One is again about Iggy and how she loses her virginity, based on Hanna Gustafsson's book IGGY FOR EVER. And together with Emma Broström (FLOCKEN), I'm writing a story about a girl that is sent to a foster home.



NIGHT CHILDREN

Summary: Gert Hermans for ECFA

With thanks to Per Eriksson, coordinator of the seminar