

## *Women in Film Productions*

A closer look at women in film, as directors or as characters, provides a basic understanding of the situation of a society. Within this topic one is able to develop a much greater comprehension of if and how gender equality is represented and understood, through simple application of common sense. Gender role models are constructions, made common and perpetuated by media productions.

Movies are reflecting cultural and social relationships in a society, and subsequently have an influence on society as well. Audience, the often-stressed unknown being, also includes women. In cinemas within some particular age groups, women are even the majority. We, the women, are an integral part of society; without us there would be neither society nor civilization. This is truism, but astonishingly enough it nevertheless has to be mentioned from time to time again.

Contemporary movies and TV productions are mostly dominated by male producers, directors, commissioning editors and heads of program, yet tell not only stories from that of a male perspective. Even character design is coined by a male view of the world; among the women represented, female characters are frequently designed in a way that gives an overall impression that women would be unable to act as independent human beings. They could be neither able to act as a director nor as female characters embedded in a story that do more than acting as a secretary, nurse, housewife, shop keeper or sex worker. Those characters often lack a name or intelligent dialogue lines, and can be exploited or tortured and murdered more easily than male characters. Productions like *FORBYDELSEN* (Dk 2007-2012) or *BORGEN* (Dk 2010-2013), *ARNE DAHL* (1<sup>st</sup> season, S 2011) still are the exception, not a standard.

Having analyzed many movies and TV productions produced during the last decades, one can say about female characters depicted in (especially but not limited to) German productions, that if they are part of the action, they are designed as either bad mothers or cold 'career women'. In other words, female characters can be characterized as that of the 'Weak Woman' or 'Strong Woman'.

'Strong woman' is a term representing the male glance towards women and inheriting dominant conditions of power and the structure of society. This term is corresponding to 'a man from the boys' and is directing towards a peculiarity, which throughout that ironic approach is pointing at a nearly unattainable exception. This is expressing that with either a "Man From the Boys" or a "Strong Woman" a traditional married life will be impossible. Instead, the term is expressing that those kinds of characters are demanding a specific hierarchy and personal freedom.

'Strong Women' in film and TV productions- with the exception of the aforementioned productions- usually have to fail miserably. In terms of dramatic action those women are infringing upon the implicit engraved rules of the society, which in the case of the western German tradition, means women should act firstly as 'good' wives and mothers. Here one can see the long shadow of the gender role models developed and set with that propaganda machinery during 'Third Reich'

continued with post-war cinema made in West Germany. In terms of psychology one can say that those were 'priming' the view and opinions of the audience, setting up anchors (Kahneman 2012) for an understanding of society and their codes. Within the hierarchy of such characters, female characters were almost always narrated out of a male position. Thus, they have little to no influence on the narrated action. If it is a female character indulged to be the protagonist, her action is shown as personal, fleshly or erotically motivated, not because of a societal or political motivation or longing of the character.

One can see an example of this given in *BARABARA* (D 2012, Petzold), the adaptation of *DIE FLUCHT* (DDR 1977, Gräf). In the DEFA movie the main character, a male doctor, is frustrated about the political and economic circumstances hindering his research, causing him to flee GDR to the west; in *BARABARA* the female doctor wants to go to the West to live with her love or lover, whom she is meeting for short events to have sex together in the wood or a hotel while he is crossing GDR for business trips, causing her to give up her exceptionally good position at one of the leading research hospitals. Another example is *KRIEGERIN* (D 2011, Wnendt), like *BARABARA*, premiered at the *Berlinale* Film Festival. Within the action the young, blonde female main character, called Marisa, (given by Alina Levshin) is shown as driven into the group of Neo-Nazis by her life situation and circumstances—her mother unable to support her, a bad job, a region undeveloped and of no hope for the young generation. As a result of her one and only human action (helping the illegal migrant to hide) she became sacrificed at the end. Independent decisions made by a female character ignoring the rules of the group she belongs to were not endured. The body of the death Marisa is shown aesthetically exaggerated, in sense of 'Edelkitsch' (Friedländer, 1999)

This dramaturgical approach to analyze the significance of the character for the action going on, is within sociology defined as *Agency*. Although this term as such first of all just means someone is able to decide independently (Holland, 1998) and still not the active influence of events happening because of a person character acting in a specific way, that term already is been used to discuss characters, especially female ones, in media productions. But to establish modern / contemporary female characters to show them as independently deciding and acting is a progress, but is not enough. Many films representing female characters with some kind of 'Agency', will pass as well the so called 'Bechdel Test' or other of these new measurements, but at the same time nevertheless stick to conservative role models. To change the ways of representing women in media productions it is necessary to have many more female writers and directors, who should in numbers correspond to the percentage of women in society and the audience. It is time to change the representation of both genders in media productions to give both of them a better perspective in a civilized world as well.

That this is possible without losing audience and attraction is obvious through mentioning productions like the TV series I mentioned above already – *BORGEN*, *FORBYDELSEN*, *ARNE DAHL* – as well as *HATUFIM* (ISR 2009-2012, Raff). Within these productions characters are interacting on eyelevel, especially within the

dramaturgical structure. Action, hopes, dreams and decisions of female characters are of the same weight and influence for the action going on as those of the male characters. Their decisions and actions are not body directed or only emotion based- they are as clear and rational as those of their male counterparts.

Of course, cinema productions written and directed by women were and are successful, like f.e. movies by Agnès Varda, Agnieszka Holland, Deepa Mehta, Sally Potter, Małgośka Szumowska, Lucrecia Martel, Claire Denis, Jane Campion, Nora Ephron, Kathryn Bigelow, Sofia Coppola, Sussane Bier, Al Mansour Khairiya, El Degheddy, Shafik Viola or Natalya Bondarchuk, Ana Carolina, Věra Chytilová to name just few of the international well known directors. Based in socio-cultural structures in the cinema business movies directed by women were differently discussed, distributed and reviewed than those directed by their male colleagues. A closer look and analysis shows that female directors more often tend to open dramaturgical forms and less often tell classical stories of a hero. Thus, a more open minded reception is needed to give them same respect as traditional male narrated movies.

To support the discussion and critical thinking of representation of gender in Film and TV productions of today we will add here from time to time short reflections on randomly selected examples we came across.

One of those will be the BBC production FROM DARKNESS (BBC 2015) written by Katie Baxendale and directed by Dominic Leclerc or the 2<sup>nd</sup> season of ARNE DAHL (S 2015).

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#### Literaturverzeichnis

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