

slapstick comedy, starring the well-known stage comedians Leif Juster and Ernst Diesen, was followed by other comedies. The most popular Norwegian comedy during the Occupation was *A Gentleman with a Moustache* (*En herre med bart*) (1942), a more sophisticated screwball comedy directed by the famous actor Alfred Maurstad.

The most popular Norwegian feature film during the war years was *Vigdis* (Helge Lunde, 1943). Even though the film contains comic relief, *Vigdis* is not a comedy pure and simple. More than anything else it is a modern version of those feature films of the thirties that brought into sharp focus the way outsiders were treated in small communities. The action in *Vigdis* takes place in the countryside, but the main characters are teachers or doctors, not farmers or milkmaids. In the film young Vigdis gets pregnant, but refuses to name the father. This leads to much trouble, but after many plot twists and melodramatic confrontations she finally names the father, whom she then marries. A simple melodrama in more ways than one, *Vigdis* still criticizes small-town narrow-mindedness and discrimination.

During the war years the entertainment tax on film-going rose dramatically. The tax on every ticket sold rose, from 10 per cent to 30 per cent on foreign film, and from 5 per cent to 25 per cent on Norwegian feature films. However, a small amount of this tax now went towards the production of Norwegian features, and the policy of the film directorate laid the foundations for a form of subsidizing of feature films which significantly influenced film production in Norway from the early 1950s up to the present. For the first time the government subsidized Norwegian feature films, through the film directorate. At the war's end, a sizeable residue – 10.5 million kroner – remained in a production fund. In the first post-war years nothing happened to this fund, but discussions about how it should be used resulted in a new government engagement in film production.

## THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The German Occupation of Norway ended in spring 1945, and the immediate post-war period saw many changes as regards the cinemas and film production. Attendance rose sharply, and the post-war years were golden years for municipal cinemas. In 1945 the number of attendances were the highest ever: 8,056,665 in Oslo, and 2,099,885 in Trondheim. People went to the movies more often than ever before. One obvious reason was that British and American films were being shown again. The first film from an English-speaking country that premièred after the war was the British feature film *In Which We Serve* (Lean/Coward, 1942), which became a tremendous success. The film opened in Oslo on 17 May, Constitution Day and a national holiday, an emblematic coincidence that signalled the approaching domination of the Anglo-American film, television and the music industry in Norway in the post-war period.

Another reason for the large attendance figures was the need for information about the war, and the new vehicle for this information was the Norwegian newsreel. The first post-war newsreel was produced by Norsk Film A/S, and shown in Oslo (21 May) and in other cities immediately following the German capitulation. Prior to the war, there had been no Norwegian newsreels for national distribution. The municipal cinema organization in Oslo had been inserting locally filmed news into a weekly newsreel programme consisting of various international newsreels, but this newsreel was not widely distributed. During the war, the film directorate had decided that Norsk Film A/S should produce a weekly Norwegian newsreel, to be shown together with the *Deutsche Wochenschau*, and a subdivision of Norsk Film A/S was organized. Production started in January 1944, and continued until the last days of the war. So-called 'good Norwegians' largely boycotted the newsreel, but the production facilities were excellent, and became the foundation upon which Norsk Film A/S based its national newsreel service after the war.

The first liberation newsreel met with immediate success, and a national distribution system was improvised almost overnight. In Oslo one cinema was reserved solely for newsreel screenings, presenting the Norwegian newsreel – *Filmavisen* – in a programme consisting of other international newsreels, like *Fox Movietone News* and the *Pathé* newsreel. Seven copies were made of each weekly edition of *Filmavisen*, and dispatched to the biggest cities. The prints were then circulated locally according to a central distribution plan.

In spite of the intention to establish a truly national newsreel, the Oslo district clearly came to dominate the selection of items presented in the newsreel. Oslo accounted for more than 50 per cent of attendance and income, the production units' base was in Oslo and most major events took place in the capital. Although attendance declined after the large numbers immediately at the war's end, it was relatively stable during the 1950s. In 1959 the newsreel was shown in sixty-three municipal cinemas all over Norway, in addition to screenings with the state-financed mobile exhibition units – *Norsk Bygdekino* – that travelled to those parts of the country which did not have cinemas, and the welfare service of the large Norwegian merchant marines. The newsreel thus played an important part in the circulation of news and information in Norway during the important years of reconstruction and stabilizing of the economy after the Second World War. It became the 'voice of reconstruction', expressing the desire for national unity. The introduction of television to Norway in 1960 signalled the end of *Filmavisen*. In the years following, attendances fell sharply, and the last edition of the newsreel was made in 1963.

The Second World War had a huge impact on film production in Norway, partly because wartime experiences offered a wealth of potentially dramatic stories that were to result in a new genre of Occupation

dramas which dominated Norwegian feature film production for years, but also because of the government's new interest in the media. The war had shown how important film could be as an instrument of propaganda, both by means of the newsreel service and by fictional stories, so the government signalled a new support for film production. This new governmental support took the form of only words and promises for years, but ended eventually in a new state production system, that guaranteed stable national film production from the early 1950s.

After the war a new generation of film-makers made pioneering advances in Norwegian film production, while providing the hungry audiences with authentic stories from the Occupation. A new genre was created – the Occupation drama – often known as docu-dramas. Many of these films were faithful reconstructions of actual events, often featuring some of those who took part in the events portrayed. The most famous of these early Resistance films was *The Battle for Heavy Water* (*Kampen om tungvannet/La Bataille de l'eau lourde*) (1948). Directed by Titus Vibe-Müller, and supervised by the French director Jean Dréville, the film relates the attempts of the Resistance to foil German efforts to ship a stock of heavy water (Deuteriumoxide) from Norway to Germany, intended for the manufacture of an atomic bomb. Saboteurs are parachuted into the Hardanger plateau, to carry out their mission to blow up the factory where the heavy water was produced. Operation Swallow, as it was known, later attracted the attention of Hollywood, which two decades later produced *The Heroes of Telemark* (Anthony Mann, 1965).

*The Battle for Heavy Water* was not the first Occupation drama – Olav Dalgard and Rolf Randall dramatized the patriotic Resistance in *We Want to Live* (*Vi vil leve*) (1946), and Toralf Sandø made his *We Leave for England* (*Englandsfarere*) the same year – but the Franco-Norwegian co-production became the model for later Occupation dramas. Films like *The Shetland Gang* (*Shetlandsgjengen*) (Michael Forlong, 1954), *Contact!* (*Kontakt!*) (Nils R. Müller, 1956) or *Nine Lives* (*Ni Liv*) (Arne Skouen, 1957) sought as much authenticity as possible in their dramatic rendering of the Occupation and the Resistance Movement.

These early Occupation dramas focused on the actions, adventures and struggles of a male war hero. *Nine Lives*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, was an adaptation of a story about a Norwegian saboteur and his harrowing escape from Nazi-occupied Norway to Sweden. Like most Hollywood war films, women in these Occupation dramas acted as marginal helpers in the central male character's heroic pursuit of freedom. *Nine Lives* is no different in this stereotyped depiction of gender, but it signalled a new treatment of the heroic saboteur. Early on in the film, when escaping from German soldiers, the hero is wounded and suffers frostbite, and has to cut off nine of his toes while sheltering in a mountain cabin. For the rest of the film he

is rendered immobile, and completely dependent on his helpers. The main protagonist of *Nine Lives* is virtually an anti-hero, and the Occupation drama changed dramatically during the early 1960s. The docu-drama tone disappeared, women became more important in the stories, and the hero was shown to have his faults. The heroes were no longer larger than life and perfect, but human beings like everybody else. The revision of these earlier central themes of the Occupation dramas goes on even today, and films like *The Reward (Belønningen)* (Bjørn Lien, 1980) or *Over the Border (Over Grensen)* (Bente Erichsen, 1987) show a different side of the Resistance spirit, namely the betrayal and deception not only of the Germans or of the Quislings, but inside the Resistance Movement itself.

The years after the Second World War saw many directors making their first feature films, and this new generation of film-makers favoured a highly realistic approach to film style. Not only in the Occupation dramas, but also in other genres Norwegian directors strived for a new realism. In these years of reconstruction many had a dark, realistic tone. The most important of the new directors was undoubtedly Arne Skouen. He is, besides Tancred Ibsen, the most important, original and productive among the Norwegian directors. Skouen has been regarded as Norway's first genuine auteur, because he wrote the screenplays for all seventeen of his films save one. Towards the middle of his career as a film-maker he also established his own production company to ensure himself even greater independence.

Having already been a successful author and journalist in Norway, Skouen worked in New York as a press attaché during the Second World War. Before he left the USA in 1946, he travelled to Hollywood. Just like Tancred Ibsen two decades earlier, Skouen observed the Hollywood way of making movies, and learned a lot from this experience. In Norway he returned to his work as a writer, and forgot his plans about film-making, but one day in 1949 he received an offer he could not refuse. Norway is a small country, with a small film culture, and the anecdotal story about how Skouen came to be the single most important film-maker in the post-war period tells a lot about the Norwegian system of film production.

As before the war, Norwegian feature film production was dominated by short-lived enterprises which seldom managed more than one film before giving up. Norsk Film A/S, the municipal production company, was handed back to the original organization after the war, but lack of capital resulted in the company producing no feature films between 1945 and 1948. During this time the only active part of the company was the newsreel division, which also produced one feature-length compilation documentary about King Haakon VII. In 1948 the company was reorganized, new capital was invested, and in accord with the national economic policy and its new involvement in the national film culture, this investment was made by the government. Since 1948 Norsk Film A/S has been a joint

state/municipal venture. Feature film production resumed after the re-organization, and the first feature the company produced after the war was Tancred Ibsen's *The Secretive Apartment* (*Den hemmelighetsfulle Leiligheten*, 1948).

Even though the government invested capital in Norsk Film A/S, the company was still run by the municipalities, and one man within the municipal organization had enormous power. Kristoffer Aamot was not only the managing director of the municipal cinema organization in Oslo, he was also top man within the nationwide organization of all municipal cinemas, and chairman of the board of directors of Norsk Film A/S. In this key position, he often acted on his ideas and whims, and initiated film projects himself. In 1948 Aamot read Arne Skouens' novel *Street Boys* (*Gategutter*) and liked it so much that he wanted Norsk Film A/S to make a film of the book. Aamot also wanted Skouen himself to direct the film, although Skouen had no prior experience of film-making, apart from his trip to Hollywood. One day Skouen received a telephone call from Aamot, who wanted to see Skouen at his office. When Skouen arrived, the novel *Street Boys* was on the desk, and before Skouen could say anything, Aamot just pointed his finger at the book and asked if Skouen wanted to direct a film adaptation of the novel. Skouen said yes, wrote the script, and with the assistance of the experienced photographer Ulf Greber, directed his first feature film in 1949. This led to other projects, and between 1949 and 1969 Skouen directed seventeen films, thus being one of the few Norwegian directors to direct more than one or two feature films. As this anecdote illustrates, film production in Norway has often been dominated by strange coincidences, and even though the government invested money in film production after the war, no proper industry evolved. Just a handful of films were made each year, some produced by Norsk Film A/S, others by short-lived private companies.

Skouen's *Street Boys* (*Gategutter*) (1949) tells the story of a gang of boys. They wore baggy shorts and shirts, with large caps on their heads, as they ran through the streets of Oslo in the 1920s. They all go to school, but eagerly await the time when school's over so that they can get jobs, and start earning money and being a financial help to their poor families. Days are spent on petty thievery, stealing fruit from the harbour boats and copra from trucks passing 'their' street. The film paints a grim picture of broken families, strikes and lock-outs, and domestic poverty. At the centre of this highly realistic feature film stand Karsten and Gotfred, two boys who become rivals. They both want to head the gang. Karsten gets a job after his school days are over, and learns the importance of solidarity and union membership, while Gotfred ends up as a petty criminal who goes to gaol or borstal. *Street Boys* is a stark and realistic picture of Norway during the 1920s, but the film also contains many poetic sequences focusing on the hopes and dreams of these boys, and the growing friendship and solidarity

within the group. The film ends with Karsten and his younger friend Sofus wandering home at dusk, after a fight with the police and strike-breakers that nearly lands them in gaol. As they wander, the street-lights are suddenly switched on, bathing the two in a new light; they keep on walking and the film ends.

The ending is apparently a combination of a Chaplin film and the French poetic realism of the 1930s. Skouen himself has often talked about Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se Lève* (1939) as his model and favourite movie, but *Street Boys* resembles the Italian neorealist films more than anything else. It bears a close resemblance to some of Vittorio de Sica's films, for instance, *Sciuscià* (1946) or *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), and Skouen's films share the stylistic traits of the Italian neorealist films. Important is Skouen's use of amateurs in most parts, and the young kids in the film were practically taken off the streets. Many of the boys later pursued a career in acting or directing. The young Sofus was played by Pål Bang-Hansen, who became a film director in the 1960s, and also a popular television commentator with his own programme about films.

With his next feature, *Forced Landing (Nøddlanding)* (1952), Skouen made the first of four Occupation dramas, the most famous being *Nine Lives*. As is usual in the genre, Skouen's early films are realistic docu-dramas, but in his later films – *Surrounded (Omringet)* (1960) or *Cold Trails (Kalde Spor)* (1962) – he creates chamber-plays (*Kammerspielfilme*) about guilt and wrongdoing during the Occupation. To a larger degree he questions the official hero-worship of the Resistance fighters.

Skouen's films often tell the same story over and over again, disguised by genre and locales. His protagonists are outsiders who through their actions and attitudes have excluded themselves from their community. To get back inside, and to be part of a community, they often use desperate measures. In the highly expressionistic *The Flame (Det brenner i natt!)* (1955) the main character is a love-starved poet suffering writer's block who turns to arson. Only in this way can he fill his life with a perverse warmth. Skouen's credo may be simple, and his films convey the message that people should stick together and care for each other, but his films are highly complex and assured dramas. Skouen made his last film in 1969. *An-Magritt* is in many ways different from the rest of his films, being an adaptation of another author's book, set in a primitive seventeenth-century community, and having a woman as protagonist. The young An-Magritt, played by Liv Ullmann, is an orphaned girl who has to fight for her basic rights. Her mother committed suicide because she was raped, and An-Magritt is the consequence of that rape. She fights the constant repression and violence, is forced to labour in a stone quarry and, denied even a modicum of food, she clings to life through her friendship to Johannes, a German migrant artist. *An-Magritt* became Skouen's swan-song, and his focus on a woman as the main character heralded a new turn in the history of Norwegian film.

Two other directors emerged in the late 1940s and became the makers of the most popular films. The comedies of Nils R. Müller and Edith Carlmar dominated the Norwegian screen in the 1950s. Edith Carlmar was the first female Norwegian director, but her first feature film *Death is a Caress* (*Døden er et kjærtegn*) (1949) was about masculinity and male melancholia. It is a film noir, the story of a wealthy middle-class woman Sonja and Erik, a garage mechanic. She divorces her husband and marries the younger Erik, but their marriage becomes a series of increasingly violent rows, and Erik finally kills her. The film is told in flashbacks, as Erik awaits the sentence for the murder of his wife. Sonja is a *femme fatale*, and the film has all the stylistic features of film noir. Thus, the first woman director made her debut with a film about male melancholia!

After this film noir, Edith Carlmar made two social problem films before turning to comedy. Her most popular comedy was the enormously popular *Fools on the Mountain* (*Fjols til fjells*) (1957), a situation comedy of mistaken identity set in a mountain resort. The most popular genre in Norwegian post-war film production was comedy. In the 1950s the sub-genre of romantic comedies dominated Norwegian film production. In no other period in Norwegian film history has this sub-genre been so popular with film-goers nor films so numerous. In the years from 1951 to 1963 the number of romantic comedies varied between one and four, of a yearly production varying from six to twelve features.

The first commercially successful Norwegian film comedy after the war was *We are Getting Married* (*Vi gifter oss*) (Nils R. Müller, 1951). This film became one of the greatest box-office hits ever in Norwegian cinema, and was followed by many films that were variations of the same story. Müller's film tells the story about a young, urban couple and their housing problems. They want to establish a home of their own and get married, but they cannot do so without having somewhere to live. Frustrated by this situation, the couple are forced to move from the city to a farm in the countryside. This is a place of hard work and female intrigues, and their marriage seems to be on the verge of collapse, until one day the husband wins a popular music contest. This allows them to move into a house of their own, and saves the marriage. The film ends in a celebration of traditional values, marriage and the middle-class nuclear family.

*We are Getting Married* takes a social problem – the lack of housing – as a way to paint an idyllic portrait of a romantic couple and their marriage. This blend of social and political issues, and romantic comedy, characterizes feature film production in Norway in the 1950s. Popular films like *A Woman's Place* (*Kvinnens Plass*) (Nils R. Müller, 1956) and *Dust on the Brain* (*Støv på hjernen*) (Øyvind Vennerød, 1959) deal with sex-roles within marriage. By focusing on the female sex-roles, which appear to be under pressure and changing, these films give the female protagonist a more central position in the films than hitherto. *Dust on the Brain* also

deals with adultery, or what happens in a marriage when the woman is so immersed in her role as mother and housekeeper that her husband no longer finds her attractive as a woman, and she can no longer keep him at home. In some of these films of the 1950s the man and the woman are not equal, but in others the woman appears to be superior to the man, thus having a dimension of social critique and not only being 'pure entertainment'.

With very few exceptions the most popular comedies in the 1950s were romantic, 'marital' comedies. The married, middle-class couple are at the centre of a story that focuses on the condition of love and sexual desire inside the institution of marriage. The 1950s was a period of rebuilding and recovery after the war, but also a decade of economic growth and social change. In this decade, large-scale urbanization and industrialization were indicative of progress and modernization, and the period was full of optimism. The comedies reflect both this new optimism, and, in dealing with the emerging 'new' society – where the nuclear family was at the centre, and the housewife was given a special role – reflect the changing ways of life and sex-roles.

These comedies were enormously popular all over the country. In earlier years the difference in taste and preferences in individual cities was extensive, but this changed during the 1950s. Comedies like *Fools on the Mountain* or *Dust on the Brain* dominated the screens in Norway the year they were released, and no foreign imports could match their popularity. Even though American movies still dominated the imports, Norwegian films were favoured by the audiences. During the 1950s a homogenization of film taste seemed to take place, but domestic films were still preferred.

Feature film production in Norway in the 1950s and 1960s was dominated by comedies. One obvious reason for this dominance was the popularity of the genre. These comedies allowed both male and female spectators to laugh, both at comic situations and characters, and at themselves and their everyday life in the changing Norwegian society. However, audience popularity was not the only reason for this dominance. Another reason may be the changing production support provided by the Norwegian state.

After the Second World War the government showed an increased interest in film production. The new state involvement in domestic film culture started in 1948, when Norsk Film A/S became a joint state/municipal venture. Two years later, the government launched a generous system of support for feature film production. This revolutionary system, the state production system of 1950, made film production a national project in Norway, and guaranteed continuous domestic film production. The new production system made it much easier for the private producers. If the films they produced had 'a minimum of artistic quality', the state would



contribute 300,000 Norwegian kroner – later raised to 350,000 – towards the production. This amount was rather lower than the cost of an average feature film, but this support was extremely important, and the chances of losing money on the production of a film became less. Thus, since 1950 film production in Norway has been a joint venture between private companies and the state. At first, private companies made their films and later applied for support, but this was to change a few years later due to the sinking quality of the films that were produced.

Film production rose in Norway in the first years after the initiation of the production system of 1950, and more production companies dared to make ambitious artistic films. After a few years, while still wanting to make quality productions, many private companies had adapted their production methods to the new state support system. To minimize loss, production companies made their features as cheaply as possible – the goal being to produce a film at the same cost as the state support, thus guaranteeing no loss at all – and as a result, the Board of Review which controlled quality started to worry about film production. A new type of ‘kitchen-sink’-production emerged, i.e. films made as cheaply as possible, and these productions jeopardized the whole production system. At the same time the government knew full well that a producer who was denied support would be in financial trouble, so for a few years every Norwegian feature was almost automatically supported by the state.

This situation became more and more of a problem, and in 1953 a film was denied state support because it was not good enough. The film *The Seal-Woman* (*Selkvinnen*) (Jonson, 1953) was considered too primitive, and did not fulfil the demands for ‘a minimum of artistic quality’. The man behind the production was Leif Sinding, former head of the Nazi-controlled film directorate during the war, and he believed the government wanted to punish him for his wartime crimes as a collaborator, but this is probably not true. *The Seal-Woman* was a bad film, and simply too bad for the government to sponsor and encourage; thus the speculative way in which private producers like Sinding used the production system of 1950 eventually led to its demise.

In 1955 the old production system was replaced with a new state production system. This system was different, in that it did not endorse the production of ‘quality’ films but rewarded popular films. From now on a production company received support from the state according to a film’s box-office receipts. The more money a film earned, the more money the private production company received from the state. This new system boosted the production of comedies in Norway, and made it much harder to produce films for a smaller segment of the audience.

After 1955, and until the late 1960s, the government’s support encouraged the production of popular films. Thus, film production as a national project changed drastically. Film production in Norway in the post-war

years may be divided into two periods, the first between 1946 and 1955, when film production was artistically ambitious and the government (from 1950) supported a 'quality' production by minimizing the chance of loss, the second period after 1955, when box-office receipts and popularity were what the government sought to support.

Because of the unique municipal cinema system, and the state production system of 1955, fewer dramas were produced in the 1960s. A few Occupation dramas were made, but comedies predominated. Some social problem films were also produced, films that focused on social problems like juvenile delinquency (*Youth on the Run (Ung Flukt)* (Edith Carlmar, 1959)), ecstatic religion (*Brother Gabrielsen (Broder Gabrielsen)* (Nils R. Müller, 1966)), or narcotics (*Heaven and Hell (Himmel og Helvete)* (Øyvind Vennerød, 1969)), but many of these social dramas were speculative. They focused on social problems as a way of staging scenes of sexual excess, and for all their raising of social problems they ended up confirming, rather than querying, a consensual view of the world.

The early 1950s was the golden age of documentary. Short films accompanied every feature in Norway, and many full-length documentaries were produced. They were very popular, and Thor Heyerdahl's spectacular travelogue recorded in *Kon-Tiki* (Olle Nordemar, 1950) in particular was a huge success, and won an Oscar for best documentary. The director Per Høst also made many documentaries about his voyages to exotic places far from Norway, but his most famous film of this period was about the Lapps in northern Norway: *The Laplanders (Same Jakki)* (1957). The introduction of television to Norway in 1960 brought this golden age of film to a close. The Norwegian newsreel ended in 1963, and both short films and full-length documentaries nearly disappeared from the screens during the 1960s. In the 1950s eighteen full-length documentaries were produced in Norway, but a decade later this number was reduced to one-third, only six long documentaries.

The coming of television signalled great changes in film culture in Norway. Attendance fell sharply, and feature films no longer held the same attraction as before. The audience changed and became younger and more educated, and the older generation of film-makers was replaced by a new generation, with fresh ideas about how to compete with television and socio-cultural changes in leisure-time activities.

## THE MODERN BREAKTHROUGH

Directors like Tancred Ibsen and Arne Skouen showed that Norwegian film could be both popular and respectable, international and national, by simultaneously drawing upon popular Hollywood cinema and domestic conventions of literature and theatre as well as using the Norwegian landscape. Ibsen and Skouen, or the directors of popular comedies in the 1950s

or 1960s, used the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema, but transformed and decoded them in a new national context. Thus, emphasis upon collective or group action in Skouen's films separates his production from classic Hollywood individualism in terms of both ideology and narrative style.

In the late 1960s the relation between Norwegian cinema and classical Hollywood cinema, in terms of style and ideology, shifted from one of similarity to one of outright antipathy. At the same time a new generation of film-makers dominated film production. Edith Carlmar made her last film in 1959, Ibsen his in 1963, and Skouen's last movie came out in 1969. The old generation stopped making movies, while the new young film-makers actively embraced oppositional approaches and alternatives to Hollywood. In Norway, American movies were still popular, but the new generation of domestic film-makers searched for alternative sources of cinematic style and social values.

French new wave films had a profound influence on this new generation. For a short period Norwegian film-makers embraced the French new wave as a model cinema, and a modernist breakthrough took place in film production. The director most inspired by French film-making was Pål Løkkeberg, who became an enormously influential director in Norway. His first feature *Liv* came out in 1967, and was the portrait of a young photographic model called Liv. His next film *Exit* (1970) was even more sharply influenced by Jean-Luc Godard, and resembles a remake of *Pierrot le Fou* (1965). *Exit* experiments with flashbacks, flashforwards, dream sequences and abrupt cutting, while expanding the theme from *Liv* about middle-class alienation. Even more experimental than Løkkeberg, who returned to the theatre proper after his two features, was Lasse Henriksen. His first, and only, feature film, *Love is War* (1970), is based on short stories by the Norwegian author Johan Borgen. This film used infra-red photography and videotronics in order to blend two fragmented stories, about a man and a woman, into a single entity. *Love is War* won a Silver Bear award at the Berlin Festival in 1971, and the film's self-conscious psychedelic effects captured the spirit of the times.

Until this modern, and modernist, breakthrough, few films had been made in Norway that could be characterized as experimental or modernist. Tancred Ibsen made a modernist feature in 1948, the strange *The Secretive Apartment*, a film that resembles Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976). The film tells the story of an elderly man who changes apartments. His new apartment is furnished, and full of modernist art, and at first this scares the conservative man, but slowly his attitudes to life change until he takes on the identity of the previous owner. The film used voice-over to give the audience a chance to hear the character's inner thoughts, and Ibsen experimented with different styles. The end result is not altogether convincing, and it was eleven years before another modernist

feature film was to emerge in Norway: Erik Løchen's *The Hunt (Jakten)* (1959).

*The Hunt* was an unusual film in more ways than one. It tells the story of a hunting trip in the mountains. Two men and a woman are isolated, and two old rivals fight over the woman. Male desire generates violence and death, and the film openly criticizes male mimetic desire. *The Hunt* used modernist *Verfremdung* effects in the Brechtian tradition, to tear the fabric of the film apart, right in the middle of action-oriented sequences, and thus bring the film content and the form to the attention of the audience. Erik Løchen's second feature is the most experimental of the films from the early 1970s, and marks perhaps the end of a short but hectic period of modernist experimentation. *Remonstrance (Motforestilling)* (1972) is a meta-film, a film about a crew making a political film, and follows the crew in its work and political discussions. At the same time the film is an 'essay' on filmic representation. Løchen wanted to create a completely different dramaturgy from the one in Hollywood, and explained later that he had written the film so that the reels could be shown in different sequences, thus creating 120 possible versions of the film.

*Remonstrance* was a more overt political movie than *Exit* or *Love is War*, and at the same time the film marks the end of a short modernist, experimental period in Norwegian cinema, and the beginning of a new sobriety. Political ideas became more important than narrative or character development. This refusal to tell a 'good' story is characteristic of film production in Norway during the 1970s. Feature films not only focused on social problems, but became obsessed with political ideas. Films were used as a vehicle for political propaganda, an instrument in the debates around social and political issues, more than a way to tell stories.

A typical example of this new sobriety is *Strike! (Streik!)* (Oddvar Bull Tuhus, 1975). This film chronicles the bitter strike at the Sauda factory – an industrial firm owned by the giant Union Carbide – and re-creates the various stages of the dispute in the spring of 1970. The director examines the tension that builds between the unions at both local and national level, and the division between old and young workers. *Strike!* is social realism at its best; it is a protest film, where political ideas are placed in the forefront. Another example of the new sobriety is Anja Breien's *Rape (Voldtekt)* (1971). This film focuses on the suspect rapist rather than on the victim, and explores the legal system. The interest of the film lies in exposing the inadequacies of the legal system, thus overtly criticizing the government's policy. *Rape* is a grim-faced docu-drama, shot in black-and-white, and with long speeches delivered directly to the camera.

Anja Breien is perhaps the most prominent woman director in Norway, and 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. Directors like Nicole Macé, Anja Breien, Vibeke Løkkeberg and Laila Mikkelsen made important features during the 1970s and early 1980s, and today Eva Isaksen and Unni Straume remain among the most interesting directors. Women characters have become the central players or the central narrative focus in films about strong adult or adolescent women who learn to cope with social injustice, patriarchal abuse and community intolerance. Women directors' criticism of patriarchal forms of discrimination within Norwegian society has become important, and their enunciation of feminist points of view is also important in the development of the new sobriety, and alternative values and forms of expression to those of Hollywood.

The Norwegian cinema of the 1970s and early 1980s was a political cinema; a cinema dealing with social problems and injustice. Most producers and directors seemed to be in agreement that they did not make films solely for the sake of profit, and this attitude was supported by the financing system. Since 1964, the Norwegian government made pre-production loan guarantees covering about 90 per cent of film costs available to those projects approved by a seven-member board, including production representatives, and this new system of support tended to boost production of 'idea films': features focusing on political ideas or social issues rather than on a 'good story'. One of the most important social issues was women's role in society, and many of the new women directors made brilliant films focusing on social outsiders, significant problems of growing up in Norwegian society or community intolerance.

The most outstanding, and most popular, of these films made by a woman director was *Wives (Hustruer)* (Anja Breien, 1975). This was a sparkling satire on the role of women in the modern consumer society, and the film not only became a domestic hit, but was popular in other Nordic countries. Inspired by John Cassavetes's *Husbands* (1970), Breien's film tells the story of three women, one of whom is pregnant, who go off on a three-day spree. They are old class-mates, and were once best friends. Over a period of three years, they have allowed themselves to become wholly involved in their respective husbands' lives. They meet at a school reunion party, and in a fit of sardonic humour they agree to ignore the responsibilities of job and children. Thirsty for a few days of independence they tease and harass strange men on the streets of Oslo with sexually suggestive questions, and take the boat to Copenhagen. The film has a slow, contemplative pace, with scenes shot in a cinema vérité-style on the streets of Oslo. The dialogue was improvised by the actresses, who had toured Norway with a play on a related theme, and this gave the film a spontaneous edge. The popularity of *Wives* is obvious, not only through the box-office figures, but also by the fact that Breien was encouraged to produce a sequel entitled *Wives – Ten Years After (Hustruer – ti år etter)* (1985). This film picks up the lives of the same characters ten years later,

and the three women go on a new binge, regardless of the fact that it is Christmas time. The sequel was also a huge success in Norway. Anja Breien has recently made a third movie about the three women entitled *Wives III – Twenty Years Later* (1996).

Another important, and popular, film made by one of the new women directors was *The Betrayal* (*Løperjenten*) (Vibeke Løkkeberg, 1981), and the first Norwegian film since Skouen's *Nine Lives* to be commercially distributed in the United States. The setting in this feature is the coastal town of Bergen in 1948. Amidst the post-war turmoil – of rebuilding, trials of war criminals, and the cultural invasion by the USA – Kamilla and Svein grow up. Kamilla is the daughter of a bankrupt factory owner making his living as a shoemaker, and dreaming of a prosperous new life in America. Svein is a working-class child. Together, Kamilla and Svein experience homes breaking up, child abuse, and social and emotional humiliation. In this film, oppression within the family parallels oppression from state welfare institutions, and oppression at the hands of Germans and Americans. *The Betrayal* focuses upon patriarchal social policies and bourgeois family relations. The film adopts the point of view of the young girl, and gives a moving portrait of Kamilla. In recent years, Vibeke Løkkeberg has been the most controversial film-maker in Norway, directing two melodramatic period dramas: the three-hour-long *The Wild One* (*Hud*) (1986), and the Chekov pastiche *Sea Gulls* (*Måker*) (1991). Her latest feature *Where Gods are Dead* (*Der Gudene er døde*) (1993) was a docu-drama set in war-torn former Yugoslavia, a film that met with an extremely negative press in Norway and sparked much controversy.

The new generation of women directors made important contributions to the genre of sobriety in the 1970s, and *Wives* and *The Betrayal* became popular films and box-office hits. Still, attendance seemed to sink even lower during the 1970s, and domestic films ceased to be as popular as before. The films' political and social issues were important, but did not boost attendance figures. Most people now stayed at home when Norwegian films were screened, preferring American movies. Two significant exceptions to this were *The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix* (*Flåklypa Grand Prix*) (Ivo Caprino, 1975) and the popular film series about the Olsen Gang.

The most popular Norwegian feature ever was also the first, full-length animated film. *The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix* was made by the veteran Ivo Caprino, who had directed a large number of short films in which puppets play the parts of human beings, in narratives taken from Norwegian folktales. Caprino is Norway's answer to Disney, and he built his own studio, and later his own theme park outside of Lillehammer. In 1975, he turned to the artist Kjell Aukrust, and his popular stories about the village of Flåklypa (Pinchcliffe). *The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix* tells the story about a car race, and how local forces win over the international elite. The film uses a highly advanced technique, which has impressed audiences and

film critics throughout the world. *The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix* has proved enormously popular in Norway, and quickly became the Norwegian feature film which has attracted the largest audiences. The film has been reissued several times, and proved more popular than ever in 1995.

Another huge success in the 1970s was the film series about the Olsen Gang. In 1968, the Danish film company Nordisk had a big hit with the comedy *The Olsen-Gang (Olsen-Banden)* (Erik Balling). The success of this film led to a popular film series resulting in thirteen titles between 1968 and 1981. The first of these films was imported to Norway, but met with virtually no interest. The Norwegian film company Team-Film A/S, which had produced many similar comedies since 1962, saw the potential in the first Olsen Gang film, and produced a Norwegian version of the original Danish screenplay. Norwegian director Knut Bohwim chose popular actors from the Oslo vaudeville, replaced local Danish jokes with Norwegian ones, and adapted the film to Norwegian taste, while at the same time remaining loyal to the plot of the original and providing an almost verbatim translation of dialogue. The result, *The Olsen-Gang (Olsen-Banden)* (1969), turned out to be a big success, and led to a series of movies. Just as in Denmark, these films became an institution in film production, and thirteen Norwegian Olsen Gang movies were made between 1969 and 1984.

All Olsen Gang films were profitable, and centre around a main plot which is basically the same in all thirteen movies. The Olsen Gang are a motley crew of petty criminals, and each film starts with gang leader Egon Olsen being released from gaol. He is met by the other gang members outside the prison gates, and each time Egon Olsen has a new and fantastic plan. Through such intricate schemes the Olsen Gang come close to carrying out a successful operation, but due to some small, freakish accident their machinations are always unveiled and Egon returns to prison.

The Norwegian producers blueprinted the first twelve Danish Olsen Gang films, and some Norwegian versions were actually shot mainly in Denmark, on the original Danish sets, thus saving both money and time. Although differences exist between the Danish and Norwegian Olsen Gang movies, as the reception in Norway of the first one suggests, the films are very much alike, both in humour and plot. Some changes were always made, and the chosen Norwegian actors brought their existing comic personae to the series. Interestingly, the reception by the critical establishment was different for each of the two countries. In Denmark the critics often loved the movies, while in Norway they were scorned and hated. They did not fit well with a climate of sobriety and political radicalism. This may conversely partly explain why these films were such enormous box-office hits. Even though they were successful in both countries, it was ten years before the Swedish variant of the series – films about the Jönsson Gang – was produced, and while the production of

Olsen Gang movies stopped in Denmark and Norway in the early 1980s, production is still going on in Sweden. In Norway, the Olsen Gang is currently a big success on video, and by 1993 more than 100,000 video cassettes had been sold.

Despite the successes of *The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix* and the Olsen Gang movies, cinema attendance sank even lower in Norway during the 1970s. At the same time audiences no longer favoured domestic production, and shied away from most Norwegian films. These politically 'heavy' features were often loved by the critics, but were box-office failures. Due to state production support, and a new policy of co-productions between Norsk Film A/S and production companies in other countries, the number of feature films rose to ninety-eight in the 1970s, but Norwegian film production met with a growing crisis in confidence. American movies dominated more than ever, and Norwegian directors and producers met the crisis by copying the American genre films that flooded the Norwegian cinemas.

## NORWAY GOES INTERNATIONAL

The year 1985 proved to be one of the most interesting and significant years for Norwegian film culture. Several high-quality productions created international interest, and attitudes among producers and directors seemed to change drastically. The new slogan in the Norwegian film business was: Norway goes international.

An important landmark in the early 1980s was the film *Orion's Belt* (*Orions belte*) (Ola Solum, 1985), which signalled a new international orientation in Norwegian cinema. The production of *Orion's Belt* required more capital than the government, through the State Production Committee, was willing to give, so the producer invited a financial company to draw upon other sources. The solution was found in the shape of a limited partnership, where investors could obtain considerable tax advantages, together with the prospect of a possible profit, if the film earned more than its production costs. The success of *Orion's Belt* resulted in a new Klondike situation in Norwegian film. Foreign companies, like Goldcrest and Buena Vista, as well as Norwegian ones, used the limited partnership for a few years in order to finance projects. This led to a new situation in Norwegian film culture. On the one hand, Norwegian capital was used to partly finance American movies like *Revolution 1776* (Hugh Hudson, 1986) and *Flight of the Navigator* (Randal Kleiser, 1986). On the other hand, Norwegian films were more internationally oriented, striking examples being the black comedy *Blackout* (Erik Gustavson, 1986), set in a studio world complete with its own Chinatown, and *Turnaround* (Ola Solum, 1987), which did not even use the Norwegian language, and thus was denied state support. The social realism of the 1970s had been replaced by action-oriented movies, often intended for an international



audience. Norwegian film culture vibrated with excitement, because Norway was going international!

*Orion's Belt* was one of the first, and the most successful both economically and artistically, of these new action dramas. This political thriller tells the story of three Norwegians on board the freighter *Sandy Hook*, who make their living from dubious assignments on the coast of Spitsbergen. By coincidence, they discover a Soviet listening-post for submarine detection in a cave. Caught red-handed by a Soviet helicopter, two of the Norwegians are killed in battle, but at the same time the helicopter is shot down. The lone survivor reaches Spitsbergen, and the listening-post proves extremely interesting for the Norwegian Secret Service. In the end the discovery has to remain top secret, for diplomatic reasons, and the lone survivor is pursued through the streets of Oslo, no doubt by agents of the Norwegian government who want to obliterate all traces of the unfortunate boat crew.

*Orion's Belt* was Norway's most expensive production to date, and the film was the greatest box-office hit since *The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix*. The commercial success, and international acclaim, of *Orion's Belt* immediately led to similar projects, winning support from eager investors now willing to invest money in a film culture 'going international'. Action films like *Rubicon* (*Etter Rubicon*) (Leidulv Risan, 1987), *Blücher* (Oddvar Bull Tuhus, 1988) and *The Dive* (*Dykket*) (Tristan de Vere Cole, 1989), were classic race-against-time thrillers, either dealing with a NATO neutron bomb explosion in the North of Norway, the hunt for secret papers on a sunken German warship, or a diving accident on an oil rig in the North Sea. Many of these thrillers were well produced, but could have been made in almost any Western country. This new extreme action orientation and international tone, an imitation of classical Hollywood cinema, was also evident in films like *Blackout*, *Turnaround* or *Karachi* (Oddvar Einarson, 1989), the titles themselves telling something about the international orientation.

The most successful of these action thrillers which was produced in the years after the success of *Orion's Belt* was *Pathfinder* (*Veiviseren*) (Nils Gaup, 1987). This was the first feature film ever to be shot in the Sami language, and the film was an Academy Award nominee in 1988 for Best Foreign Language Film. *Pathfinder* is based on a twelfth-century legend, about a young boy who sees his parents and little sister slaughtered by a raiding party of Tsjudes. The boy is taken prisoner, and forced to act as a pathfinder for the evil raiders. The boy manages to trick his captors and lead them over a cliff to a violent death. This film owes much of its international fame to its close resemblance to the western genre, and is often referred to as a 'cod-western'. The director Nils Gaup has made two more features, both successes: *Shipwrecked* (*Håkon Håkonsen*) (1990) for Disney, and *Head over the Water* (*Hodet over vannet*) (1993). The first

film became a huge success on the American video market, and a remake of the latter is currently being planned in the United States. Gaup is currently finishing a large internationally produced movie, *Tashunga*, starring James Caan and Christopher Lambert.

After a few years the excitement in Norwegian film production seemed to wear off, and the Klondike feeling disappeared, but many of the Norwegian films produced today are action films closely imitating the Hollywood genre films. Thus there have been radical changes since the cinema of sobriety in the 1970s. Audiences started to return, and once more favoured domestic films. Of course, not only action thrillers were made in the late 1980s, but these thrillers completely dominated Norwegian film culture. Norwegian producers and directors, helped by the state support system, resurrected the Hollywood genres in Norway, and, like Tancred Ibsen in the late 1930s, met with new acclaim when the films looked to Hollywood for inspiration.

Exceptions in this age of thrillers and black comedies were films like *X* (Oddvar Einarson, 1986) and *To a Stranger (Til en ukjent)* (Unni Straume, 1990). *X*, which won a Silver Lion award at Venice in 1986, is the story of the relationship between a taciturn art photographer and a 14-year-old homeless girl in Oslo. In a slow rhythm, in long takes, a strange relationship and a social situation is explored. Where Einarson was inspired by Antonioni, woman director Unni Straume was more inspired by Tarkovskij or Wenders. *To a Stranger* is a beautiful cinematic poem about a young woman who is studying in Oslo, but one day decides to hitch-hike back to her childhood home in the west of Norway. She gets a ride with an elderly composer, and during their journey, past experiences become intertwined with those of the present. At the opposite extreme of the spectrum from *Orion's Belt*, these slow, poetic visions continue to use international models in a new way. Norwegian cinema is perhaps more international today than ever before, even though the models are as different as Antonioni or classical Hollywood cinema.

Even if Norwegian film culture and production has been internationalized in recent years, film production is still a national project, and private investors rely on government support. Today, all Norwegian full-length films receive a subsidy from the state, currently equivalent to 55 per cent of the gross box-office takings. This subsidy continues to be paid until the authorized production costs have been recovered by means of film rental income and the subsidy. In the case of films designated as suitable for children under ten years of age, the subsidy is calculated at 100 per cent.

Most Norwegian feature films today are produced with the aid of governmental support, which is granted in one of two ways. First, by the state, in the form of the Norwegian Film Institute's Department of Production and International Relations, after the application has been considered by the film advisory officer (replacing the five-member

National Film Production Committee in 1992). Second, the money can be granted automatically within the framework of Norsk Film A/S, the independent, government-owned production company.

As of the mid-1990s, Norwegian film production consists of between seven and eight feature films per year. Since the mid-1980s, and the revitalization of Norwegian film production due to the internationalization of film output, these features acquire a very respectable share of the box-office. Unlike the 'golden age' of the 1950s, when eighteen of the thirty most popular features shown to Norwegian audiences were domestic films, but most Norwegian films still do very well with home audiences.

The Norwegian peculiarity of the municipal system is the same today as before. Revisions of the 1913 Cinema Theatres' Act were attempted throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but only after Norway suffered a 'video nasties shock' in 1980 were measures undertaken to remedy current legislation. In 1987 the new Film and Video Act was passed in Parliament by a two-thirds majority, and went into effect on 1 January 1988. This Act is a revision of the Act of 1913, and central censorship is maintained for public screenings of film and video. The Act also requires everyone who 'exhibits, rents or sells video tapes commercially to consumers' to acquire a licence from the municipal council. The government has also imposed a tax on video cassettes, and the money from this tax is to be used for cinema purposes.

In these post-television times, the Norwegian municipalities no longer earn so much money from cinemas as before, and they have even been willing to foot the bill for keeping their 200 cinemas operating, for the one important reason that the municipalities once took over the cinemas: community service and cultural benefit. In 1988, 92 per cent of municipal cinemas were operating in the red, with total deficits of approximately NOK 49 million. In recent years this situation has somewhat improved as people seem to visit cinemas more often, but running a cinema is no longer as profitable as it once was in Norway.

Both film production, through state support, and the cinemas, through the municipal system, are today a national project in Norway. Municipalities and central government agree that it is important to support a domestic film culture as a way to ward off the international culture industry. Nationality seems to be under siege, however. Film production is diverse, but many films today look just like American thrillers. Norwegian landscapes continue to be romanticized in many recent films, among them the two Hamsun adaptations *Wanderers (Landstrykere)* (Ola Solum, 1989) and *The Telegraphist (Telegrafisten)* (Erik Gustavson, 1993), or Liv Ullmann's gigantic adaptation of Undset's novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1995). The most popular retail video cassette is a portrait of the Norwegian King Olav V, who died in 1991. National icons and scenery still play an important role in Norwegian film production.

The situation in the mid-1990s is in many ways similar to the late 1930s, when the horizon of anticipation that Norwegian audiences have created for domestic films is based on previous encounters with Hollywood cinema. Films like *X* or *To a Stranger* point to the diversity of film production, but the American influence is obvious. Today, both thrillers imitating the dominant Hollywood generic modes and modernist film journeys about the tragedy of modern existence are produced in Norway.

Norway no longer goes *only* international, like in the mid-1980s, but continues forward with one eye on the past, to the cinematic roots of the national breakthrough of the 1920s.

## APPENDIX

### Feature film production in Norway

1906–1919:	16
1920–1929:	26
1930–1939:	26
1940–1949:	37
1950–1959:	75
1960–1969:	63
1970–1979:	98
1980–1989:	94

### Feature-length documentaries in Norway, with a nationwide distribution

1920–1929:	9
1930–1939:	13 (including workers' films)
1940–1949:	5
1950–1959:	18
1960–1969:	6
1970–1979:	8
1980–1989:	3

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Nordic  
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