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Ingrid S. Holtar

Feminism on Screen

Feminist Filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Thesis for the Degree of
Philosophiae Doctor
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Art and Media Studies



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NOTES ON TRANSLATIONS

This is a dissertation written in English about Norwegian filmmaking and film culture. Because of this, extensive translations from Norwegian to English have been necessary. All translations of quotes from Norwegian publications and films (as well as from Danish and Swedish) are my own, unless otherwise specified. Here I want to thank proof-reader Trond-Atle Farestveit for help and input. For clarity and flow, I have opted to introduce the Norwegian names of organizations and institutions first with the English translation given in parenthesis. After the first introduction, I will, with the exceptions of production and distribution companies, continue to use the English translation.

I have furthermore opted to give an English translation of all film titles cited in this dissertation. I use the official English title where one exists. Film titles are first cited as *Original title / English Title or Translation*, and they are listed in this same way in the Filmography. Upon later mention, the English title will be used.

In the Works Cited and Filmography, I have opted for an alphabetical order where the Norwegian special letters Æ and Å are alphabetized as A, and Ø is alphabetized as O.

CH 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. “The women are coming”

In 1979, a Danish journalist and researcher living in Norway summarized her take on Norwegian cinema for the Danish newspaper *Politiken*. Under the heading “Come to Norway, ma, if you want to see women directing film”, she wrote: “Norway has a very weak film tradition, and in many respects, we usually regard Norway as culturally challenged. Yet, this is a mindset that now is under pressure, as there has been a veritable explosion in women’s politics and film production, and the place where they meet” (Fabricius 1979, n.p.).

In the 1970s, feminist ideas spread across most of the Western world, its impact materializing in movements for women’s liberation. The new feminist impulses reached Norway among other in the form of an American backpacker. Jo Freeman, a political science major working on her Ph.D. and a leading figure of the burgeoning women’s liberation movement in the U.S., had spent her summer travelling around Western Europe and distributing feminist literature. On initiative of the newly established New Feminist group *Blid, men beinhard* (Cheerful but Fierce), her hitchhiking tour had now come to Norway, and in August 1970 she addressed a chockfull University of Oslo auditorium (Hagemann 2004, 276). Talking about the right to equal pay and the need for women-exclusive groups to create new political consciousness, her speech is often credited with igniting feminist flames among the young women attendees. Many of them were students impatient with and disillusioned by what they experienced as a false promise of equality. As one woman recalls: “I was ready, but this was an avalanche! I had [already] read about the American women’s movement in an American newspaper, and I thought: ‘Oh God, this is what I have been waiting for!’” (Aanesen 2018, 16).

This avalanche became the new women’s movement in Norway: A broad social movement bent on challenging male domination in all its forms and changing the self-understanding of thousands of people. Through a wide array of interventions into public life, the new women’s movement created a women’s public sphere, developing language, analysis, and forms of activity with the aim of enabling women to understand their own oppression and to organize for its end (Haukaa 1982; Danielsen 2013). In 1978, the editors of the Norwegian feminist magazine *Sirene* created what they called a “miniature lexicon” of the issues they had covered since their first

publication in 1973. The lexicon spans several pages, alphabetically listing their coverage of issues such as the right to safe, legal, and self-determined abortion, women's work, women's history, the housewife and paid domestic labor, and women's culture. Among the pages there is a collage that gives a timeline of the major developments connected to the new women's movement in Norway. Here, between the years 1976 and 1977, we find portrait pictures of the three film directors Laila Mikkelsen, Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg next to captions that begin with the statement: "The women are coming" (LouLarsen 1978, 34-35).

Indeed, in Norwegian film, women were coming. In film historical accounts of Norwegian cinema, the second half of the 1970s stands out as the period when women entered as directors of feature film. Like in many national film industries, Norwegian film production had historically been a severely male dominated domain. As strikingly pointed out by Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, exactly "zero per cent of Norwegian feature films between 1911 and 1948 were directed by a woman" (2019, 35). For the most part of the era of silent cinema, women had been absent from key positions in Norwegian film production.¹ A few women entered the director's chair in non-fiction formats in the early 1930s, but it was not until 1949, when Edith Carlmar directed the controversial *Døden er et kjærtegn / Death is a Caress*, that a woman broke what Martha Lauzen (2009) has called the 'celluloid ceiling' into feature film direction.² *Death is a Caress* is

¹ We have to go to the very end of the silent era to find the first traces of women's contribution behind the camera: Gurly Drangsholt is believed to be the first woman who played a role behind the camera in Norwegian fiction film production as script writer and most likely head of production and assistant director on the silent crime film *Madam besøker Oslo / Madam Visits Oslo* from 1927 (Myrstad 2013a). On one of the latest silent films, the Danish-Norwegian *Eskimo* (Schnéevoigt 1930), Aud Egede-Nissen is head of production Aud Egede-Nissen, also known as Aud Richter, was one of the few major silent screen actors to come from Norway, and she enjoyed considerable stardom as an actor and producer in the German film industry between 1915 and the late 1920s (Iversen 2013b; Lund 2017).

² As Hanssen points out, this is, however, not the whole story (2019, 35). Gyda Christensen is credited as part of the directing staff as line director (replikinstruktør) on *To levende og en død / Two Living and One Dead* (Ibsen, 1937). Before this, Alfhild Hovdan, a famous anti-conformist and later the Head of Tourism in Oslo, directed three short documentary films about the capital city in 1931, making her probably the first woman who directed film in Norway and perhaps also among the very first sound film directors in the country (Hanche). The home economics teacher and pioneering film pedagogue Ingerid Askevold started directing short educational films on topics related to household and nutrition in the late 1930s (Føreland). By the end of the 1950s, her production totaled more than twenty short films. It seems fitting to note that both Hovdan and Askevold were awarded the King's Medal of Merit in Gold, an honor given in recognition "for service in the fields of art, science and industry and for outstanding public service" and only on special occasions conferred in gold (The Royal House of Norway 2018). Similarly, Hjordis Kittel Parker (1909-1989), a first generation Norwegian-American emigrant who made several feature length travelogue films in the Nordic countries as part of her lectures for a North American audience in the 1950s, was awarded the Medal of St. Olav for her role in spreading knowledge about Norway (Czach). More women directed short and educational films in the 1950s and 1960s. Liv Sandberg, for instance, started her career as director

considered to be Norway's first film noir, and the film's erotically candid depiction of the relationship between a young car mechanic and a *femme fatale* socialite both shocked and pleased audiences who in turn filled up the movie theatres (Dokka 2000). This would be the beginning of a prolific career: With ten feature length films and seven short films between 1949 and 1959, Edith Carlmar has been referred to as the "First Lady of Norwegian Cinema" (Iversen 2011, 162). Carlmar came to film from the stage, and with her husband Otto Carlmar functioning as her producer and often screen writer, she became one of the most successful directors in Norwegian film of the 1950s (Dokka 2000, 32).

Following Carlmar's debut, two more women briefly entered the director's chair in the early 1950s. The Danish director Astrid Henning-Jensen was invited to Norway to direct two films, *Kranes Konditori / Krane's Confectionery* and *Ukjent mann / Unknown Man*, both released in 1951. The author, playwright, and women's rights activist Solvejg Eriksen realized one feature film, *Cecilia*, in 1954, which she wrote, directed, and produced herself through her production company Artistfilm AS (Iversen 2018). By the 1960s, however, women had again disappeared from feature film direction. Edith Carlmar directed her last feature, *Ung flukt / The Wayward Girl*, in 1959. This film would prove to be both an introduction and an adieu: Introducing for the first time to the silver screen the actor and later director Liv Ullmann, but also signaling the end of Carlmar's career in film.³

After more than ten years of male dominance of the director's chair, women once more stepped into feature film production. Beginning in 1970, Anja Breien's short film *Vokse opp - Sagnet om Jostedalsrypa / Growing Up* had theatrical release as one of three parts of the episode film *Dager fra 1000 år / Days from a 1000 Years*. The following year, three of the six domestic feature film

of short children's films in 1956 with *Gråpus som forsvant / The Cat Went Missing*, and continued making several short films and television series in the 1960s, notably the children's short film *To gutter med flaks / Two Boys with Luck* (1965) which had distribution by the BBC and won awards at film festivals in Venice and San Francisco (Parker a). In other key positions we find for instance the author and screenwriter Eva Seeberg who co-wrote scripts for the marriage comedies *Kvinnens plass / Woman's Place* (Müller, 1956) and *Ekte mann alene / Husband Alone* (Müller, 1956), contemporary classical composer Maj Sønstevoid who scored several films including Edith Carlmar's *Fjols til fjells / Fools in the Mountain* (1957), and the production manager and active film union member Rigmor Hansson-Rodin, who became Head of the Film Department when the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation began television broadcasting in 1959.

³ Carlmar returned briefly to directing in 1964 with her eighth short film *Bak kulissene / Behind the Scenes*, but *The Wayward Girl* would be the last feature film she directed. The phrasing "an introduction and an adieu" is inspired by the title of an essay I wrote on *The Wayward Girl* in occasion of the film's restoration in 2019 (Holtar 2019a).

releases were directed or co-directed by women. First out was Breien's first feature film *Voldtekt / Rape*. Next, the actor Randi Nordby co-directed the children's film *Full utrykning! / Full Emergency Response!* together with her husband Eric Johnson, who had a background in the Swedish film industry. Third, but not the least, French-Norwegian critic and stage director Nicole Macé wrote and directed the relationship drama *3 / Triangle*. The feature film release in the second half of the 1970s would confirm women's presence as directors as more than a curiosity. Nordby, who worked mainly as an actor for the stage, radio, and screen, is credited as assistant director on the sequel *To fluer i ett smekk / Two Flies in One Snap* (1973), but did not direct any more films after this. Breien and Macé, however, continued their careers as directors of both short and feature films in the second half of the 1970s. Anja Breien got her breakthrough with the smash hit *Hustruer / Wives* in 1975. Following *Wives*, she stepped in last minute as director for the Swedish-Norwegian co-production *Den allvarsamme leken / Games of Love and Loneliness* (1977) after the initial director fell ill, before directing *Arven / Next of Kin* in 1979. Nicole Macé directed her second and final feature film *Formynderne / The Guardians* in 1978. By this time, two more directors had made their way into the director's chair: Laila Mikkelsen with *Oss / Us* in 1976 and Vibeke Løkkeberg with *Åpenbaringen / The Revelation* in 1977. While women only accounted for about a tenth of the total national production of the decade, women directors of feature film emerged as a small, but critical mass in Norwegian film production during the 1970s. Breien, Mikkelsen and Løkkeberg would sustain careers as film directors into the 1980s and 1990s, with Breien and Løkkeberg especially recognized as among the most prominent filmmaking voices of their generation.

Today the foray of women as feature film directors stands as a foundational narrative of women's access to film production in Norwegian film history (Dahl et al 1996; Holst 2006; Iversen 2011; Kindem 1987). Film historian Gunnar Iversen coined this development "kvinnebølgen" (the women's wave) in his overview work *Norsk filmhistorie* as the section title on women directors in the 1970s and 1980s (2011, 230). Elsewhere he writes that "the re-emergence of women directors - after a decade without any women directors in the 1960s - is one of the most important changes in Norwegian film culture in the 1970s" (1998, 132). This sentiment is repeated in most film historical accounts about the 1970s and remains an uncontroversial historical argument. Why then, should a dissertation take this development as an

opening point of departure? For one, this should signal that this dissertation is not about forgotten or marginalized directors, nor will the aim here be to give women directors working in Norwegian film production in the 1970s their due. Rather, what is at stake here is to deepen the understanding of how this could happen and what this entailed by contributing new perspectives and generate new knowledge on a particular aspect of women's filmmaking in the 1970s: The legacy of feminist involvement and engagement in films by women directors.

In recent years, the women's wave has increasingly become a cultural and historical touching stone for visions of gender equality. The development has featured prominently in recent film criticism and discussion on contemporary gender balance and distribution of production means in the Norwegian film sector, where gender balance has increasingly become a flagship concern in film policy development (Lian 2015; Gjelsvik 2014; Svane 2020). The work of the women filmmakers of the 1970s has been revisited through seminars, film restorations, screenings, and art exhibitions.⁴ In 2015, The National Library of Norway released a DVD boxset of Anja Breien's newly restored films *Den allvarsamme leken / Games of Love and Loneliness* (1977), *Arven / Next of Kin* (1979) and *Forfølgelsen / Witch Hunt* (1981). In 2021, the National Library restored and released a collection of Vibeke Løkkeberg's films and Laila Mikkelsen's *Liten Ida / Little Ida* (1981), with a planned release of Nicole Macé's *Formynderne / The Guardians* (1978). Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg, in particular, have once again become figures of public attention, their work and standing as pioneers and feminist role-models critically and popularly cemented through initiatives such as the 2013 retrospective of Anja Breien's films of the 1970s and 1980s at the Museum of the Moving Image in New York and the seminar on her work and life on occasion of her 75th birthday at the National Library in Norway, and the recent publication of Vibeke Løkkeberg's artist biography written by Johanne Kielland Servoll (2020). This is the first biography of a woman director to be published in Norway. Breien and Løkkeberg's work has furthermore been championed by a younger generation of filmmakers and artists. During the 8th of March parade, film and art students at Kabelvåg Art School made a plea for funding to allow Breien to make the fourth iteration of her *Wives*-trilogy, while filmmaker and visual artist Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen's exhibition *Lilithistic Revelation* (2017) was built as

⁴ My research over the previous years has both contributed to and is inspired by this development.

a “destigmatizing” of Vibeke Løkkeberg, whose experiences of misogynic media coverage in the 1970s and 1980s gained resonance by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements of 2017.

Once again, the women are coming. In their call for contributions to an anthology on feminism in the 1970s, Shilyh Warren and Kimberley Lamm describe the turn to the 1970s as “one of the most salient dimensions of feminist studies to emerge over the last decade” (2017). Recent examples of research projects that have turned to the 1970s include “Feminist Archives; Feminist Futures” (FAFF), about the feminist archives and women’s libraries in Britain and USA; “Feminist Legacy in Art Museums” (FLAME), about feminist art in the national art museum collections in Norway; and “Women in Swedish Film: gender, film and representation”, an interdisciplinary study of women’s role in Swedish film production. The turn is not only evident in academia. In cultural consumption, activism, and artistic practice there seems to be a new momentum for revisiting the theory, cultural production, and legacy of feminisms in the 1970s. This is evidenced by such diverse initiatives such as the Pembroke Center’s Feminist Theory Archive collecting feminist theory from the 1970s, art exhibitions of 1970s feminist art by women, including *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960 – 1985* held at The Brooklyn Museum in 2018, and the publication and travelling exhibition of the Feminist avant-garde foci of the Vienna-based Sammlung Verbund collection (Schor 2016). These initiatives share a recognition of the 1970s as a culturally and politically defining moment for feminism.

The time thus seems ripe to re-visit the foundational story of women’s access to Norwegian film production in the 1970s and to look more closely at the synergy between the new women’s movement and women’s productive relationship to cinema by exploring women’s feminist filmmaking in the 1970s in Norway.

1.2. Dissertation aim and scope

This is a dissertation in film studies, and it is first and foremost a film historical project. In this dissertation, I adopt perspectives from the fields of feminist film studies and women’s film and television history to investigate a generation of women directors who worked in Norwegian film and television in the 1970s and the explicitly feminist films they made. The study focuses on a selection of twelve films, both feature and short, fiction and documentary, directed by women, produced in Norway, and released between 1971 and 1980. Located between an aesthetic and a

social film history, the aim is to expand the notion of women's entrance into filmmaking in Norway and the study of feminist *auteurs* with an account of the characteristics and central concerns of feminist filmmaking, of the women who made them, the resources and material conditions that enabled them to do so, and the feminist discourse and exhibition practices surrounding them.

This is a historical study of feminist filmmaking and feminist film culture in Norway in the 1970s. Feminist film culture refers to a broad set of social and critical practices that developed in several film cultures in the early 1970s through the synergy between feminism and film. As the movement for women's liberation swept across nations, meeting points of film and feminism flourished internationally through what is known as the "feminist film movement".⁵ Much like the social movement it emerged from, the feminist film movement was both national and transnational (White 2015, 205). Spreading across filmmaking contexts throughout the world, a range of cinema practices developed that were devoted to interrogating the relationship between the categories of "women" and "cinema". For the first time, women were not only making films, but were in positions to formulate and shape the context of reception and aesthetic criticism (Kaplan 2003, 18). Despite political and artistic differences, these feminist film practices had in common a fundamental project of, in the words of Annette Kuhn, "making visible the invisible" (Kuhn 1994, 71). The common concern was "that of becoming sensitive to what often goes unnoticed, becomes naturalized, or is taken for granted within sexist society" (1994, 71). B. Ruby Rich has described feminist film culture as an eclectic field of action and opportunity comprising of developments which can be divided into three main engagements: 1) in filmmaking as women took command of the camera as a tool for political change; 2) in the development of a strand of film criticism that adopted a feminist point of view and critically engaged the images of women in cinema; 3) in the practices of exhibition and distribution dedicated to gathering, promoting and screening films made by women (1998, 64-65). As Rich writes, "the films came first", and it was in filmmaking that feminism first was most readily felt

⁵ Different terms have been used to describe the activity and activism of the feminist film movement, such as feminist film culture, film feminism, and cinefeminism. In this dissertation, I will predominantly use the terms feminist film movement and feminist film culture to describe the practices that developed in the synergy between film and the new women's movement.

(1998, 65). However, the point Rich makes is that they all began together, emerging from the intersection between the new women's movement and practices of film and media.

The history of how these meeting points developed in Norway, however, has so far been rendered largely invisible. Indeed, a striking feature of the previous research on one or more of the women directors who worked in the 1970s within a feminist film studies framework in Norway is how it attempts to carefully destabilize the ideas of affiliation between them or between their films. In the 1990s, Norwegian film and television history received a boost through the extensive research project "Levende bilder i Norge" (Moving images in Norway) funded by the Norwegian Research Council (Diesen 2016, 20). The project resulted in the publication series *Levende bilder* with eighteen volumes, as well as the wide-reaching collection *Kinoens mørke, fjernsynets lys* (Dahl et al. 1996). Two separate volumes of the publication series were studies of women directors: Tone K. Kolbjørnsen's *Levende kvinnebilder* (Moving images of women, 1992) on three films by Vibeke Løkkeberg and their reception, and Liv Hausken's *En annen historie* (A different story, 1992, abridged in 1997) on *Wives* (1975) by Anja Breien. Both of these were master's theses building on feminist film theory and psychoanalysis, and both of them contended that there was no shared feminist project between the Norwegian directors: Hausken by pointing to how feminist filmmaking in Norway did not entail any unified aesthetic project (1997, 167), while Kolbjørnsen refers to her interview with Løkkeberg, stating that the contact between the women working in the film industry at the time was minimal, and certainly held no room for discussing feminism and film (1992, 19). With reference to these two works, Johanne Kielland Servoll later noted the lack of feminist film theory in Norwegian film journals, stating that "[...] there was very little contact between the new women's movement and film culture in Norway in the 1970s" (2014, 260).

While the significance of the 1970s for women directors is established, the connection between the new women's movement and the women directors has been left rather vague, and the legacy of the feminist film movement has gone largely unexplored. In effect, several questions have gone unasked and unanswered. In addition to the questions concerning how women entered feature film production, we would want to know: Were there shared feminist themes in women's filmmaking or recurring aesthetic characteristics in the feminist films they made? Were women directors really so peripheral to the feminist film movement? Was there any visible impact of

feminism on film culture? If we look beyond the feature film, how does the connection between film and feminism look? Of course, not all women working as directors made films about women or would consider their film practice influenced by or related to the new women's movement. Yet, many of them did do so. What has so far been lost is an account of women directors' productive relation to feminism as a social and transnational movement.

In formulating the dissertation's main aim, I take my cue from Kathleen McHugh's article "The World and the Soup: Historicizing Media Feminisms in Transnational Contexts" (2009).

Addressing the question of why and how feminisms fall out of media history, McHugh asks:

"How can we move beyond paradigms that marginalize women's film production as reference material, as specialized national or regional genre, or as exceptional anomaly (the female *auteur*) and instead articulate a more historical sense of women's and feminisms' productive relations to the cinema?" (2009, 115). Like McHugh, I am concerned with the specific historical moment and the impact of feminism, focused on the "soup" in Norwegian film production (2009, 122).

As a case study of feminist filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s, this dissertation can thus be seen as an answer to McHugh's call for studies of the impact of feminism on film texts, on filmmakers, on the production communities and on the contexts of reception and exhibition.

Setting feminist films at the center of feminist film culture, this dissertation asks: How can we describe the synergy between women's feminist filmmaking and the new women's movement in Norway in the 1970s? To answer this question, I look at three areas of investigation, probed through three main research questions:

1. How did feminist films give form to the agendas of the new women's movement and engage the debates on gender and women's rights?
2. What led women to make feminist films, and what were the central conditions that enabled them to do so?
3. How did feminist films interact with other engagements of the feminist film movement, and what were the central characteristics of feminist film culture in Norway in the 1970s?

1.3. Central placements and previous research

This dissertation builds on and contributes to mainly two broad fields of study: Women's film and television history and Norwegian film history. The main contribution of this dissertation is to film history, but it also touches upon the cultural impact of the new women's movement in Norway. In the following, I present the relevant fields and sub-fields to further situate this dissertation.

1.3.1. Women's film and television history

I place the dissertation within the growing field of women's film and television history (Bean and Negra 2002; Callahan 2010; Gledhill and Knight 2015; Stigsdotter 2019). Considerable efforts have been made in the last decades, from a feminist film studies perspective, to excavate, explore and expand histories of women's contributions behind the camera and in film culture. This is not a coherent field of study, but a vast set of research interests and objects of study united by a focus on feminist historiography and women's place in film and television histories, tightly connected to practices of exhibition and distribution, such as film festivals, DVD restorations and academic conferences.

As Gledhill and Knight argue, the enterprise of doing women's film and television history is not merely a corrective history concerned with putting women back into film history and of giving women their due, or of creating a separate tradition of "women's film history" alongside that of "men's film history" (2015, 11). Rather, the questions posed to film historical research by women's film and television history often challenge the traditional methodologies as well as conceptions of "what counts" as film history, expanding notions of what counts as "evidence" and of "cinema" to be able to bring into view women's work and engagements in cinema. The field has developed in tandem with two debates: One with earlier historical accounts and another with feminist film theory (Gaines 2004). As described by Vicki Callahan in the introduction to the anthology *Feminism and Film History*:

much of the feminist work in the arena of film history functions as a double-edged sword: on one level reviewing received notions of what and who counts in film history [...] and

on a second level rethinking the ongoing tension in film studies between cinema as a machine of pleasure and cinema as a machine of oppression (2010, 3).

The historiographical intervention launched by the field of women's film and television history is both an intervention to the way film history has been written, and women included within it, and an intervention to the history of feminist film studies itself.

As a field, women's film and television history shares intellectual history with other forms of revisionist film histories associated with what is known as "the turn to history" in film studies and the development of the New Film History (Gaines 2013; Chapman 2013). Thomas Elsaesser coined the term "the New Film History" in a *Sight and Sound* book review in 1986 to describe a methodological shift taking place. Here he discussed, among others, the work *Film History: Theory and Practice* by Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery (1985). This would be the first textbook on doing film history and took as a point of departure a critique of the lack of methodological and theoretical insights in previous works of film history. Indeed, according to Elsaesser, two pressures had produced the New Film History: "A polemical dissatisfaction with the surveys and overviews, the tales of pioneers and adventurers that for too long passed as film histories", on the one hand, and on the other "sober arguments among professionals now that [...] much more material has become available" (1986, 246). What was "new" about the New Film History was, then, firstly its methodological and theoretical sophistication, and secondly new areas of study that opened up through the availability of film prints from world archives, for instance the articulation of the paradigm of "cinema of attractions" (Gunning 1986) based on studies of early cinema.⁶

In feminist film studies, the turn to history came somewhat later.⁷ Beginning in the 1990s and revamped in the recent decade, a series of demarcated studies have explored histories of women directors and women in national film industries, often in tandem with inventive methodological

⁶ The 34th Congress on the International Federation of Film Archives in Brighton in 1978 and the screening of "forgotten" films from between 1900 and 1906 is often invoked as a starting point for what is now known as the historical turn in film studies (Gaines 2013). See Strauven (2006) for discussions and reprints of articles on the cinema of attractions.

⁷ According to Alison Butler, a decisive turn to history was not apparent until after a "twenty-year lull" in feminist scholarship, and the "discovery", in the 1990s, of the astounding number of women who worked in early and silent cinema (2008). See Gaines (2004; 2018) for a discussion of the relationship between film feminism in the 1970s and the later discovery of women in the silent film industries.

enquiries (Mayne 1990; Bruno 1993; Shlupmann 1990/2010). Anthologies such as *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Bean and Negra 2002), *Feminism and Film History: Reclaiming the Archive* (Callahan 2010), *Doing Women's Film and Television History* (Gledhill and Knight 2015), and *Making the Invisible Visible* (Stigsdotter 2019) have further broaden the field through articles on feminist historiography and case studies in film histories. Other initiatives include the publication series "Women and Film International" and the journal *Feminist Media Histories*. "The Women Film Pioneers Project", started by Jane Gaines and Monica Dall'Asta in 1993 and online published in 2013, is in many ways a hallmark of this field, for one by showing the need to re-think what work women did and expanding the notion of "film worker". The online portal, which as of March 2022, feature 312 women film workers in the silent film industries, lists occupancies from directors, screenwriters and producers to accountants and animal trainers (Dall'Asta, Gaines and Vatsal 2013). In Scandinavia, the online portal "Nordic Women in Film" (Thorslund 2017) holds career profiles on women in select professions who have worked in Swedish, Norwegian and Danish film sectors from the silent period and until today.

Like the two online portals exemplify, the field of women's film and television history is characterized by studies that uncover the lives and work of women professionals, with threads to studies of gender balance and gendered work cultures in historical and contemporary screen industries (e.g. Hallett 2013; Gaines 2018; Liddy 2020; Jansson and Wallenberg 2021; Arnold 2021). But the field also includes historical studies of the representation and reception of women on screen (e.g. Stamp 2000; Vincendeau 2000; Negra 2001; Bell and Williams 2010; Dalquist 2013; Horak 2016). Much work published and presented within the networks of women's film and television history will offer a combination of these perspectives. Similarly, this dissertation is a combination between a study of women professionals, in this case women working as directors in Norway in the 1970s, a thematic study of feminist films by women, and a study of feminist film culture. By focusing on films by and about women, the dissertation engages the tradition within feminist film theory known as "women's cinema" (Johnston 1973/2000; Kaplan 1983; Kuhn 1994; Butler 2002; Wang 2011; White 2015). I return more fully to this tradition in chapter 2. In line with a historical positioning, this dissertation will employ a conceptual framework of women's cinema as historically conditioned and will furthermore claim for the selection of films analyzed and discussed the heading of "feminist films".

Historical studies of film feminism in the 1970s

For studies of feminist filmmaking in the 1970s, the historical turn has enabled what can fruitfully be described as a re-consideration of this decade as a pivotal moment for film feminism. I see my research as part of an ongoing endeavor among feminist film scholars to broaden the understanding of the 1970s moment and remap feminist film discourse within and beyond the Anglo-American context from which it developed. Over the past two decades, a wide array of papers, monographs and anthologies have broadened the scope and understanding of ‘film feminism’ as a historical phenomenon by looking at contexts outside the U.S. and the U.K. (Knight 1992; Armatage, Banning, Longfellow and Marchessault 1999; Rashkin 2001; Ryberg 2019; Soila 2019; Missero 2022), or by re-visiting the work and activity of film feminists and feminist engagements beyond the canonical theoretical texts of feminist film theory (Rich 1998; Warren 2008; Smukler 2019; Fabian 2018; Jacobs 2015). I am particularly indebted to work that revisits and uncovers the activity of film feminists and the feminist film movement, where Shilyh Warren’s research into the feminist documentaries in the U.S. (2008; 2012; 2016) and Ingrid Ryberg’s work on the feminist film movement in the Swedish context (2015; 2019) have figured as models.

In the Nordic countries, the feminist film movement had different impacts on film culture and has to different degrees been registered in film historical research. According to Tarja Savolainen, feminist film activists in Finland gathered in the 1980s to show films directed by women and organize seminars, and later published a book on women and film (2020, 137). As for Iceland, little has been written on feminist film culture. On the one hand, the film sector was struggling in the 1960s and 1970s, with only two narrative feature films produced in this period. On the other hand, according to Guðrún Elsa Bragadóttir, accounts of Icelandic film history have tended to focus on the absence of women directors rather than women’s contributions to film and film culture (2020, 180), and this might explain why traces of the feminist film movement have not been brought into light.

Feminist film culture developed more strongly in Sweden and Denmark. The histories of these quite robust feminist engagements are, however, often overlooked in transnational and national historiographies (Ryberg 2020, 145). In Denmark, the history of feminist film culture has most

notably been registered by women who themselves were central in the Danish feminist film movement, such as Mette Knudsen, who has written on women's access to film production in the 1970s together with Jane Rowley (2004), and whose compilation film *Rødstrømper: En kavalkade af kvindefilm / Redstockings: A Cavalcade of Women's Films* (1985) itself is a historical work on feminist filmmaking, and Vibeke Pedersen, who contributed an unsigned article on the feminist film movement in the recent publication of the Danish feminist magazine *Kvinder* (2015). In Sweden, research on women directors and film culture of the 1970s is in dialogue with a strong research interest in gender and Swedish film governance (Jansson 2017; 2019; Ryberg 2020; Jansson et al. 2021). In addition to the aforementioned research project "Women in Swedish Film: Gender, Film and Representation" and the anthology *Making the Invisible Visible* (Stigsdotter 2019), recent work on feminist film culture in the 1970s include publications on the feminist director Mai Zetterling and the organization Svenska Kvinnors Filmförbund (Larsson and Stenport 2015; Larsson 2019; Larsson 2020; Ryberg 2019; Soila 2019), as well as on the grassroots filmmaking in the 1970s (Ryberg 2015; Andersson and Sundholm 2010; Andersson and Sundholm 2012).

This dissertation shares with this diverse body of research a project of uncovering and exploring the heterogeneity of film feminism in the 1970s and aims to contribute knowledge on Norwegian feminist film culture to this growing field of research.

1.3.2. Gender perspectives on Norwegian film history

While the study is transnational in its horizon, it takes as its object a national framework. In the intersection between Norwegian film history and the field of women's film and television history, this dissertation is a contribution to gender perspectives on Norwegian cinema in the 1970s.

There are no accounts that offer larger historical overviews of the conditions and contributions of women as film workers and filmmakers in Norwegian cinema. However, several demarcated studies have adopted gender perspectives on Norwegian film history, with for instance studies on the representation of gender relations and gendered address in silent cinema (Myrstad 1995), the hybrid genre of the so-called "Housewife film" (Myrstad 2012), and the Norwegian marriage comedy of the 1950s (Larsen 1997; 1999). There are further articles and master's theses that

have adopted gender perspectives in studies of representation. A recent interest in women's contributions in cinema history and experiences in the film industry characterizes this field as well, with studies on individual women directors and women's filmmaking. Through the research initiatives Women Film Pioneers Project and Nordic Women in Film, several careers and contributions of women working as directors, editors, cinematographers and scriptwriters, as well as women working in the expanded field of film culture, have been brought into light.

As presented at the beginning of this introduction, the emergence of women directors in the 1970s has become fairly established as a historical narrative in Norwegian film history. The works *Norsk filmhistorie* (Iversen 2011), *Kinoens mørke, fjernsynets lys* (Dahl et al. 1996), and *Det lille Sirkus* (Holst 2006) about the production company Norsk Film AS, all claim the 1970s as a period when women returned to the director's chair and offer presentations of careers and central films, privileging those films that are about women and adhere to the category of "kvinnofilm" (women's films). More in-depth explorations of the industrial and cultural conditions surrounding women's filmmaking in the 1970s is offered by Gorham A. Kindem in the article "Norway's New Generation of Women Directors: Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Laila Mikkelsen" (1987), where he also conducts film analyses of the films *Forfølgelsen / Witch Hunt* (Breien, 1981), *Løperjenten / Kamilla* (Løkkeberg, 1981) and *Liten Ida / Little Ida* (Mikkelsen, 1981); by Johanne Kielland Servoll in the dissertation "Den norske auteuren" (2014) on the Norwegian rendition of the concept of the *auteur* from the 1950s and through the 1980s; and by Anne Marit Myrstad on the history of the state-municipally owned production company Norsk Film AS in the 1970s, which includes a production study of Anja Breien's *Arven / Next of Kin* (1979) (2020a; 2020b). Other key studies of feminist filmmaking in the 1970s have looked at the feminist films and careers of individual directors or films, including master's theses and journalistic work on Anja Breien's *Wives* (1975) (Hausken 1992; 1997; Barth 2008; Stubberud 2010; Holtar 2015) and Vibeke Løkkeberg's films (Kolbjørnsen 1992; Barth 2007; Servoll 2016), with the artist biography *Vibeke Løkkeberg* (2020) written by Servoll figuring as the major work on Løkkeberg's career and cultural significance. This dissertation draws on this work and will expand the attention to women's filmmaking in the 1970s beyond the two feature film directors Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg to include Nicole Macé, Laila Mikkelsen, the television documentarian Ellen Aanesen, whose career has been discussed by Jan Anders Diesen

(1996), as well as feminist journalists who turned to filmmaking and feminist film collectives formed in Norway in the 1970s.

Servoll work and her dissertation in particular holds an important place in this study. The dissertation “Den norske auteuren” is a history of ideas, and it stands as both one of the earliest revisionist histories of the women directors of “the women’s wave”, and one of the earliest reconsiderations of Norwegian cinema in the 1970s. It is a sad fact that the decade when women entered the director’s chair has for a long time been a reviled period of Norwegian cinema (Servoll 2014, 195). It is especially the committed social issues films and the artistically ambitious films of the decade that have been the subject of criticism. Even if some feminist films, such as *Wives*, have dodged some of this criticism, the bad reputation of the committed films made in this decade lives on in popular opinion, strengthened by a historical narrative of a progress story in which a shift in the mid-1980s towards professionalism and action-orientation enabled filmmakers to win back the trust of the audience they had lost in the 1970s (Iversen and Solum 2010; Iversen 2011, 250-253). In her presentation of the position of the 1970s film, Servoll fittingly quotes one journalist, writing in 2014, who claimed of the artistically ambitious films of the 1970s: “these films’ heavy, slow, and at times hysterically comical ‘social realism’ is so thoroughly forgotten that its only film scholars who blow the dust of them when working on their dissertation” (Hovde 2014). With Servoll’s dissertation, however, the dust did not settle completely. Inspired by Servoll, this dissertation will continue a reconsideration of Norwegian film in the 1970s, but will more fully explore women’s feminist filmmaking, which Servoll, whose object of study was the concept of the *auteur*, only touched upon.

“Den norske auteuren” offered analyses of Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg’s careers and discursive struggles to be accepted as film artists in the 1980s (2014). In the chapter on these directors, the dissertation set at stake a need for revisionist histories of women directors. Servoll pointed to how the filmmaking of Breien and Løkkeberg had never been historicized within a gender perspective, but always written about *as gendered* in the sense that they were primarily regarded as woman directors (2014, 324). A similar argument was made shortly after by Vigdis Lian in the debate book *Ta det som en mann, frue!* (2015) about gender balance and women directors in the Norwegian film sector. In the introduction, Lian points to how women directors have been grouped together in the major film history books and reference works on Norwegian

cinema, with their sex seemingly being the only common denominator. Both Servoll and Lian discuss how these directors have accordingly suffered from simplification – as long as they are regarded as “women filmmakers,” other aspects of their filmmaking have tended to be forgotten or marginalized (Servoll 2014, 324; Lian 2015). I concur with them, yet contend that what has also been forgotten and marginalized is a clear understanding of the ways in which women’s filmmaking interacted with and can be regarded part of a collective movement.

1.3.3. The cultural history of the new women’s movement

Over a few hectic years in the early 1970s, the new women’s movement in Norway grew into a visible social force that redefined and expanded the meaning of the political and nominated new ideas and issues as public concern (Haukaa 1982; Danielsen 2013). The movement developed in synergy with other parallel social movements of the time and in tight connection to the critique of society fostered by the student uprising in the late 1960s. One of its defining characteristics, however, was its explicit address to women. The emphasis was on how women themselves needed to develop and lead the struggle for liberation, placing as central contact between and activity among women. As Synnøve Skarsbø Lindtner and Jostein Gripsrud argue, a core goal of the new women’s movement was the development of a new consciousness through a new women’s public sphere (Gripsrud and Lindtner 2017). Key literary works were translated into Norwegian and published in the early 1970s, and women read Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970), Simone de Beauvoir and Sheila Rowbotham, as well as Norwegian writers such as Kari Skjønberg, Berit Ås and Astrid Brekken, to name a few. New terms such as “mannsamfunn” (male society), “kvinneundertrykkelse” (women’s oppression), and “kvinnekultur” (women’s culture) were imported into or embraced in the Norwegian language. In 1972, the 8th of March was re-introduced as a protest day for women’s rights, increasingly gathering traction and support throughout the decade. The Women’s House in Oslo (1975) and in Porsgrunn (1973) offered women-exclusive spaces. Women established their own printing presses and published feminist magazines, wrote books, wrote and performed songs and plays, and, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, made films about women’s situation and the issues raised by the new women’s movement.

Significant scholarship on the history of the new women's movement has placed the movement in a social history of Norwegian society (Blom 2013), or focused on its development as a political movement, most notably through the new women's movement's relationship to the Norwegian welfare state (Hernes 1987; Hagemann 2004; 2010) and through the history of the organized activity of the women's groups (Haukaa 1982). These groups counted around 5 000 members at the most, but their reach was broader than the numbers might suggest (Haukaa 1982, 93). Many women and men who were not registered members of any organization or group still considered themselves part of, and allies to, the new women's movement. The first women's groups, formed in 1970, were often self-described Nyfeminister (New Feminists). They followed a North American radical feminist model of non-hierarchical structure, with independently run groups that practiced consciousness-raising and organized protests and political actions. They built their analysis on an existential and cultural liberation, with a focus on personal freedom, sexuality, and self-expression. In 1972, the New Feminists were challenged by the establishment of Kvinnefronten (The Women's Front). This would become the numerically largest radical women's group in Norway. They privileged an analysis of class struggle and capitalist criticism. In contrast to the New Feminists, the Women's Front was a national and hierarchically structured organization with close ties to the Norwegian Maoist party, AKP (m-l) (Workers' Communist Party, marxist-leninists). While AKP (m-l) was a relatively small party, it had an immense impact on most parts of Norwegian cultural life, including the development of a women's public sphere. In the mid-1970s, several new groups sprung from the roots of these two organizations, including Kvinneaktivistene (The Women Activists) in 1973, Lesbisk Bevegelse (Lesbian Movement) in 1975, and Brød og Roser (Bread and Roses) in 1976. In 1979, immigrant women established Foreign Women's Group (FWG). The older women's rights organization Norsk Kvinnesaksforening (The Norwegian Association for Women's Rights, est. 1884) also experienced a membership surge in this period. These different groups and organizations found common ground on several key issues and worked together on coordinated struggles, yet there were also significant tensions and differences within and between them.⁸ While generally

⁸ The history of internal conflict has been popularized by an anecdote from the first 8th of March parade. On the initiative of the Women's Front, the women's organizations collaborated on the day: The main parole in Oslo read "Kamp mot all kvinneundertrykking – full frigjøring av kvinnene" ("Fight against all women's oppression – full liberation for women"). Some New Feminists, however, sparked controversy by adding their own paroles, such as "No to forced fucking", "We want to lie on top", and "No to motherhood" (Hagemann 2004, 227).

speaking most active feminists were also socialists, the questions of whether to fight for liberation or equality, or of the primacy of gender in an anti-patriarchal struggle, or of class in an anti-capitalist struggle, were constantly discussed within and between the different groups.

Recently, several publications about the new women's movement in Norway have shifted the focus to also include the wider cultural activity and cultural ramifications of the new women's movement as part of this history. *Vi var mange* (2018) edited by Ellen Aanesen and *Kreativitet og feministaktivisme* (2017), written by Astri Holm and Berit Rusten, both document and celebrate the legacy of the activism of the new women's movement, told as memory and recollection by members of the movement themselves. Original research connected to the research project "Da det personlige ble politisk: Kvinnebevegelsen på 1970-tallet" (When the personal became political: The women's movement in the 1970s) at the University of Bergen explore the countercultural ramifications of the new women's movement and the public arenas created by the movement's expanded conception of the political (Danielsen 2013; Lindtner 2014; Müftüoğlu 2013; Taule 2017). An anthology of the same name, edited by Hilde Danielsen (2013), is the first comprehensive account of the new women's movement since sociologist Runa Haukaa's book *Bak slagordene* (1982). Together, these contributions uncover and restore to collective memory the wider cultural sphere of the new women's movement in Norway in the 1970s. I contend that the feminist efforts in film, which have so far remained merely footnotes in this history, make up an integral part of this recovered landscape of a social movement.

1.4. The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of ten chapters, including the introduction. In this introduction, I have presented the motivation for the dissertation, the research questions, as well as an overview of fields of study and central previous research. Chapter 2 will present the methodological and theoretical framework of the dissertation. It will discuss the tradition of women's cinema in feminist film studies and narrow down how feminist filmmaking will be approached in this study. The chapter will then provide an account of the source material, including the film selection and the components that make up the case study. This will serve as an elaboration of the research questions and the areas of investigation they point to. Chapter 3 provides contextual frames of the new women's movement and Norwegian film production in the 1970s, as I look at

women's entrance into feature film direction and introduce the careers of the feature film directors Anja Breien, Laila Mikkelsen, Nicole Macé and Vibeke Løkkeberg.

Chapters 4 through 9 offer analyses of the selected films. These are organized according to a combination of chronology and context of production. I begin with the narrative fiction films produced in the established film sector and made by the four feature film directors. Chapter 4 looks at the feature film *3 / Triangle* (Macé, 1971) as a starting point for feminist filmmaking in Norway. Chapter 5 jumps to the mid-1970s and begins with an introduction to the impact of the feminist film movement on Norwegian film culture, before turning to the two films *Ukeslutt / Weekend* (Mikkelsen, 1974) and *Hustruer / Wives* (Breien, 1975). Chapter 6 will discuss the feature film *Åpenbaringen / The Revelation* (Løkkeberg, 1977), and use the reception of this film to discuss some of the debates in feminist film criticism. Chapter 7 looks at *Formynderne / The Guardians* (Macé, 1978), an adaptation of Norwegian author Amalie Skram. This chapter will also give an account of similar productions made in the Television Theatre of Norwegian public television.

Chapter 8 and 9 turn to documentary filmmaking. First, chapter 8 discusses documentary films produced or exhibited by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation through three films on the abortion legislation, one early documentary by Løkkeberg (1972) and two documentaries by television documentarian Ellen Aanesen (1978). Last but not the least, chapter 9 looks at a body of independently produced works made between 1978 and 1980, which document the new arenas and activities of the new women's movement. This chapter is organized through a focus on the first international women's film festival held in Norway.

The divide between narrative fiction and documentary films are not the most interesting way to categorize films, and the connection to historical reality is not of key importance in this dissertation. Rather, this divide allows for threads of feminist themes, sites of production and feminist film culture to be drawn out. These threads will be summarized in chapter 10, where I answer the three research questions and points toward developments into the 1980s and further research.

CH 2. GRASPING A FEMINIST FILM PROJECT: APPROACH AND POSITIONING

This chapter will give an account of the methodological approach and theoretical positioning that frame this historical study of women's feminist filmmaking. The chapter begins by accounting for the conceptual framework that informs the dissertation, including why I have chosen the heading of "feminist" for the selection of films. Here, the tradition of women's cinema provides a central conceptual framework, and I frame my approach in dialogue with this concept. In the second section, I move to the film analytical framework and account for how I approach the films. Finally, the third section turns to the components of the study. I introduce the three legs that make up the study and present the source material. The main sources are a selection of films. Alongside the films themselves, the study builds on a collection of print sources, including newspapers, magazines, trade journals, as well as interviews with select filmmakers. The chapter closes with a presentation of the selection of films and how I have found and chosen them.

2.1. Definitions and traditions of women's cinema

The avenue within feminist film theory known as "women's cinema" is the most important theoretical tradition for this dissertation. For more than four decades, this line of scholarship has investigated women's filmmaking as an oppositional practice, and is especially important for the continued insistence on the woman director as an important organizing principle. While I will use "feminist films" rather than "women's cinema" as my heading, I am influenced by and indebted to this conceptual framework. I begin, therefore, with an elaboration on this tradition, its intellectual history, and the central points of contestation as a way to position how I will use and understand "feminist film" in this dissertation.

Some initial clarification is needed: In line with common usage, "women's cinema" is understood as an academic concept within feminist film scholarship. I reserve "women's films" to an earlier use in critical and journalistic practices associated with the feminist film movement of the 1970s. The two, however, share common roots in feminist film criticism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it is important to note that the nomenclature is of less importance, as "feminist films", "women's films", "women's cinema" and "women's pictures" are often used interchangeably in the scholarship on women's filmmaking practice. These must, for clarity, be

further distinguished from “woman’s film”, in the singular, which refers to a Hollywood studio genre of the 1940s primarily directed by men and targeted at a female audience (Doane 1987).

2.1.1. An intellectual history of women’s cinema

In its earliest conception, women’s cinema was articulated as a political counter-patriarchal-cinema: a cinema in opposition to what was understood as a subjugation of women in classical Hollywood cinema.⁹ The now canonical writings of Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey were both significant in staking out this course. In their early writings, Johnston and Mulvey, both of whom combined critical writing with filmmaking, aimed to envision how a feminist film practice could offer a real alternative to the oppressive mechanisms of mainstream film. In “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema” (1973), Claire Johnston proposed the possibility of a women’s counter-cinema as a challenge from “within the Hollywood system” (1973/2000, 30). Arguing for the importance of entertainment and pleasure in a successful political women’s cinema, Johnston suggested, with Dorothy Arzner as an example, that disruptions and internal contradictions in the mainstream and bourgeois classical film text could open it up for alternative ideologies. In alignment with a hegemonic view of ideology and cinema posited by among other *Cahiers du cinema* critics Comolli and Narboni (1971), Johnston argued that women could “bring about dislocation between sexist ideology and the text of the film” by formal means such as distortion and exaggeration (1973/2000, 30). In following works, she would more clearly articulate this as a discursive struggle of re-writing and appropriation of dominant cinema (Butler 2002, 12-13). Laura Mulvey, by contrast, by and large rejected the possibility of an alternative within the mainstream, but rather envisioned feminist filmmaking as an avant-garde cinema in opposition to classical Hollywood cinema. In the article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) Mulvey famously stated her intention to destroy the pleasure of the classical film form by

⁹ Feminist film theory began with popular Hollywood cinema and focused on women on screen, developing a powerful mirror concept of absence and presence. Indeed, as pointed out by Catherine Fowler, the analogy of visibility, vision and the visual were central in feminist film culture of the 1970s (2003, 53). Feminist film criticism aimed to reveal the overdetermined image of women as objects within the film text itself. either through studies on the representation of women that examined and categorized female character types in classical Hollywood cinema, showing how these were often reduced to stereotypes, subordinated by and defined against male protagonists (Haskell 1974/1987, Rosen 1973, Higashi 1978). A second body of works went further by questioning how the film medium in itself figured in this reduction, where, perhaps most forcefully, Laura Mulvey argued how the psychic operations of cinema was dependent on the image of woman as lack, stabilized by what she termed ‘the male gaze’ (1975/2000).

analyzing it, and by so doing make way for an alternative, one that would dare “break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive of a new language of desire” (1975/2000, 36). Indeed, in this view Mulvey’s wildly influential article is not so much an analytical toolbox for the analysis of women’s subjugation in the cinematic text, as a manifesto for political filmmaking (McHugh 2009, 115). In the tradition of feminist modernism, Mulvey envisioned women’s counter-cinema as a negation of the pleasures (narrative, visual) of mainstream cinema, and thus turned to the deconstructive and experimental strategies of avant-garde filmmaking as the productive model for political filmmaking.

The two offered different views on what would constitute a women’s counter-cinema, yet their theoretical positions shared the insistence on feminist filmmaking as one that challenged and disrupted classical codes of representation and film language on the level of film form by breaking the psychological realism created by classical continuity editing in Hollywood cinema. While these positions were not dogmatic, their early articulations have been influential for later investigations into the relationship between women filmmakers, film, and feminism. Mulvey’s deconstructive feminist modernism was adopted by feminist film criticism and theory, and was influential in the formation of a feminist canon, including the films by Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman and Sally Potter (Butler 2002, 7). From the late 1980s, Johnston’s view of the possibility for alternative discourses within dominant cinema remained an especially potent avenue for the theoretical contributions to approaching women’s cinema as negotiation and resistance of film language, and one important strand of scholarship would continue this line of inquiry through mainly comparative textual and intertextual analysis of narrative feature film.¹⁰

For this dissertation, in which the contextual and historical situatedness is vital, another strand of women’s cinema has more immediate relevance. If the first is concerned with film texts, the second might be described as placing emphasis on the historical woman director. I will tentatively call this a “historically conditioned women’s cinema”, and in general, it has developed from two broad interventions towards the first view of women’s cinema as an opposition towards a patriarchal mainstream: First, by moving beyond the psychological realism

¹⁰ I place such works as for instance Lucy Fischer’s *Shot / Countershot: Film Tradition and Women’s Cinema* (1989), as well as newer works such as Sue Thornham’s *What If I Had Been the Hero? Investigating Women’s Cinema* (2012) and Geetha Ramanathan’s *Reading Feminist Auteurs* (2006) within this tradition.

of Hollywood as the monolith to oppose; and second, and perhaps more fundamentally, beyond a feminist resistance to patriarchy as the only, or the most significant, form of opposition. Both these interventions in women's cinema have consequences for how I understand feminist films in this dissertation, and I account for each of them below.

First intervention: Broadening oppositional film practice

The first intervention concerns the question of aesthetics and opposition. This is an important discussion for this dissertation, as it addresses the need to broaden the view of what kind of films can be regarded as successfully oppositional or alternative. What women's counter-cinema suggests is that feminist filmmaking is a question of film language. This is a vital insight to hold on to, and indeed, as Patricia White notes, seems more relevant now than ever "in the postfeminist climate of 2000s" (2015, 9), where various forms of liberal feminism would label any film about 'a strong female character' as feminist. However, the counter-cinema positions developed by Johnston and Mulvey both emphasized anti-realist aesthetics, whether through political modernism or through stereotype and exaggeration. Consequently, realism was discarded as a politically viable strategy for feminist films. The rejection of realism was most famously postulated by Claire Johnston, who rejected as ideologically bourgeois both cinematic realism as well as the modernism of European art cinema ("There is no doubt that Agnès Varda's work is reactionary" (1973/2000, 32)). Criticizing what she saw as a "naïve" belief in the "real" of realism and stressing that cinema is always a mediated form of expression, Johnston polemically asserted: "the 'truth' of our oppression cannot be 'captured' on celluloid with the 'innocence' of the camera, it has to be constructed/manipulated" (1973/2000, 29). For Johnston, realism was a patriarchal representational system, and a film adhering to representational codes of realism would partake in ideological myths of a stable and transparent recording of reality.

In the Anglo-American context, this most visibly affected the position of feminist documentary filmmaking. These films were often shot in fast stock and featured interviews with, or encounters between, women captured in real time. Because the early feminist documentary films used traditional "realist" techniques, the films came under scrutiny for political and cinematic naïveté. In subsequent years, several scholars of feminist documentary have stressed the enormous consequences the rejection of cinematic realism had for the feminist documentary tradition in

making it quite invisible and marginalized in the intellectual history of film feminism (Juhasz 1994; Waldman and Walker 1999). These tensions, however, also have implications for approaching feminist filmmaking more generally, for instance within a small national cinema like the Norwegian in which few, if any, feminist films made in the 1970s can be described as avant-garde or anti-realist, and where social modernism and social realism remain the guiding stylistic currents.

The problem of realism in the counter-cinema framework makes visible a tension between theoretical and normative projects of defining a feminist cinema for the future, and descriptive, historical, or sociological projects of studying the feminist films that women have made as part of the movement for women's liberation. Put another way, at stake here is perhaps also a question of the weighting of film language (text) against social commitment (authorship).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many feminist critics and scholars were weighing these two concerns. Several thinkers expanded the conception of women's cinema to include different aesthetics and forms. In "Re-Thinking Women's Cinema", Teresa de Lauretis proposed to shift the conversation over to questions of the spectator, viewing women's cinema as an aesthetics of reception whose potential above all is found in the flexible identifications of the film's address (1987). The major works *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (1983) by E. Ann Kaplan and *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (1982) by Annette Kuhn can be seen as both surveying a range of different kinds of engagements, incorporating contextual and film historical perspectives with textual analysis of a quite wide selection of European feature films, U.S. documentary filmmaking and experimental and avant-garde works, while also testing these films towards a theoretical framework: In this case, a counter-cinema informed by psychoanalysis and apparatus theory. These are important models for this dissertation, yet their theoretical foundation, and thus their goal, differs from mine.

More comparable to this dissertation are the works by Jan Rosenberg, Julia Lesage, and B. Ruby Rich. Arguing from the opposite side of the debate on realism, Rosenberg (1979/1983) and Lesage (1978/1990) championed the feminist documentaries precisely for their political immediacy and effect. Stressing feminist documentary filmmaking as the product of women who wanted to express their feminist politics, they viewed feminist documentary filmmaking as a

direct outcome of the women's liberation movement. From a film critical perspective, B. Ruby Rich aimed to make room for different aesthetics and forms by offering a new taxonomy of what the films *do*, in which for instance *validative* ("realist" documentary) and *correspondence* (deconstructive) are regarded as equal strategies (1978/1998, 74-75).

Like these last examples, all of which claim the term "feminist film" rather than women's cinema, I am interested in what the films in my selection *do* and how we can describe their feminist film *project*. This places the dissertation on the side of criticism and history, rather than on the side of theory. This does, however, not mean to disregard resistance and opposition, but it does entail an expansion of what opposition and resistance means. In her reconsideration of feminist documentary of the 1970s, Alexandra Juhasz forcefully argues that the cursory rejection of the conventions of 'realism' within women's counter-cinema actually masked both the multiple forms of realism and the variety of ways that realist styles functioned within the film texts, while disregarding the way realism and identification worked as theoretically viable political strategies (1994, 175). In dialogue with Claire Johnston, who argued that "any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality" (1973/2000, 30), Juhasz concurs and suggests "that realist images of women discussing their lived experience is one strategy with which to initiate this challenge" (1994, 184). I follow Juhasz's line of thought.

In addition to an expansion of what aesthetic strategies can be considered oppositional, there is further need for attention to the extratextual conditions that define film production. In her work on Mai Zetterling, Ingrid Ryberg has argued that feminist filmmaking, contrary to other art forms coming from the new women's movement, required considerable funding and equipment, and was thus to a higher degree dependent on an infrastructure that involved a variety of instances and institutions. According to Ryberg, feminist filmmaking cannot, then, be seen as *independently* oppositional, but also as indicative of what issues women were able to raise and get support for (2019, 169). As such, a study of feminist films needs an awareness of these processes and relationships.

Second intervention: Studying the films that women have made

The call to contextualize oppositional film has wider reach. The exclusion of feminist documentary from the feminist film canon is only one of the blind spots effected within the

theoretical legacy of women's cinema, where the tendency to focus on Western and mainly Anglo-American perspectives and contexts has overwritten films and filmmakers not neatly aligned with the concerns of counter-cinema. This leads to the second intervention, and the need to expand the view of women's cinema as primarily an opposition to Hollywood cinema as a patriarchal system of representation. In "Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation, and the Cinema", Ella Shohat argues how the universalizing discourse of "First-World Eurocentric feminism" has subsumed under one narrative what is in fact a range of different personal and creative interests and commitments (2003, 52). This concerns not least the question of differences in conditions of productions, material resources and political reality. In a recent turn, women's cinema has been marked by a new attention to historical and cultural specificity.

The shift cannot be separated from larger developments in feminist film theory, or indeed in film studies more generally. It runs parallel to a development in the 1990s and 2000s of turning away from a focus on the ideological effects and workings of cinema, and of a theoretical framework committed to psychoanalysis, structuralism, and apparatus theory. In the introduction to the anthology *Cinema and Nation*, for instance, Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie note a shift towards "what is beginning to look like a promising emphasis on the specificity or relevant cultural, social, and historical contexts in accounts of literature, film, and the other arts" (2000, 1). A similar development took place in feminist film studies.¹¹ From the late 1980s, vital interventions from black and transnational feminism, as well as from queer studies and post-colonial critique, addressed the need to complicate the monolithic and ahistorical construction of the cinematic apparatus in feminist film theory, and to critically engage the blind spots created by heterosexual binarism (Lauretis 1988/2000), or the white perspective informing much

¹¹ Approaching what Mary Ann Doane has called the "deadlock situation" in the 1980s and 1990s (1990), it was increasingly difficult to navigate the questions of female subjectivity, the gaze and authorship against the leading theoretical framework and a paradigm predilected on the absence of women. The powerful theoretical conception of woman as lack inherited from Lacanian readings and political philosophy placed the absence of female subjectivity as a first principle. This figurative absence of woman developed implicitly to mirror an absence of women in film production and reception. As Alison Butler argues, "For feminist film scholars studying a cultural form so massively dominated by men, the construction of a theoretical paradigm in which the absence of female subjectivity is a first principle has more or less been a disaster" (Butler 2000, 74). As empirical women were bracketed out, so were the differences between them in resources, opportunities, and engagements, as well as other historical contexts of production. Lingzhen Wang has argued that the underlying cause for the analytical ambiguity of the historical women in women's cinema stems from "the early feminist expectation of a homogeneous group of women involved in the production and discussion of women's cinema" (2011, 25). Expecting the makers of feminist political cinema to be white, elite Western women, the need to discuss and place them in contexts of production and across differently positioned agendas was less urgent (Wang 2011).

feminist film theory (hooks 1992/2004; Gaines 1988/2000). The turn to materiality and to history has been one way to meet this critique. There is, however, an ongoing debate on whether feminist scholarship and theory has adequately responded to and been able to address these interventions.

In conjuncture with transnational and world cinema frameworks, this second iteration of women's cinema has increasingly displaced a theoretical project of defining the parameters of feminist, oppositional filmmaking and replaced it with a methodology that can take into account difference and diversity across multiple contexts of production. An influential work here is Alison Butler's *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (2002). Butler, responding to the wide array of films and cinematic engagement that characterized women's film production in the early 2000s, proposed the need for a new methodology. Inspired by Meagan Morris (1998), Butler borrows Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of "minor literature" (1986) for her conception of women's cinema as a "minor cinema". Minor literature is not marginal, but it is what a minority or marginalized group constructs using majority language. For Butler, this characterizes the cultural production of women within a patriarchal society. In her view, women's cinema, made in a range of filmmaking contexts, "is not 'at home' in any of the host cinematic or national discourses it inhabits". Rather, it "is always an inflicted mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting the conventions of established traditions" (2002, 22). As such, women's cinema as minor cinema retains the textual opposition and hegemonic negotiation from counter-cinema, and Butler traces the theoretical legacy from Johnston and the insight of patriarchy as hegemonic rather than monolithic (2002). More recently, Patricia White (2015) further develops women's cinema away from a monocultural framework and employs a "worlding of women's cinema" in her study of how different discourses, such as the elite *auteur*, cultural authenticity and human rights frames and enables the practices and reception of contemporary women filmmakers. In the edited collection *Chinese Women's Cinema*, Lingzhen Wang mobilizes women's cinema as a historical and transnational model for an anthology of women script writers and directors in mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (2011).

2.1.2. Defining feminist films in this dissertation

This dissertation derives its methodology from these interventions in approaching women's cinema as historically conditioned. As formulated by Patricia White, "the categories we have used – authorship, aesthetics and address – remains vital, yet they are insufficient at this juncture. They must be supplemented by consideration and theorization of institutional questions – of production, distribution, exhibition and reception" (2015, 13). I follow this call to pay attention to questions of historical, economic, and social conditions, to contexts of production, as well as to the often diverse personal, political, and creative commitments that drive women to direct political film.

I will, however, not use women's cinema (whether counter, minor or world) as my heading, but rather call my selection of films "feminist films". The main reason for this is the recognition that women's cinema today seems most meaningfully used in transnational or transhistorical studies of women's filmmaking. Women's cinema, in other words, does not seem to me the appropriate heading for the study of a national feminist cinema, which is both historically, geographically and thematically specific. As I will revisit towards the end of this chapter, my selection actually excludes from consideration many films directed by women in Norway in the 1970s.

For the purposes of this study, "feminist films" provides a narrower definition, one that clearly suggests that it is the feminist commitment of the films in question that will be studied, rather than the productive relationship between women and filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s in general. "To claim the 'F' word", writes Shilyh Warren in her work on the U.S. feminist documentary, "is to lay claim to a 'movement' of practices and to emphasize the radical and cohesive politics of that period" (2008). What it entails is to place these films as part of a political movement, and to claim for the selection of films a feminist agenda. I retain the contention of negotiation and resistance as an important framework for grasping a feminist film project, and furthermore define this resistance as aimed at patriarchal oppression. The films in this dissertation are sustained as feminist through aesthetic strategies, but also and primarily through the aesthetic formation of feminist themes – understood as the issues and concerns of the new women's movement - as well as by social practices of exhibition and discussion. At first struggling with the challenge posed by the selection's different stylistic and formal qualities, the

move to how the films engage subject matter and issues of the new women's movement has been one way to approach a historically situated, yet politically vital, film project.

The heading of "feminist" also helps set apart the selection of films from the Norwegian term "kvinnefilm", which remains a controversial term. The problems associated with it are not only limited to the word itself, but also brings forth contestations of separating women's cultural production more generally. In the following section, I account for these tensions and the way women's films have been approached in Norwegian film studies, before I return to the film analytical framework employed in this dissertation.

2.1.3. Women's cinema in a Norwegian context: The contested concept of *kvinnefilm*

In this dissertation, *kvinnefilm* will be translated into "women's films", and refer to a label primarily used in film journalism and film exhibition in the 1970s and into the 1980s to group together films either by or about women. Understood as a journalistic term, *kvinnefilm* is one of the important keys for this dissertation to unlocking practices of circulation and discussion of feminist filmmaking. The term can be traced to the influence of Anglo-American feminist film criticism, but its equivalent is also found in several other film cultures with influence over Norwegian film criticism, such as *frauenfilm* in German, *kvindefilm* in Danish or *kvinnofilm* in Swedish, as feminist film activists, festival curators and critics struggled to name, map and bring together films by, for and about women. *Kvinnefilm*, then, is a central part of feminist film culture in the 1970s, and most films discussed in this dissertation were exhibited or discussed under this heading.

The legacy of *kvinnefilm* is, however, ambiguous at best. Whereas in the Anglo-American context, women's films migrated into theoretical considerations of what would constitute feminist filmmaking, this theoretical development did not register to any notable degree in Norway. In general, feminist film theory was not included in Norwegian film criticism in the 1970s (Servoll 2014, 260). In the mid-1980s, academic interest in women's creativity and women's history contributed to publications on women directors, such as essays on Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg in the essay collection *Kvinne og kunstnar* (Woman and artist) (Moe 1986), and a history of women's filmmaking feature in the second volume of the publication *Kvinnenes kulturhistorie* (Women's cultural history) (Kalmar 1985). These years also saw an

increase in discussions concerning the parameters of a female or feminist film language in Norwegian film criticism (Servoll 2014, 260).¹² The question of a female film language was further posed in the emerging field of Film Studies in Norway. Here, the titles of several student papers on Norwegian film, such as “Lager kvinner annerledes film enn menn?” (Do women make different films than men?) (Dæhlin 1986) and “En for alle – alle for en: en vurdering av kvinner og film” (One for all – all for one: An assessment of women and film) (Bjerke and Dahstrøm 1984), and the articles “Filmestetikk og kjønntidentitet” (Film aesthetics and gender identity) (Mark and Braathen 1984) and “Mot et feministisk filmuttrykk?” (Towards a feminist film language?) (Fonn 1987), attest to an interest in the vexed question of the relationship between the woman director, women’s films, and the existence of a female film language. These are comparable to the scholarly tradition of women’s cinema in their interest in investigating a women’s tradition.

However, after these initial studies, many of them formulated as questions, few studies have followed this scholarly avenue. Rather, the category of *kvinnefilm* has remained a dated and contested one. Within both critical and academic language, *kvinnefilm* had predominantly come to signify a negatively valorized gender-specific label. Like several of the new terms, such as “women’s culture” and “women’s literature”, “women’s films” was tied to the new women’s movement’s project of making women’s contribution visible and redefining public expressions for women. These were, however, not uncontroversial projects, and the flip side of this initially celebratory discourse was increasingly recognized as one of marginalization. From the perspective of film and art criticism, such a term contributed to labelling women’s cultural production as not only a specific form of production, but a derogative one at that. In her dissertation on the Norwegian rendition of the concept of the *auteur*, Johanne Kielland Servoll has argued that in Norwegian critical language in the late 1970s and 1980s, *kvinnefilm* figured as

¹² In Norwegian film criticism, this discussion was most readily tied to the Danish author and dramaturg Ulla Ryum’s conception of “female dramaturgy” (1987). Her thinking was presented in Norway through Nordic and Norwegian seminars, and in Helga Fjordholm’s article “Handling / Tilstand” (Action / Stasis) published in the film journal *Z.filmtidsskrift* in 1983. Looking at women’s film and theatre, Ryum identified in their work a predilection towards a slow pace and a rejection of typical characteristics of the classical dramaturgy, such as linearity and action-orientation, and proposed that this “anti-Aristotelian” storytelling was expressive of and tied to a specific female experience of time. In clear dialogue with the French feminist literary theorist Luce Irigaray, Ryum tied the characteristics of this model of dramaturgy to the feminine unconscious and a specific experience of time connected to the female biological functions of menstruation and pregnancy, as well as to an experience of repetition in daily life within the domestic sphere.

an acceptable, yet lesser, category of art for women as it treated their work as a political rather than as an artistic endeavor (2014, 257). In this view, we might find in the controversial position of *kvinnefilm* at least one reason why the search for commonality in films by women directors has not been viewed as an entirely legitimate endeavor within Norwegian film scholarship.

The challenges associated with the category of *kvinnefilm* mirror discussions in feminist film and art history more generally and address a core tension of this dissertation. The problem posed by the category of “women’s film” (or “women filmmaker”, for that matter) is one of gendering the production of directors who might prefer their work to be received as non-gendered, and in any rate as of universal interest, and additionally of placing women in a category that seems to connote sameness between members of a marginalized group (female directors) and difference from a majority group (male directors). Some will argue that such a separate construction of women’s cultural production works against the goals of feminism by subsuming the actual differences between women under one, or question the legitimacy of upholding “woman” as an uncontested term at all. Others maintain that it is the social position of women that is studied, and that social difference cannot be denied. As Alison Butler asks, “without women, how long can feminism be sustained?” (2000, 74). Other feminist thinkers have been concerned with the paradox at work. As formulated by Teresa de Lauretis, this is “a contradiction specific to, and perhaps even constitutive of, the women’s movement itself”, which she calls the double pull of feminism:

A twofold pressure, a simultaneous pull in opposite directions, a tension towards the positivity of politics, or affirmative action on behalf of women as social subjects, on one front, and the negativity inherent in the radical critique of patriarchal, bourgeois culture, on the other (1987, 127).

Feminist engagement is contradictorily placed between a pull to take action for women as social subjects, in this instance by drawing attention to women’s cultural production, and on the other hand, the pressure towards critically challenging the very concepts that would identify women’s production as inherently harboring an unusual aesthetic, or indeed the very categories of “woman,” “art” and “aesthetic.” Historian Joan W. Scott has described this as the founding paradox of feminism, a movement constituted on the need “both to accept *and* to refuse sexual

difference” (Scott 1996, 3-4). Beyond distinctions of “waves”, the history of feminism has, following Scott, been dependent on speaking on behalf of women while at the same time opposing the ways that woman is used as an exclusion. As discussed by Judith Butler, this creates the contradictory (but not impossible) situation of wanting to eliminate the conditions from where one speaks (Butler 2011, 15).

The discussion concerning the grounds for feminism to construct women as a collective identity lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. Here, I limit myself to emphasizing that I understand “woman” as a socially and historically conditioned category. The dissertation rests on the assumption that none of the practitioners discussed in the following chapters – the filmmakers, the audience, the critics and *cinéastes* – can in any way be exhaustively defined by their belonging to this category, nor are the films discussed exhausted by a categorization as feminist films. The goal of the dissertation, however, is to see what the categorizations of women directors and feminist films *can* bring into view: What practices, engagements, opportunities, and struggles are uncovered by searching for feminist projects in films directed by women in the 1970s?

2.2. Investigating feminist films

A feminist film in this dissertation does not entail a specific film language, stylistic similarities, or arguments of a necessary connection between women working as directors and the feminist politics of their films. In this dissertation, a feminist film is a film that shares a project influenced by and related to the new women’s movement in Norway. In order to bring this into view, I analyze the films by focusing on a set of questions and concerns, a set of *themes*. In this section, I elaborate on my film analytical approach and introduce the themes that guide my analysis.

2.2.1. Thematic film analysis

My primary method of film analysis is close reading, and the approach shares several key characteristics with thematic film analysis. The theme, a term stemming from literary criticism, is a way of approaching how the text gives form to a principal idea or set of ideas (Elsaesser and Buckland 2002, 117). As Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland write in their presentation of thematic film analysis, “To read film thematically involves determining its significance,

identifying a general level of meaning that links the film's various elements into a unified structure" (2002, 118). While thematic analysis means a focus on what the film *means* or *says*, this cannot be disconnected from the aesthetic level of the film. That is, the theme is precisely the specific, aesthetic formation of a subject matter: Any question posed about *what* must be explored through the related question of *how*, and thematic analysis in this dissertation is dependent on close reading of film style and combines sensitivity to cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing and sound with attention to the film's narrative form.

The aim of thematic film analysis, in the words of film scholars Anne Lise With and Ingrid Rommetveit, is to be sympathetic to the film and try to grasp what it expresses (2008, 112). This is what I will embrace as the film's *project*. Historically, thematic film analysis has been connected to auteurism and the activity of exploring a single, visionary director's cinematic project. The thematic analysis has been one way to connect and explore a film director's *oeuvre* and make a case for the signature of the filmmaker or a consistency between otherwise different film productions. However, the attribution of significance and intention to a single director is not a necessary part of the thematic film analytical method; nor do we have to assume that the notion of authorship will be a reading that implies the "countervailing forces" against which the (often male) *auteur* succeeds in "remaining true to himself and articulate his 'vision of the world'" (Elsaesser and Buckland 2002, 127).

In this dissertation, the director-writer or the group who initiated the film is the most important creative agent. Their intentions and aspirations for the film informs one perspective and approach to what the film's project might be: what it seems to be saying, what arguments about the world the film appears to make, and how it does so. These words of reservation (*seems* and *appears*) acknowledges that the themes explicated in the thematic film analysis are to some degree *contingent* and *potential*. That is, they have to be inferred. In *Making Meaning*, David Bordwell, surveying the current film critical field, suggested four types of constructions of meaning at work in film analysis: the referential meaning, the explicit meaning, the implicit meaning, and lastly, the repressed or symptomatic meaning (1989). The thematic analysis is placed in the movement from the explicit to the implicit meaning – in Bordwell's terms from a comprehension of the abstract statements the film makes to an interpretation of the film's issues, problems or questions (1989, 8-9). I say "movement" here to underscore my own understanding that the thematic level

is located in between the explicit and the implicit meaning, which cannot always be easily distinguished from each other. As Bordwell also notes, different critics might assign not only different meanings to the same textual unit, but also different types of meaning (1989, 10). In this way, what constitutes an explicit or implicit meaning varies from the point of view of the critic or scholar and can depend on their theoretical and contextual standpoint.

My standpoint is from a feminist film studies perspective, and I will conduct thematic film analysis informed by this perspective. Put another way, while any film might have several different projects, I will investigate the *feminist projects* of the film: Reading for those explicit and implicit meanings that connect specifically to the themes and issues of the new women's movement, on the one hand, and which resonate with cinematic projects found in the filmmaking associated with the feminist film movement, on the other. These are readings *with the grain*, and they ask sympathetically: Seen through these two contexts of feminist analysis, what feminist goals and strategies can be detected in the films?

In this way, my method varies from the traditional thematic film analysis, as I do not look for the central theme in the film, but rather use a set of predetermined themes, understood as both subject and form, to guide the analysis. This makes my approach somewhat more stringent when it comes to the general categories usually explicated through thematic film analysis. Elsaesser and Buckland argue, with literary critic Johnathan Culler, that the thematic analysis tends to relate the work to a small, shared set of basic values and categories, exemplified by Culler, writing in the mid-1970s, as "expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe" (2002, 121). My approach, while comparable to this male-oriented description, is re-written for a feminist perspective: The thematic film analysis, as I intend to use this method, will help me explore how the films can be said to engage an analysis of women's social/historical position developed within the new women's movement.

2.2.2. The themes of the new women's movement

In each film analysis, I explore the feminist project by looking more specifically at five main themes that help guide my analysis. The themes are chosen through an oscillating movement between research on the new women's movement (Haukaa 1981; Korsvik 2010; Danielsen 2013; Hellesund 2013) and the films in my selection. These are, in broad strokes: Marriage, work,

sexuality, the body (as commodity, as a site of control), and solidarity. I will briefly present them here.

1. Marriage

The first theme concerns marriage as an institutionalization of forms of patriarchal oppression. In feminist analysis, the modern family unit has been understood as the primary expression of the binary gender system that relegates man to the public and woman to the domestic sphere. As such, the theme of marriage encapsulates several of the other themes. As historian Trine Rogg Korsvik has argued, most parts of the international movement for women's liberation were skeptical towards the bourgeois institution of marriage (2010, 102). The institution of marriage stood not only as the utmost expression of the public/private split, but was further seen as a site of humiliation, of rape, violence, and control of women (2010, 102). Dissolving the family unit in favor of alternative ways of living, such as cohabitation, communal living arrangements or as single households, was one answer. However, there were different positions on whether to abandon the institution of marriage completely or try to reform it. According to Korsvik, in contrast to for instance the French women's liberation movement, where critique of marriage was fierce and few fought to retain the family unit, the critique remained less pointed in the Norwegian context (Korsvik 2010, 102-103). In Norway, it was predominantly the content of marriage that was under debate, and the possibility and conditions required for creating a more equal relationship between women and men (Hellesund 2013, 79).

Most of the films in my selection offer a critique of marriage, yet the question of analysis is: How do the films formulate this critique? What views on the possibilities of marriage and heterosexual relationships do they present?

2. Work

The theme of work is tightly connected to the theme of marriage as it concerns the distribution and validation of different kinds of work. As part of the vision for a more democratic and anti-bourgeois marriage, the movement formulated several demands directed at sharing responsibility for the home, including six-hour working days, free childcare and that men should perform their share of housework and child rearing (Korsvik 2010, 103). There was, however, a tension

between paid work and unpaid work, in which the role of the housewife represented a particularly contested area (Hellesund 2013, 80). This was a conflict between the traditional care-giving role of women, and the new autonomy of the career woman, and was a question of what kind of social transformation the new women's movement should work for: A revaluation of reproductive care (with brief discussions of "housewife salaries"), or a transformation of the labor market? In Norway, this became primarily a question of how to combine these two aspects of women's experiences, with childcare centers as an important demand (Hellesund 2013, 82).

I take the theme of work then to speak both to a validation of the work women have done, and of the conflicts between paid and unpaid work. Do the films give figurations of work and work-related challenges, and if so, in what way?

3. Sexuality

For the women's liberation movement, sexuality was a key issue, encompassing questions of autonomy and power. In Norway, the new women's movement contributed to separating sexuality from reproduction. Lifting sexuality out of the bedroom and into public discourse, this enabled a more open conversation on sexual practices, preferences, and identities (Hellesund 2013, 83-84). There was, however, strong contestation within the movement on the view of sex: On the one hand, sex was an arena of pleasure to be reclaimed, on the other, (hetero)sexuality was seen as a form of oppression. In Norway, moreover, most of the new women's movement was directed at women with male sex partners, while lesbian women and the theme of lesbianism was far more marginalized (Hellesund 2013, 87).

Looking at my selection, I will therefore pose the question: How do the Norwegian films relate to sex and sexuality?

4. The body

The theme of the body is twofold, pointing both to the body as a site of control and the objectification of the female body. When Jo Freeman visited Oslo in 1970, one of the engaging topics was the commodity status of women's bodies, summarized in the contention that "naked women are used to sell absolute anything" (Quoted in Haukaa 1982, 54). This argument fostered

actions against beauty pageants and strip clubs, but also a direct critique of the way the female body was shown and used in popular media. The skeptical stance towards the mediated display of the female body is closely interlinked with the critique of the conventional cinematic treatment of the female body found in feminist film theory and criticism in the early 1970s (Rosen 1973; Haskell 1974/1987; Mulvey 1975/2000).

In the analysis of the objectification of women, the making of women into a “something” for men’s pleasure was by some understood as a deprivation of subjecthood and autonomy, and further linked to sexualized violence and abuse (Hellesund 2013, 91). As such, the theme of the female body encompasses the work of the movement for battered and raped women. I also place under this theme the fight for self-determined abortion. Reaching into the interlinked themes of sexuality, autonomy, and motherhood, abortion rights is often discussed as a defining issue for the new women’s movement (Haukaa 1982, 27; Aanesen 2012).

The theme of the body, then, is a broad theme which I approach through two main questions: First, how do the films engage the new women’s movement’s struggle against the control of women’s bodies (through abortion legislation, through violence, through commodification)? Second, in what way are the films concerned with the female body on screen as an over-determined image?

5. Solidarity

The fifth and last theme is, in a sense, the new women’s movement itself. The new women’s movement placed as central the contact and activity between women, and most of the groups were women-exclusive and did not allow men. The goal was the liberation of women, which meant among other the ideal that, in the words of Haukaa: “Women must learn from each other to be strong, independent, demanding, and bodily emancipated” (1982, 59). Each woman needed to work towards their own liberation, but in the process could lean on and be helped by other women. The terms “sisterhood” and “sister solidarity” were imported into the Norwegian new women’s movement from the women’s liberation movement in the U.S., and emphasized the positive outcome of women standing together and supporting each other (Danielsen 2013, 51).

This was especially important in the New Feminist platform of consciousness-raising. This political strategy emphasized communality among women, but also made each individual woman important and valuable.

Like the theme of the body, I approach the theme of solidarity in two ways. First, how do the films in my selection emphasize contact between women, and how is the new women's movement itself mediated in the films? Second, does the film itself show solidarity towards the women characters, fictional or historical, featured in the film?

As this brief presentation suggests, the themes are not strictly separated, and they blend into each other and open up to related and intertwined themes, concerns and questions. While some of the films engage several of the themes, other films will only address one or two. In general, the fiction narrative films are more thematically diverse, while the documentary films more often will only address one or two of these themes. The themes are, moreover, not the point of the analysis themselves, but a way to draw out and investigate the feminist argument of the film. As such, and in line with thematic film analysis, they are not to be understood as mere "topics", but might also engage rhetorical structures, aesthetics, and representational problems brought into view by feminist films and feminist film criticism of the 1970s.

2.3. The components of the case study

I now turn to describe the various components that make up this historical case study into feminist filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s. While the goal of the discipline of film history is to explain "change and stasis over time" (Allen and Gomery 1985, 5), the case study takes a narrower approach. It is, in the words of James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper, "a close up rather than a long shot" (2007, 1). This study concentrates on a small selection of films produced and released within a limited time period in order to give an in-depth exploration and analysis of a unique situation: the development and characteristics of feminist filmmaking in the 1970s in Norway. In order to illuminate this phenomenon, this dissertation adopts a mixed-method approach that combines close analysis of films with historical contextualization of film production, circulation and reception.

As a work of film historical scholarship, the methodology of the dissertation follows three key characteristics set out by Chapman, Glancy and Harper to define the field of a New Film History (2007). First, as a work of historical scholarship, the dissertation adopts a methodology for investigating feminist films that acknowledges the complex relationship between film and social context. Feminist films are not studied as mere reflections of Norwegian society in the 1970s, nor is the dissertation concerned with a theoretical investigation of feminist film practice. Rather, feminist films are placed “at the nexus of a complex and dynamic set of relationships between producers and consumers” (2007, 7). Secondly, the study is built on the importance of primary sources for historical research. While there is a clear emphasis on close analysis of the films themselves, the dissertation also builds on analyses of primary sources relating to the production and reception of the films. Third, as a case of film history that sets a selection of films at its center, the dissertation recognizes the unique aesthetic and formal properties of film as a medium. As described in the previous section, the analysis will pay attention to films as audiovisual products, contrary to reading films as mere “narratives”.

The dissertation investigates three areas of study: 1) the themes of the women’s movement in a selection of films, 2) the women who made them and the context of production, 3) the context of circulation and reception. These three areas are what I will call the three legs of the case study, and each of them corresponds to one of the three research questions of the dissertation. In this section, I begin by presenting each leg, before I move to my source material and strategies of collection, and finally, to the film selection at the heart of this dissertation.

2.3.1. Three legs of the case study

The first leg approaches the question of what the films *do* as feminist films. Guided by the themes of marriage, work, sexuality, the body, and solidarity, the film analysis will aim to answer how the films gave form to and were inspired by the agendas of the new women’s movement and engage the debates on gender roles. The overarching questions for the film analysis are: What arguments about women’s conditions of life are presented, and how does the film make this argument? What solutions do the films offer, if any? What is the cinematic perspective on the female characters? Does the film work to privilege and place the characters’ or documentary subjects’ experiences as viable? I also draw comparisons to contextualize and

help set out the film's project – diachronically to Norwegian aesthetic film history, and synchronically to women's feminist films in the 1970s.

The second leg concerns the production of the films and the material conditions that enabled women to direct feminist films. Here, the directors who made the films, and their opportunities within the Norwegian film and television sector, are the main object of study. As women breaking into a male dominated film sector, how they did so and how they came into position to use their voice in filmmaking is important, as is their choice and rationale for making feminist films. For each filmmaker I ask: What was their entry into film direction? What position did they hold in the film and television sector? Were they connected to the new women's movement? Looking specifically at the films in my selection, I ask: What was the initiative for the film, who were the key contributors and collaborators? Who produced the film and how was it financed? Were there specific constraints or controversies in the production?

I do not conduct production studies, nor do I aim to present general arguments about how it was to work as a woman in the Norwegian film and television sector in the 1970s. However, by adopting the historiographical strategy of following the filmmakers (McHugh 2009, 122), certain patterns, repetitions and developments become apparent, making it possible to discuss the important institutions and instances that supported women's and feminist filmmaking, as well as the constraints and determining factors that characterize the body of works. I focus on the opportunities rather than the constraints. This study does not aim to identify the patterns of discrimination that women faced in Norwegian film production in the 1970s, or to identify what kind of women who were able to direct feminist films in this period. This is, however, a story of white women, though not all of them were born in Norway, and the absence of women with a national minority background, such as the indigenous Sámi people, in and of itself suggests that discriminatory structures were at work in Norwegian society.

The third leg of the case study concerns the context of exhibition and reception in which the films were recognized as having something to say about or to the new women's movement. Here, the Norwegian film cultural landscape and the cultural initiatives of the new women's movement and the practices of the international feminist film movement are brought in as frames. How were the films distributed and exhibited? Were they screened under the heading of

“women’s films”? Were the films actualized in discussions about the concept, or about specific topics related to the new women’s movement? How was the films’ political potential assessed by feminist critics?

Like the second leg, this too is a question of making visible enabling structures of opportunity. This takes the form of identification and mapping out, rather than in-depth analysis of, for instance, the impact of feminist film theory in film criticism. I do not conduct reception studies, and I will not pursue the critical reception or audience reception in and of itself. Although such a study would have been a valuable contribution to the project of retracing a social movement and the impact of feminism in Norwegian, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, the third leg is concerned with identifying some of the sites where “women and film” were discussed or films by women were screened, and the critical and organizational work that supported these initiatives in order to identify the central characteristics of feminist film culture in Norway.

Together, the three legs circle in a historically conditioned feminist cinema.

2.3.2. Sources

Due to the limited research on feminist film culture and women’s filmmaking in the 1970s in Norway, it has been necessary to build on and interpret a range of different sources in order to piece out relevant information about the contexts of production and reception of the films. In the study, I combine historical research strategies of collecting archival material and various journalistic sources with conversations with select practitioners. It is mainly through these methods that I have been able to orient myself about the key events and moods of the time.

The print sources I have consulted are primarily short news reports, interviews, films reviews, articles, and essays published in newspapers, journals, and magazines in Norway in the 1970s, but I also build on publicity material, festival programs and pamphlets. Most of the sources have been collected through online and manual searches in the film journal *Fant* (1965-1974) and *Filmavisa* (1977-1981), the trade journals *Rushprint* (1965-) and *Film og Kino* (1965-), the feminist journals *Sirene* (1973-1983) and *Kvinnefront* (1975-1982), as well as local and national newspapers accessed through the digital database of the National Library. This database holds scanned and searchable versions of newspapers, Norwegian published books, reports, journals,

and magazines. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions from March 2020, the online database became the primary access point during the second half of the project.

Before this, I consulted the National Library's pre-collected folders organized after feature film directors and feature films. The materials in these folders are mostly connected to press coverage and are as such reflective of the director's public persona and star status at the time. Material concerning Vibeke Løkkeberg, who was both a celebrity and a public figure since the late 1960s, makes up several folders. Similarly, there is a considerable collection under Anja Breien's name. Laila Mikkelsen, on the other hand, kept out of the public eye, resulting in fewer news stories, interviews, and opinion pieces, while Nicole Macé, who had the shorter career of the four, only left one, slim folder. She was a cultural critic, and the folder does not contain her critical writing. Broader searches in newspapers and journals have thus been necessary, both as a way to fill out the gaps of the folders, and as a way to find sources relating to films and filmmakers beyond feature film production.

Some printed sources have been collected through informants, researchers, and online availability. I was lucky enough to be granted access to Ellen Aanesen's private archive concerning two abortion documentaries she made in the late 1970s, which consist of newspaper clippings and letters from the audience. I have also come across, through informants, other researchers, and online availability, printed programs and reports from women and film events held in Norway and abroad.

One of the most rewarding parts of the research process has been the conversations with several of the women directors featured in this dissertation. I conducted preliminary conversations with Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Laila Mikkelsen at an early stage of my project in the fall of 2017. Towards the end of the project period, in the fall of 2021, I conducted interviews with some of the women central in the production of the documentary films: Inge-Lise Langfeldt, Laila Mikkelsen, Ellen Aanesen and Sidsel Mundal.

These were informal interviews with the aim of gathering information about the production of specific films as well as the career paths of the women I spoke to. The conversations lasted between two to three hours. As a research method, the conversations can be described as

qualitative, elite interviews. They share affiliation to oral history. Oral history will often try to give voice to marginalized experience and are furthermore characterized by a focus on the past, in which the interviewees' life experiences of a particular historical period or event remain the focus of the interview (Edwards and Holland 2013, 33). The interviews conducted for this dissertation had a biographical approach and were conducted based on written consent and a contention of openness. The data management has been registered through the Norwegian Center of Research Data (NSD). As a source, the conversations were primarily used as part of a mixed method approach in order to grasp the mood of the time and gain access to information about the films that could not be found in written sources. The conversations are thus used in this dissertation together with the journalistic sources and archival materials, where each has been used to validate the other, known as a triangulation of methods.

Many of the narratives, thoughts, and recollections of the women I spoke to pointed beyond the scope of this dissertation and could not be explored or pursued within the pages of this monograph. These were rich conversations about the experiences of working in the Norwegian film and television sector in the 1970s, as well as stories about *cinophilia*, feminism, and union work. The work is far from done: There is need for oral history projects that gathers these and many others' stories.

2.3.3. Film selection: Finding feminist films in Norway

Turning finally to the film selection itself, this study includes, to the best of my knowledge, an extensive sample of feminist films directed by women and produced and released in Norway between 1970 and 1980. They have been chosen using the criteria of "feminist film by and about women". In line with a historical approach, I have opted for a definition of "feminist film" that is inclusive of different styles, genres, and modes of filmmaking (documentary and fiction, feature length and short), while remaining rigorous in terms of subject matter and themes, in so far as they must be explicitly concerned with the issues of the new women's movement. In my selection, this translates into films that center on one or more women characters (fictional or historical) and give cinematic formations (narrative, stylistic, thematic) that resonate with feminist analyses of women's positioning, as well as films that are about the political practice of feminism – that is, the new women's movement in Norway.

The definition excludes from close consideration films about women directed by men, as well as films directed by women that are not feminist and do not place women characters at their center (e.g. *Exit* (Pål Løkkeberg, 1970), *Kvinnene / The Women* (Per Blom, 1979), *Full utrykning! / Full Emergency Response!* (Randi Nordby and Eric Johnson, 1971), *Oss / Us* (Mikkelsen, 1976), *Voldtekt / Rape* (Breien 1971), *Den allvarsamme leken / Games of Love and Loneliness* (Breien, 1977), *Arven / Next of Kin* (Breien, 1979))¹³. While I focus exclusively on feminist films directed by women, I do not argue that it is necessary for women to direct feminist films, nor do I argue that it is impossible for men to do so. Clearly, feminist themes were not the exclusive domain of women directors – just as not all women directors would pursue issues of feminism.

Second, my study is mainly concerned with the film sector, and I have excluded from close consideration most of what was produced by the public broadcaster, the NRK. This includes the film production output of the public broadcaster's televised theatre, Fjernsynsteateret. However, preliminary research points to Fjernsynsteateret as a highly interesting context of feminist engagement, and further research into Fjernsynsteateret and the role played by the public broadcaster for the dissemination of the concerns of the new women's movement is warranted. My sincere wish is that this dissertation can serve as a stepping-stone for more research into these channels and the filmmaking that so easily falls between the cracks of film historical research. I have furthermore chosen to limit my search to films released between 1970 and 1980. The first feminist film directed by a woman that I have been able to identify is Nicole Macé's *Triangle*, and so the actual scope spans the years 1971 to 1980. This is done in the interest of time and scope but means that significant releases after 1980s – notably the feature film releases *Forfølgelsen / Witch Hunt* (Anja Breien), *Liten Ida / Little Ida* (Laila Mikkelsen) and *Løperjenten / Kamilla* (Vibeke Løkkeberg) in 1981, a year popularly known as “the Year of the Girls” – fall out of consideration in this dissertation.

¹³ There are border cases. *Games of Love and Loneliness* (1977) directed by Anja Breien, is a love story that takes as central themes sexual moral, women's access to paid work and inequality of power between the sexes. Upon the DVD release of a new restoration, cultural critic Ingun Økland reclaimed the film as a forgotten feminist masterpiece of Norwegian and Swedish cinema (Økland 2015). I have chosen to exclude the film because its perspective resides with the male lead through voice-over, focal point, and narrative. Likewise, the short film *Regn / Rain* (1975) directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg represents a border case, where an adult world of gender and class disparities looms in the background of a narrative about a young child.

Based on these criteria, I have landed on a selection of twelve films directed and mostly written by women. These are both fictions and documentaries, as well as hybrid forms, in short and feature length. A striking feature of the selection, however, is the ratio between the feature length and the documentary short. In the U.S. context, Sue Thornham and Shilyh Warren have both pointed to the fact that most feminist films directed by women in the 1970s were documentaries (Warren 2008; Thornham 2012, 35). In Norway, however, this is not the case. My selection consists of four feature length narrative films: The canonical films *Hustruer / Wives* (1975, 1 hour 24 min), directed by Anja Breien and written in collaboration with the film's three main actors, and *Åpenbaringen / The Revelation* (1977, 1 hour 20 min), directed and written by Vibeke Løkkeberg, as well as the less well-known *3 / Triangle* (1971, 1 hour 26 min) and *Formyndrene / The Guardians* (1978, 1 hour 43 min), both written and directed by Nicole Macé. There is one short narrative film: *Ukeslutt / Weekend* (1974, 23 min), directed by Laila Mikkelsen and written in collaboration with Per Blom.

In the documentary category, I have only been able to find five films. One of them is an experimental short film: *Bildene omkring oss / The Images Surrounding Us* (1978, 9 min), directed by Laila Mikkelsen and Anne Siri Bryhni. Four are mid-length documentaries: The documentary *Abort / Abortion* (1972, 39 min), directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg, *Kvinnekamp og kvinneår / Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (1979, 60 min), directed and written by Eva Mannseth, and two collective productions: *Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake / It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (The film production group, 1979, 38 min) and *Krisesenteret i Oslo / The Women's Shelter in Oslo* (Inge-Lise Langfeldt / Damefilm AS, 1980, 30 min). From the NRK, I have included two hour-length documentaries, both directed and written by Ellen Aanesen: *Kvinnens møte med abortnemnda / Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee* (1978, 55 min) and *Fra 3 års fengsel til selvbestemt abort / From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* (1978, 58 min). Aanesen has been vital in making visible the work and legacy of the new women's movement. Aanesen's book *Ikke send meg til en kone, doktor!* (1981/2012) is about the historical battle for the right to self-determined abortion in Norway, which still stands as a fundamental work on this history. More recently, she edited the memoir book *Vi var mange: Den nye kvinnebevegelsen på*

1970-tallet (2018), written in collaboration with Unni Rustad, Berit Morland and Linn Stalsberg. Her filmmaking, however, has not received much attention.

Finding these documentaries has been challenging and reflects the privileged position of the feature film in film historical research. While I could identify and evaluate the film production of Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg, Nicole Macé or Laila Mikkelsen by referring to existing filmographies or compiling such filmographies myself¹⁴, the greater challenge was to find films beyond the feature film format which were not directed by women who also directed feature film. First, this was a challenge of imagining what to look for. In my preliminary research, I had not encountered – or recognized as such – feminist filmmaking outside of feature film production. With the exception of Vibeke Løkkeberg’s documentary work, there were no traces of feminist documentary filmmaking in Norwegian film history. Not knowing whether there was something to look for, resulted in this body of work entering the project at a later point. The conundrum of, in a sense, having to know what to look for in order to find it, was strengthened by the challenge of knowing *where* to look. In contrast to the possibility of navigating the feature film production through filmographies compiled in film historical research, there are no extensive databases for short film and television production in Norway. This makes short film production a difficult area to navigate.

One way forward was through investigations into the spaces and events of the new women’s movement and into the screening practices of women’s films. Indeed, my ‘discovery’ of the non-feature films has, to a large degree, been made possible because of these headings. Through the digital database of the National Library, I have been able to search through film programs with the aim to identify possible feminist films. The distribution catalogues of Statens Filmsentral (The National Film Board of Norway) and Norsk Filmklubbforbund (the Norwegian Federation of Film Societies) have been especially valuable resources. This means, however, that much of what could be labeled amateur filmmaking is left out of consideration. Based on these sources, the selection, as it appears in this dissertation, includes every narrative short and feature film and

¹⁴ At the start of this project, there were already extensive filmographies for Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg, although the latter had several inaccuracies in the listing of her documentary work. There were no filmographies available for Laila Mikkelsen or Nicole Macé.

every independently produced documentary film with some form of film distribution that I have been able to find.

The help and assistance from the research librarians at The National Library of Norway has furthermore been invaluable, not only in locating and identifying films, but also in providing access to them. Because, once “found”, the third challenge has been the availability of the films. During the research period, only two of the twelve films were available to the public. *Wives* (1975), by far the most well-known and widely circulated film in my selection, is the only film available in a physical format, although the DVD release has gone out of production. Together with *The Guardians* (1978), *Wives* is furthermore available for rent from the VOD service Filmarkivet.no. Recently, a DVD/blu-ray collection of Løkkeberg’s films, including *The Revelation* (1977), has been released. During the research period, however, most of the films have been restricted to on-site viewings in the Norwegian National Library or through University Library rental. One final hope is that this dissertation might provide an opportunity to bring these films back into public consideration.

CH 3. FRAMING WOMEN'S ENTRANCE INTO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR IN NORWAY IN THE 1970s

The development of feminist filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s is intertwined with the development of women's access to the director's chair. For women to be able to direct political, committed film, they first needed to be in position to make the films they wanted to make. Between 1971 and 1977, Anja Breien, Nicole Macé, Laila Mikkelsen and Vibeke Løkkeberg all directed their first feature film. In these same years, aspiring directors, producers, editors and cinematographers such as Kikki Engelbrektson, Eva Ch. Nilsen, Ellen Aanesen, Bente Erichsen, Kjersti Alver, Margrethe Robsham, Bente Kaas, Sidsel Mundal, and Inge-Lise Langfeldt were entering film production. Some of them would go on to direct feature film, while others fostered prolific careers in other forms of filmmaking or in other professions. The question I would like to pose is: How did they manage to do this? How did they make their way into the director's chair? This chapter will point to important conditions and changes that enabled women to enter feature film direction in the 1970s and introduce some of the central careers of filmmaking women.

The increased presence of women as film directors in Norway in the 1970s coincided with similar developments in other national cinemas and film industries. This narrative of emergence is thus not singular to Norwegian film history, but can be seen as part of a historical change in women's access to film production that began in the late 1960s and continued into the 1980s and 1990s. Building on Kathleen McHugh's study of a transnational cohort of women directors coming into feature film direction in the 1970s and 1980s (2009), I will draw out two important historical developments that can frame women's pathway into feature film direction. The first is the impact of feminism and what McHugh describes as the "significant and widespread material, political, social, and cultural transformations in the meaning of the category 'woman'" (2009, 120). The second is the re-building of national cinemas in the postwar period and the development of a specified cinematic culture of film societies and film criticism characterized by the rise of auteurism.

In the case of Norway, this translates into, in the broadest sense, a narrative of public responsibility that intersects with at least two developments: On the one hand that of women's increased movement into the paid workforce, and on the other the developments of a state supported film sector. Both developments have roots in the postwar period, characterized by the

Norwegian Labor Party's unifying project of rebuilding Norwegian society. Both developments furthermore lay the ground for generational uproars in the 1970s, expressed through the new women's movement and what is recognized as a generational shift in Norwegian cinema. In the following, I present these two frames. As examples of how these frames impacted women's opportunities and ambitions as film directors, I draw in the biography and filmography of primarily the four feature film directors Anja Breien, Laila Mikkelsen, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Nicole Macé. In subsequent chapters, these careers will be elaborated on, and other filmmaking women who worked as directors in the 1970s will be introduced.

3.1. Women on the move

On a fundamental level, the influx of women directors in Norway in the 1970s and the possibility of a feminist cinema are framed by the dramatic reconfigurations of gender relations and social organization that took place in Norwegian society in the 1970s. From a gender perspective, historian Ida Blom has described this decade as a watershed in the postwar period (Blom 2013, 336). This was, as in many other industrial countries, a period of disruption. The protest movements and anti-authority sensibilities of the Student Uprising in 1968 and the liberation movements created new lifestyles and conceptions of what constituted a good life. At the same time, the institution of marriage was beginning to lose its centrality, as other forms of family organization such as co-habitation became more common. Social equity, a boom in higher education, and lower fertility rates signaled a changing demography. The 1970s would also be the beginning of the Norwegian oil era. The discovery of oil in the North Sea in 1969 became the lifeline for Norwegian industry, staving off growing unemployment rates and instead fostering technological and economic development, and eventually providing a significant source of income to the state. One of the most dramatic changes, however, might have been married women's movement from housewife to paid employment. In the 1950s and 1960s, Norway had mainly been a housewife society characterized by conservative family politics that supported the single-income household, complimented by a model of gender roles that worked to establish men in the role of provider and women as caregiver in the home. At the time, Norway had the lowest percentage of women working outside of the home out of the OECD countries, surpassed only by the Netherlands (Hagemann 2004, 275). In 1960, 55% of all adult women were registered as

housewives, making this the largest employment group in Norway. By the end of the 1970s, however, the two-income household had generally replaced the housewife society as a norm.

Feature film production was, then, one of many arenas dominated by men where women increased their presence in the 1970s, and women's changing opportunities as film directors is connected to a change in women's access to and negotiation of the public sphere. The clearest expression of this negotiation was the new women's movement, where women's work participation became, alongside the fight for self-determined abortion, one of the most important and widely agreed upon platforms of the movement (Danielsen 2013, 55-56). The organized sections of the new women's movement worked in different ways to enable women to make their own life decisions, while also making sure that these were in fact genuinely available choices by demanding public childcare and schemes of parental leave, as well as access to self-determined abortion. Several of these demands would be incorporated into the welfare state in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and feminist scholars generally agree that the divide between the public and private sphere lost much of its gendered significance in the Nordic countries in this period (Borchost and Siim 2008, 214). This was, however, not only a result of the new women's movement itself. The demands of the new women's movement were formulated at a time when the state needed women's labor power, and the expansions of the welfare state towards what Helga Hernes conceptualized as a potentially "woman-friendly state" – meaning a state that would enable women to combine work and family life, that is, not having to make more difficult choices than men – came about through a correlation between the needs of the state and the demands of the new women's movement (Hernes 1987, 15; Danielsen 2013, 57).

Indeed, in addition to the outside impact of transnational feminism, the foundation for the significant change in gender relations is found in older developments within Norway. Gro Hagemann has pointed to the significance of the so-called "feminist turn" of the Labor Party in the mid-1960s as an important precondition (2004). The Norwegian Labor Party was the governing party of the postwar period, rebuilding Norwegian society with attention to equality, welfare, and education. In a postwar situation craving economic growth, the housewife represented an important group for a growing consumer economy, with the modernized and effective kitchen championed as an ideal of welfare and modernity (Hagemann 2010). The Labor Party thus championed the housewife as a positive force, and as such they were not forgotten. In

cinema, we find the expressions of the housewife's central position in the production of so-called "housewife films", a hybrid genre of entertainment, information and commercials that were created, promoted, and exhibited specifically for the housewives (Myrstad 2012). However, as the need for labor power to support the expansion of the welfare state was ever-growing, the national congress voted to emphasize gender equality in the party program and instigated a shift towards supporting the two-income household. In this way, the Labor Party's social democratic project of modernization acted as a foundation for the new women's movement both by crystalizing a complimentary gender system and by raising the issue of women's work and gender roles.

3.1.1. Personal pathways into the director's chair

Wanting a different life for themselves, many women chose to seek an education and to pursue a career. Paid work came to signify independence, autonomy, and self-realization – claiming control of one's own life as an active, full human being (Danielsen 2013, 56). These ideals likely impacted several of the women who chose to pursue film direction as their career in the 1970s. Some were quite explicit in making such a connection. Drawing on feminist analysis in interviews and essays, some of the directors framed their career paths as a movement towards greater subjecthood.

Nicole Macé (1931-2011), who worked as a film director and film critic in the 1970s, intriguingly called the making of her first short film "a liberation from the kitchen bench" in an essay published in the trade journal *Film og Kino* on occasion of the International Women's Year in 1975 (1975a, 77). The essay was entitled "Fra kjøkkenbenk til registol" (From the kitchen bench to the director's chair) and the text strongly suggests this was a movement into greater personal agency. Macé, who was born in Paris in 1931, moved to Norway in 1953 as a young newlywed. With her she had a solid academic background with degrees in linguistics from the University of Sorbonne and language from Harvard University where she studied under the structuralist Roman Jakobson. There were plans to pursue a PhD in Norway, but these were never realized (Dokka 2015, 300). Macé spent her first years in Norway as a housewife in the west-coast city of Bergen, but upon her divorce, she moved to Oslo with her child where she started working as a journalist and a French teacher for the Cultural Center at the French

Embassy in Norway, the Centre Culturel Francais. After publicly siding against the French Government in the Algerian War for Independence, however, her employment for the Cultural Center came under pressure (Dokka 2015, 302). Faced with the choice between loyalty to the French Government or loss of employment, she chose the latter. In her own words, “that’s how I became a freelancer in Norway,” marking the beginning of her life as a stage director, writer, and cultural critic, as well as her career as a film director and film critic (Bentzrud 1991, 31).

In the essay “From the kitchen bench to the director’s chair”, Macé describes the work as a theatre and film director as her true ambition, but one she, due to her gender role, never dared pursue as more than a hobby (1975a, 77). Macé directed her first film in 1962, a short documentary about the Norwegian writer Johan Falkberget.¹⁵ She writes: “Then I finally managed to liberate myself from the kitchen bench. In the Spring of 1962, I was given the opportunity to make my first film [...]. Five days of shooting at Røros.”, but then continues: “Right in the midst of the pleasure of working, the PROBLEM arose: Who would take care of my daughter, who was then 8?” (1975a, 77). Macé’s essay is concerned with the pull of the double labor of working mothers and married women, a pull that had ten folds the intensity if the work was in film production. The irregular hours, the lack of day care institutions for film workers: Was there any wonder few women were able to pursue their artistic ambitions of filmmaking? Macé maintained that she had never been discriminated against on account of her sex. On the contrary, she writes, she was the one insisting on her “difference” by making the situation of women a crucial concern in her work. On the other hand, the forcefulness of gender expectations had created obstacles. Macé concludes her essay by reflecting on how working against the established norms of women’s responsibility at home and for the necessity of collective day care institutions for women working in the industry could enable more women to make the leap from the kitchen bench to the director’s chair (1975a, 77).

¹⁵ *Falkberget* (1962) was produced by the documentary film production company ABC-film and co-directed with Svein Toreg in a French and Norwegian version and shown on the weekly television program *Filmavisa*. Other than this, there is not much information about the film. However, it seems reasonable to assume that Macé got involved in the project based on her central position in the nascent film milieu in Oslo and her previous work at the Cultural Center.

Vibeke Løkkeberg (previously Kleivdal, b.1945) similarly cast the pathway into the director's chair as a movement away from a confining ideal of womanhood (Servoll 2014; 2020). This was not framed as a liberation from the kitchen bench, but from the camera lens. As a young woman, Løkkeberg had worked as a model for European fashion houses, taking her to Denmark, Italy, and France. In the mid-1960s, she returned to Norway to pursue acting, one of her many creative aspirations, at the National Theatre School in Oslo. Her acting training was cut short, however, when she became romantically involved with and later married to director and Theatre School teacher Pål Løkkeberg, who, struck by her abilities as an actor, wanted her to join him into filmmaking. In the years they were together, the couple collaborated on the two feature films *Liv* (1967) and *Exit* (1970). Both films show clear influences from the French new wave, and star Løkkeberg as women characters who struggle for greater personal freedom and self-realization in the face of confining gender roles. *Liv* follows a day in the life of a model as she attempts to break with her position as an object of love and sexual objectification. The film was based on Løkkeberg's own experience as a model, and in addition to playing the lead role she was both a co-producer and the primary scriptwriter. In *Exit*, the character Maria escapes her bourgeois marriage and joins a small-time criminal in a bank robbery. The films broke ground by thematizing women's conditions of life, yet as Anne Marit Myrstad has shown, the portrayal of the female characters can be seen as paradoxical: The characters are women in explicit revolt to gender norms, but they are also infantilized and cinematically placed as objects of desire (2013b, 50).

This paradox entered into Løkkeberg's public and private life, and her practice as a filmmaker was to a large degree informed by a break with these roles.¹⁶ In several interviews she would explain her experience of increasingly being boxed in by her roles as Pål's actress, as a diva, and as an on-screen object of desire (Hveem 1970; Rostad 1980).¹⁷ At the cusp of the 1970s, Løkkeberg distanced herself from acting and from Pål Løkkeberg. As summarized by Johanne Kielland Servoll, she got a divorce, cut her hair short, and in the early 1970s directed several

¹⁶ Løkkeberg would later prevent the film *Liv* from being aired on public television, stating its harmful effect on her public person (Aftenposten 1977, n.p.; Servoll 2020, 202-203).

¹⁷ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, she was on the verge of what might have been a breakthrough as an actor in European art cinema, with offers from directors such as Federico Fellini and Peter Watkins. Yet, she found the roles uninteresting at best, and the few acting jobs she did accept left her disillusioned. "Imagine", she said in an interview in 1970, "a director who says full of despair: 'Vibeke. Your right breast is heavier than your left. What shall we do?' If that is the problem, then I'd rather make films at home" (Hveem 1970, 13).

social issue documentaries (Servoll 2014, 265). In an interview from 1980, she refers to this period as a moment when she decided she wanted to be “a subject and not an object”, a move made possible by the new women’s movement:

I think we can say that was the beginning of my little revolt. I started reading women’s literature and got an “aha”-experience. This happened in a time when the student uprising embossed the world. The changes that were happening gave me strength to become proactive, to do what I meant and thought. The thing is you need support if you want to swim against the current (Rostad 1980, 5).

Løkkeberg continued to work as a performer, but primarily established herself as a socially engaged filmmaker with clear feminist attachments through her documentary practice. In three documentaries made among other for the Norwegian public broadcaster in the early 1970s, Løkkeberg took on the controversial topics of abortion legislation in *Abort / Abortion* (1972), paternity cases in *En far skal barnet ha / The Child Needs a Father* (1973), and the effect of Norwegian assimilation politics on the Romani peoples in *Tater / Gypsy* (1973).

Other women less explicitly framed their movement into the director’s chair as liberatory projects, but this often still very much concerned questions of a movement into previously inaccessible arenas. In the intersection of gender and class, many of the film directors began their pathway into film direction through new opportunities of education. Laila Mikkelsen (b. 1940), who came from a working-class background, studied at the University of Oslo. She developed her interest in filmmaking through the university film community. Anja Breien (b.1940), who came from a middle-class background, entered the director’s chair through training at a French film school. Norway did not have a national film school at the time¹⁸, and for filmmakers eager to pursue a career as director, there were primarily two ways of learning the trade: either to seek education abroad or to work their way up the production ladder. Breien went the former way, and between 1962 and 1964 she studied at Institute des Hautes Études Cinématographique (IDHEC) in Paris, where she was among the first women to be accepted into the directing program. This was not without controversy, and Breien was initially met with discouragement based on her

¹⁸ The Norwegian Film School would not be established until 1997, more than 30 years after Denmark and Sweden started their film schools.

gender. Even though she had both applied to and been accepted into the directing class, she was placed in the editing class instead. The school board's explanation for this, according to Breien, was the contention that it was a waste of time to train women directors as they would eventually abandon filmmaking in favor of a domestic life anyway (Bellsund 1976, 30). Nevertheless, she managed to argue her way into the entry exam and reclaim her spot in the directing program.

3.1.2. Collective actions, group identity

Next to changes in opportunities and self-understanding exemplified by these directors, the analysis and demands of the new women's movement also fostered initiatives on a collective level in the film sector. During the 1970s, several events and initiatives gathered women working in film and television on the contention that women shared similar challenges and interests more generally.

One issue that gained traction during this decade was the conditions of working mothers. Indeed, several of the women who pursued careers in film and television seem to have encountered the same problem Macé had a decade before: the challenge of combining family life with work in film production. For instance, Mikkelsen (then Bull Tuhus), who worked both as a director and a continuity supervisor – a so-called 'script' – in the early 1970s, described in an opinion piece in the freelance film worker's union's trade journal *Rushprint* how the extensive overtime and six-day working weeks in effect excluded from film production everyone except "people under 30, people without children, men with stay-at-home (and patient) women" (Mikkelsen [Bull Tuhus] 1973, 5). Mikkelsen would later be part of the work group that headed Filmaksjonen-78 (the Film Initiative of '78), an independent call to arms initiated by film workers to exert pressure on the production company Norsk Film AS, which was not only the largest film producer but a state-owned one at that, to improve working conditions in the company's productions by for instance restricting the use of overtime (Myrstad 2020a, 191-192). Four of the seven members in the work group were women: make-up artist June Paalgaard, production leader Kirsten Bryhni and director Bente Erichsen, in addition to Mikkelsen (Myrstad 2020a, 191). The initiative led to a re-organization of the production company and a new trade agreement that secured higher compensation for film workers and stricter management of working hours on film productions. In addition to the demands of the Film Initiative, which indirectly concerned family life, there

were attempts to establish opportunities for on-set childcare during film production, such as the “childcare group” within the freelance film worker’s union (2020a, 358).

The challenge of working mothers was also a central theme in an interview film made by Nicole Macé in 1975. In this film, she interviewed Scandinavian women filmmakers about their experiences in the film industry. The program was aired on public television in 1976 under the title *Om å være kvinne bak kamera / On Being a Woman Behind the Camera*. The film features interviews with Anja Breien, Laila Mikkelsen and Vibeke Løkkeberg from Norway, Mai Zetterling and Marianne Ahrne from Sweden, and Astrid Henning-Jensen and the feminist film collective Røde Søster (The Red Sister) who were behind the film *Ta’ det som en mand, frue! / Take it Like a Man, Ma’m!* (1975) from Denmark. In the film, Macé asks the women about what it’s like being a woman in the film industry, about their relationship to the category of “women’s films”, their thoughts on the new women’s movement, as well as their thoughts on inhabiting the traditionally male role of film director. While the answers given by the directors point to very different individual experiences and concerns, the interview itself is indicative of how the cultural climate surrounding this generation of woman directors nourished a communality and group identity. The cultural shift brought on by the new women’s movement and its focus on women’s labor opportunities and artistic production made the woman film director a point of interest.

The interview film *On Being a Woman Behind the Camera* would be one of a series of interviews and events that brought women directors together. For instance, in October 1978, a handful of Swedish directors travelled to Oslo for a Swedish-Norwegian Women Directors Meeting, organized by the film critic and culture activist Elsa Brita Marcussen¹⁹. Over a weekend, women directors and film workers met to discuss women directors’ situation, the categories and genres of women’s films and children’s films as contested “women’s areas”, and to screen films by the women present (Lian 1979). The event was as a networking event, warmly described by film critic *in spe*, and later director of the Norwegian Film Institute, Vigdis Lian as a necessary and crucial gathering that proved there was strength in numbers (1979, 39). From

¹⁹ Elsa Brita Marcussen was then working part-time as culture secretary at the so-called ‘Swedish house’ at Voksenåsen in Oslo. The Swedish house was a gift from Norway to Sweden in recognition of Sweden’s humanitarian aid during and after World War 2.

Norway, the four feature film directors Anja Breien, who had recently directed film in Sweden, Vibeke Løkkeberg, Nicole Macé and Laila Mikkelsen participated. Additionally, in the words of Lian, “some women film workers were present as observers” (1979, 39). The Swedish delegation was larger, and included film directors Mai Zetterling, Christina Olofson, Birgitta Svensson, and Ingegjerd Hellner, as well as a producer from the Swedish Film Institute and a representative from Svenska Kvinnors Filmförbund, SKFF (The Swedish Women’s Film Association). The Swedish Women’s Film Association had been founded in 1976 by women working in the Swedish film sector, and was an advocacy group with the expressed goals of supporting women film workers, revealing and countering the discriminating images of women in film and television, and working for the promotion of women in decision making positions (Branner 1986, 2). Similar initiatives were found in the Norwegian media sector as well, with for instance the Engebret-movement established by female journalists in Oslo in 1974 (Utheim 2009). In 1982, women working in the film and television sector came together to form Kvinnenes Filmforum (The Women’s Film Forum) (Lund). This was a discussion and screening forum with an expressed goal to strengthen women’s position in film production. For the most part of the 1970s, however, the meeting points created for women working in the film sector were of a more temporary nature, in the form of group interviews, panels, seminars and, not the least, film screenings that set women directors in the spotlight.

This activity impacted women directors in at least two ways. It brought to light the challenges faced by women working as directors, with potential for collective experiences and action. It also elevated the importance of individual women working as directors. Film historian Jane M. Gaines, considering the different ways women’s contributions in international silent cinema have been accounted for, suggests that the “remarkability” of a woman directing is not only a function of how many women could or could not direct films, but of the exigencies of the time (2018, 8). The woman director is, in other words, as remarkable as the context of reception requires her to be. In the 1970s, women directing film *were* remarkable, and it might be possible to claim that even though women had directed films before, the 1970s stands out as a period when *woman as director* gained particular significance.

While the celebration of and interest in the woman director made women working as directors visible, this visibility must be understood as ambivalent. The group identity of women

filmmakers could have collective potential, yet there is also a sense that the construction of the group in and of itself often overshadowed both the actual films that were made as well as the challenges that women faced in the film sector. In other words, while women working in the film sector as directors enjoyed public visibility, there is also a sense that this visibility also subsumed the collective revolts or potential calls for transformations under a celebratory narrative of national progress. An example of this is found in 1973, when the freelance film workers' union dedicated a page in their trade journal *Rushprint* to celebrate that four of its female members had received favorable coverage of their films. Signed by none other than the journal's former editor and veteran director Walter Fyrst²⁰, the page carried the caption "Hurra for jentuten!" (Hurrah for the gals!) and presented four names: Anja Breien, who had just won the film critics' award for her feature film *Voldtekt / Rape* (1971); Vibeke Løkkeberg, who had created heated debate with her documentary film *Abort / Abortion* (1972) about the Norwegian abortion legislation; Ellen Aanesen, who had made the television program *Maridalen* (1972) – the best television Fyrst had seen; and Eva Ch. Nilsen, who signaled a new television style in her debut as a director with the television theatre *Som natt og dag / Like Night and Day* (1972) (Fyrst 1973, 11).

The choice of the Norwegian term "jentuten" – a dialect form of "girls" – can hardly be a coincidence. The term was popularized in the mid-1960s as the nick name for the women's cross-country ski team as they first won Silver in the World Championship in 1966 and later the Olympic Gold Medal in Grenoble in 1968. This was a turning point for the public opinion of women's skiing. From meeting strong contestation, the women's ski team became increasingly popular during this period (Vibe 1998). By using the same name for women filmmakers, it is tempting to read Fyrst as signaling a similar sense of national pride and celebration of the accomplishments of this "sports team" of women directors, anticipating later accounts of the 1970s as a turning point for women's access to the director's chair and pointing to a sense of making harmless the social and cinematic contributions these women's filmmaking represented.

²⁰ Fyrst had worked for a long time in Norwegian cinema as a director. He was active in the Nazi party NS during the German Occupation and was convicted of treason in the post-war reconciliation process. In the 1960s he returned to filmmaking and was the first editor of *Rushprint*.

3.2. Cinema in recovery

As women's position in Norwegian society was changing, so were conditions for Norwegian film and media production. A central frame for women's entrance into the director's chair can be pinned to changes in the Norwegian film sector itself. In 1970, when the first New Feminists started organizing in Norway, another hope for change was brewing as cinemas across the country premiered the new film *Dager fra 1000 år / Days from a 1000 Years*. While the film in hindsight marked the beginning of the entrance of women as film directors, its significance at the time was of another character. *Days from a 1000 Years* was helmed by the three up-and-coming directors Anja Breien, Egil Kolstø and Espen Thorstenson, who each directed a short film segment set in a separate historical moment – the past, present and future, respectively. The short films shared a stylistic movement towards the expressive and experimental, downplaying narrative in favor of mood. Equally important as the names on the credits, was the name of the company that produced the film: the state-municipally owned production company Norsk Film AS.

Norsk Film AS was the producing arm of the uniquely Norwegian municipal cinema system, and as such the company both symbolically and institutionally signified public engagement in the film sector. *Days from a 1000 Years* was among the first films made by Norsk Film AS after the company had undergone major restructurings, following economic challenges as well as pressure and boycotts from film workers (Tryggeseid and Larsen 2020; Myrstad 2020a).²¹ The film *Days from a 1000 Years* itself was a box office disaster, but for parts of the filmmaking community it offered proof of a new direction from Norsk Film AS (Myrstad 2020a, 173-174). With a public mandate to support aspiring filmmaking talents, and to a greater degree pursue filmmaking as an artistic, non-commercial endeavor of social relevance, the company raised its sails in the name of

²¹ In the 1960s, the company, its organization and direction, that had been the major battleground for the film production community (Tryggeseid and Larsen 2020; Iversen 2011). The conflict escalated when several members of the freelance film worker's union, known as "de 44" ("the 44"), threatening with general strike if the board of Norsk Film AS did not change its direction away from what was understood as a prioritizing of commercial needs over artistic ambition. The management of Norsk Film AS was in the end forced to acknowledge and act on their protests, and by 1965, most of the demands of "the 44" were realized. This instigated a new epoch of Norsk Film AS and Norwegian film production: With the establishment of a new position of creative director, and mandatory representation from the film worker's union in the boardroom, the filmmaker's themselves were given influence over the public management of the film sector (Tryggeseid and Larsen 2020, 157).

the new film art. A central frame for women's entrance into the director's chair is found in this change of direction, and in the changes within the Norwegian film sector itself.

3.2.1. The municipal cinema system and public support for film production

The municipal cinema system is a stand-out feature of Norwegian film history. In Norway, the majority of cinema businesses were controlled by the municipalities.²² While internationally it is not unusual for municipals to own and run a movie theatre, the extent of this ownership in Norway is unparalleled (Asbjørnsen and Solum 1999, 270). In the 1970s, approximately half of all movie theatres in operation were under local government control, and almost 90% of box office revenue came from the municipally owned theatres. It is only in the last decade that the system has broken down and private ownership has taken over to any real extent. The distribution arm of the municipal cinemas, Kommunernes Filmcentral (The Norwegian Film Exchange Ltd., est. 1919), started producing some films from 1919 onwards in recognition of the poor state of film production in Norway, before the municipalities established the production company Norsk Film AS (Norwegian Film Ltd.) in 1932. With Norsk Film AS, Norway had a publicly owned, vertically integrated cinema system. However, as it was the municipals who owned the movie theatres, income from screenings was for the most part not redistributed back into film production, but rather into municipal budgets. In Norway, many cultural institutions and infrastructures have been financed by movie ticket sales. Moreover, in contrast to the neighboring countries Denmark and Sweden, where the privately owned companies Nordisk Film AS (est. 1906) and Svensk Filmindustri AB (est. 1919) developed as vertically integrated production companies with control over production, exhibition and distribution, the allocation of exhibition venues was not possible for Norwegian production companies. In this way, the municipal cinema system is often used to explain the historically rather impoverished state of Norwegian film production.²³ In Norway, continuous film production was challenging, as the

²² The system dates back to the establishment of the national censorship scheme with the Film Theatre's Act of 1913, *The Act of Public Exhibition of Cinematographic Images*, that placed control of cinema licensing in the hands of local councils instead of local law enforcement. Recognizing in cinema theatres both a valuable source of income for the municipalities and an area begging public control, several municipalities voted to award the licenses to themselves.

²³ For instance, film historians Tore Helseth and Jo Sondre Moseng muse: Could a more sustainable, vertically integrated production system have fostered a Norwegian Ingmar Bergman or Th. Dreyer? (Helseth and Moseng 2020, 326-327). See Grønnestad (1999) for a challenge to this explanation.

municipalities did not secure funding, and from the first fiction film production in Norway in 1911 right up to the 1950s, the overall national production could barely manage three to five films a year, and some years only a single feature film was released.

Into the 1970s, the conditions for film production would improve as the State strengthened its ties to Norsk Film AS. In this period, there was broad political agreement and consensus on the importance of having a public production company, and across political dividing lines there was a willingness to provide the company with the appropriate framework conditions (Myrstad 2020a, 179). In 1966, Parliament increased funding for the company's film studio located at Jar in Oslo. In 1971, the state became the company's main shareholder after several large debt restructurings, and from 1973, Norsk Film AS was allocated continuous public funding, allowing the company to develop and produce films independently from the film funding bodies, following a model used at cultural institutions such as theatres and the opera. The direct funds corresponded to three feature films a year and created some leeway for the production company to champion certain projects and filmmakers. This talent development program was strengthened through additional funding for a department for training aspiring directors. Norsk Film AS established a study department in 1973, with the goal of training promising film directors and preparing them for feature film production, as well as allowing for experimentation.

The shift in the relationship between the state and the film sector was part of a larger development stemming from the 1950s, when national film production became a symbolical part of the postwar social democratic project of rebuilding the nation. The new relationship instigated what Ove Solum and Dag Asbjørnsen has called the second phase of the municipal cinema system in the 1960s and 1970s, which was characterized by increased involvement of the state in film production and the implementation of new incentives for funding, as well as a change in the argumentative basis for film production and distribution (2003, 93-94). The shift was in part due to an economic situation of new international trade agreements for the taxation of film, an economic boom in Norway, and a changing media landscape. With the growing competition from television as home entertainment and a channel of information, the running of cinemas, previously a source of income for the municipalities, was instead becoming an expense. It was also due to the development of a state film policy in the postwar years that, in words of Gunnar Iversen, both "recognized that film was an important artistic expression [and] recognized the role

of film for national culture, and as an important way to strengthen national identity” (2013a, 19). From an area begging public control and taxation, film production and exhibition were viewed as eligible for protection and nourishment by the state in order to ensure variety, quality, and access for all.

In addition to increased state ownership of Norsk Film AS, state involvement in film production manifested itself through the development of much-needed public funding schemes for film production. After several adjustments, a dual funding system was put in place in the early 1970s which consisted of two main avenues for film production funding, allocated by Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet (The Ministry of Church and Education): Preproduction subsidies based on artistic merit and budget calculations, awarded by an appointed committee, Statens filmproduksjonsutvalg (The Film Production Committee), and a ticket relief system. Into the 1970s, state allocations to the film sector were increased, at the same time as the so-called “luxury tax” on film was revoked in 1969. Before this, public support of film production merely constituted a tax deduction. From 1964, production funds were awarded to short film as well, first through a short-lived funding opportunity awarded by Kulturrådet (The Cultural Council) and later by the Ministry of Church and Education.

3.2.2. Women directors and public funding

The strengthened position of Norsk Film AS and new conditions of short and feature film production resulted in a relatively stronger film sector. While still reeling from the dire economic situation in the 1960s, with plummeting audience numbers caused by competition from television, film production was making a slow recovery. The number of feature films produced almost doubled after 1970, with a steady production of twelve films a year after 1973.

Women directors, then, re-entered the director’s chair at the same time as film production stabilized, more lucrative public funding was in place, and Norsk Film AS entered a financially secure period. The relationship between public funding and women’s access to the director’s chair presents itself as an intriguing and important question. Indeed, in the Norwegian case, can the dovetailing of the first funding schemes and the first women directors of feature film in the 1950s, once more repeated in the 1970s, be a mere coincidence? Going back to the postwar period, public funding seems to have been an important precondition for the first generation of

woman directors as well. The success of Edith Carlmar is often credited to the economic stringency of her husband Otto, and their penchant for popular and modern topics. Another important factor was the availability of new funding opportunities for feature film from 1950. As film scholar Ingrid Dokka notes in her Master's Thesis on Edith Carlmar, it is possible to see the way the couple shifted their films according to the different funding schemes: from social problem films in the early 1950s corresponding to funding of serious, 'quality' film, including films about mental illness, drug abuse, and housing problems, towards comedic farce in the second half of the 1950s as a new scheme favored box office revenue (Dokka 2000, 26-28). Gunnar Iversen makes a similar point for Solvejg Erichsen's feature film *Cecilia* (1954), which was also made during a limited funding window for ambitious film in the early 1950s (2018).

Looking at international developments in the 1970s and 1980s, public funding remains a recurring feature of women's filmmaking. For Kathleen McHugh, this is a question of the impact of feminism, and she writes:

The feminist, women of color, civil rights, and liberation ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s had a material dimension, most pronounced in Euro-American and other Western democracies, which translated into material support for women's film production, often deriving from state and community funding sources (2009, 131).

In several film industries, the public film bodies further established top-down institutional initiatives with a goal to foster women's filmmaking. These initiatives were often connected to, and a result of, activism and grassroots initiatives that grew out of radical and feminist film activism or university communities dedicated to promoting women's filmmaking, yet the outcome of these initiatives was often more ambiguous. Well known examples of such institutional support include The National Film Board of Canada, which established the women's studio, Studio D, in 1974 (Anderson 1999), the American Film Institute's Director's Workshop for Women, also in 1974 (Smukler 2019, 205), and the Australia Film Commission's Women's Film Fund in 1976 (French 2003). In her study on Mexican film production, Elissa J. Rashkin notes the connection between public funding and women's filmmaking as indicative of the "contradictory conditions" that have fostered women's participation and work in cinema (2001, 16). Drawing a line between Meaghan Morris's (1988) discussion of the development of

women's writing in Europe in the 1970s at the same time as the status of the writer as an intellectual was in decline, she explains:

Although it would be, to use Meaghan Morris's sardonic phrase, 'too paranoid for words' to suggest a link between the apparent declining fortunes of the film medium and its rising accessibility to women [...] it is important to note that while women's involvement in film production quantitatively increased [in the late 1980s], the increase took place overwhelmingly within the state sector and not the commercial industry (2001, 16).

In Norway, where all film production would be state funded, such a split between commercial and public film sectors is of little relevance. Still, "paranoid" thoughts appear for the Norwegian case as well. In his discussion of the new generation women directors in Norway, Gorham Kindem has similarly pointed out that the status of cinema as a relatively impoverished part of cultural life might have made this a less contested area for women to enter (1987, 33). Mirroring Morris's formulation, Johanne Kielland Servoll has further questioned the timing of the re-emergence of women directors in Norway during a decade in which "film no longer was supposed to be art with a capital A" (2014, 259). There are also other ways to interpret how the political and cultural climate of the 1970s impacted women's access to film direction. Kindem, for instance, suggests that Breien, Mikkelsen and Løkkeberg both "promoted socialism and have been promoted by it", pointing to political solidarity among film workers as another possible aspect (1987, 33). The Film Production Committee, which awarded production funds based on project proposals, included peer representatives from the freelance film workers' union, Norsk Filmforbund (The Norwegian Film Association). The union was at the time dominated by members with clear socialist and radical political leanings, and Kindem suggests that the tight connections between socialist and feminist concerns in Norway, while not leading to an active promotion of women, might at least have made it more difficult to actively discriminate against women in funding processes (1987, 33).

While public funding alone cannot account for women's entrance as film directors or their absence in earlier years, it does provide some explanation for the *kind of films* that (some) women were able to make in the 1970s. For film directors with ambitions of making film as a personal or artistic expression, the 1970s represented an era of possibilities. Indeed, as Kindem

has argued, “artistic, socially progressive or feminist films probably could not be made in Norway if there were no government financing available” (1987, 32). On a fundamental level, the availability of public funding allowed for filmmaking that, although surely preferable, was not strictly required to recoup expenses through ticket sales (Iversen and Solum 2010, 17). Moreover, the dedication to talent development found primarily in Norsk Film AS and expressed through short film opportunities, created the material grounds for what Servoll has called the “institutionalizing of the concept of the auteur” (Servoll 2014, 255). This institutionalized *auteur* ideal nurtured the director-writer, with the directors themselves often initiating the film project and just as often writing or co-writing the script. While film production still remained notoriously difficult, and the production processes and funding applications long-winded, several filmmakers were able to make their way into Norwegian feature film production during this decade.

3.2.3. A New Norwegian cinema and Norsk Film AS

Next to Anja Breien, Laila Mikkelsen, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Nicole Macé, directors such as Per Blom, Oddvar Bull Tuhus, Lasse Glomm, Ola Solum, Espen Thorsteinson, Haakon Sandøy, Bredo Greve, and the partners Svend Wam and Petter Vennerød made their first feature films in the 1970s. While there was no singular film project uniting these filmmakers, they shared, among other things, the experience of growing up with the shift in cultural validation of film in the 1950s and 1960s tied to aesthetic innovations in cinema from the modernist waves in Europe, to the rise of auteurism, and to the development of specified *cinophile* cultures of film societies and film criticism. Most of these directors came to voice with their first short films and film training as the radical energies of the liberation waves hit Norwegian society. This translated into films of social commentary, and the films they made often belonged to a strand of social criticism that would become the hallmark of Norwegian cinema in the 1970s. These were primarily films with political and social agendas, sometimes employing clear anarchist, socialist, and feminist convictions in their film work.

Films such as *Voldtekt / Rape* (Breien, 1971) and *Rødblått Paradis / Red-Blue Paradise* (Bull Tuhus, 1971) addressed the failures of social democracy and the alienation of modern society. *Rape* details in a distanced style and through experimentation with narrative time the increasing

isolation by the legal system of a young construction worker accused and convicted of rape.²⁴ Although the film to a certain degree keeps the question of guilt in the dark, the film is explicit in its analysis and critique of the juridical institutions and the way both police and court in particular marginalize and alienate people from the working class. Other films were more clearly anarchist and anti-establishment, such as the experimental feature and short films of Arild Kristo and Bredo Greve. Svend Wam and Petter Vennerød made films through their production company Mesfistofilm AS that centered on the outcasts of the Norwegian social democracy through a decadent nihilism and episodic structure in films such as *Lasse og Geir* (1976) and *Det tause flertall / The Silent Majority* (1977). Other directors used more traditional narrative forms to expose the hypocrisy of the bourgeois, as Anja Breien did in *Arven / Next of Kin* (1979) and to a certain degree in *Den allvarsamme leken / Games of Love and Loneliness* (1977). Inspired by political documentary filmmaking in Sweden, the U.K., the U.S. and France, directors such as Sølve Skagen, Malte Wadman and Oddvar Einarson made radical documentaries in support of worker's strikes and nature conservation, while Laila Mikkelsen's feature film *Oss / Us* (1976) included moments of montage technique in a dystopian tale about food shortage following the breakdown of the capitalist economy and ecology crisis, and a young couple trying to survive by accepting a place within the Government sponsored farming program. Like many of these films, the feminist films of the decade pursued social critique and analysis through experimentation with forms of production and film language.

As Laila Mikkelsen has described it:

I belong to the new [film] generation, which came in the mid-sixties, and we were influenced by the ideas around the French New Wave. Film itself was the most important thing, to find the distinctive expression for this was primary. There is no reason to conceal the fact that many of us had strong contempt for the larger part of the American film tradition and the commercial entertainment film. Our freedom was rather great. Also, the producers were in agreement that we didn't make films for the sake of money (Stensrud 1984, 99, translated by Kindem 1987, 31).

²⁴ The film was originally entitled "Tilfellet Anders", "The Case of Anders", but was released in 1971 under the more provocative title *Voldtekt / Rape*.

While still narrative and communicative films, they shared, at the very least, a pursuit of the medium of film for means other than entertainment, and indeed, very few of the films were box office successes. With one foot in European postwar traditions of art cinema, and the other in the radical cultural politics of the 1970s, the new generation of film directors made films and television programs built on a view of film as a (personally or politically) expressive medium in opposition to commercial and mainstream filmmaking associated with Hollywood and the Norwegian comedies of the era (Iversen 2010; Servoll 2014, 254).

Mikkelsen's pathways into film direction are in many ways typical for the generational shift. Her interest in film developed during her time at the University of Oslo where she earned a degree in French, history, and literature. Outside of her studies, she read the film journal *Fant* and frequented the Film Society where she was part of a weekly film study group (Bull Tuhus 2017, 26-27). In the mid-1960s, Mikkelsen picked up the phone and made calls to various production companies in search of a job in the film sector. She got a positive reply from Øyvind Vennerød, a film director known for his folksy comedies, to type up a script for his next film, the anti-drugs film *Himmel og Helvete / Heaven and Hell* (1969). This film initially led to work as a production assistant on the prolific film director Nils R. Müller's film *De ukjentes marked / Market of the Unknown* (1968),²⁵ then to her first job as a continuity supervisor, called "script girl" in the Norwegian jargon, before she went to the Short Film Department of Norsk Film AS asking for the opportunity to direct film herself. Attesting to the openness of the sector in this period, the head of the Short Film Department, Terje Helweg, gave her film stock and later sound equipment, and Mikkelsen's portrait of her teenage nephew *Arve 16 og et halvt / Arve 16 and a Half* was completed in 1969.

Anja Breien's pathway and early film practice also epitomized the new film in Norway. In 1967, she established the production company Vampyrfilm AS (Vampire Film Ltd.) together with fellow aspiring directors Per Blom and Oddvar Bull Tuhus. Vampyrfilm, or Vampyrfilmgruppen

²⁵ This was a star-studded-film, but, according to Mikkelsen, also a truly kitchen bench production: Production meetings were held at the director's home, and his wife, the author Bjørg Gaselle, was the production manager. As her assistant, Mikkelsen gained crucial experience of film production (Interview with Mikkelsen 2021). Müller also figured in Breien's pathway into directing. After graduating from high school, she got a job as continuity supervisor on *Det store varpet* (Müller, 1960) through family connections, after which she decided to pursue a career as a filmmaker through film school education (Faldbakken 1979, 59). This points to the importance both of connections in the small film sector, and to the people willing to give young aspirants early opportunities.

– the Vampire Film Group – as they came to be known, was a production company and a film collective counting ten members at the most, with Breien the only female “vampire” among them. In addition to Breien, Blom and Bull Tuhus, the group consisted of directors Ola Solum and Espen Thorstenson (a fellow IDHEC graduate), cinematographers Halvor Næss, Erling Thurmman Andersen and Per Foss, sound technician Gunnar Svensrud, and producer Nils Ween. Other film workers, such as Laila Mikkelsen, were affiliated to the Vampire Film Group. She was married to Bull Tuhus (the two divorced in the mid-1970s), and while she was not a vampire herself, she was both socially and professionally linked to the group.

The Vampires did not have any one artistic ideal or program, but the group came to symbolize the generational shift of Norwegian cinema (Servoll 2014, 211). Their status as the young and radical face of film in Norway was spurred on by certain vampires’ (Breien included) vocal dissent towards most aspects of Norwegian film production, including the production company Norsk Film AS. They envisioned themselves as oppositional; vampires sucking dry the State Production Fund because, writes Oddvar Bull Tuhus in his memoir, “[...] in the world of film, money was just as arousing and precisely as vital as blood in Transylvania” (2017, 74). By combining their efforts, the Vampire Film Group believed they could increase their chances for funding, and they could work on each other’s productions should the Film Production Committee, the public film funding body, accept any one of their applications. While the Vampire Film Group aspired to be a full-fledged producer of feature film, the company produced mostly short films, and Breien realized several short films through the company²⁶. The Vampire Film Group dissolved in the mid-1970s, but by this time most of the vampire directors had made their way into feature film production. As it turned out, the relationship to Norsk Film AS was far more symbiotic than oppositional, with Breien, Bull Tuhus and Blom all directing their first feature film through the state-owned company (Servoll 2014, 213).

²⁶ These were most prominently critical documentaries, such as *17. mai – en film om ritualer / 17th of May – A Film About Rituals* (1969), a satirical commentary on the celebrations of the Norwegian Day of Independence became an award-winner at Oberhausen Short Film Festival and *Murer rundt fengselet / The Walls around the Prison* (1972), about the prison system, and *Gamle / The Elderly* (1975), directed together with Espen Thorstenson about the solitude experienced by the city’s old people. Breien also made films about art, exploring the portraits of Edvard Munch in *Ansikter / Faces* (1970) shown at the Venice Film Festival, and the work by graphic artist Arne Bendik Sjur in *Alle mine søsken goddag / Brothers and Sisters, Hello* (1974).

It was, indeed, Norsk Film AS that would become the most central film producer in Norway in the 1970s, and most of the women who entered feature film direction in the 1970s were fostered through the talent development system of Norsk Film AS. Jan Erik Holst has argued that the public production company created “far greater possibilities for the enhancement of gender equality” in the sense that more women directed films within the company than outside, a tendency Holst claims continued until Norsk Film AS was shut down in 2001 as part of a larger restructuring of the public film bodies (Holst 2015, 93-94). During the 1970s, the company produced seven of the nine feature films directed or co-directed by women in the 1970s. Film historian Anne Marit Myrstad describes the strong presence of women helmed feature films coming from the company as both the “result of and a contribution to [the company’s] commitment to artistically ambitious film” (2020a, 198). The company did not have an explicit goal of gender balance, yet women directors would prove to be central for the company’s aesthetic development and its orientation towards contemporary issues (2020a, 175). The feature films these women produced furthermore brought considerable success to Norsk Film AS, especially through recognition from the international film festival circuit. Breien’s second feature film *Wives* was a major success for Norsk Film AS and further validated the company’s radical culture politics and talent development. The film enjoyed wide festival circulation, attending more than twenty film festivals from Moscow to New York, and bringing home a special mention from the Locarno Film Festival (1975) and the Silver Hugo from the Chicago International Film Festival (1976). Breien’s last film of the decade, *Next of Kin* (1979), was nominated for the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival the same year,²⁷ and was awarded the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury. Laila Mikkelsen’s *Oss* (1976) won Best Foreign Film at Laceno d’oro International Film Festival and First Prize at the radical Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 1978. *The Revelation* travelled to several international film festivals and was awarded the Best Debut Film Prize in San Remo. In 1980, *The Revelation* was screened together with *The Guardians* and the children’s film *Mormor og de åtte ungene i byen / Grandma and the Eight Children in the City* (1977), directed by Espen Thorstenson, in a curated series entitled “Scandinavia: New Film” at MoMA in New York City.

²⁷ At the time of writing, only two other Norwegian directors have received this marker of prestige: Thor Heyerdahl for the documentary *Kon-Tiki* (1950), and Joachim Trier with *Louder than Bombs* (2015) and *Verdens verste menneske / The Worst Person in the World* (2021), for which Renate Reinsve was awarded the prize for best actress.

Next to Norsk Film AS, another state-owned, publicly funded institution stands out as an important site of production for filmmakers in the 1970s: the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK (Norsk rikskringkasting AS). The NRK was established in 1933 as a state monopoly and began regular television broadcasting in 1960. The arrival of television impacted women's filmmaking in two ways. Firstly, television was a driving force for structural and cultural changes in the film sector. Secondly, the establishment and development of public television created new opportunities for an aspiring generation of film workers within the film sector. Due to the need for technical staff on television sets, many established filmmakers moved to television (Diesen 1996, 64-65). This created openings in below-the-line positions on film productions, with opportunities such as continuity supervisor and assistant director of photography becoming available in the film sector. The NRK was furthermore itself a content provider, and public television functioned as both producer and distributor of documentary filmmaking. The NRK was also a place of employment. Indeed, by the 1970s, television had become an attractive place of employment, with an increase from one hundred employees in 1960 to more than eight hundred in 1970 (Bastiansen and Syvertsen 1994, 128). As a producer of documentary film, the NRK provided opportunities for film directors, especially filmmakers with an interest in current issues, and both Løkkeberg, Breien and Macé made documentary films produced by the NRK's Department of Public Information.

3.3. Concluding remarks: Into the director's chair

The narrative of women directors in the 1970s is also a narrative of the development of a new Norwegian cinema. That the four women Anja Breien, Laila Mikkelsen, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Nicole Macé, together with male peers, were able to direct personal and political films was a result of the rebuilding of the national cinema and the development of a modern film culture. This, in turn, was supported by stronger state involvement in film infrastructure and funding. In this way, a central factor for women's entrance as feature film directors is found in Norwegian film production itself, where especially the strengthening of Norsk Film AS, the availability of public funding for feature and short film, and the coming of television stand out as a core material conditions. This happened at the same time as new feminism was claiming dominance in the public sphere and the housewife society was crumbling. The impact of feminist analysis on women's self-understanding and ambitions provides one frame in which to understand their

pathways into feature film direction. It also made the individual women working as directors important as precisely woman directors. Indeed, the fundamental change in the 1970s was not simply that more women were working as directors. What was new in the 1970s was also the way that women as directors became a point of interest in and of itself.

Coming into the political moment of the 1970s, the new generation women directors made socially engaged films while also nurturing an ideal of film as a significant artistic expression, often writing the script themselves and exploring the artistic possibilities of the medium. In the next four chapters, I delve into the feminist narrative fiction films directed by feature film directors Nicole Macé, Laila Mikkelsen, Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg, before I expand the historical perspective to the NRK and independent documentary in chapters 8 and 9. While several of the films made in the 1970s criticized societal structures of the social democracy and the established family norms, the feminist films directed by women stand out in addressing the conditions of women in the social and economic system. Moreover, while relatively few of the committed films were audience magnets, some of the feminist films directed by women were able to capture the audience, either through popular appeal or following controversial receptions, not the least through an address to a women's public sphere created by developing practices of a feminist film culture.

CH 4. *TRIANGLE* (1971): PROPOSING AN ALTERNATIVE

In 1971, when women returned to the director's chair, only one of the three feature film releases that were directed or co-directed by a woman subscribed to feminist ideas: Whereas *Full Utrykning! / Full Emergency Response!* (Nordby and Jonhson) was aimed at a child audience²⁸, and *Voldtekt / Rape* (Breien) offered a modernist critique of the legal system, it was Nicole Macé's relationship drama *3/ Triangle* that would prove a starting point for a string of narrative feature films engaging women's position in marriage.

In the film, the institution of marriage as heterosexual monogamy is first put under pressure as a married couple open their relationship to a third woman and then abandoned as the threesome breaks apart and the two women choose each other. The film tells the story of Ingrid and Jan, a happily married and childless couple whose relationship is put to the test when Jan has an affair with his colleague Tore, a divorced single mother. When Ingrid learns of the affair, there is a confrontation which eventually leads to all three of them initiating a sexual relationship. The three-way alternates between blissful lovemaking and hurt feelings of neglect, a fragile balancing act in need of constant readjustment. In the end, Ingrid and Tore leave Jan and move in together with Tore's young son, the two women and the boy creating a new family triangulation.

Nicole Macé both wrote and directed the film, which was produced by Teamfilm AS – one of the most commercially oriented film production companies of the decade. The film is colorful, stylized, and excessive, almost parodic in its representation of sex and intrigue. The visual style and a recurring use of classical music makes the film feel like a reverie set in bright colors and plastered with 1970s wallpaper patterns. As such, the film offers a clear break from the social modernist films of alienated young men that otherwise characterized the early 1970s film production, such as Breien's *Rape* (1971), *Rødblått Paradis* (Bull Tuhus, 1970) and *Anton* (Per Blom, 1973), but it also differs from the later films directed by women about women through its focus on the sexual liberties of the progressive middle class.

²⁸ In the film we follow the good-natured policeman Baldriansen as he, with the unknowing aid of the town's eager children, investigate suspicions of drug smuggling, and it was planned as the first film in a series about the policeman.

In this chapter, I look at *Triangle* as a starting point for feminist filmmaking in Norway. Most importantly, I introduce what I will call “the scene of female solidarity”, which I contend is a defining trope of the feminist narrative films of the 1970s.

4.1. Nicole Macé and Teamfilm AS

When Nicole Macé debuted as director of feature film with *Triangle* in 1971, she had already been involved in the film community as a short film director and film critic for the better part of a decade. Her engagement, however, was not limited to cinema, and in addition to stage and radio directing, she had written about theatre, literature, dance, and cultural policy in national newspapers such as *VG*, *Morgenbladet* and *Dag og Tid*, and cultural journals such as *Vinduet* and *Samtiden*. A French intellectual, she was dedicated to building film culture in Oslo and to raise the bar for Norwegian film discourse by making accessible the European art cinemas and the French New Wave for a Norwegian audience and film community. She contributed to the establishment of the Film Society in Oslo in 1960, and organized screenings and invited French film directors to Norway through her work at the French Cultural Center (Dokka 2015, 302). She also wrote extensively on film and television. In the mid-1960s, she established herself as a film critic, for instance in the recurring columns At the Movies with Nicole Macé (“Med Nicole Macé på kino”) and Critical Take on TV (“Kritisk blikk på TV”) in the daily newspaper *Dag og Tid*. Into the 1970s, as the new women’s movement gained foothold in the cultural and intellectual sphere, Macé would increasingly turn to a focus on feminist issues in her writing as well as film practice.²⁹

Macé, then, played an important role in facilitating and strengthening both cinephile and feminist film culture in Norway in the 1960s and 1970s. She also belonged to a somewhat different section of small Norwegian film production than Breien, Mikkelsen and to a certain degree Løkkeberg. For one, Macé was forty years old when she debuted with her feature film *Triangle* in 1971, making her not only ten years a senior to these women, but indeed to all other aspiring directors of the decade. Most of these directors were born between 1940 and 1950, belonging to the generational cohort of the ’68 student uprising (Servoll 2014, 211). Perhaps because of the

²⁹ Examples of articles with a feminist perspective include the article “Kvinnerollen i etterkrigsfilmen” (Macé 1975b) about women characters in postwar European cinema, and a discussion of women’s cinema with Danish and West-German examples in “Bare kvinner” (Macé 1976).

age difference, her nationality, or a combination of both, Macé was in ways set apart from the generational shift of Norwegian cinema. Another difference can be found in her relationship to the production company Teamfilm AS.

Teamfilm AS was a prolific, but also controversial, feature film producer in the 1970s. Three men from the advertising industry, director Knut Andersen, director and producer Knut Bohwim and cinematographer Mathis Mathiesen, founded Teamfilm AS in 1962. They wanted to work with feature film together, hence the company name (Helseth and Holm Jensen 2016, 107). In terms of continuity and longevity, this collaboration remains one of the most successful ventures in Norwegian film history; only surpassed by the publicly owned Norsk Film AS (ibid). Indeed, with a back catalogue of 44 feature films in 32 years, Teamfilm AS is unique in a Norwegian landscape where continuity in production was the exception rather than the rule. Typically, production companies folded after one or two films, and Norway is often described as a nation of one-time directors and producers (Helseth and Holm Jensen 2016, 107). Teamfilm AS, however, managed to stay financially viable and in continuous production almost throughout its history, not the least due to sensible repertoire strategies.

In their production study of Teamfilm AS, Helseth and Holm Jensen suggest that into the 1970s, the company represented a popular counterculture to the increasingly political film discourse of the time (2016, 119). Teamfilm AS's main output was folksy comedy, and thus the company filled a void in Norwegian comedy production. Most famously, they made the *Olsenbanden* films, a series built around the small-time criminals of the Olsen gang and their many failed attempts at orchestrating the perfect heist. These films were remakes of a Danish series, sometimes shot-by-shot copies, but placed in a Norwegian setting with well-known Norwegian revue actors and a somewhat different comedic tone (Iversen 2011, 224). The films were major audience successes, but they did not fare well with the critics. Indeed, in a period of strong opposition between art and commerce, Teamfilm's reliance on lowbrow comedy was at odds with a contemporary film discourse built on film's potential as art and social critique. Teamfilm was generally regarded as the speculative, commercial end of Norwegian film production, far removed from the artistic and political uproar associated with for instance the Vampire Film Group. It is, then, a curious turn of events that this should be the company to produce the first feminist film directed by a woman in Norway.

While Teamfilm was mainly a producer of popular entertainment film, the company's production was diverse (Helseth and Holm Jensen 2016). A source of their success was the alternation between production aimed at box office success and more artistically ambitious films, represented by the company's leading figures in the 1970s, Knut Bohwim and Knut Andersen. Whereas Knut Bohwim had a nose for commercial productions, Knut Andersen would often pursue more artistically ambitious and personal projects. Among Teamfilm's artistic productions, we can count Macé's feature films. Teamfilm AS was an important pathway into filmmaking for Nicole Macé. It is also reasonable to assume that her relationship to Knut Andersen was crucial for her opportunities within the company. Andersen and Macé met through Oslo's film culture community, and the two got married in 1965. In the latter half of the 1960s, while Macé was also directing short films for Norsk Film AS³⁰, she worked as editor and assistant director on two of Andersen's films: the occupation drama *Brent Jord / Scorched Earth* (1969) about the liberation of Finnmark in 1944, and the more whimsical film *Balladen om mestertyven Ole Høiland / Ballad of the Master Thief Ole Hoiland* (1970) about the adventures of a Robin Hood-like Norwegian figure. After this, Macé realized two feature film projects through Teamfilm AS: her own film *Tre / Triangle* in 1971, followed by a collaboration with Andersen on *Marikens bryllup / Mariken's Wedding Day* in 1972. This was a low-key comedy about a young couple's wedding day, and the more or less grave complications that arise during the celebrations, directed by Andersen with Macé as scriptwriter and editor.³¹ Both films were made during a period of economic stability for Teamfilm AS, with the first Olsenbanden-films, *Olsenbanden – Operasjon Egon / The Olsen Gang – Operation Egon* (Bohwim, 1969) and *Olsenbanden og Dynamitt-Harry / The Olsen Gang and Dynamite-Harry* (Kant, 1970), providing the financial sustainability that

³⁰ Macé directed three films for Norsk Film AS in the late 1960s: the children's film *Til deg da du var liten / To You when You Were Young* (1967) based on her own script and idea, and the so-called 'culture films' *Munnharpe / Jaw Harp* (1968) and *Neverfletterne / Birch Weavers* (1969). The first was financed through the novel funding opportunity for "Free artistic short films" made available by the Council for Culture from 1965 (Iversen 2011, 210), and was shown among other in a short film program at Scala cinema in Oslo in 1967 (Ev. L. 1967, 14). The latter two belong to a type of filmmaking commonly referred to as 'bread films' - commissioned films that could keep bread on the table between larger projects. For Macé and other filmmakers eager to break into film directing, however, these films also functioned as a way of learning the craft (Iversen 2011, 209).

³¹ The couple are co-credited as directors on additionally two short documentaries, *Fest i Nord / Celebration in the North* (1971) and the lyrical *Det var en gang et fiskevær / Once There was a Fishing Village* (1979) about the problem of depopulation of coastal towns in northern Norway, but Macé herself has referred to *Mariken's Wedding Day* as their "only cinematic child" (Staalesen 2001).

made it possible to take risks pursuing films with potentially less popular appeal (Helseth and Holm Jensen 2016, 112-113).

4.2. *Triangle* (1971): “A Simone de Beauvoir”

Macé spent three years developing the script for *Triangle*, and she both directed and edited the film. *Triangle* was released in 1971, before the development of what Synnøve Skarsbø Lindtner has called “a women’s public sphere”. Lindtner has described this as a broad and productive public sphere created by the new women’s movement and connected to the project of making visible and bringing into consciousness women’s experiences (2013, 122). This included publications as various as reports, literature, magazines, and fanzines, but also music, theatre, and film. The goal was to «gather women so that they themselves could find their repressed common interests” (2013, 122). While *Triangle* is the only narrative film in the selection that was not circulated within the auspices of women’s films, the press coverage and promotional material for the film explicitly tied the film to the developing discourse of the New Feminists.

In an interview in the journal *Film og Kino*, where she also worked as a film critic, Macé elaborated on the premise of her film. She stated that the situation she depicted was simple, even banal: A threesome between two women and a man. “But”, she continued, “I have wanted to see the situation from a woman’s point of view, to expose some of the points of view I have spent twenty years of my life developing a consciousness of” (Bjørnson 1971, 110). The main issue, for Macé, was to use the situation of the threesome to say something about how people understand their own gender role, even women and men who otherwise make unconventional choices:

The women define themselves in relation to the man, and not in relation to each other. It is only when they get the chance to see themselves in each other, that solidarity becomes possible, and no change, no revolution, can happen without solidarity (Bjørnson 1971, 110).

With the emphasis on solidarity and women-centric activity in order to effect real change, these formulations echo New Feminists’ publications of the time.

The feminist intentions of *Triangle* are no-where as strongly signaled as in the opening credits, where the film is dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir. Suggesting themes of freedom and choice, the dedication furthermore brings in Beauvoir's unconventional love-life, her well-known open relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre and her exploration of the existential stakes of the threesome in the novel *L'Invitée* (*She Came to Stay*, 1943). The existential philosopher's major work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*, 1989), first published in 1949, would be a key work for the new women's movement. In Norway, the publishing house Pax released an abridged translation of the book in 1970. In this work, Beauvoir described the relationship between man and woman as relational, in which man's position as subject is confirmed through woman's position as object. Women are, in Beauvoir's argument, not autonomous, but have through historical, cultural, and societal developments been reduced to and accepted a position as the *other*, as men's secondaries and subordinates. Several women who became active feminists in Norway hold out their reading of Beauvoir as life-altering because it brought into light a way of understanding their own life as well as the life conditions and experiences of their mothers (Danielsen 2013, 36).

Macé's bold opening dedication points to the serious intentions on behalf of the director to address the myths of women and gender ideology. Interestingly, the film itself is light-hearted and distanced in its cinematic style. While there are scenes of conventional dialogue-driven drama, *Triangle* primarily and most interestingly explores alternatives to heterosexual monogamy through stereotypes and the use of repeated scene constructions with slight nuances in *mise en scène*.

4.2.1. Film analysis: Dissolving marriage through light blue linens

Already from its opening scene, *Triangle* sets the stage for a film that will dwell in the most private life and space of marriage: to Mozart's piano piece *Fantasia in d-minor*, the camera pans gently from flowery wallpaper to closed curtains to a bedside table with a carefully placed wristwatch, and onto a wall-side mirror where we see the reflection of the naked backside of the husband, Jan (Per Tofte), as he sits across his wife, Ingrid (Hanne Løye), both of them wrapped in light blue bedding. Over the course of the film, this image of the fulfilled, happy couple will slowly crumble until, in the end, any semblance of marital bliss is long gone.

The bedroom of the opening sex scene, with its distinct light blue linens, is revisited throughout the film, each time reflecting a new status of the relationship. When Ingrid, who works as a key punch operator at a bank, is promoted to lead programmer and goes away to learn the new computer system, Jan finds himself alone in bed. His impatience with this situation is relayed through cuts between what appears to be his jealous fantasy of Ingrid's flirtations with her male boss and shots showing him alone in their bed, glancing at the empty space next to him. To fill this gap, Jan seeks comfort in Tore (Tone Schwarzzott), a single mother who has just started working as a substitute teacher at the school where Jan also teaches. The affair is disclosed, and after the initial trouble has settled, all three of them share the bed and each other.

The trio goes on a summer holiday to Denmark, Ingrid's native country, to enjoy their newfound sexual liberty, the triangle-shaped cottage they have rented providing a visual pun on their arrangement. A montage of happiness shows highly stylized situations, beginning with trips to the zoo together with Tore's son Thomas, before he is dropped off at his father's house and the three adults start their honeymoon of sorts. We see them picnicking in tall grass, frolicking in bed, laughing, and enjoying themselves and each other. These scenes do not have diegetic sound or dialogue but are instead set to emphatic classical music that underscores the joyous mood almost to the point of ridicule. Throughout the film, the narrative development of the relationship is intercut with such small intermissions, picture-perfect pockets of harmony devoid of dialogue. There is so much happiness, the overdetermined depiction of idyll suggesting an ironic look: a bubble that is bound to break.

Indeed, the triangulation is unsteady, and as the summer sun is displaced by rain, the triangle breaks apart. The man, Jan, is quick to voice his progressive views, but is also the first to back out as his own social position is put under pressure and his place at the center of attention is challenged. The woman, Ingrid, is amiable but also sensitive to any sign of being left out of the threesome. But it is not before Tore dances with another man and Jan grows openly jealous and succumbs to petty remarks ("I can't phantom how *that's* something to consider, such a slick spaghetti-charmer") that Ingrid has finally had enough of him. Back in Oslo and back in the apartment bedroom, she angrily changes the blue sheets and moves into the spare room, leaving Jan to sleep alone yet again, until finally, it is Ingrid and Tore who eat breakfast together in bed,

Ingrid sitting under her light blue duvet, and Tore under pink-patterned linen; Tore's young son Thomas sitting at their feet, and a family dog lying on the floor.

With its vivid color pallet and the motif of interchangeable family structures, *Triangle* strongly recalls another controversial film by a French filmmaker: Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur / Happiness* (1965). Macé, who functioned as an ambassador of French film in Norway, would be familiar with Varda's stylistic tour-de-force, and the similarities between the two films are striking. Both films carry an excessive and superficial style that offer a borderline parodic view of 'happiness' akin to the glossy magazine, opens and closes on a family outing that is presented as a pocket of harmony – a montage of brightly colored-shots with non-diegetic classical music, and follow a structure in which an affair causes one family member to be seamlessly switched for another.³²

In *Happiness*, we are introduced to the picture-perfect life of François, a happily married man with two children, although not so happy as to pass up the chance to start a relationship with Émilie. François, like his Norwegian counterpart Jan, revels in his new situation of marital and extra-marital joy. His content self-justification, "The happiness is additive," is echoed in Jan's monologue on the bliss of the threesome. "Ingrid and Tore at the same time. Incredible!" Jan muses: "And what is most incredible is that you understand it as well, that you feel the same way. It is as if love [...] grows stronger the more you share it. It's as if I'm filled with a huge love for the both of you. To everything, to the whole world". Unlike the women in *Triangle*, however, François's wife Thérèse does not understand at all. Soon after François tells her the news, Thérèse is found dead, floating in the river. In the final scenes of *Happiness*, Émilie has replaced Thérèse, the two adults and the two children walking in the autumn leaves as a new, perfect family. Following Heidi Holst-Knudsen's reading of *Happiness*, the cynical ending reveals how women become mere instruments under patriarchy: Émilie can replace Thérèse as if nothing has happened. In her words, *Happiness* offers "a caricatured portrait of male entitlement

³² *Happiness* had been the subject of controversy, including charges of misogyny. Much like the reviews of *Triangle* where the Norwegian critics seemed unable to place the film because of its style, a core component of the reception of *Happiness* revolved around the meaning of the film – should it be taken on face value or not? (Holst-Knudsen 2018)

and female submissiveness” (2018, 504). By using irony and ekphrasis, the film condemns male privilege, and the way women are socialized to uphold it.

In its many references, *Triangle* read as a *homage*, to say the least, to *Happiness* and its critique of male entitlement, but imagines a different outcome for the drama of infidelity. Like in *Happiness*, the seasons in *Triangle* change along with the different family constellations. The film begins with Ingrid and Jan walking amongst the green of Norwegian woods in spring and ends in the yellow colors of autumn grass as Ingrid, Tore and Thomas walk their new dog. The closing images of the two films are so strikingly similar – the yellow and orange colors of autumn, the thick, matching sweaters of the families walking hand in hand – yet, the sex of the swapped family member make them different in the most crucial way.

Triangle, in a sense, begins where *Happiness* ends, by having the wife and the mistress meet and comfort each other. In the happy montage sequence of the summer holiday, the women play around, wearing identical black fitted shirts and comfortably falling into place on either side of Jan. Soon, however, this mirroring develops into a bond between the two women. This is most apparent as Ingrid teaches Tore how to make her own dress, the two women deep in concentration over the sewing machine while Jan eventually grows bored and impatient. The triangle, then, brings the two women together not in erotic discovery, but through the mundane activity of dressmaking. They prefer to stay in and sew instead of going out with Jan, doing each other’s hair, stopping to watch a young child play in a pond. It is as if these shared moments, placed within the realm of the domestic, feminine sphere, provide a space for them to inhabit without the interruption of Jan. The subtle differences in the bedroom that Ingrid and Tore share in the final scene of the film suggest a new form of companionship based on equality. The bedroom no longer exclusively signals the private and intimate, but the personal and mutual as well. The linens are mismatched, as if two separate lives have been combined, and the walls behind them are plastered with pictures, drawings, magazine cuttings, and other personal memorabilia. The two women have created a new life together, within a new and expressive home space.

Sexual pleasure

With its focus on the sexual life of a married couple, infidelity and sexual intrigue, *Triangle* picked up on a favored topic of Norwegian popular cinema. Marriage and marital problems were the key themes of Norwegian post-war film (Vibe 1977, 67), most popularly explored in the cycle of so-called “marriage comedies” of the 1950s, including *Vi gifter oss / We’re Getting Married* (Müller, 1951), *På Solsiden / On the Sunny Side* (Carlmar, 1956) and *Støv på hjernen / With Dust on Their Minds* (Vennerød, 1959). As Leif Ove Larsen shows in a study of the Norwegian marriage comedies, these films, contrary to the romantic comedy, were engaged in old love; their plot structures typically revolving around bringing a couple together again (Larsen 1997, 105). In the marriage comedies of the 1950s, the characters’ flirt with infidelity but ultimately choose reconciliation, contributing to a reaffirmation of the institution of marriage. The popularity of the genre died out during the 1960s with the introduction of television and the move away from the housewife society (Larsen 1997, 128). In a sense, *Triangle* updates the Norwegian marriage comedies of the post-war years, exploring the “old love” within heterosexual marriage through the lens of both the sexual revolution of the 1960s and women’s liberation in the 1970s.

On the one hand, *Triangle* forms part of a liberalizing tendency towards showing sexual pleasure on film in the 1970s. The explicit opening scene, showing the married couple in the middle of sex, twists the motif of the re-marriage films from the 1950s: Ingrid is far from the tired housewife who can no longer please her husband like she used to (in the words of Vibe, “[her] sex-appeal disintegrated in ammonia and chlorin” (1977, 78)). *Triangle* was, in this way, a product of increased openness on sexual norms. The 1960s had been a decade of moral conflict, with a rapid development towards a more liberal society in terms of sexual morals. In cinema, the changing norms were expressed through the development towards more liberal censorship rules and changing codes of sexual representability in the late 1960s (Skretting 2003).³³ This was not the least ushered forth by debates surrounding the controversial censorships of erotically

³³ During the 1960s, censorship had been hotly contested in the Scandinavian countries (Skretting 2003, 77). After several years of deliberation, new censorship laws with a refined rating system were implemented in Sweden and Norway, while Denmark, where the ban on written pornography was lifted in 1967, abolished censorship rules for adults two years later (Skretting 2003, 79-80).

charged Swedish and Danish art films, such as *En fremmed banker på / A Stranger Knocks* (Jacobsen, 1959) and *Jäg er nyfiken – gul / I Am Curious (Yellow)* (Sjøstrøm, 1967) (Birkvad 2020, 46). Opponents of film censorship argued that violence and sexual explicitness could be part of the artistic expression. In 1971, the same year as *Triangle* was released, Norwegian author, film censor and journalist Sigurd Evensmo published the book *Den nakne sannheten: Sex i filmene*, where he made the case for “sexual realism” in film, understood as an artistically motivated, non-speculative representation of sex developing in the postwar art cinema (Evensmo 1971).

On the other hand, there is a distinct sense that the film is completely uninterested in sexuality as such, and indeed, the most striking feature of the portrayal of sex in *Triangle* is what it doesn't show. This is most startlingly evident in the pivotal scene where the threesome is initiated. The scene begins with a set-up to melodrama as Ingrid, hurt and confused by her husband's infidelity, has still agreed to Jan's suggestion to invite Tore to a dinner party at their apartment. Ingrid has too much to drink, and when all the guests except Tore have left, confrontations ensue. Tore tries to convince Ingrid that she is no threat to her, telling her that now that they have met, she would never do anything to hurt her. Tore embraces her, and Jan approaches to comfort them. A sudden cut, and the following scene shows the three characters together in bed, the camera tightly framing their upper bodies as they embrace each other between naked breasts, eyes closed in contentment as they place small kisses on bare skin.

As a defining turn of the events, the scene calls into relief the effects of the ellipse as discussed by Linda Williams (2008). The ellipse is a rhetorical figure of speech represented by three dots that demarcates a conscious omission where the content can still be inferred. In film, ellipses are used all the time, but they are “especially frequent and felt as ellipses – noticed as dot, dot, dot – when they elide sex acts” (Williams 2008, 40). Indeed, inherited from the production code of the classical Hollywood period, the sex ellipse has become a cliché: Two characters kiss passionately, a fade out and in again now finds the characters relaxed and repositioned from their previous placement, momentarily relieved of the sexual tension that was there second before. In *Triangle*, however, the ellipses become glaring. While it is perfectly clear what has happened, the sudden move is surprising and somewhat jarring. This is especially so as the scene is completely silent, not only devoid of music but of all sound. Here, what is elided is not only the

sexual act, but also the seduction; both made abundantly clear as “missing” by the unusual auditive break. Not a kiss, not a sensuous touch, is shown to suggest sexual tension or budding lust leading up to the character’s arguably bold decision, and nothing of the current sexual state is heard to retrospectively bridge this gap in the mind.

The exaggerated ellipses might point to a second project in the film: In tandem with re-imagining an outcome of infidelity, *Triangle* arguably engages in a project of re-imagining the cinematic portrayal of sex. According to Williams, it is the internal conflict between pleasure and the taboo that create the erotic (2008, 41). By eliding the internal conflict, *Triangle* elides the erotic. Not only cut from reproduction, from the institution of marriage, but also from the erotic, the way sex is framed in *Triangle* can arguably be seen as an attempt to free the representation of sex from the game of seduction. Sex and sexual desire instead become something potentially joyful, uncomplicated and by extension quite harmless. Within this harmless utopia, new placements and structures become possible.

The scene of female solidarity

In the final instance, what *Triangle* as a feminist film does is to offer a portrayal of solidarity, compassion, and love between women. Carving out a space of intimacy, the film offers among the first instances of what I will call the “scene of female solidarity”. The scene unfolds towards the end of the film. It begins with a long, uninterrupted take showing Ingrid talking about how she has experienced the affair, and her thoughts about why their triangle failed. “They say I need to be reasonable. [...] But what does that mean? That one should accept everything?” While she talks, the film intercuts short scenes from their holiday that show Jan alone and in bad temper, Ingrid’s words and his posture positioning him as an immature child. “It’s just going to be the same over and over,” Ingrid continues. The camera pans out to show Tore sitting at the kitchen table opposite Ingrid, large yellow mugs of coffee or tea in front of them, a cigarette in Tore’s hand. “Give me one good reason, and I’ll try again” Ingrid begs Tore, who falls quiet before saying: “No, I get you.”

This scene construction, showing two women talking confidentially, with characters listening to each other and supporting each other, was rarely seen on Norwegian film before. Indeed, by only revealing that it is Tore who listens to Ingrid towards the end of the scene, the film arguably

presents their confidentiality as precisely a twist. Most often, female characters had been positioned as rivals, or placed in a strained, sometimes antagonistic friendship made to foster character conflict, if they were shown speaking to each other at all. The marriage comedy *Støv på hjernen / With Dust on Their Minds* (Vennerød, 1959) is a case in point. Among the top-grossing films in Norwegian cinema, the film revolves around various couples in an apartment building where the housewives all have “dust on their minds”, competing to keep the most immaculately clean house when they should, the film argues, spend more time being attentive to (and attractive for) their husbands. The film’s setting houses several female relationships, but these are presented as predominantly petty and judgmental, a community that breaks down even the most devoted newlywed into a stern housewife. The one female friendship of the film is primarily a mentor-mentee relationship, where the friend scolds and gives advice for the main character to recapture her man. Another example is the film *Kranes Konditori / Krane’s Confectionary* (Henning-Jensen, 1951), about an exhausted seamstress pulled to shreds by the demands placed on her from her children and customers. Here, the women in the film are rivals and gossips, while it is the male characters who can offer the female lead compassion and understanding. In the later and more comparable films *Liv* (P. Løkkeberg 1976) and *Exit* (P. Løkkeberg 1970), women characters Liv and Maria are quite isolated and alone in their attempts to break away from their confined gender roles.

In *Triangle*, the women’s isolation is broken when they meet and seek understanding and trust in each other, with Tore literally supporting and lifting Ingrid up. The scene of female solidarity gives Ingrid a space not granted her before. While her perspective at first was privileged through bursts of internal monologue and points-of-audition, each of these moments had ended with Ingrid straightening herself out; apologizing and diminishing her own role or being ridiculed for her dramatic behavior. In this scene, however, the character talks aloud, is heard and is taken seriously within the diegesis.

The scene construction can be seen as a narrative and cinematic equivalent to the consciousness-raising group. Consciousness-raising was an import from the North American women’s movement, and it referred to the political act of collectively articulating and naming experiences in order to effect enlightenment and change. The consciousness-raising group was a primary cell in this enlightenment project, and many of the political organizations of the movement for

women's liberation were based on or included the consciousness-raising group. The goal was that group conversation would give women both the energy, will and knowledge to take charge of their lives (Danielsen 2013, 49). Through conversations, reading groups, and discussions, women would come to realize that their own experiences were not unique, but collective, and part of societal structures that could be changed. Writing in the 1970s, Julia Lesage argued how in the feminist documentary film, consciousness-raising played a crucial role as an aesthetic and structuring principle, where "[f]ilm after film shows a woman telling her story to the camera. It is usually a woman struggling to deal with the public world" (1978/1990, 229-230). Similarly, in *Women's Reflections: The Feminist Film Movement*, Rosenberg emphasizes how the feminist documentary films show "women [who] speak in their own words about various problematic aspects of their lives. Their dawning feminist awareness is simulated on screen" (1979/1983, 56). In narrative film, the scene of female solidarity can be seen as an equivalent to this structure. Located between two or more fictional characters, the scene construction revolves around a woman character who articulates her thoughts within a space of female intimacy. I contend that the scene of female solidarity is one of the most important cinematic tropes of the feminist films in Norway. Indeed, as I will show in following chapters, this scene would be repeated in films to come.

4.2.2. Breaking a silence on lesbianism?

Triangle, however, does not only present female solidarity, but can well be read as more radically suggesting a lesbian relationship as an alternative to the heterosexual marriage. As such, the film addressed a theme otherwise characterized by silence. In 1971, the lesbian woman as a figure and group identity was marginalized and understood as invisible (Haukaa 1982, 129; Hellesund 2013, 87): A situation described by the French writer and theorist Monica Wittig in the foreword to her novel *Le Corps Lesbien* (*The Lesbian Body*, 1973/1976) as a theme without a past or a present, a theme that is "not even a tabu, because it does not exist in literature" (Quoted in Haukaa 1982, 129). Only the year before, in 1970, Karen-Christine (Kim) Friele was the first person to publicly come out as a homosexual in Norway. She became a central figure in the gay rights organization "Det norske Forbundet av 1948"³⁴ (The Norwegian Association of

³⁴ Det norske Forbundet was an organization that worked for gay rights, and was created as a sub-chapter to the Danish organization Forbundet af 1948 in 1950, and became an independent organization in 1952.

1948) and contributed to the legislative change that decriminalized homosexuality between men in 1972 (Haukaa 1982, 128). Forbundet experienced a surge in membership the following years, yet only 20% of the members were women. As for the new women's movement, the question of lesbianism was not explicitly raised until 1973, and then with contested and ambiguous results. According to Haukaa, the main issue was not that there was an explicit opposition to lesbian women within the new women's movement, although this was also the case. Rather, the greater problem was the silence surrounding issues of lesbianism, as few heterosexual feminists engaged issues of lesbianism and lesbian women in public (1982, 130). This meant that lesbianism remained difficult to discuss, and contributed to invisibility and marginalization of lesbian women as a minority group, as well as a lack of LGBTQ-issues in the cultural agenda. For many lesbian feminists, coming into visibility and into voice became a strategy to counter discrimination.

Was *Triangle* part of such a project of visibility? Like the scene of female solidarity, the fact that the two women choose each other is presented as a great reveal. The film's epilogue consists of several scenes depicting the daily life of the three characters now that the triangle and the marriage have been dissolved, each one pointing to possible different outcomes: From Tore picking up her son from primary school, to Ingrid at work, now in a senior position as a programmer. Her flirtatious tone with her boss suggests that they might have struck up a relationship. Next, the epilogue moves to Jan, securely back in a traditional heterosexual relationship, on his way home with a new female colleague. Mirroring an earlier scene from the teachers' lounge, they discuss in radical terms their disappointment with the school administration ("It's simple racism!"). The teacher is impressed with Jan's new apartment, "But how did you get hold of it?" she exclaims, and he answers "Well, do you remember Tore Nergaard?". The question lingers as the film then cuts back to Tore and her son, now in a pet store picking up a grey dog. After this, the closing idyllic morning scene unfolds: A soft piano tune playing, a ragged dog lying on the floor, its head lifted towards its owners in the bed. The camera tracks to the young boy in his pajamas eating breakfast at the foot of the bed and looking up at Tore and Ingrid, who are both sitting under the duvets. "Go get dressed and we'll go for a walk" Tore tells him. "Will you come?" he asks Ingrid, and she replies "Of course, we'll go, all

of us.” With these words, the film ends as the three of them walk hand in hand into the autumn day.

In contrast to for instance Norwegian writer and lesbian activist Gerd Brantenberg’s novel *Opp alle jordens homofile* (*Arise, Homosexuals of the World*, 1973), a groundbreaking work for the Scandinavian gay liberation movement that mocked the pathologizing discourse on homosexuality (Ryberg 2015, 143), *Triangle* does not explicitly engage dominant discourses of homosexuality as such. Rather, setting women’s choice at the center of the film, the ending of the film points to a political project of women choosing other women as their life partners. In this way, the film can be linked to the position within the lesbian movement of women who regarded feminism and lesbianism as concomitant political projects, where lesbianism was also seen as a political choice (Hellesund 2013, 88).

This reading seems to have been at stake in the critical reception of *Triangle*. In general, the film received quite poor reviews, and most film journalists remained unconvinced, particularly by the film’s light and colorful film style. The ending in particular became a source of ridicule. One critic mused with apparent sarcasm: “Isn’t this a rather peculiar form of solidarity between women? The man is made redundant in the film – might it be a guide in the direction of the aggressive association Society for Cutting up Men?” (Gjessing 1971, 10). The quote supports Runa Haukaa’s assertion that already by the first years of the 1970s, opposition to the new women’s movement was structured through associating New Feminists and lesbianism with man-hating: A charge that came from both the political right and the political left (1982, 16).

There were, however, also those who supported *Triangle* from a feminist perspective in letters to newspaper and film journal editors. Most notably, after the film journal *Fant* re-printed an especially harsh review by infamous film critic Arne Hestenes, calling the film a “simple sex comedy” (Hestenes 1971, 14), one woman wrote a lengthy response in defense of *Triangle*. In her response, she maintained that this was a film that “in a proper way aims to analyze our conventional gender roles” and that “shows how alternative ways of living are impossible as long as the participants are too strongly bound to traditional gender roles” (Solheim 1972, 76). The most positive feature of the film, however, was in her view the ending, which she vaguely describes as “the two women move in together” (Solheim 1972, 76). For her, the weakness of the

film was that *Triangle* did not adequately stress the radical edge of this action, yet it is unclear if this entailed a lesbian reading. She concludes by claiming that most women she had spoken to had experienced the film as a thorough awakening and saw the film as providing an important point of departure for discussions about gender roles and gender ideology (Solheim 1972, 77). The reception of the film, in this way, points towards a cultural development where film's potential to address ideas and provide analysis of gender roles increasingly came to play a role in film criticism and consumption.

Macé herself was ambiguous about the nature of the on-screen relationship and would in interviews talk about solidarity rather than lesbianism. In an interview following the film's release, she commented on the negative reactions towards the ending: "People can react to the film in two ways. They can reject the film and say that this is a film about lesbian girls [sic.]. Or you can see the film's ending as a life situation: That is, that they move in together instead of living with a man they have little in common with" (Finstad 1971, n.p.). Still, by placing *Triangle* within a history of queer representation in Norwegian cinema,³⁵ another intriguing *homage* becomes feasible. Previously, I have made the case that the film both references Simone de Beauvoir explicitly and *Happiness* implicitly, yet it is further possible to suggest that *Triangle*, through its lesbian theme, also nods to the Norwegian film *Cecilia* (1954), written and directed by the author and journalist Solvejg Eriksen. According to Gunnar Iversen, *Cecilia* is the first film produced in Norway that addressed lesbian love (2018).³⁶ Seeing as Macé had followed Norwegian film closely as a critic and had knowledge of women directors in Norway and Scandinavia, interviewing the prolific Danish director Astrid Henning-Jensen who directed film in Norway in the very early 1950s, it would not be unlikely that she was aware of Eriksen's film as well. This suspicion is strengthened by the remarkable similarity between the character

³⁵ Few studies have set out to explore such a history of representation. In the master's thesis "Queer Norwegian Cinema Doesn't exist" (2020), Jennifer Britt Lundberg Hansen argues, through a critical reading of the major work *Norsk Filmhistorie* (Iversen 2011), that queer readings have been marginalized in Norwegian film historiography, contributing to an exclusion of queer cinema in Norwegian film history. *Triangle* can serve as an example of such an exclusion, as the film has not been recognized as a film that engages themes of lesbianism.

³⁶ The film, constructed through a series of flashbacks aimed to solve a narrative question of an undisclosed crime, follows the young girl Cecilia into adolescence, thematizing her growing disdain of heterosexual gender relations and her strong friendship with and attachment to Tore. Tore is coded lesbian through clothing and other visual cues as well as in looking relations that strongly suggests Tore's attraction to and affection for Cecilia. The two young women address women's relationship as an alternative to heterosexual marriage, and although the ending is not resolved in clear favor of their relationship, the emotional connection, the film suggests, is returned by Cecilia.

Tore in *Triangle* and the supporting character Tore in *Cecilia*: Not only do they sport similar short, blonde hair, smoke cigarettes, and present an independent and self-assured character-type, but that they share the gender ambiguous name Tore seems, at least from the vantage point of today, almost too striking a coincidence – even if it was an unuttered and unclaimed citation.

The silence on lesbianism in narrative film continued throughout most of the 1970s. In 1973, the NRK aired a documentary program about homosexuality as part of the current issues series “Vindu mot vår tid”, which consisted of an interview with activist Kim Friele and a feature portrait of a male gay couple living together. The documentary film *Kvinnekamp og Kvinneåret 1975 / Women’s Struggle and the Women’s Year 1975* (Mannseth, 1979), which I return to in chapter 9, includes footage of the feminist organization Lesbian Movement (1975). In feature filmmaking, the subject of lesbianism would not be explicitly raised before the end of the 1970s, with *Kvinnene / The Women* (1979), directed by Per Blom. Blom later addressed adolescence and lesbian attraction in the visually evocative adaptation *Is-slottet / The Ice Palace* (1986). Male homosexuality was explicitly thematized in films such as *Equilibrium* (Müller, 1965) and later by Svend Wam and Petter Vennerød in *Sebastian* (1995). In women’s feminist films, however, homosexuality would be an unuttered Other, downplayed in favor of female friendships.

4.3. Concluding remarks: Proposing an alternative

As a starting point for women’s feminist filmmaking in the 1970s, *Triangle* makes for an intriguing and somewhat surprising beginning. Produced by Teamfilm AS, at first glance a production company far removed from the concerns of political and engaged filmmaking, the film critic and director-writer Nicole Macé presents a direct cinematic intervention into the budding new feminist discourses. Explicitly dedicated to the philosophical work of Simone de Beauvoir, the film’s use of repetition, color and characterization also points to the *Le Bonheur* and to *Cecilia*, homages which together create a thematic triangulation of marriage, sexual freedom, male entitlement, and love and solidarity between women.

Using stylistic and structural repetition, the film creates a structural argument for common interests among women. More radically, the film arguably presents lesbianism as an alternative to the heterosexual marriage. Beginning with the matrimonial bed and ending with a new vision of the family unit, the film’s narrative resolution presents an alternative for women: A

relationship between women based on communality and solidarity. While the film is somewhat ambiguous about the nature of Ingrid and Tore's relationship, the intimate space of the bedroom, both women significantly placed under the duvets, marks their relationship as more than a living arrangement.

Triangle explores the central themes of marriage, sex and solidarity at a distance, and through expressive mise en scène and non-diegetic, exaggerated classical music, the film creates pockets of harmony with characters that are, to a large degree, disembodied. In this way, *Triangle* does not present arguments about women's conditions of life as such. The material dimensions of work, sex, the body, and the institution of marriage, such as the struggles that Tore as a divorced woman and single mother would face in the early 1970s, are of less interest to the film. The inequalities in the marriage between Jan and Ingrid are similarly only hinted at: The primary expression of their differences is found in the threesome itself. It is, in this way, the sexual life and liberty of the characters that sit center stage. Yet sex and the desiring body, so central to the narrative intrigue, is primarily a means to an end: To bring the two women together and to show how a woman's self-esteem and consciousness develop by her growing intimacy with a woman who would otherwise have been considered her rival.

Through an enclosed narrative about three well educated and financially independent people who cannot live out their alternative way of love due to ingrained gender roles and fear of social repercussions, the film moves from an exploration of a threesome to an argument of women's self-expression. The man, Jan, is portrayed as quick to voice his progressive views, but is also the first to back out as his own social position is put under pressure and his place at the center of attention is challenged. For the woman, Ingrid, the film offers a different and opposite trajectory. From apologizing and diminishing her own position, she is increasingly able to articulate her needs: And what she finally wants, the film's narrative tells us, is to divorce Jan and find a new way of living with Tore and Thomas. In this way, the film's primary feminist concern is the self-confidence and individual freedom of women to claim and articulate their own needs.

Women directors would continue to explore the institution of marriage and women's position within it. Macé herself would return to the limitations of the bourgeois marriage in her second and last feature film *Formynderne / The Guardians* (1978), which I discuss in chapter 7. Before

this, the three narrative films *Weekend*, *Wives*, and *The Revelation*, as well as the documentary film *Women's Struggle in a Women's Year* (see chapter 9), all continue to critically engage the conditions and content of marriage, and the expression and possibilities of freedom. However, these films would more clearly delve into specific analyses of being women: Posing questions of paid and unpaid work, presenting a darker view of sex, while still upholding solidarity among women as key. They were furthermore made in a different context of reception as the discourse of feminism and film was developing, as well as new meeting points between film culture and the new women's movement.

CH 5. TEMPORARY ESCAPES: *WEEKEND* (1974) AND *WIVES* (1975)

Right at the mid-point of the decade, Norsk Film AS produced two narrative films that center on female characters searching for a liberating moment through a break from the mundane and from their scripted part in life. The narrative short film *Weekend* (Mikkelsen, 1974) follows a night in the life of Reidun as she tries to escape her everyday struggles by taking on a role as a seducer, while in the feature film *Wives* (Breien, 1975), childhood friends Mie, Kaja and Heidrun leave their husbands and children at home and go on a drunken binge, doing whatever they believe the guys usually do. Offering different versions of escapist fantasies, the two films pose a similar question to explore through their female characters: How do you discover a new way of living?

The two films continue the themes of marriage, infidelity, and solidarity between women that Nicole Macé addressed three years earlier in *Triangle* (1971), as discussed in chapter 4. Yet the differences between them might suggest how the new women's movement had by this time gained considerable footing in Norwegian public discourse. Whereas *Triangle* addressed feminism implicitly, *Weekend* and *Wives* are explicitly staged at the political scene, offering characters that stand in for positions in the social conflict of women's liberation. This difference is further grounded in their aesthetic distinctions, in which the colorful stylization of *Triangle* is replaced with more somber social realism in *Weekend* and documentary aesthetic in *Wives*.

In this chapter, I look at the answers they give, while also circling in the cultural change at stake in the mid-1970s. Each film analysis starts with a discussion of the films' context of production, highlighting the directors' position with the company Norsk Film AS and the film production opportunities, as well as a discussion of how the film was placed in developing discourse and curating practices of "women's films". I begin the chapter by presenting this new context of reception and feminist film culture in the mid-1970s.

5.1. The feminist film movement comes to Norway

In the first half of the 1970s, the new women's movement had brought women's conditions and analysis of oppression into public light through actions, protests, publications, and public statements. The activity enabled feminism to become part of the public agenda, and from the mid-1970s, the new women's movement entered a new period of normalization and broader

participation. In this period, cultural and artistic expressions of the new women's movement became more pronounced, while feminism increasingly became part of the public discourse. It was also in this period that the international feminist film movement made inroads into Norwegian film culture.

In her influential account of the development of the feminist film movement, B. Ruby Rich marks the mid-1970s as a period of institutionalization, where the early activist spirit and cross-fertilization between theory and practice gave way to increasing specialization and academic interest (Rich 1978/1998). In Rich's account, it was the publication of Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in the UK based *Screen* magazine in 1975 that radically changed the look of feminist film culture, and solidified the field known as "feminist film theory" (1978/1998, 2). Looking beyond the Anglo-American context, however, this should also be understood as a period of increased international reach and visibility.

On the one hand, the defining events of feminist film culture took place in the early 1970s: Influential women's film festivals were organized, first in New York (1972) and Edinburgh (1972), then in for instance Toronto (1973), Berlin (1973) and Paris (1974) (Carocci 2016, 449). Key publications include the feminist film journals *Women & Film* (1972-1975) in the U.S. and *Frauen und Film* (1974 -) in Germany, Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* (1974) and Marjory Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1973) which both offered studies of the representation of women in Hollywood cinema, as well as theoretical texts such as Claire Johnston's essay "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema", published in 1973 in the pamphlet *Notes on Women's Cinema* which she developed at the Edinburgh event. Alongside practices of film criticism and exhibition, independent distribution companies such as the New York-based Women Make Moves and the Paris-based Ciné-Femme International (1977) were formed, as was feminist film and media groups such as the Canadian women's film organizations La femme et le film (later Vidéo Femmes) in Quebec (1973) and the feminist production group Women in Focus in Vancouver (1974) (Anderson 1999, 45), the British London Film Group (Fabian 2018) in the U.K., the Italian Collettivo Femminista Cinema (Pompili and Santini), and the Sydney Women's Film Group (1972) and The Melbourne Women's Film Group (1973) in Australia (French 2003, 13).

On the other hand, for many national film cultures both in and beyond the West it was during the second half of the 1970s that active feminist film cultures developed. In Latin America, film students from National Autonomous University of Mexico formed the Cine-Mujer (Cine-Women) in 1975 (Rashkin 2001, 68-69). The Colombian Cine-Mujer was formed in 1978 (White 2015, 205). The Women's Organization of Iran organized a women's film festival in Tehran in 1976 (Naficy 2011, 334). This was also the case in Scandinavia. In late November 1976, the Danish directors Mette Knudsen and Janne Giese, among others, organized the Nordic region's first international women's film festival in Copenhagen. Director Lisbeth Dehn Holgersen reviewed the film festival in the feminist magazine *Kvinder* (Dehn Holgersen 2015, 342). This was an important arena for discussing film and feminism, carrying film reviews of short films made by and about the Danish new women's movement, the Red Stockings, as well as foreign women's films, providing information about special screenings and distribution details, and even giving instructions on how to operate a film projector (Pedersen 2014). It was also in 1976 that women in the Swedish film sector established The Swedish Women's Film Association³⁷, which turned into a lively platform for feminist film culture in Sweden (Ryberg 2019, 165). The Association mostly arranged seminars, lectures, and screening events, but a small number of documentary films were also made with support from the SKFF (Bellsund 1979a, 29). Early events include the seminar "Women and Film" during the European Conference on New Film held in Stockholm 1976, taking its title from the German feminist film journal *Frauen und Film*, followed by a women's film festival at the alternative movie theatre Folkets bio (The People's Cinema) in 1977 (Branner 1986, 2).

As for Norway, the development of a feminist film culture appears to have been inextricably tied to the UN's International Women's Year in 1975, when questions of gender equality and women's rights were placed on the political agenda in an unprecedented way, contributing to international visibility of the women's movement (Halsaa 2006, 101). In addition to mobilizing

³⁷ The organization grew out of an earlier effort by Mai Zetterling to form an international association in of the Symposium on Women in Cinema in Italy in 1975 (Ryberg 2019). In fact, of the 28 participants at the UNESCO symposium, four were from Sweden: the actor Bibi Andersson, director Maj Weshelmann, and Anna-Lena Wibom from the Swedish Film Institute, in addition to Zetterling herself. The international organization did not materialize at that point, but the Swedish Confederation for Women Film Workers worked to promote women's filmmaking and women film workers.

organizations connected to the new women's movement, the Women's Year also prepared the ground for a push to place women's conditions on the agenda in a range of different social and cultural arenas. Film was no exception. Internationally, the Women's Year provided an often-overlooked context of networking for women filmmakers, as UNESCO, as part of the resolution to advance women's rights across the world, organized a symposium called 'Women in Cinema' in the Valley of Astoa in Italy. The aim of the event was to:

provide an opportunity for women active in cinema from many different countries to exchange views on the various theoretical and practical considerations of their work, to discuss their mutual or different problems and points of view and to consider action that might be taken to improve their professional lives and the image of women projected in films (UNESCO 1976, 1).

The symposium consisted of workshops, headed by Canadian director Anne-Claire Poirier and Swedish director Mai Zetterling, plenary sessions, and film screenings by the present filmmakers.³⁸ Ingrid Ryberg discusses the UNESCO symposium as an example of how the support for women's filmmaking could come from unconventional places (Ryberg 2019). While many of the engagements of the feminist film movement were connected to feminist activism, the instances that supported women as filmmakers and feminist film culture in this period were not necessarily activist or oppositional (Ryberg 2019, 163). Rather, the feminist film movement interacted with larger public contexts and institutions and developed in concert with a popularization of issues of women's rights.

In Norway, the Women's Year first and foremost created a context of relevance for attention to women and film. Nicole Macé's essay on her experiences of coming into film direction and her interview with Scandinavian directors mentioned in chapter 3 were both initiated on occasion of the Women's Year. Actually, the essay "From the Kitchen Bench to the Director's Chair" was part of a special issue of the film trade journal *Film og Kino* dedicated to "Women and Film".

³⁸ In addition to Zetterling and Poirier, the representatives included Susan Sontag (U.S.A), Chantal Akerman (Belgium), Valie Export (Austria), as well as Marta Meszaros (Hungary), Maria Louisa Bemberg (Argentina), Attiat El-Abnoudi (Egypt), Larissa Shepitko (USSR) and Durga Khote (India). At the Symposium, Mai Zetterling initiated the formation of an international association for women film workers (Ryberg 2019:164). The international organization did not materialize at that point, but the Swedish Women's Film Association grew out of this first initiative (Ryberg 2019, 165)

Film og Kino was primarily the municipal cinemas' trade journal, owned by Kommunale Kinematografers Landsforbund (the National Association of Municipal Cinemas), but it had undergone several changes since the National Association first established the journal in 1930 as *Norsk Filmblad* (Servoll 2014, 162-163). Most importantly, the journal changed its name and layout in 1965 as part of a larger shift in address from a member's magazine towards the larger film sector and the film interested public. This was very much a result of the growing cinephile culture and followed in the wake of the formation of the ambitious film journal *Fant*. At this point, *Film og Kino* held a key position in the film critical landscape. The year before, in 1974, *Fant* had folded, and for a few years *Film og Kino* was the chief journal for film criticism and debate.

In scope and volume, the "Women and Film" issue stands out as not only the earliest, but among the most ambitious contributions to feminist film criticism found in Norwegian film journalism in the 1970s. The issue began with a short editorial that explicitly set at stake the representation of women in popular cinema, describing how cinema created ideals of women for men to desire and women to inspire to (Film og Kino 1975, 48). According to the editors, cinema in its popular and commercial form worked to cement and standardize the dominant figurations of gender behavior – the word "mønster" (pattern or form) is used – and thus kept these figurations alive for longer than they would otherwise have survived. In this way, the editorial stated, "it is beyond doubt that cinema has been one of the most important reasons for the prevalence in the Western world of the form of woman (kvinnemønster) that women today are revolting against" (Film og Kino 1975, 48). The articles gathered in the special issue set out to explore this prevalence by addressing women's representation in several aspects of film culture, from the cult of female film stars to viewing habits of Norwegian housewives. Many of the articles were written by or featured women working in the Norwegian film sector who shared their own experiences and thoughts about gender discrimination, opportunities, and the state of Norwegian cinema. In addition to several essays penned by Nicole Macé, the issue included an article by film critic, and later cinema manager, Elsa Brita Marcussen on the lack of women in leading positions at municipal cinemas and public film bodies, interviews with women educated as cinematographers, including Ellen Aanesen and Eva Ch. Nilsen, on the challenges they faced in their "he-man" profession, and an interview with Anja Breien before the premiere of *Wives*.

Nicole Macé ends a long article on women characters in postwar European cinema by looking into the crystal ball and predicting a backlash to women's liberation in society as well as in film (1975b, 78). Yet, she writes, there would also be "more and more films that in a truthful, demystifying way portray women's situation in society" and, she concludes, "more and more women will themselves come to expression in films that show a woman's experience of reality" (78). The editorial itself ended by calling for more balanced repertoire that challenged "male society's images of women, and films that aim to challenge these images" (Film og Kino 1975, 48).

These calls for different, new and more truthful images found their counterpart in an exploding amount of "women's film" screenings and were further developed within the women's public sphere and in debates on Norwegian cinema policy.

Beginning with the latter, the feminist film movement influenced cinemas as cultural institutions and was itself supported by the municipal cinema system. As described in chapter 3, the municipal cinema system went through fundamental changes in the 1960s and 1970s. While cinema theatres had been under public control for almost half a century, they were now becoming a public responsibility and was increasingly viewed as a central institution in the local cultural life that both needed and were deemed deserving of public support and protection. Into the 1970s, there was growing attention to repertoire politics and the conditions of film distribution and import. Whereas cinema business was largely under public control, the distribution chain was still privatized and run by American subsidiary companies, some independent companies, and a municipal joint stock company. The first public support for the import of so-called artistically and culturally valuable films was made available from 1969, and it became possible to grant support to film and cinema through public culture budgets (Asbjørnsen and Solum 1999, 278). In 1978, the first Green Paper on Norwegian cinema exhibition, *Om import og distribusjon av spillefilm* (On import and distribution of feature film), was published. It was Johannes Østtveit, in his last year as elected representative for the Christian Democratic Party, who initiated the Green Paper in 1973. The inquiry was conducted by a committee called Det utvidede Filmråd (The Expanded Film Council) and was headed by the Supreme Court attorney Tor Erling Staff. Film critics Jan Erik Holst and Sylvi Kalmar both provided background reports for the committee, and Kalmar later joined the Expanded Film

Council (Ministry of Church and Education 1978). The Green Paper identified lacking support for the so-called “ambitious”, or “quality” film, and suggested measures to rectify the situation through increased state support. A minority of the committee more radically suggested state control over the import of film (Asbjørnsen and Solum 1999, 279).

In the Green Paper, we can find explicit examples of what can be termed a feminist perspective in the designation of “quality film”.³⁹ Most notably, an introductory section entitled “Film and Society” ends with a discussion of the attitude towards women found in the so-called “trivial” film and the possibly harmful cumulative effects of these representations (Ministry of Church and Education 1978, 27). The report identifies three types of discriminating images of women: First, a repetition of traditional gender roles, second, what the author’s deem “gross discrimination” in films of women as sex objects in pornography and ‘sex-films’, and a third, new discrimination in films that represent “sex in pleasant/stylish wrapping” (lekker) that contributed to “[...] sustaining women’s insecurity and stress the duty to be attractive, if necessary at the expense of skill and independence” (1978, 28). The section concludes that, even though some new films offer different images of women, these still only represent a drop in the ocean: “The world of film is still in essence a man’s world. Films build their plots on areas where man is active and agentic and woman passive” (1978, 28). Pointing here to the dichotomies of active / passive, and public world / private home sphere, these concluding sentences arguably sum up main tenets in feminist film criticism and theory of the 1970s. This was not only in the film sector. According to Henrik Bastiansen and Trine Syvertsen, the Film Department of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, the NRK, would complain about the series and films available on the international market, and “worried explicitly about the negative role models and the portrayal of women in many films and series” (1994, 138). While neither the Green Paper nor the ensuing White Paper (1981-1982) developed the remarks on the representation of women in cinema into specific measures, these first formulations suggest that

³⁹ Østtveit also joined the committee as a special appointee. In a statement from Østtveit in the introductory section he calls for more open debate on the (moral) values underpinning the determination for a film’s quality (Ministry of Church and Education 1978, 9). Here he presents faithfulness to reality and humanism as especially important but argues that realist depictions of human misery could also put a strain on human worth by for instance reinforcing gender and racial prejudice (1978, 10-11). The relationship between Christian thought and tradition and feminist film culture and feminist debate in Norway is an interesting question for further research.

feminist analysis of images of women formed part of the initial discussions of cultural policy of cinema in Norway in the 1970s.

Alongside debates in the media sector, feminist film criticism grew more pronounced in the women's public sphere, influenced by the transnational feminist film movement. Both Danish and Swedish film feminists stand as important influences in this regard, as does the German director Claudia von Alemann. Alemann was a central figure of the feminist film movement in West Germany. Together with director Helke Sander, she had co-organized the First Seminar on Women's Films in Berlin, held in November 1973, where Vibeke Løkkeberg had presented her first film *Abort / Abortion* (1972) about the Norwegian abortion legislation. Indeed, in the festival report we can glimpse a picture of Løkkeberg and her husband Terje Kristiansen sitting in the audience listening to what appears to be a seminar discussion (Alemann and Sander 1974, 6). In 1975, Alemann was invited to Norway to screen her documentary film *Es kommt drauf an, sie zu verändern / The Point is to Change It* (1972/1973), about the exploitation of women in the work force. Alemann's visit to Norway was organized through the Goethe Institute, the film society in Bergen and the Women's Front in Oslo (Bergens Tidende 1975, 3). It is unclear if Løkkeberg and Alemann connected in Oslo or Bergen. The influence of Alemann's visit can, however, be traced to the developing discourse of women's films in Norway as a description she had given of the necessity of showing the "unpolished female reality" was relayed by both Nicole Macé in *Film og Kino* (1976, 65), and by film student and critic Eva Bellsund in the feminist magazine *Sirene* (1976, 23).

Sirene was started by a group of journalists and writers connected to the New Feminists in 1973. It was envisioned as a Norwegian version of the American monthly publication *Ms: A conscious woman's magazine* that would bring feminist analysis to ordinary women (Lindtner 2010). The subject of film, however, did not feature prominently until the second half of the 1970s, when Bellsund wrote a series of articles for the magazine.⁴⁰ The first of these articles, published in 1976, was a triple profile interview with Laila Mikkelsen, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Anja Breien,

⁴⁰ Bellsund's critical production include interviews with women directors (1976; 1980), an expose of Norway's first international women's film festival (1979a), and a discussion of the dilemmas created by political Hollywood films, with the activist films of Jane Fonda as an example (1979b; 1981). In the late 1970s, she studied film studies at the University of Stockholm and wrote a student paper with Marie Nilson on the production of *Åpenbaringen / The Revelation* (Løkkeberg 1977).

entitled “Kvinnelig virkelighet på film” (Female reality on film). Bellsund began the feature article by asking the reader to consider what she presents as a gap between the reality of women presented on-screen, through the glamour of film stars, and the reality experienced by the *Sirene* readers themselves. “Let’s be honest,” she writes, “are we served by this falsehood? Are we served by this flight from reality?” (1976, 23). Putting at stake the possibilities for identification and for finding in cinema a reflection or recognition of what she calls, with reference to Alemann, the “unpolished female reality”, Bellsund asserts that “nothing revolutionary will happen before women themselves create the cinema that they want” (1976, 23). In order to counter the polished images of women in mainstream cinema, women would have to make their own films, describing themselves on the silver screen.

Bellsund stands out in the Norwegian film critical landscape in defining and defending women’s films as films by and about women. In general, however, the category of women’s films was understood as a genre designation of films about women’s conditions of life and could be directed by both women and men. This was, importantly, still defended as a new presence. In the words of Ingeborg Moræus Hanssen, board member of the production company Norsk Film AS and later cinema theatre head in Oslo, these were films that could “say something central about women in such a way that women in this contemporary moment identify with the fates of women in the films in a new and revolutionizing way!” (Moræus Hanssen 1979, 41). The quality of these films, according to Moræus Hanssen, stemmed from “a new dimension” in the films that women themselves had been part of creating; one that was more enjoyable, more truthful, more equal and earnest than what had been made before. Moræus Hanssen did not give a more extensive definition of the “new dimension” of the films in question. Based on her discussion, however, one important facet seems to have been the ability to communicate a sensitivity to and knowledge about what it meant to be a woman in the historical world by incorporating contemporary understandings of women’s embattlement from feminist analysis.

While Moræus Hanssen and Bellsund had different criteria for what would constitute a women’s film, and moreover came from opposing political sides (Hanssen being a member of the Conservative Party, while Bellsund’s writing places her on radical left), they do seem to have shared similar views on what women’s films could offer women (and men): An intimate exploration of women’s private sphere through narratives of embattlement and women’s

confinement. In this way, the discourse of women's film formed part of a women's public sphere that emphasized the sharing and consumption of women's experiences. In Lindtner's discussion of *Sirene* as a quintessential expression of the women's public sphere in Norway, she points out that while the magazine covered a range of different life situations in terms of family situation, class background and sexual orientation, the implicit reader was heterosexual, from the middle class and was, or would be, a mother (2013, 132). There is reason to assume that similar identities were at work in the implicit women spectators that the women's films potentially could reach, and the use of the plural "women" by both critics is indicative of creating a unified political subject of "women" for which "women's films" could offer truer images.

The two films *Weekend* and *Wives* were thus released in a period characterized by a broadening of the relevance of feminism for cultural consumption, and an institutionalization of feminist film culture. In the intersection between the feminist film movement and the municipal cinema system, the category women's films was popularized and the number of screenings carrying this heading multiplied. There had been screenings by and for the new women's movement before this, including special screenings of Vibeke Løkkeberg's documentary film *Abortion* in 1972, which I return to in chapter 8. In 1973, a New Feminist group and the older Association for Women's Rights organized one of the first film series curated with a feminist perspective. Entitled "Filmen og kjønnsrolledebatten" (Film and the gender role debate), this was a thematic film week held at Oslo film society's screening room on occasion of the International Women's Day 8th of March, and screened seven films that were seen to address the male and female gender roles with post-screening discussions (Rushprint 1973, 16). The series consisted of seven feature films followed by post-screening discussions.⁴¹ What was new in 1975, was the embrace of "women's films" as a heading, as well as the support by the municipal cinema system. While this had different impacts on the individual films, it did create a discourse where films by and about women were regarded as new and significant.

⁴¹ Interestingly, this first film series differs from later series in explicitly engaging films about both women and men. Among the films screened, we find the Swedish films *Flickorna / The Girls* (1968) and *Älskande Par / Loving Couples* (1964) written and directed by Mai Zetterling, *Husbands* (1970) by John Cassavetes, *Klute* (1971) starring Jane Fonda and directed by Alan J. Pakula, and *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1970) written by Eleanor Perry and directed by Frank Perry.

5.2. Setting gender roles on the agenda: *Weekend* (Laila Mikkelsen, 1974)

Marriage. Children. Work. Consciousness-raising. The old, handed-down image one carries inside of what it means to be “woman”. “Ukeslutt” tries to say something about what happens when these elements collide (Norsk Filminstitutt 1974).

The short film *Ukeslutt / Weekend* (1974, 23 min, color) takes as its point of departure the demands placed on liberated women of the 1970s. The protagonist of the film, Reidun (Eli Anne Linnestad), is characterized as a woman striving for emancipation, a working mother of two who is the union representative at her place of work and well versed in women’s cause issues. In the film, she and her husband (Thor Michael Aamot) host a small weekend evening dinner party, where she cheats on him with their mutual friend, Karsten (Nils Ole Oftebro). The experience turns out to be a disappointment, and rather than offer relief only drives her further into despair. The film ends on a somewhat hopeful note, as she finds unlikely compassion in the friend’s date, Mona (Kate Rasmussen). Reidun talks to Mona, an outsider in the group of friends, about the affair and provides the not so subtle moral lesson of the film: “I don’t know why I did it. Maybe it’s about feeling like a woman in the old way? It’s not so easy finding a new way. There’s so much to fight for, but then all that is left is fighting.” The film engages the challenge of navigating womanhood in the contemporary moment, balancing ‘new’ demands and freedoms with ‘old’ ideals and desires.

5.2.1. A feminist try-out and opportunities for low-level entry

Weekend belongs to a quite small body of short novella films made in the 1970s as part of the development of new opportunities for short film directing. Laila Mikkelsen initiated and directed the film, co-writing the script with Per Blom. It was one of the first productions of the Study Department (Studieavdelingen) at Norsk Film AS, and forms part of Mikkelsen’s trajectory within the company’s talent development.

As described in chapter 3, Norsk Film established the Study Department following debates about the necessity of a proper pathway for training aspiring directors. Using public money to support inexperienced directors in feature film, as creative director Erik Borge had done with the episode film *Days from a 1000 Years* (1970), was not deemed reasonable expenditure (Myrstad 2020a,

182-183). While not exactly a film school, the Study Department offered select filmmakers and film workers the chance to make novella films in order to hone their skills in preparation for feature film production. The purpose was to allow filmmakers a place for experimentation and development of an artistic voice outside of commercial demands.

As a training ground for aspiring film directors, the Study Department is comparable to the Danish and Swedish film workshops established by the national public broadcasters and film institutes in the early 1970s. Together with the national film schools in Copenhagen (1966) and Stockholm (1964), the film workshops were a key factor for both women's entrance into filmmaking and the development of a feminist film practice in Sweden and Denmark, primarily for the way they loosed the hierarchical structures in the established film industries by providing entry-points into filmmaking besides working ones way up the production ladder. However, the film industries in Denmark and Sweden would remain male-dominated in the 1970s, with relatively few women making it into the director's chair of the prestigious feature film, and these low-level initiatives were perhaps most important for the production of feminist short and documentary films (Knudsen and Rowley 2004, 12; Soila 2019, 123-124).

The Danish Film Workshop, *Workshopen*, was established in 1970 with funding from the Danish Film Institute and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Danmarks Radio, and crucially provided non-professionals and aspiring filmmakers the opportunity to borrow equipment and experiment with the medium. Jens Frederik Kragholm, leader of the workshop from 1971-1972, recalls: "[...] the milieu became increasingly ideological, many of the groups regarded *Workshopen* as a tool for the revolution" (Larsen 2019). Part of this revolution was the liberation of women, and director Mette Knudsen later remarked that the new women's movement was the "most filmed of all the grassroot movements" (Knudsen 1985, 3). According to documentary filmmaker Janne Giese, women affiliated with the Red Stockings group exerted political pressure in order to have as many women as possible accepted into the workshop (Bellsund 1979, 29). While not all feminist films originated from *Workshopen*, it did function as an important precondition for the feminist filmmaking practice that developed. For instance, the feminist film collective *Røde Søster* (Red Sister), who later made the gender role reversal comedy *Ta' det som en mand, frue / Take it Like a Man, Ma'm!* (1975), was formed by women who had met in the film workshop, among them Mette Knudsen, Li Vilstrup and Elisabeth

Rygård (Redvall 2015, 274-275). Early examples include the experimental films *Tornerose var et vakkert barn / The Sleeping Beauty* (1971) by Jytte Rex and Kirsten Justesen, who came from the avant-garde and feminist art community, the observational documentary *Femø 1971* (1974) by Vibeke Pedersen about the women's summer camp held at the island Femø in 1971, and the debate films *Vi kræver ligeløn / We Demand Equal Pay* (1972) by Lisbeth Dehn Holgersen and *Kvinnen og Fællesmarkedet / Women and the EEC* (1973) directed by Mette Knudsen in collaboration with Mette Bauer, Li Vilstrup and Dola Bonfils. These films circulated around the country through women's liberation groups and film societies, among others ending up at the small cinema at the Women's House in Åbenrå (Pedersen 2014).

Like in Denmark, the Stockholm film workshop, Filmverkstan, played an important role in providing a low-level entry point for aspiring filmmakers (Andersson and Sundholm 2010; Ryberg 2015). The film workshop was founded by the Swedish Film Institute and the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, Sveriges Radio, in 1973. Andersson and Sundholm have discussed how the film workshop, as an example of independent, oppositional filmmaking made possible by state subsidies and support, created a venue for marginalized filmmaking voices, with examples from immigrant filmmakers and women's and gay liberation filmmaking (2010). Initially, few women applied to the workshop, but the ratio would rise to 25% towards the end of the decade (Rushprint 1980, 33). As Ingrid Ryberg notes, acceptance of films from the gay liberation movement was the exception rather than the rule, pointing, like in the Norwegian context, to the exclusion of LGBTQ issues from the cultural agenda (Ryberg 2015, 141; 144). For instance, while the film *Bögjävlar / Damned Queers* (1977) was made with support in the form of equipment from Filmverkstan, the film *Eva & Maria* (1983), about a lesbian couple, was unsuccessful in applying for support. Rather, the film was made with funding from the Swedish Socialstyrelsen (The National Board of Health and Welfare). Likewise, the film *Kvinnan i ditt liv är du / The Woman in Your Life Is You* (1977), made by women connected to the Lesbian Front in Sweden, was made on earmarked funding from the National Board of Health and Welfare for initiatives that could prevent abortions (Ryberg 2015, 142).

The Study Department at Norsk Film AS was in some ways similar to the Swedish and Danish film workshops. It did, however, not foster grassroots activism like those attributed to these workshops. While the Study Department would be a notable site of production for feminist films,

the volume remained relatively low: Next to *Weekend*, Vibeke Løkkeberg's feature film *The Revelation* (1977) and the experimental short film *Reise gjennom ukjent land – gravid / Travel through Unknown Country – Pregnant* (1981), directed by Veslemøy Haslund and produced by Nicole Macé, are the most prominent examples of feminist films centering on women made within the Study Department, while *Regn / Rain* (1975), directed by Løkkeberg and *Kaptein Maria* (1979), directed by Dagmar Richter Larssen touch on gender roles and conflicts through a child protagonist. This means that *Weekend* stands out as the only narrative novella film from the 1970s that directly engaged issues of the new women's movement, although other examples might be found in the production for public television. As for feminist documentary filmmaking, only the film *Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake / It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (1979), which I return to in chapter 9, was made with support from the Study Department or from Norsk Film AS. The scarcity of short and documentary feminist films does not necessarily reflect a lack of interest in exploring the themes of the new women's movement or of making feminist films. It could equally be seen as a result of the organization of the Study Department. Rather than offer a low-level entry point, like the Swedish and Danish film workshops were meant to do, the Study Department was primarily an entry point into feature filmmaking for filmmakers and film workers who had already shown promise. The films made in the department were increasingly perceived as try-outs for aspiring feature film directors to prove their worth, hence encouraging narrative rather than documentary film output.

In hindsight, *Weekend* was such a try-out film. By the early 1970s, Mikkelsen had directed four short films, several of them produced by Norsk Film AS: *OBOS og byen / OBOS and the City* (1971), a commissioned film on social housing development in the suburbs of Oslo, the observational documentary *Kloster / Monastery* (1971/1972) about the daily life of the Contemplative order of Dominican nuns at Lunden Monastery in Oslo⁴², the short poetic film *Et spann av tid / A Bucket of Time* (1971), and the Vampyrfilm production *Forsøks-gymnaset i Oslo* (1973/1974). Following these films, *Weekend* was accepted for production at the Study

⁴² The short film *Kloster / Monastery* (1971/1972), an exploration of a quintessential female space few outsiders had access to, was arguably not alien to the new women's movement's investment in women-centric spheres. The film, however, does not engage in an explicit political analysis of the meaning of this space.

Department and completed in 1974. It acted as a stepping-stone into feature filmmaking for Mikkelsen, who directed her first feature film *Oss / Us* in 1976 for Norsk Film AS.

Weekend, then, was made to explore both filmmaking and feminism. In the interview with Eva Bellsund in 1976, Laila Mikkelsen described *Weekend* as her only “true” women’s film, posing a problematic question: What happens to the psychological and emotional aspects of women’s liberation? (Bellsund 1976, 27).

While the mid-1970s was otherwise a period of growing attention to showing women’s films in Norway, this heading only marginally impacted the short film circuit. As I will revisit in chapter 9, there were entirely too few opportunities for showing short films during these years. Traces of the reception and movement of *Weekend* are likewise limited, but the film did traverse the 16mm network of film societies and other alternative screening venues. In 1975, the film was for instance shown at Club 7, a popular concert venue and counter-cultural hang-out in Oslo, while in 1978, two different programs screened the film under a feminist theme. Ås Film Society screened *Weekend* alongside a film about women’s double labor in South America that was available for rent from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, NORAD (Akershus Amtstidene 1978, 2). Later that same year, *Weekend* was shown at the very first edition of the Norwegian Short Film Festival in Røros, where it was part of the program “women’s Films” together with two documentaries about the 8th of March. The day of the women’s film program, a representative of the radical women’s organization The Women’s Front urged people to go see the films, calling the program “[...] a unique opportunity to see films by and about women” in the local newspaper (Kobberstad 1978, 2).

5.2.2. Film analysis: “It’s not easy finding a new way”

Weekend opens by placing us in the middle of a ritual of self-staging before a party. A close-up shows Reidun’s mirror reflection as she puts on her make-up. Her eyes are adorned with dramatic blue eye shadow and thick black eyeliner, a dramatic evening style in tune with the look of the day. Over this image we hear a simple tune from a flute and clarinet. The two instruments repeat a low-key musical theme, in a sense commenting on each other and offering two different perspectives on the melody. Most of the film uses only diegetic music, sounds and dialogue, but the tune will return at the very end of the film, providing a framing function for the

weekend narrative. Through these elements, the opening can be seen as preparing a thematic streak concerning roles, ways of being and variations of self.

Reidun's husband, Jan, painfully interrupts the ritual. He calls out to her, and even though the call is low and far from jarring, hearing his call makes her poke her eye with the mascara brush. She throws the brush in the sink and sits down crying with her back turned against the camera and the bathroom door. Reidun's relationship to her husband is introduced as cold and distanced, an intruding force in her life. The following scene throws us abruptly into an argument between the two, a sharp cut making it unclear whether this has in fact happened before or after Reidun started putting on her make-up. The exposition of the couple, however, could not be clearer: Their marriage is at a breaking point.

The central conflict is quickly established to be about Reidun's decision and wish to work outside the home. The presentation of the argument clearly shows the film's project of setting social issues under debate by using characters as stand-ins for different positions. "But what do you want?" the husband shouts, using the plural form of "you" – in Norwegian *dere* and not *du*. Thus, he positions their fight on a general level, addressing his wife not as an individual, but as a member of the group 'emancipated women'. Reidun becomes a representative of the many women who joined the paid work force in the 1970s. Keeping with the film's generalizing tendency, we do not learn what kind of work either of them do, but their home – later shown to be one of the new apartment buildings in the eastern suburb of Oslo – and Reidun's engagement in the worker's union, strongly suggest that they belong to the working class. Their argument nods to the logistical and psychological challenges of the responsibilities for childcare and domestic work that now must fall on him as well, but also to the pay gap between male and female employers rooted in the system of single-household income. Jan offers to work overtime just so that Reidun can stay at home with the children, pointing both to his conviction that their marital problems stem from her shift away from being a housewife, and his considerably larger income. The issue of equal pay is later literally brought to the table as the dinner party escalates into a heated political discussion. Reidun presents her arguments for the failed political practice ("It's not difficult to subvert the whole 'equal pay for equal work'-thing, it's just to make the jobs a little different"); the friend Karsten makes mocking and flirtatious comments; Mona, the friend's date, appearing naïve and amiable in contrast to Reidun, defends the differences, while

Jan finally blows up with impatience over Reidun's attitude ("All right, you are so virtuous and enlightened!").

As Gunnar Iversen argues in his discussion of the film, *Weekend* was both typical and original in its portrayal of how political issues impacted the personal and private (2015). A typical trait is the way the film uses dialogue driven arguments between the characters and a larger discussion at the dinner table as a means of addressing current political and social issues. A similar example is found in *Triangle* (1971), where an early dinner party scene has the characters discuss and argue about the use of audiovisual media in schools. *Weekend* was, however, the first narrative film to use these scenes to address issues of the new women's movement, predominantly the gendered significances of paid and unpaid work. In their opening argument, Jan maintains that he "helps out pretty well" by babysitting his own children when Reidun has union meetings. Reidun, on her side, suggests that one of the challenges of achieving equal pay is that women only think about work "as a part-time thing". In this way, the film points to how sharing responsibility (of children, domestic work, and paid work) only goes so far as long as the responsibility itself remains grounded in the traditional division of the domestic and the public.

The film, however, further develops the dialogue driven argument on the gendered division of labor more subtly through aesthetic means. After the dinner, and perhaps to smooth over the uncomfortable mood, Karsten makes a scene about how the men will clear the table. Close-ups show the men stacking the plates and tidying up, before the hand-held camera follows them into the kitchen. Karsten hastily opens the cupboards looking for where to throw away the leftovers and waste, but then simply puts the dirty plates down by the sink and turns to Jan to talk about some unspecified investment and Mona's looks. Unnoticed by the characters but seen by the camera, the casual ease of not doing the job properly presents the gesture as an act and ties in with the film's argument about the gender role system and gendered areas of responsibility as ingrained and naturalized.

Old ways of seduction?

Weekend's presentation of how easy it is to slip back into the 'old ways' gains particular weight as Reidun, perhaps tired from carving out her rights and spaces to act, tries to escape it all by reverting to another role. Before the dinner guests arrive, she continues her ritual of beauty, and

the film turns from her strained relationship with her husband to her relationship with herself and her own image. She struggles to find what to wear; the red dress she has picked out doesn't fit her like she wants it to. She removes her clothes and looks at herself in the mirror. The scene, showing her dressing and undressing, is focused on her face as her expression turns from a critical to an admiring gaze at herself. A sudden close-up, coming from the mirrors' impossible point of view, shows her hand caressing her stomach, before the next shot returns us to a distanced view of her full figure.

The close-up is ambiguously placed. Whereas the film as a whole makes use of a partially mobile camera, operated by Paul René Roestad, that registers the action at a distance, moving around to reveal aspects unseen or unacknowledged by the characters, the close-up of her hand departs from the otherwise registering style of the camera. Perhaps it is Reidun herself who is drawn in by her own mirror reflection, made aware, together with the camera, of her potential "to-be-looked-at-ness", described by Laura Mulvey as the traditional exhibitionist role of women in cinema (1975/2000, 40). In *Weekend*, we can understand this display as possibly connoting the noted "old ways" of being a woman. It is as though the close-up effects a shift in Reidun: Encouraged by the mirror reflection, Reidun then decides to pursue a different kind of role for the night: as an object of desire, or better yet, as a seducer. She cuts the dress in half and creates a new outfit of a red skirt and a black fitted shirt, a belt accentuating her waistline and figure, before cheering herself on by raising her glass to her own reflection.

Reidun's escape, however, is rendered disappointing and painful. Unlike the exaggerated ellipses of *Triangle*, where both seduction and sexual acts were cut away to show uncomplicated pleasure and harmless sex, *Weekend* adopts the opposite strategy. Here, a conventional build-up of sexual desire is followed by an unflinching camera as the drive towards pleasure turns to disappointment and a withdrawal of consent. Throughout the dinner party, Karsten and Reidun exchange flirtatious glances and comments, the seductive game between them intensifying until they share an impatient kiss in the kitchen. On Reidun's suggestion, they slip out under the pretense of getting more cigarettes. They drive in Karsten's car in search of a place to stop, lust and desire strongly conveyed by yet another close-up that frames her hand as she steers his hand up her thigh and between her legs. When they stop and pull back the car seat, the camera stays on Reidun's face. At first, she is laughing and smiling, then gently moaning as he enters her. As

he quickens his pace, however, she grows quiet with a blank look on her face, his heavy breathing and heaving dominating the sound. He comes, kisses her on the cheek, and crawls off her. The camera remains on her mute and expressionless face.

The shift in Reidun, while registered by the camera, remains invisible to Karsten. “But didn’t you notice I wasn’t into it?” she asks him. As with her husband, the conversation becomes an argument, yet another fight, in which her new identity as a conscious woman is set at stake (Him: “Couldn’t you have said something?” Her: “Said something? The way you were going at it! I felt absolutely nothing with you!” Him again: “You could have done something more than just lying there, you who have become so damned liberated!”). Karsten’s last comment shares the same kind of disdain towards Reidun earlier expressed by her husband. Both Karsten and Jan wish for a different kind of female role from Reidun: a mother and housewife, a sexual partner. The question of what she wants for herself, however, is left lingering, as was her answer to her husband in their first fight: “Not this.”

Female solidarity: A way out

Weekend gives a sordid look at the state of women’s emancipation and the relation between the sexes. The characters seem boxed in and stagnant in more ways than one. This is especially apparent in the sex scene, where the small space of the car, the dark lighting, and the tight and enduring framing of Reidun’s face contributes to a feeling of entrapment. Almost the entire film is shot in interior scenes. We are made to understand that Reidun and Jan have moved to a bigger apartment, yet the economical cinematography in *Weekend* cramps the characters together in the frame, instilling a sense of confinement and restricted space. In the few scenes that take place outdoors, the night-time setting prevents the location from providing openness, as when Reidun walks home from Karsten’s car, clutching her arms around her body and crying, the black night making her figure seem encroached by the darkness.

If the film offers any way out for Reidun, it is through the last and final fight with Mona. After the unuttered betrayal, Reidun returns to the apartment and to her bedroom. She and Jan try to approach each other, but he storms away. Karsten is long gone. Mona, however, insists on staying. She sits down on the bed where Reidun is curled up crying, stroking her hair. “I just want to help you” she tells her. Reidun, however, reacts in a hostile manner, and when Mona

retorts “Do you know how self-involved you are?”, Reidun has a final meltdown. She yells and pulls at the other woman to make her leave her alone and then slaps her in the face, before collapsing on the floor. But Mona does not give up. She covers Reidun with the duvet and sits down opposite her. This makes Reidun soften and apologize, and they talk: a fade between shots suggesting that they talk for quite some time.

Here, the scene of female solidarity is almost forced into the film. Mona’s dedication to Reidun comes across as rather remarkable, and the film does not work to underpin this narrative turn. As characters, they have been constructed as opposites, not only in terms of political positions, but furthermore through character traits: Reidun, strong minded with dark hair and distinct facial features stands in contrast to the quiet-mannered and blonde Mona with her softly spoken North Norwegian dialect. Yet, as Mona provides Reidun with some relief, she manages to undercut the earlier rivalry between them. In this way, the film places solidarity between women as the foundation for finding the new way of being. After three painful fights, it is only with Mona, in a caring, compassionate mode of listening, that the film presents a possibility for dialogue and understanding. By listening with remarkable sympathy, the film suggests, Mona is able to help Reidun.

Weekend ends with a shot showing the two women asleep next to each other on the bedroom floor. The closing image tracks out of the window, cutting to an expositional shot of the exterior of the apartment building, the early daylight providing the first sense of open space. The musical tune from the opening returns, concluding both the night and the narrative. There is hope for the characters in this closure. Yet, *Weekend* retains some ambiguity. From the opening shot of Reidun’s made-up face, the film takes us to another kind of face: the façade of identical apartments, modern housing blocks as far as the eye can see. These housing blocks were built in the suburban areas of Oslo in the 1960s and 1970s: a symbol of the prosperous social democracy, but also a symbol of modern alienated society. This is a theme explored by Laila Mikkelsen in her documentary film *OBOS and the City* (1971) (Iversen 2015). Keeping with the general and typified plane of the film, the ending suggests the story of Reidun as one of many similar stories of boxed in and stagnant relationships unfolding in the apartment building.

Weekend explicitly raises several issues of the new women's movement connected to paid and unpaid work, sexuality, and the psychological foundation for emancipation. While the film's portrayal of the relationship between the sexes is pessimistic, it does not necessarily give up on the heterosexual marriage. As Reidun tells Mona, "We need to keep trying". Still, it is in the female-only and intimate space that understanding is made possible. In this way, the film's ending mirrors that of *Triangle*, with women carving out a space for themselves. This space is in both instances created within the private spheres: in *Triangle* with the two women building a new family life together, while Mona and Reidun in *Weekend* barricade themselves in the bedroom and talk things over. In the next film I turn to, the feature film *Wives* (Breien, 1975), the break the women seek take them into the urban spaces of the city.

5.3. Into the public sphere: *Wives* (Anja Breien, 1975)

In a much-quoted anecdote, director Anja Breien has recounted how she had the idea for *Wives* after seeing John Cassavetes' film *Husbands* (1970) for the second time (Breien 2008). *Husbands* is about three male friends, played by Peter Falk, Ben Gazzara and Cassavetes himself, who embark on a temporary break from their responsibilities. They try to escape the meaninglessness of their organized lives in order to feel alive, and male, and free. The film ends with a scene where the character played by Cassavetes walks up his driveway, his arms full of stuffed toys bought at the airport to bribe his family, his face full of remorse, or anticipation of all the trouble he's in. Breien, according to her anecdote, thought to herself:

What would happen if it were three *women* who left their families behind in order to enjoy themselves? Not only would they feel bad when they came back home – they would have felt bad all the time! (Breien 2008, 7).

The resulting comedy of gender role reversal combines a fantasy of escaping the responsibilities of the everyday with a clear aim of setting social problems and issues of women's lives under debate. In the film, three childhood friends reconnect at a school reunion. When the party ends in the early morning hours, they decide not to go home, not yet, but to continue the party, leaving their husbands to take over at home for a change. The three women end up embarking on a multiday binge: drinking, talking, discussing, arguing, playacting, and making fun of men and of themselves. The film explores contemporary women's condition of life, firstly by creating a

narrative and space occupied by women and their stolen time together and secondly by explicitly setting at stake situations of role reversal.⁴³

5.3.1. Outreach theatre, popular feminist art, and the *auteur* politics of Norsk Film AS

Wives was a collaborative project between Breien and the three actors Katja Medbøe, Anne Marie Ottersen and Frøydis Armand. The initiative for the film originated from the radical stage culture of the 1970s, when the four women, together with actors Veslemøy Haslund, Liv Thorsen, Eilif Armand and Lars Andreas Larssen, author and playwright Liv Køltzow and stage producer Margrethe Aaby, began work on the stage play *Jenteloven / The Law of Girls* (1974). This was a group project about women's double labor and oppression in the work force and was made through the practice of political outreach theatre at the National Theatre (Barth 2008, 11-12; Sandvik 2008).⁴⁴ *The Law of Girls* was based on a recent strike organized by women working as cleaning personnel in Kongsberg. According to Veslemøy Haslund, the play came about through a Women's Front-group in the National Theatre. In an interview with the organization's members' magazine, she recalls: "We were a fine group of actors and cleaning ladies who wanted to support the striking women with what resources we had" (Kvinnefront 1979a, 12).

In the play, four women in low-income jobs experience a work conflict. The play explores their situation through a two-part structure that included musical numbers of political folk songs by composer Finn Luth, as well as discussions with the audience. The play ended with a clear call for women's active political participation and an appeal to solidarity and union organization. The title of the play, "The Law of Girls", was an allusion to the Scandinavian concept of *Janteloven*, the "Law of Jante", from author Aksel Sandemose's *En flyktning krysser sitt spor (A fugitive Crosses His Tracks)*, 1933). This "law" consists of ten rules, modeled on the biblical Ten

⁴³ Parts of this analysis of *Wives* was first articulated in my Master Thesis "What If It Had Been Three Women?:" Columbia University School of the Arts 2015.

⁴⁴ Seeking to work politically, the ideal of the out-reaching theatre was to bring theatre to the people by performing outside of the established institutions and to create activating plays about issues that concerned the working classes (Barth 2008, 13). This was an international import, with Dario Fo and Franca Rame in Italy as clear sources of inspiration. In Norway, the Director of the National Theatre, Arild Brinchmann, championed this political theatre under the slogan that a theatre that does not provoke is no theatre. Other examples of out-reaching theatre include *Pendlerne* (1972) and *Svartkatten* (1971). Like *Jenteloven*, the plays aimed to analyze working class problems and provide political solutions (Barth 2008, 12).

Commandments, which set out a Scandinavian social norm of being skeptical towards individual achievement and complacency. The Law of Jante is popularly known by its first lines: “You are not to think you are anything special. // You are not to think you are as good as we are” (Sandemose 1933, 85). *The Law of Girls* was a positive and politicized rewriting of this law, listing ten new laws that aimed to rectify women’s oppression in the work force and in the private sphere. The ten laws of girls spoke to women’s self-affirmation, saying: “You must know you are special” and “You must know you have something to contribute”, as well as asserting the right to equal pay, eight hours working days, the right to decide over your own body, and the right to enjoy sex (Barth 2008, 12).

The Law of Girls was a success. It premiered in January 1974 at a stage in Romsås, a suburb of Oslo, and continued to sell out both on the National Theatre’s stage and beyond (Rønneberg 1974, 306). It was later turned into a studio album released on the radical label MAI. In a later interview, Breien, Ottersen and Armand explained that, as part of the groundwork for the play, the group visited the striking women and conducted interviews with them, their families, and their employers (Sandvik 2008, 22; Barth 2008, 13). The women had a lot to say, apparently talking for hours about their experiences. However, they were not engaged in women’s liberation, and did not necessarily see their own problems as relevant for the new women’s movement’s analysis of women’s oppression. In line with an aim of consciousness-raising, the group wanted to make a film as a way of reaching out to these women.

Breien brought the project idea, now specified as a riposte to *Husbands*, to the production company Norsk Film AS, where the creative director Erik Borge green-lighted the film based on a 15-page scenario. This was the first time in the company’s history that a project was accepted without a complete manuscript,⁴⁵ and the film was also among the first in-house productions bankrolled by direct funding (Barth 2008, 15). As such, *Wives* exemplifies both the possibilities for creative freedom that the public production company could offer at that time, the *auteur* politics developed in Norsk Film AS, and Anja Breien’s central position in the company.

⁴⁵ This would later be more common. For instance, Breien was given direct funding for *The Next of Kin* (1979) (Myrstad 2020b, 206), while Mikkelsen’s *Oss / Us* (1976) was also accepted for production based on a scenario description.

In the 1970s, Breien would be the company's most important director (Myrstad 2020b, 204). Crucially, Norsk Film AS and Erik Borge had championed Breien as a filmmaker since the mid-1960s when Borge, who was then part of the production company ABC-film, was charged with scouting for new talent and hired Breien, newly graduated from IDHEC, for below-the-line work on the Danish-Norwegian co-production *Sult / Hunger* (Carlsen, 1966)⁴⁶. This job would be important for Breien both personally and professionally and was a starting point for the Vampire Film Group. As creative director of Norsk Film AS, Borge furthermore played a role in realizing Breien's first short film *Sagnet om Jostedalsrypa / Growing Up*, made as part of the talent focus project "Ungdom 66" and released as *Days from a 1000 Years* (1970). After two years of re-submissions and delays in the decision-making process, Breien was able to finish her segment of the three-part film with preproduction funds directly from Norsk Film AS. Following this film, Breien made several award-winning short films, as well as her first feature film *Rape*, released in 1971.

Wives was Breien's second feature film as a director, and it became a flagship achievement of the company. In Oslo alone, more than 200 000 tickets were sold, and *Wives* was among the top-grossing films of the year, surpassed only by the now beloved children's film *Flåkløya Grand Prix / The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix* (Caprino, 1975) (Iversen 2011, 230). The film enjoyed wide festival circulation, bringing home a special mention from the Locarno Film Festival (1975) and the Silver Hugo from the Chicago International Film Festival (1976). In 1976, Breien participated with the film at the Second Women's Film Festival in New York. By then, *Wives* had already made its way around Norway through the growing number of women's films events.

5.3.2. A women's film in a Women's Year

The premise of *Wives* seemed to create something that had not been made in Norwegian film before: A film directed by women, inhabited by only women protagonists, structured around female friendship. That the film was released in the International Women's Year, further gave the film a context of relevance: a women's film in a women's year. For this reason, *Wives*

⁴⁶ Breien was also assistant director to Henning Carlsen on the film *Mennesker mødes og sød musik opstår i hjertet / People Meet and Sweet Music Fills the Heart* (1967). The two formed a long-term relationship and lived together in Denmark for several years, with Breien sharing her time between Copenhagen and Oslo.

became the quintessential women's film in the Norwegian context. In the *Sirene* interview, Eva Bellsund asserted that «*Wives* is a watershed in Norwegian film history. And the one women's film with success [...] will hopefully be a support for all women's films in Norway» (Bellsund 1976, 23). As a film made by and about women in response to a film made by and about men, *Wives* was integral for the popularization of the concept in Norwegian film and cultural discourse. While this heading only marginally impacted the short film *Weekend*, for *Wives*, the situation was different. An important emphasis of the Women's Year strategy of the Norwegian government was to foster local activity that could engage debate and spread information about gender equality (Müftüoğlu 2013, 139). Each municipality had a Women's Year committee, and several of these municipal committees organized film screening series as part of the effort to create awareness of women's conditions and the women's struggle. *Wives* was a mainstay at many of these series and events. For instance, the municipal cinemas in Bergen, Eidsvoll and Ålesund all screened *Wives* as part of a program series with films about women (Staalesen 1975, 3; Evensen 1975, 2; Sunnmørsposten 1975, 3). In Hedemark, the Ringsaker film society and the Women's Year committee used *Wives* as a starting point for an evening of discussions about women's liberation and gender roles (Bjørshol 1975, 2).

Breien herself spoke about *Wives* as a women's film in the sense that, contrary to her first feature film *Rape* (1971), a film about the alienation of a working-class man by the judicial system, the fact that she was a woman and collaborated with other women was crucial for the making of *Wives*. In an interview in the Women and Film issue of the trade journal *Film og Kino* some months before the release of the film, she stated:

There is still much to do when it comes to film about women. It is also important to get more women into film production, there should be as many female directors as male directors. Only by letting women contribute will we be able to explore women's situation from the inside. When I made *Rape*, I did not think like this, and that film could well have been made by a man. But through the work with *The Law of Girls* and a general consciousness-raising, it seemed natural to make a film about women's situation. Could really *Wives* have been made by a man? (Li 1975, 53).

Breien's rhetorical question, also the title of the interview, addressed the idea that women directors and writers were able to give form to stories and experiences unavailable to men. Breien repeated and elaborated on this point in the filmed interview conducted by Nicole Macé in 1975 and sent on television in 1976. In the interview, Macé asks: "Is *Wives* a women's film?", to which Breien responds with a clear "Yes", before reiterating the same sentiment: that *Wives*, a film about three women leaving husbands behind to be together, needed to be told by women, because men don't know what women do when they aren't around (Macé, 1976).

However, already in the interview with Sirene in 1976, Breien was more reserved towards the concept. She repeated the contention that it was important to make films by, for, and about women, but also warned that the term could result in isolation: "Women's films are not distributed through the usual channels. Until we can manage on equal footing with men, it can be fruitful to isolate, to make our own festivals, as long as it doesn't turn into a ghetto..." (Bellsund 1976, 30).

Women's film series and events continued to be organized in Norway throughout the decade. After 1975, a dozen or so women's film series and events were organized in Norway, several of them at municipal cinemas, and several of them featuring *Wives*. The series were predominantly held by the municipal cinemas in populous areas such as Oslo, Bærum, Bergen and Trondheim, but women's films were shown in smaller municipal cinemas as well: For instance, in 1978, the Florø municipal cinema screened *Wives* under the rubric "Women's film" on occasion of 8th of March (K.S. 1978, 2). The same community hosted a "women's film seminar" in 1980 (G.S. 1980, 2). Other series were more ambitious, lasting several days and showing multiple films. The largest and most influential of these series was the international Women's Film Week in 1979, which I return to in chapter 9. This was held in collaboration with the municipal cinemas in Oslo, Oslo Kinematografer AS (Oslo Cinematographs Ltd.), and screened for instance *Wives*, in addition to *The Revelation* (Vibeke Løkkeberg, 1977) and *The Guardians* (Nicole Macé, 1978).

Following *Wives*, Breien would direct seven more feature films, all produced by Norsk Film AS, including two sequels to *Wives* that reunited the three characters for new escapes from responsibilities: first in 1985 with *Hustruer – ti år etter / Wives – Ten Years Later* and then in 1996 with *Hustruer III / Wives III*. Each film, in film historians Gunnar Iversen and Ove Solum's

words, aimed to “take the pulse” on women’s experiences (2010, 176). This is an understatement, as these films not only passively register, but actively comment on and interrogate women’s conditions in each decade, while also themselves becoming historical documents of the concerns and analyses of each moment.

5.3.3. Film analysis: Women without men

Wives opens on black with the sound of chatting women’s voices, followed by a loud “shush!” that makes the voices quiet down. Cut to a still black-and-white photograph of an all-girl’s primary school class, the title “Hustruer” appearing in large white letters over the picture. A new cut puts us in the midst of a dinner party, many years later, as one of the old classmates is about to hold a welcoming speech. As the party ensues, we witness bits of polite small-talk and catching-up that for the most part revolve around the women’s husbands – how they look, what they do – or about their children. One woman starts reading from a book containing greetings and rhymes they wrote to each other as girls, these too centering on futures of romance and happy homemaking. The simple intercutting of the school reunion and the old school picture places the characters within a gendered and pre-determined life trajectory: from school girls to married women.

By not returning home, the three friends Kaja (Katja Medbøe), Mie (Anne Marie Ottersen) and Heidrun (Frøydis Armand) take a break from this trajectory. At first, their decision to continue the party is not a bold one: they simply go for breakfast at a small cafeteria. From here on out, the break just never ends. They go to a public swimming hall to sauna and shower, then to a café for more beers and to write postcards to their husbands, letting them know they won’t be returning any time soon. They go the marketplace and take a nap in the park before being woken up and thrown out by the police, then stop by Kaja’s mother (Nøste Shwab) to borrow money. They try to get into a nightclub but end up joining a couple of photographers (Helge Jordal and Svein C. Thue) at their studio before they hurry along to yet another bar. They roam the streets for a while and make their way home to Mie’s absent lover, talking more about their marriages and their problems, before deciding to catch a boat to Copenhagen, making stops at the factory where Heidrun works and the apartment where Mie lives to collect money and clothes for their trip.

As a feminist film, *Wives* presents an unparalleled portrait of solidarity among women. Here, women and their time together sit center stage, while the few male characters in the film are relegated to peripheral figures that primarily threaten to disrupt the unity of the women. As Professor of Media Studies Liv Hausken has argued, the film works both stylistically and narratively to portray the characters as group, uniting them as a collective protagonist (Hausken 1997, 171). The premise of the film creates a state of exception that unifies them. Independent of their everyday situations of life, their project of escape is constructed as a collective endeavor rather than an individual one. This is visually enhanced by the framing that often works to keep the women unified in the cinematic image through the use of expositional shots or slow pans. The camera is tied to the group (1997, 172). In *Wives*, the women's companionship is not only the solution to the narrative problem, but also the driving force of the narrative itself. The women's project of escape becomes a project of continuing in and of itself, and the film centers their being together, of not stopping *just yet*, as the most important.

In this way, *Wives* becomes an elongated portrayal of female solidarity. Scene after scene place them together, sometimes in intimate private settings, other times in the public spaces of cafes and bars, where they talk and listen, fight and argue. In dialogue with European cinematic modernism and the French new wave, the film adopts a distanced style that follows the characters as they wander the streets of Oslo. Yet here, we do not follow the development of a heterosexual relationship as in *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1959), nor a young boy's escape into the allure of the modern city life as in *Les Quatre Cents Coups / The 400 Blows* (Truffaut, 1959), but two housewives and a factory worker's escape from responsibility. As such, the wives might be comparable to the title character in Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7 / Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) who enacts a similar escape from the confinements of her life. Unlike this film, however, *Wives* brings to the table an explicit political discourse. In line with a typifying tendency, the three characters in *Wives* represent different positions across social class and economic independence: Mie, most visibly impatient with the way her life turned out, is a housewife and mother of three, whose husband has recently been promoted to a white-collar job at a car dealership. Kaja is highly pregnant with her second child and content, yet somewhat infantilized, in her marriage to a successful lawyer, while Heidrun is the most independent of them: She does not have any children, is later revealed to be separated from her husband, and works at a

chocolate factory where she is an active union member. Their differing family situations make them disagree and counter each other, and the conversations between them turn into a cacophony of outlooks and reflections that set issues on the agenda. Through the constant movement within Oslo and between topics of conversation about their lives as (married) women, *Wives* explores a myriad of issues central to the new women's movement: childcare, beauty standards, freedom, domestic work, and gender discrimination.

Observing a change of roles

Like *Weekend*, *Wives* relies stylistically and argumentatively on codes of cinematic realism. More so than the former, however, *Wives* moves close to a documentary film aesthetic of observation associated with the film movement Direct Cinema and cinema vérité (Nichols 1991, 38-44). The film is shot on location, often using an immobile or slowly panning camera placed at a distance. It has no non-diegetic music, but only uses atmospheric sound and dialogue. The camera is rarely used to analyze the situation or move beyond the character's better knowledge, but instead acts as a witness to events that seem to be unfolding independently of its presence. Together with the episodic and loose narrative structure, the open-ended form, and the flow of dialogue between the characters, this imbues the film with a sense of immediacy and spontaneity.

On the one hand, the film uses this documentary aesthetics authenticate the characters as a more honest portrayal of women on-screen, implicitly compared to the perceived glamorous female characters of classical cinema. As we follow the women into the cityscape, we also accompany them into public bathrooms, or into the locker room of the swimming pool. Indeed, as the camera captures the three friends crouching behind bushes to pee, the film certainly signals a project of expanding the cinematic images of women. In *Wives*, this is most clearly articulated in the sauna scene, where an expositional shot places the three characters among other naked women of different ages, shapes, and sizes. The highly private sphere foregrounds the diversity of women, all of them naked and relaxed, exposing tan lines, body hair and wrinkles: As they shower and get dressed again, Mie, Heidrun and Kaja discuss the women and their own bodies, bringing up different views on the issues of body complexes ("Do *you* have complexes?"), changing standards of beauty ("It used to be alright to be fat, just think of that guy Rubens"), and the

precarity of women as objects of desire (“Your market value falls when you pass thirty” – “No it doesn’t” – “Yes, it does”).

On the other hand, the film’s style creates a stage on which the women perform their escape from home and their change of roles. The expositional shot of the sauna both works to present a normalizing image of naked women, as well as setting up a situational comedy as Heidrun tries to hide the fact that she has the hiccups after having too much to drink – putting on display within an intact cinematic space the increasingly disapproving gazes of the other women as Heidrun and Mie turn into giggling schoolgirls. The film’s use of physical humor is signaled early on as Heidrun suddenly disappears into an open manhole on their way from the party – all three of them laughing as Heidrun calls out for them to wait for her. Indeed, *Wives* combines the observational style with slapstick humor as the women revert into playful childishness: They silly-walk, make faces and put on acts for each other.

In this way, *Wives* works to portray ordinary women in an explicit out-of-the-ordinary break from the everyday, and we become witnesses to the women’s play and performance as they imagine and try out a fantasy of being *something else* than their ascribed gender roles. At the marketplace, Mie pulls a cap over her hair and dons a character as a hunchbacked woman: “The home front is out looking at the people. It’s not so often the home front gets out,” she says in a made-up voice, jumping around as they buy groceries. By referring to herself as the “home front”, Mie playfully subverts the pride in the Norwegian resistance movement during World War 2, when Norway was under German occupation, equating the predominantly male resistance fighters with the housewife – the other “home front”. The women’s project sets at stake a transgressive mobility between private and public spaces and relegated gender roles: Towards the end of the film, *Wives* introduces the mirror image of their escape from home and shift of roles as Mie finds, to her surprise, her husband (Sverre Anker Ousdal) in their kitchen doing the dishes. Here as well, the film creates a visual pun on the change of roles: framing a certain out-of-place-ness through the husband’s pink rubber gloves and broad-backed body crouched over the small sink.

Performing subjecthood

It is in the realm of sexuality that their performance is most aggressively pursued as the women increasingly test out the boundaries of their own gendered position within the city's public spheres. Like Reidun in *Weekend*, they want to desire and be desired by men. Unlike for Reidun, the pursuit of seduction and meaningless sex retains an air of the uncomplicated. In the words of Heidrun: "We want to have some fun – we can fuck at home, dammit!". Perhaps, precisely because none of them venture beyond pre-coital seductions and foreplay, the film can leave the narrative question of *Weekend* – what happens when the desire for something else is within reach – unanswered and unexplored.⁴⁷

In *Wives*, sex and sexuality is fun and games, yet the film articulates a critical look at heterosexual gender relations and sexual objectification as the women act out gender behavior. The first scene of gender role reversal starts out as a typical heterosexual encounter at a bar. Two men approach them with jokes about an old clock Kaja is carrying around – an heirloom her mother insisted she take with her and another example of the film's predilection for visual jokes. The women laugh, the men buy them drinks and then invite them for another at their photography studio. "Can't we take your picture?", Heidrun suggests. While reluctant at first ("No, that's corny"), both men eventually agree and play along as Heidrun and Mie take on the roles of fashion photographers. The men pose against a bright red backdrop, while Heidrun and Mie call out to them encouragingly: "Be like the models!", "More skin!", and "Be yourself, now!". As Kaja dresses the men in *faux* jewelry, and the men unbutton their shirts and pull up their pants, the group enacts a role reversal of sex objectification. In this way, the scene switches the usual gendered positions in the cinematic construction of what Laura Mulvey would call the "male gaze" in her seminal essay published the same year (1975). In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Mulvey argued that in classical narrative cinema, women characters are displayed and looked at through a three-part structure of the cinematic gaze: the camera that records, the characters within the diegesis who look at the female character, and the audience who sees the final product (1975/2000, 46-47). In *Wives*, this structure is reenacted and switched

⁴⁷ Sex as both danger and pleasure would be more fully explored in the second film about the three friends, *Wives – Ten Years Later* (1985), engaging medical discourses of female sexuality from venereal disease to psychoanalysis, and where possession, desire, and desperation are set center stage.

within the diegesis: It is the photographers, whose walls are plastered with photographs of half-nude, highly sexualized women used for commercial ends, who now become the looked at, while the women, both looking at the men and taking their photographs, become the holders of the gaze.

Next, the women take their game of objectifying the male body further by moving their gender role reversal into the public space. “Let’s try to pick up one of those biker guys”, Mie says as they approach a group of young men in biker gear hanging by the sidewalk of Oslo’s main street Karl Johan. Her dare sets in motion a series of attempts to pick up guys from the street, inhabiting the roles of male street harassers. They cat-call, cuddle the men’s beards and feel the fabric of their shirts while telling them how sexy and fresh they are. Some of their attempts come very close to being successful, but most of the time the man picks up his pace, looking back in confusion. In this scene, the mostly static camera is replaced by a hand-held camera that follows right behind them, capturing these street encounters through a cinema verité style. Indeed, this sequence was the only truly improvised scene of the film and was made through a combination of hidden camera use and reenactments, as many of the men they approached did not consent to the footage being used (Barth 2008, 16).

In both these scenes, the women’s enacted change of roles makes visible gender role behavior through play and performance, setting at stake the typical positions of active / passive, object / subject in the heterosexual script. As a rhetorical figure, the gender role reversal is found in many examples of feminist critique of gender ideology. In Norway, the novel *Daughters of Egalia* by Gerd Brantenberg (1977) became a cult book for the new women’s movement in Norway through its humorous imagination of a futuristic society of men subjugated under women’s rule. In the Danish film *Take it Like a Man, Ma’m!* (Vistrup, Knudsen and Rygaard, 1975) released the same year as *Wives*, the main character, Ellen, depressed by her life as a housewife, sighs “What if things had been different?”. The film then moves into a dream world interlude that show an alternative reality where women and men have switched roles: Here, she has no longer lost contact with her friends as a consequence of marriage, but is part of a tightly knit group of women in power who treat their employees as boytoys, while the men don fake chest hairs to impress their wives and sweat over the dinner pots. In Sally Potter’s *Thriller* (1979), a rewriting of Puccini’s opera *La Boheme*, the protagonist Mimi investigates her own

role in the opera and imagines a change of roles (“what if I had been the subject of this scenario instead of its object?”) that cues in an image of her as the male lead in the classical ballet position *arabesque*.

What these examples share is the evocation of the absurd, creating a critical distance which is crucial for reading the subversive potential. Ellen’s fantasy ends with her chuckling and shaking her head, while Mimi laughs at her imagined role reversal. Mimi laughs because, writes Sue Thornham in her investigation of the female hero, “The image is self-evidently absurd” (2012, 9). Similarly, Liv Hausken locates the subversive potential of *Wives* in the film’s use of laughter (2008). As she points out in her discussion of the pick-up scene in *Wives*, the carnivalesque project of gender role reversal will in and of itself not necessarily offer critique or hope for change (Hausken 2008, 37-38). The gender role reversal makes visible gender roles as *roles* – as ways of acting. Yet, the film still keeps the roles themselves intact: The scripts of the heterosexual encounter and the power axis of active / passive are seemingly kept in place. Still, argues Hausken, it is the performance the women put on that gives the women’s acting out its subversive potential. They laugh at and make fun of male behavior, while simultaneously laughing at themselves for inhabiting the male role. For Hausken, this becomes a critique of the very dichotomy of subject/object, the looker and the looked at, so that the women reject both the position of master and mastered (2008, 38).

The role reversal, in other words, is itself never completed. Indeed, the photographic role play ends with Mie and Heidrun dancing and kissing with a photographer each, until Kaja breaks up the mood by sharing her discovery of an inflatable sex doll: the camera swirling around the couples before coming to rest in an expositional shot that allows the awkward scene to unfold as one of the guys grabs the doll and deflates it, while the vinyl record shifts to a new track. The dance music starts up as the air literally goes out of the party to great anempathetic effect, to use Michel Chion’s term (1994, 9). Even though the role reversals are fleeting moments, the project of escape is important as precisely a fantasy: As the creation of temporary moments of “what if?”.

To continue despite limitations

Much of the time, Mie, Heidrun and Kaja never really get the chance to find out where they would want to take their “night out,” as their escape from home quickly becomes riddled with constraints. The spaces of the city are, it turns out, not necessarily open to them. Throughout their binge, male figures of authority stand in their way: policemen who ask them to leave the park for sleeping on a bench, a barman who asks them to leave the pub for talking too loud, an usher who won’t let them into a nightclub. Moreover, the film constantly introduces material constraints and psychological pressures that complicate their temporary escape and place it within a systemic critique which opens up questions of work, money, and freedom.

While the women do not “feel bad all the time,” as Breien suggested in her anecdote (2008:7), several arguments flare up between them about the validity of their project. This is especially tense in relation to domestic responsibility. Keeping with its cacophonous style, the film circles in questions of motherhood as womanhood proper, pointed to by Heidrun, who despite not having children makes one up at the school reunion (“I didn’t want to feel left out”), and Mie, who has three children but longs for a different life (“Why should I suffer just so my children should be alright?”). Mie’s wishes for self-realization and fulfillment are countered by Kaja’s insistence on women’s particular responsibility for childcare (“But *you’re* the mother!”). Indeed, Kaja, with the outline of her large pregnant belly visible under a long, white dotted pink dress, becomes a jarring presence on their drunken binge.⁴⁸

Next to the women’s internal rationale, the film’s narrative points to the material conditions necessary to make their escape possible. The first thing Heidrun, Mie and Kaja do after they have talked each other into not going home is count their money. They burn through it quite quickly, and soon find themselves at Kaja’s mother’s asking for pocket money – money she in turn, we understand, has gotten from her husband. The home front wants to be out in the street, but it does not necessarily have the resources to do so. In their scramble for money, the difference between paid and unpaid work comes into view: Kaja has money, but it is not hers to access, and, like her mother, she is dependent on her husband. “Maybe it’s got something to do with money?”

⁴⁸The character Kaja is perhaps even more radical today. In the film she represents the most traditional of the women, yet now, as the harmful effects of alcohol and substance consumption by pregnant women is well-documented, the moral judgement and thus social control on pregnant women have arguably increased.

Heidrun later muses, to which Mie replies: “You look down on us who stay at home.” “No”, Heidrun answers, “but you need to be able to decide for yourself as well.” This is, perhaps, the clearest articulation of a conclusion in the film. Heidrun, while working-class and less financially secure, owns her own money, and thus has independence and the choice of what to do with it. Yet, while Heidrun is independent in her relationship to her husband, she is precariously placed in her relationship to her male employer (Alf Nordvang), characterized as a cynical and oppressive factory manager. Throughout the film, Heidrun discusses the discrimination against women in the work force, before she herself loses her job at the factory after several days of absence.

Despite the limitations experienced by the women, the film ends on a hopeful note. Even at the end, when Heidrun has decided to stay in Denmark and Kaja has been reported missing by her husband, the project continues. Kaja and Mie return home, but when the ship docks in Oslo, Heidrun is on the pier waving to them and mimicking that she came by air. Mie and Kaja run to her, and the three women hug and laugh. Mie asks Heidrun why she came back, to which Heidrun replies: “Well, we can’t stop now!” The image of them freezes while the sound of laughter continues, and big, red letters appear on the screen: “But the film ends here.” *Wives* ends, but the project of the women is neither finished nor given closure. All that is given is the promise that they will not stop yet: A call that in the context of the new women’s movement could flow beyond the film and towards the audience as a call to continue imagining a different way of being.

5.4. Concluding remarks: Searching for liberating moments

Made and released in the mid-1970s, the two films *Wives* and *Weekend* are indicative of important changes in the Norwegian feminist film landscape of the 1970s. In terms of production, both films were made through novel funding and training opportunities made available from state involvement in Norsk Film AS after 1973. *Weekend* was one of the first films to be made in the Study Department, while *Wives* was made through direct funding. In this way, the two films serve as examples of the kinds of opportunities and sites of production that were enabled by the strengthened position of Norsk Film AS and the company’s talent development program. As for reception, the films can be seen as part of a new phase of the new

women's movement and were released in an increasingly more visible public discourse on feminism. From what is considered a spontaneous activist period in the early 1970s, the concerns of the movement were beginning to be adopted in a wider cultural and political context. This is evidenced through growing attention to women's filmmaking and the images of on-screen women in film culture. The most important was the development of screening series that gathered women's films. These series impacted the two films in different ways: *Wives*, a feature film with both regular theatrical release and additional screenings in occasion of the UN's Women's Year, enjoyed considerable reach and popularity. The short film *Weekend*, in contrast, had more limited exhibition and distribution opportunities, but would also be screened, and to some degree discussed, under the heading of women's films in the second half of the 1970s.

Through narratives of women who enact escapes from responsibilities and the ties that bind, *Wives* and *Weekend* bring to the table analyses of the challenges that 'ordinary' women in Norway anno the mid-1970s might face, but also set at stake the way gender roles and gendered expectations have been naturalized. In both films, stylistic codes of cinematic realism, such as scarce or no use of non-diegetic music, an observing camera style, and self-effacing editing, together with generalizing tendencies that work to make the characters stand in for larger social groups, work to authenticate the dilemmas and bring them into conversation with the historical world.

In this way, *Weekend* and *Wives* can be related to the aim to engage and enlighten the audience by putting into view central aspects of the gender system and draw in current issues and concerns of the new women's movement. The films pose a series of questions with relevance for women and men in the 1970s moment: What does liberation look like? How do you navigate the different expectations and demands on liberatory projects? How do you weigh the projects of personal liberation against the responsibilities one has for others?

Significantly, neither film provides definitive answers to the questions they pose. While they do show characters that with the support of other women possibly, but not necessarily, have started a process of consciousness-raising, the change of roles does not in itself lead to an answer or an alternative vision of the future. Rather, in line with ideals of cinematic modernism, the films present open-ended and somewhat ambiguous projects of liberation. The escapist fantasy

undertaken by Reidun in *Weekend* is arguably presented as a dead-end, but one that has sets the main character on the path towards an unarticulated solution in the future. In *Wives*, the women characters' role-reversal and rejection of responsibility is more radically open-ended, and *Wives* especially can be seen as an argument for fiction, fantasy and play in the imagination of the goals and ways forward for the new women's movement.

CH 6. *THE REVELATION* (1977): A PORTRAIT OF ISOLATION

In this chapter, I turn to the fourth feminist narrative film of the decade, *Åpenbaringen / The Revelation* (1977), written and directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg. *The Revelation* portrays a woman whose sense of self is so tightly connected to her role as a housewife that, as this role starts to unravel, her connection to the world is put under pressure.

In many ways, *The Revelation* signaled the end point of what can be seen as the first cycle of feminist fiction films directed by women. *The Revelation* shares several similarities with the three films already discussed: It is set in the contemporary moment, levels a critique of heterosexual marriage, explores women's conditions and places female solidarity as key to alternative ways of living. Yet, while the women characters in *Triangle*, *Weekend* and *Wives* somehow managed to carve out a space for themselves and point towards a different future, the character Inger is so severely boxed in that it ultimately becomes impossible for her to imagine a future at all. Moreover, the film was highly controversial, and the critical reception offers important insight into some of the ways feminist film debate developed in Norway.

6.1. *The Revelation* and the figure of the deprived housewife

In an interview from 1977, Løkkeberg described her idea for *The Revelation* in the following way: «For some time now I have been bothered by a strange sensation, and an image of a woman sitting in a window, cutting her vein. The blood runs down the wall...» (Fremover 1977, 20). This is one of the closing images of the film, and while the film keeps open the question of the woman's suicide, this image of a dying woman points both to the film's stylistic turn towards the symbolic and surreal, and to the emergent discourses of the housewife's deprived state of living.

The Revelation is about Inger (Marie Takvam), a woman who has spent all her adult life as a housewife. Now that her son is grown-up, she no longer has a clear role to play. Her sense of being redundant is strengthened by her husband (Wilfred Breistrand), who is cold and dismissive. We follow Inger through a short period of time as she tries to reconnect with the world while balancing on the brink of a nervous breakdown. In the final sequence of *The Revelation*, we see Inger cleaning the entire home. She vacuums the leather sofa, which she worries is stained with semen after her husband has had an affair. She scrubs the stairs and cleans

the windows. As she looks out, a point-of-view shot shows a young blond woman living next door; she, as well, cleaning her windows. They pause and look at each other briefly, disturbed and bothered by this mirroring. The young woman, a younger version of Inger, always cleaning or serving meals to her family, will, we suspect, end up the same way as her. Inger washes the couch once more, then showers and washes herself, makes the bed, and winds up a bedside music box. The narrow melody plays, alluding perhaps to her lost role as a mother, or her infantilization by her husband. A sudden cut shows Inger bent over the window frame across white linen, holding out her arm and letting red blood flow down the white sheet. The bloodstained cloth becomes a disturbing presence among the large and identical houses in the otherwise posh and orderly neighborhood. Abruptly, a new cut moves us back into the house, the music box melody immediately replaced by an intrusive synthesized note and with Inger, standing in the corner of the room, looking directly into the camera. The take lasts for several seconds, before ending with a close-up of Inger's face, her eyes unflinching and her expression serious as she looks the camera – and the audience – in the eye. As the scene fades out, so do the lower octaves, leaving only the highest pitched note to linger, its piercing effect intensifying Inger's piercing stare.

From being an ideal in the media discourse of the 1950s, the housewife had also become a symbol of deprivation and enclosure: someone who could not realize their abilities. As cultural researcher Hilde Danielsen suggests, the new women's movement's ideals of womanhood and femininity were defined as a reaction to the older identity of the housewife (2013, 36). For women in the new women's movement, the new identity of the emancipated woman was defined by ideals of agency, freedom and strength, whereas the role of the housewife came to represent passivity and restraint. This can be understood as a revolt against the parental generation's values and gender roles, but also developed from young women's experiences of the housewife role as limiting. This is clearly articulated by Aase Bang in the introduction to the first non-fiction publication from the new women's movement in Norway, *Hva bråker de for* ("What are they fussing about"), published by the radical publishing house Pax in 1972:

No-one told you that marriage would lead to a life in total isolation, that your own little home would become a prison, that you would be driven to the brink of breakdown because you never have an adult human to talk to (Bang 1972, 9).

The life of the housewife is represented as imprisonment, relegating women to a life of passivity and deprivation. Facing this role, understanding its systemic nature and, together with other women, revolting against it became the first step towards emancipation. Articles, poetry, novels, music, and visual arts articulated and named the experiences of women's mundane domestic life and the lack of opportunities it offered. Within this landscape, *The Revelation* gave an uncompromising cinematic portrayal of such a life.

6.1.1. Personal filmmaking and the limits of Norsk Film AS

The Revelation was Løkkeberg's first feature film as a director. By this time, Løkkeberg had become a well-known actor and quite the celebrity in the Norwegian cultural sphere. This was firstly due to her work with Pål Løkkeberg and her performances on television, and secondly and more importantly, through documentary films for among other the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, the NRK, that placed her as a socially committed and uncompromising filmmaker in her own right and a public feminist figure. I return to these films in chapter 8. In the early 1970s, she was invited to talk about the subject "Film and the myth of woman" at Norsk Folkeakademi, the public academy in Oslo, and to discuss the new women's movement on television, and due to her celebrity status, she headlined parties held in the feminist communities in Oslo (Servoll 2020, 164-165). Indeed, Løkkeberg stands out as a Norwegian cinefeminist, and shares in this regard with Nicole Macé a feminist engagement that went beyond her filmmaking.

The opportunity for the feature film came through the Study Department of Norsk Film AS, where Løkkeberg directed the novella film *Rain* in 1975. Moving away from the current social and political issues she had explored in her documentary filmmaking, *Rain* is based on short stories by author Torborg Nedreaas and is about a little girl wandering the rainy streets of Bergen anno 1912 during the turmoil of her parents' divorce.⁴⁹ The film was shown on several occasions in film societies together with *Weekend* (Mikkelsen, 1974) and aired on television under the Tuesday programming post Fjernsynsteateret, the television theatre. Like *Weekend* did for Laila Mikkelsen, *Rain* worked as preparation and a try-out for feature film directing, and Løkkeberg,

⁴⁹ This kind of childhood portrait for an adult viewer would become a pronounced genre in Norway in the 1980s (Iversen 2011), and Løkkeberg herself developed these themes in her second feature film *Løperjenten / Kamilla* from 1981 for which *Rain* is often discussed as the precursor.

in line with the talent development trajectory, was invited to bring her next film project, *The Revelation*, to Norsk Film AS.

In the production of the film, Løkkeberg cultivated an auteur approach of personal vision and artistic control. She both wrote, directed, and acted in *The Revelation*, with the poet and writer Marie Takvam in the leading role as Inger. Takvam had not acted before,⁵⁰ and she was partly chosen for the role based on the contention of the raw, non-trained expression she could offer, but also for her social engagement as a writer (Servoll 2020, 190). From her debut as a poet in 1952, Takvam had developed a simple modernist style that put into words women's trivial everyday life and increasingly engaged a gender role revolt (Bugge 1990, 44-45; Lie 1990, 216). Her literary voice found a new resonance in the 1970s moment. For this reason, she held out the role of Inger as custom made for her, in an interview stating: "I know many women like Inger, and I have written many poems about them" (Servoll 2020, 190).

Løkkeberg also turned to recurring collaborators, among them cinematographer Paul René Roestad, who was also the cinematographer of *Rain* and *Weekend*, and editor Lillian Fjellvær who had edited Løkkeberg's documentary *Abortion* (1972), as well as the involvement of her family. Løkkeberg's husband, the cinema theatre manager Terje Kristiansen, acted as production manager, assistant director, co-scriptwriter with Løkkeberg, and was also cast in a supporting role. As was Løkkeberg's mother, who otherwise contributed as babysitter for Løkkeberg and Kristiansen's small child during film production. In her work on the director, Johanne Kielland Servoll ties this production form to Løkkeberg's expressive desire and the *auteur* politics of Norsk Film AS, but also describes Løkkeberg's decision to involve her family in filmmaking as a specific attempt to combine family life with a profession as a filmmaker (Servoll 2016, 213; Servoll 2020, 187). On the one hand, Løkkeberg would describe her experiences working on *The Revelation* as appealing due to the possibility it gave her to explore a personal, aesthetic vision. On the other hand, moving the production close to home was one way of bridging the double labor gap of being a working mother. In the filmed interview conducted by Nicole Macé, Løkkeberg recounts her experience of being pregnant during the shooting of *Rain*, discovering,

⁵⁰ Takvam had, however, already had a small appearance in *Lasse og Geir* (Wam, 1976), and she would figure in several of Svend Wam and Petter Vennerød's films of the 1970s: *Det tause flertall / The Silent Majority* (1977), *Hvem har bestemt? / Says Who?* (1978) and *Svartere enn natten / Darker than Night* (1979). Takvam also acted in Løkkeberg's second feature film *Løperjenten / Kamilla* (1981).

in her words, the need to break away from male society's norms of work in order to be able to work as a woman, and not *despite* being a woman (Macé 1976; Servoll 2020, 181). Løkkeberg would continue to strive for production conditions that could offer more creative freedom and control. In 1980, Løkkeberg and Kristiansen started the production company ÅsFilm AS, and from then almost all Løkkeberg's films were self-produced with Kristiansen as her creative producer.

The Revelation, then, provides another example of the support of, and relative freedom enjoyed by, writer-directors in Norsk Film AS. Yet, the production process of *The Revelation* also puts in relief the shortcomings of Norsk Film AS's talent development, as the company and its creative director Erik Borge did not necessarily possess the financial resources to follow up the artistic ambitions (Bellsund and Nilson 1979; Servoll 2016, 212). Løkkeberg presented her new script for production at Norsk Film AS in 1976. Borge was open to the idea but didn't consider it to be enough material for a feature film, and Løkkeberg was encouraged to take the film to the Study Department instead. When production began, it soon became clear that the project would exceed the budget and scope of Norsk Film's Study Department. According to Eva Bellsund and Marie Nilson, who conducted a production study of the film as students at Stockholm University, one reason for this was the film language itself, as Løkkeberg envisioned long-takes and a slow-paced tempo, whereas the production manager of the Study Department had expected more economical continuity editing (Bellsund and Nilson 1979, 34). The completed footage convinced Borge to reverse his decision and turn the project into a feature film. This was, however, not easy. Norsk Film AS, on the one hand, did not have the budget to complete the film as an in-house production, while on the other, the status of the film created problems with the Film Production Committee. In the eyes of the latter, supporting *The Revelation* could set an unfortunate precedence in which Norsk Film could bamboozle the funding body by starting projects in the Study Department and later transfer them into the Feature Film Department, framing the projects as necessary to fund (Bellsund and Nilson 1979, 39; 43). The film was eventually completed through funds from Norsk Film AS after several application rounds and

dead ends, but the finished film still ended up costing less than one third of a usual feature film budget (1979, 46).⁵¹

The circulation of the film was, likewise, first hampered by the film's unclear placement in the production system. Originally, *The Revelation* was given less than half the usual marketing budget under the contention that this would be a niche film (Servoll 2016, 212), which in hindsight would appear an underestimation of the interest in provocative feminist filmmaking. A controversial reception gave the film unexpected attention, while personal initiative furthered the film's reach. The journalist Gudrun Christina (Gun) Aasnes was so struck by the film that she organized alternative distribution, engaging the Oslo chapter of Norges Husmorforbund (the Norwegian Housewives' Association) and The Norwegian Association for Women's Rights. This resulted in a second launch of the film followed by a panel discussion at a suburban cinema in Oslo where more than 400 people were present (Aasnes 1977, 10; Bellsund and Nilson 1979, 29). The film was further circulated through international film festivals and was awarded the Best Debut Film Prize in San Remo. In 1979, Løkkeberg and *The Revelation* were invited to a Scandinavian film seminar in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, where Løkkeberg attended meetings for the organization Women in Film (Servoll 2020, 210).

6.1.2. Film Analysis: A wasted woman

We meet Inger as she attempts, for the first time in her life, to enter the job market as a saleswoman. The job, we are to understand, has been arranged by her husband. The depiction of her day at work begins with a close-up of Inger as she tries to blow air into an inflatable coat hanger ("For your husband on his travels"), the image both sexually suggestive and humiliating. The camera zooms out rapidly, revealing Inger at a sales stand next to the escalators in a large and crowded mall. The woman next to her is selling a meat grinder; her voice stepping through the entire scene as she steadily and without pause holds the potential buyer's attention and produces one marvelous wonder after another from this mobile grinder. Next to her, Inger

⁵¹ *The Revelation* ended up being the cheapest feature film ever made, with a total budget of 450 000 NOK, only one third of *Wives'* budget of 1.3 million NOK.

becomes a pathetic figure, trying her best to sell the plastic coat hangers. “This is an inflatable coat-hanger”, she repeats with a sort of helplessness to passers-by, but no one stops.

The portrayal is devastating, the yellow and blue plastic hangers lying in front of her like deflated symbols of impotence. The mobile camera and quick cutting rate that repeatedly introduces images of mallgoers, their anonymous unimpressed faces looking on, give a sense of being overwhelmed and of failing in the eyes of others. In the end, her boss escorts her away. An elevated camera angle provides a bird’s eye view of her as she steps out into a back alley littered with garbage. Snow that looks like small bits of paper starts falling. Inger, visually surrounded by waste, tasked with selling a ridiculous product that no one really needs, becomes positioned as a wasted human being herself.

The theme of waste and the wasted is pursued throughout the film. Visually, this is enhanced in the portrayal of the refuse.⁵² Together with Inger’s visions of unwanted objects forced into her, the body’s shattered boundaries and bodily decay come into view as a figuration of Inger’s existential angst and her harsh fate as a woman who has completed her biological function and now seems to be viewed as left over, as refuse. *The Revelation* develops the thread on the wasted humans in society beyond gender ideology and connects the harsh vision of the isolated woman’s fate to questions of ability and class as Inger goes home to visit her parent’s apartment in the city. This is positioned as a class journey back to her working-class background, and the sense that she and Walter have climbed the social ladder is later underscored when he comes to pick her up, his large car almost too broad for the narrow entrance of the apartment building. At her childhood home, she meets her severely disabled father (Wilhelm Lund), another iteration of the body in decay, and watches and helps her mother (Bonne Gaugin), a tired and hard-looking woman, wash and care for him. She then joins a next-door party with childhood friends, among

⁵² In this sense, *The Revelation* takes far Siegfried Kracauer’s notion of the refuse as a primary cinematic subject (1960/1997, 54). In his classical theory of film and realism, Kracauer argues for cinema’s possibility to show the unseen, including waste and garbage - these parts of physical reality that “we ordinary prefer to ignore” (1960/1997, 54). The film forces a confrontation with cinematically ignored aspects of life by foregrounding stains of menstrual blood and of semen, vaginal secretion, excrement, and piss. These markers of bodily waste imbue the film with a radical corporality. At the beginning of her essay on the abject, Julia Kristeva describes the phenomenology of the loathsome in terms that resonate with *The Revelation*’s portrayal of the bodily waste and help bring out its thematic significance: “Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (1982, 2).

them a childhood sweetheart (Rolf Søder). We understand by the tone of Inger's mother that these people are now deemed low-lives; a divorced woman (thus a 'loose' woman) and alcoholics. These "wasted" people are a source of comfort for Inger, but her encounter with her childhood friends does not open avenues of escape. Rather, her association with them is perceived as a transgression. When they return home, Walter makes this evident as he tells her off by saying: "Who do you think you are?". But Inger replies: "Who I am?". The implicit answer to the question is no-one.

Inger is a woman who is not a person, an Ibsen's Nora who has not had the opportunity to become a person. *The Revelation* forms part of the portrayal of the deprived housewife found in several films of the decade that shows, in the words of Tone Kristine Kolbjørnsen, "a lack of substance in this type of being woman" (1992, 31). Already in *Wives* (1975) this character is signaled through Mie who sighs in an early scene:

And it's the same plates every day. Out of the cupboard, down on the table, up from the table, into the sink, up in the cupboard. Three times a day. The same plates. I've had this plate since I was little, with a picture of a woman feeding chickens on it. And that picture has become really worn. And when that picture is all gone, then I'll be all dead.

The serious undertone of Mie's description resembles Simone de Beauvoir's description of housework as akin to "the torture of Sisyphus": "The clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present" (1952/1989, 451).⁵³ The mundane, repetitive nature of housework was perhaps most radically explored cinematically in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielmann 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) released the same year as *Wives*. The film, following the daily routine of the titular character, played by Delphine Seyrig, is a meditation on repetition. According to B. Ruby Rich: "Never before has the materiality of

⁵³ In terms of a critique of marriage, philosopher Andrea Veltman argues that for Beauvoir, the oppression of marriage is precisely the way that housework and other sustaining activities bounds the wife to the home, thus demoting her to activities of immanence, while simultaneously frees the husband to pursue life projects and thus giving him greater opportunities for transcendence (2004, 125).

women's time in the home been rendered so viscerally. Never before has the tempo of endless time, repetitively restoring itself, been demarcated so carefully" (1998, 170).

In *The Revelation*, it is not so much the housework itself, as the consequences these repetitions have, that is rendered. When the recipients of the repetitions of housework – the children and husband – no longer seem to need or want this work, what then? A comparable figure to Inger is found in the Danish film *Take it Like a Man, Ma'm* (Knudsen, Rygaard and Vilstrup, 1975). In this film, the main character Ellen is also a middle-aged woman who gradually finds her state of life meaningless: Intellectually disregarded in her husband's social settings, she is reduced to isolation, to cleaning each leaf of the plants in the living room. Inger shares several similarities with Ellen, but without the latter's hopeful ending, in which Ellen experiences the importance of female solidarity and consciousness-raising. Instead, in Inger's aimlessness and weakness, if not in her social position, she recalls the title character of Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1970), whom Maja Montañez Smukler describes as a "poor, unemployed, and aimless young woman who does not have access to opportunities and also lacks the awareness to look for them" (2019, 98). Inger is a woman without a sense of purpose, sitting in her living room with her swollen feet in water like a potted plant.

An alternative of solidarity and sex

As a character, Inger is far removed from the active women found in the previously discussed films. Both Ingrid and Tore in *Triangle*, Reidun in *Weekend*, and Mie, Heidrun and Kaja in *Wives* are spirited and resourceful, or helped to be so by their female friends or lovers. *The Revelation* does, however, open brief moments of relief for Inger and retains an insistence on women's solidarity as fostering unique understanding and support. After the disappointing attempt at entering the paid workforce, Inger's husband sends her away to a seaside holiday resort to calm her nerves. There she meets a young couple, played by Vibeke Løkkeberg and her husband Terje Kristiansen, who invite her along on a boat trip to a nearby island, where Inger and the young woman get to talk. Sitting close together, Inger wrapped in the woman's shawl, she tells her about her childhood and upbringing, and puts into words thoughts and questions about her life and sexuality – issues, we suspect, she hasn't spoken to anybody else about. The

scene of female solidarity ends with Inger singing a psalm she learned from her grandmother, the camera swirling around them in circling motions.

The younger woman, a stand-in for the director, offers both a compassionate look at Inger and points towards an alternative to her present life. The film continues to highlight the women-only sphere but departs from the earlier uses of the scene of female solidarity in two ways. First, placed in the middle of the film, the solace is only temporary for Inger. Second, the film expands on the thematic thread of solidarity between women by allowing, for the first time, a man to play a positive role in enabling this intimacy. In the film it is the couple, as a team, who decide to care for Inger. In this way, they come to represent a new kind of heterosexual marriage, in sharp contrast to Inger's own traditional and loveless one. Their long hairstyles and fashionable clothing place them as a modern couple, but more to the point, the representation of their fulfilling sexual life positions them as a liberated one.

Before the boat trip, Inger walks in on the couple twice while they are having sex. The first time is by accident, but the young woman's orgasmic sounds follow Inger into her own room, instigating a hallucination of bodily harm that compels her to return to their room once again. The woman's moaning does not sound as if it is coming from the other side of a wall. Instead, it is loud and clear and encroaches on the entire cinematic image. A similar effect is used early in the film as Inger listens to her husband masturbating in the bathroom at night. The sound of his increasingly heavy breathing is loud and sharp and works against audible verisimilitude. It becomes, rather, an unbound sound of pleasure that seems to haunt and confuse Inger to the point of bodily breakdown. When she is in the hotel room, suddenly all sound disappears, creating not silence, but the total absence of sound, as if the film breaks down together with Inger.

She herself is rendered asexual or at least unfamiliar with sexual pleasure. She later confides in the younger woman that she has never had an orgasm ("It wasn't supposed to be like that, we didn't talk about it"). In her room at the seaside resort, Inger sits down in front of the vanity mirror. We briefly hear a mellow classical string piece that sets the stage: The oval mirror frames the image of Inger, a housewife with her pearl necklace and black dress, as she picks up her bag of cosmetics, retrieving beauty products, make-up and prescription pills. She is about to apply mascara but hesitates and starts undressing instead. A new frame centers her back and neck as

she pulls down her dress and her bra, studying herself, before we once more see her reflection as she gets into bed, covering up with her jacket. She rubs her shoulders and neck and moves her hands under the duvet to masturbate but stops with a small shake of her head. She smells her fingers, then abruptly stands up and washes them thoroughly to the piercing sound of a screaming seagull.

Contrary to Reidun's undressing in *Weekend*, Inger's relationship to her own naked body is not portrayed with any sense of self-love or admiration, but rather suggests a woman uncomfortable in her own skin. Inger wears a distanced look on her face, constantly covering up and trying to minimize her presence. In the film, her mother and her husband both tell her that they think she has "let herself go", suggesting her middle-aged and overweight body as further evidence of her status as 'wasted'. Set up in contrast to the happy younger couple, the portrayal leans into the film's argument about the closed-off life of women who are not given the chance to become a person proper; Inger, confined in the role of homemaker, does not only find herself deprived of a sense of self-worth and confidence outside the home, but also deprived of sexuality and of pleasure.

Shattered glass

The Revelation portrays a specific view of the role of a housewife, but importantly also gives form to the experience of domestic abuse. In the same years as *The Revelation* was in production, the battered women's movement was growing stronger in Norway (see chapter 9). The first helpline was established in 1976 and the first women's shelter in 1978, working to provide information about and develop language to describe physical and emotion abuse in the home. Inger is imprisoned by her role as a housewife, yet the film also locates her situation as an effect of her husband's increasingly violent treatment of her. As her world closes in, her fixation on dirt and bodily harm increases. Her grip on reality is shaken: The film positions us within her uncertainty – showing blood running from her vein, but then in the next shot no blood, or excrement next to her on the bed vanishing a moment later. While Inger is at the resort, she breaks her sunglasses and becomes convinced that she has glass stuck in her eye. She repeatedly returns to this conviction, constantly rubbing at her tear duct. These visions of bodily harm and breakdown point towards her possible suicide, yet it is Walter who pushes Inger into a downward

spiral. A hallucinatory dream sequence towards the end of the film re-introduces several images and sounds from earlier in the film and places Walter at the center of her breakdown.

The surrealist dream sequence begins with a shot of Walter standing on top of a coastal rock, looking down and into the camera. He is holding a meat grinder, the same grinder that the woman next to Inger at the shopping mall was demonstrating, while shouting out a sale-pitch (“Come closer!”). The ticking beat continues and is joined by a grinding noise as well as that of running water. The reverse shot shows Inger standing on the beach and waving a red handkerchief at him, before she finds her way to him. “Have a taste!”, Walter shouts and feeds her a piece from the grinder. But instead of grinding up meat, Walter is grinding shards of glass. A close-up of Inger shows blood trickling down her chin as she chews the broken glass. Inger chews and chews as best she can, while the sounds of running water and something clinking, shattering and breaking dominate the images, before the scene is punctuated by Inger’s loud scream. The dream sequence is physically demanding to watch. It is not the verisimilitude of the representation that renders the scene unwatchable, but its excessiveness, the sound once again used to create the jarring effect.

The pain and submission to violence depicted in the scene is replaced in the next shot by an explicit act of violence as the film cuts to the two spouses in their bedroom where Walter is brutally forcing her to take pills, sedating her and managing her. In a later scene, Walter rapes Inger. In contrast to the use of brute force displayed as Walter tackles Inger in their bed, the rape is presented off camera, slow and controlled, epitomizing Walter’s power over her. He starts by scolding her for embarrassing them by visiting her childhood friends, before he signals for her to sit down on the living room table next to him. The camera is placed in front of them and slowly tracks into a closer framing as Walter pulls Inger closer to him. In a medium shot, we see Walter move one hand under her skirt while the other pulls off the top of her dress. He slowly forces her down on the floor, out of the camera frame. The camera stays in place a long time, recording the plants in the window as we hear Inger’s sobs and a clock ticking.

The Revelation is the only film in my selection that does not end in a women-only sphere with a scene of confidential female solidarity. The film, rather, ends with Inger standing quite alone, broken, looking into the camera and the eyes of the audience. In Tone Kristine Kolbjørnsen’s

thesis on Løkkeberg's films, she offers an interpretation of the title *The Revelation* as an allusion to the biblical scripture *The Book of Revelations* (Kolbjørnsen 1992, 33). In *The Book of Revelations*, the prophet John describes in dense and symbolic language his visions of Judgement Day and the ending of the world. In Kolbjørnsen's reading, Løkkeberg takes on the role as a feminist prophet: offering a description of the current state of pain and driven by a wish for radical change. The title, then, can be understood as offering a revelation, yet it is also deeply ironic: Inger does not get a revelation, nor will she find peace in a world to come (1992, 34). This would prove a controversial choice and instigated a far more public debate about the film's potential for the new women's movement than either *Triangle* or *Wives* did. In the final part of this chapter, I turn to the critical reception of *The Revelation*. I spend less time on general reception but focus on the aspects that might tell us something about the feminist critical landscape in the 1970s.

6.2. Analysis or exposition? Controversies in feminist (film) criticism

Already during the first screening of the film at Trondheim Film Festival, *The Revelation* was criticized for its bleak ending. In an interview with the leftist newspaper *Klassekampen*, cineastes Kine Aune and Wenche Blomberg both argued that the film was problematic, even dangerous, in their view selling female depression without showing a way out. The two women concluded: "*The Revelation* is futile for the women's struggle!" (*Klassekampen* 1977, 15).

The controversy surrounding *The Revelation*'s political potential gained traction as it intersected with another polemical review of the film. Film critic Arne Hestenes saw *The Revelation* and reacted vehemently to what he had seen under the title "No to Marie Takvam's buttocks". Here, he plainly states his revulsion at the portrayal of bodily decay and sexual activity in the film: The scenes of masturbation and representations of excrements made *The Revelation*, in Hestenes' view, "a nauseating and unappetizing lightweight of a film, despite the constantly exposed takvastian kilos" (1977, 32). The last comment was directed at Takvam's weight, and her naked appearance in the film seems to have been the final straw for Hestenes.⁵⁴ Hestenes's review

⁵⁴ This was not the first time Hestenes fixated his critical pen on women's bodies on film. While some saw Hestenes as a bold critic with a lush style, others would react to his critical treatment of especially women on-screen. For instance, after Hestenes wrote a scathing review of *Triangle* (Macé 1971), the musician Bill Mulholland wrote a response against his treatment of both *Triangle* and *Exit* (1970), starring Vibeke Løkkeberg, where he accused Hestenes' of being particularly prone to enjoy writing film critical slaughter "when processing a film where

instigated what is known as “rumpefeiden” – “the derriere dispute” - in Norwegian cultural history. As formulated by film critic and writer Morten Barth, it stands as a shameful chapter in Norwegian cultural debate (Barth 2007, 15). For several weeks, dozens of retorts and replies were published, polarized between those who defended and celebrated the film as an honest and bold expression and called out Hestenes’s sexism, and those who sided with Hestenes in viewing the film as either distasteful, or politically hollow (Kolbjørnsen 1992, 26; Servoll 2020, 197). At the heart of these debates was the question of the film’s uncompromising realism and tragic outcome. Importantly, the critical reactions were, however, not confined to the film text in and of itself but was intertwined with Løkkeberg as a public person and the public image both cultivated by and created of Vibeke Løkkeberg and her husband Terje Kristiansen, and their appearance in the film (Servoll 2020, 201-205).⁵⁵ Critics reacted especially to the comparison between the younger and the older woman, with for instance film critic Sylvi Kalmar arguing that Hestenes’ obsession with Takvam’s backside was a result of Løkkeberg’s perceived unflattering display of her in the first place; she had created a trap for him to fall into (1977, n.p.).

Marie Takvam also participated in the debate, and she was the one who coined term “the derriere dispute” as a humorous gesture to show the tabloid dimension of the “debate”. In her op-ed, she pointed to two tendencies of the negative critical reactions. Both leveled critique at the way she was portrayed in the film, but from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the “old group” consisted of mostly male critics and audience members “who have always believed women should be there as mere ornaments and pleasure for men and that’s that” (Takvam 1977, 13).

women’s position in society becomes the object of critical examination” (Mulholland 1971, n.p.). He questioned whether Hestenes was able to keep an objective eye when women, in particular naked women, were involved and effectively asking him to refrain from reviewing films about women in order to “save us all the embarrassment” (Mulholland 1971, n.p.). Hestenes’s well-known pendant for glamorous female film stars and his key role in the organizing the Norwegian Miss Universe beauty pageant must have strengthened Hestenes’ public image as harboring a certain view of women, and while Hestenes rejected the criticism of his skill as a film journalist, he did not dispute this image.

⁵⁵ Hestenes spends almost half the essay on setting up the couple as cynical and hypocritical, chasing PR where they could (Hestenes 1977, 32). Two recent public controversies fueled his reaction: First, Kristiansen, in his position as the cinema manager in Ås Municipal Cinema, had issued a press release concerning a decision to decline the premiere screening of the American film *Lipstick* (Johnson, 1976) on the grounds that the film was violent and sexist, but his stance lost some of its edge when the distributor of the claimed it was not intended for a premiere screening at Ås in the first place (Servoll 2020, 201). Second, Løkkeberg had stopped a re-run of the feature film *Liv* (P. Løkkeberg 1967) on Norwegian public television citing as her reason her wish to reduce the damage the film had done to her public figure (Servoll 2020, 202).

This group was provoked by the presence of a struggling and overweight woman on-screen. The sauna scene of *Wives* received a similar reaction, but the reception of that film was generally more positive and less polarized (Hausken 1992, 8). The second “new group” consisted of women reacting to what they perceived as a lack of analysis and unfair treatment of Takvam from a feminist point of view. This group was, perhaps, less predictable, but also more interesting in the context of this dissertation. The debate surrounding *The Revelation* highlights the competing ideological projects and aesthetic views circulating within the women’s public sphere.

It is reasonable to suggest that the reactions towards *The Revelation* mapped onto tensions within the new women’s movement itself, which by the late 1970s had become a fractured movement (Lindtner 2010; Danielsen 2013; Haukaa 1982). The split began already in the early 1970s when The Women’s Front was established by women who felt that the New Feminist emphasis on personal freedom and authenticity was too individualistic and failed to address the material and economic systems under capitalism that were the real causes of women’s oppression (Lindtner 2010, 373). According to the Women’s Front, the New Feminists were, in short, not political enough. In the years between 1974 and 1977, the Women’s Front had particularly strong ties to the Marxist-Leninist party, AKP (m-l), and the organization’s main goal was to expand class consciousness. In this program, the focus on individual consciousness-raising and women’s autonomy in private relationships came under attack, charged as singularly aimed at middle class women. In this period, the Women’s Front also rejected the term “feminism” as such – claiming for their practice the term “kvinneaktivister”, “women activists”, instead (Haukaa 1982, 119).

The conflict within the new women’s movement shows that this was not a unanimous group, but also provides a clearer view of how certain themes were seen as more political than others. While there was broad agreement concerning public childcare and abortion rights, for instance, marriage and sexuality were more contested themes in terms of their political rapport (Danielsen 2013, 54; Hellesund 2013, 76). While *The Revelation* cannot easily be labeled as either a New Feminist or a Women’s Front film, this does help explain how the film’s focus on the theme of sexuality could be viewed with suspicion by certain parts of the new women’s movement. For instance, Bitten Modal, a well-known Women’s Front member who also appeared in *The Revelation* as the husband’s mistress, withdrew her support to the film (Servoll 2020, 198). The

film was, in her view, more demystifying than clarifying, placing the central conflict as a private matter and not a political concern. The split effected by Modal between the personal and political is perhaps surprising in a decade where personal experiences and the private sphere in an unprecedented way had become subjects for political action, alerting us to different ideological projects at work in the new women's movement.

There were, similarly, competing discourses of what constitutes a successful strategy for a feminist work of art. In her study, Kolbjørnsen relates the feminist critical reception of *The Revelation* to two broad tendencies in feminist literary criticism in Norway in the 1970s. The first was a normative and didactic thread of feminist literary criticism in which art and literature should champion heroines and work to provide role models that women could learn from. This was not singular to feminist literary criticism, but also figured in Norwegian literary debate in the 1970s concerning both Christian and socialist literature (Kolbjørnsen 1990, 30). The second thread of feminist criticism contended that feminist literature should portray women's experiences to offer identification for women. This position was less didactic, and thus also enabled a more open attitude towards the work as an individual artistic project.

In Norwegian film discourse of the 1970s, we can understand the first position as an insistence on feminist films to engage and enlighten the audience by putting into view central aspects of the gender or capitalist system. This is in tune with a certain politicized strand of film criticism emerging in the 1970s in Norway that embraced culture activism inspired by Marxist-aesthetic readings (With 1992, 163; Servoll 2014, 205-210). Within this critical strand, film was viewed as a potent social force. Arguing for the influence of popular film and its crucial place as a medium of public education, the message of the film became as important as its aesthetic dimensions. An example of how this impacted feminist film culture is found in the practice of recommending "use-films" available for rent, such as a list compiled by Jan Erik Holst for *Sirene* of "films that portray women's situation at work and at home" (1976, 33). Here, the use-value of the films are set center stage, and several of the listed films include short assessments of their analytical clarity and of what kind of discussion they might be able to provide. For instance, Holst writes of one short documentary: "Maybe not an entirely precise and successful collage of gender roles and women's situation in the workplace. Suitable as an introduction to discussion" (1976, 34). The list also gives detailed information about distribution and descriptions of the way forward

for having the films screened at the local municipal cinema or film club. Within the engagement of the new women's movement, film, in this view, could be intertwined in the radical project of remaking society through its representational power. In feminist film criticism, we find this perceived ability to set problems under debate and offer clarity of analysis of gender roles and conditions of life.

In the case of *The Revelation*, a proponent of this tendency is found in the teacher and literary critic Elisabeth Aasen. Aasen was at the time herself part of the burgeoning field of women's studies in Bergen and would become a pioneer in women's literary history, uncovering forgotten female authors with for instance an anthology of women authors from the 19th century (Sejersted 2006). Like the film critics, she reacted to the portrayal of Inger's hopelessness, and pointed to what she perceived as a lack of analysis to build up an understanding of the main character's situation – and thus a possibility of hope. "From a women's point of view, we must reject this message. We must demand an analysis of Inger's situation, not just an exposition" (1977, 5). The film's radical situational report and portrayal of Inger's situation was not enough. In Aasen's view, a "feminist film should raise consciousness and encourage" (1977, 5).

Aasen had started the thread of hope and hopelessness in feminist filmmaking in her review of *Wives* two years earlier. In comparison to *The Revelation*, Aasen was positive to *Wives* and defended the film against charges of simplicity and meaninglessness. Aasen wrote a response to one of the more negative reviews of *Wives* by the Bergen city newspaper, *Bergens Tidende*. In her response, she described the characters' situation and related them to sociological positions of women from different social strata and current women's issues, writing in conclusion:

[the film] does not show the grand dramatic situations, it does not give a solution to women's problems. By themselves, the three women might seem depressing, but together they point towards a hope. The companionship they have found is the last image of the film (Aasen 1975, 4).

Despite the film not showing positive heroines in the sense that the characters learn anything or themselves become conscious, the film's insistence on upholding female solidarity was key to Aasen's reading of the film's productive political potential. Although *Wives* also received similar

criticism as *The Revelation* for its lack of clear analyses and resolve, this film was never as controversial as *The Revelation*. The successful feminist film, then, was one where consciousness-raising was rendered textually, and where a forward drive could ensure that the new women's movement was positioned as an answer to the character's plight. *The Revelation* did not include these features, and thus it was a film that, in Aasen's view, suggested that "middle aged women can just go kill themselves" (Aasen 1977, 5).

Whereas proponents of the first tendency were generally critical to *The Revelation*, the film was supported by proponents of the second tendency, in which feminist filmmaking should offer a chance for women to see themselves and their experiences represented on the screen. In defense of *The Revelation*, the film critic Elsa Brita Marcussen applauded Løkkeberg for creating new portrayals of women away from the typical clichés in Norwegian film. In her view, "Løkkeberg has confirmed that portrayals of women become different when women make film. She has dared to bring in realistic details in the description of two marriages that before would have been unthinkable in Norwegian films" (1977, 269). Marcussen described the film as bold in its portrayal of sexual realism and in engaging the themes of domestic abuse and rape. Gunn Christina Aasnes, who organized alternative distribution of the film, wanted to ensure that the film found its way to the wider public precisely because of the level of recognition it could offer: "I have seen women who have struggled with similar problems as Inger. [...] most likely this triggered my wish to do something for the film" (Aasnes, quoted in Bellsund and Nilson, 1979, 28-29).

In these formulations, it is not the film's clarity of analysis or argumentation, but the potential of the film as a descriptive medium that is set at stake. Through its portraits of Inger, *The Revelation* could bring forth a figure, a life and life conditions that otherwise would remain cloaked in silence, and thus could offer possibilities of recognition for women in the audience. This position can be understood as predicated on a certain claim to truthfulness or authenticity, and as such, it is in tune with Eva Bellsund and possibly Ingeborg Moræus Hanssen's definition of women's film introduced in chapter 5. In the *Sirene* interview, conducted before the release of *The Revelation*, Bellsund asked Løkkeberg what she would do to break down the ideals of women found in cinema, to which Løkkeberg replied: "Be totally honest and private. In that way one will necessarily make something true that men have not been able to make because they are

not women” (1976, 23). Repeating here the idea presented by Anja Breien, that women possess certain knowledges about womanhood that men do not, Løkkeberg located the radical potential in her filmmaking in her ability as an artist to give form to intimate, gendered experiences. Indeed, the reactions from both the old and new groups opposing *The Revelation* do point to the radical edge of showing, following Bellsund, “the unpolished” female body and an “unpolished” depiction of a woman’s experience (1976).

6.3. Concluding remarks: Portraying isolation

The Revelation offers strong social criticism within an existential drama about a woman who feels as if there is no more use for her, and who is imprisoned by her marriage and within her own state of being. The revelation of her situation, of her enclosure, is painful and violent. The film’s brute realism, where the dirt and waste of the everyday is brought onto the cinematic screen in grainy, hand-held takes, intersects with surrealist elements to create a portrait of a woman disconnected from the social, and sometimes physical, reality.

The Revelation was made within the same structures of institutional support and addressed several of the themes found in *Weekend* and *Wives*, but the film sets into relief the diversity of experiences and projects found in films by and about women in the 1970s. Like *Weekend* and *Wives*, *The Revelation* was a product of talent development in Norsk Film AS. However, the production process, documented by Bellsund and Nilson (1979), gives a more nuanced view of the artistic freedom offered by the production company. On the one hand, Vibeke Løkkeberg was able to pursue a personal way of filmmaking, but was in turn forced to make the film on a severely reduced budget. This meant that the film was dependent on a cast and crew that were willing to work for less money – which in part might provide additional reasoning for why Løkkeberg brought in friends and family on the production.

The reception of the film, likewise, points to the different expectations at stake in the political moment of the 1970s. The new women’s movement itself was not a singular unified movement, but consisted of different understandings of the meaning of “the political”. For feminist film culture, a similar diversity registered in different views of what a feminist film should do: Should it provide analyses and answers, or portray life conditions and give room for identification? *The Revelation* is the film that perhaps most strongly adhered to the second call. If *Triangle* proposed

an alternative, and *Wives* and *Weekend* posed questions, *The Revelation* can be seen as exploring a situation. Indeed, few, if any, films in Norway in the 1970s more radically explored the corporality and deprivation of the passive state of a woman's life. This is not the least evident in the way the film closes off future alternatives for the main character. Here, solidarity still holds a positive potential, and the film significantly extends the vision of solidarity beyond women's intimacy. In the film, men, old friends, and old lovers all propose possible points of solidarity, but are, however, cut off by class difference. In this way, *The Revelation* shows the opposite of *Wives*'s escapist fantasy and *Triangle* and even *Weekend*'s hopeful ending, as we meet a character completely imprisoned, a devastating reply to "what if not."

CH 7. *THE GUARDIANS* (1978) AND ADAPTATIONS OF WOMEN'S LITERATURE

The four films *Triangle*, *Weekend*, *Wives* and *The Revelation* were all set in the contemporary moment, but this was only one facet of the production of feminist films. *Formynderne / The Guardians* (1978), written and directed by Nicole Macé and starring Vibeke Løkkeberg in the leading role, exemplifies a second thread of women's feminist filmmaking engaging the historical past. Set in the late 1800s, *The Guardians* tells the story of painter Else Kant who suffers a nervous breakdown from the strain of combining her roles as artist, mother, and wife. She agrees to be submitted into the care of esteemed professor Hieronimus to rest and recover. Yet, far from recovering, she finds in Hieronimus an enemy who seems bent on destroying her. He keeps her in the municipal mental hospital against her will before declaring her insane and transferring her to St. Jørgen's Mental Asylum. After being incarcerated in the two institutions for more than a year, she finally gets her freedom. The film ends after she divorces her husband and moves to the countryside to live as an artist with her son and maid.

Nicole Macé wrote the script for the film based on the prominent author Amalie Skram's two autobiographical novels *Professor Hieronimus* and *På St Jørgens (At St. Jørgens)*, originally published in 1895. These were groundbreaking works about the precarious situations faced by female mental health patients within psychiatric institutions in the late 19th century. *The Guardians* was one of several adaptations of Skram's work to emerge in these years, and the film forms part of a larger attention to women authors surfacing at university courses, in the publishing houses, and on the cinema and television screen. In this chapter, I begin with Skram and her feminist renaissance, moving then to discuss the film *The Guardians*, its production and its central feminist themes.

7.1. Amalie Skram's feminist renaissance

One of the artists who received a feminist renaissance through the growing discipline of women's studies in the 1970s was the author Amalie Skram (1846 – 1905). Skram was born in Bergen, Norway, but she lived and worked most of her life in Denmark. From the mid-1880s until her death in 1905, Skram wrote approximately twenty novels and short stories, in addition to some plays and literary criticism. Her production belongs to the naturalist movement in Scandinavia in the late 1800s. According to historian Ida Blom, while it is Henrik Ibsen's

women characters that have gained Norwegian literature international renown, Skram wrote equally provocative on similar issues (Blom 1994, 165). Skram is particularly known for her explorations of the brutal human conditions of life. She tackled the jealous and spiraling mind, the conflicts of class and sex difference, as well as critically engaging women's position in bourgeois marriage and the double standards of sexual morals (Engelstad 2019).

Skram's social critique and interest in women's situation found clear resonance in the political moment of the 1970s, and through the impact of the new women's movement, Skram's work and person was re-actualized. In the mid-1970s, the publishing house Pax published new editions of her first novel *Constance Ring* (1885/1973) and the two so-called 'asylum-novels' *Professor Hieronimus* and *Paa St. Jørgens* (1895/1974), on which *The Guardians* would be based. Pax also published a short story collection and the never-before published novel *Mennesker* ("Humans", 1976), while Gyldendal, one of the largest publishing houses in Norway, re-published her collected novels (1976). The new editions marked the beginning of a literary re-consideration which would later come to fruition in academic publications (e.g. Engelstad and Øverland 1981; Engelstad 1984; Hamm 2002).⁵⁶ It was especially the cycle of so-called "marriage novels", consisting of *Constance Ring*, *Lucie* (1888/1976), *Fru Ines* (1891/1976) and *Forrådt* (1892/1976), and the two asylum-novels that were now at the center of attention. That the marriage novels were re-actualized in the 1970s moment is perhaps not surprising. Skram's descriptions of the impossible conditions of marriage, which destroyed and distorted the conditions for love and sexual intimacy, were mapped onto analyses of the effects of patriarchal and capitalist society (Engelstad 1973; Lundbo Levy 1974). Yet, also the asylum-novels, whose autobiographical aspects had earlier been a source of controversy, were read within the new feminist discourse.

The asylum-novels build quite directly on Skram's own nervous breakdown while working on the generational epos *Hellemyrsfolket* (1887-1898/1976), her experience of incarceration at the Copenhagen Community Hospital in 1894, and her soon-to-be public feud with the psychiatrist Knud Pontoppidan. In an afterword written for the new Pax publication of *Professor*

⁵⁶ Whereas earlier literary historians and critics placed the tetralogy *Hellemyrsfolket* (1887-1898), a generational epos exploring shame, fate, and social determinism, as her *opus magnum*, the 1970s brought an increased interest in other parts of her literary production (Wilhelmsen 2011, 6-7).

Hieronimus, the Danish literary critic Jette Lundbo Levy described the two novels as “extreme” instances of Skram’s authorship (1974, 167). However, she argues, by using these “extremely” specifically personal experiences as a spearhead, “Amalie Skram’s two novels [...] convey connections between women’s situation in general and some of the destructive dominance of patriarchal structures” (1974, 167). More than novels that merely described a minority experience of mental illness and the loss of freedom of the bourgeois, argued Lundbo Levy, *Professor Hieronimus* and *Paa St Jørgens* made explicit a system of women’s oppression within patriarchal society, directly and sometimes indirectly pointing to women’s conditions as artists, the impossible institution of marriage, and the structures that enable such a system to survive.

Skram’s authorship and life seemed relevant like never before. In the feminist magazine *Sirene*, for instance, literary scholar Elisabeth Aasen described Skram as a “foremother” (Aasen 1976, 25), while in the documentary film *The Women’s Shelter in Oslo* (Langfeldt, 1980), discussed in chapter 9, we see a poster of the author in the common room of the women’s shelter in Oslo. Skram’s novels and short stories figured prominently on feminist reading lists, they were discussed at university seminars in the new discipline of women’s literature history, and, not the least, were adapted into films and television productions.

7.1.1. Skram on film and television

In 1978 and 1979, multiple adaptations of Amalie Skram would figure on Norwegian silver and electronic screens. Beginning in 1978, Norwegian audiences were presented with two audiovisual adaptations of Skram’s asylum novels. In July, the NRK’s (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) Television Theatre aired the Danish teleplay production *Else Kant* (1978), directed by Line Krogh and adapted for the screen by the author Kirsten Thorup. When working on the script, Thorup and Krogh had collaborated with researchers who had studied Skram’s novels (Andersen 1980, 103). In September the same year, the production company Norsk Film AS released its own feature film version of the novels, *The Guardians* (1978), directed by Nicole Macé. Curiously, in Norwegian press coverage, the reviews and press releases of either production failed to acknowledge the other, pointing to the institutional boundaries that existed, and often still exist, between film and television. One exception was the literary historian and

Amalie Skram-scholar Irene Engelstad, who discussed *The Guardians* as part of a renaissance of Skram's authorship visible in Scandinavian film and television (Engelstad 1978, n.p.).

The following year, Norsk Film AS released a second Skram-adaptation. This time, the novel *Lucie*, belonging to Skram's cycle of marriage novels, was adapted by veteran director Jan Erik Düring into a feature film by the same name. *Lucie* (1979) is about a showgirl who marries her well-off lover, finding herself a prisoner in the home and at the mercy of the husband's jealousy and disdain for her working-class manners. The same year, the NRK's Television Theatre aired two in-house productions based on Skram's work: Finn Kvalem adapted one of Skram's few dramatic pieces, *Agnete* (1893), while Erna Ofstad and Eli Ryg adapted the short story "Knut Tandberg" (1888) into a single play called *Ekteskap / Marriage*. Both these teleplays circle around divorce as a theme. While *Marriage* examines the process of asking for a divorce from the point of view of a woman whose husband has fallen in love with someone else, *Agnete* is about the struggles that face an already divorced woman. After having aired two adaptations of Skram's work, the NRK's Television Theatre finally broadcasted *Prisgitt / At the Mercy* (1979), a two-part teleplay about the author herself. This was a co-production between the NRK and Swedish television (Svensk Radio 2) and was written and directed by the Swedish television producer Tone Bengtsson, who hosted a literature history program on Swedish television from 1966 to 1983.

These adaptations were a response to Skram's feminist renaissance, but also reflected the importance of literary adaptations in the repertoire politics of Norsk Film AS and as subject matter for the Television Theatre. Beginning with the latter, the NRK's Television Theatre, Fjernsynsteateret, was the precursor to the NRK Drama Department, airing adaptations of international and national literature and plays every Tuesday night (Bastiansen and Syvertsen 1994, 137). This was from the onset a hybrid and ambiguous genre in the intersection between theatre, television, and film (Eide 1997, 42). While over time, the Television Theatre developed closer to traditional film production, it would retain its strong identity as a *theatre*, not the least through the central position held by plays or adaptations of literary works as source material (Eide 1997, 90).

In an essay in the debate book *Ta det som en mann, frue!*, Ryg, who was an acclaimed director of the Television Theatre, describes *Marriage* as part of the conscious attempt to bring more women's literature into public television (2015, 101-102). She credits especially the important role played by the dramaturges in championing women's and feminist writing. The dramaturges, under the leadership of Karen Lisa Castberg⁵⁷, were responsible for obtaining legal rights to plays and literature, reading and comprehending the material, as well as searching for new plays to record or novels to adapt (Ryg 2015, 101). This gave them quite a lot of influence over what material would be brought to the television stage. According to Ryg, they had a certain obligation to show classical plays and literature, but worked to increase the share of new, Norwegian dramatic literature and of women's content, stating that "[i]t was important to create balance, and we searched actively for things written by and about women" (2015, 101). In line with the visibility project of the new women's movement, this prepared the ground for collaborations that brought women's and feminist literature to Norwegian television audiences⁵⁸, including the adaptations of Amalie Skram. These productions deserve new consideration.

For Norsk Film AS, literary adaptations, in addition to experimental film, social relevance, and the mandate of historical registration, had been one of the main areas of development drawn up by the company's creative director Erik Borge in his strategic plan for the company's reorganization in the late 1960s (Myrstad 2020a, 170). Adaptations of literary works constituted a significant portion of the company's production output, although the Skram films stand out as

⁵⁷ Karen Lisa Castberg had a university degree in dramatic literature. She was the first dramaturg in the NRK's Television Theatre and was important for the early development of what is considered the television theatre's bold artistic line of modernist and abstract theatre in the 1960s (Eide 1997). Castberg was later joined by four other dramaturgs: Åse Vikane, who also directed some teleplays and worked as a scriptwriter for feature films, Hilda Lundgren Olsen, Jan Hogne Sandven, and Erna Ofstad.

⁵⁸ The share of teleplay productions based on women's writing was not extensive. Between 1970 and 1980, about 14 of 159 teleplays were based on literary work written by women. There was, however, a growing interest in work by and about women in the latter half of the 1970s and into the 1980s. Among the notable examples include Cora Sandell's *Alberte og friheten / Alberta and Freedom* (1931) adapted into a five part series by Sverre Udnæs in 1970, Sigrid Undset's *Jenny* (1911/1967) adapted by Per Bronken in 1981, Bjørg Vik's play *To akter for fem kvinner / Two Acts for Five Women* directed by stage director Kirsti Sørli in 1976, and at the very close of the decade, an adaptation of Ninni Roll Anker's novel *Den som henger i en tråd / Those Who Hang by a Thread* (1935) directed by Eli Ryg and adapted by Åse Vikane and sent in four parts in 1980.

exceptions as they were among the few feature films based on women's writing produced during the decade.⁵⁹

Both films were included in the contemporary cinema programming of women's films. *The Guardians* was shown along with *The Revelation* (Løkkeberg, 1977) and *Wives* (Breien, 1975) at the Women's Film Week in Oslo in 1979, the first international women's film festival organized in Norway (see chapter 9), while *Lucie* was screened as part of a large women's film series held in the Bærum Municipal Cinema in 1979 (Bærum kinematografer 1979, 3-15). Beginning on March 8th and running through June, the Bærum-series screened thirteen feature films focused on female protagonists, including *Wives* and *The Revelation*, as well as the Norwegian film *Kvinnene / The Women* (1979) directed by Per Blom, *Girlfriends* (1978) directed by Claudia Weill, *Herbstsonate / Autumn Sonata* (1978) directed by Ingmar Bergman, and the Danish film *Vinterbarn / Winterborn* (1978), directed by Astrid Henning-Jensen and written by Dea Trier Mørch.

The Bærum screening series serves as an example of how the category "women's films" was primarily used to gather films *about* women. It also suggests how feminist film culture itself had become popularized as the issues of the new women's movement were taken up by the municipal cinemas as topical themes for filmmaking and exhibition practices. As the film *Lucie* might serve to exemplify, not all films made and received under the heading of women's films were consciously feminist or indeed successfully so. While the subject matter of *Lucie* clearly engages feminist themes, these are arguably limited by moments in the film that revert to a sensational display of the female body as a site of oppression. Crucially, in a film that is mostly a dialogue driven adaptation, an over-exposition of Lucie's suffering body, including a rape scene constructed through swirling and dizzying special effects that center on the ugliness of the rapist's face, and an explicit childbirth used to create a damning narrative mood, make a spectacle of the character's suffering by reducing these to cinematic shock effects.

⁵⁹ In addition to the two Skram adaptations, Anne-Cath. Vestly's children's book series *Mormor og de åtte ungene* (Grandma and the Eight Children) were adapted into two films written and directed by Espen Thorstenson: *Mormor og de åtte ungene i byen / Grandma and the Eight Children in the City* (1977) and *Mormor og de åtte ungene i skogen / Grandma and the Eight Children in the Forest* (1979). Vampyrfilm was a co-producer on both films, with Vestly starring as the titular grandmother.

In contrast, *The Guardians* appears as a more consciously feminist project, not only in the aesthetic strategies and argumentation, but also in the way the production itself seems to have been built around a wish to make a film by and about women.

7.2. *The Guardians*: Adaptation and biography

The Guardians follows the novels *Professor Hieronimus* and *Paa St Jørgen* quite closely, anchoring its story in the character Else Kant's deprivation of freedom. However, in many ways, the film is also a biographical film about Amalie Skram. In the film, more time is spent on Else Kant's life before and after her incarceration at the two institutions. Through a prologue, an extended opening sequence leading up to Else's breakdown, and an epilogue set after Else's release, the film presents an additional narrative framing not found in the original novels. These scenes, however, include details that correspond to biographical events in Skram's life. In the prologue, the character Else Kant shares Skram's real-life maiden name Alver, while the epilogue shows the character's decision to divorce her husband Knut Kant once she is released from the mental asylum, as Skram also did. By adding beginnings and endings not found in the novel to the film's diegesis, *The Guardians* works to strengthen the connection between the character Else Kant and the historical person Amalie Skram.

In this way, *The Guardians* adapts the autobiographical novels into a portrait of Amalie Skram as an artist. Building, to a certain degree, on conventions of the artist biography and the biopic (Brinch et al. 2016, 87-88), the film arguably uses the experience of incarceration as a defining event in order to depict Skram as an artist. Already in the film's opening prologue, the character Else – personifying Skram – is presented as a creative force and an unconventional artist. The prologue, set several years before the main narrative events, introduces us to Else as she is in the middle of creating woodcuts. It begins with close-ups of her hands producing fine carvings in the wood, and a selection of tools, before a wider shot shows her in full figure standing by her worktable dressed in a smudged petticoat, her whole body engaged in the act of making woodcuts. From her artist's studio, the film cuts to the exhibition of the finished prints, a slow tracking shot moving from print to print. Each black and white frame depicts a tableau of the hardships of everyday life, small unfolding dramas in domestic settings captured in hard, coarse lines. The prologue is set to a slow atonal melody, which combines chimes with woodwinds

playing unsteady, dragging tunes, occasionally interrupted by a short series of knocks. As the film moves to the exhibition, a more traditional melody is introduced, but the accompanying piano and strings still contain hints of the unconventional, so that the music does not land comfortably.

The melody, used throughout the film in conjuncture with Else's prints and paintings, and the expressive naturalist style of the artworks points towards Else as an unconventional artist, someone who challenges the given expectations of harmony and delicacy. The controversial aspect of her art is made explicit as Else reads aloud from reviews of the exhibition, describing her dark style as "hideous", and claiming that if art is the creation of beauty, then she does not deserve to be called an artist: a reference, it seems fair to assume, to the reception of Skram's first novel, *Constance Ring*, which itself was received as crude and immoral by contemporary critics (Halse 1993).

7.2.1. Women's work on *The Guardians*

Several women artists were engaged in the making of *The Guardians*. Most prominently was perhaps the casting of Vibeke Løkkeberg in the role of Else Kant. This was her first leading role since *Exit* (1970). Originally, Norsk Film wanted to cast the actor Lise Fjeldstad in the role, but Nicole Macé managed to convince the producer that Løkkeberg was the ideal choice (Servoll 2020, 185). Further attesting to the film as a biographical work, Løkkeberg's connection to the author was a crucial reason behind the casting. Løkkeberg was deeply familiar with the author and had herself worked on a script based on *Sjur Gabriel*, the first novel in Skram's epos *Hellemyrsfolket*, in the early 1970s.⁶⁰ Like Skram, Løkkeberg was from Bergen, and furthermore shared a likeness with the author's physical appearance. More importantly, as a controversial artist drawing on personal experiences, Løkkeberg seemed to embody the 1970s spirit of the figure of Amalie Skram. The parallels between the two artists were also noticed in the press, where for instance an interview in the newspaper *Nationen* described the reactions to Løkkeberg's first feature film *The Revelation* (1977) as an "echo" of the controversy surrounding

⁶⁰ The Film Production Committee declined her application for funding. Macé had also tried her hand at that material, but was, likewise, unsuccessful in obtaining production funding.

Skram's novel *Constance Ring* (Servoll 2020, 208). Løkkeberg also contributed to the final formulation of the script.

Next to Løkkeberg, at least two other artists were important in gestating the characterization of the painter Else Kant. The graphic artist and sculptor Kari Rolfsen created the woodcuts, drawings and paintings displayed in the film. Rolfsen was one of the founders of the feminist magazine *Sirene*, where she created the cartoon series "Jensen". She would also illustrate and make the cover design for a 1979 edition of *Constance Ring*. In *The Guardians*, her paintings are central to the narrative intrigue. The film's score was made by contemporary classical composer Synne Skouen. The daughter of author and film director Arne Skouen, she was an aspiring composer and music critic, who later became Director of Music at NRK Radio (1993-1999) and briefly Director of Culture at NRK (1999-2000). At the time of the production of *The Guardians*, she had recently graduated from academies of music in Vienna and Oslo, and the score for *The Guardians* was one of Skouen's earliest commissions (Heggstad 2009). She would later collaborate with Macé and the dramatic writer Cecilie Løveid in the NRK's Radio Theatre.

Women's work, then, was not only a narrative concern in *The Guardians*, but also featured prominently in the film's production.⁶¹ The film was considered as having a strong feminist profile, and during production, it was helmed as the "women's film of the decade", with "strong women in front of and behind the camera" who arrived at the best decisions through "women's intuition" (Myhrvold 1977, n.p). A behind-the-scenes reportage in the women's magazine *Kvinner og klær* posited that, due to the film's setting in a women's psychiatric ward, there were so many women working as actors on *The Guardians* that they had to set up a childcare center at the Jar film studio, the atelier owned and managed by Norsk Film AS (Henriksen 1977, 102). The production nursery of *The Guardians* was a temporary initiative subsidized by Norsk Film AS, but it is unclear how extensive these services actually were. In the comment section in the trade journal *Rushprint*, a small notice signed "film dad" praised the initiative and suggested that they should continue this as a permanent solution (Filmfar 1977, 9). In this way, *The Guardians'* production history is intertwined with a history of union efforts to promote more manageable

⁶¹ Surely, both women and men held important positions in front of and behind the camera, with the creative staff including the experienced editor Edith Tøreg, Paul René Roestad, the cinematographer on both *Weekend* and *The Revelation*, and costume designer Wenche Petersen, who also designed the costumes for *Lucie* (1979).

working conditions and the attempts to establish opportunities for on-set childcare during film production, such as the “childcare group” within the freelance film workers’ union (Myrstad 2020a, 358).

Despite the celebratory discourse on women’s work found in the feature articles, the production itself was not without its controversies. Løkkeberg and Macé clashed over issues of creative control and expression during the making of *The Guardians*, and the two fell out after the film (Servoll 2020, 206). Løkkeberg described Macé’s directing style as inflexible, and described the experience as being boxed in without any opportunities for expression (2020, 207), while Macé, in her view, had managed to pry Løkkeberg away from her public persona (Dokka 2015, 303).

The Guardians would be Macé’s last feature film as a director. In the early 1980s, she was part of a group project that reunited several women who had worked on *The Guardians*. The film, entitled *Reise gjennom ukjent land – Gravid / Travel through Unknown Land - Pregnant* (1981/1982) is an experimental short film that explores post-natal depression. It was made through the Study Department at Norsk Film AS and would be the last production released from the Department before it was shut down in 1982 (Myrstad 2020a, 197-198). Macé functioned as the producer, while Veslemøy Haslund directed the film. Haslund had acted in *The Guardians* and been part of the radical theatre production *Law of Girls* (1974), while also having worked as a stage director. The film consisted of drawings and animations by Kari Rolfsen combined with live-action footage featuring actor Eva Opaker, set to Synne Skouen’s original score. The only “new” addition outside of *The Guardians* was cinematographer Eleonora Tissé.

7.2.2. Film analysis: Capturing the figure of oppression

The major structuring motif of *The Guardians* is a painting that Else is working on, and it is through this painting that the film develops its central argument of Else’s oppression as a woman and an artist. Early in the film, we get a first view of the painting: a large canvas in dark hues of black, grey, and blue. In the lower left corner, Else has painted the figure of a seated woman, her shoulders and face visible as she looks directly onto the audience with a pale, somber stare. Behind her, over her right shoulder, there is a rubbed-out space where another human figure is meant to stand, hovering behind her as an ominous presence. It is this figure Else is struggling

with, and it is this figure that shifts throughout the film to increasingly represent the concretization of Else's experience of oppression under male authority.

In the first section of the film, the painting is shown as a work in progress. Placed on its easel, it is a site of labor that becomes both a symbol of her conflicting roles and the source of her exhaustion. We see her try out various ideas for the figure, but none of them seem right to her. Its unfinished state is increasingly infused with guilt as she obsessively searches for the right form ("I'm a horrible mother. I know how selfish I am; I care more about the painting than about my own son. I hate that painting!"). Yet, no matter how strong the painting's pull on her attention might be, she rarely finds time to devote herself to it. As she tells her husband (Odd Furøy) one late evening, exhausted from trying: "I think Paul [the Apostel] was quite right when he said that married women shouldn't be allowed in the public space. [...] No woman can manage her house, children, and husband, if she also has her own work to consider". Her plea finds its visual expression in a montage showing the strain that faces Else, as a woman of her class, to combine and manage the different tasks expected of her. It shows a series of glimpses from her daily life and the different areas of her responsibility; from walks with her son, to going over cutlery and table decorations with her nanny, to herself hosting, attending and entertaining at evening parties as well as visiting the opera and art exhibitions with her husband. The montage is set to an upbeat piano melody that soon melts into an atonal melody played by a dragging flute, the latter used several times throughout the film. The two melodies challenge each other and create a dizzying effect of unrest and conflict, only pausing as the film cuts to a static shot of her untouched painter's palette, before they finally collide and end in a dissonant note as Else comes home late at night and dons her painting frock over her evening dress. Nighttime has become the only time she is free to paint.

At the end of the film's first section, Else breaks down. The only solution seems to be to seek help, to be "torn away from the painting" as she says. Yet, instead, Else is torn away from everything. From her exhausting carousel of never-ending responsibilities and expectations, she is soon confined within a new prison as a captive of professor Hieronimus (Helge Reiss). He declares Else insane, diagnosing her with an inability to control her emotions, and thus sentencing her to incarceration at an asylum. Confronted with the damning diagnosis, Else's painting reappears, only this time it is not the painting as a site of labor that is brought into view,

but the depicted motif itself. A close-up of Else's face fades into a close-up of the painting that slowly morphs between different iterations. The space behind the seated woman, in some versions staring blankly ahead, in others shown screaming, is filled by a threatening male figure that encroaches on her, his features changing from a sinister-looking man with a large cape, to a vulture-like monster with black feather wings, while Hieronimus's voice is heard, as if from far away, repeating his diagnosis: "You are insane. You are not fit to be released. You are insane." No longer an unfinished painting wrapped up in emotions of guilt and angst, it shifts into an expression of Else's own situation.

The third and final appearance of the painting comes at the very end of the film, following an epilogue showing Else's life after she is released from the mental asylum. The epilogue begins with a view of a lake, woodwinds and strings playing the same slow atonal melody from the prologue, while the camera pans over to show the boy Tage and the nanny Inger skipping down a pathway next to a white picket fence. They climb up small stone stairs and into the garden outside a grey and white house. On the veranda, behind wild roses growing on the pillars, Else is standing by her easel, painting, one final time, on the large canvass: The woman on the canvas, now in Else's likeness, is wearing the blue petticoat worn by the patients at the mental hospital, and behind her is no other than the professor Hieronimus himself.

In its final iteration, the painting has become a self-portrait. Through her own experience with direct subjugation by the hands of Hieronimus, she is finally able to articulate and give form to the unspecified shadow of oppression she was looking to capture. Re-introduced in the end of the film as a finished work, the painting itself becomes the two asylum-novels, creating a *mise en abyme*, an adaptation within an adaptation. Indeed, the painting, in this way, is set to represent two levels of her oppression as a woman artist: First, the painting as subject matter frames the persecution by Hieronimus, delivering a portrait of her unjust treatment. Second, as a site of labor, Else's struggle with completing the painting itself centers her situation as a woman artist.

Anti-psychiatry and male medical authority

The film, like the painting, is about the female patient as a voiceless victim of paternalistic male medical authority. The novels *Professor Hieronimus* and *Paa St. Jørgens* were written in Denmark at a time when there were no mental health laws, rendering the legal rights of mental

health patients non-existent. They were placed under legal guardianship and could be kept in the mental institutions indefinitely unless their next of kin demanded their release (Engelstad 1981, 160). It is this legal incapacitation that the character Else Kant falls victim to.

Visually, this incapacitation is given form through a cinematic closing in. While the first section of the film takes place in the open and generic spaces and rooms of the bourgeois, the second section is confined mainly to the interior of the women's ward. For the first part of Else's stay, the film is tied to the bedridden Else, keeping to her space through framing and sound that speaks to her sense of captivity and powerlessness. Hospital rules dictate the door must stay open at all times, and through the doorframe we see nurses, doctors, and other patients walking past her room or peeking in at her. There is no privacy, and certainly no rest. The music, so present in the first section of the film, is completely absent. In its stead are the noises made by the other patients, often expressively enhanced to create a frightening soundscape of whispers, screams, loud bangs and angry hisses that keep her awake. Isolated in her room, Else can only react to the various people who enter.

On her first morning at the hospital, a static shot shows Else sitting in her bed, her white undergarment and long curly dark hair, which earlier in the film has been neatly placed in a knot, brings into mind so many portraits and photographs of bedridden patients. One after the other, men in long, white doctor coats enter through the open door, so that no less than six men are crowding the foot of Else's bed. Finally, Hieronimus himself, wearing a black coat and sporting pince-nez, enters and takes a seat in front of the group of men. "But who are all these people?" asks Else in bewilderment. "They are doctors", Hieronimus answers courtly. The overwhelming delegation has an almost comical, but also frightening, effect; the anonymous and silent corps of physicians, looking at and observing Else without engaging with her, their white coats reminiscent of prison bars around her bed.

Through these representations of medical authority's disregard for the patients' integrity, *The Guardians* engages a critique of mental institutions and the anti-psychiatry discourse in the 1960s and 1970s. Inspired by Erving Goffman's sociological study of a mental hospital in Washington (1961), Michel Foucault's work on the history of the treatment of the psychiatric patient, translated into English as *Madness and Civilization* (1961/1988), as well as publications

in the early 1960s by psychiatrists such as Thomas Szasz (1961) and David Cooper (1967), a social movement of popular and activist protests rose against involuntary psychiatric hospitalization and the theories, practices and institutions of the discipline of psychiatry (Hansen 2015; Burns and Hall 2021). While a diverse set of views have been gathered under the label “anti-psychiatry”, a core facet of the movement was the view that mental illness was not a medical issue, but a social, legal, and political one. The film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Forman, 1975) is perhaps the most famous example of anti-psychiatry in cinema (Hansen 2015), yet films such as *Family Life* (Loach, 1971) and *A Women Under the Influence* (Cassavetes, 1974) also engage an anti-psychiatry discourse by showing mental illness as a function of a disciplining society that constructs and defines “normality”. In Norway, we find a similar tendency in *Hvem har bestemt? / Says who?* (Wam 1978), as well as in the film *Lukket avdeling / Closed Ward* (1972) directed by Arnljot Berg. This film is about life in a male psychiatry ward and is built around a series of episodic flashbacks of the diverse group kept in the closed ward. Like *The Guardians*, *Closed Ward* has a similar scene depicting the weekly consultation with the head psychiatrist, who barges in with a cohort of assistant doctors, dispensing diagnoses on the flow without the slightest interest in speaking to the patients.⁶²

The Guardians directs its critique of the mental institutions towards the disciplining function of mental authority in terms of gender ideology. Like *A Woman Under the Influence*, the film takes as its subject matter the conflation of mental illness and the woman perceived to be outside of the norm. Hieronimus quite explicitly punishes Else because she does not devote herself to the role of wife and mother. As he tells her husband, he would rather she be a good wife and mother than an artist, and he finds in her predilection with the so-called hideous in her art a symptom of her madness. Indeed, investigating the film, we realize that Hieronimus has actually been there all along, watching and judging Else from a distance. At the opening exhibition, we clearly see his profile looking at a print depicting a tortured man sitting in his bed, the same woodcut Else works on at the start of the prologue. We see him once more in the park as Else and Knut are returning from a party, the camera lingering on his face as he follows Else with his gaze.

⁶² In sharp contrast to these representations *Skadeskutt / Maimed* (1951), directed by Edith Carlmar and written by Otto Carlmar, presents the psychiatrist as a voice of reason and humanity. The film was made in collaboration with the mental hospital with the intention to sway public stigma on mental health.

The historical argument put forth by *The Guardians* finds resonance in feminist scholarship of the 1970s on gender and the history of medicine (Douglas Wood 1973; Smith-Rosenberg 1972). The depiction of the asylum is grounded in the historical situation of the 1890s, where the asylums were modeled on the patriarchal family, in order to instill new morality in the unwell patients. The professor, villainous and cruel to the point of exaggeration, stands out as a typified version of the male physician who aims to reprogram the hysterical woman into a traditional role. Although the word is never mentioned, Hieronimus's bed-rest regime was a typical treatment for hysteria in psychiatry in the late 1800s (Rosenbeck 1992, 427). This was the quintessential woman's illness and cultural diagnosis in the 1800s. Cultural historians have suggested that hysteria might also have been a form of protest against the female role in the bourgeois marriage: By becoming sick, hysteria could be one way for women to express dissatisfaction and anger with their limited life choices (Rosenbeck 1992, 427). In her dissertation on hysteria in Norway, Hilde Bondevik suggests that such a protest is at work in Skram's novel, where hysteria has a creative and productive potential towards a process of self-realization (2007, 339).

The guardianship that Else falls victim to amounts to more than Hieronimus's concrete persecution and wielding of medical authority, signaled in the use of guardianship in the plural in the title *The Guardians*. Although her husband, Knut, is sympathetically portrayed as trying to do what he thinks is best, he still passively agrees to her fate and believes that his wife is insane simply because Hieronimus says so. The trust in (male) medical authority leaves Else utterly powerless under a guardianship of men who do not talk to her or believe her. Yet, as the film shows, the conditions of passivity she is relegated to in the mental hospitals are mirrored in her situation outside the ward as well.

Impossible conditions of the woman artist

Else's conditions as a woman artist are grounded in a critique of the bourgeois marriage, given form through the painting as a site of labor. That Else is able to complete the painting in the last instance is significant. With this ending, Else is not only free from Hieronimus, but she is shown to have finally found a balance that enables her to combine her roles as an artist and a mother – one that, significantly, does not include a husband. Her final gesture in the film displays her

victory: We hear her son Tage call for her to join them for some hot chocolate, and see her wave her pencil at him, sign her initials in the corner, and then proceed to remove her painting frock and move out of frame.

This movement repeats and rewrites the opening sequence. Following the prologue with its condensed exposition of Else as an unconventional artist, the next scene opens on Tage holding hands with his nanny, played by Macé's daughter Karin Macé, as they walk up a spiraling staircase to a city apartment. The film cuts to a shot of Else in her stained painting frock, standing by her easel in deep concentration. We hear the boy calling for her from an adjacent room, and he soon comes running into her study and asks her repeatedly to make him some hot chocolate. She indulges, but throughout the scene, her eyes dart towards the unfinished painting, her speech disrupted as she loses her train of thought.

The film presents her split attention as a direct outcome of her secondary position as an artist within her marriage. As the boy and the nanny enter the apartment, a close-up shows a brass door sign that reads "Knut Kant". "Quiet", the nanny tells the little boy as they enter, "you mustn't disturb father when he is writing". The husband, visually absent, is still presented as the most significant person: their home demarcated as his home, and his work and his concentration as the most important to protect. This is further reiterated in a later scene. On the suggestion of her friend, Karoline, Else takes her family to a house in the countryside. The scene opens onto Knut sitting at his desk, writing. He has raised his head and listens with a gentle smile to the voices coming from the window where Else and the maid are heard making plans for dinner ("What does the ma'am want for dessert?" "Rhubarb? No, we had that yesterday..."). A cut to the outdoors shows Else standing on the patio in front of her easel. She is shown in physical command of her work, one leg resting on the tripod, but at the same time having to negotiate demands on her attention. Of the two artists, he, a writer, husband, and father, is free to concentrate on his dissertation and partake in family life as he sees fit. She, however, must divide her attention between her painting and her young son, while also making sure the everyday runs smoothly – a split she cannot navigate, and which makes her ill.

And the sisters?

Through the film, the painted motif has developed from the symbolical and universal, to the personal and concrete. The movement in Else's painting mirrors the film's ambitions as a whole: A system of gender ideology captured in the portrait of one woman's concrete experience. In this way, the film seems to make an argument in which the patriarchal system of the mental institution is but one iteration of the larger system of female subjugation under male supremacy. In the finished painting, the two sections of the film and the different forms of confinement they represent are brought together within one representation. Free from Hieronimus, she can give a face to the shadow of oppression; free from her husband, she is able to work. The final question is, what possibilities for liberation and pathways to consciousness are found in this representation?

The structure of the repeated family scene recalls Macé's first feature film *Triangle* (Macé, 1971) in its envisioning of a different kind of living arrangement based on women's communality. However, Else and her nanny Inger are not women on equal footing creating a new kind of marriage like the characters in that first film, but rather an employer and an employee. As a character, Inger is not given any history, but remains a piece within the portrait of Else. This is true of most of the characters of the film. It is, throughout, Else as an individual and her strength, stubbornness and endurance that is put at stake, and that prevails in the end. The repetition of the melody in the prologue and the epilogue support this sense of constancy. Far from being broken from the deprivation she has been subjected to, the film suggests that she might return even stronger and in more control.

In this way, the film marks a shift from the fiction films discussed in the previous chapters regarding the representation of the potential of female solidarity. Here, the scene of female confidentiality holds a secondary place to the close-ups of Else's face, centering her struggle as an individual drama of injustice. On the one hand, the film positions women as Else's allies. Else's friend Karoline (Vibeke Falk), in whom she confides her worries and exhaustion, denounces Hieronimus ("That beast!"), while the nanny Inger smuggles out a letter to Else's husband, making her the only character who is willing to risk something for Else. Within the walls of the mental institution, the initial strictness of the nurses soon melts away. Miss Stenberg

(Veslemøy Haslund) who coldly undresses Else at her arrival, soon comforts Else as she cries, agreeing that she does not belong there, and that justice will be served. On the other hand, the patriarchal system of the mental institutions creates hierarchies that complicate solidarity and friendship between women. The nurses are a great source of comfort, but they also uphold the system, repeating to Else the same words of advice: Be calm, be good, be patient.

It is, however, in the film's representation of Else's relationship to the other patients that the film most clearly departs from the potential of female solidarity. The loss of privilege that Else experiences places her on equal footing with more unfortunate women than herself, yet, positioned mostly as a sane person among the insane, she retains a distance to the other characters. While some of them are portrayed to suffer from various mental conditions, others seem to be locked up because they do not fit the norm and are unwanted in one way or the other, or simply do not have anywhere else to go. It is, however, not until Else arrives at St. Jørgen's Asylum and sees a woman who is locked up because of her body odor ("No wonder her family does not want her") that she likens her own fate to the other patients. Shocked at learning the misuse of guardianship that not only keeps her there, but perhaps many like her, Else confronts the warden, played by Tone Schwarzott, who also played Tore in *Triangle*, but her relationship to the other patients remains unchanged.

A different relationship and process of consciousness is presented in the Danish television adaptation, *Else Kant* (1978). The teleplay consists of two parts, corresponding to the two novels. The first, *Hustruen / The Wife*, is about Else's breakdown and her time at the public hospital, and the second, *Søstrene / The Sisters*, is about her stay at the mental asylum. Each part lasts a little under one and half hours, the length giving room for these episodes to follow the novels more closely – and it is especially in the last part that the difference between *The Guardians* and *Else Kant* becomes clear. In the Danish television production, Else develops a companionship with a group of patients, turning against the nurses and initiating a small revolt against the system. In an article about *Else Kant*, the Danish critic Tina Andersen argues that the two parts show the development of Else Kant from being "the wife", an isolated and passive individual, to becoming "one of the sisters", a free and independent woman (Andersen 1980, 110).

In *The Guardians*, Else also emerges as a free and independent woman. Her pathway to this position, however, does not come through female solidarity and the confidential space alone, but first and foremost through her own artistic process. She observes and draws sketches, before finally processing her experiences in her art.

7.3. Concluding remarks: Turning to history and to literature

While *The Guardians* is set in the historical past, it is very much a tale about an independent woman, of gendered expectations to the artist, and the strain of double labor for working mothers. The key to the feminist argument of *The Guardians* is found in the film's structure and repetition of form. While less stylized than the first film Nicole Macé directed, *The Guardians* is clearly sectioned and uses Else Kant's painting in order to set at stake the questions of the conditions of the woman artist, developing along two threads that show the material limitations and gendered expectations experienced by the woman artist on the one hand, and celebrate the resilience of the artist on the other. The film further shares with *Triangle* a clear closure, thus proposing, once more, an alternative to the heterosexual marriage. This time, however, the vision of the future it is not found in an equal companionship with another woman, but in the single woman's household – made possible, in the historical context, through the help of a maid.

As a literary adaptation and a period piece, *The Guardians* functions as a primary example of several tendencies. Firstly, the film shows how feminist filmmaking intersects with broader contexts of feminist research and discourses that identified and brought attention to women's cultural contributions more generally. *The Guardians* shares its choice of source material and the impulse of adapting women's work with the NRK's Television Theatre, as well as Swedish and Danish public broadcasters. The thematic cross-over between television and film poses intriguing questions for further research.

Secondly, *The Guardians* also points into the 1980s, where the tendency towards historical narratives would be a pronounced part of women's feminist filmmaking. Here, especially *The Witch Hunt* (Breien) in 1981 and *Hud / Vilde – the Wild One* (Løkkeberg) in 1986 offer similar portraits of singular women who are victims under patriarchal rule, but who nonetheless stand tall in the midst of their own destruction.

While there were fewer historical films in the 1970s, perhaps due to the higher budgets often demanded by the historical format, the turn to history was nevertheless evident in this period. In documentary filmmaking, archival compilation films such as *Union Maids* (Jim Klein, Julia Reichert and Miles Mogulescu, 1976) and *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (Connie Field, 1980) from the U.S. placed women as subjects of history. In her work on women in the New German Cinema, Julia Knight notes women's history as one of the recurring thematic concerns of women's filmmaking (1992, 122), with examples of films that are set in or concerned with the historical past, including Helma Sander-Brahms's *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter / Germany, Pale Mother* (1980) and Claudia von Alemann's *Die Reise nach Lyon / Blind Spot* (1980). In Norway, the archival compilation films *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* (Aanesen, 1978) and *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (Eva Mannseth, 1979) both turn to the history of women's struggle. I turn to these films in the next chapters on feminist documentary filmmaking. Like *The Guardians*, these films look back at history as a way to probe the present, but also as a way of creating a collective history of the new women's movement.

CH 8. FIGHTING FOR SELF-DETERMINED ABORTION ON THE NRK

In this chapter, I focus on three medium length films about the right to self-determined abortion produced or exhibited by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, the NRK, in the 1970s: *Abort / Abortion* (1972), written and directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg and aired on television in 1972, *Kvinneres møte med abortnemnda / Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee* and *Fra tre års fengsel til selvbestemt abort / From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion*, both written and directed by Ellen Aanesen and produced and aired by the NRK in 1978. Intersecting at key moments of the struggle for self-determined abortion, these three films were part of the public discussion on abortion legislation. In different ways, these films aim to give a face and a voice to women's experiences of the various abortion law, experiences that earlier had been criminalized into silence (Aanesen 1999, 5).

The films do, moreover, bring into view the NRK as a producer and distributor of documentary film, as well as a place of employment. The status of documentary within the NRK warrants some clarification. During the 1960s and 1970s, the NRK developed into a key exhibitor and producer of short documentary films in Norway (Iversen 2001a, 107; Diesen 1996). While most of the television program output from the NRK can be termed journalistic reportage, film historian Jan Anders Diesen has made the case that a considerable amount of this production can, and should, be considered documentary, understood as a more self-enclosed and ambitious format (Diesen 1996, 69). At the time, the mode of production in television was similar to that of film production, among other using 16 mm film stock, and many of the key contributors in the development of Norwegian television came from documentary production (Diesen 1996, 63-65). In contrast to for instance the Documentary Department of the Swedish public broadcaster, Sveriges Radio, Norwegian television did not have exclusive film production departments. When NRK established its television unit, television inherited its organizational form almost directly from radio (Bastiansen and Dahl 2019, 261). This meant that Norwegian television departments were organized in a technical department, housing the technical staff of cinematographers, editors, and sound-recordists, and a series of content departments, notably News, Public Information, Children and Youth and Entertainment. The only new addition was the establishment of the Department of Film. While the broadcaster itself seldom used the term, documentary films were made as part of the NRK's dedication to public education and

information. Documentary films could be produced by The Department of Public Information, the Department of Film or, more rarely, by the Television Theatre.

Neither of the documentaries discussed in this chapter are available in their original form. Due to censorship, the last segment of *Abortion* (Løkkeberg, 1972) is missing from the version analyzed in this dissertation. As for the two documentaries *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee* (1978) and *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* (1978), a practice of re-using the electronic tapes in the NRK has left only the film stock component of the films, which means that much of the textual components, including the credits, are missing. It is still possible to look at how the films frame their argument for self-determined abortion, and at the possibilities for expression and public debate that existed within the NRK.

8.1. The engaged line of the NRK

In the 1970s, the television department of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation entered what media scholars Henrik Bastiansen and Trine Syvertsen have labeled “the era of high monopoly” (1994, 134). By this time, television had gone from being a new medium to a new normal. The NRK’s television broadcast, the single channel of a state monopoly, had developed into a structuring factor in people’s lives and a central – and contested – stage for public debate (1994, 134). Hans Jacob Ustvedt, who was the Director-General during the establishing phase of the television department (1962-1972), was particularly concerned with the NRK’s role as a public educator and wanted the channel to contribute actively to the public debate by allowing challenging material and opinions (Lindtner 2014, 157; Eide 1997, 26). In the 1970s, the NRK gave Ustvedt’s policy of engaged public enlightenment a more radical edge in a new political climate. Steeped in what Bastiansen and Syvertsen label a “social democratic enlightenment ethos”, the next Director-General Torolf Elster (1972-1981) cultivated a programming policy in the service of an egalitarian project of public education (1994, 138). The NRK produced a variety of content, from award-winning comedy programs and light entertainment to literary adaptations in the Television Theatre. Still, its main characteristic was the output of documentaries, information programs, series, and children’s programs through which “the NRK demonstrated its mission to create a new and more actively involved breed of human beings” (1994, 138). Through public information, the NRK would contribute to a well-informed

Norwegian population. This meant that while the NRK was bound by the Norwegian broadcasting legislation and committed to an implicit claim to objectivity, balance and neutrality in its programming, the channel allowed for quite radical opinions in the interest of public debate and information.

As part of the new engaged policy, several radio and television programs addressed women's issues and made visible the new women's movement. The new women's movement, crucially, was also an enlightenment project (Müftüoğlu 2013, 20) driven forth by women able to use the public broadcaster as a medium for feminist politics. Media scholar Synnøve Skarsbø Lindtner has suggested that the dissemination of feminist thought through the public audiovisual and printed media was seen as an important part of many feminists' activism, and many active feminist women even worked as journalists (2014, 156). In practice, many women in the media sector regarded their work as part of the feminist project of making visible women's conditions and contributions in society and history. The fight for recognition and visibility was an ongoing struggle within the newsrooms as well. In the mid-1970s, female journalists from the Oslo-based newspapers and the NRK established the women's network known as Engebret-bevegelsen (the Engebret Movement).⁶³ This was an informal forum used for consciousness-raising and debate, but the network also exerted pressure on the main journalism union, Norsk Journalistlag, to better women's representation and working conditions (Utheim 2009).

According to Lindtner, the NRK was a key institution within the feminist media landscape, in which especially the television department, characterized by fresh recruitment, became a hub for feminist engagement (2014, 157). Here, Mette Janson (1934-2004) was an important figure. In 1959, she became, together with Tollef Berg, the first journalist and presenter employed in the newly established television news department (Bastiansen and Dahl 2019, 254). She had worked as a trainee for the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in New York in the late 1950s, which made her the only one with technical experience from actual television broadcasting to work in the Norwegian news department during the time of its initial establishment (Løvskar 1989, 169; Bastiansen and Dahl 2019, 260). In 1965, she became a producing journalist for the Department of Public Information where she made several programs breaking ground on issues

⁶³ The network got its name from the café where most of the meetings took place. Reidun Kvaale, Gerd Benneche, Harriet Eide, Anne Lise Refsum (now Stafne) and Gerda Vislie initiated the first meeting.

of gender and sexuality. She is perhaps best known for her television series about relationships and marriage from 1969, *Om samliv*. The series contained information about the controversial themes of contraception and family planning, and was met by moral outrage to the point of it even being debated in Parliament (Haug 2020). However, the fact that the series was even aired testified to the changing moral norms taking place during the 1960s, and according to Bastiansen and Syvertsen, a mere five years earlier it would not have been possible to show the program at all (1994, 133). In the 1970s, Janson made several programs where she investigated women's conditions and gender equality both in Norway and abroad, such as the program series *Adams Eva: nest best i mannssamfunnet / Adam's Eve: Secondary in the Male Society* (1971) together with Eva Brustad, about women's conditions in Norwegian society, followed by *Kvinner – utdanning – yrke / Women – Education – Profession* (1973), and *Hva nå, mann? / So, What Now, Man?* (1974) together with Terje Kristiansen and Vibeke Løkkeberg, about the male gender role.⁶⁴

Other central women in the television department include Else Myklebust, Marianne Weiner, and Gerd Inger Polden.⁶⁵ In the radio department, Astrid Brekken (b.1943) stands out as a seminal feminist voice. She was one of the co-founders of the feminist magazine *Sirene*, and in her radio programs for the NRK she frequently brought feminist perspectives and concerns into public light. Among her prolific production are programs about women and the EEC debate, the gender roles perpetuated in children's literature and in schoolbooks, as well as an interview with Germaine Greer on occasion of the Norwegian translation of *The Female Eunuch* (1970) in 1972. In 1973, Brekken, together with Solveig Bøhle, Anne Torsvik and Wenche Margrethe Myhre, made a radio documentary series about abortion legislation and women's experiences with applying for abortion.

⁶⁴ She made the latter program together with Terje Kristiansen and Vibeke Løkkeberg, and it was the couple who originally pitched the idea to NRK (Servoll 2020, 166). However, with more experience, Janson was set to direct the program series, with Kristiansen as writer and host (2020, 168).

⁶⁵ In 1975, Else Myklebust (b.1938) and Marianne Weiner made four programs together that investigated the changing conditions for and views about the role of the housewife. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Myklebust set rape and incest on the agenda through her work in the flagship news program *Dagsrevyen*, most notably in 1984 with the program series *Valdtekt – ein vond sirkel / Rape – A Circle of Pain*, about rape and child abuse in the U.S. (Aanesen 2018, 105-106; Ose 2008, 18), while Gerd Inger Polden (b.1945) directed several programs addressed to school children and youth about gender equality and human rights. In 1987, she directed the anti-racism television series *Svart og hvit / Black and White* about racism, immigration laws and immigrant experiences in Norway (Ose 2008, 18).

These women did not make their films and programs in a vacuum but were part of what stands out as a strong feminist media culture within the NRK. In her master's thesis on the history of grassroots engagement for gender equality in the NRK, Ane Larsdatter Hobæk Ose (2008) draws attention to several women's networks and initiatives in the 1970s aimed at bettering women's conditions within the public broadcaster. For instance, a Women's Front group within the NRK published the feminist bulletin *Kvinner og klør* (Women and claws), a pun on the Norwegian equivalent to *Women's Wear* (2008, 32). In 1973, a group of women initiated the survey "Who's talking in the NRK?". Over four weeks, sixty women noted the gender and occupation of the people who spoke on Norwegian public broadcasting. The aim of the survey was to register the gender (im)balance within the public broadcaster by counting how often women and men spoke on radio and television as interviewees and interviewers (2008, 34). The figures provided the grounds for discussing which groups the public broadcaster allowed to be seen and heard, and the numbers uncovered a gross underrepresentation of women: In radio, 21,5% of the people who spoke were women, while the number was 25,3 % in television (Aanesen 2018, 116). The divide had a class dimension as well, with the numbers clearly showing that, while women were underrepresented in all occupations, well-educated men were the most likely to speak in NRK (Ose 2008, 36). Following this survey, several actions supported by the Director-General were initiated, such as the formation of women's networks, a seminar on gender equality, and the establishment of a women's archive (2008, 38-39). The archive was envisioned as a roster of potential women that NRK journalists could contact for use in their programs. For different reasons, the archive was not developed to fill its intended role. The survey, however, was repeated several times, first in 1983, and thus continued to be used as a tool for working towards gender equality within the institution.

The survey showed that women's perspectives were being marginalized in the NRK. Still, the public broadcaster provided an opportunity for feminist women to address this disparity, as well as to cover issues and lines of inquiry that placed women's conditions on the agenda. In the memoir book *Vi var mange*, Astrid Brekken recalls:

Even though there were fewer women in NRK in those years, there were many conscious women. We really enjoyed a climate of equality and women's liberation in NRK. And there was plenty of room for debate in the state channel (Aanesen 2018, 116.).

Backed by networks of the new women's movement within and outside of the NRK, feminist journalists and filmmakers could use the public broadcaster to present the movement and inform the public about its central concerns. According to Ellen Aanesen, the NRK provided opportunities for expression, but it was still due to the efforts of journalist activists that women's issues and women's rights were included in public broadcasting (Interview with Aanesen 2021). Without these journalists, in her view, the public history of the new women's movement would not have existed. Moreover, a political project of visibility and consciousness-raising would often be at odds with the NRK's claim to objectivity and neutrality. In the words of Brekken the question was: "How far could one toe the line before being blocked by the demands on objectivity and neutrality and impartiality?" (Aanesen 2018, 116). There were, surely, clear and obvious restrictions, and as the debates surrounding the abortion documentaries would put into relief, not everything was acceptable at every juncture.

8.2. The fight for self-determined abortion in Norway

Women's reproductive rights was a defining issue for the movement for women's liberation. In Norway, the right to self-determined abortion stands as the first unifying cause of the new women's movement (Haukaa 1982, 27; Hellesund 2013, 81). The fight for self-determined abortion in Norway dates back to 1913, when Katti Anker Møller staged the first public demand for legal abortions (Aanesen 2012). Abortion was, however, not legalized until 1960, with the first abortion law, *Lov om svangerskapsavbrudd ved visse høve* ("Law on induced termination of pregnancy in certain cases"). This law, which was implemented in 1964, replaced paragraph 245 of the criminal code, which had criminalized abortion except on severe medical grounds, with a penalty of up to three years in prison for undergoing or contributing to abortion. The abortion law of 1964 granted legal abortion to women on medical and, in some instances, social grounds, to be determined by an abortion committee. In principle, this law formalized the current practice among physicians. The major battleground of the 1970s, then, became the fight for legislative change to place the control and decision in the hands of the pregnant women themselves, rather than in the hands of the medical doctors.

The demand for self-determined abortion, so-called 'free abortion', was actualized in the late 1960s and promoted by the new women's movement, the Norwegian Association for Women's

Rights and women in the Norwegian Labor Party (Aanesen 2012; Blom 2005, 379; Ryste 2003). Into the 1970s, the political activity gained momentum. On November 9th, 1973, 1200 people marched the street of Oslo in support of self-determined abortion (Aanesen 2012, 299). Similar demonstrations were held in West-Germany, Austria, Denmark and in the U.S.A. In 1974, the Women's Front initiated the establishment of the action group "Kvinneaksjon for selvbestemt abort" (Women's Campaign for Self-Determined Abortion) to exert additional pressure in the build-up to the Parliamentary vote on a government proposed bill for self-determined abortion, uniting women's organizations and women from the labor movement in a shared front (Aanesen 2012, 310). Despite their efforts, the Parliament majority voted against the law for self-determined abortion. This was partly due to a massive and somewhat unexpected mobilization from the Christian-conservative center-right, through the campaign "Folkeaksjon mot fri abort" (The People's Coalition Against Free Abortion). The tipping vote, however, was a vote of conscience by a Parliamentary Member of the Socialist Party. A revision of the law of 1960 was passed instead. The revised law, implemented in 1975, gave women the right to apply for an abortion themselves. Before this, it was the physician who applied on their behalf. It also broadened the social grounds for legal abortion in line with the current medical practice, but primarily strengthened the position of the medical doctors in the abortion committees and secured the right for health workers to refuse to participate in abortion procedures. In 1978, a new Parliament voted once again on a proposed bill for self-determined abortion. This time, the law was passed with the smallest possible majority, granting women the right to self-determined abortion within the first 12 weeks of a pregnancy.

Writing in the context of North America, Jennifer Nelson (2003) has importantly argued that the history of the struggle for reproductive rights needs to be broadened beyond the issue of access to safe, legal abortion. For instance, for many poor women and women of color, the right to bear healthy children and the struggle against involuntary sterilization was as significant a struggle as the right to terminate unwanted pregnancies (2003, 5). Nelson shows how women of color pushed for a more complex reproductive rights discourse in the 1970s that broadened the focus of mainstream white feminism on legalizing abortion to a movement for reproductive control that included the right to contraception and the means to raise the children that were born. As the film analysis will show, this broader perspective was also visible in the Norwegian context as

abortion rights was connected to class perspectives. Still, for reasons of selection criteria, where most of the NRK's production has been excluded from consideration, such a broader history has not been pursued to its fullest extent in this dissertation. It is, however, important to note that for both Vibeke Løkkeberg and Ellen Aanesen, the first abortion documentaries were followed by films that engaged the forced assimilation of the Romani peoples through adoption and sterilization: First by Løkkeberg in the documentary film *Tater / Gypsy* (1973), and later by Aanesen in the two documentaries *Av reisende folk / Of the Travelling People* (1994) and *Hu er dronninga mi! / She's My Queen!* (2005) and in the portrait book *Nasjonens barn* ("The Children of the Nation", 2008) created together with photographer Bernt Eide.

8.3. Vibeke Løkkeberg and *Abortion* (1972)

The short documentary *Abort / Abortion* (1972) was one of the first programs about the abortion legislation to be aired on radio or television in Norway. It was also Vibeke Løkkeberg's first film as a director and signaled her position as a socially committed filmmaker. She based the film on interviews and conversations with women applying for abortion. Halvor Elvik, who at the time was also in a relationship with Løkkeberg, is credited as co-writer. In the press release ahead of the film's broadcasting, Løkkeberg stated that she had been motivated by a wish to start a discussion about the life situations of women seeking abortions (Løkkeberg 1972, 4), and at the heart of the film is an expression of the intolerable circumstances created for women by the 1964 abortion law.

Abortion started out as an NRK production, but was in the end produced by Norsk Dokumentarfilm AS, a production company specialized in documentary and commissioned films. Løkkeberg began the film project in 1969 after reading in the newspaper about the mistreatment by the police of a young pregnant woman who had been picked up for prostitution (Løkkeberg 1971, 70). She became interested in the story and, using equipment from the NRK, she interviewed the woman about her life and her situation. The idea was to make a film about the conditions of women in Norwegian society across social strata. However, the subject of prostitution was deemed too controversial, and the NRK backed away from the film. According to Løkkeberg, there had been a misunderstanding concerning her intentions to feature the young woman on screen: "The girl had been frequenting the city hall district [known for street

prostitution], and prostitutes are not allowed to speak in Norwegian broadcasting” (Løkkeberg 1971, 70).

Based on one of the themes from the interview, Løkkeberg re-focused the project as a film about the abortion legislation. From this point on, the film was in principle produced as an independent documentary.⁶⁶ I return more fully to the conditions for independent documentary filmmaking in chapter 9, but this was, as a rule, a long and tedious process. Funding remained a constant challenge. She spent two years applying for funding, re-writing the film as a fiction feature and back again to a documentary short. After unsuccessful applications for funding to the Ministry of Church and Education, she was finally able to complete it in the early 1970s with support from radical voices in the public sector (Aanesen 2018, 65-66; Servoll 2020, 135). Aud Blegen Svindland was the chief physician at the Norwegian Directorate of Health and an advocate for self-determined abortion. She contributed with an interview in the film, but also introduced Løkkeberg to Karin Stoltenberg, who was the senior official of Forbruker- og administrasjonsdepartementet (Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Administration). She was the architect behind the new progressive family policies of the 1970s and wrote the White Paper on self-determined abortion in 1974 (Aanesen 2018, 69). With Blegen Svindland and Stoltenberg’s help, Løkkeberg obtained final funding for the film and was able to complete *Abortion* in 1971.

Abortion figures as among the earliest and most explicit examples of how film could be used as rallying points by and for the new women’s movement. The film was screened by film societies and women’s groups across the country as part of the growing mobilization for self-determined abortion, and it had a limited theatrical release in select theatres. In the memoir book *Vi var mange*, Løkkeberg recalls the chock-full premiere screening at the Scala cinema in Oslo: “It was so full that people couldn’t enter. They were sitting on the floor, in front of the stage; they were sitting along the walls” (Aanesen 2018, 62). The circulation of the film did not stop at the Norwegian border. Løkkeberg took the film to several film festivals in Europe, among them the

⁶⁶ Løkkeberg continued working on the film with the encouragement of Jon Stenklev, head of the Norwegian Film Institute (Løkkeberg 1971, 71). The Film Institute functioned as a film archive, and was established in 1955 as part of the post-war commitment by the State to Norwegian film and film culture. While the Film Institute did not have any financial means to produce films itself, it had been relocated together with the State’s Film Education and could provide a contact point into the resources and equipment of Norsk Film AS, giving Løkkeberg access to film stock and collaboration with a cinematographer and sound technician.

radical film festival in Pesaro, and to the first International Seminar on Women's Films in Berlin in 1973. Following the seminar, *Abortion* was bought for distribution by Kino Arsenal in Berlin, which would later also distribute Løkkeberg's feature film *The Revelation* (1977).

The Berlin seminar is of particular interest for this dissertation. This was a chance to meet other filmmaking women, discuss and share experiences, and places Løkkeberg within the transnational feminist film culture of Northern Europe (Holtar 2019b). The event became an important kick-off for the vital feminist film culture that developed in West Germany. The seminar served as a model for women's film seminars in Munich (1974) and Frankfurt (1974) and was a starting point for the German feminist film journal *Frauen und Film* (Women and Film). Directors Helke Sander and Claudia von Alemann organized the seminar which screened more than forty films from seven countries over the course of two days (Knight 1992, 102). As Sander emphasized, "for most of us it was surprising that there were already enough of us to be able to fill a whole festival with our films" (Sander quoted in Knight 1992, 103). In addition to women from West Germany, the seminar brought together films and filmmakers from the U.S. and Western Europe. Other Scandinavian women with films in the program were the Danish directors and visual artists Vibeke Pederson, Jytte Rex, Kirsten Justesen, Ursula Reuter Christiansen, and Lisbeth Dehn Holgersen.

While she was in Berlin, Løkkeberg recorded interviews with several of the groups and women present at the Seminar about their experiences working in film and television. The film project was called "Kvinner i media" / "Women in Media". Centralfilm AS, a production company mainly involved in producing informational films, supported the film for some time but eventually lost interest, and "Women in Media" was left uncompleted.⁶⁷ According to an interview in the daily newspaper *Dagbladet*, the film featured women from France, Italy, the U.K., and the U.S.A. (Ramnefjell 1974, n.p.). Intriguingly, this might include members of feminist film collectives such as the London Women Film Group, the New York based Newsreel and the Italian women's film group Collettivo Femminista Cinema, who all had films in the program. Løkkeberg spoke about the unfinished film project in the portrait interview "Kvinnelig virkelighet på film" by Eva Bellsund (1976) for the feminist magazine *Sirene*, saying that it was

⁶⁷ Recently, research librarians at the National Library of Norway found a film reel that might contain material from this film. The sound has so far not been found.

a shame “Women in media” was not completed as “[the interviews] provided a revealing picture of what it’s like to work as a woman director, and of women’s films more generally” (Bellsund 1976, 24). In a film historical perspective, the film could also have served as a source to feminist film culture in the early 1970s.

8.3.1. Film analysis: Numbers in a system

The aim of *Abortion* was to bring to light the precarious situation for women in difficult economic and social situations who wished to terminate their pregnancy. Shot in 16 mm black and white and lasting approximately 40 minutes, the film reads as a poetic exploration of the issue of abortion and the misconstrued guardianship that fueled restrictive abortion legislation. By combining different documentary strategies of narrative segments, interviews and the use of voice-over, the film works to firstly give a portrait of the effects of the legislation, and secondly, to argue for the need for self-determined abortion. The film makes use of codes of cinematic realism to authenticate women’s experiences on screen and to argue its case: that the pregnant women themselves must have the opportunity to decide whether to have the child or not.

The women’s experiences are given form through narrative segments that combine codes of cinematic realism with a discourse of information. The narrative segments are built around a scene set in the corridor of a hospital, where we see several women seated in rows along the walls. They are waiting for their turn to speak with the abortion committee, where their case will be assessed, and they will either be allowed or refused to have an abortion. The camera moves across the faces of the seated women, pausing on some of them while the filmmaker’s voice-over presents what appear to be objective facts about them: their name, age, income, family situation, and living situation. The information is private but impersonal, and the film gives no access to the feelings or thoughts the women might have concerning their pregnancy, nor why it is an unwanted one. Rather, these are reminiscent of the cold facts of case files, perhaps taken from social reports used by the abortion committees to make their decision. This reading is strengthened as Løkkeberg later in the film reads in voice-over a letter from an abortion committee declining one of the women’s applications. The human profiles created by the listed facts position the women as belonging mainly to the working-class, and thus implicitly points to

a class aspect of the abortion legislation in which wealthy women had the means of obtaining abortions outside the application system.

The film moves to offer more background on one of them, 16-year-old Kirsten played by Ege Askildsen, the daughter of author Kjell Askildsen and a friend of Løkkeberg, and she becomes the focal point of the film. Through a series of short scenes, we see glimpses of her everyday life, her work and her home situation, the background for her pregnancy and her process of applying for an abortion. These past events are strung together by the repeated return to Kirsten's "present" and the hospital hallway where she sits next to the other women, waiting to learn whether or not she will be allowed to have an abortion. The film ends when her number is called, and the door closes behind her.

The women applying for abortions, the film argues, are voiceless and without agency, reduced only to numbers in the system. Through the framing story of Kirsten and the repeated return to the corridor and the women sitting there, the film provides a portrait of the precarious situation women are placed in due to the abortion committee system. Like the other women, Kirsten is mostly inaccessible to us: the filmmaker's voice-over presents several facts about her, but she herself is mostly silent and only shown responding to concrete actions in the narrative reenactments.

The first glimpse opens with a shot showing Kirsten lying in bed next to an apathetic looking young boy, who awkwardly answers "no" when she asks him if he came inside her, while noises of a house party rage outside the bedroom door. Another scene places Kirsten at the doctor's office, asking for an application for an abortion. The doctor is portrayed as quite sympathetic to her, yet the scene reveals the vulnerability of Kirsten in the situation: sitting quietly with down-cast eyes as the doctor asks intimate questions about her sexual life, scolds her for being careless and suggests she might marry the boy ("A marriage does not need to be failed just because you're young"). The film gives an answer to this suggestion by cutting to a shot of the young couple standing by the boy's motorcycle in silence while he steadily and slowly slams his open hand on his helmet.

The voiceless women of the narrative segments are intercut with others who speak for and about them through direct interviews. Two separate interviews feature the physicians Fredrik Melbye and Aud Blegen Svindland, who were both well-known advocates for self-determined abortion working for the Directorate of Health. A third interview features anti-abortion activists, two older women with backgrounds from medical professions and organizations for the protection of mother and child. These women are not only opposed to self-determined abortion, but in fact find the current legislation too liberal, while also expressing opposition to contraception.

While the film presents these different views on abortion, its own stance for self-determined abortion is made explicitly clear by the way these two opposing views are represented. The two first interviews, one placed at the beginning and the other at end of the film respectively, are filmed in continuous takes and framed in medium close-ups. They take place within professional settings, invoking the medical authority as a positive through the markers of the office spaces and the white physician's coat – as we will see, this would not always be the case. The interviews follow a similar structure where they explain the current abortion law and abortion procedure, before giving their reasons for supporting self-determined abortion. They point to how the then-current law left room for different interpretations and thus inequality before the law, the low medical risk for modern abortion procedures, and, crucially for the film's argumentation, to women's knowledge and ability to assess their own situation. In the words of Melbye in the opening interview: "It is a difficult – to say the least – problem the woman in question faces and I cannot see any other option than that it is a problem only the woman herself is able to solve. She is the only one who knows all the factors that need to be considered."

In contrast, the anti-abortion activists are seated in a private living room with the table set for teatime. They are dressed in their Sunday best, the Norwegian national costume.⁶⁸ While this is probably intended to give an air of respectability and tradition, it contributes to further removing them from the professionalism of the other interviewees, and from the everyday scenes of the narrative segments. The primary difference, however, is in the cinematography and editing. In place of the steady camera capturing the physicians as talking heads, the camera scrutinizes the

⁶⁸ Interestingly, the use of the national costume in debates concerning the rights of mother and child resurfaced in 2019 as the so-called "bunadsgerilja" ("The gerilja wearing *bunad*"), a protest movement that began in Kristiansund but soon gained national traction and media attention for their work against the centralization of hospitals and the shutting down of maternity wards in the districts (e.g. Korsnes 2019).

faces of the older women. Tight close-ups make their features appear uncanny, the black and white exposure draining them of color and tones. Through these monstrous close-ups, the film constructs the anti-abortion activists as cinematic villains and leaves little question about the film's own stance towards the views they profess. Indeed, when the women animatedly describe women seeking abortions as penitent criminals while the camera's skewed perspective brings out gums and bulging eyeballs, they appear inhuman and cruel.

Abortion further works to discredit the anti-abortion activists' statements through editing that stages them as ignorant to the reality of women seeking abortion. One scene in particular places the two women as out of touch with social and historical reality. In between the interviews, the film cuts to an intermission showing the two women walking through the apple yard outside the house. Over these images, we hear birds chirping, but the sound editing is too loud as to give a sense of verisimilitude and atmosphere. Rather, this creates another effect of de-familiarization. As the film cuts back and forth between these women's stroll, their condemning language, and the young girl Kirsten pacing around Oslo, it develops a sense of distance – of how far removed these women are from the social reality of the women they judge.

By cutting across and between different discourses, the film creates a complex structure that set at stake a question of understanding social reality. This thematic thread of not being able to understand is further introduced through the voice-over of Kirsten's mother, played by Løkkeberg's mother, in what appears to be an internal monologue about her daughter's situation. "They don't understand", she says in response to the suggestion that she and her daughter are indeed fit to take care of a child. The narrative segments have shown what she already knows: They cannot possibly take care of a child – the girl, Kirsten, eating potato chips and hanging around with her friends, is merely a child herself. Here the mother explicates the core argument of the film: That only the women themselves might understand and possess the knowledge needed to make the decision.

8.3.2. *Abortion* in the NRK

Abortion was aired in January 1972 by the NRK. However, to comply with the claim to objective programming, the NRK cut the last three minutes of the film. In the copy available from the National Library, which is also the one analyzed in this dissertation, this ending is missing.

The fact that the NRK had censored the film featured prominently in two issues of the film journal *Fant*, where the editors, headed by Sylvi Kalmar, were sympathetic to Løkkeberg from an anti-censorship viewpoint and relayed the censored ending as well as an interview with Løkkeberg about the issue of objectivity and political film (Fant 1972; Kalmar 1972). The censored ending, as described in *Fant*, consisted of a montage showing images of the anti-EEC demonstrations in Oslo and the painting *Madonna and Child* by Renaissance painter Rafael set to Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler's song "Abortion is illegal" which was translated into Norwegian and sung by Løkkeberg herself (Kalmar 1972, 68)⁶⁹. The lyrics to the song featured in the journal, and were later included in the publication *Kvinneviser*, published in the Women's Year in 1975 (Servoll 2020, 179). The exact effect of this segment is difficult to ascertain without having seen it, but based on this description it is possible to imagine the last segment pulling a thread between the patriarchal myths of women upheld through the image of the Virgin Mother and women's position in the labor movement, with the ECC-protest as an expression of an anti-capitalist struggle. The segment was deemed too explicitly political, revealing too much of Løkkeberg's own views to be fit for public broadcasting.⁷⁰

Surely, then, there were limits to what could be expressed on the public broadcaster. In this way *Abortion* is an example of the struggle over objectivity and political expression found within the NRK (Iversen 2001). In the 1960s, there had been internal debates about the degree of personal views allowed in the public broadcaster ushered forth by what is known as

⁶⁹ Løkkeberg's translation of "Abortion is illegal" was later included in the publication *Kvinneviser*, published in the Women's Year in 1975 (Servoll 2020, 179).

⁷⁰ Even with the last segment removed, *Abortion* spurred some discussion in the Norwegian press, with Løkkeberg receiving criticism for the difference in the film's presentation of the two positions on the issue of abortion – the contention focused on the interviews with the anti-abortion activists. That it was Løkkeberg, formerly known as an actor and model, who had made the film was not inconsequential either. An open letter to Løkkeberg published in *Fant* (Formo 1972) can be seen as one example among many of an inability to separate Løkkeberg's person and appearances from her filmmaking (Servoll 2014).

“objektivitetsopprøret” (“the objectivity uproar”) in 1969 as journalists, riding on the waves of the Student Uprising, increasingly expressed subjective views in their work (Iversen 2001a, 33). Despite the uproar, the management of the NRK retained objectivity as the ideal. This meant that even though there were high ceilings for issues and topics that were relevant and controversial, and an agreement that a diversity of perspectives should be included by the NRK, the employees of the NRK were bound to “present the most diverse, objective information, and moreover secure the right of all opinions” (Director General Elster quoted in Iversen 2001a, 33).

The interesting question here is not whether *Abortion* was objective or not. As a feminist film actively used in the mobilization for self-determined abortion, *Abortion* was arguably a committed film, rather than a film with pretenses towards neutrality. However, the decision to cut the last segment might point to the importance of *form* in determining the question of a film’s status as *political*. As film historian Gunnar Iversen notes, the formally experimental film was usually not shown by the NRK, nor was the politically agitating documentary (2001a, 110). In these same years, for instance, the feature documentary *Kampen om Mardøla / The Fight for Mardøla* (Einarson, 1972), an activist film supporting the fight against river system development in Mardøla, was denied airtime on the state channel (2001b, 181). The film uses a contrast montage in the tradition of Soviet montage cinema to make its case, for instance juxtapositioning images from the U.S. invasion of Vietnam with the local community in Norway, and it seems reasonable to suggest that it was this aggressive editing, rather than the support of the protest movement in and of itself, that made the film too radical for the NRK. Indeed, agitating montage was something that belonged outside the state channel.

A similar point might be at work in the censorship of *Abortion*. That Løkkeberg took part in a controversial debate that she had publicly taken a stand on was, perhaps, less problematic, as long as the film did not formally engage too explicit montage editing. This might help, furthermore, to explain the lack of such cinematic techniques in most of the feminist documentaries made in Norway in this period. Indeed, during the 1970s, there are very few feminist films that adopt a montage or agitative style. Reverting to more conventional editing techniques might have been a way to navigate the NRK and thus be able to express and disseminate feminist politics through the public broadcaster. While the NRK was generally less interested in artistic and experimental short films, or in explicitly political documentaries

(Iversen 2001a, 110), the feminist documentary work that, to a certain degree, conformed to an “enlightenment ethos” could be deemed appropriate.

A somewhat more conventional form is already signaled in Løkkeberg’s second documentary film, *En far skal barnet ha / The Child Needs a Father* (1973). This film was produced through the NRK’s Department of Public Information and aired on television in August 1973 as part of the current affairs program “Vindu mot vår tid” (Window to our times). *The Child Needs a Father* is explicitly political and works to expose the double standard of sexuality by taking as its subject matter the statutory assessment of paternity, under the law of 1956, of children born outside of marriage. Together, the two films *Abortion* and *The Child Needs a Father* create a diptych on women’s reproductive rights, and the issue of abortion looms in the background. Without access to self-determined abortion, the film positions paternity cases as another instance of the legal and moral control of women’s sexuality and reproduction. As with her previous film, Løkkeberg developed the project based on a news story. This time, it was about a young unmarried mother who had been sentenced to prison for giving a false statement to the police concerning the identity of the father of her child (Servoll 2020, 147-148). For children born outside of marriage, the determination of paternity was a matter of public concern. If the identity of the father remained uncertain, paternity would be determined by the civil court to ensure the child full familial rights to the surname, child support and inheritance from the putative father (Rødsten 1997). The mother of the child was requested to name the likely father, as well as any other men she had engaged in intercourse with, and faced potential legal consequences for failing to do so.

The film takes the side of a mother and the humiliation she had to endure during a courtroom session. Like *Abortion*, *The Child Needs a Father* is a hybrid documentary that relies on narrative segments to express and give form to women’s experiences of the shame and paternalistic treatment that shadows their lack of reproductive control. The film operates by placing different cinematic discourses together, yet in this film these are more clearly demarcated and correspond to two distinct parts of the film, creating a less complex expression than found in *Abortion*. The first part is a narrative sequence about a young teenage girl’s meeting with sexuality as shameful, while the second part of the film is a reenactment of a civil court where a paternity case is in session. The film begins and ends in the same way, with a scene showing the

young mother walking to and from the courthouse, a mobile camera trailing her movement while the voice-over of the male judge reads aloud the court documents. In a dry voice he repeats on both accounts that the court finds it difficult to believe her due to her sexual history. Here, the use of segmentation and repetition creates a cumulative argument: That women do not own their sexuality.

The one voice that is not heard in either *Abortion* or *The Child Needs a Father* is that of the pregnant woman herself. This silence would be lifted as the fight for self-determined abortion gained momentum, and more women dared share their stories in public. Ellen Aanesen's two films about the Norwegian abortion legislation from 1978 both rely on the women themselves talking and sharing their experiences with the camera, and furthermore serve to exemplify a certain enlightenment ethos adopted by feminist documentary filmmaking in the NRK.

8.4. Ellen Aanesen: Feminist television documentarian

Ellen Aanesen (b. 1945) belongs to the same generation as Laila Mikkelsen, Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg, and shares with them several comparable developments in her career trajectory as a film director: Starting her training in the mid-1960s with the impact of the growing cultural validation of the cinematic medium and making her first short film at the cusp of the 1970s. Like Løkkeberg, Aanesen was a film feminist. Spanning the years of her career, Aanesen developed a socially engaged and feminist film practice aimed at giving a voice to those who often go unheard or have been silenced by the majority. Her career path, however, brings to light a different part of Norwegian production culture, as she was both trained and permanently employed by the NRK, working not in the freelance film sector towards feature film, but as a journalist and documentary filmmaker.

In 1964, Aanesen was accepted into the NRK's newly established film education program, the Film Course, as part of the very first graduating class. This was a two-year vocational film program that offered primarily education in cinematography and editing, and at the time it was the only film education available in Norway (Diesen 1996, 170). During the 1970s, additional film education would be offered at the program for journalism and media studies at the University College in Volda, but for the most part of the 1960s and 1970s the NRK was the only formalized institution for technical training. The television department of the NRK established

the course to meet their need for skilled film workers. In the beginning, the film course was offered to two recruitment groups: One smaller, internally recruited group who typically had experience from television as assistants, and one larger group recruited from outside of the NRK (Diesen 1996, 170). Aanesen, who herself came straight from high school, belonged to the second group. She was one of fourteen students, and apart from her, there were two other women in her group: Ellen Marie Nålsund in cinematography and Lillian Fjellvær⁷¹ in editing (Arbeiderbladet 1964, 25). The course ran for two years, with an additional two-year mandatory contract with the NRK. It consisted of a combination of practical training, which included making three short films, as well as studies in film analysis and film history. Aanesen has particularly credited film director Arnljot Berg's film history lectures as important for her in showing the aesthetic possibilities of documentary film (Diesen 1996, 172). Berg, a film director and a cinephile, showed his students key works from documentary film history, from the Soviet montage cinema and the British Documentary movement to the contemporary French *cinéma vérité* of for instance Jean Rouch.

After graduating from the film course in 1966, Aanesen started work as a cinematographer in the technical department, making her the first woman to hold this position in the NRK. It is likely that Rigmor Hansson Rodin, the Head of the NRK's Department of Film, played a key role in her employment (Diesen 1996, 72).⁷² Aanesen describes Rodin as a women's rights activist and a person of high esteem in the NRK, and while Aanesen never spoke to her about it directly, she credits Rodin's support of her wish to work behind the camera as an important precondition (Interview with Aanesen 2021). Indeed, it was not a given that Aanesen would be able to pursue a profession as a cameraperson after graduation. While Aanesen relates encouragement and valuable mentorship from the older male cinematographers, cinematography was a heavily male dominated profession with strong gender biases that affected women's opportunities to pursue that line of work. As a tendency, most of the women who graduated from the film course in the 1960s would continue to work in the NRK as editors, regardless of their specialization. The

⁷¹ Fjellvær would become a strong feminist presence in the NRK (Servoll 2020, 206). She edited among other both *Abortion* (Løkkeberg, 1972) and *The Revelation* (Løkkeberg 1977). She was one of the initiators of the Women's Front in NRK, and later part of the network The Women's Film Forum in the 1980s.

⁷² Rodin was a powerful figure in the NRK. She had long experience from the film sector as production manager, and she was a board member of the freelance film workers union, Norske Filmforbund, and was part of the action group "the 44" that originally pressured Norsk Film AS into re-organization in the mid-1960s (Thoresen 1996). In 1959, Rodin was hired as head of the Department of Film in the NRK's Television.

gender imbalance was addressed in an interview with Aanesen, Eva Ch. Nilsen and Liv Benkow in the special Women and Film issue in the trade journal *Film og Kino* from 1975 (Østlyngen 1975). Nilsen and Benkow had graduated from the cinematography class the year after Aanesen and had worked as cinematographers for the NRK, yet at the time of the interview none of them held this position. According to the interview, eight women had graduated from the NRK Film Course. Of them, four worked at the NRK and only one worked as a cinematographer, but then in combination with editing (Østlyngen 1975, 51). The three women point to similar reasons. On the one hand, difficulties finding a work/life balance with the odd working hours and travelling involved in the position, and on the other an experience of often being overlooked when competing with male peers for various jobs and thus not being offered opportunities to develop their profession and skill set in the same way men were. A recurring theme is their experience of having their physical capability questioned, a concern plainly underscored in a second part of the interview where one of the technical department heads commented on the lack of women cinematographers:

The profession [of cinematography] has always been a traditionally male profession, and even though the ladies of course can perform adequate work, they might have certain handicaps. I am thinking especially of strenuous jobs that entail risk. Here, women cinematographers might fall short (Østlyngen 1975, 51).

According to this department head, women were too weak, or potentially too weak, to handle the equipment and the physical aspects of the camera work. This concern would have impact on what work female and male cinematographers were offered, and points to patterns of discrimination found in other film and media contexts as well (..). In Norway, the stereotype was pervasive, suggested by Aanesen: “[It was] especially tiresome hearing the same dumb jokes about heavy equipment every day. After three years I just couldn’t laugh it off anymore” (Østlyngen 1975, 50).

After a few years as a cameraperson, Aanesen moved from cinematography to work as a so-called “program secretary”, a producing journalist in the NRK. This entailed a professional transition from the technical department to one of the content departments of the NRK. At the time, this transition was not that common as the dividing lines between these two sections were

rather airtight. In Aanesen's case, she managed the switch by leaving her permanent position at the technical department in favor of short-term contracts at the Department of Sport and Reportage before she eventually was hired as a producing journalist in the Department of Public Information. In the 1960s and 1970s, this position held much room for independent work and creativity. As a program secretary, one could pitch ideas for single programs or program series to the head of the department. If the idea was accepted, the program secretary was mostly free to develop the program as they saw fit. This relative freedom enabled much of the feminist work stemming from the NRK, contingent both on the commitment of the journalists and a management sympathetic to and interested in the new women's movement. This was the case for Aanesen, who developed her career as a documentary filmmaker in the Department of Public Information under the leadership of Oddvar Foss.

Aanesen made her first short film, however, through the Department of Film. Once again, Hansson Rodin seems to have played a key role. Together with Pål Bang Hansen, who had directed feature and short film in the early 1960s and was the host of the film news program *Filmmagasinet* ("The Film Magazine"), Hansson Rodin was interested in supporting new talent and had the power to fund programs and films through the department (Diesen 1996, 72). In this way, the talent development program of the production company Norsk Film AS, discussed in previous chapters, had a kindred version in the NRK. The similarities register in aesthetics as well, as Aanesen's first film, *Lekeplasser / Children's Playgrounds* (1969) was, like Laila Mikkelsen and Anja Breien's early films, inspired by continental documentary filmmaking and emanated from a political engagement, and was furthermore recognized with a special award by The Nordic Short Film Forum for its use of image and sound (Diesen 1996, 73; Asker og Bærums Budstikke 1969, 16). Aanesen made the film in extension of a group advocating for the need for children's explorative freedom and for a different conception of children's playgrounds. The film challenged the static style of the television reportage through a hand-held camera, operated by Aanesen herself, and it did not include a commentary track. This was uncommon at a time when most television programs, following the tradition of radio documentary, relied heavily on voice-over commentary.

In the 1970s, Aanesen's convictions, along with her production for the NRK, became increasingly political. In 1972, she became an active member of the Women's Front and served

for some time on the organization's national board. In 1973, she contributed to the initiative to register gender imbalance within the public broadcaster through the survey "Who's talking in the NRK?", and was part of the Women's Front network in the public broadcaster and a contributor to the bulletin *Women and Claws*. She stands out, then, from the feature film directors in her political affiliation with the organized new women's movement. Her social engagement registers in her work as well. Notable examples from the 1970s include a series about the housing situation in Norway made in collaboration with Eva Brustad and Bjørn Nilsen (1972), a program series about the discovery of oil in the North Sea (1971), a program about worker's rights in three Norwegian industries (1979), and, not the least, the two documentaries on the Norwegian abortion legislation (1978).

In 1978, Aanesen completed two hour-long programs on the Norwegian abortion legislation. Both programs were aired by the NRK the same year. The first one was aired in February and the second one in October, six months after Parliament voted – with only a single-vote majority – in favor of self-determined abortion. A third program about abortion legislation was sent by the NRK in November. This was an imported West German production that looked at abortion legislation in West Germany, Ireland, France, and the Netherlands. The two programs directed by Aanesen were created as companion pieces meant to offer new information in the debate about abortion by having women who had sought abortion share their experiences. The first film, *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee*, aimed to allow "women themselves to talk about their situation, instead of having other people debate the situation of women seeking abortion" (e.g. *Østlands-posten* 1978, 2), while the second, *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion*, would give a historical account of women's situation under the different abortion legislations. Based on the two films, the left-wing publishing house Oktober contacted Aanesen and asked her to write a book about the historical battle for abortion. It is this book, *Ikke send meg til en kone, doktor!* (1981), re-published in 2012 by the publishing house Rødt!, rather than the earlier television films, that stands as Aanesen's key contribution in making public the history of the struggle for self-determined abortion. The two films, however, deserve new consideration. Few films adhere so clearly to the project of giving a voice to the voiceless. Highly argumentative, they are made to educate the public and convince the viewers of the need for self-determined abortion through the testimonies of women.

8.4.1. Film analysis: *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee*

Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee consists of a series of interviews with women talking about their experiences with applying for an abortion and going before the abortion committee. It also features interviews with physicians and social workers, and uses voice-over and some observational footage as illustrative material, but the emotional and argumentative power of the film lies with the interviewed women themselves. Indeed, in this film, the women articulate and share their experiences, making visible the humiliating treatment many women were subjected to as part of the process of applying for an abortion. The law is here portrayed as creating an unnecessary and humiliating experience for the women forced to go through it, with ample room for different interpretations of the letter of the law leading to unequal treatment.

The interviews are structured in a chronological manner. Through an organizing logic that follows the chronology of the events, the film cuts between the women as they talk about their encounters with the abortion committee. Guided by questions posed by the filmmaker, who remains off-screen throughout the film, the women talk about and reflect on their expectations before coming to the abortion committee, their experience before and during the committee hearing itself, their feelings about the way their case was handled, and their experience of the hospital and the abortion procedure. The women in *Women's Encounters* are the mirror opposite of the women in Løkkeberg's *Abortion*. We do not get any background information about them, but only have the weight of their testimonies. The women are framed in static medium close-ups with beautifully patterned cloths or textiles hanging behind them that seem to reflect the colors of their clothes and features. In this subtle way, each interview setting becomes visually striking and unique, and gives a sense of heightening the individuality of each woman. Their stories, however, are linked and reveal patterns of humiliation in their encounters with the abortion committees.

Through the culminative force of their testimonies, the women reveal the dysfunction of the current abortion legislation. In this way, the film moves closer to the narrative structure that characterizes so many of the films of the feminist documentary movement, especially in the U.S.A. In her analysis of the political aesthetics of feminist documentary, Julia Lesage observes the similarity between these films: "Film after film shows a woman telling her story to the

camera,” usually “a woman struggling to deal with the public world” (1978/1990, 229). Although the feminist documentary films show different social classes and address different issues, there is a striking recurrence across feminist documentaries of the 1970s of women talking about their lives, sharing their history and their experiences. Lesage sees this “deep narrative structure” as the artistic analogue of the consciousness-raising group (1978/1990, 229). It is also then, an analogue to the scene of female solidarity recurring in the Norwegian feminist fiction films.

Indeed, *Women’s Encounters with the Abortion Committee* functions in a similar way. On screen, the women gain the voice that they are systematically denied in the question of abortion. The women are given space and time to tell their stories, and the film’s argument rests on the women’s accounts as offering proof and revealing the true face of the system. In this way, the talking heads interviews “serves the function of rephrasing, criticizing, or articulating for the first time the rules of the game as they have been and as they should be for women” (Lesage 1978/1990, 234). More than mere witnesses able to tell us how the law works in practice, the women are given an authorial voice, claiming legitimacy and a position of subjecthood.

The accounts are given strength by a structuring principle that always grants the women the final word. In between the interviews, two voice-overs introduce and explain the law: A male voice⁷³ reads aloud sections of the abortion law of 1975 and the guidelines for the abortion committees, while a female voice, belonging to the filmmaker, contextualizes the law, probes at it, and provides additional information. The voice-overs are set to black screen – probably a placeholder for visual material now lost. At other points in the film, the voice-over is accompanied by a freeze frame of one of the women. Together, the voice-overs and the interviews take the form of a debate between the impersonal voice of the law, the guiding voice of the filmmaker, and the testimonies from the women. For instance, the male voice-over reads with a formal air: “It is crucial that the committee ensures that the woman is given support, advice and counseling if she wishes.” The filmmaker then asks one of the women off-screen: “Did you get any advice from the committee that was of importance to you?”, to which the woman replies that she only got one piece of advice, and that was to move in with her in-laws, as their apartment was a bit larger than

⁷³ The version of the film I have been able to see does not have any opening or closing credits, and the name of the actor or the other filmworkers involved in the film is as of yet unknown.

her parent's home –advice she did not deem helpful at all. She continues: “Other than that I only felt trampled on and humiliated. It was certainly not a place to get advice and counseling”. The film cuts to other women who answer the question in a similar vein, one of them revealing that the committee did not talk to her at all, another telling us that she was advised to go back to her husband and consider herself lucky that someone wanted her. The intercutting, crucially placing the women's testimonies as *responses* to the letter of the law, is used to reveal gaps and collisions between the intentions of the law and its actual implementation.

This structure is used later on in the film as it broadens the initial scope and more interview subjects are brought into the discourse. The film moves to focus on the right for health workers to recuse themselves from participating in abortion procedures, which had the consequence of making nine hospitals around the country inaccessible for women seeking abortion. Using the island of Stord on the western coast of Norway as a case, the filmmaker interviews the head of the medical hospital, social workers, and a woman who had to travel to the mainland to have an abortion. Her identity is kept anonymous, and the film uses footage from bus and ferry travel as she recounts her own harrowing experience as she had to travel with a high fever and small children, one still breast feeding, to another municipality in order to have her abortion application processed. Her account undercuts the preceding statement from the medical doctor that many women prefer to go to another hospital for the procedure. Confronted with this statement by the filmmaker, she shrugs: “I can't understand how having to go away could be an advantage to anyone”.

Similarly, the filmmaker interviews three physicians who served in abortion committees about their views on the differing treatment women were given by different committees, reflected in the significant statistical variations between them. Two of them are male physicians who clearly express their wishes for restrictive legislation on abortion. The third is the physician Ragnhild Halvorsen (previously Engeseth), who had been part of the work for self-determined abortion from the very beginning as part of the New Feminists and the Labor Party's information campaign on self-determined abortion (Aanesen 2018, 52). The three interviews are intercut so that the feminist doctor is given the final say and her medical opinions and experience from serving on the committees acts as responses to and corrections of the statements made by her colleagues.

Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committees gives several reasons for self-determined abortion as the solution. Inequality before the law and the humbling position women are placed in are made out as the common themes. The main contribution of the film is the way it forms part of entering new subjectivities into public discourse. Building on Alexandra Juhasz, the power of a film like *Women's Encounters* rests in "documenting the reality of a collective, gendered oppression" (1994, 182). Through the interviews, the film continues the work of the new women's movement to have the invisible, unarticulated stories of women's private experiences of oppression become part of public life.

This is developed in Aanesen's second abortion film, which aims to ensure the struggle for self-determined abortion a place in history.

8.4.2. Film analysis: *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion*

The second of Aanesen's abortion films, *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion*, was aired on public television on October 23rd, 1978, some months after the Parliament voted, with the smallest possible majority, in favor of the law for self-determined abortion. As the title tells us, the film chronicles the long struggle for and public debate about women's right to abortion and contraception. The film employs voice-over, interviews, performative scenes, as well as a wide range of archival and visual material to communicate the historical narrative of the struggle for self-determined abortion, as the film creates a cohesive narrative, while continuing to privilege women's articulation of their recollections, stories and experiences. It begins with paragraph 245 of the criminal code in 1902, moving to the first public debates about de-criminalization of abortion in 1913, the same year that women earned the right to vote, thereby tracing the 65 year-long struggle up until 1978 and the historical vote to pass the law for self-determined abortion.

From the very beginning, the film positions the history of reproductive control and the fight for safe, self-determined abortion as a history of women's suffering and women's bravery. The film intercuts black and white photographs of working-class women in the early 1900s and coal drawings depicting mother and child, while the voice-over, filled with pathos, narrates a history of women dying from injuries after visiting quack doctors and of having to take on the burden of rearing too many children, "breastfeeding until the body was drained of all energy". Aanesen's

voice-over, which runs throughout the film, tells us: “This part of women’s history is well hidden. Everybody knows about it, but many pretend it does not exist”. With this film, we understand, history will be re-traced and made visible. The film achieves this by telling two histories: one public history of legislation, committee-work and debate, and one personal history of recollection and experience. The histories are mutually reinforcing, but they rest on different forms of enunciation.

The public history of abortion legislation is told by the filmmaker’s voice-over and is found in documents and newspapers. It begins with the pioneering feminist activist Katti Anker Møller who was the first one to demand, to great public outcry, the de-criminalization of abortion, as well as sexual education and contraception for the working-class. In the words of the voice-over: “the first woman who dared to say publicly what thousands of women were thinking: that giving birth had to be voluntary.” From Anker Møller’s first attempt, the filmmaker’s voice-over gives a detailed account of the development of the public debates about abortion up until the late 1970s. She explains legislative changes, provides historical context, and introduces key publications and events, as well as individual contributions. Occasionally a male voice-over is introduced to read official legislation, yet in contrast to the debate format established in *Women’s Encounters with the Abortion Committee*, this is not developed into a structuring logic. Rather, the voice-over of the filmmaker, functioning as a voice-of-authority (Nichols 1991, 37), provides a cohesive, informative whole. The historical narrative is illustrated and made probable through a range of visual material, primarily newspaper clippings, but also photographs and footage from news reportage. The visual materials support the spoken words, for example by showing the newspaper article that the voice-over references. Other material works as visual aids to what is being explained; clearly speaking from the present moment by for instance listing up in bullet points the content of proposed and implemented abortion laws.

This history of public legislation is given a counterpart in oral history of direct interviews with several women belonging to different generations and social classes who share their memories and recollections connected to the issue of abortion. These interviews intersect with the public narrative told by the filmmaker’s voice-over, but in contrast to the spoken words of the voice-over and the evidence of the images – which rest on the notion that the truth of history can somehow be found in the archives – the oral histories rest on the notion of the verisimilitude and

truth of the recollections in and of themselves. Here, the film clearly interacts with Aanesen's previous film, *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee* (1978), and once again introduces the narrative structure of women speaking and naming their experiences.

The women become witnesses to the historical events, their testimonies implicitly answering the gaps of the official stories. Without the right to legal abortion, what did women do? The film answers this question through the women's stories about solidarity among women at the coffee houses, where they could get advice from each other about contraception and abortion. They talk about Mødrehygienekontoret (the Maternal Hygiene Office) – the first free public health clinic in Norway. Katti Anker Møller and women of the labor movement opened this clinic in the 1920s in order to inform, educate and offer contraception to married women. In the interviews, women who worked there describe the office spaces, their daily activity and the moral outrage that the establishment fostered. One of them, when asked by the filmmaker about what they did when pregnant women came to ask for advice and help with abortion, falls silent at the thought of all the women they were unable to help, and who they knew would probably seek out quack doctors. The women share stories of family and friends who had to go through dangerous self-induced abortions, sometimes not surviving the intervention. Older and younger women talk about their own abortions. Some had to obtain illegal abortions from doctors willing to help – often demanding payment equaling a month's wages – while another, a wealthy woman, had the proper connections and could afford a legal abortion, but still had to be declared mentally unfit by the abortion committee even though they knew she had five children at home. They talk about the loneliness, the secrecy and the humiliating and painful experiences of abortions, their voices shake with anger at the thought of how they were treated.

From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion is a revisionist history. The film tells and records the story of women who fought for the right to abortion and of women who suffered under the absence of this right. In addition to the testimonies of the interviews, the film brings in reenactments and performances to embody the working-class voices of the past. The voice-over presents a booklet published by the Maternal Hygiene Office, who archived many of the desperate letters they received (Mødrehygienekontorets styre, 1931). This marks the beginning of three reenactments showing the writing of letters by lamplight. The content of the letters is read aloud in a voice-over, and the stories are haunting. One woman, played by Frøydis Armand,

reads aloud: “I am 38 years old, and this is the thirteenth time I am in this predicament”, while another, played by Katja Medbøe, explains that she has remained bedridden for over a week, and asks advice on how to stop the bleeding after attempting a self-induced abortion. Both actors were known from *Wives* (Anja Breien, 1975), and Medbøe worked on several productions in the NRK’s Television Theatre. Crucially, the film uses these performative segments not only to give form to the suffering of the working-class, but also as a celebration of their agency. Later in the film, Medbøe reappears in the role of a working-class woman speaking out against the church: Standing outdoors in the winter cold, Medbøe looks directly at the camera while she delivers in monologue a rousing call to arms for the right to free abortion. Addressing women of the working class, she says: “Do you really think it is out of compassion and love for us that they remain so afraid of allowing abortion? Oh no. It is a *cover* to keep women in the chains we have been carrying for centuries.” The performance, which following the logic of the film is strongly presumed to be based on written material, positions the fight for self-determined abortion as a fight for the liberation of women and of the working-class.

Thematically, the film sets at stake a narrative of women speaking up and gaining a voice – and a place – in history. Between the two histories of public discourse and private experience the film creates a collective narrative of increased acceptance for talking about abortion, and of solidarity among women. The new women’s movement is here introduced as a defining moment when women came together, spoke with each other and supported each other. The voice-over tells us: “A stream of experiences were brought into light. In this way, the limits for legal abortion were stretched far beyond the letters of the law.” The film ends with footage of the 8th of March protest parade in Oslo in 1978, where we see women and men walking under banners with slogans calling for further strengthening women’s right to abortion. To a live recording of the Swedish feminist song and anthem of the new women’s movement in Norway, *Vi är många* (1971)⁷⁴ “We are many”, the film returns to the black and white images of working-class women from the opening.

Through this circular motion, the film creates a generational narrative and envisions the issue of abortion as a unifying cause for women across class and social milieu. It downplays the

⁷⁴ The song came from the collectively made album *Sånger om kvinnor* (1971), compiled songs by women about women’s lives. Melody: Marie Selander, Lyrics: Wava Stürmer.

differences between women and between historical contexts in order to register and to celebrate a cumulative effort carried out by women in their fight for the right to legal, safe abortion. As a revisionist history, the film creates a unified image in order to inspire further action based on the collective articulation of oppression. The closing image depicts two elderly women walking arm in arm away from the camera. These were women who came of age in a time when abortion was illegal, whose possible experiences of abortion have been criminalized to silence. This, then, is the secret story of the foremothers who gained a voice, and who carved out the possibility for women to speak out.

8.4.3. Balancing acts in the NRK

As in-house productions from the public broadcaster, Aanesen's two abortion films were highly controversial, and the reactions to them were as polarized as the issue itself. Each program was met by a wave of open letters, op-eds and newspaper editorials split between two opposing views: Those in favor of self-determined abortion thanked Aanesen and the NRK for the films. Those in opposition voiced their protests, labeling the films as one-sided propaganda, and the NRK was put under pressure by the Peoples' Coalition Against Self-Determined Abortion and the organized Christian community to withdraw the programs from public broadcasting. After the first film was aired, Parliament representative Hans Olav Tungesvik of the Christian Democratic Party and a member of the Peoples' Coalition Against Self-Determined Abortion, was quoted in the media protesting against the program as a "untimely intervention in the Parliament's work with a new abortion legislation" (Rogalands Avis 1978, 6), demanding an apology from Director-General Elster. This was in and of itself a controversial statement, coming from an elected representative, and offset its own debate about freedom of speech (see e.g. Rogalands Avis 1978, 6; Bergens Tidende 1978a, 2). The film was referred to the Norwegian Broadcasting Council, a publicly appointed governance body that addressed audience complaints and ensured that the NRK complied with broadcasting legislation. The media reported that a divided council ruled that the programs were within reason, stating especially the role of the NRK as a voice for the less fortunate as an important precondition (Bergens Tidende 1978b, 19).

The second film about the history of the struggle for self-determined abortion was no less contested. Once again, the Peoples' Coalition Against Self-Determined Abortion and Hans Olav

Tungsvik played key roles. Tungsvik was set to appear in that film to speak about the views of the People's Coalition, but after seeing the film at the pre-screening he wanted his interview removed. In a rare move, the NRK complied. Aanesen later recalls that she was prepared for this response and had placed the interviews so that they easily could be cut away (Interview with Aanesen 2021). Maintaining that the NRK had grossly overstepped its mandate, Tungsvik and the Coalition publicly called upon the NRK to cancel the scheduled re-run of the first film, make a new program that represented the opposing view, and moreover, that Aanesen should be "prohibited from developing similar programs in the future" (Rø quoted in open letter from Kringskastingsens Landsforening 1978, 4). In effect, they both criticized Aanesen's journalistic integrity, asking for her removal from controversial material, and asked for editorial control of a new program. Due to the complaints, this film was also discussed by the Broadcasting Council, where once more, a divided council found the film to be within the guidelines.

This was not the first time the public broadcaster received audience criticism for its political representation and for professing left wing biases. The NRK was under pressure to maintain balance and objectivity in order to avoid stricter outside regulation (Bastiansen and Syvertsen 1994, 139). Of interest to this dissertation, then, is the stance of the NRK itself. In both instances, the management of the NRK supported Aanesen. This became especially clear in the second round, as the complaints and responses were publicly addressed. In response to the demand from the People's Coalition, the NRK, through the Head of the Department of Information, rejected the notion that external interest groups should be allowed to dictate the NRK's programming, and that, moreover, seeing as how the abortion law had already been changed, another abortion program would not be of interest to the public (I.S. 1978, 55).

The management of the NRK supported their employee and her journalistic integrity, yet there appears to have been a fine line navigating the political landscape. Like Løkkeberg's film about the abortion legislation, Aanesen's film had already made internal rounds before it was aired on television. Aanesen's films were not as blatantly censored as *Abortion* (1972), yet she had to make compromises. According to Aanesen, she was forced to make changes in the commentary track regarding the 1974 parliamentary vote on self-determined abortion (Interview with Aanesen 2021). She had originally written a commentary that explained the defeat of the new women's movement by stating: "[...] The Socialist Party's representative Otto Hauglin did not

have the conscience to vote for self-determined abortion. Thus, The Socialist Party turned its back at its own election promise. One vote was missing.” This direct indictment of the Socialist Party was perceived as crossing the line. In any event, the matter went all the way to Director-General Elster, and Aanesen had to remove the middle sentence that explicitly accused the Socialist Party of breaking their promise to the voters (Interview with Aanesen 2021).

The small change suggests the balancing act required by filmmakers and journalists committed to political filmmaking within the public broadcaster, and what a political expression would mean within the NRK. Aanesen especially upholds one commentary decision as a bold political act. In the introductory sequence of *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion*, Aanesen relates in her voice-over: “For generations women have fought to decide how many children they want to give birth to, for the right to contraception and abortion, for the opportunity to give the children we bear forth a livable future.” In this sentence, Aanesen made the change from an original “they” to a final “we”. The change, while subtle and small, was a radical political statement in the context of the public broadcaster – a movement from talking about a group from a distance and relaying their plights, to claiming a place in that group and in that struggle, pointing to the political act of solidarity and commonality.

8.5. Concluding remarks: Feminist filmmaking in the NRK

The films *Abortion* (1972) by Vibeke Løkkeberg, and *Women’s Encounters with the Abortion Committee* (1978) and *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* (1978) by Ellen Aanesen, directly engage and criticize the laws that govern women’s bodies and women’s sexuality, and work to show the injustice and humiliation of women at the hands of these laws.

Together, the films exemplify the status and opportunities for feminist filmmaking in the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, the NRK. On the one hand, the NRK seems to have provided an important institutional structure for the dissemination of feminist thought. Several programs made within the NRK can be considered feminist documentaries, something which speaks to a general openness towards, and acceptance of, issues of women’s rights in public opinion. It seems to have been possible to express quite explicit views and offer social criticism within the NRK, as long as certain lines were not crossed. On the other hand, there were clear limitations on what could be expressed, and not the least *how* these views could be expressed. As

a public broadcaster in a monopoly situation, the NRK's claims to objectivity and neutrality also meant that political and feminist filmmaking were balancing acts that demanded a different level of accountability and precision than the films made under artistic expression in the freelance film sector. Here, we can find at least some explanation for the stylistic features of feminist documentaries in Norway, which often fall on the side of enlightenment ethos and public education, their arguments engaged through careful construction of segmentation, rather than for instance agitating montage cinema.

Both films clearly argue for women's right to self-determined abortion. They do so, however, through different strategies. *Abortion* combines narrative segments with expert interviews that discredit the opposing side, while making an epistemological argument for self-determined abortion. Those who speak on behalf of women, whether anti-abortion activists or legislative bodies, do not know their reality, and do not properly consider the social and life situation of the women they speak for. Only the women – or girls – themselves can know, and thus decide whether they can have a child. The two films by Aanesen, by contrast, develop their argument through the cumulative force of women speaking about their experiences. These testimonies are intercut with expert interviews, yet the argumentative and emotional force of the film resides in the women interviewees. These two films address more directly the theme of solidarity as they create commonalities among women's experiences that together point to the weaknesses of the abortion committees, as well as bring to light the work that women have done – the solidarity they have shared – to circumvent the laws in the past. *From Three Years to Self-Determined Abortion* especially works to present the self-determined abortion as a right for womankind. This creation of a collective “we” across historical and social dividing lines was also a core facet of several of the feminist documentary films made outside of the NRK.

CH 9. DOCUMENTING THE NEW WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: INDEPENDENT FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY

While women made explicitly feminist films from within the major production institutions Norsk Film AS and the NRK throughout much of the 1970s, a grassroots activism and documentary filmmaking practice associated with early feminist filmmaking in the 1970s was less pronounced in Norway. Towards the end of the decade, however, such productions started to appear.

Looking outside of the films produced by the NRK, I have been able to find four feminist documentary films, in addition to *Abortion* (Løkkeberg 1972), made during this period: *Bildene omkring oss / The Images Surrounding Us* (Laila Mikkelsen and Siri Bryhni, 1978), *Kvinnekamp og kvinneår / Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (Eva Mannseth, 1979), *Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake / It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (The Film Production Group, 1979), and *Krisesenteret i Oslo / The Women's Shelter in Oslo* (Inge-Lise Langfeldt, 1980).

These films place at their center the ways women are legally, socially, and economically subjugated in Norwegian society, and document the work done by women to counter this subjugation. With a clear feminist agenda, the films investigate topical issues of great concern to the new women's movement: media representation of women, the gender division of the workforce, the oppression of women in marriage, the need for and work of the women's shelters against domestic abuse and rape. They also showcase women in collective struggles against these very systems of oppression, as well as the breadth of women's art and political activism. Indeed, if feminist films of the 1970s worked to make women's stories visible, they also worked to document the new women's movement itself and the new arenas for women created by and in extension of the movement.

The four films I look at in this chapter bring to light these new arenas. The images from the 8th of March protest parade that are introduced at the end of *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* (Aanesen, 1978) are perhaps the most visually striking trope within this tendency. In the late 1970s, several films contain footage from these parades; the protesting women and the large red banners introduced as the central iconography of the struggle of the new women's movement.

9.1. The circulation of independent feminist documentary

The four films discussed in the chapter share the production context of independent production, which means that the filmmakers applied directly for funding and produced the film themselves. The institutional contexts for these films are not radically opposed to the films already discussed, but there are some important differences. As a tendency, they were made by first-time directors who often had experience from other filmmaking roles besides that of director, or had worked in television. The films were often still financed or supported by public money primarily through successful applications for funding to the Ministry of Church and Education, yet they were often made on a voluntary basis and with difficult production pathways. With these films, moreover, the larger film culture in Norway becomes more visible, as the films and filmmakers who made them were often associated with and dependent on the student societies, film societies and alternative exhibition venues for support and circulation.

While the short film, whether narrative fiction or documentary, had gained increased status as a form of expression in the 1970s, institutional frameworks for the distribution and exhibition of short films were lacking (Iversen 2001a, 96-97). By the mid-1960s, Norwegian documentary had almost vanished from cinemas. As with feature film production in general, the production of feature length documentaries, a significant and popular part of the Norwegian cinema selection⁷⁵, fell drastically from seventeen documentary films in the 1950s to a mere three in the 1960s. As film historian Jan Anders Diesen has argued, documentary filmmakers migrated into the NRK in this period, and would remain important influences as teachers and mentors for the next generation television journalists and documentarians (1996). In the 1970s, a new generation of filmmakers brought back feature length documentaries to the big screen. During this decade, filmmakers associated with the radical left made a string of short and feature documentary films in support of protest movements and political actions. By engaging issues like environmental conservation in *Kampen om Mardøla / The Fight for Mardøla* (Einarson 1972) and *Hvem eier Tyssedal?* (Wadman and Skagen, 1975), and worker's struggles in *Stå på! Keep It Up!* (Omdal,

⁷⁵ Popular genres included the expedition film, nature documentaries and ethnographical films, such as the documentarian Per Høst's *Gjensyn med Jungelfolket / Jungle Beyond* (1950), about the indigenous peoples chocho tribe on the border of Panama and Colombia, and his later *Same Jakki* (1957), and the expedition film *Kon-Tiki* (Thor Heyerdahl, 1950).

Nicolayssen, Knutzen and Skagen, 1976), the feature length documentary returned to movie theatres with a radical political vengeance (Sørenssen 2001).

The short film, however, did generally not find renewed representation in movie theatres, but were dependent on a more specialized context of exhibition and distribution (Iversen 2001a, 109). The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation was the most important exhibitor of short documentary in the 1970s. Outside of the NRK, documentaries and short films were exhibited through alternative contexts of circulation supported by film cultural infrastructures. From 1969, selected short films were made available for rent to film societies and other organizations through so-called short-film packages presented by the Norwegian Film Institute, including the films coming from the Study Department at Norsk Film AS, such as *Weekend* (Mikkelsen, 1974) and *Rain* (Løkkeberg, 1975). In 1980, a more comprehensive collection of Norwegian short films was made available through the Short Film Catalogue, distributed by Statens filmsentral, (the National Film Board of Norway) and Filmklubbforbundet (the Norwegian Federation of Film Societies). Most of the feminist independent short films, as well as the short films from Norsk Film AS, were distributed through these two organizations.

In addition to the National Film Board of Norway and the Norwegian Federation of Film Societies, Norsk Filmsenter (The Norwegian Film Center) was a crucial institution for independent short film in the 1970s. Film activists coming from the university and the film societies established Norsk Filmsenter in 1972, modeled on the Swedish FilmCentrum (Iversen 2001a, 109; Sørenssen 2001, 51). FilmCentrum was a distribution center for radical and independent filmmaking established in 1968 and later expanded with the exhibition outlet Folkets Bio (The People's Cinema). Like the Swedish model, Norsk Filmsenter had a clear left-wing political agenda. The goal was to foster an alternative distribution and production system in Norway for short and documentary film. Under the slogan "Film in the Service of the People", the center championed radical and political documentary film through production, distribution, and eventually, following the establishment of the film journal *Filmavisa* in 1977, through film criticism. Women cineastes, such as documentarian Kikki Engelbektson and film critic Wenche Blomberg, were central in the activity of Norsk Filmsenter. Feminist issues, however, was not a pronounced part of Norsk Filmsenter's political profile. Influenced by the dominant position of the Maoist party AKP (m-l) in cultural life, the radical independent documentary in Norway was

predominantly invested in class struggle and anti-capitalism, as well as in ecology and environmental conservation (Sørenssen 2001, 51). Moreover, by the 1980s, at the same time as the feminist film movement was becoming more pronounced in Norway, the activism of Norsk Filmsenter had dropped to a minimum (Sundholm et al. 2012, 157). Still, feminist and radical concerns intersected, and this network and community stands out as an important support structure for production and distribution of most of the films discussed in this chapter.

Through these distribution networks, short and documentary film found their way to alternative screening contexts such as the counter-cultural Club 7 concert venue in Oslo, the Hennie Onstad art exhibition center in Bærum, and eventually to the Norwegian film festival circuit. For the Norwegian short film, the establishment of the Norwegian Short Film Festival in 1978 was an important event (Iversen 2001a, 110). Held, for the very first time, in the picturesque town of Røros in the middle of Norway, the Short Film Festival provided the filmmaking community with a much-needed exhibition window for short filmmaking and a networking event for the film sector. For feminist documentary filmmaking, a crucial event took place the following year.

9.1.1. The Women's Film Week in 1979

In 1979, women from the Short Film Festival, together with film and art students, organized Norway's first international women's film festival. It was called "Kvinnefilmuka" (The Women's Film Week) and ran as part of the larger Kvinnekulturfestivalen ("The Women's Culture Festival"). This festival was a grand event of music, theatre, arts and craft, poetry, dance, and film held over a summer week in Oslo and ending with an outdoor rock concert on Kalvøya just outside the city, headlined by popular names such as the Danish band Savage Rose and the American folk-rock artist Julie Felix. The Culture Festival was inspired by women's festivals held in Sweden and Denmark, and would be the first of a series of women's culture festivals held in Norway (Haukaa 1982, 168; Müftüoğlu 2013, 169).

Women connected to the new women's movement, as well as women engaged in different parts of cultural life, formed work groups to organize and document the festival. There were at least twenty-six groups involved in the planning of the festival, each of which remained economically and organizationally independent (Müftüoğlu 2013, 171). According to Ingrid Müftüoğlu, the flat organizational structure had been negotiated by the New Feminist groups of the so-called

Women's House in Oslo at the initial festival meetings, and can be read as a way for the New Feminist-affiliated groups to safeguard against the Women's Front gaining too much influence over the festival, as their connections to the Maoist party AKP (m-l), in the view of the New Feminists, made them susceptible to a patriarchal view of culture (ibid.). This shows the inherently challenging agenda of the festival: The Women's Culture Festival was both meant to communicate the creativity, force, and actuality of the new women's movement, and to revitalize the political commitment to women's liberation, while at the same time attempting to unify the increasingly divided movement itself (2013, 163). Another challenge was the definition of women's culture itself. This definitional problem was also at stake in the programming of the film festival.

The Women's Film Week was a festival within the festival. It ran for a week from the 5th to the 11th of June at Carl Johan Teatret in the center of Oslo. Among the organizers were Torunn Nyen and Anne Haugsgjerd, both of whom later worked as film directors. Like several of the international women's film events organized during the 1970s, the festival can be understood as responding to a double aim of showing films by and about women, as well as creating an arena for women working in international cinema. The program for the film festival consisted of short and feature films from over ten countries, some of them organized into focus sections according to theme or country of production. There was a program of Norwegian women's films, British short films, a family-themed section which included Løkkeberg's short novella film *Rain* (1975), as well as a retrospective of West-German director Ula Stökl. Stökl attended the festival as a special guest. Other filmmaking women present included Mette Knudsen and Janne Giese from Denmark, as well as Christina Olofson from Sweden. In addition to the screenings, there were two organized film discussions with women film workers: One international night and one post-screening discussion following the Norwegian films that once more gathered the women directors working in Norway.

The festival received thorough coverage in an exposé penned by Eva Bellsund in *Sirene* (1979a). Here, she discussed some of the films screened during the festival and interviewed several of the international guests about the conditions for women's filmmaking in Denmark, Sweden and Germany respectively. Bellsund also spent time discussing the very definition of "women's films" at work in the film programming, and she was not uncritical of the broad and inclusive

definition seemingly at work at the Women's Film Week. Torunn Nyen, member of the screening group and later film director, commented on the programming in the interview for *Sirene*:

Almost everyone in the screening group had a different view of what a women's film is [...]. So it became an event of compromises. Everyone had their favorites, and we accepted them in a democratic manner. Not all of the films had a woman director, such as *Cassavetes'* 'Opening Night', or were about women's issues, like '[Tältet] Vem tillhör världen' by Christina *Olofson* and *Göran du Rées* [...] (Bellsund 1979a, 15; 28, italics in original).

The festival screened films about women as well as films made by women. This was, as noted earlier, a programming practice in line with common usage of women's films in Norway. Moreover, looking at other film festival practices abroad, an exclusive selection of films directed by women was not necessarily a rule. For instance, in a review of the international women's film festival in Copenhagen for the Danish feminist magazine *Kvinder*, film director Lisbeth Dehn Holgersen holds out as a high point the Hollywood star vehicles of Mae West (1977/2015, 342), pointing, at the very least, to a broader definition of "by women" than films with a woman director. These films, Dehn Holgersen writes, were "a merry dream" and even though West's on-screen persona did not give a solution ("in the same way that James Bond does not give a solution to men") they were a much-needed break that women, judging by the gloomy pictures of women's conditions presented by the other films in the program, could very well need (1977/2015, 342).

The definition, however, was only one of many challenges faced by the Screening Group. In Norsk Filmsenter's film journal *Filmavisa*, the Film Screening Group recounted the trouble they had with the Norwegian censorship body: The documentary *Self-Health* (1974), directed by Cathrine Allan, Judy Irola, Allie Light and Joan Musante with the San Francisco Women's Health Center, was banned from public exhibition altogether because it features shots of women conducting pelvic self-examination, while several of the films included in the children's program were given age restrictions from 16 years and up (Haugsgjerd, Langfeldt and Nyen 1979, 30).

There was then an additional, and clearly more institutional, aspect to the programing practices of women's films concerning both import and censorship laws.

For Norwegian feminist film culture, the Women's Film Week and the Women's Culture Festival stand out as influential events. The Norwegian program presented many of the films discussed in this dissertation, including the feature films *Wives* (Breien, 1975), *The Revelation* (Løkkeberg, 1977) and *The Guardians* (Macé, 1978), as well as a short film double bill with two documentaries: the 10-minute short experimental film *Bildene omkring oss / The Images Surrounding Us* (Mikkelsen and Bryhni, 1978) and the 60-minute documentary *Kvinnekamp og Kvinneåret 1975 / Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (Mannseth, 1978/1979). *The Images that Surround Us* is about the commercial representation of romance and beauty found in the weekly magazines, while *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* is most likely the first documentary film about the new women's movement made in Norway. In addition to the Film Screening Group who organized the women's film festival, no less than two film production groups followed the events of the culture festival through the boom and camera lens.

These documentary films are significant, as they point to a largely overlooked part of Norwegian film, namely that of documenting the new women's movement itself. In the following, I begin with the two documentary films screened by the festival, before I turn to the two film production groups set to document the festival as it unfolded.

9.2. The Women's Film Week's documentary double bill

In an invitation to the Women's Culture Festival published in the Women's Front's member magazine *Kvinnefront*, it is noted that the film screening group "will show films by women directors every day. The films will portray women's situation. They would like to get in contact with women who have made 8 or 16mm films, or who can acquire such films" (Kvinnefront 1979b, 31).

There are few known films produced in Norway that fit this description, and the two films *The Images Surrounding Us* (Mikkelsen and Bryhni, 1978) and *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (Mannseth, 1978/1979) are both rare examples of a quite exclusive body of feminist documentary work in Norway. There were, however, most likely many more amateur films that

documented the new women's movement in Norway. Indeed, the year before, in 1978, the first Short Film Festival included a program section labeled "Women's Films" that screened three films: first, what appears to be an earlier version of the documentary *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (Mannseth, 1979) about the new women's movement under the title "Who are these girls who walk in the 8th of March Parade?", second, a film made by female students at the Teacher's College called "Hva synes folk om 8 mars – hva er 8 mars?" / "What do people think about 8th of March – What is 8th of March?" about the new women's movement in Trondheim, and third, Laila Mikkelsen's short narrative film *Weekend* (1974).

The documentary "What do people think about 8th of March – What is 8th of March?" is an interesting case. I have not been able to find this film, but in a presentation of the program in a local newspaper in Røros, the film is referred to as "[a] group project made by some girls [sic] from the drama program at the Teachers' College. A documentary film that sheds light on the women's struggle in Trondheim in 1978" (Arbeidets rett 1978, 9). The film points to a larger context of production of potentially feminist films made by various women's groups or in educational settings. Another example of such a trace is a news story about an amateur women's film group in the Northern city Harstad. According to the news story, the group had just completed a film called "Kvinnfolk bak kamera" ("Women behind the camera") that among other aimed to show the women's "own development from being objects of the film medium to becoming active and creative practitioners behind the camera" (Nordlys 1979, 5). In the interview, the women stated that they had started the group with the goal of participating at the Women's Film Week, but they were too late to be included in the program (Nordlys 1979, 5).

The two documentaries that were finally screened at the Women's Film Week were made by women with ties to Norsk Filmsenter and to the established film sector. They are stylistically and thematically distinct. Still, the documentary double bill presents an interesting opportunity to see what they have in common. Between them, a new iconography of the new women's movement comes into view.

9.2.1 *The Images Surrounding Us* (Laila Mikkelsen and Anne Siri Bryhni, 1978)

The short montage film *The Images Surrounding Us* offers an upbeat and ironic look at the content of the weekly magazines. Laila Mikkelsen and Anne Siri Bryhni wrote and directed the

film with Mikkelsen acting as producer. Both of them were at the time involved in the feature film production of *Arven* (Anja Breien, 1979), and they were becoming quite established in the film sector. Mikkelsen had released her first feature film *Oss* in 1976, and had directed a total of eight short films. Anne Siri Bryhni, who worked as a costume designer and scenographer, had recently designed the costumes for the Swedish-Norwegian co-production *Games of Love and Loneliness* (1977) directed by Anja Breien, as well as the Swedish-West German production *Victoria* (Widerberg, 1979).⁷⁶ *The Images Surrounding Us* was her first and only directing credit. Bryhni and Mikkelsen made the film with funding from the Ministry of Church and Education. This was known as the “tombola”, which suggests the perceived arbitrariness of the funding schemes (Mikkelsen 1977, 5). Little information exists about the production of the film, but the people behind the film can be broadly placed within the extended social and professional community growing out from Vampyrfilm AS in the early 1970s. Per Blom, with whom both Bryhni and Mikkelsen had worked before, edited the film together with Bente Erichsen. She, on the other hand, ran the production company Marcusfilm together with former Vampire Lasse Glomm, her husband at the time, and was engaged in the movement Filmaksjonen-78, aimed at improving working conditions on Norwegian film productions, together with Mikkelsen (Myrstad 2020a, 191).

As a short experimental film, *The Images Surrounding Us* is somewhat unusual in my selection for its aggressive and rhythmic editing style. This is, most likely, an important reason for why it was not aired by the NRK (see chapter 8). Instead, the film enjoyed limited exhibition as a pre-runner at some municipal cinemas and was additionally distributed through film festivals and film societies. The film premiered at the Women’s Film Week in 1979 and was later screened at the Norwegian Film Festival in Haugesund and was part of several screenings in local film clubs.

⁷⁶ Bryhni (b.1942) came to film somewhat by accident when costume designer Ada Skolmen had to find a last-minute replacement on a job (Jakobsen 1977, 15). Bryhni stepped in, and from 1971 she began her career in film. There was no vocational training for costume design in Norway, and Bryhni was self-taught in sewing and dressmaking, and with a degree from the department of philosophy and history at the University of Oslo, she had extensive knowledge and interest in art and literary history (Parker b; Jakobsen 1977, 15). She also had experience as assistant director, production manager, and continuity supervisor. From the late 1970s, she would collaborate with Anja Breien on many of the films she directed, including *Witch Hunt* (1981) and the final *Wives* film, *Wives III* (1996).

9.2.2. Film analysis: “Is this the reality you know?”

The Images Surrounding Us offers an ironic look at the representation of romance, beauty, and the commercialization of the female body found between the covers of weekly magazines.

Interviews and observational shots of public spaces in Oslo and shots showing the production and distribution of the magazines are rapidly intercut with and commented on by close-ups of illustrations, commercial photographs, headlines and textual extracts taken from the magazine pages and made to pop out through sound editing, using extracts from hit songs by the Spanish Euro Disco group Baccara. From this montage, the film gives an ironic commentary on the weekly magazines and develops a critique against the commercial interests driving the content production.

The film sets at stake questions of representing reality, summed up in the closing montage. “A central charge against the weekly magazines is that they are value conservative, that they reinforce existing values in society” the spokesperson of the weekly magazine *Ukepressen* tells the camera. “This is in a way correct [...] the magazines mirror the society the reader lives in, the reality of daily life the reader lives in”. The voice-over of one of the filmmakers then replies: “Is this the reality you know?” as fast-paced cutting moves between several close-up images from the weekly magazines: dolls, the smile of then-Crown Princess Sonja, drawings that illustrate romantic short stories, and commercial photos where the female body and face feature prominently. The images are connected by the churning beat of the paper press and children’s voices singing a rhyme, before they are replaced by the sound of wolves howling. The machinery of the media as wolves, or perhaps the loneliness that these representations cannot fill? The film ends with images of a dark cityscape at nighttime and yellow text in a thin font presenting the scope of the weekly magazines in numbers: 2.4 million magazines sold each week to the value of 14.2 million NOK. The material dimension of this industry is shown earlier in the film in a shot from the production of the magazines, with a cover picture of a smiling young woman reproduced over and over, packed, and then thrown away in the mass of recycling.

Even before this closing montage, the film has answered its own rhetorical question. It starts with a series of blurry shots of mundane life, depicting people walking in the streets, suburban building blocks and a subway car approaching an outdoor station. These scenes of daily life are

intercut with short bursts of pop songs set to close-ups of romantic illustrations from the weekly magazines. The drawings of men and women are cut in eye-line matches as if establishing eye contact – and romantic contact – as close-ups of texts in bold states typical plot set-ups from the genre of romance novellas: “Together they found happiness in a few, golden summer weeks. But they knew it was not theirs to keep...” The film develops a theme of being whisked away into the romantic, exotic and larger-than-life stories of the weekly magazines, soon countered with headlines reading “Doping” and “Loneliness”, and by the sound of howling wolfs.

The Images Surrounding Us is clearly critical of these media images, engaging in a larger critique by the new women’s movement of the mass media and consumer culture (Lindtner 2013, 113). Several feminist films were part of this critique. This is perhaps most clearly articulated in *Wives* (Breien, 1975), where the three women walk around a couple of photographers’ studio, studying the walls plastered with advertising photos of half-nude women, the men’s use of the female body underscored even more so by the discovery of the inflatable sex doll. *The Images Surrounding Us* broadens this critique of the media’s disruptive role in perpetuating gender stereotypes to include the mythmaking of beauty, romance and happiness, and deconstructs the innocence of the images through collisions and juxtapositions in a tradition of reflexive documentary filmmaking and the principle of Soviet montage cinema in which a collision between two images create a third, new meaning (Nichols 1991, 60-61). For instance, one of the early shots shows the text, “Try something different... Something exciting!” before the film cuts to a photograph of a topless woman straddled on the back of a horse. Similar counter points are used to discredit the interviews with representatives from the magazines. While the film gives plenty of screen time to the two male representatives – one from the information office of the organization, and the other the head of the magazine *Hjemmet* – the film just as soon undercuts these voices. As in *Abortion* (Løkkeberg, 1972), it is primarily through editing that the opposing view is critiqued, but in this film, it is the direct relation between the spoken words and the still images that create the ironic effect. For example, one interviewee, moving into voice-over, states that the magazines aim to offer friendly advice to their readers, while the camera tracks page after page with advice (and advertisements) on how to get thinner thighs and put on make-up correctly.

The Images Surrounding Us works to reveal the speculative representation within the magazines. Yet, while it critically engages codes of representation, the film does not question representation and mediation as such. Instead, it offers a critical look at *false ways* of representing. The technique of montage draws attention to the power of editing in shaping and manipulating meaning, yet within this compilation not all images are presented as equally malleable. In one scene, two young women from the new women's movement are interviewed about their thoughts on the weekly magazines. The short scene is filmed on a town square just before an 8th of March demonstration, with women in the background holding banners filled with slogans. "Well, I think they're pretty shitty" the first woman replies, draped in a Palestine scarf and laughing a bit at her own answer. The filmmakers ask a second woman about the makers of the magazines, and she answers: "I think its people who speculate in the needs of others, who try to create ideals for people to live up to." The young women, cool, eloquent, summarize the argument of the film: that the weekly magazines have a negative effect and are driven by commercial ends.

In this way, *The Images Surrounding Us*, like so many of the other films previously discussed, gives women's articulations a privileged place within the film. These are direct interviews, presented with synchronization between sound and image, and with no additional sound editing. In this way, they are granted a pause from the otherwise quite rapid intercutting of sounds, music, and images in the film. This has the effect of placing them as distinct from the otherwise malleable units of the montage. By placing the women within an intact cinematic space, the women are presented as subjects who speak the truth, in contrast to the magazines and the industry representatives whose discourse is easily disrupted.

Significantly, the interviews with the women from the new women's movement introduce a female figure not found in the fiction films: the active member of the new women's movement. The use of the 8th of March parade in *The Images Surrounding Us* as the arena of the new women's movement represents a new development in the iconography adapted in Norwegian feminist films. The theme of solidarity is here moved from an interpersonal relation between characters or filmmaker and historical subject and placed on a collective level: an arena to lift up women's rights through common struggle. The 8th of March protest parade would not the least be central in the argument that the second of the double bill documentaries, Eva Mannseth's documentary film *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975*, seems to want to make.

9.2.3. Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975 (Eva Mannseth, 1979)

Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975 is about the new women's movement in Norway. Running for just over an hour and shot in black and white, *Women's Struggle* evokes mainly an expository documentary mode and a voice of authority (Nichols 1991, 34-37). With the air of a journalist and in a didactic manner, the filmmaker Eva Mannseth explains, presents statistics and offers research in her efforts to draw together a large array of archive footage and still images, interviews and observational footage taking us through several large themes connected to a presentation of the new women's movement and its political legitimacy.

Eva Mannseth (b.1936), a teacher, journalist, and out-spoken feminist, came into filmmaking through the NRK and was a central activist in both film and feminist culture. In the mid-1970s, she became a freelance journalist, writing extensively for the feminist magazine *Sirene*, as well as for the film journal *Film og Kino*, while also working in the NRK, producing several television programs and radio documentaries, including the radio series *Sommerportretter av kvinner i norsk film* in 1980, where Mannseth interviewed Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Laila Mikkelsen. She was involved in the work for better film education in Norway as part of the Society for Film Education together with among others Laila Mikkelsen; a board member and advocate of Norsk Filmsenter; active in the Student Film Society, and also served as a representative of Statens Filmkontroll, the Norwegian government film censorship body. In 1979, Mannseth ran the information campaign "Municipal government, joint responsibility for woman and man" before the local elections. The goal of the campaign was to get more women voted into the municipal and city councils.⁷⁷ Birgit Borgersen Wiig and Torild Skard initiated the

⁷⁷ These information campaigns have a long history in Norway (Halsaa 2019). The local election system gives the individual voters some influence over who is elected to the municipal councils. The available means for such an influence is complex and has varied according to changing legislation regulating the power balance between the political parties and the individual voters. Still, this has created the possibility for interest groups to mobilize through information and propaganda campaigns directed towards both political parties and voters to use their power and navigate the election system to their interest. Since 1967, women's organizations have mobilized in order to get more women elected to the municipal councils (Halsaa 2019, 166). Most infamously, the propaganda campaign before the local elections in 1971 led to a notable increase in female representation in the municipal councils from 9% to almost 15% on a national basis, and a female majority in the councils of the major municipalities Oslo, Trondheim and Asker (Halsaa, 2019, 166-167; Skard 1979). The campaign was labeled a "women's coup", yet as Torild Skard maintained, the local government was still decisively male dominated (Skard 1979).

campaign which was supported by eight women's organizations and helped raised female representation in the municipal governments from 15% to 22% (Halsaa 2019, 166-167).

The documentary *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* was the only film Mannseth directed outside of television, and it was a laborious project. Mannseth began the film in the early 1970s, but she was only able to complete it towards the end of the decade. The draining process was tied to problems with funding, pointing to the difficult production situation for the independent documentary film. The film was initiated through Norsk Filmsenter and made with support from The Student Society in Oslo and Oslo Film Society, with additional funding from The Ministry of Church and Education. Mannseth directed, wrote, and edited the film, with cinematography credited to "several members of Norsk Filmsenter" and technical assistance from Jan Knutzen. Knutzen was the cinematographer on *Abortion* (1972), and would, together with Malte Wadman and Sølve Skagen, be a leading figure of the radical documentary movement.

Like *The Images Surrounding Us*, the film was exhibited through festival and film society circulation but had a clearer connection to feminist film cultural meeting points than the short experimental film. After screening at the Short Film festival in Røros in 1978 and the Women's Film Week in 1979, the film was primarily shown at special screenings, among them in Ås as part of a cultural event presenting women's organizations in 1981 and in Nordreisa in Northern Norway on occasion of the 8th of March celebration the same year (Holter 1981, 19; Nordlys 1981, 19).

9.2.4. Film analysis: What is all the fuss about?

The film stages the introduction to the new women's movement as an investigation into this 'new' phenomenon and the question of its necessity. Adopting a historical perspective, *Women's Struggle* begins with the filmmaker's voice-over rhetorically stating that women have, after all, gained equal rights. "Slowly," she remarks, before guiding us through some of the civil and political rights allowed women from the 1850s and onwards, using still images as illustrations:

The right to equal inheritance in 1854, the right to learn a craft in 1866, majority status in 1869⁷⁸, the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1913, and a right to equal pay for equal work through the equal pay agreement in 1961 between The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Norwegian Employers' Confederation (NAF).

“So, what is all the fuss about?”, she asks us in a voice-over. This is an alliteration of the title of one of the first non-fiction publications emanating from the new women's movement, *Hva bråker de for?* (Bang 1972), which begins with a manifesto, translated into Norwegian from a Swedish pamphlet, that counters the title question, asking: “Why shouldn't we make a fuss?”, and continues to list how the patriarchal and capitalist systems of oppression reduce and dehumanize women through marriage, low income, sexual objectification, ridicule and silence (Bang 1972, 7).

Like the manifesto, the film moves to prove exactly how far removed the Norwegian society is from true gender equality. This is done through a focus on work and women's position in productive and re-productive labor. Drawing on labor reports, the voice-over guides us through a dismal portrait of women's opportunities in the labor market: the over-representation of women in low-level income occupations, the still high numbers of women who remain unpaid housewives, and, despite the union agreement, the wage gap between men and women in comparable professions.

The film ties these differences in payment and education to the continued physiological and material consequences of the ideology inherited from the single-income household:

Woman's private relationship to husband and child and her role as a housewife do not only prevent her from participating in politics and developing intellectually and professionally, they also prevents her from gaining access to good professional opportunities. The State and the municipalities' policies on wages ensure that she cannot manage as well in the job market.

⁷⁸Majority status was first given in 1863 to unmarried women at the age of 25. Before this, only widowed women had majority status. In 1869, the age of majority for unmarried women was set to 21 years of age (Blom and Tranberg 1985, 151-152).

In the film, the institution of marriage is set as central for women's confinement and oppression. The voice-over narrates a history of women's subjugation in marriage, arguing for the legal, material and ideological ways women have been kept within the binds of marriage, such as the shame of children born out of wedlock. Commercial images of brides-to-be and small photo novellas depicting nuclear families point to the ideological representation of family bliss. The photographed brides are stylish but, do they not also look sad? The voice-over declares: "Our fate is to be married, not to be happy."

Indeed, not even the radical young women of the new women's movement are exempt from the prison of marriage and the ideology of the housewife. The filmmaker interviews two members of the women's group The Women's Front. One is a young mother trained as a social worker who is currently on maternity leave, while the other is a woman in her mid-50s, a mother of twelve, with a background in the labor movement. The older woman, interviewed in her living room, speaks about how the younger women are bolder and more outspoken than her generation, and with more education, better media-knowledge, they have a responsibility to fight for women's rights. She continues: "They manage everything, but they have to cater to their home, have to cater to their husbands." The interview with the younger women affirms this view. Here, we do not see the interview situation, but rather hear the younger woman's description of her life while being shown footage of her daily activities: washing, making beds, preparing food, but also holding political meetings with her Women's Front cell. Her voice-over runs like a stream of consciousness over these images as she talks about her expectations for her maternity leave and the freedom it would allow her to work for the women's movement, and finally the disappointment she instead faced in a situation that simply drained all her creativity and inspiration. Balancing guilt and a sense of inadequacy, she describes how she feels she must be doubly effective: active in her work for the Women's Front, but also active at home to legitimize the time spent on the political work.

In this way, *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* bridges a biographical structure with the critique of marriage and women's gender roles addressed in the contemporary feminist fiction films. Thematically and rhetorically, the film engages the depriving effect of monotone housework and the ingrained image of housework as the responsibility of women set at stake in especially *Weekend* (Mikkelsen, 1974) and *The Revelation* (Løkkeberg, 1977). This thematic

streak is found in several other documentaries as well. For instance, the American documentaries *Janie's Janie* (Geri Ashur, Peter Barton, Marilyn Mulford, and Stephanie Palewski, 1971), produced through the Newsreel collective, and *Growing Up Female* (Julia Reichert and Jim Klein, 1971) are built around sections of observational footage of women's work in the home set to their stream of consciousness. In *Women's Struggle*, one scene stands out as particularly evocative of the physicality of housework. As the young woman speaks about her sense of isolation, we see her leaning out the window towards the right side of the frame of the hand-held, unsteady camera, to retrieve the washing line. She clips off underwear and socks hung to dry, but as she loosens one of the wooden clips, a sock falls out of frame, down into the courtyard way below. The image freezes, a repeated technical figure in the film, but in this instance creating an arrested moment of coincidence in the endless work of domestic labor.

The new women's movement

Alongside the journalistic and biographical investigation into women's position in the work force and subjugation in marriage, the film presents a very different set of images: that of the new women's movement. If the young woman talks with exhaustion about her sense of isolation at home, she talks with pride of all she has learned as part of her political work in the new women's movement. Through interviews and observational segments, the film offers some insight into the movement and the women who chose to dedicate themselves to it. However, the film does not offer any detailed presentation of the movement at such. While, at the time, the new women's movement was riddled with internal conflict, this is not addressed in the film. Rather, *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* works to show the new women's movement as a broad coalition of action by using the 8th of March protest parade in the International Women's Year 1975 as a structuring event.

The 8th of March had a long history as a political day for women in the labor movement, but it was reintroduced as a day of protest for women by organizations of the new women's movement in the early 1970s. For most of the decade, there would be a yearly increase in the number of people who celebrated the 8th of March (Haukaa 1982, 94), and the day would increasingly become the defining meeting point of the new women's movement, characterized by protest parades with political slogans, stands, parties, and, as I have pointed out, film screenings. The

increased participation was also a function of the declining political activity, as many women would limit their activism to this one day (Haukaa 1982, 167). According to Runa Haukaa, in the mid-1970s it would also become a visible sign of the dividing lines of the new women's movement: in some cities, two separate parades were held (1982, 10).

This divide, however, does not figure in *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975*. Here, the Women's Day becomes a symbol of the power and accessibility of the new women's movement. The film begins and ends with footage from the 8th of March protest parade in 1975: here we see young women painting banners for the protest march, women, men and children walking in the parade, and appeals by the new radical women's groups and by the older Norwegian Association of Women's Rights. The political slogans attest to a diversity of concerns and positions, and the film pays special attention to the newly established group, the Lesbian Movement. As discussed in chapter 4, some lesbian feminists established the Lesbian Movement in 1975 in response to an experience of marginalization in both the new women's movement and in the gay rights organization Det norske Forbundet av 48. In the film, we hear them sing a protest song about recognition. From a montage of the protest parade set to a piano piece, the film moves to present several short interviews with various people attending the march. These interviews are conducted in the style of a survey, asking women and men of different ages and nationalities why they attend the march and in what ways women are oppressed. By bringing in the voices of "ordinary people", the film works to create a sense of the diversity of people who support the new women's movement: men talking about the importance of women's liberation as a liberation for men as well, or as a movement they need to support as progressives; mothers, and some fathers, walking with their daughters or for their daughters; young girls in school wanting the same opportunities as their male class-mates, old women wanting change for the young generation.

The film privileges linkage and similarity over detailed presentation and difference in order to represent the diversity of the new women's movement. In clear similarity to Aanesen's film about the historical fight for self-determined abortion, it creates a generational narrative of women's liberation. At one point, Mannseth references "the generations of women who have stayed silent and suffered." Now, the film tells us, women are coming into voice, and the film can be read as a clear call to arms for further collective action.

While the divide within the new women's movement is not addressed in *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975*, this divide did have some impact on the two film production groups that followed the festival with cameras and microphones in hand.

9.3. Feminist film collectives from the Women's Culture Festival

In response to the Women's Culture Festival's call to action, a group of women interested in film or already working with film and television created *ad hoc* film collectives to document the festival itself. While initially, the women who wanted to document the festival started out as one shared project, they were eventually divided into two separate groups characterized by different professional and political affiliations. The larger group made the documentary film *Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake / It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (1979), which aired on television March 7th, 1980, the day before the International Women's Day celebration. The second, smaller group was not able to complete their film about the festival. Women from the group, however, formed the production company Damefilm AS and made the documentary film *Krisesenteret i Oslo / The Women's Shelter in Oslo* (Langfeldt 1980). This film enjoyed broad distribution, including special screenings and television air time, and formed part of the work to establish and strengthen the women's shelters and helplines in Norway and the Nordic countries. Together, the two groups and the projects and initiatives that stemmed from them are examples of grassroots feminist film engagements of the late 1970s.

9.3.1. The Film Production Group and *Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake* (1979)

The larger of the two film production groups consisted of twenty-five women from the film and television sector. I will list them alphabetically: Anne Marthe Albers, Liv Baggerånås, Madli Birkelund, Anne Britt Bøe, Borgny Baastad, Torunn Calmeyer Ringen, Kirsti Dale, Kikki Engelbrektson, Kristin Eriksen, Bente Erichsen, Lillian Fjellvær, Kari Færøvik, Anne Lise Indrefjord, Bjørg Kittelsen, Sidsel Kraakenes, Ingeborg Kvamme, Inge Lise Larsen, Merete Lindstad, Hilde Løchen Trier, Sidsel Mundal, Eldrid Orvik, Ann-Elise Pettersen, Nina Sandås, Unni Straume and Bente Weisser.

This was a diverse group of women who would have careers as directors, cinematographers, sound recordists, editors, scenographers, and journalists. Most of them worked freelance in the

film sector or were employed by the NRK at the time of the Women's Culture Festival, while others were involved in the surrounding film cultural sphere. Some of them were already semi-established filmmakers and film workers, such as Kikki Engelbrektsen, who had graduated from the Swedish film school, Svenska Dramatiska, and had made short documentary as part of the radical documentary movement, and Bente Erichsen, who had edited *The Images Surrounding Us*, but also worked as a short film and commercial director, managing the production company Marcusfilm with her husband Lasse Glomm. Both of them would move into feature film in the 1980s and 1990s: Engelbrektsen as a documentary filmmaker who revitalized the expedition film genre with for instance *Mange flagg - ingen grenser / Many Flags – No Borders* (1991), and Erichsen as director and producer of narrative feature film. Other distinguished careers in the film and television sector include television director Torunn Calmeyer Ringen, who worked as script and director in television, Ingeborg Kvamme, who worked as a scenographer and prop master, and editor Lillian Fjellvær, who was a feminist force in the NRK and the editor of all three films directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg discussed in this dissertation. Yet again, other women were at the cusp of their careers, such as Ann-Elise Pettersen, who would be an autodidact video artist in the 1980s, Sidsel Mundal, who had been active in the student film community, worked as assistant editor on *Games of Love and Loneliness* (Breien, 1977), and would go on to enjoy a prolific career as editor and filmmaker in the NRK, and Unni Straume, who had then just recently graduated from the media and journalism program at the University College in Volda and would become a noted art film director in the 1990s with *Til en ukjent / To a Stranger* (1990) and *Drømspel / Dreamplay* (1994).

As a tendency, several of these women had been active in the radical distribution center Norsk Filmsenter or in the feminist networks in the NRK. Broadly speaking, then, the group was loosely affiliated with the Marxist left and The Women's Front. However, as Sidsel Mundal recalls, many of them were just as interested in working on an exciting film project with other women, and one of the main points of connection was the NRK and the access to equipment this entailed (Interview with Mundal 2021). For many of these film workers, the film production functioned, firstly, as an important networking event between film and television at a time when the professional contact and exchange between these two sectors was limited and, secondly, as an opportunity to connect with other women in a still severely male dominated industry. Indeed,

after they completed the film about the Women's Culture Festival, several of the women in the Film Production Group continued to build this professional network, first through an informal 'women in film and television' group, and later through the organization Kvinnenes Filmforum – the Women's Film Forum (1982-1989). This was a women-only network, dedicated to building women's professional confidence by sharing experience and hosting workshops on professional issues, organizing discussions, holding screening nights, and inviting foreign and Norwegian women working in film to talk about their work life.

During the week of the Women's Culture Festival, the women in the film production group followed the festival's key events, filming and recording concerts, theatre performances, talks, political appeals, shows, and the bustle of the festival's arts and crafts marketplace. The completed film, *Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake / It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (1979), running for 38 minutes and shot in color, shows a myriad of impressions and highlighted moments of the festival intercut with images of the women, men and children who attended the festival events.

Like several of the films discussed in this chapter, the documentary was a volunteer project made from the spare time and energy of committed people. The filmmakers donated their time and talent to produce the film. The NRK was, perhaps, the most important institutional structure of support, and much of the equipment and material cost of the film was covered through some of the women's professional connections to the media house. The film received additional support from Bærum kinematographer (The Municipal Cinemas of Bærum), the concert venue Club 7, and the Study Department and the short film department of Norsk Film AS, and it was distributed by Norsk Filmsenter. In an interview about the production, Bente Weisser describes how they made the film through a largely non-hierarchical and collaborative working method (Waagaard 1980, 16). While unpaid film work was not unusual in independent documentary production, this kind of collaboration was less common, especially as they used a rotating system, taking turns as for instance continuity manager and director depending on who was available. Only the cinematographers Eldrid Orvik and Borgny Baastad and sound recordists Anne Marthe Albers and Kari Færøvik remained locked into their roles. Next to them, a core group, including Kikki Engelbrektsen, Hilde Løchen Trier, Lillian Fjellvær, Bente Weisser and

Sidsel Mundal, took charge of the production organization and editing, with the other women stepping in and contributing when and where they could.

9.3.2. Film analysis: Celebrating Women's Culture

The film *It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* is compiled of an impressive array of footage from the festival and gives a wonderful sense of the time and as a portrait of a period. In its style and thematic project, the film stands out from the other documentaries discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the film is made within an observational mode of documentary filmmaking (Nichols 1991, 38-44). An observing camera associated with the style of cinema vérité is used in several of these documentaries, but never as pronounced as in this film. With the absence of a guiding voice-over and of narrative or performative scenes, the filmmakers' organizing discourse is only vaguely introduced. It is there, surly, through the structuring of the material, through the use of some direct interviews, and through textual markers, such as thin white letters in the lower left corner giving the name of the group or performer, as well as the use of intertitles. Yet, compared to the previously discussed films, *It's still a long way to go...* is less informative and argumentative. The title "Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake", in my translation: "It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back", is a Norwegian saying that in the context of the women's movement placed the political struggle within a historical trajectory. Often used as a grim joke, the paradox of the saying points to the importance of looking back in history when assessing the current situation, and functions as a stab at those who do not see how the past influences both the present and the future.⁷⁹

Four similar sayings are superimposed on the images throughout the film: "It's not enough to be beautiful, one should be kind as well, said the girl", "Someone as sweet as sugar will soon be eaten!"; "It won't make its way here, said the crone, hearing chatter of war" and "One time done is ten times thought". The meaning and function of the sayings remain rather ambiguous, but, like the old crone in the title, they suggest a careful commentary on women's culture as stubborn

⁷⁹ The first part of the saying was used as the title of a recurring column in the feminist magazine *Sirene* that gathered cut-outs of sexist or outdated remarks, images or phrasings from newspapers and magazines.

and unruly, and signal a project of creating a historical line of women's work by bringing folk tradition into the contemporary moment.

In this way, the film moves away from a project of making visible the causes and effects of women's oppression, to offer a celebration of women's creativity and abilities. The film is framed by street interviews with women who give their opinions on the culture festival. The film begins with several women responding with enthusiasm to the question, posed by the off-screen filmmakers: "What do you think about the plans to organize a woman's festival?". A younger woman elaborates: "I get such a good feeling. It's always the guys doing things, but now it's girls who are doing something." Towards the end of the film, a new interviewee is included. A woman, sitting on the grass in the concert area, speaks into a microphone held by an otherwise off-screen filmmaker:

Yes, I do think there is something called women's culture. That part of culture that maybe takes women seriously. [Where] women make themselves capable of holding their own, on their own terms. And I think the week has given the impression that this exists. [It has] also created a foundation for new things to come, so that it doesn't end with this festival.

By expressing a positive attitude towards the project of making women's contributions and abilities visible, these interviews point to a change in the emphasis of the new women's movement as some feminist activists turned to making visible the agency and potential of women (Müftüoğlu 2013, 178). This was not the least tied to art and culture, with exhibitions and now festivals dedicated to showing what *women can do*.

It's still a long way to go... demonstrates and makes visible such a celebration of women's culture. International in scope, the film shows performances by Norwegian, Swedish, Danish and American artists and bands, as well as performances by Norwegian immigrant women. Some of the performances are explicitly political, with for instance theatre performances that mock the Miss Universe competition or engage the socialization of women as objects of love and desire. Through these performances, the film paints a portrait of the way the new women's movement made use of art and cultural expressions to formulate issues of women's subjugation. Consider,

for instance, in my limited translation, the lyrics sung by the all-female band Hekseskudd: “We are women, and we won’t stand for // all the falseness of what women are and the speculative profit cravings // we’ll put a stop to it, let the porn fires burn!”. The lyrics continue in a similar vein and reads as a political article of demands and analysis.

However, while most of the performances in some way engage women’s position under patriarchy, the film’s presentation of the Culture Festival places as primary an aim of showing and bringing to light the diversity of women’s contributions across a wide array of traditions and expressions. Over the course of the film, we see glimpses of lectures about historical women, the author Karin Sveen reading a poem about the witch hunts, women singing folk songs, including musical performances by immigrant women from Greece and India at the International Night held at the cultural venue Club 7, a woman in *bunad* playing the accordion, a Sami woman in traditional costume singing a *joik* of sisterhood, but also footage of women making and selling a variety of arts and craft that more broadly speaks to traditions of women’s cultural knowledge.

Importantly, *It’s still a long way to go...* is the only film in my selection that includes women who are not white and Scandinavian. Even though Norway was an immigrant country by the end of the 1970s, this part of Norwegian society remains invisible in most of the films. An exception is *Women’s Struggle and the Women’s Year 1975* (Mannseth, 1979) where the survey interviews include a woman from the People’s Republic of China who carries flyers about women’s conditions in her home country. Whereas *The Women’s Struggle* aims to present the broad appeal of the new women’s movement, *It’s still a long way to go...* creates communality among women across historical, national and cultural borders, as well as across cultural expressions themselves.

9.3.3. Damefilm AS and *The Women’s Shelter in Oslo* (1980)

The second of the two production groups tasked with filming the Women’s Culture Festival was smaller and consisted of about eight film feminists. Some of them were already established film workers. Inge-Lise Langfeldt, who became an unofficial spokesperson for the group, had received her early training in film through the anarchist and counter-cultural spheres surrounding the Club 7 scene. In 1974, she was offered a job as an assistant editor on the feature film *Streik! / Strike!* (Bull Tuhus, 1975) and started training under the experienced editor Edith Toreg. She

edited her first feature film in the mid-1970s, the low-budget film *Heksene fra den forstenede skog / The Stone Wood Witches* (1976) by Bredo Greve, and would go on to have a prolific career as a film editor, later becoming a Professor of Editing at the Norwegian Film School. Another member of the group, Helen Perzon, worked as a production manager and had been the assistant director on *The Guardians* (Macé, 1978), while also serving on the editing board of *Rushprint*, the film journal for the freelance film workers' union, Norsk Filmforbund. Other women were at the start of their careers in film. Kari Nytrø started her career path as a sound designer and Foley artist in the late 1970s, and worked, among other, with sound on Oddvar Einarson's radical ecology documentary *Prognose Innerdalen / Prognosis Innerdalen* (1981), while Jeanette Sundby, receiving her first training through the Women's Culture Festival film, would work as a production manager on for instance *Over grensen / Across the Border* (1987), directed by Bente Erichsen, and later as a producer. Yet again, other women were not connected to the film production communities at all but came to the group through a feminist engagement.

The main point of connection for this group was political, and the film production group was tightly affiliated with the Women's House in Oslo (Interview with Langfeldt). Following several years of feminist women's lobbying, the Women's House opened its doors in the city center of Oslo on November 29th 1975. It was a concrete attempt to create a place within the public sphere where women could claim their space, examine their needs, and develop ideas, activities, art, and culture outside of the influence of the mainstream, male-dominated society (Müftüoğlu 2013, 134). The house became a hub for the activities of the new women's movement, described by Ingrid Müftüoğlu as its "production center" (2013, 134). It was home to a diverse set of initiatives and groups, including the legal aid organization JURK, the printing house Sfinxa, several artistic and creative groups and a women's café, and also hosted music and literature nights (Haukaa 1982; Müftüoğlu 2013, 141). Most of the organizations of the new women's movement made use of the house, and the Lesbian Movement, Bread and Roses, the Women Activists and even the older Association of Women's Rights held their meetings there, although the latter had to inhabit a separate floor because they, in contrast to the newer groups, allowed men in their meetings (Müftüoğlu 2013, 141). The only organization that did not hold its meetings in the Women's House was The Women's Front. Members of the Women's Front

frequented the house, but the organization, due to its ties to the male dominated AKP (m-l), was not welcome (Müftüoğlu 2013, 141).

The split between the smaller Women's House-affiliated film production group and the larger NRK-affiliated documentary group can then be traced to a dividing line of the new women's movement itself, between the Women's Front, on the one hand, and the various new feminist groupings, on the other (Interview with Langfeldt 2021; Interview with Mundal 2021). However, the background for this specific split and the relationship between the two groups is not entirely clear. Moreover, in hindsight, the projects of the two film groups have more things in common than not. They were both made using non-hierarchical working methods and on a volunteer basis, and both groups came together because of an expressed wish to work with other women and to form collaborative and professional networks.

The ambition of the Women's House film group was to be actively involved in the cultural project of the Women's Cultural Festival itself. In the words of Inge-Lise Langfeldt, who was one of the initiators for the group and became their unofficial spokesperson, they wanted to "avoid standing on the outside and just make a document. Our concern is not only to make film, but to be part of the alternative women's culture" (Bellsund 1979a). The group had an explicit aim of using the Women's Culture Festival as an opportunity for providing a low-level entry point for women curious about filmmaking. The film group's project involved a long pre-production period with training and sharing of technical experience. The production phase itself was committedly non-hierarchical, with the group members sharing all the positions of the film set. Moreover, their connection to the Women's House gave the production group access to other parts of the festival, with footage including a performance by the theatre group *Livets mangfold* (The Diversity of Life), a flat-structure group that staged satirical sketch-shows breaking down gender relations, heterosexuality, and the representation of women in media.⁸⁰ At the time, one idea for the film was to intercut footage from the festival with archival material from the international women's movement (Bellsund 1979a, 30; Bellsund 1980, 32).

⁸⁰ Women from the community surrounding the lesbian feminist print house *Sfinxa* and the organization *Lesbian Movement* formed *Diversity of Life* in 1977. This was among the most well-known theatre groups coming from the new women's movement.

The film, unfortunately, was never completed for public exhibition. While it is unclear exactly why the film was shelved, time and money seem to have been the core reasons. In the words of one of the women who worked on the film: “We had to take on other film work to make ends meet” (Bellsund 1980, 32). Like the other festival film, this film was made on a volunteer basis and was dependent on the women’s spare time and resources. They, moreover, did not have access to the NRK, likely making it more difficult to develop the film.

The next project of the film group would prove more successful. Growing directly out of the festival initiative, the four members Inge-Lise Langfeldt, Jeanette Sundby, Helen Perzon and Kari Nytrø formalized their collaboration by establishing the production company Damefilm AS in 1979. This company stands as the only registered feminist film production company formed in the 1970s in Norway, and it features in Runa Haukaa’s major history of the Norwegian new women’s movement, *Bak slagordene* (1981), as the only time that film is mentioned. As a collective, Damefilm wished to create and explore non-hierarchical working methods. In an interview with Langfeldt in the feminist magazine *Sirene*, she elaborated: “All four of us struggle to find our place in the film community. We have ideas about collaboration that do not fit the established working methods. But we also want to make film about the same things” (Bellsund 1980, 32). In the collective, the women aimed to find room to explore alternative ways of creating and working with film, but primarily to explore explicitly feminist subject matter.

On the initiative of Inge-Lise Langfeldt and based on a successful funding application to the Ministry of Church and Education, Damefilm produced the documentary film *Krisesenteret i Oslo / The Women’s Shelter in Oslo* (1980). The film is about the “Camilla shelter for battered and raped women” in Oslo. This was the first shelter of its kind in the Nordic countries, offering a temporary living arrangement for women, together with their children, who had experienced domestic abuse. Damefilm developed the film in collaboration with the women working at the shelter, but the production of the film had a clearer divide between the technical positions, with Langfeldt as scriptwriter, director, and editor. In addition to the four filmmakers in Damefilm,

the film team included cinematographer Kjersti Alver⁸¹ and Laila Rakvåg as assistant cinematographer, with music by Nina Chr. Badendyck.

The work for a women's shelter in Norway was directly connected to, and grew out of, the new women's movement (Ahnfelt 1987). It first began following the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women held in Brussels in March 1976, where domestic violence was on the agenda. Upon their return, the three Norwegian representatives called a meeting at the Women's House in Oslo and initiated a helpline and formed an action group tasked with working towards establishing a women's shelter (Krisesentergruppa). Two years later, in 1978, the Camilla shelter was established. Several shelters and helplines followed (Ahnfelt 1987, 49). The primary aim of the women's shelters was to provide critical help and support for women in abusive relationships. They were not established as institutions for treatment or therapy but were founded on a principle of providing tools for self-help. The shelters were managed through a flat structure, and the women were encouraged to participate in the daily operations of the house and the work of the women's shelter group. A second aim of the shelters was to provide information about their work and about the problem of domestic abuse (Ahnfelt 1987, 53).

The film *The Women's Shelter in Oslo* can be seen as a part of this second aim. Functioning as both an informational film and an activist film, it was made during a time of uncertainty in terms of the shelter's future, due to funding issues. In an interview, Langfeldt explained: "We made the film because of the threat of the shelters being closed down. As we kept working on the film, we found it more important to emphasize what the shelters actually are and why they remain so necessary" (Maaland 1980, 45). Shot in color and lasting just under 30 minutes, the film combines direct interviews, voice-over accounts and observational footage of the life at the "Camilla Shelter" in Oslo in order to highlight the problem of domestic violence, provide information on the operation of the women's shelters, and argue for their continued survival.

The film was distributed through the National Film Board of Norway and through VHS distribution released by Norsk Filmsenter. It was first aired on television on December 17th 1980, and later shown across the country at public forums to raise awareness of the issues of rape and

⁸¹ Alver established the production company Focus on Human Rights in 1981, together with Alexander Røsler, Knut Jorfald, Pål Gengenbach og Jan Olav Brynjulfsen.

domestic violence, the need to secure government funding for the women's shelters, and to aid the establishment of new women's shelters and helplines. The film was conceived with a clear ambition to function as an instruction video so that other women's groups could watch and learn about the shelters (Interview with Langfeldt 2021). For instance, in June 1981, two women working at the women's shelter in Oslo toured the Northern part of Norway to meet and share their experience with the people working at the local helplines. They screened the film *The Women's Shelter in Oslo* as part of their presentation (Finnmark Dagblad 1981, 12). According to Langfeldt, the film was further screened at women's film festivals in Denmark and Sweden and contributed to the establishment of women's shelters in Stockholm and Copenhagen (Interview with Langfeldt 2021).

9.3.4. Film Analysis: "Scenes you never saw"

The opening scene sets the stage for uncovering and bringing into light the invisible stories of abuse in Norwegian homes. The film begins with a panning shot over a night-time cityscape that ends on a clutter of building blocks. This exterior shot has similarities to the closing image of *Weekend* (1974) directed by Laila Mikkelsen. Like that film, the exteriors of the buildings connote a generalized plane of action: the lives of common homes across the city. The sequence shows a series of exterior shots of buildings and windows. Each house and window frame are different; the curtains, flowerpots, and figurines visible from the inside pointing to differences of ages, cultural tastes and class of the people who live there. Yet, all of them are closed with no human figures visible behind them. These images are intercut with interior shots of women's hands dialing numbers on house phones, sometimes putting the phone down, sometimes stopping even before touching the phone at all. These anonymous windows and phones establish a view of the closed-off private sphere where no-one can look in, and the impulse of the women to find a way out.

At first, the music forms a counterpoint to the gravity of the film's topic by introducing a soundtrack of saxophone and guitar that play a quite up-beat rhythm, alike an infotainment jingle that jars with the title of the film, *The Women's Shelter in Oslo for battered and raped women*. Towards the end of the sequence, the saxophone theme stops, and a woman's choir sing a melody with the lyrics: "There is fear concealed, and scenes you never saw. Because no-one is

filming now that she is alone". In Norwegian, these lyrics read as a rhyme, and introduce the central argument of the images: of domestic abuse as hidden, an unrecorded part of many women's lived experience. The unseen scenes of violence and abuse concealed in the privacy of the home, an invisible part of too many women's lives happening behind the closed doors and the closed curtains of so many houses.

From the general plane of any Norwegian home, the film moves into the individual experiences of women willing to share their story. Following one woman's call, the ringing of the telephone forms a sound bridge into a tracking shot inside the empty corridors of what we soon understand is the women's shelter. Here, we hear a woman's voice answering the phone and telling the woman on the other end to come to the shelter immediately. The film cuts, and a new voice-over, clearer now, as if closer to the recording equipment, tells us: "But it took another week before I got out". The cut between the reenactment of the woman calling the women's shelter and the direct interview moves us into the concrete and personal: one woman's past experiences of severe physical and psychological abuse, her escape from it, and her current situation as an inhabitant at the women's shelter.

The Women's Shelter in Oslo addresses the question of how to represent the personal experience of violence, control and rape, of which no visual records exist. The documentary adopts a strategy of withholding the visual and resting instead on the spoken accounts by the women themselves. The sound is only synched to the images when it is the women working at the shelter who speak, as well as an interview towards the end of the film with a woman who has moved out of the shelter. In a sense, the women who live at the shelter, who are recovering from their abusive situations, are rendered as un-representable as the trauma of the scenes no-one saw. The first woman, like most of the women who share their experiences in the film, remains anonymous, her face kept off-camera and her identity hidden. As she speaks, we see her hands and legs as she sits on her bed. She lights a cigarette and fiddles the matchbox between her fingers, her socks with strings of hearts visible underneath her sandals. Other women living at the shelter who share their story of physical and emotional abuse are equally kept anonymous. Three of the voice-over testimonies are accompanied by images showing black silhouettes of women set in profile against textured backgrounds; one colored in red, one in green and one in yellow. The silhouettes remain still while we hear the voice-overs speak. This creates an effect of

disassociation, but also provides a silent visual background for the spoken discourse that allows the words of the women to come into focus and their stories to be heard.

Like in the abortion films directed by Ellen Aanesen, the women's stories are structured according to themes and follow a narrative progression of chronology of events. In this way, the film continues the drive to name and articulate invisible or marginalized experiences, and *The Women's Shelter in Oslo* creates a powerful argument of collective experiences of abuse and injustice. These are difficult accounts, told by women in vulnerable situations. They talk about the abuse, sharing their experiences of violence and rape, fear, shame and humiliation. Each woman has a different story to tell and there are clear variations in their experiences, yet here as well, the filmmakers foreground the similarities between them through the act of compilation and repetition. In this way, the voice-overs engage the "deep narrative structure" of consciousness-raising (Lesage, 1990). By structuring their accounts according to themes, their experiences emerge as commonalities, forming patterns. The patterns are identified and validated *as patterns* through the interviews with the women working at the women's shelter. These interviews, conventionally framed with synchronized sound, responding to off-screen questions from the filmmakers, provide context and scope to the individual accounts and place them within an explanatory framework through analyses of gender relations, economic dependency within marriage, and the failure on behalf of the judicial system to protect women from domestic abuse. The differences between the two sets of interviews counter, to a certain degree, the women's shelter's own ideology of not distinguishing between the women who live there and the women who work there (Ahnfelt 1987).

By combining the two layers of the testimonies of the women living at the shelter and the interviews with current and former employees at the shelter, the film works to highlight the problem of domestic abuse and reveal its harrowing scope and the unwillingness of the outside world to intervene. The film itself emphasizes the point in an intermission scene addressing the issue of rape. Once more the film introduces the musical motif of the saxophone and the guitar. The women's choir then starts singing, "We are raped with the blessing of the Church. We are locked up in the name of the law". The lyrics are unambiguous in their accusations of the blindness and complicity of law and order. The camera slowly tracks out from a close-up to an establishing shot of three seated women sitting on chairs that are evenly placed in a line on the

floor. They keep their bodies still, one leg crossed over the other, their clothing is everyday but their heads are covered by large black cones so that the women become uncanny figurines; faceless judges, faceless victims. The upbeat music, the literal lyrics and the jarring images of the headless women present an opaque comment on the silence that envelops violence against women.

In the film, the struggle for visibility is directly connected to power and is presented as a fight with legislation for recognition, protection and funding. Towards the end of the film, the film turns its focus onto the need for more shelters and for a financially secure future through a montage of newspaper clippings concerning the pressured economic situation of the shelters and the discussion of continued funding, and articles showing the growing visibility of violence against women at home. Between each new newspaper clipping, the film intercuts the image of the clenched fist of the new women's movement, the feminist symbol beating back at the obstacles.

The Women's Shelter in Oslo works to shed light on the invisible and disregarded stories of domestic abuse, but it also provides a portrait of the Women's Shelter as an institution and the homosocial, women-only space created by the Battered Women's Movement. The women who live there talk about their experience of the women's shelter, telling us how they got there, what the daily life is like for them and how the shelter has helped them. The interviews are intercut with footage showing the daily life at the shelter, a hand-held camera observing the social meetings points of the weekly house meetings and the dinner table, where women and children gather to eat, but also showing women managing the home: fixing the chairs, changing the lightbulbs, and doing grocery shopping. Herein lies the positive message of the film, once again located in solidarity: that women, coming together and supporting each other, can change their situation to the better.

The final part of the film is an outdoor interview with one of the women who has moved on with her life. She talks about what the shelter meant for her and the continued need for collective housing situations for single women. The camera stops to rest on a wrought-iron gate by the sculptor Gustav Vigeland, depicting three women standing together, and offering a visual analogy of women's community. This positive image of communality finds its equivalent in

footage from the 8th of March protest parade and the slogan “More women’s shelters, abolish violence against women!”. Like the clutched fist of the montage sequence, the new women’s movement, the film might seem to suggest, will continue to work tirelessly.

9.4. Concluding remarks: Independent feminist documentary

The independent feminist documentary films released in the final years of the 1970s shows the breadth of feminist film engagement in Norway in this period. While relatively few, these films broaden the history of feminist filmmaking in Norway substantially.

The institutional context of the films opens onto new questions of production, circulation and distribution. The production of these films was as a rule time-consuming and often on a volunteer basis, which means that only a select few could afford or muster the patience for such committed filmmaking. As films without regular theatrical release, the documentaries furthermore faced the problem of lacking distribution and exhibition outlets. Here, the importance of the NRK as a distributor of short and documentary film once more comes into view, but also the necessity of alternative distribution networks, in which feminist film culture provided one significant support structure. For the production and exhibition of independent feminist documentary in Norway, the Women’s Culture Festival and the Women’s Film Week in 1979 stand out as synergetic events of feminist film culture and provide examples of how the organized women’s movement and the practices of cinema intersected within a grassroots engagement outside of the major production sites. As such, they stand out as the most significant events of the development of feminist film culture in Norway in the 1970s; opening the history of the feminist film movement in Norway to include more precisely the activity of film activists and festival programmers, but also to feminist film collectives.

By addressing quite different topics, and adopting a diverse set of styles, the documentaries also show the diversity of themes and styles pursued in feminist filmmaking: From montage technique in *The Images Surrounding Us*, compilation of archival material in *Women’s Struggle and the Women’s Year 1975*, observational footage in *It’s still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (1979), to testimonies and reenactments in *Women’s Shelter in Oslo*. Still, there are also clear similarities between them. Most notably, the films celebrate, to different degrees, the positive power of women’s collective action. Like the narrative feature films, they

privilege solidarity among women, but go further in creating unities among women across historical, cultural and political divides. These arguments for sameness and sisterhood simultaneously rests on the suppression of the very real differences that existed within the new women's movement. Across the documentaries, the new women's movement is brought into light, visually cemented by a repeated return to women's protest parades and large red paroles as imagery of battle. As such, the independent documentaries were also part of making visible and creating certain iconographies of the new women's movement itself.

CH 10. CLOSING CHAPTER: FEMINIST FILMMAKING IN NORWAY

This dissertation has aimed to explore and bring to light the synergies between women's filmmaking and the new women's movement in Norway in the 1970s. I did this by posing three research questions: How did feminist films give form to the agendas of the new women's movement and engage the debates on gender and women's rights? What led women to make feminist films, and what were the central conditions that enabled them to do so? How did feminist films interact with other engagements of the feminist film movement, and what were the central characteristics of feminist film culture in Norway in the 1970s?

In this closing chapter, I will answer these questions and sum up the main findings of the dissertation. I begin by discussing the central thematic and aesthetic strategies of feminist films, moving then to the women who directed these films and their relationship to the new women's movement and the conditions for the production and dissemination of feminist filmmaking, before I turn to central characteristics of feminist film culture. In the last section, I sum up the main contributions of this dissertation, and point to unanswered questions. By way of conclusion, I draw lines into the 1980s and suggest areas of further research.

10.1. Women's feminist filmmaking

In this dissertation, I have analyzed and contextualized five narrative fiction films and seven documentary films directed by Nicole Macé, Laila Mikkelsen, Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg, Ellen Aanesen, Eva Mannseth, Anne Siri Bryhni, Inge-Lise Langfeldt and Damefilm AS, as well as the Film Production Group, which included among others Sidsel Mundal, Kikki Engelbrekton, Hilde Løchen Trier, Lillian Fjellvær and Bente Weisser. I have used these analyses to explore how feminist films engaged central discourses, struggles and analyses of the new women's movement, to map out the opportunities for production and exhibition of feminist films, and to trace central aspects of the development of a feminist film culture in Norway.

10.1.1. The feminist films

The feminist films directed by women in Norway in the 1970s brought to the screen popular, provocative, or informative cinematic mediations of central arguments of the new women's movement: that women are secondary in marriage, the need for self-determined abortion, for

women's shelters, that women can be strong through female solidarity, among them.

The narrative fiction films

The narrative fiction films created intimate portraits of characters that try to tackle their lives in different ways. In a tradition of European art cinema, these films combined a traditional narrative form with a more experimental film language in which the self-effacing style of classical cinema is replaced by reflexivity and ambiguity, on the one hand, and the argumentative drive of social realism on the other, to draw attention to facets of women's experiences in the world drawn from feminist analysis. In different ways, these films set at stake questions of autonomy and self-expression predominantly derived from analyses of marriage as a site of women's embattlement. Here, it is women's secondary position in marriage that stands in the way of the women character's claim to autonomy and to subjecthood, whether this concerns articulating one's own needs (*Triangle*, 1971; *Weekend*, 1974), carving out space for political or creative work (*Weekend*; *The Guardians*, 1978), or that it hampers the development of selfhood (*Wives* 1975; *The Revelation*, 1977). While only *Triangle* and *The Guardians* propose to reject the heterosexual marriage, all the narrative fiction films offer as necessary a break from marriage and present this break as a point where the women characters take responsibility for themselves and become, to a larger degree, their own person.

The centrality of personal freedom and autonomy is especially evident in the way the films address the theme of work. With the exception of *Wives*, where work and material security as such is thematized, work is primarily a question of self-fulfillment and sense of purpose, and it is inextricably linked to the theme of marriage. Several of the films set at stake how the responsibility for home and childcare, and the unequal validation of women and men's work, serve to limit women's opportunities for self-expression and autonomy. In *Weekend* and *The Guardians*, as well as in the documentary film *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year* (1979), liberation means finding a way to balance the conflicting demands of being a working mother, while in *Wives* and *The Revelation*, the absence of paid work is thematized as limiting self-worth. Even *Triangle*, which is perhaps the film that is least explicit in terms of singling out the structural conditions of women's oppression, includes dialogue to suggest how the man's work is treated as more valuable than the woman's work.

This is also evident in the way the films address the theme of sexuality. While the sexual or sexually loaded encounter is also used to set at stake inequality between the sexes, across the narrative films, the theme of sexuality is primarily related to the character's self-expression and personal freedom: In *Triangle*, *Weekend* and *Wives*, the pursuit of sex outside of monogamous marriage is a central, if also ambiguous, part of the character's search for alternatives, while in *The Revelation*, the absence of a sexuality of her own becomes an expression of Inger's state of deprivation. In these films, then, sexuality is a way to address freedom and choice, if not necessarily liberation (the pursuit of seduction and sex alone does not lead the women to become liberated women). This points to how these films circle around questions of the authentic personal projects, in which sex is a way of exploring how difficult it is to find new ways of living, and the demands resting on individual women.

While these films revolve around a similar set of issues, they give form to these themes in highly different ways. *Wives* gives a humorous and gentle look at women's position in Norwegian society through an aesthetic experience of tagging along three friends who just want to extend their joyous respite a little bit longer, rather than return home to their regular lives. Going out on the town, the women characters' role reversal breaks with the conventional positions in heterosexual scripts (man out, woman at home; man as looker, woman as being looked at), thus working to make these positions visible *as gendered*. Through an episodic structure and an immediacy created using only diegetic sound, an observing camera, and a familiarity in dialogue, the film allows the viewer to tag along the friends' stolen time together as the three characters move restlessly around the city of Oslo, play-acting and discussing and arguing, but also creates a sense of intimacy with the characters through close-ups of the women's faces as they talk and react to each other. *The Revelation*, by contrast, is more confined and focused in its consideration of the life situation of a housewife's deprived state of being. Here, the freedom of movement explored in *Wives* and relayed through expositional shots of their movement in the city is replaced by symbolically loaded framings that convey the main character's emotional and physical entrapment. A moving camera stays close on Inger, following her as she is humiliated, unable to change her situation, and partaking in her dreams and hallucinations. A surrealist streak is introduced, as the film combines the gritty realism of images filled with waste and dirt and blood with associative editing and jarring low quality sound. *The Revelation* placed on the screen

the body of a female character that is different from an implicit glamorous, commercialized, and objectified presentation of the female form. A related impulse is found in *Wives*, and both films can be said to break with expectations of women on film, signaling projects of bringing different women figures onto the cinematic screen.

A quite different aesthetic is adopted in *Triangle*. Employing a slightly distanced, ironic style where scenes of conventional drama is intercut with picture-perfect, brightly colored montage sequences set to empathetic classical music, the film works to present a more intellectual argument of women's situation. The set-up of a threesome makes possible new alternatives, bringing the two women together to create a new family life. Here, then, another marginalized figure is given form, as the film arguably presented characters who chose a lesbian relationship. Yet again more conventional cinematic language characterizes *Weekend* and *The Guardians*, but these films also make use of aesthetic figurations to give form to women's confinement. In *Weekend*, the camera's way of revealing what the characters cannot see is used to link Reidun's struggle to find a way of balancing the different demands on her as a woman, a mother, and a worker to inequalities between the sexes. In *The Guardians*, stylistic segmentation formulates both the differences between Else Kant and her husband in household responsibilities, as well as her removal from one intolerable situation to another: The first, exhausting carousel of responsibilities for home, child and work, expressed by an atonal medley and rapid cross-cutting, is replaced by a second excruciating imprisonment and a cinematic closing in, the camera tied, like Else Kant, to her bed.

Feminist documentary filmmaking

The documentary films represent a shift from the narrative fiction films in that they offer a far more direct indictment of the unjust laws and systems that oppress women. Most of these films give form to the agendas of the new women's movement through argumentation, persuasion and information, using some form of compilation that combine two or more documentary strategies, such as direct interviews, voice-over, narrative segments, observational footage and archival material, and draw in a discourse of information by presenting facts, such as statistics, laws and historical dates and events. It is in the combinations of these different strategies that many of these films gave form to central issues of the new women's movement.

The Images Surrounding Us (1978) adopted an aesthetic of conflict montage to criticize the falseness or cynicism of the media in portraying the good life and implicitly in perpetuating stereotypes, combining pop music, magazine cuts outs with interviews to indict the weekly magazines. In this way, the film connects to an experimental or avant-garde aesthetic to offer a critique of mass media for their complicity in controlling women's bodies through commercialization and consumerism. *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975* (1979) combines interviews, statistics, commercial images and observational footage to argue how the pay gap between men and women is founded in union agreements and labor law, rooted in the single-income household and the institution of marriage. The film thus connects clearly to the narrative films in the analysis of marriage as a source of women's oppression.

In *Abortion* (1972), a narrative segment shows a young girl, who has just had sex at a party, as she asks her partner if he came inside her, worrying he has not been careful. She is right, and an observing camera gives new glimpses of the steps she must now take to try to get an abortion. The film cuts to an interview with anti-abortion activists, who seem to be sneering – so tightly is the camera framed on their faces – as they liken women seeking abortions to criminals who will never repent. Through the emotional force of this injustice, and the gap between the young girl and the women arguing against both abortion and contraception, the film shows how women do not own their own bodies or their sexuality.

The same argument is made in *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee* (1978), *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* (1978), and *The Women's Shelter in Oslo* (1980). In these films, another crucial aesthetic figuration of feminist filmmaking is used as they allow historical women themselves to speak and articulate their own experiences and stories. The two documentaries *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committees* and *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion* use direct interviews with women who tell their stories of legal, and even illegal, abortions straight to the camera in order to make the argument of the flawed abortion law. In *The Women's Shelter in Oslo*, only the voices of women are heard as they recount their traumatic experiences of rape, psychological, and physical abuse at the hands of their husbands. These films broke silences. Telling hidden stories of rape, abuse and violence, these films can be said to have brought to the screen figures previously disregarded or marginalized in public discourse: the battered woman, the woman seeking abortion, or who has

undergone an abortion. The films *Abortion*, *The Women's Shelter in Oslo*, the two documentaries on abortion legislation by Ellen Aanesen, as well as *The Revelation*, all engage the project of making women's marginalized or hidden experiences visible, and to name and to give form to parts of women's experiences that had been left out of public concern and knowledge.

Scenes of solidarity

While most of the feminist films in Norway gave form to analyses of women's embattlement, these films also celebrated the new women's movement and women's collectivity. The films *Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee*, *From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion*, *Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975*, and *The Women's Shelter in Oslo* all celebrate the work and resilience of the new women's movement: showing footage of the 8th of March parade, cross-cutting women's recollections of the work they have done, presenting the triumphs won for women's rights. *It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (1979) celebrates women's creativity and the diversity of "women's culture" by intercutting a myriad of footage from the Women's Culture Festival. In *Triangle*, *Weekend*, *Wives*, *The Revelation*, and even *The Guardians*, women find moments of relief in female friendship or love; moments that in *Triangle*, *Weekend* and *Wives* gives a forward drive and sense of hope for the future.

Indeed, the most striking aesthetic and thematic figure is the recurrence across formats and modes of a woman talking to another woman: in the narrative film, through two characters talking in confidence, and in the documentary films, through the relationship between the filmmaker and the documentary subject. This is what I have called "the scene of female solidarity", and it traverses most of the films in this dissertation. The theme of women's solidarity is then, in many ways a defining theme of my film selection. Whereas marriage is almost always positioned as a problem, solidarity between women is almost always part of the solution. This is the facet of feminist filmmaking in Norway that has gained the least attention, but which I contend stands out as the most important characteristics of this body of works. Looking back, the theme of female friendship was an integral part of feminist cinema in the 1970s. Julia Knight lists "female bonding" as one of the recurring thematic concerns of women's filmmaking in Germany (1992, 122), while Sue Thornham notes that one of the shared

characteristics of both documentary and avant-garde filmmaking in the 1970s was the cinematic construction of a female protagonist “who is both subject [...] and embodied, sustained by her relationship with other women” (2012, 63). In the Norwegian films, these sustained relationships are one of the primary ways in which the films acknowledged women as historical and social subjects. By showing solidarity with women characters, fictional or historical, the feminist films not only made visible women’s plights and challenges, but also placed them as viable and worthy of public attention.

10.1.2. Women directors and feminist filmmaking

The women directors discussed in this dissertation were not peripherally linked to the new women’s movement but took part in its cultural expression. Through their filmmaking, they created audiovisual expressions of core arguments of feminism in the 1970s. Some films were made with the explicit intention to support ongoing struggles of the new women’s movement, while other films thematized and engaged issues and analyses of feminism. The directors were, however, differently placed in relation to feminism and to the Norwegian film sector, and they contributed to feminist film culture in different ways.

For some of the filmmakers I have discussed in this dissertation, feminism appears to have played a fundamental role in their goals and method of filmmaking. Nicole Macé’s work as a feminist film director can be described as an intertextual practice in which she often drew on other women’s work in literature and film, citing Agnès Varda, Simone de Beauvoir and possibly Solvejg Erichsen in *Triangle*, and bringing Amalie Skram’s two novels to the silver screen in *The Guardians*. Importantly, Macé’s cultural commitment was not confined to cinema, and she made a name in both theatre and radio. She was also actively involved in making women directors visible in Norwegian film culture. For Macé, the working conditions of mothers was a primary question, yet she also brought feminist perspectives to her film reviews, discussing among other French and German film through the lenses of female characters and woman directors.

Other directors formed part of feminist film networks as the films they made were picked up for distribution within the feminist film movement. Vibeke Løkkeberg, especially, exemplifies the connection to the transnational feminist film movement, as she travelled with her films to attend

seminars and workshops with other women directors and film feminists. Most notably, she was the only Norwegian filmmaker present at the First Women's Film Seminar in Berlin in 1973, where she screened the documentary *Abortion*, and she later attended a Women and Film meeting in Los Angeles while touring with *The Revelation*. As a filmmaker, Løkkeberg cultivated a personal and uncompromising film style where she often involved family and friends in the production. This was one of the reasons why her films would often prove controversial, but also points to a practice of carving out a space for herself to be able to exert artistic freedom and social commitment.

A similar feminist engagement is found in Ellen Aanesen's journalist and documentary practice. Contrary to Macé and Løkkeberg, Aanesen was part of the organized new women's movement. She was a member of the Women's Front and part of the Women's Front community in the NRK, and her feminist documentary practice exemplifies the tight connection between the profession of journalism and active feminists in Norway in the 1970s, where many journalist and media producers used their position to further the new women's movement on the public agenda.

Several of the women who realized feminist documentary films in the 1970s had similar connections to the organized new women's movement. They were, furthermore, often one-time directors. Eva Mannseth worked in a variety of engagements in both film culture and the new women's movement. Inge-Lise Langfeldt and the feminist film collective Damefilm were affiliated with the anarchist and feminist counterculture of the Women's House in Oslo that developed from the New Feminists. For this group, filmmaking and feminism seems to have shared mutual goals. They were, then, positioned on the other side of the internal divide within the new women's movement from the documentarians in the NRK, and from the Film Production Group who documented the Women's Culture Festival. This group, while consisting of a diverse group of women, were affiliated with the Women's Front community of the NRK. In general, the divide between the New Feminists and the Women's Front was a question of organizational structure, the role of Marxist analysis and the relationship to the AKP (m-l), where the Women's Front would place as primary the question of class over that over gender. However, it is not so easy to pin-point how these differences registered in the final works. Both Damefilm and the Film Production group, moreover, were feminist film collectives that sprung out of the Women's Culture Festival in the late 1970s.

For other directors, feminism was only one of several issues they pursued in their filmmaking. The Film Production Group, for instance, consisted of several women who were not primarily interested in feminism or the new women's movement, but saw the documentary as an opportunity to connect with other women, or as one of many projects where they could hone their skills. For feature film director Laila Mikkelsen, feminism comes across as only one of many issues she made films about, and she engaged the ideas of the new women's movements primarily through collaborations with other filmmakers: *Weekend* together with Per Blom, and *The Images Surrounding Us* with Anne Siri Bryhni and Per Blom. Similarly, Breien's feminist film practice developed as a result of collaboration. Breien discussed the film *Wives* as a film she arrived at as part of her own consciousness-raising coming from the play *The Law of Girls* (1974). Like Vibeke Løkkeberg, Anja Breien traversed the international women's film festival circuit, and *Wives* was perhaps the most important film for the dissemination and popularization of feminist filmmaking and the category of "women's films" in Norway. Breien would also continue to pursue feminist issues in her work, most importantly in *Witch Hunt* and in the *Wives*-trilogy, but she also stressed the diversity of her filmmaking in the face of the categorization of her work as women's films.

Institutional support

In addition to differences in political affiliation, personal engagements and artistic ambitions, women directed feminist films within different institutional settings. In this dissertation, I have discussed feminist filmmaking in relation to three contexts of production: first, the established film sector of feature film production; second, documentary film production in the NRK; and third, the alternative and independent production of short film. All three contexts were tied to public funding and state policies for film and media, and the combination between public funding and institutional flexibility stands out as an important institutional precondition for feminist filmmaking.

Indeed, feminist films in Norway were, as a rule, publicly funded, and primarily produced through either the publicly owned production company Norsk Film AS, or by public television. The handful of films that were produced independently by women outside of these two institutions were still dependent on the same state-level funding body that funded Norsk Film

AS, and were furthermore often dependent on the NRK or Norsk Film AS for material support. This means that feminist filmmaking interacted with the dual developments of the new women's movement, on the one hand, and public subsidizing of the film sector on the other.

Most of the feminist narrative fiction films were made possible by the publicly owned production company Norsk Film AS's commitment to talent development and cultural politics of relevance. In this way, Norsk Film AS represents a uniquely Norwegian opportunity structure. During the 1970s, the state's increased involvement resulted in favorable conditions for the company, and women directed feature and short film by taking full advantage of these novel opportunities. Apart from Nicole Macé's *Triangle* (1971), which was produced by her husband's production company Teamfilm AS, and Randi Nordby and Eric Johnson's self-produced *Full Emergency Response!* (1971), Norsk Film AS produced every feature film directed by women in Norway between 1971 and 1980. With the feature films *Wives* (1975), *The Revelation* (1977) and *The Guardians* (1978), and the short film *Weekend*, the company helmed four of the five narrative fiction films I have defined as feminist films directed by women. The company also supported the documentary film *It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* (1979).

In a debate book on women filmmakers in Norway, Jan Erik Holst points to the freedom of selection created by direct funding as a key component in the company's ability to promote women as film directors (2015). As Anne Marit Myrstad suggests, the relatively prominent place of women directors during this decade can also be seen as a function of the aesthetic reorientation of the company in the 1970s (2020, 175). However, there is not enough evidence to suggest that these direct funds specifically benefited women as a group, nor that gender balance was part of the company policy. The program of talent development certainly promoted some directors, but, as the debacle surrounding the production of *The Revelation* suggests, this freedom was not absolute. Moreover, none of the feminist films of the decade were expensive films, but retained the usually quite modest budgets of Norwegian film production, if not lower, as was the case with *The Revelation*. Perhaps it would have been more difficult to find support for more extravagant filmmaking?

Indeed, many of the feminist films helmed by Norsk Film AS were made through low-budget training opportunities. Both *Weekend* and *The Revelation* were produced by The Study

Department, while the documentary film *It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back* received material support from this department as well as the Short Film Department. These departments provided crucial entry points for some directors into feature filmmaking, but also seem to have raised the initial threshold for aspiring filmmakers who were not connected to Norsk Film AS. This might explain how the Norwegian film sector fostered a string of artistically ambitious feminist feature films by women in the 1970s, but less feminist filmmaking at an amateur and grassroots level.

Feminist documentary filmmaking was primarily conducted within the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, the NRK. As the NRK held a monopoly on all television production during the 1970s, the public broadcaster stands out as the second most important structure of opportunity for women's filmmaking in general and feminist filmmaking specifically. Indeed, the NRK was an important institution for both the production and dissemination of feminist films. Sharing this site of employment, women in radio and television created quite robust feminist networks within the public broadcaster and used their position as journalists to further the agenda of the new women's movement. Several of the feminist documentaries were aired on public television, although this placed limitations on the aesthetic direction of the films, and might explain the lack of montage techniques used in feminist filmmaking in Norway, as well as the scarcity of ethnographical films. To a high degree, feminist documentary in Norway adopted a didactic and informational stance: rather than agitating films, these were made to enlighten and bring issues of women's rights into the public sphere.

Feminist films were not only dependent on public funding for production, but were also to a large degree exhibited by the public cinema system. Norsk Filmsenter (The Norwegian Film Center), established in 1972 as an alternative distribution and production channel for political and oppositional filmmaking, supported feminist documentary filmmaking, but this does not appear to have been the most central concern of Norsk Filmsenter. Additionally, feminist films circulated through the film societies, and through the municipal cinema system. As such, there is reason to discuss if indeed the 1970s fostered what one could call a feminist public cinema. This support must still be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, the popularization of feminist themes suggests that feminist filmmaking was both topical and oppositional; perhaps leading to a washing out of the political appeal of the films distributed under the heading of women's films.

On the other hand, the circulation also created opportunities for watching and discussing film and feminism, thus enabling and furthering the development of a feminist film culture in Norway.

10.1.3. Feminist film culture

It is reasonable to assume that the feminist films made and released in Norway in the 1970s gained strength through practices that recognized and discussed them as part of a larger project of visibility and consciousness-raising. As such, they form part of the development of a women's public sphere and a feminist film culture. While this dissertation has not aimed to give a thorough or systematic presentation of all the discussions and initiatives that could be considered part of a feminist film culture, the chapters have mapped out some important examples that provide ground for discussing the central characteristics and traces of such a culture in Norway.

In Norway, feminist film culture appears not to have developed with the same vigor or organizational force as in the more robust film nations of Sweden and Denmark. However, in tandem with the popularization of issues of women's rights and the cultural impact of the new women's movement, there were several initiatives and practices characterized by an attention to women in/and film. Most importantly, this was expressed through exhibition practices dedicated to showing films with relevance for women. While I have not found any traces of screening rooms solely dedicated to showing women's filmmaking, such as the Kvinnobio in Stockholm and the cinema at the Women's House in Åbenrå in Denmark, a range of special screenings, film series, and film events provided opportunities for watching and discussing films by and about women. Some of them were organized as rallying points by and for the new women's movement. Other screening events, typically focusing on narrative cinema, used film to address the wider public about issues of the women's liberation more generally.

Perhaps the most striking development in exhibition practices and film journalism and criticism in the 1970s is the adoption of the category of women's films. The International Women's Year in 1975 stands as a watershed in this regard: A search for the term "kvinnofilm" (women's film) in the Norwegian National Library's digital database for newspapers yields over sixty mentions in 1975, in contrast to eight the previous year (nb.no, accessed 11.08.2020). Between 1975 and 1979, at least a dozen "women's film series" or "women and film events" were organized across

the country, many of them organized by the municipal cinemas. This suggests both a willingness and attention on the side of the cinema managers to create engaging screenings as part of the cinema's position as a central cultural institution, and the impact of the feminist film movement on film culture at large. The largest and most significant of these was the international Women's Film Week in 1979. The festival functioned as an influential and synergetic event for feminist film culture in Norway, gathering women directors, screening feature and short films by women, and creating an opportunity for the establishment of the *ad hoc* feminist film collectives. The documentary films connected to the festival are significant, as they point to the largely overlooked part of Norwegian short and documentary films about the new women's movement.

In addition to film screenings, there was also critical activity in the film and feminist press that interrogated questions of women and film. Through interviews and feature articles, the working conditions of women directors, and sometimes also women working in other roles, were placed on the agenda. This worked primarily to make women directors visible as a group, a development furthered by the creation of meeting points for women directors. The category of women's films itself and the potential of film as a tool for the new women's movement was also discussed or addressed at various points. While women's film was primarily used as a genre designation of films that thematically engaged women's situation of life and provided affirmative images of women, there were some who would champion a stricter definition. In this dissertation, I have pointed to film critic Eva Bellsund in the feminist magazine *Sirene* as an interesting example. While her critical production was not extensive, Bellsund shows a sustained concern with what constitute feminist film practice and argued for women's films as an oppositional and alternative film practice of films by, for and about women. There were, furthermore, different pressures on what women's films should offer women, with at least two principal competing views within feminist criticism: to present clear and hopeful analyses that women could learn from, to or create portrayals or descriptions that women could identify with.

These differing views show that neither the new women's movement nor the women for whom women's films were screened were united or unanimous groups. The various women's film series, special screenings, interviews, and criticism have in common, however, that they attested significance to films about women. While there were different pressures on what, exactly, women's film should offer women, and different views on how films most successfully could

work politically, the feminist films directed by women were both made and received in a context that believed in the potential of films to offer concrete expressions of collective experiences, to provide points of departure for discussions on the gender role system, or to offer visions of, or of pathways towards, liberation. While there is reason to question and probe the communality created by feminism in the 1970s, this belief in the potential of film remains a powerful legacy of feminist filmmaking in this period, and an argument for the social and communal practice of cinema.

10.2. Central contributions and further research

This dissertation has explored the synergy between the new women's movement and women's filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s. The research shows that women directors in Norway used the camera to address feminist concerns, and that filmmaking women were important voices that through their feature films and television productions managed to reach a wide audience with a feminist agenda. This was, moreover, not a phenomenon of single *auteurs* working against monolith structures in isolation. They were many. This dissertation has shown the extent of feminist filmmaking beyond individual key contributions. There was a broad commitment to feminism and the new women's movement in film and television, for which the feature film directors were only the most visible representatives. It has also shown that feminist filmmaking found support in public film and media institutions that enabled women to push the limits of acceptable utterances in the public sphere. Surrounding them was a feminist film culture characterized by a range of feminist film practices: of making, exhibiting, and writing about film.

A work of historical scholarship, the dissertation has first and foremost offered a contribution to the aesthetic and social film history of Norway in the 1970s, and to a history of women directors in Norwegian film and television. Most importantly, the dissertation has offered feminist film as a category for historical investigation in Norwegian film history. In the tradition of women's cinema, 'feminist film' has here been used as a narrow and contextually specific concept that can set at stake the cultural and material conditions for, and the aesthetic and thematic expressions of, women's oppositional filmmaking. By combining historical investigations into contexts of production and reception with thematic film analysis of feminist films directed by women, the dissertation has shed new light on the expressions of, and conditions for, feminist filmmaking in

Norwegian film production. It has brought to light a group of independent documentary films, documentaries in television, as well as short and feature films that were mostly forgotten and disregarded in earlier historical accounts, as examples and representatives of feminist filmmaking in Norway. The dissertation has illustrated the place of film and television in the cultural expression of the new women's movement and given examples not only of how the new women's movement impacted practices of film and feminism, but also of how film was used by the new women's movement in Norway. As such, this dissertation is both a contribution to Norwegian film history and to the cultural history of the new women's movement.

By bringing to light the history of feminist filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s, the dissertation provides a contribution to a reconsideration of Norwegian film in this decade. Hopefully the dissertation's findings, and the projects, commitments and connections uncovered by this focused study on a small part of Norwegian film and television in the 1970s, will serve as an inspiration for further work to look anew at other parts of the production communities, filmmaking, and film culture in Norway in the 1970s.

The dissertation holds significance beyond Norwegian film history of the 1970s. It offers a contribution to a growing body of research in the field of women's film and television history that aims to restore to cultural memory histories of the impact of the movement for women's liberation on film cultures and filmmakers, and to broaden the understanding of "film feminism" as a historical phenomenon. The significance of a transnational history of feminist filmmaking in the 1970s can be located in the potential for further comparative investigations. The Norwegian case can offer an example of a feminist film culture that developed differently along the lines of institutional support and grassroots activity, where the support of the municipal cinema system represents a quite unique aspect in an international context. In this way, the Norwegian case offers both evidence of transnational tendencies, as well as an opportunity to discuss the complex relationship between oppositional filmmaking and institutional support, and its effect on filmmaking practices and aesthetic expression. The Norwegian case can, furthermore, offer evidence of transnational tendencies. Indeed, the history of feminist filmmaking and the feminist film movement is both a national and transnational history, and there is both potential and need for further research that explores the movement of films and filmmakers across borders.

10.2.1. Unanswered questions and further research

While this has not been a study of what women made films about or about women directors in general, the woman director has been a core research interest in this dissertation. This means that some questions regarding feminist filmmaking and feminist film culture have been asked in favor of others. First, the method of analysis could have accommodated a broader selection of films. Indeed, the television work and the independent documentary filmmaking stand out as particularly interesting and powerful findings. There is evidence of more amateur feminist filmmaking having been made in Norway in the 1970s. As for television, this dissertation has merely scratched the surface, but hopefully made the case for further research into the producers and productions of the NRK. Another line of question that could have been pursued is the place of men's contributions to the legacy of feminist filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s.

Second, the role of the director as the primary agent of feminist filmmaking means that important questions regarding below-the-line work, as well as other creative positions on film productions, have gone unexplored. What did feminist engagement look like for women in roles besides film and television director in the 1970s? As a decade both of union organization and attention to women's working conditions, how was the work life of women working in the Norwegian film and television sector, and how would a broader account of women in these sectors impact the narrative of the "women's wave"?

Third, the focus on filmmakers and films as the central nexus has meant less attention to questions regarding film culture and reception at large. While the dissertation has begun the work of mapping out important contributions of women to feminist film culture, more attention to the women active in festival programming, film criticism and film institutions could probably have given an even more nuanced and colorful picture of feminist film culture in the 1970s. There is need for further research into the grassroots engagements and meeting points created by and for women in a male dominated industry. This dissertation can serve as a background for a larger oral history project that collects and delves into these contributions and engagements.

The choice, furthermore, not to conduct extensive reception studies has left a systematic account of feminist film criticism a topic for further research. Such a study could have shown in greater detail the general public opinion of feminist filmmaking and the new women's movement. By

relating this reception to the reception and discourse of other parts of the political or oppositional filmmaking community of the 1970s, such a research endeavor would offer important insight into what was seen to constitute the political and the oppositional in this period. It would, in this way, further contribute to the research interest in the visual cultures of the 1970s as a defining moment of political practices and visions of political change.

Into the 1980s

For Norwegian film history, one of the most urgent research questions generated by this dissertation concerns what came after, and the conditions for, and expression of, feminist filmmaking into the 1980s. By the early 1980s, a national narrative of the Norwegian film sector as a forefront in terms of gender balance was starting to take hold. This was symbolically epitomized in 1981, coined “Det store jenteåret” (“the Great Year of the Girls”) by for instance Bjørn Bratten in the daily newspaper *Dagbladet* (Bratten 1981, 18), because it was three women directors who saved the face of Norwegian film this year: *Forfølgelsen / Witch Hunt* (Breien), *Løperjenten / Kamilla* (Løkkeberg) and *Liten Ida / Little Ida* (Mikkelsen). According to Jan Erik Holst, a Nordic film seminar hosted by the American Film Institute in 1982 gave rise to the term “Norway - land of female directors” (2006, 75). The same year, an interview with Laila Mikkelsen in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* began with the ingress “What is happening in Norway, have they introduced radical gender quotas or what?” (Lindahl 1982, n.p.). The interview continues by nuancing the situation suggested by the rhetorical question, but this still speaks to a visibility afforded the presence of women working as directors in Norway at this moment. These descriptions point to two coalescing tendencies of national identity building: One concerning the development of Norwegian cinema as an international export, and the other of Norway as a country of gender equality. With a series of policies aimed at women’s rights and gender equality implemented in the late 1970s, the election of Gro Harlem Brundtland as the country’s first female Prime Minister, and the appointment of the “women’s government” in 1986, Norway seemed to be on the track to become a “women friendly country” (Hagemann 2004, 275; Hernes 1987).

The historical narrative of the women’s wave and the idea of Norway as a forefront of gender balance in the film sector are, however, rife with contradictions. On the one hand, these

formulations put into relief the ambivalent way in which the woman director gained visibility, recalling the double-edge of Walter Fyrst's "hurrah for the gals" (see chapter 3). Addressing the "Great Year of the Girls" as a nostalgic high point, film scholar Anne Gjelsvik has pointed out the patronizing attitude in calling women in their late 30s and early 40s for "girls" (2015). This echoes Claudia Lennsen who wrote of women directors in the New German Cinema: "These women directors were born around the year 1940 and were for a ridiculously long time labeled 'the up-and-coming generation'" (1984, 4). On the other hand, film production did generally not develop into a "women friendly" sector. While the 1970s and 1980s set women directors' working conditions and presence on the agenda, few institutional measures were taken to meet the challenges women faced, or to increase the number of women directors in the film sector, and women working as directors in Norwegian film production would still be in the minority.

Breien, Løkkeberg and Mikkelsen continued their careers as directors into the 1980s, and were joined by Bente Erichsen with *Over Grensen / Across the Border* (1987) and Eva Dahr and Eva Isaksen with *Brennende blomster / Burning Flowers* (1985). Following in the footsteps of Randi Nordby, women such as Margrethe Robhsam and Grete Salomonsen, as well as Mikkelsen and Erichsen, directed films aimed at a youth and family audience. This trend continued in the 1990s, with successful youth and children's films by new directors Berit Nesheim, Vibeke Idsøe and Torunn Nyen. Other notable first-time directors of feature film include Unni Straume and Kikki Engelbrektsen, as well as the internationally renowned actor Liv Ullmann. Counting the number of women who directed or co-directed feature films produced in Norway, the percentage averages 15% from 1975 to 1989, and 22% from 1994 to 2003 (Lian 2015, 12). In 2007, the Norwegian Parliament issued White Paper no. 22 (2006-2007) that stated that women should account for at least 40% of the creative persons in the positions of director, scriptwriter, and producer on Norwegian film productions, thus instigating a new era of policy measures dedicated to ensuring gender equality (Ministry of Church and Culture 2006-2007, 109).

For the women who started their career in the 1970s, the 1980s would be an ambivalent decade. Despite the success of the feature film directors, a recurring feature of their careers is that it would be increasingly difficult for them to obtain funding as the 1980s progressed. As Johanne Kielland Servoll has shown, the 1980s, known to have introduced an aesthetic reorientation towards the genre films and dramaturgy of classical Hollywood cinema, as well as an increased

professionalization and specialization of the Norwegian film sector, led to a marginalization and devaluation of the experimental and modernist aspects of the *auteur* cinema championed by directors such as Anja Breien and Vibeke Løkkeberg (2014). Indeed, if the 1970s is known as the decade when everything became political, the 1980s stands, from the point of view of feminist directors, as a period of backlash.

The ambivalent and contradictory position of woman directors in the history of the 1980s introduces here to a greater degree the national and the nation as contexts of institutional and historiographical analysis, but also as contexts for thematic analysis as the national historical past and the figure of the mother entered with full force in films directed by women. We see this in films that address women's historical oppression, as in the four-part teleplay from the NRK's Television Theatre *Den som henger i en tråd / Those Who Hang by a Thread* (Ryg, 1980), about the exploitation of women factory workers in the 1930s, and in the epic historical dramas *Witch Hunt* (Breien, 1981) and *Hud / Vilde – The Wild One* (Løkkeberg, 1986), both unapologetically scrutinizing the suffering of women in patriarchal society. We can also see this in films that recast the experiences of the Second World War and the postwar period, first from the eyes of the child on her mother in *Liten Ida* (Laila Mikkelsen, 1981) and *Kamilla* (Løkkeberg, 1981) and then from a mother's perspective in the television theatre production *Kvinnen og den svarte fuglen / The Woman and the Black Bird* (Ryg, 1982). Other thematic connections also become visible: post-natal depression in the experimental short film *Reise gjennom ukjent land – Gravid / Travel through Unknown Country – Pregnant* (Haslund, 1981) and the teleplay *Etterbyrden / Afterbirth* (Ryg, 1984); incest and rape in *Vilde – The Wild One*, in the thriller *Papirfuglen / The Paper Bird* (Breien, 1984), and in the programs *Valdtekt – ein vond sirkel / Rape – A Circle of Pain* (1984) and *Ingen rom er trygge / No Rooms are Safe* (1985) by Else Myklebust for the evening news; the duality of sex as pleasure and danger in *Hustruer – ti år etter / Wives – Ten Years Later* (Breien, 1985).

There is still work to be done. This dissertation will end with an invitation to continue the research into feminist film culture through attention to the social significance of filmmaking, to collective and communal practices of production, exhibition and discussion, and with an assertion inspired by feminist filmmaking in Norway in the 1970s: We cannot stop now.

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3 / Triangle. 1971. Directed and written by Nicole Macé. Runtime: 1 hour 26 min. Color. Production: Teamfilm AS. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Abort / Abortion. 1972. Directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg. Written by Vibeke Løkkeberg with Halvor Elvik. Runtime: 39 min. (Censored version). Black and White. Production: Norsk dokumentarfilm AS. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Åpenbaringen / The Revelation. 1977. Directed by Vibeke Løkkeberg. Written by Vibeke Løkkeberg with Terje Kristiansen. Runtime: 1 hour 20 min. Color. Production: Studieavdelingen ved Norsk Film AS. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Bildene omkring oss / The Images Surrounding Us. 1978. Written and directed by Laila Mikkelsen and Anne Siri Bryhni. Runtime: 9 min. Color. Production: Self-produced with funding from the Ministry of Church and Education. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Det er langt fram, sa kjerringa, ho såg seg tilbake / It's still a long way to go, said the crone, as she looked back. 1979. Made by Anne Marthe Albers, Liv Baggeråns, Madli Birkelund, Anne Britt Bøe, Borgny Baastad, Torunn Calmeyer Ringen, Kirsti Dale, Kikki Engelbrektsen, Kristin Eriksen, Bente Erichsen, Lillian Fjellvær, Kari Færøvik, Anne Lise Indrefjord, Bjørg Kittelsen, Sidsel Kraakenes, Ingeborg Kvamme, Inge Lise Larsen, Merete Lindstad, Hilde Løchen Trier, Sidsel Mundal, Eldrid Orvik, Ann-Elise Pettersen, Nina Sandås, Unni Straume and Bente

Weisser. Runtime: 38 min. Color. Production: Self-produced by the Film Production Group at the Women's Culture Festival 1979, with support from Bærum kinomategrafer, Club 7, The Short Film Department and The Study Department of Norsk Film and NRK. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Formynderne / The Guardians. 1978. Written and directed by Nicole Macé, based on Amalie Skram. Runtime: 1 hour 43 min. Color. Production: Norsk film AS. Accessed: VOD. Filmarkivet.no.

Fra 3 års fengsel til selvbestemt abort / From Three Years in Prison to Self-Determined Abortion. 1978. Written and directed by Ellen Aanesen. Runtime: 58 min. Color. Production: NRK. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Hustruer. 1975. Directed by Anja Breien. Written by Anja Breien, Katja Medbøe, Anne Marie Ottersen and Frøydis Armand. Runtime: 1 hour 24 min. Production: Norsk Film AS. Accessed: DVD. (Oslo: Nordisk Film, 2009) / VOD. Filmarkivet.no.

Krisesenteret i Oslo / The Women's Shelter in Oslo. 1980. Directed by Inge-Lise Langfeldt with Camilla krisesenter. Runtime: 30 min. Color. Production: Damefilm AS with funding from the Ministry of Church and Education. Accessed: VHS (Oslo: Norsk Filmsenter, 1980). National Library of Norway.

Kvinnekamp og kvinneår / Women's Struggle and the Women's Year 1975. 1979. Written and directed by Eva Mannseth. Runtime: 60 min. Black and White. Production: Self-produced with Norsk Filmsenter. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy, scan. National Library of Norway.

Kvinnens møte med abortnemnda / Women's Encounters with the Abortion Committee. 1978. color. Written and directed by Ellen Aanesen. Runtime: 55 min. Color. Production: NRK. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Ukeslutt / Weekend. 1974. Directed by Laila Mikkelsen. Written by Laila Mikkelsen and Per Blom. Runtime: 23 min. Color. Production: Studieavdelingen ved Norsk Film AS. Accessed: Unreleased digital copy. National Library of Norway.

Other films and television programs mentioned in this dissertation

Original title / English Translation. Year. Director. Country. Production company.

17. mai – en film om ritualer / 17th of May – A Film about Rituals. 1969. Anja Breien. Norway. Vampyrfilm.

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Adams Eva: nest best i mannssamfunnet / Adam's Eve: Secondary in the Male Society. 1971. Mette Jansson and Eva Brustad. Norway. NRK.

Agnete. 1979. Finn Kvalem. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Alberte og friheten / Alberta and Freedom. 1970. Sverre Udnæs. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Älskande Par / Loving Couples. 1964. Mai Zetterling. Sweden. Sandrews.

Alle mine søsken goddag / Brothers and Sisters, Hello. 1974. Anja Breien. Norway. Vampyrfilm.

Angst / Anguish. 1976. Oddvar Bull Tuhus. Norway. Marcusfilm.

Ansikter / Faces. 1970. Anja Breien. Norway. Vampyrfilm.

Anton. 1973. Per Blom. Norway. Norsk Film.

Arbeidsplassen: Rett til arbeid – men ikke for alle! / The work place: Right to work – but not for all! 1979. Ellen Aanesen. Norway. NRK.

Arve 16 og et halvt / Arve 16 and a half. 1969. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Self-produced with equipment from Norsk Film.

Arven / Next of Kin. 1979. Anja Breien. Norway. Norsk Film.

Av reisende folk / Of the Travelling People. 1994. Ellen Aanesen. Norway. NRK

Bak kulisene / Behind the Scenes. 1964. Edith Carlmar. Norway. Norsk Film AS for Oslo kinematographer.

Balladen om mestertyven Ole Høiland / Ballad of the Master Thief Ole Hoiland. 1970. Knut Andersen. Norway. Contact Film, EMI-Produksjon, Teamfilm.

Bögiävlar / Damned Queers (1977). Gunnar Almér, Nils Gredeby, Lars Gustafsson, Staffan Hallin, Håkan Hede, Sten Åke Hedström, Olle Holm, Anders Näslund and Pelle Pettersson. Sweden. Uppror Filmproduktion.

Bolignød i Oslo / Housing Shortage in Oslo. (Four part series). 1972. Ellen Aanesen, Eva Brustad and Bjørn Nilsen. Norway. NRK.

Brennende blomster / Burning Flowers. 1985. Eva Dahr and Eva Isaksen. Norway. Norsk Film.

Brent jord / Scorched Earth. 1969. Knut Andersen. Norway. Teamfilm.

Cecilia. 1954. Solvejg Eriksen. Norway. Artistfilm.

Cléo de 5 à 7 / Cléo from 5 to 7. 1962. Agnès Varda. France. Rome-Paris Films.

Dager fra 1000 år / Days from a Thousand Years. 1970. Episodes by Anja Breien, Egil Kolstø and Espen Thorstenson. Norway. Norsk Film.

De ukjentes marked / Market of the Unknown. 1968. Nils R. Müller. Norway. NRM-Film.

Den allvarsamme leken / Games of Love and Loneliness. 1977. Anja Breien. Norway, Sweden. Svenske Filmintitutet, Norsk Film AS, Sandrew Film & Teater AB.

Den som henger i en tråd / Those Who Hang by a Thread. 1980. Eli Ryg. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Det store varpet. 1960. Nils R. Müller. Norway. NRM-Film AS.

Det tause flertall / The Silent Majority. 1977. Svend Wam and Petter Vennerød. Norway. Mefistofilm.

Det var en gang et fiskevær / Once There was a Fishing Village. 1979. Nicole Macé and Knut Andersen. Norway. Teamfilm.

Deutschland, bleiche Mutter / Germany, Pale Mother. 1980. Helma Sander-Brahms. West Germany. Helma Sanders-Brahms Filmproduktion, Literarisches Colloquium, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.

Diary of a Mad Housewife. 1970. Frank Perry. USA. Frank Perry Films Inc.

Die Reise nach Lyon / Blind Spot. 1980. Claudia von Alemann. West Germany. Alemann Filmproduktion.

Døden er et kjærtegn / Death is a Caress. 1949. Edith Carlmar. Norway. Carlmar Film.

Drømmespel / Dreamplay. 1994. Unni Straume. Norway, Sweden. Unni Straume filmproduksjon.

Ektemann alene / Husband Alone. 1956. Nils R. Müller. Norway. NRM-Film.

Ekteskap / Marriage. Eli Ryg. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Else Kant. 1978. Line Krogh. Denmark. Danmarks Radio.

En far skal barnet ha / The Child Needs a Father. 1973. Vibeke Løkkeberg. Norway. NRK.

En fremmed banker på / A Stranger Knocks. 1959. Johan Jacobsen, Denmark. Flamingo Film Studio.

Equilibrium. 1965. Nils R. Müller. Norway. NRM-Film.

Es kommt drauf an, sie zu verändern / The Point is to change it. 1972/1973. Claudia von Alemann. West Germany. Alemann Filmproduktion.

Eskimo. 1930. George Schnéevoigt. Norway, Denmark. Skandinavisk Talefilm.

Et spann av tid / A Bucket of Time. 1971. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Norsk Dokumentarfilm Filmopplæring.

Etterbyrden / Afterbirth. 1984. Eli Ryg. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Eva & Maria. 1983. Marie Falksten, Mary Eisikovits, Annalena Öhrström. Sweden. Tjefilm.

Exit. 1970. Pål Løkkeberg. Norway. Norsk Film AS, Nordisk Films Kompagni.

Falkberget. 1962. Nicole Macé and Svein Toreg. Norway. Studio ABC.

Family Life. 1971. Ken Loach. U.K. Anglo-EMI, Kestrel Films.

Femø 1971. 1974. Vibeke Pedersen. Denmark. Det danske filminstituts Workshop.

Fest i Nord / Celebration in the North. 1971. Nicole Macé and Knut Andersen. Norway. Teamfilm.

Fjols til fjells / Fools in the Mountain. 1957. Edith Carlmar. Norway. Carlmar Film.

Flåkløya Grand Prix / The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix. 1975. Ivo Caprino. Norway. Caprino Filmcenter.

Flickorna / The Girls. 1968. Mai Zetterling. Sweden. Sandrews.

Forfølgelsen / Witch Hunt. 1981. Anja Breien. Norway. Norsk Film, Svenska Filminstitutet.

Forsøksgymnasen i Oslo. 1973/1974. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Vampyrfilm.

Full utrykning! / Full Emergency Response! 1971. Randi Nordby and Eric Johnson. Norway. Johnson-Produktion.

Gamle / The Elderly. 1975. Anja Breien and Espen Thorstenson. Norway. Vampyrfilm.

Girlfriends. 1978. Claudia Weill. USA. Cyclops.

Gjensyn med Jungelfolket / Jungle Beyond. 1950. Per Høst. Norway. Per Høst Film.

Gråpus som forsvant / The Cat Went Missing. 1956. Liv Sandberg. Norway. Svekon Film.

Growing Up Female. 1971. Julia Reichert and Jim Klein. USA. Self-produced.

Heksene fra den forstenede skog / The Stone Wood Witches. 1976. Bredo Greve. Fotfilm.

Herbstsonate / Autumn Sonata. 1978. Ingmar Bergman. West Germany. Personafilm.

Himmel og Helvete / Heaven and Hell. 1969. Øyvind Vennerød. Norway. ContactFilm, Norsk Film, Nordisk Films Kompagni.

Hiroshima mon amour. 1959. Alain Resnais. France, Japan: Argos Films, Como Films, Daiei Studios.

Hu er dronninga mi! / She's my Queen! 2005. Ellen Aanesen. Norway: NRK.

Hud / Vilde – The Wild One. 1986. Vibeke Løkkeberg. Norway: ÅsFilm.

Husbands. 1970. John Cassavetes. USA: Faces Music.

Hustruer – ti år etter / Wives – Ten Years Later. 1985. Anja Breien. Norway. Norsk Film.

Hustruer III / Wives III. 1996. Anja Breien. Norway. Norsk Film AS, Magdalenafilm.

Hva nå, mann? / So, What Now, Man? 1974. Mette Jansson. Norway. NRK.

Hvem eier Tyssedal? / Who Owns Tyssedal? 1975. Malte Wadman and Sølve Skagen. Norway. Self-produced for Statens filmsentral.

Hvem har bestemt? / Says Who? 1978. Svend Vam and Petter Vennerød. Norway. Mefistofilm.

Ingen rom er trygge / No Rooms Are Safe. 1985. Else Myklebust. Norway. NRK Dagsrevyen.

Is-slottet / The Ice Palace. 1986. Per Blom. Norway. Norsk Film.

Jäg er nyfiken – gul / I Am Curious (Yellow). 1967. Viglot Sjøstrøm, Sweden. Sandrew Film & Teater.

Janie's Janie. 1971. Geri Ashur, Peter Barton, Marilyn Mulford, and Stephanie Palewski. USA. Newsreel.

Jeanne Dielmann 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles. 1975. Chantal Akerman. Belgium, France. Ministère de la Culture Française de Belgique, Paradise Films, Unité Trois.

Jenny. 1981. Per Bronken. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Julia. 1977. Fred Zinnemann. USA. Twentieth Century Fox.

Kampen om Mardøla / The Fight for Mardøla. 1972. Oddvar Einarson. Norway. Elinor film.

Kaptein Maria. 1979. Dagmar Richter Larssen. Norway. Studieavdelingen ved Norsk Film.

Kloster / Monastery. 1971/1972. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Norsk Film AS for Oslo Kinematografer.

Klute. 1971. Alan J. Pakula. USA. Warner Bros.

Kon-Tiki. 1950. Thor Heyerdahl. Norway, Sweden. Artfilm, Synchron-film.

Kranes Konditori / Krane's Confectionery. 1951. Astrid Henning-Jensen. Norway. Norsk Film.

Kvinnan i ditt liv är du / The Woman in Your Life Is You. 1977. Lesbisk Front. Sweden.

Kvinnen og den svarte fuglen / The Woman and the Black Bird. 1982. Eli Ryg. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Kvinnen og Fællesmarkedet / Woman and the EEC. 1973. Mette Knudsen, Mette Bauer, Lil Vilstrup and Dola Bonfils. Denmark. Det danske filminstituts Workshop.

Kvinnene / The Women. 1979. Per Blom. Norway. Marcusfilm.

Kvinnens plass / Woman's Place. 1956. Nils R. Müller. Norway. NRM-Film.

Kvinner – utdanning – yrke / Women – Education – Profession. 1973. Mette Jansson. Norway. NRK.

Lasse og Geir. 1976. Svend Wam. Norway. Mefistorfilm, Elan-film.

Le Bonheur / Happiness. 1965. Agnès Varda. France. Parc Film.

Lekeplasser / Children's Playgrounds. 1969. Ellen Aanesen. Norway. NRK.

Les Quatre Cents Coups / The 400 Blows. 1959. François Truffaut. France. Les Films du Carrosse, Sédif Productions

Lipstick. 1977. Lamont Johnson. USA. Dine de Laurentiis Company, Paramount Pictures.

Liten Ida / Little Ida. 1981. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Norsk Film.

Liv. 1967. Pål Løkkeberg. Norway. P.V.L. Produksjon.

Løperjenten / Kamilla. 1981. Vibeke Løkkeberg. Norway. ÅsFilm.

Louder than Bombs. 2015. Joachim Trier. Norway, Denmark, France, USA. Motlys, Memento Films Production, Numbus Film Production.

Lucie. 1979. Jan Erik Düring. Norway. Norsk Film.

Lukket avdeling / Closed Ward. 1972. Arnljot Berg. Norway. Norsk Film.

Madam besøker Oslo / Madam Visits Oslo. 1927. Harry Ivarson. Norway. Kommunenes filmcentral.

Mange flagg - ingen grenser / Many Flags – No Borders. 1991. Kikki Engelbrektson. Norway. Norsk Filmstudio, NRK

Maridalen. 1972. Ellen Aanesen. Norway. NRK.

Marikens bryllup / Mariken's Wedding Day. 1972. Knut Andersen. Norway. Teamfilm.

Mennesker mødes og sød musik opstår i hjertet / People Meet and Sweet Music Fills the Heart. 1967. Henning Carlsen. Denmark, Sweden. Henning Carlsen Film, Nordisk Films Kompagni, Sandrew Film & Teater.

Mormor og de åtte ungene i byen / Grandma and the Eight Children in the City. 1977. Espen Thorstenson. Norway. Norsk Film, Vampyrfilm.

Mormor og de åtte ungene i skogen / Grandma and the Eight Children in the Forest. 1979. Espen Thorstenson. Norway. Norsk Film, Vampyrfilm, Aprilfilm.

Munnharpe / Jaw Harp. 1968. Nicole Macé. Norway. Norsk Film.

Murer rundt fengselet / Walls around the Prison. 1972. Anja Breien. Norway. Vampyrfilm.

Neverfletterne / Birch Weavers. 1969. Nicole Macé. Norway. Norsk Film.

OBOS og byen / OBOS and the City. 1971. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Norsk Film for OBOS and Oslo kinematografer.

Oljen og vi / The Oil and Us. (Four part series). 1971. Ellen Aanesen and Ole-Jacob Kvinnsland. Norway. NRK.

Olsenbanden / The Olsen Gang. 1969. Knut Bohwim. Norway. Teamfilm.

Olsenbanden og Dynamitt-Harry / The Olsen Gang and Dynamite-Harry. 1970. Ove Kant. Norway. Teamfilm.

Om å være kvinne bak kamera / On Being a Woman Behind the Camera. Nicole Macé. 1976. Norway. NRK.

Om homofile. 1973. Norway. NRK.

Om samliv. 1969. Mette Jansson. Norway. NRK.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. 1975. Milos Forman. USA. Fantasy Films.

Opening Night. 1977. John Cassavetes. USA. Faces Distribution.

Oss / Us. 1976. Laila Mikkelsen. Norway. Norsk Film.

Over grensen / Across the Border. 1987. Bente Erichsen. Norway. Marcusfilm.

På Solsiden / On the Sunny Side. 1956. Edith Carlmar. Norway. Carlmar Film.

Papirfuglen / The Paper Bird. 1984. Anja Breien. Norway. Norsk Film.

Prisgitt / At the Mercy. 1979. Tone Bengtsson. Norway / Sweden. NRK, Svensk Radio 2.

Prognose Innerdalen / Prognosis Innerdalen. 1981. Oddvar Einarson. Norway. Elinor Film.

Regn / Rain. 1975. Vibeke Løkkeberg. Norway. Studieavdelingen ved Norsk Film.

Reise gjennom ukjent land – gravid / Travel through Unknown Country – Pregnant. 1981.
Veslemøy Haslund. Norway. Studieavdelingen ved Norsk Film.

Rødblått Paradis / Red-blue Paradise. 1971. Oddvar Bull Tuhus. Norway. Norsk Film.

Rødstrømper: En kavalkade af kvindefilm / Redstockings: A Cavalcade of Women's Films. 1985.
Mette Knudsen. Denmark. Wide Film Service.

Same Jakki. 1957. Per Høst. Norway. Per Høst Film.

Sebastian. 1995. Svend Wam. Norway. Mefistofilm, Nordisk Film TV, Miramar Film.

Self-Health. 1974. Cathrine Allan, Judy Irola, Allie Light and Joan Musante with the San Francisco Women's Health Center. USA. Self-produced.

Skadeskutt / Maimed. 1951. Edith Carlmar. Norway. Carlmar Film.

Som natt og dag / Like Night and Day. 1972. Eva Ch. Nilsen. Norway. NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Stå på! / Keep It Up! 1976. Skjalg Omdal, Hans Otto Nicolayssen, Jan Knutzen and Sølve Skagen. Norway. Self-produced.

Støv på hjernen / With Dust on Their Minds. 1959. Norway. Øyvind Vennerød. Contact Film.

Svart og hvit / Black and White. 1987. Gerd Inger Polen. Norway. NRK.

Svartere enn natten / Darker Than Night. 1979. Svend Vam. Norway. Mefistofilm.

Streik! / Strike! 1975. Oddvar Bull Tuhus. Norway. Marcusfilm AS, NRK Fjernsynsteateret.

Sult / Hunger. 1966. Henning Carlsen. Denmark, Norway, Sweden. Studio ABC, Sandrew-Ateljéerna.

Ta' det som en mand, frue! / Take it Like a Man, Ma'm! 1975. Li Vistrup, Mette Knudsen and Elisabeth Rygaard. Denmark. Røde Søster.

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