

AR@K 2026 - Reclaiming art!

Creative expression as a building block in our social foundations.

Freedom to fib – the screenwriter as ethical subject

Audiences today show an insatiable appetite for real-life stories on screen, whether they deal with celebrities, historical characters, or participants in reality shows. This fascination may, at best, represent a sincere wish to understand the lives of others, echoing Roger Ebert's definition of cinema as «an empathy machine».

This year's symposium foregrounds the potentially rebellious role of the arts, a role requiring what we call «artistic freedom». Among creatives, such freedom is often considered an absolute value, rooted in freedom of speech. Yet it is also a banner frequently waved in defense of art against criticism.

In this presentation I will ask whether «artistic freedom» trumps ethical considerations in the field of biographical fiction writing. Does the writer of life stories have an ethical responsibility when turning biographical material into drama with narrative impact? Where is the line between legitimate invention and distortion?

Using examples from screenplays, including my own work in progress, *Henrik & Susanne*, I will explore legitimate and illegitimate dealings with the truth on screen, reflect on the screenwriter as «ethical subject», and ask whether exemption from ethical norms is defensible. Ultimately, I question whether certain practices may undermine our credibility as social critics.

Field: Screenwriting/film

Affiliation: Kristiania niversity of applied sciences

Key words: Artistic freedom – Biographical screenwriting – Ethics in storytelling– Truth and fiction – Artistic responsibility

Mini-bio: Siri Senje is a screenwriter, stage director and professor of screenwriting at Kristiania. She holds a doctorate in screenwriting and an MFA in stage directing. She has written for theatre, film and television and published several books. Her research interests are creative development, feedback methodology, and biographical drama. She has published in the *Journal of Screenwriting*, *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, *Kunnskap Kristiania* and *Rushprint*. Senje has served as a director-in-residence at various Norwegian theatres and as gatekeeper at the Norwegian Film Institute. Currently she is the project manager of **Writing the Writer**, an artistic research project funded by the Norwegian Artistic Research program (PKU).