

THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Regie Vibeke Løkkeberg

Norwegen | 2025

80 Min. | Englisch, Deutsch, Norwegisch mit englischen Untertiteln

Buch Vibeke Løkkeberg. **Kamera** Georg Helgevoold Sagen. **Montage** Mina Nybakke. **Sound Design** Bror Kristiansen. **Produzent*innen** Anders Tangen, Terje Kristiansen. **Executive Producers** Vibeke Løkkeberg, Anders Tangen, Knut-Jørgen Erichsen. **Produktionsfirmen** The Norway Film Development (Oslo, Norwegen), Viafilm (Oslo, Norwegen). **Mit** Claudia von Alemann, Vibeke Løkkeberg, Helke Sander, Alice Schwarzer, Karin Howard, Nurith Aviv, Annabella Miscuglio, Ariel Dougherty, Angelika Wittlich, Christiane Schaefer, Valeska von Roques.

Synopse

Als eines der ersten feministischen Filmfestivals überhaupt kann das 1973 von den Filmemacherinnen Claudia von Alemann und Helke Sander organisierte „Erste Internationale Frauenfilm-Seminar“ gelten. Es fand in Berlin, im „alten“ Kino Arsenal in der Welserstraße sowie der gegenüberliegenden Grundschule statt. Zu den angereisten Gästen gehörte auch die damals 28-jährige Vibeke Løkkeberg aus Norwegen, Filmemacherin und ehemalige Schauspielerin. Sie kam, um ihren Film *ABORT* zu zeigen und das Festival zu dokumentieren.

Knapp fünfzig Jahre später fand die Regisseurin nun das als verschollen geltende Rohmaterial – Bild und Ton – und machte daraus einen Film, der einer Zeitreise gleicht: Interviews mit den Teilnehmerinnen als Erfahrungsaustausch auf Augenhöhe, als geduldiges Zuhören, das Gedränge im Foyer, das Kommen und Gehen vor dem Kino, die Versammlungen im Seminar. Aufbruch liegt in der Luft und Zigarettenqualm, Solidarität und Offenheit, die Entschlossenheit und Zuversicht der Frauen, die in Film und Fernsehen grundsätzliche Veränderungen wollen – gegen die Vormacht der Männer. Heute konfrontiert uns dieser Rückblick mit unerledigten Kämpfen und womöglich – verlorenen Hoffnungen. (Gaby Babić)

Vibeke Løkkeberg, geboren 1945 in Bergen, ist eine der produktivsten Filmemacherinnen und Autorinnen Norwegens. Mit dem Produzenten Terje Kristiansen verheiratet und Mutter von zwei Kindern, entwickelte sie ein einzigartiges Konzept, ihr Privatleben mit ihrem Filmemachen zu verweben und oft mit ihrer Familie zu drehen. Sie begann ihre Karriere als Schauspielerin und spielte in den meisten ihrer eigenen Filme. Ihre Werke wurden weltweit auf Festivals gezeigt. Løkkeberg ist auch eine erfolgreiche Romanautorin. 2015 erhielt sie den Honorary Amanda Award für ihren Beitrag zum norwegischen Kino.

Filme: 1971: *Abort* (Abortion). 1974: *Prostitusjon* / Prostitution. 1975: *Regn* / Rain (Kurzfilm). 1977: *Åpenbaringen* / The Upbringing. 1981: *Løperjenten* / The Story of Camilla. 1986: *Hud* / Skin. 1991: *Måker* / Seagulls. 1993: *Der gudene er døde* / Where the Gods Are Dead. 2010: *Gazas tårer* / Tears of Gaza. 2025: *The Long Road to the Director's Chair*.

Kommentar der Regisseurin

Das Wesen der Zeit spüren

Jeder große Wendepunkt schafft eine neue Leinwand für Künstler*innen

1973 war die Welt nach den Umwälzungen der späten 1960er Jahre, die in den militanten Aufständen von 1968 gipfelten, auf den Kopf gestellt. Diese Ereignisse beeinflussten auch die Welt des Kinos, die von der Nouvelle Vague (Neue Welle) aus Frankreich dominiert wurde. Der Feminismus war geboren und die Einführung der Antibabypille bot Frauen ein neues Gefühl der Freiheit.

Die Ära war politisch transformativ und wurde, wie heute, von anhaltenden Kriegen beeinflusst, damals in Vietnam und im Nahen Osten. Der französische Filmemacher Jean-Luc Godard trat als führende Figur in Opposition zur amerikanischen kommerziellen Filmdramaturgie hervor.

Ich habe als Autorin, Schauspielerin und Regisseurin an mehreren Filmen mitgewirkt, die von der Nouvelle Vague inspiriert waren.

In *THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR* bewahrt die Regie bewusst eine archivarische Qualität. Dieser Ansatz ermöglicht es dem Publikum, die Essenz der Zeit zu spüren, sowohl hinter als auch vor der Kamera.

Für Künstler*innen ist es an der Zeit, ihren filmischen Ausdruck zu entmystifizieren und die Nähe zum Inhalt über eine polierte Form zu stellen, die Gefahr läuft, Distanz zu schaffen oder die Botschaft zu verschleiern.

Jeder große Wendepunkt in der Welt schafft eine neue Leinwand für Künstler*innen. Ich würde behaupten, dass unsere turbulente Welt heute einen solchen Wendepunkt erlebt.

Vibeke Løkkeberg

Interview

We Cannot Just Continue Like We Were Before

Vibeke Løkkeberg talks to Gaby Babić and Barbara Wurm about the historical context of her film and the long road to its completion

Barbara Wurm: Vibeke, welcome to Forum 2025. I'm extremely happy and also grateful to Gaby Babić to have arranged this conversation – and to you for giving us the opportunity to show your film, a film so important for female and feminist filmmaking and also for Arsenal.

Vibeke Løkkeberg: Yes, I'm happy and surprised, too, because I thought this film would never get any help for completing it, but now, finally, it did.

*BW: The First International Women's Film Seminar took place in November 1973 in the 'old' Kino Arsenal on Welserstraße. I was five months old then. 50 years ago, you managed to shoot this film, now you've managed to finish it. **THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR** was itself a long road it seems.*

VL: It was, yes. I experienced exactly the same thing. It is so difficult to make a movie, for women especially. This is very good footage, and I have been walking around with it and trying to screen it and ask people for some money. And they said, 'Well, you know, this is an old movie, it's better to start by making a new one or mixing it with a little of today, because this is not good enough. It's not interesting enough.' And I tried to say, 'Well, in Berlin they thought it was interesting enough.' But they insisted that this was passato, you understand, something belonging to the past. Anyway, I was very much backed up by this screening in Berlin at Archival Assembly #3 in June 2023, organised in cooperation with the "feminist elsewheres" collective. I was so happy, because the featured filmmakers came in with all their feelings to this movie. And there were young people who liked looking into this room of young women in 1973 who really started the feminist movement.

BW: Claudia von Alemann and Helke Sander are the two prominent directors who initiated the Women's Film Seminar. Did you know them before you came to Berlin in 1973?

VL: Sort of, yes, because I was following the lists of German women and movies, and I got to know them. My friend Ulrich Gregor also thought that these women were very good filmmakers. I felt I knew them, and of course, they invited my film **ABORT** (1971). This energy you can see in **THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR**, in the conversations we have, they are so fantastic because we were complete strangers to each other. QUOTE: And I finally re-appeared as a very radical woman. That surprised everybody and then the aggression started to come because they didn't like me changing the role I'd had.

GB: Back in 1973, in Norway, were you already involved in the women's movement or connected to it, or even to women fighting for their rights elsewhere in the world? Or did you mainly consider yourself a filmmaker?

VL: I had made two features, not as a director, but as a lead actress with involvement in the scripts, where I played women in revolt. These films were invited to the Berlin Film Festival and the Moscow Film Festival, so I was quite known already. But then I broke out of it completely because I felt that even if I played these modern women, they were not received or understood enough by the director because he was a male. I was supposed to be sexy and people looked at me, at my breasts, instead of listening to what I had to tell them. Thus, I revolted against it, and said that I'd like to make a movie about abortion, and that took me three years in which I did interviews, wrote scripts, got a little money here and there. And I finally re-appeared as a very radical woman. That surprised everybody and then the aggression started to come, because they didn't like me changing the role I'd had.

GB: When you then were invited to the seminar, were you the one who suggested to producers or TV that you wanted to travel to Berlin to document it?

VL: Yes, I asked a producer if he could lend me some money to make this movie. When I came back, he tried to sell it to Norwegian state television, and they said no. They didn't want it because of course it was critical, and they didn't like listening to all these women with all these opinions in 1973, because, you see, in 1973, at the state television in Norway and also in

Germany, we had to say 'Sir' when we addressed people. We had guys wearing suits, sitting there and having discussions, while us women were not part of the discussions at all.

BW: How were you addressed by the men in the suits? 'Girl'?

VL: Yeah, very much in a way to keep me down. 'Don't speak too loud here', I was told. They didn't want to accept me being so serious. Nice looking women really weren't accepted as serious at that time.

GB: Did you lose the footage right away or did you try for a while to make something out of it?

VL: It was such a strong no that there was no hope. I went on making very radical TV productions, but not critical about the TV or film situation. They were about groups who it was important to talk about. Three years later, I made a movie called **ÅPENBARINGEN** (THE REVELATION, 1977). Ulrich Gregor discovered it and he invited me to the Berlin Film Festival, to Forum. And that movie created such a war in Norway because the critics didn't like me putting a fat woman in the main role. And I even undressed her and there was sexual stuff in the movie. So, from that movie on, there was a shame around my name, but abroad, in America and all those places where there was a bigger system for intellectual movies, they very much appreciated it. This is really a movie that goes against all these systems we are talking about.

BW: Do you think that this system has gotten better or worse over the last 50 years?

VL: Worse. And I would also say that this system is a kind of censorship, because you don't get as close to people as you want. All the aesthetics are kind of boring. These are the aesthetics they use and which the system demands of people who are in front of the camera. To make people feel secure, but in the end, they don't come across naturally.

BW: While we are talking, Arsenal is moving its cinema once again. 25 years ago, the cinema left Welserstraße, where the Women's Film Seminar took place, and moved to Potsdamer Platz. Now we're moving to Silent Green in Wedding. During the move, we had a lot of farewell evenings and reunions, and a lot of photos were shown. One of the most fascinating aspects of your film is the crowds of people meeting and talking in front of the cinema and in the foyer. It is so clear that the actual place, the building and the cinema, became a space for all these encounters and the human aspect of what you describe could take place. How did you film this density and the vibes that were in this place?

VL: It was important for the photographer to be among these women all the time and to observe their faces and to record their moods and their vibes, as you say. And this was something which we had been talking about because sometimes I had to be in the picture, so I couldn't be with him, and he had to know how he should film. That was the style I wanted. I didn't want the movie to be like a stranger coming to this event, to be a kind of report. I wanted to keep this atmosphere and this mood, which was present in 1973, and which today is very valuable because you can see we didn't wear makeup, they are smoking like hell, and we didn't have bras because that was the consensus at that time: We should be clean from any selling of ourselves. Everything should be organic. Also, the way we used the camera and the sound. I remind you that in this time we had had '68, a big difference, a big revolution. We had the Vietnam War ongoing and wars in the Middle East. The pill came out at the end of the '60s, and this changed a lot for women. And I think that artists, unconsciously, are also very influenced by the political status in the world. We were very conscious of what was happening around us. Today we also have a very unpleasant situation with all the wars, and that should also

influence artists to simplify the way they make movies and try to catch not the glamour, but the situation itself we really are in. We know what is happening, we cannot just continue like we were before. We must do as we did in 1973. And that's why this movie is a good example of where I think we should turn nowadays.

GB: It's very beautiful how you leave the footage you found after 50 years quite raw. Sometimes you hear the camera person or the sound person talking. The way you edit really makes it possible for us as viewers to experience the mood back then, all the listening to each other, the tenderness amongst the women. It lets us sense what we've lost as a society. A certain way of talking with each other or maybe also a kind of optimism. Could you describe the moment you rediscovered the footage and the process of deciding how to work with it?

VL: Thank you for that. I was very moved when I saw it because I saw the same thing you saw. We have lost a lot. We had ambitions, but we have also gone in the wrong directions. And we lost opportunities because we weren't given the right to be in the director's chair, to seriously influence the media and the film industry. And I was very much disappointed that this footage didn't really affect the few people who saw it in Norway, but it was maybe because I was asking for money. But in the 1960s and 1970s, we had Godard, who changed the whole way of filmmaking with the New Wave. They are much more naked movies and much more based on real contact with people. And I feel that this film reflects on some of that and my continuation of making movies. The feeling I had with this movie was very important for me. I worked together with the Norwegian National Library very much, they were very enthusiastic and helped me a lot.

BW: Speaking of the National Library, whose idea was it to come back to this film?

VL: They just found some reels with my name on them and the name of your cinema. They opened them and understood that this was something that belonged to me. And then one of the main people there, Ingrid Holtar, came with us to Berlin for the screening in 2023. She was writing a book about me and was researching what I did in the 1970s. And then she found an article which said I was making a movie in Berlin. That was the way they found out that this footage was connected to Arsenal. They were so enthusiastic and so passionate, and they wanted to find the whole thing. But it took another year to find the sound. I looked with them and made phone calls to everybody involved in the project, and at last we succeeded.

BW: Where did you find the original sound tapes? Were they stored separately from the negative?

VL: In the Norwegian archives located in the north of Norway, in the mountains – and, yes, separately, that was what was difficult. This is also where you send all the prints now. They really had to go into this mountain to find the sound. Isn't that fantastic?

BW: When you showed the silent version at Archival Assembly #3 and you had all the participants who were still alive in the audience commenting on the images, did you already have the sound back then?

VL: No, I found it afterwards. But at that screening, the fantastic Claudia von Alemann really entertained the whole 100 people who were sitting there, and she did it excellently. Also, she did a great job identifying and finding out all the names of these people and the stories around them. And she did it. I want people to see the time behind the camera and the time before the camera. I feel it's very important to keep the archival atmosphere. You can see how important what we want to say is. When the film camera stopped recording, we continued to speak. And that is something which would never happen to any

interview subject on TV today because it is so important for them to keep everything like it should be.

GB: You were a crew of three, right? A cameraman and a sound recordist. Was it a consideration to have an all-female crew back then or not at all?

VL: At the time, you couldn't find a camerawoman or a female sound recordist. And my husband was also in the background there. He was following me to help.

GB: I was asking about the male participants because I felt that the women are at ease and talk freely, even if there are men present. I was wondering about that.

VL: At that time, that was the usual picture. We knew it would be men or guys in the roles of photographer and sound recordist, but I had a feeling that he was a very good photographer. He wanted to be very close to the women. They felt that we were coming there with the right questions. And of course, they related to me first because I was the director.

BW: What has been the main emotional or intellectual aspect in coming back to this film? What is the most striking aspect of what you see in this footage?

VL: I see the simpleness, the easiness of how we came to speak about very important things, which are also very important today, but are not said. And I feel this easiness gives the people something which they lack, and they don't see in mainstream projects today.

BW: Why did this easiness get lost?

VL: In the 1970s, we really had an opportunity to feel important. You know, we felt important that we had something we should do, and that our voice was important. And when we came to the 1980s, we had to strive a lot. Then we were disappointed. We were kind of outcast again. We couldn't be ourselves. And more and more, it accelerated like up until today.

GB: Could you say a few words about the evolution of your career after you made the film ÅPENBARINGEN (1977)?

VL: That film was successful. After that, in 1981, I made LØPERJENTEN (THE ERRAND GIRL) or, the US distribution title, CAMILA. It takes place in 1948, just after the Second World War, and is about how people longed to go to America and give up Norway. That was a big success in the US, too, it was one of the ten best films that year. And then I made the movie HUD (SKIN) in 1988. Both those movies were in Cannes. HUD was about the incest and rape of women, it's set in the 1890s. A very powerful movie, very expensive, and it deals with those subjects. And in Norway, where people are more interested in football than movies, it was a scandal. We had some fantastic reviews, but very contrasted because I took up this subject which is so dangerous to take up. And then I made a movie called MÅKER (THE SEAGULLS, 1991), which was about children from a family who went bankrupt, and they didn't know from whom they came. And then I had one more movie, DER GUDENE ER DØDE (WHERE GODS ARE DEAD, 1993). When the war broke out in Yugoslavia, I went there and made this movie in Vukovar, a documentary fiction. And in Norway, again, hell broke out when it came out. In the US it was in the Los Angeles Film Festival, it got a big review, everything was fine – but not in Norway, as always, because in the end, I was called a Norwegian witch. It was very difficult for my whole family, my children. The conservative media here depicted me as a kind of aggressive, angry person, and insinuated I was not entitled to be a director. I was always defined by my sex, by being a woman, and I was not like I should be. They felt I made movies that were critical to the guys. So, they had me stop everything. They stopped me from making movies with my children, with my husband. There is a letter stating

we should never make movies with our children, or with your husband as a producer, that I should never act in my own movies. I was cut out completely, I didn't ever get money to make a movie again. It went on like that for the next 20 years. They even said I'd need a writer to make my script, because I couldn't write a script. 'You're not a writer', they said, whilst I had written all my scripts to all my movies myself. I am capable of writing my own movies. I am an author, and that is useful. And then I wrote a book to convince them that I could write, and that book became a big success in many countries. And it was my debut as an author. So, in those 20 years, I didn't make any movies, but I wrote six beautiful novels. And I also wrote a book called "Purple", it came out in Germany and was translated into six languages, including Greek, Italian, and Russian. I was awarded the title of Cavaliere by then president of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. It was about Renaissance Italy. A very special book which I wish people could read again today because it's about Pope Pius II from the 1400s who wanted the gap to conquer Turkey. Now, with all these wars, this book is very relevant. Anyway, and then the war came out in Gaza, and I saw some pictures, I lifted myself from the chair. I called an institution that was called Free World, and I said: 'Please give me some money. I want to go to Gaza and film the war. What is happening there?' No journalist could enter. I went down there with my husband, and they didn't let us in, but I had connections inside Gaza. I wrote a script in my bed in Norway. We decided what to do and whom to go to ask questions of the children because it's about children. That film premiered at Toronto Film Festival as the most important movie in 2010. And since then, I haven't made any other movies.

BW: But now you made one!

VL: Yes. And I wrote a book, a new novel in 2018 about my husband and myself living and waiting for him to die of cancer.

GB: Thus, THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR is your comeback as a film director?

VL: Isn't that fantastic?

BW: It's not the end of the journey. It's the beginning of the next journey.

VL: Oh, yes. I feel very competent now. I turn 80 in January. Imagine!

BW & GB: Happy birthday, and thank you very much, Vibeke.

VL: Thank you so much. Very nice to speak to you.