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**Title: A revelation: Addressing feminist agency in Norwegian film history**

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**Abstract**

This article concerns how gender balance in the Norwegian film sector has been narrativized, and as such is a historiographical challenge to a tendency to delineate the presence of women film directors at key dates as markers of equality. To suggest alternative trajectories, this article adopts a methodology of constellation (Dall'Asta and Gaines 2015), putting into dialogue the little-known women's film and television network Women's Film Forum (1982-89) and WIFT Norway (2005-) as well as the production practices of director-writers Vibeke Løkkeberg, whose career began in the 1970s, and Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen, whose first feature film premiered in 2021. Through these constellations, we explore ways to acknowledge the strategies and agencies of individual filmmakers and grassroots organizations that have addressed gender inequalities in the film and TV sectors for more than four decades, and to re-frame the present moment beyond official film policies.

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myth of Lilith

This is a Kairos moment for addressing questions of diversity and equality in Norwegian film production. In the past decade, gender equality has become a flagship concern in Norwegian film policy (Dancus 2019), and never has the achievement of this goal been so closely within reach. Currently, Norway ranks, behind Sweden, as one of the European countries with the highest proportion of women directors (Halfon and Brabant 2017). In 2019, the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) reported better numbers than ever before. With 52 per cent of that year's feature film production funding allocated to film projects with women in key positions, NFI could claim success in having reached the goal of 50/50 by 2020 (NFI 2020).

Despite these recent developments, there is reason to pause. As Anette Svane (2020: 152-153), among others, has pointed out, the numbers do not tell the whole story, and a closer look reveals several discrepancies and inequalities. Women receive less of the total budgets, tend to work in less prestigious categories of film, and as directors often have shorter careers than their male peers (Gjelsvik 2014: 17; Gjelsvik 2015). Similar discrepancies have been uncovered in

other countries where public film governance has implemented measures towards gender equality in film production. As for instance Maria Jansson (2019) and Ingrid Ryberg (2020) have argued for the Swedish context, Tess Sophie Skadegård Thorsen (2020) for the Danish, and Orianna Calderón-Sandoval (2021) for the Spanish context, the issue needs attention beyond initiatives and numbers. In Norway, several critics have directed attention to the blind spots of today's gender equality debates. On the one hand, the debate about Norwegian film, its goals and direction, has been too focused on film policy, overshadowing other conversations about, for instance, film aesthetics, artistic ambitions or what it means to have a voice. On the other hand, representatives from the film and television sector argue for the need to broaden the understanding of diversity beyond a singular approach of gender binary. In Norway, this has most substantially been discussed as a call for the recognition of different voices from a greater variety of minority positions (Larsen 2015; Maimouni 2018; Devold 2018; Storstein 2020; Utsi 2020).

Another blind spot that has garnered little interest is the missing historical perspectives in the public discourse concerning equality and feminist agency in the film industry. This includes, not least, a reassessment of the way the current situation is narrativized and historicized. In her writings on the Swedish film sector, Ingrid Ryberg points out how a focus on official goals of gender equality formulated in film policies has tended to ignore the history of the feminist film movement and the way 'self-organized women filmmakers [...] have advocated for better opportunities since the 1970s' (2020: 145). And recently, Susan Liddy describes how 'contemporary film activists are part of a new wave of a movement that stretches back well over half a century' (2020: 3). In the Norwegian context, the history of feminist film activism and mobilization for women's access to, and presence in, the film industry has rarely been acknowledged.

In this article, we discuss how these legacies are present in the current moment by constellating the agency of women filmmakers and activists historically (Dall'Asta and Gaines 2015). We begin with a description of the main ways that issues of gender balance have been historicized in Norway, pointing to how this is often presented as a numerical development towards progress or lost opportunities. Drawing on Jane Gaines and Monica Dall'Asta's methodology of constellation, we then offer alternative trajectories. In the second section, we bring to light the lesser-known history of grassroots organization, drawing a line from the

initiative Kvinnenes Filmforum (Women's Film Forum) (1982-89) to today's online engagement connected to the network of WIFT Norway. With the donation in 2019 of letters, receipts and lists from the Women's Film Forum to the National Library of Norway, an archival gap has been filled that now carries the potential of providing new insights into a forum that sprung out of the 1970s feminist movement and illustrates an alternative history of female filmmaking and feminist agency on the grassroots level in Norway – a part of the story that is often rendered invisible. In the last section, we turn to the exhibition 'A Lilithistic Revelation' by filmmaker Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen as an example of how an individual director has looked to the past and created a space in the present through a process of 'de-witchification'.

Through these examples, the article aims at making historical absences (grassroots organizations) and presences (feature film directors) of women working in the film industry visible at the same time (Hanssen 2019) by way of constellation, and thus foreground some of the ways feminist agency is at the heart of the histories that make up today's (achievements of) gender equality in Norwegian film.

### **Narratives of loss and progress**

The dominant historical perspective on women's prospects within the Norwegian film industry has, to a large degree, been framed either in terms of the development of policy measures or through a discourse focusing on the careers of individual women directors, in particular feature film directors. The former usually begins with the publication of several reports in the early 2000s, such as *Tallenes tale* ('What the numbers say') (2006) and the following White Paper on Norwegian film (no. 22, 2006-2007), where gender equality became an explicit agenda in Norwegian film policy. With reference to the Swedish Film Agreement of the same year, the White Paper introduced the official goal that Norwegian films reach at least a 40 per cent share of women in so-called key positions of director, scriptwriter and producer (2007: 109). Since 2010, NFI has implemented several measures to reach this goal, including the use of affirmative action in film funding and talent development schemes (Gjelsvik 2014; Dancus 2019; Svane 2020). While film policy measures have undoubtedly played an important role in fostering greater diversity, this way of framing the history of access and diversity in creative positions gives the somewhat limited impression that gender balance has primarily been the concern of top-down film governance, and thus primarily solvable through rigorous statistical goals, self-

reporting and targets. It furthermore dates this concern quite specifically to the mid-2000s, thus overlooking previous agenda-setting contributions.

The latter frame, focusing on individual film directors, allows for a somewhat longer historical perspective, but nonetheless retains some of the same shortcomings. It takes as its point of departure the historical juncture of the 1970s, when women directors emerged as a small yet critical mass in Norwegian film production. This occurrence was dubbed *kvinnebølgen* ('the women's wave') by film historian Gunnar Iversen in the overview work on aesthetic film history, *Norsk filmhistorie* ('A history of Norwegian film') (2011: 230), but the development is described in most reference works on Norwegian film production (Dahl et al 1996; Holst 2006; Iversen and Solum 2010). As the use of the wave metaphor suggests, it is a narrative of comings and goings. After more than ten years of complete male dominance in the director's chair in Norwegian feature film production, the 1970s marked the beginning of a wave of feature films directed by women. The wave reached its high point in 1981 with the premieres of *Løperjenten (Kamilla)* (Løkkeberg), *Liten Ida (Growing Up)* (Mikkelsen) and *Forfølgelsen (Witch Hunt)* (Breien). The daily newspaper *Dagbladet* named 1981 *Jenteåret* ('the year of the girl'), and it stands as the year when three 'girls'<sup>1</sup> rescued a Norwegian cinema in crisis (Bratten 1981: 18).

At this point the Norwegian film industry was said to be in the vanguard for gender equality, giving 'the women's wave' its symbolic sway. While the actual climate for women working as directors in these years was far less favourable than this narrative might suggest, the 1970s and early 1980s continue to stand as *the* formative moment for gender equality in the Norwegian film sector. Indeed, when debate about gender equality in the film sector, or the lack thereof, was reinvigorated in the mid-2010s with, in particular, the publication of the 'debate book' *Ta det som en mann, frue* ('Take it like a man, madam') (2015), edited by the former director of NFI, Vigdis Lian, the narrative of the women's wave was invoked as a provocative starting point. The book, taking its title from the Danish feminist film from 1975, addresses the opportunities of women working as directors in Norwegian film from the 1970s to the present moment and begins by asking why film production in the 'land of the female directors' had not developed into a more gender equal sector (Lian 2015: 7).

Through both these historical frames, the contemporary situation risks becoming a numerical correlative to an establishing moment: Either the most current data from NFI affirm a story of progress in which the Norwegian film sector has been able to return to a moment of

opportunity, or it becomes a story of loss in which the promises of gender equality remain unfulfilled. While pointing to these trajectories is an apt starting point for debate, they possibly obscure accounts of the diverse efforts made by women working within the film industry at gaining access to and remaining in creative positions.

At stake here is how to narrativize the development differently. Suggesting that these two narratives do not tell the whole story does not mean we suggest that any narrative will. History, Vivian Sobchack remarks, 'is always writing itself over and writing over itself' (2000: 313). Our concern, then, is not to set the record straight. Rather, following film scholars Dall'Asta and Gaines, we adopt a methodology of constellating the past and present. In their prologue to the edited anthology *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Past and Future* (Gledhill and Knight 2015), Dall'Asta and Gaines propose to 'bring the past into the present' as a critical methodology of history. They contend that such a constellation would not be based on an effort to represent the historical past, but to bring into the present the historical objects, prompting multiple narratives instead of a single one with claims to exhaustiveness (2015: 18). With the aim of creating new connections in the present, we address gender equality through two constellations, the Women's Film Forum of the 1980s and WIFT Norway of the 2000s on the one hand, and female directors Vibeke Løkkeberg and Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen on the other. By shaking up the present, the aim, following Dall'Asta and Gaines, is not to simply set the history straight by pointing out the blind spots and amnesia of the debate on gender equality and film policymaking in Norway, but to demonstrate that there are many co-existing narratives.

### **Grassroots initiatives: The Women's Film Forum and WIFT Norway**

In 1982, a call went out to women working in the Norwegian film and TV sectors. 'Dear woman film worker. Now is your chance to join a unique movement. GRAB IT! [In February] the first women's FILM FORUM in Norway's history is starting up' (Weisser et al. 1982). The letter went on to describe the group's origin story as dating three years back to Kvinnekulturfestivalen (the Women's Culture Festival) of June 1979. The festival, organized by a plethora of women's interest groups, was a week-long event in the Oslo area, and it is likely that a synergy between (at least) three film-related events during the festival was key to the subsequent establishment of Kvinnenes Filmforum (the Women's Film Forum) in 1982: 1) A screening programme of international scope called the Women's Film Week at the Carl Johan Theatre, located on Oslo's

main street, devoted to Norwegian and international women's films; 2) Visiting international filmmakers associated with the feminist film movement, including Danish filmmakers Mette Knudsen and Janne Giese and German film director Ula Stöckl, who participated in discussions about women in the film industry and women's cinema; and 3) The formation of two groups of Norwegian freelance film workers and TV professionals making films about the festival,<sup>2</sup> alongside training amateurs interested in learning the craft (Bellsund 1979).

At the initiative of the larger of these film groups, the Women's Film Forum was established in 1982. Discussions and ambitions that originated at the festival were in many ways continued in the forum, which also represented voices from different branches of the feminist movement. Members included freelancers active in the film industry and employees at the Norwegian national broadcaster NRK. Overall, the group's core members were below-the-line workers and practitioners working in other formats than feature film. Feature film directors as such were a minority – indeed, only three female directors were making feature films in Norway at the time the group was founded: Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Laila Mikkelsen, all members. A work group planned and facilitated the forum's meetings, organized as screenings, lectures and discussions, continually asking members for input and requests, keeping the door ajar for all to join and following an ideal of a flat structure that for many had been an important takeaway from participation in the Women's Culture Festival. Casting a wide net, the work group brought in filmmakers and artists who were doing creative moving image work in such different fields as animation, video art, choreography, documentary, film scoring, dramaturgy, scriptwriting, scenography, adaptation, editing and cinematography. Until the forum dissolved in 1989, members met on a regular basis in Oslo.

In several letters and invitations circulated to the group's members, the wish to define, redefine and evolve the group's malleable mission was formulated through a series of open-ended questions, including whether men should be allowed to become members or attend certain events; if the group should get politically engaged, identify as a strictly feminist forum, or put an emphasis on film-related discussions and accommodate an articulated need for workshops. Indeed, the aspect of training and exchange of competences was especially important at a time when Norway still did not have a national film school. Within NRK there had been courses for employees, and the College of Volda did at times offer film classes as part of its journalism programme. But in 1983, when the aspiring film director and scriptwriter Anne Haugsgjerd



wrote an open letter to the Women's Film Forum that was circulated to its members, the aim was to address a larger vacuum. In the letter, Haugsgjerd described the lack of a 'natural' place to approach the industry with ideas and scripts after the closing of the Study Department at the state-owned film production company Norsk Film AS. For many filmmakers, the Study Department had been an arena for developing projects, and its closing coincided with the decision of the Ministry of Culture to shut down the Oslo-based independent production unit Filmgruppe 1 (Film Group 1) (Nymo 2006: 111). For a while, it seemed new talents had nowhere to turn to get projects up and running.

With meager opportunities to be educated as film professionals, and with the film industry a predominantly male sphere, making inroads as a female film worker was a difficult endeavor. The networking aspects of the forum facilitated informal opportunities for members to make connections and artistic alliances within and across the film and TV spheres. The forum also shed light on difficult processes within NRK, the largest employer of forum members, one example being journalist Dagmar Loe's difficult process of making a TV documentary about gender equality and the subsequent opposition she met inhouse.

Another through-line at the meetings was an international focus, with visiting guest lecturers and filmmakers, including Stephen Peet of the BBC, who gave a lecture on documentary filmmaking, and Olga Surkova, close collaborator and biographer of Andrei Tarkovsky, who discussed the Russian director's films. Danish author Ulla Ryum lectured on feminine dramaturgy and Swedish film workers, among them director Agneta Ehlers-Jarleman and scenographer Anna Asp, also visited the meetings, maintaining a connection to women's networks in Scandinavia and making room for agendas that went beyond strictly national concerns. When the forum ended in 1989, the level of ambitions reflected in documents and papers seemed as high as ever, while the voluntary work efforts by the core work group had begun to take a toll after seven years of regular meeting activities.

On a general level, the experience of being female and working outside the established parameters of film production seems to have brought very different film practitioners together, thanks to the Women's Film Forum. In one instance, the forum was apparently directly responsible for connecting two NRK employees, cinematographer Borgny Baastad and sound technician Kirsti Haaland, with the Danish director Nele Rue of the Danish Broadcasting Company (DR), who needed an all-female film crew to be able to document the lives of women

in Yemen for the TV documentary *Arabias døtre (Daughters of Arabia)* (1984). The collaboration came about because Rue had not managed to find women in Denmark who possessed the needed technical skills and thus turned to Norway. While the aim here is not to argue what the significance of the group has been, keeping in mind Susan Liddy's assertion that '[p]revious waves of activism have slipped into historical darkness and, soberingly, often "without permanent change"' (2020: 3), it is rather to remind ourselves that some grassroots initiatives have escaped the radar of film historians.

The Women's Film Forum and its members were working towards uniting female film practitioners at a time when women in the film industry sought to establish alternative spaces for the exchange of ideas, experiences and skills. Riding on the waves of a specific moment in the history of the women's movement, there was a shared need and desire to create a forum where female film workers across the television and film industries could engage and discuss with one another – a common milieu where above and below-the-line film workers could speak across the divide, as it were. This made the Women's Film Forum a unique arena. Informal exchange of information and skills development were at the core and forefront.

By the time Women in Film and Television Norway (WIFT Norway) was established in 2005, the Women's Film Forum of the 1980s was largely forgotten. WIFT Norway was formed as a sub-chapter to the US-founded WIFT (1973-). Its founding was part of a distinct reinvigoration of international networks dedicated to women and film at the beginning of the new millennium with more or less explicit ties to the feminist film movement of the 1970s. In Denmark, the film feminist Mette Knudsen established the Danish WIFT chapter as early as 1999. Knudsen had advocated for women's conditions in the film industry for almost three decades, initially as part of the Red Stockings film movement in Denmark in the 1970s, and she had been a central figure when visiting the Women's Film Week at the Women's Culture Festival in Oslo in 1979, an event that was a direct inspiration for the formation of the Women's Film Forum in 1982. Inspired by the Danes, amongst others, Görel Elf and Anita Oxburgh established WIFT Sweden in 2003, shortly after the Swedish Confederation of Women Film Workers disbanded. Like these sister organizations, WIFT Norway had a predecessor in the Women's Film Forum. While there were no direct connections between the two networks, they were formed to meet similar needs, one of which was articulated by the left-wing daily *Klassekampen* that ran an article on the new network and described WIFT Norway as an answer

to the question why there were so few women behind the camera in the Norwegian film industry. As *Klassekampen* saw it, ‘the old truth is that men are better at establishing and taking advantage of informal networks than women’ (Kulås 2006: 16).

WIFT Norway’s foundation closely coincided with the report ‘What the Numbers Say’, a statistical analysis of women filmmakers active in the industry. The report, conducted by Anne Berentsen and Svanhild Sørensen on behalf of the various unions of the Film Industry Council, uncovered a gross underrepresentation of women in central creative roles. According to the numbers, between 2001 and 2005 only 35 of 191 key creative positions were held by women, and women received less than 20 per cent of the production funding (Faldalen, 2006). The report stands as an important precondition for the development of government intervention in issues of diversity in the film sector. For WIFT Norway, a main concern became to pinpoint the vaporization of women *en route* from the National Film Academy, where the student body was evenly divided between men and women, to the professional film industry, where, as the report had laid bare, 80 per cent of invested capital in film productions went to men. By directing the focus towards the question ‘What is happening with women in the film industry?’ (see Gaines 2018 for a discussion of the ‘what happened’ paradox), WIFT members started championing equality measures to ensure that the industry would make use of all talents. In 2008, WIFT Norway organized a visibility campaign to draw attention to the fact that in (more than) 100 years of filmmaking in Norway, not a single female cinematographer had shot a feature film, and organized screenings of short films shot by women photographers to launch these film professionals as viable cinematographers for a future feature film.<sup>3</sup>

The WIFT agenda shares many similarities with the issues that were discussed within the Women’s Film Forum, although in a different historical context. In the 1980s the Forum worked on changing the industry from within, educating its members, sharing concerns and ideas and tackling issues related to specific work situations or the status of film education. In the 2000s, however, WIFT Norway had a more outward-reaching and activist presence and perhaps an added momentum, guided by the conviction that by that point in the history of filmmaking, women should be occupying more space in every aspect of film production. At the same time, both groups formed networks that were able to strengthen local, national and international connections and promote women film professionals within the film and TV sectors.

At WIFT Norway's 10-year anniversary in 2015, a panel discussion was held at the Films from the South festival in Oslo, dedicated to WIFT Nordic and its member countries. Since the early 2010s, WIFT Norway had initiated few, if any events and campaigns and largely migrated online to a Facebook group where some 700 members continue to share information, circulate news and discuss the industry, at the same time as the WIFT Norway initiators have taken a more passive role. Indeed, in the Films from the South catalogue, the president of WIFT Norway, Ingebjørg Torgersen, described the network as a sleeping beauty, asking whether it was time to 'awaken the beauty' from her sleep (Karlsvik 2015: 34).

If WIFT Norway failed to awaken from its beauty sleep, its umbrella organization WIFT Nordic became highly active in the following years, perhaps overshadowing or enveloping its subchapter in Norway. At the Cannes Film Festival in 2016, WIFT Nordic launched the '50/50 by 2020 – Global Reach' initiative, co-sponsored by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI). Also in Norway, NFI was working on an action plan to promote gender equality and diversity on and off the screen, perhaps coincidentally picking up the baton from WIFT Norway. When NFI organized the seminar 'Let's Talk about Sex!' in November 2017 with contributions and appeals from many film industry professionals, WIFT Norway was tellingly not a part of the official agenda nor on the list of speakers. As the watershed moment that was the beginning of the international #metoo movement gave issues of gender in the film industry added urgency, a combination of many factors seemed to relieve WIFT Norway of its leadership role as a spearhead for equal rights in the film industry. Instead the group aligned itself with the various efforts by NFI, the #metoo movement and overlapping campaigns that continue to put a spotlight on (the lack of) gender equality in the film industry.

By constellating the Women's Film Forum and WIFT Norway, a timeline of continuous grassroots work for improving women's positions and opportunities in the film and TV industries can be found stretching back more than four decades. These examples further illuminate that a need for networks has long been present in an industry that has been male dominated in most economic, technological and creative aspects. For the Women's Film Forum in the 1980s, one challenge was the informal route of gaining access to the film industry before a permanent film education or funding system was in place. For WIFT Norway in the 2000s, a new issue arose after the establishment of the Norwegian Film School in 1997, as reports had found that female graduates were not proportionally involved in NFI-backed projects that largely

favoured male-dominated productions. With the late 2010s #metoo movement, the grassroots engagement has increasingly become part of the public film agenda. Yet, alongside the work of the public film bodies to address gender discrepancies in Norwegian film production, the present moment also includes collective and individual endeavors that continue to question power balance, gender balance, equal pay and workplace safety, to mention a few of the issues at stake – not least by turning to history.

### **Lilithistic film practice**

Just as the #metoo movement was erupting worldwide in November 2017, Norwegian filmmaker Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen invited audiences to her art exhibition ‘A Lilithistic Revelation’. The show included the film *Åpenbaringen (The Revelation)* (1977) by Vibeke Løkkeberg and a collage consisting of documentation of its misogynistic reception and the subsequent stigmatization of the filmmaker. *The Revelation* was Løkkeberg’s debut as a feature film director. The film gives a devastatingly intimate portrait of a woman in her 50s who, having spent all her adult life as a homemaker and mother, finds herself deeply disconnected from the outside world and increasingly experiences her home as *unheimlich* (literally ‘unhome-like’, uncanny), a feeling that later possesses her estranged body as well, void of any sexual desires. While the film was invited to several international film festivals and received mostly positive reviews in Norway, the infected debate, primarily by a handful of male film critics who obsessed over the main character’s body, swiftly dominated the reception of the film and its legacy (Kolbjørnsen 1992: 25-29).

Just as the demonized Lilith, who according to Judaic and Christian creation mythology was Adam’s first wife and created as his equal (unlike her successor Eve, who was molded from Adam’s rib) and had to flee Eden when she refused to submit to him (Plaskow 1991: 54), the exhibition suggested that Løkkeberg, in her film practice, was similarly punished for her audacity to demand the same creative rights as men. From her first short films in the early 1970s as the movement for women’s liberation hit Norway, Løkkeberg’s own emancipation as a woman nourished her role as a female director in the sense that her film authorship is closely associated with the '70s slogan of making the personal political. For Løkkeberg, this meant creating an artistic practice steeped in a personal vision and having control over her film productions. In the 1980s, the Norwegian production culture took a sharp turn from a climate of

experimentation to a new emphasis on efficient storytelling, professionalism and action orientation. Løkkeberg, who combined uncompromising artistic projects with big budgets, was increasingly seen as a difficult, self-indulgent and even witch-like woman whose personal filmmaking in the 1980s brought shame to the Norwegian film sector, a perception that, although changing, has followed the director-writer into the contemporary moment (Servoll 2014: 319-25). The public perception of Løkkeberg brings into stark relief Joan Acker's argument that '[w]omen enacting power violate conventions of relative subordination to men, risking the label "witches" or "bitches"' (2006: 447).

Through the exhibition 'A Lilithistic Revelation', Guttormsen set out to 'de-witchify' or de-stigmatize Løkkeberg, reclaiming her for the present moment. The audience took part in the re-creation of Løkkeberg's *The Revelation*, as they were invited to embrace 'the film in a healing screening uterus' (Guttormsen 2017: n.pag.). In the exhibition programme, Guttormsen wonders if the massive critique and skepticism Løkkeberg met 'worsened the possibilities for other female directors' and whether 'the inflamed term Auteur – created a fear-driven, controlling production environment, affecting film artists to this very day, preventing space to take risks, to move' (2017: n.pag.). On the one hand, what the de-stigmatization of the figure of Løkkeberg might be said to do for Guttormsen is to make Løkkeberg, formerly evoked as the proponent of an illegitimate auteurist film practice, into a valid role model and trailblazer of an artistic tradition that Guttormsen can position herself in relation to. On the other hand, by bringing Løkkeberg into the late 2010s, the exhibition furthermore draws attention to the contemporary opportunities of spaces of action, exploration and expression. Indeed, what was controversial about Løkkeberg was not only the subject matter and form of her films, making women's experiences the core of her film art, but also the way she navigated production opportunities (Servoll 2016: 215-217). Together with her partner Terje Kristiansen, Løkkeberg organized film production as a family business, with office and film studio in the henhouse in the garden and family-friendly production design, including family members as part of the cast and crew (Servoll 2020: 187).

Guttormsen is an interesting case precisely because she has done the work of constellation herself, and the re-claiming of Løkkeberg's artistic legacy can arguably be read as an explicit attempt to find a role model for her own film practice. Though Guttormsen and Løkkeberg's practices differ from each other due to their historical context and personal

circumstances, they both tailored their production methods, the art of making the film, in opposition to a film industry they consider a hostile environment for the creative human being in general and the creative woman in particular. In this way, Guttormsen's reinvocation of Løkkeberg sets at stake the search for a liberating film practice.

As participant in and initiator of several community-based organizations working in the intersection between filmmaking, visual and performative arts and urban exploration, such as the site-specific film festival ByFlimmer (City Flickers), the choir KORET (The Choir) and the film community BEVEGELSEN (The Movement), Guttormsen stands as one of the key proponents of an alternative filmmaking practice in the contemporary Norwegian film sector. In reaction to what she perceived as a rigid professional machinery and industry-driven approach to filmmaking at the Norwegian Film School, she later developed the conception of a Lilithistic film production at Akademin Valand, today HDK-Valand, the Academy of Art and Design at the University of Gothenburg. The central idea was exploration, 'to think like Lilith' in the sense of being open to the unknown, to leave the safe haven of Eden (the dominant forms of film production and film form) in a search for liberating forms of filmmaking (Guttormsen 2016: 4). The aim was a practice that could balance experimentation and artistic self-expression with an ethical and communal way of making film.

Based on the mantra 'More trust, less security', Guttormsen explored these principles in the production of the short film *Retrett* ('Retreat') (2017), which she later developed into her first feature film, *Gritt* (2021). Among the principles of the production was to prioritize the well-being of the cast and crew, for instance by only having two consecutive days of shooting, and to nourish openness in the production process (Guttormsen 2016: 20-22). In the production notes for 'Burning man' (an earlier iteration of *Gritt*), she pointed out that it would be more appropriate to look at the production as a journey to embark on rather than a rigid execution,<sup>4</sup> and she recommended that the film crew replace the image of a large film machinery with images of fauna, gardening and baking (2016: 21). Similarly, Løkkeberg emphasized how work with costumes and interiors helped create a common thread substantiating the film story, using a metaphor from handicraft: 'The film is like a lace fabric, where a quarter stitch is carefully thought out and nothing is random, down to the smallest detail' (Løkkeberg quoted in Moe 1983: 88).

The conception of a Lilithistic production method brought to a head the need to reclaim autonomy, trust and space. This position, then, and the historical work that fosters it, draw attention to a different way of addressing opportunity, access and diversity in film production than the targets and measures that are associated with NFI and to a large degree supported by WIFT Norway. At its most radical, the Lilithistic film production -- and, we might add, similar oppositional film practices -- call for attention to the dominant structures that dictate how films are made and what form they may take.

## **Conclusion**

From the 1970s until today, as we argue in this article, there have been many film workers, directors, movements and groups that have had an impact on shaping the climate for women working in the Norwegian film and TV sectors. But a continued focus on numbers, statistics and film policymaking has made many of these efforts invisible, in part because they are much more difficult to measure in terms of quantitative figures. This tendency finds its parallel in the standardized narrative of Norwegian film history, which has tended to hyper-visualize a rather small group of female film directors to highlight a story of progress (or lost opportunities) and simultaneously render invisible the many film workers in other capacities or formats.

Our intention is not to overwrite existing narratives but to suggest ways in which it is possible to acknowledge the efforts, strategies and agency of both individual filmmakers and groups that have navigated the film industry at quite different historical moments to gain access to creative or technical positions within the film industry. Furthermore, through constellation, we have made grassroots organizations and individual efforts from different decades present and relevant for us today. Thus, we are reminded of Liddy's reflection that '[it] is a testament to current activism that we are united across time and place in the continuation of a struggle for visibility, voice and an equal share of resources' (2020: 3). One such continuation may be found in the networks formed and sustained by women film workers. Consideration of grassroots organizations illuminates another narrative of invisibility, which is so often the case with women in the film industry. From the perspective of Norwegian film history, the Women's Film Forum never existed because the narrative of their historical presence has been forgotten. By reading their proclamations and agendas, we bring forth the persistent need to gather and organize to be made visible, to become manifest in history as women working in the film industry. Although



the women who established WIFT in 2006 were unaware that the association had a historical forerunner in the Women's Film Forum, they became bearers of a tradition of feminist agency.

By bringing the past into the present, we can also achieve the historization of the present. Here we can see that on an individual level, film directors like Vibeke Løkkeberg and Itonje Sømmer Guttormsen – just two of many possible examples – have negotiated on several fronts (budgets, artistic ambitions, work culture, production models, conformity) to be able to make rooms of their own, big enough to accommodate their level of ambition that in different ways challenged the industry status quo in their respective times. For Løkkeberg, there was no immediate predecessor in the form of a female film director to compare notes with or estrange herself from. For Guttormsen, Løkkeberg was just such a figure, and in her process of creating a satisfactory workspace within the film industry, reconciling herself with Løkkeberg's legacy was a source of inspiration, enabling her to create a room of her own by cultivating Lilithistic film practices.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Gjelsvik has pointed out the condescending attitude of calling them ‘girls’, as all three were women in their late 30s and early 40s (2015).

<sup>2</sup> See Holtar (2022) for a full discussion of these titles.

<sup>3</sup> In 2010, Anna Myking became the first female cinematographer of a Norwegian feature film, Anne Sewitsky’s *Sykt lykkelig* (*Happy Happy*).

<sup>4</sup> In Guttormsen’s notes, the phrase is ‘militant avvikling’.