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STORSTADSFAROR

I MÖRKRETS BOJOR

ASTRID SÖDERBERGH WIDDING

Hasselblads Fotografiska AB as Film Producer 1915-1917

Sensationalism or Quest for Quality?

It has remained relatively unknown that the Swedish camera company Hasselblads Fotografiska AB went into film production in Gothenburg during three hectical summer seasons, from 1915-1917,[1] after which the company merged into the larger Skandia; for a long time, these early films were also regarded as lost. However, with the rediscovery of the original negatives to no less than 19 of the company's 30 feature films, new light could be shed on three years in the cinema of the teens. These years had been almost effaced from the map of Swedish film history, as the largest part of the Svenska Bio productions from these years by Sjöström, Stiller and others had been destroyed in an archive fire in 1941.

The history of Hasselblad is inextricably connected to that of Georg af Klercker, who directed all but one of the feature films produced by the company. Lieutenant af Klercker, who had left the army for the theatre, thereby causing a scandal, was recruited by producer Charles Magnusson as head of the new Svenska Bio studio at Lidingö 1911-13, when he left to work for Pathé Frères' Swedish branch and spent some time in Copenhagen. He returned to work with Hasselblad – after which he left film production, with the exception of an unsuccessful comeback in 1926.

One could have suspected that the restoration of parts of the rediscovered Hasselblad films would have caused numerous comments from Swedish film historians. However, with the exception of a few essays by Bengt Idestam-Almquist and Leif Furhammar, all that followed were some negative remarks by general film historians; af Klercker was considered superficial, mostly from a strict auteur perspective comparing his films to those of Sjöström and Stiller.[2] But the international rediscovery of the films, due to the Pordenone festival in 1986, led to their reintroduction within international film history.[3] In his dissertation on Swedish cinema 1912-20, John Fullerton has also analysed several aspects in af Klercker's films, e. g. their use of off screen space.[4]

What is striking to today's spectator is the elaborate visual style of the films; deep focus photography of high quality as well as advanced lighting devices, combined with a very precise narrative economy. However, it is less interesting to evaluate – as most historians have done – whether af Klercker

could be called »the third Swedish auteur« of the silent era, worthy of the same attention as his more renowned contemporaries. The most fruitful way of analysing these films is rather, I would suggest, to relate them to their historical context, and to contemporary production in particular, combining the study of the history of a company with discussing reception.

The period when Hasselblad produced films is, in many respects, a transitional era, which from the point of view of film production is characterised by sharp reversals. In the shadow of World War I, as production giants like France collapsed, Swedish cinema suddenly discovered its new possibilities to reach the world market. 1915-16, a large quantity of films in international style were produced, by Hasselblad as well as by its main competitor and predecessor Svenska Bio.[5] Another question is to what extent the Hasselblad productions developed another style, a narrative technique distinctive from that of Svenska Bio. The Hasselblad films have usually been characterised by their typically urban profile and their sensationalism. In 1917-18, the Svenska Bio production on the other hand was reoriented towards fewer productions, where Swedishness became a key word together with the reliance upon literary sources, with the cultural prestige that they brought along. Sensationalism was a stage that had passed by in a context where the film medium forcefully tried to establish its new status as art. However, it may be too schematic to consider the Hasselblad films as sensational only, in contrast to a supposedly later development towards quality films; this is a central question in this essay.

Narrative development is yet another question that lends itself to analysis, not only from a Swedish perspective but also in relation to international norms. How do these films relate to classical narration, with its claims for spatial and temporal coherence? This question is in focus among many silent film historians; how the Hollywood narrational mode gradually acquires dominance as it is integrated by smaller national cinemas, but also the resistance to Hollywood hegemony and the alternatives developed by these small producers. Within Swedish cinema, John Fullerton has traced a non-classical style during the transitional period, whereas Jan Olsson argues that this style, though obviously present in certain films, was not generally valid. By analysing a Stiller film produced by Svenska Bio, ALEXANDER DEN STORE (Alexander the Great, 1917), he points to the presence of a classical style; however, this might be enlarged also to the Hasselblad productions.[6]

Voices from the press

The events that led to the start of the Hasselblad company are impossible to map in any detail as source material is lacking. However, it is clear that the main purpose was not to produce films, as the memorandum of association was established for a new production company, but that the plans at first

rather concerned distribution. It was of utmost importance to interfere in the controversy between Nordisk Films and Pathé Frères, where

> [...] each of them had threatened to boycott the cinema proprietors who dared to buy films from their competitor. The new company now would make it their foremost object to show these two competing film factories that nobody was obliged to yield to their dictatorship. The new company thus intended to procure novel and beautiful pictures for the Swedish cinemas from other sources, i.e. the big film companies as well in America as on the European continent.[7]

In *Göteborgs Aftonblad* the discussion continued during the summer 1915 on »the conflict between the foreign big film companies that had become extremely grave last spring, and their endeavour to rule supreme, each of them in their market«. This is mentioned as the explicit motive for Hasselblad to turn to production: »Already at that time it was announced that we should be able to produce fully satisfactory and good films for use in our own country without being dependent on supply from abroad.«[8] The local perspective adopted in the article gives the somewhat misleading impression that there existed no Swedish production at the time. But the explicit aim to acquire independency towards foreign productions interestingly prefigures the later period of the so called »golden age« of Swedish cinema, 1917-23, with its even more exaggerated nationalist discourse in the press.[9] The level of ambition, however, was quite modest from the outset: »The idea is to produce small comedies as well as more serious films«.[10]

In another article from the following year, it is confirmed that these productions were considered more or less an experiment, but that the positive experience had led to the decision not only to continue, but also to extend production significantly.[11] It might also be worth noting that the company had already, by way of its immediate predecessor Victoria, successfully started producing nonfiction films. This production continued until the merger with Skandia in 1918, with no less than 144 titles passing on to the Board of Censors, many of which overlap the fiction films thematically or visually. Probably, material shot on the same occasions was used both for fictional and nonfictional purposes.

The Hasselblad production of feature films started with ROSEN PÅ TISTELÖN (The Rose on Thistle Island, 1915), based on a novel by Emilie Flygare-Carlén. From the plot descriptions included in the film programs it becomes clear that the unhappy love story of the novel was changed in Willy Grebst's film version into a romantic story with a happy end. Also, parts of the story that could have caused censorship problems were eliminated, such as the romance between the heroine and a smuggler, or the murder of a customs officer.

As suggested above, the standard image of the Hasselblad feature productions portrays the company as a stronghold of sensationalism, influenced

by Danish cinema of the teens. A comparison to the later policy of Svenska Bio reveals that Hasselblad produced no literary adaptations before the merger into Skandia, with the exception of Flygare-Carlén, a choice that could hardly be considered as a search for cultural prestige, even though her novels were immensely popular. On the other hand, the company's search for original scripts was at that time considered as a quest for quality.[12]

Several films also testify to a social ambition, a search to win recognition by seriousness of purpose. It is also possible to trace a reorientation of the company's production policy in this direction as the censors banned the thriller MYSTERIET NATTEN TILL DEN 25:E (The Mystery of the Night Before the 25th). But well before this setback, a couple of scripts that could hardly be considered sensational, had already been brought to the screen by the company. AKTIEBOLAGET HÄLSANS GÅVA (The Gift of Health, Ltd.), classified as drama or satire, and with a script by no less a person than the film censor Gustaf Berg, explicitly aimed at polemizing against quackery.[13] VÄGEN UTFÖR (The Way Down) deals with morphine addiction, and FÖRSTADSPRÄSTEN (The Suburban Vicar), scripted by Danish author Harriet Bloch, evokes social problems. And Manne Göthson's STORSTADSFAROR (Perils of the Big City, the only Hasselblad film by another director), was subtitled »Social Drama«. FÖR HEM OCH HÄRD (For Hearth and Home), finally, was the only war film to be produced in Sweden during World War I, made as propaganda for the emergency service and financed by fundings from the Crown Princess. The sensations are thus clearly counterbalanced, and Hasselblad's productions are situated right in the middle of the film historical intersection between despised public market amusement and emerging art form.

In discussing the reception of the Hasselblad films by the press, perhaps the most interesting part is to try tracing a specific discourse on the history of the company; this kind of discourse is most likely to be found within the film press. In the first volume of *Filmbladet*, there are only a few short paragraphs concerning Hasselblads. Thus, in July 1915, an announcement is published that Aktiebolaget Victorias filmbyrå has been constituted, and in the next issue from the same month, there is a short note announcing that Swedish film dramas based on original scripts are being shot in Gothenburg on the initiative of Nils Bouveng.[14] The second volume, 1916, pays much attention to Hasselblad, in March, by a notice under the headline »Important filming in Sweden the approaching season«, where the company's ads for actors and »really good and original scripts« are also explicitly mentioned.[15] In April, a longer »Film letter from Gothenburg« is published, which presents the staff of the company and particularly emphasises the thorough scrutiny of potential scripts:

> Thus when a manuscript arrives it must be read first by lieutenant af Klercker, then by Nils Bouveng, managing director at Hasselblads, and finally by mr Georg Hasselblad. Moreover, most of the manuscripts have to be dramatised for the cinema and all of them have to be remade in one way or another. Many of them have to be

›censored‹ by the trio Klercker, Hasselblad, Bouveng; on that day only when the Gothenburg journalist from *Filmbladet* interviewed the director, 30 manuscripts came in. But then they had been sent both from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and even from Germany. Many Swedish authors of great reputation have contributed their works, but for the time being their names will be kept secret.[16]

That the companies in several ways practised a certain self-censorship is well documented by recent research; however, that censorship as metaphor was used also by contemporaries in order to describe the script selection process is worth noting. The pretensions to quality were obviously high in the Hasselblad company. This is confirmed by a long notice in June, where the staff is presented again, now together with three »experienced operators responsible for the camerawork«, and a detailed description of the new studio at Otterhällan, the installation of which is said to have »been done with American quickness within two months only, but nevertheless it is altogether first class and equipped with all the arrangements belonging to a modern film studio«.[17] In the August issue, the scripts filmed during the summer season were listed. It was particularly noted that »[t]he authors are mostly Swedes. Many of them are well known. And it is certain that the cinema-going audiences during the winter will enjoy a pleasant surprise when they find out how solid and splendid the produced Swedish manuscripts have turned out to be«.[18] In yet another presentation of the company's staff, it is furthermore underlined that several actors were recruited from abroad: both Nils Chrisander and Sybil Smolowa came from Berlin. The Swedishness functions as guarantee of the quality of the scripts, their national solidity, whereas the actors from abroad lend an aura of international importance to the productions.

In December the same year, the result of an inquiry is presented concerning the task of Swedish film art, addressed to »the only three film directors who for the time being are engaged in the direction of films in this country«: Sjöström, Stiller, af Klercker.[19] The result of the inquiry was somewhat meagre as the directors seem to have been busy elsewhere; af Klercker's response was the most eloquent, commenting on the importance of naturalness both in acting and settings. But the content of the inquiry as such is less interesting than the fact that Klercker – with both picture and signature – here obviously figures as one of the three first-rate directors of his time. This also clearly testifies to the fact that the Hasselblad company was well established in Swedish film culture by the end of 1916. The year after, *Filmbladet* follows up its coverage of the company with a note on »Hasselblad's new productions« in the May issue.[20] In 1918, there is a long report on the merger of Hasselblad, the Swedish Pathé company and Victoria into Filmindustri A.-B. Skandia, in terms that make it clear that this should be regarded as an advantageous expansion of film industry in Sweden.[21]

Summing up the Hasselblad years in an article from *Biografägaren* 1935,

which ends in an analysis of the Hasselblad film AKTIEBOLAGET HÄLSANS GÅVA, a general conclusion is offered on the company: »Victoria co-operated with Hasselblads in Gothenburg, who had begun to make Swedish film productions. These were considered promising for their time. Nils Bouveng and his director, Georg af Klercker, wanted to reach a higher level with their film productions than the cheap romance common at that time. Distinguished people took notice and supported the new attempts.«[22] This posthumous reputation differs significantly from the standard picture of a company focussed on the sensational and thrilling only, that has been drawn by older Swedish film historians, but seems all the more well grounded in the press of the period.

If, then, this history of the Hasselblad company that may be sketched from the reception of the press is to be compared to the actual representations in the films or their patterns of narration, what conclusions might then be drawn? Both in the sensation films and the social problem films, one issue remains at the centre, namely the question of modernity. I will suggest that this question remains closely linked to the representation of women. I will also try to summarise a few points where the question of the modern by means of its cinematic expressions – such as lighting, editing – is extended to the stylistic level.

Ambiguous modern women

An ambivalent attitude towards modernity was generally widespread in Scandinavia at the turn of the century. In this context, the contrast between urban and rural seems particularly central, or to put it in more general terms: the contrast between the new world and the old, which turns out to be typical of the Hasselblad films. In an essay on Scandinavian folk museums, Mark B. Sandberg argues that industrialisation and the rapid breakthrough of modernity in Scandinavia in the 19th century had led to a sense of loss and nostalgia towards traditional culture. »As actual folk bodies from the rural population increasingly crossed the line from country to city, becoming urban spectators of their former culture themselves, the absent folk body, collectively imagined, acquired great representational currency [...].«[23] At first sight, the folk museums may seem to be situated at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum from the spectacles and visual attractions associated with modernity. However, »a closer examination of the ways early folk museum visitors articulated the impressions of their visits suggests that the received experience of spectating sometimes exceeded the founding paradigm in important ways.«[24] This ambiguity is as true of cinema. Several Hasselblad films also combine the portrayal of rural culture with urban sensations for which the company has above all become famous; this pattern occurs both in KÄRLEKEN

NATTENS BARN

SEGRAR (Love's Victory) or FYRVAKTARENS DOTTER (The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter).

The turning of folk culture into a spectacle, displayed to an audience, is also present in ROSEN PÅ TISTELÖN, in the description of the sight that awaits a traveler on the island thirty years after the dramatic events told had occurred, on the same spot: a small inn.

> Business at the inn was great, and Lindgren earned many an extra coin only by gently drawing a curtain from a pane of glass in front of curious travelers. The pane of glass was part of a door in a remote corner, and whoever looked through it only saw a small room with a bed, a table and a couple of chairs. At the table, an old woman was sitting in a starched cap, crumpled and wrinkled. Her feeble hands were playing mechanically with two small shells. There were no traces of beauty in the sallow face, emaciated by sorrow – ›and yet‹, said the inn-keeper's wife, who used to sneak behind her husband, ›she used to be called The Rose on Thistle Island‹.[25]

This quotation relates the experience of spectating to modernity and places woman as a contradictory key figure at its very centre; in the Hasselblad productions, the female figure also appears as a central expression both of the possibilities of modernity, its risks and the search for traditional values.

In *Babel and Babylon*, Miriam Hansen discusses a number of the myths and clichés that contribute to articulating modernity in a complex way within American silent cinema. Particularly, her study of INTOLERANCE demonstrates, through apparent contradictions and narrative transformations, how modernity is expressed both in the excessive way of portraying femininity in the film and in its way of registering both social and sexual transformations in society.[26] In the Hasselblad films as well, transgressed identities, both sexually and socially, are in focus. In several films, the cabaret is a central place on the borderline between two worlds; it offers the possibility of new careers for peasant girls or maids.

The poor peasant girl Olga in KÄRLEKEN SEGRAR enjoys a huge success as cabaret artist, and the maid Violet in NATTENS BARN (Children of the Night), having been sentenced for theft in spite of her innocence, leaves for the United States (which represent the very essence of modernity) on her release and becomes equally successful as a music hall singer. Both films focus upon the visual performance to an audience. Thereby, these women are clearly sexualised, but most particularly, they become representatives of a double-edged modernity. On one hand, there is the promise of an independent or glamorous urban life. On the other hand there are the ever-present threats of white slavery or drugs, the latter being the destiny awaiting the heroine Mary in VÄGEN UTFÖR. And Flora in STORSTADSFAROR (Perils of the Big City), who is at first presented as housemaid, then appears as a vamp at the decadent cabaret The Night Owl, barely to be recognised. The staging of the scene clearly demonstrates her fate being worse than death, which also threats her innocent friend, who, however, instead saves Flora through the help of a Salvation Army worker. The whole setting recalls numerous other films on the white slavery theme, from the Danish counterparts from 1910 and onwards – DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDEL (White Slavery), produced in two versions in 1910 by Fotoramafilm and Nordisk Films, or DEN HVIDE SLAVEHANDELS SIDSTE OFFER (The Last Victim of White Slavery) from 1911 – to the American white slavery films, with TRAFFIC IN SOULS from 1913 as the perhaps best known example. In these films, the heroines are thus ambiguous; however, the erotic decadence is counterbalanced by contrasting images, making them acceptable to censorship in all its dimensions, from the official Board of Censors to the judgement of press and audience.

As character development was limited in Swedish cinema of the period, these female characters are turned into series of rapidly succeeding icons of women in modernity. This is true also of Violet in NATTENS BARN, who from a helpless, fainting maid is unexpectedly turned into an active femme fatale and then suddenly into a countess, as she marries her former employer; here again, the cabaret is portrayed positively, as the very seal of the new world, offering new and formerly unexplored possibilities for women.

The new potentials of life in the city also offer these women on screen the

possibility to take on temporary identities in urban space. In I MÖRKRETS BOJOR (In the Fetters of Darkness), Elinor temporarily joins a band of robbers that she meets in a bar, in order to prevent a burglary in the house where she used to live and where her son, with whom she has lost contact, now lives. The »good« motive, however, never totally conceals the pure pleasure of watching her disguise, her way of adopting the gestures and attitudes of the criminal gang. Once again, femininity is on display, and values of the old world – in this case, the stable and unchanging life in Elinor's old villa and garden – are contrasted to but also combined with values of the new, such as the ability to disappear temporarily or to take on a new identity in the anonymous big city, or the possibilities of communication society (as Elinor sends a telegram to warn her son).

Exotism, another significant feature of many films from this period, also appears in Hasselblad productions like I MINNENAS BAND (In Memories' Trammels) or NOBELPRISTAGAREN (The Nobel Prize Winner). The parallels in the history of cinema and modernity are, of course, legion: from the exotic attractions of the world fairs and fairgrounds, by way of the travel genre of early cinema and the actualities from faraway places, to the contrasts in the emerging classical American cinema between white and black culture in particular.

This exotism is in Hasselblad films exclusively associated with women. The exotic woman is on the side of a more primitive society. In I MINNENAS BAND, the gipsy girl Roszica marries a count, but her longing for freedom becomes too obsessive and so she leaves civilisation and returns to her family. In NOBELPRISTAGAREN, dr Arel who leaves for the front with his fiancée falls in love with a woman made homeless by war, the darkhaired, hot-headed and impatient Olga, as his blond fiancée after an accident has become paralysed for life. To these stereotypes are added the erotic qualities of the exotic women. On the other hand, in NOBELPRISTAGAREN there is a perspective of integration, which Rashit M. Yangirov has also traced in Russian cinema of the period. Here, the representative of the »primitive«, of »nature«, is at least partly integrated into culture and the society of development. But still, »the other woman« clearly remains the »other« woman, and thus highlights cultural clashes in modern society.[27]

Myriam Tsikounas on her part has analysed representations of the sharp confrontation or conflict between two worlds, the old and the new, in Russian films 1914-1917 (a pattern recognisable both from American or French cinema of the period).[28] A similar pattern could be discerned also in the Hasselblad films. An example is offered by the representation of nobility, in KÄRLEKEN SEGRAR and NATTENS BARN, but also in I MINNENAS BAND, I MÖRKRETS BOJOR, FÖRSTADSPRÄSTEN or REVELJ (Reveille). In these films, a woman stands in the centre, having to choose between the different worlds. If nobility is represented positively in the first two examples, this is not the case in the other films, where the perspective is reversed. In FÖRSTADSPRÄSTEN, to mention but

one example, the comfortable life at the beautiful von Tillisch estate in the countryside is contrasted to the rude life of the suburbian pastor, leading an everyday life caught up in poverty and social problems. But the noble environment is clearly characterised as limited and narrow-minded; prejudiced against the pastor, lacking joy and spontaneity. No wonder, then, that the heroine Elin, after hesitating for a long time, finally chooses to live with the pastor instead of marrying her noble fiancé, thus choosing the new world instead of the old, which is represented as a historical *impasse*.

Against the noblemen of the old world, Hasselblad films frequently offer portraits of scientists – the groundbreakers of the new world. Most noteworthy among these is a female character, Inger in MELLAN LIV OCH DÖD (Between Life and Death). She joins her fiancé dr Brinck in medical research, and so becomes one of the numerous scientists of the Hasselblad films, the engineers of the new world. Together, they are engaged in developing a new antidote that would revolutionise medicine. However, dr Brinck falls in love with another woman, and out of jealousy, Inger attempts to poison her rival. Then, on her own, she succeeds in developing the antidote, which saves the poisoned girl, and before she leaves the country forever she gives her former fiancé the credit for the discovery. I find Inger particularly interesting in her role as the only female scientist, beside the numerous cabaret girls and maids. Despite her obvious skilfulness, the highly negative connotations associated with this modern woman adds yet another aspect to the high degree of ambivalence that is characteristic of modernity.

If then, as Miriam Hansen has argued, cinema functioned both as part and symptom of the crisis as which modernity was perceived, it is equally clear that the female characters on screen, as projections, function as expressions of or responses to exactly the same crisis. The plurality of modernity, together with its erosion of both gender hierarchies and social or cultural structures – that is, the breakdown of boundaries of traditional society, between good and evil, virgin and whore, private and public – leads to the multiplication of overlapping or contrasting gender stereotypes. Thus, the multitude of perspectives on female identity displayed in the Hasselblad films also suggests that this female identity is both discursively constructed and historically changeable.

Light, staging and editing

In an article entitled »La Nouvelle Mission de Feuillade; or, What Was Mise-en-Scène«, David Bordwell notes that the traditional *découpage/tableau* duality in silent cinema has been recast by researchers such as Tom Gunning, Kristin Thompson, Richard Abel or Ben Brewster.

They attribute the rise of intrascene editing principally to filmmakers in the United States while positing that Russian, Scandinavian, and Western Eu-

ropean filmmakers elaborated an alternative system predicated upon depth staging. These scholars have suggested that while there are some continuities between the depth shot of the 1910s and the flat, distant, »primitive« *tableau*, the differences may be significant enough to warrant considering the years 1909 to 1918 as not simply a prolongation of primitive cinema but instead a major transitional phase, perhaps even a distinctive stylistic period.[29]

In the last chapter of his book on film style, »On Staging in Depth«, Bordwell returns to the same general idea, and examines among other things the deep staging during this transitional period in film history. He states that »the director of the 1910s could lay out the action in considerable depth. In a vast set (some were sixty feet front to back), the playing areas might be multiplied, with distinct zones activated in the course of a scene.«[30]

This is true not least in the case of Hasselblad (the studio at Otterhällan was also more than sixty feet in length). The films tend to rely on staging in depth rather than on cutting, yet not without noteworthy exceptions. But in general, through a complex play with centering, creating a dynamic flux between stability and instability, they offer a clear example of deep staging cinematography. According to Bordwell, »in the absence of cutting-based stylistic norms, imaginative filmmakers took rough schemas from early film and developed them into a *mise en scène* displaying a range of emphasis, dynamism and refinement suitable to the new complexities of longer films.«[31] Particularly interesting is the relation between this mise-en-scène and the lighting devices used in the films. In their discussion of pictorial staging in the theatre, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs state: »Advances in lighting did thus make the depth of the stage more available as an arena of the action rather than a pictorial background.«[32] In general, this seems to be true not only of theatre, but also of cinema. However, and somewhat paradoxically, in the case of Hasselblad, the experiments of the company seem to point in the other direction, towards a lesser degree of lighting, whereas deep staging remains the central principle of spatial organization. Darkness also figures as a theme already in the title of several films from the company: NATTENS BARN, MYSTERIET NATTEN TILL DEN 25:E, I MÖRKRETS BOJOR, NATTLIGA TONER (Night Music).

The critics regularly noted the sceneries in the Hasselblad productions, as in most Swedish films of the period, but their reception also offers a certain amount of commentaries to the lighting, one of the most noteworthy stylistic specificities in the company's productions, commentaries which are sometimes related to the discussion of the landscape. Hasselblad films defy the idea, expressed among others by Fabrice Revault d'Allonnes, that a theatrical light should be characteristic of pre-classical as well as classical cinema, and that it is only with modern cinema that more naturalistic lighting devices have become predominant. This is motivated by an empirical fact: that it was not until quite late in the history of cinema that the sensitivity of the raw film was sufficiently developed to allow a lesser degree of illumination, particularly if an image in

depth is intended; today's 400 ASA should be compared to 10-20 ASA until the end of the 30s.[33] According to Revault d'Allonnes, the very possibility of depth in the image is directly dependent on a high degree of light. However, in spite of these limitations, Hasselblad films make little or no use of stage-like lighting. In their book *Theater to Cinema*, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs offer a framework for such a rereading of lighting in cinema, separately from the devices of the theatre. They »reject the view that the history of the cinema is one of a steady emancipation from theatrical models. [...] Film lighting, for example, always owed more to still photography and painting than it did to theatrical lighting.«[34]

Among the early light experiments is a scene from MINISTERPRESIDENTEN (The Minister President), filmed during the summer 1916. Here, an entire sequence where the corrupt lawyer Alphonse Carrel commits burglary at the banker Leroux' place, in order to steal some documents from a safe deposit that would compromise the president and hero, Jean Bazard, is filmed with Carrel's electric torch as the only source of light. However, while this scene was successfully staged, little attention seems to have been paid to narrative continuity in the lighting, particularly in the last reel. One critic of the period complained about this: »In one image, the electric light is on, in the next, occurring at about the same time, Our Lord's brilliant sunshine provides the lighting, and the next moment one reaches out for the electric again. Thus, it is not clear which time of the day is intended.«[35]

The following year, I MÖRKRETS BOJOR contained another remarkable scene of burglary. Here, a man having received a warning sits in the dark in a living room waiting for the thieves. The maid switches off the ceiling lamp before leaving, and the man then goes on to switch off the lamp on his desk, so that the room becomes completely dark and his presence can barely be noticed. When the thieves arrive, however, one of them carries an electric torch which at his opening of the living room door is directed straight towards the camera. Deeds of darkness seem to inspire dark images. This preference for the darkened screen might be related to the critique of electric arc lighting on stage in the nineteenth century. Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes how the transformation of the stage by the new types of light carried new challenges and possibilities, but was met with scepticism in some respects: »The disproportionally strong and intense light [...] washes out all the surrounding colours and because theatrical devices become crudely apparent in the bright light, it destroys all illusion«.[36] Even though the problem with colours had dissappeared in a cinematic context, the awareness of the artificiality of the set and the possibly destroyed illusion is equally true of the bright film image. Schivelbusch's claim that »darkness heightens individual perceptions, magnifying them many times« also motivates the Hasselblad option of privileging the shadows, which gives a particular intensity to the single source of light when it appears on the screen.[37]

In a somewhat contradictory manner, the history of the Hasselblad company both seems to confirm and to contradict traditional historical arguments on the films. The photographic qualities, the lighting effects, the remarkable stagings in depth mentioned both by critics of the time and later historians remain central characteristics of the company's films.

At the same time, the variations in the uses of continuity editing defy simplistic classifications in »pre-classical« versus »classical«. If the stylistic emphasis in the Hasselblad productions, with their emphasis on light effects and stage-like compositions, clearly lies on mise-en-scène rather than cutting, it is also clear, as I have shown elsewhere, that they cannot be seen as unambiguous representatives of a non-classical or pre-classical mode of narration.[38] They seem to introduce a parallel mode in relation to classical narration rather than falling behind. It is obvious, however, that genre hierarchies or pre-established ideas on the complexity of certain narrative forms tend to block a more precise understanding of how the films are actually narrated. That the most substantial example of classical style in the entire production of the company is to be found in one of the most simple narratives, the uncomplicated comedy LÖJTNANT GALENPANNA (Lieutenant Madcap) may not be expected and thus disregarded; the opposite is true of the detective story MYSTERIET NATTEN TILL DEN 25:E or the war film FÖR HEM OCH HÄRD, which both stylistically and with regard to composition are among the least elaborated Hasselblad productions. However, the general narrative complexity of the Hasselblad films, from deep staging to continuity cutting, points to the need of less rigid dichotomies in the analysis of European cinemas of the teens.

The reception of the press, which is still the central source as to actual responses from audiences, has little to tell about narration as such, but is as contradictory as the issues of representation and style. The quest for quality outlined above is clearly in focus. Here, yet another aspect is added in the late FYRVAKTARENS DOTTER, where the portrayal of landscape is eloquently foregrounded by the critics, echoing the reception of the Svenska Bio production TERJE VIGEN (1917) by Victor Sjöström, the film that marked the beginning of the so called »golden age« of Swedish cinema. This film seems to represent an effort from the company to renew production according to new demands. But hand in hand with this search for quality, sensationalism remained constantly present throughout the history of the company, along with the risk of being blacklisted by censors and critics with the standard insult of the time, incarnating what was considered the threat of American culture: Nick Carter.[39] In spite of the contradictions, however, Hasselblad clearly held the position as main challenger to the dominant producer Svenska Bio, enjoying large critical acclaim which testifies to the popularity of the films.

The story of Hasselblad, finally, still contains several questions that, at

present, may not be solved. Did Pathé Frères play an active role in establishing the new company? How about the missing films – is it possible that they might revise the general picture of Hasselblad? Does the company's merger into Skandia mean that it disappeared without leaving any distinct traces? Still, the bits and pieces here recollected suggests that a specific profile of the company might be discerned, a company producing films of high technical quality, situating itself in the midst of the contradictions of the transitional era.

Notes

1 The following article summarizes parts of a study in Swedish by the author, *Stumfilm i brytningstid, Stil och berättande i Georg af Klerckers filmer* [Silent Cinema in Transition, Style and Narration in the films of Georg af Klercker], Aura förlag, Stockholm 1998.

2 Bengt Idestam-Almquist, *Filmstaden Göteborg, Hasselblads–Georg af Klercker– en bortglömd epok* [Göteborg City of Cinema, Hasselblads – G af K – A Forgotten Era], Elanders, Göteborg 1971; Leif Furhammar, »Filmpionjär i skuggan av Sjöström och Stiller« [Film Pioneer in the Shadow of Sjöström and Stiller], *Chaplin* 208, 1/1987, pp. 26-29; Rune Waldekranz, *Filmens historia*, vol 1, Norstedts, Stockholm 1978, pp. 481, 490, 540; Gösta Werner, *Den svenska filmens historia*, Norstedts, Stockholm 1979, p. 19.

3 Kristin Thompson & David Bordwell, *Film History – An Introduction*, Mc Graw Hill, Inc., New York etc. 1994, p. 65; Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *Encyclopedia of European Cinema*, Cassell & BFI, London 1995, p. 243.

4 John Fullerton, »The Development of a System of Representation in Swedish Film 1912–1920«, Dissertation, Dept. of Film Studies, Univ. of East Anglia, May 1994.

5 According to *Långfilm i Sverige 1910-1919* [Feature Films in Sweden 1910-1919], Bertil Wredlund & Rolf Lindfors eds., which lists all films longer than 750 metres, 51 Swedish films were produced during these two years. In *Svensk Filmografi 1*, Lars Åhlander ed., Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala 1986, where all feature films are listed, the result is 79 films.

6 Fullerton, op. cit.; Jan Olsson, »Förstorade attraktioner, klassiska närbilder«, *Aura. Filmvetenskaplig tidskrift* II: 1-2, 1996, pp. 34-79.

7 *Göteborgs Aftonblad*, Apr 13, 1915.

8 *Göteborgs Aftonblad*, Jul 3, 1915.

9 For a thorough analysis of this period, see Bo Florin, *Den nationella stilen, Studier i den svenska filmens guldålder* [The National Style. Studies in the Golden Age of Swedish Cinema], diss., Aura förlag, Stockholm 1997.

10 Ibid.

11 *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, Feb 29, 1916.

12 The company's script competition in a prestigious weekly magazine, *Veckojournalen*, was but one sign of this.

13 The censors noted that the film should be seen as »the base for a strong tendency against quackery and quack remedy«. Censor card 16. 684, The Swedish Board of Film Censors.

14 *Filmbladet* 1:12, Jul 1, 1915, p. 159; 1:13, Jul 15, 1915, p. 166.

15 *Filmbladet* 2:5, Mar 1, 1916, p. 68.

16 *Filmbladet* 2:7, Apr 1, 1916, p. 100.

17 *Filmbladet* 2:11, Jun 1, 1916, p. 156.

18 *Filmbladet* 2:16, Aug 15, 1916, p. 214.

19 *Filmbladet* 2:24, Dec 18, 1916, p. 346.

20 *Filmbladet* 3:9, May 1, 1917, p. 131.

21 *Filmbladet* 4:8, Apr 15, 1918, p. 141.
22 *Biografägaren* 10:19, Nov 30, 1935, p. 11.
23 Mark B. Sandberg, »Effigy and Narrative«, in: *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Leo Charney & Vanessa R. Schwartz eds., Univ. of California Press, Berkeley etc. 1995, p. 325.
24 Ibid., p. 321.
25 Emilie Flygare-Carlén (1842), *Rosen på Tistelön*, Åhlen & Åkerlunds, Göteborg 1913, p. 207.
26 Miriam Hansen, *Babel & Babylon*, Harvard UP, Cambridge Mass. etc. 1991, pp. 199-217.
27 Rashit M. Yangirov, »L'›accent ethnique‹ dans le premier cinéma russe«, *Cinéma sans frontières/Images Across Borders*, Roland Cosandey & François Albera eds., Ed. Payot, Lausanne / Nuit Blanche Ed., Québec 1995, pp. 106-121.
28 Myriam Tsikounas, »La représentation de l'›ailleurs‹ dans les films russes«, ibid., pp. 314-328.
29 David Bordwell, «La Nouvelle Mission de Feuillade; or, What Was Mise-en Scène«, *The Velvet Light Trap* 37, 1996, p. 10.
30 Bordwell, *On The History of Film Style*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass. etc. 1997, p. 179.
31 Ibid., p. 198.
32 Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theater to Cinema, Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*, Oxford UP, Oxford / New York 1997, p. 150 f.
33 Fabrice Revault d'Allonnes, *La lumière au cinéma*, Eds. Cahiers du cinéma, Paris 1991, p. 22.
34 Brewster and Jacobs, op. cit., p. 214.
35 *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, Sep 20, 1916.
36 Wolfgang Schivelbusch [1988], *Disenchanted Night, The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, Univ of California Press, Berkeley etc. 1995, pp. 199, 202.
37 Ibid., p. 221.
38 »Towards Classical Narration? Georg af Klercker in Context«, by the author, in: *Nordic Explorations*, John Fullerton & Jan Olsson eds., John Libbey, London etc. 1999, pp. 197-203.
39 Ulf Boëthius offers an elaborate analysis of the Nick Carter phenomenon in Swedish literature in his book *När Nick Carter drevs på flykten* [When Nick Carter was chased away], Gidlunds, Stockholm 1989.