

Abstract by Malena Janson

”Good Suburban Kids Without Prejudice. On the (Im)Balance Between Aesthetics and Education in Swedish Children’s Film”

The history of Swedish children’s film is by large characterized by the will to create a cinema of best intentions. That is, a kind of cinema not only meant to entertain its audience, but also educate it. Almost every single Swedish film produced for a young audience is more or less permeated by pedagogical intentions. These either take form as explicit facts and admonitions, or, more often, are mediated more subtly as stories with a moral, containing good role models. But they are always coloured by adults’ ideas on children and childhood; so called childhood discourses.

As a result of this cinema of best intentions, education has been favoured over aesthetics. This means, that the artistic aspects of the films have been over-shadowed by the pedagogical. While the film for a grown-up audience has gone through major changes, both technically and aesthetically, the development of children’s film has been almost nonexistent. And in case the artistic aspect for once has been permitted to dominate a film, such as in ”Hugo and Josefin” (1968), the film has been considered ”difficult”, ”weird” and ”unsuitable” for children. The imbalance between aesthetics and education in Swedish children’s film can, from a power perspective, be seen as an ”oppression of benevolence”: For the sake of ”their own best” children are denied strong emotional experiences. Or, might it just as well be for the sake of keeping the adult power intact?

This paper asserts that aesthetics and education are not as inconsistent as the history of Swedish children’s cinema maintains.. Lennart Hellsing, well-known author of children’s books, has claimed that ”all pedagogical art is bad art, and all good art is pedagogical”. By analyzing last year’s successful musical ”Kidz in da Hood”, I will show how a humanistic message about the importance of empathy, freedom from prejudice, and solidarity, is brought about in a film that on many levels make use of artistic cinematic devices.

This paper is inspired by Michel Foucault’s ideas on power, knowledge and oppression, as well as modern theories on childhood, by, among others, Jens Qvortrup, Karin Helander, Anne Higonnet and Patricia Holland.