

1 Lesbian Traces in Film

The following discourse offers a short overall view on film productions¹ in German which cast lesbians and / or show relationships between women – whatever their level emancipation. Therefore exemplary films have been elected from different decades and then shortly explained concerning their meaning in lesbian film history. Films that – because of their form or origin – cannot be found in the list² will be mentioned in the footnotes with their place of making and time, their director and script (D and B) and if possible with their predecessors. In case the date of their first showing should be relevant for their evaluation and if these dates are available they will be mentioned.

1.1 From the Beginning to 1933

During the first years of film history attraction between women in German silent films only occurred by way of a hint and could easily be missed at the margin and mainly in breeches parts³. Out of *need* or maybe also as an humorous attempt of deception a woman puts on men's clothes (breeches) to be able to act in a certain situation or treat a certain person differently from what would be dictated by her role as a woman.⁴ In the course of action between the woman in breeches and a traditionally dressed woman, the latter usually tricked by the "breeches", even a kiss could happen (**Zapatas Bande**, Urban Gad, **1914**) or just a flirtation attraction with the eyes (**Ich möchte kein Mann sein [I don't want to be a Man]**, Ernst Lubitsch, **1918**). Both disappear at the latest when the real gender is revealed and with this the

¹ I shall restrict myself - with only a few exceptions – on narrative fictional films which are longer than 40 minutes. Serials, soaps, documentaries or short films will not be taken into account except they are connected to a fictional film or have played a major political role. Short films are subject to different production conditions that cannot be compared with long films which are designed (= usually already by their means of funding) for cinemas or television. Besides the few accessible copies would give a distorted impression in the view of the large number of productions.

² See „**German, German speaking and co produced films**)“.

³ The term „Breeches part“ stems from the world of theatre and refers to women that wears men's clothes on stage. Further information concerning history and definition of the term “breeches part” in: Frauen in Hosen. Hosenrollen im Film. Texte und Materialien. Eine Dokumentation von Madeleine Bernstorff und Stefanie Hetze. Eine Filmreihe im Münchner Filmmuseum 15. bis 18. Juni 1989. Münchner Filmzentrum e. V. (Hrsg.). Munich 1989.

⁴ Wolfgang Theis did once perfectly point it out: „With the exchange of trousers or skirts irritating situations occur that the viewer fills with their own experiences. Homosexuality ist not explained but displayed or offered.“ Wolfgang Theis: Tanten, Tunten, Kesse Väter. 100 Jahre Travestie im Film, in : Rundbrief Film: Filme in lesbisch-schwulem Kontext. No. 3, Dez 95/Jan 96, pp. 187-190, p. 187.

attention of a woman that concerns the disguised woman seems disappears and she seems feel uncomfortable about it.

Asta Nielsen is acting Asta Nielsen, who for the making of a film takes on the part of Zapata and with her gang stupidly does not attack the awaited film carriage but the accidentally passing by Countess Bellafiore and her beautiful daughter Elena. Elena is so very delighted by the “beautiful gangster” (Intertitle!) that she kisses him immediately on his lips – which Asta Nielsen is unable to fight back, but would like to prevent. Also some scenes later on she is not very pleased when she – without knowing – breaks into Elena’s room and Elena understands this break in as an act of love. Anyway, Elena proves to be very clinging, is always looking for body contact and likes to be kissed. The fun of the scene relies on this very despair of Nielsen, to avoid those certain and very direct overtures without giving away her masquerade. Nevertheless, “cross dressing” films like to play with the cliché of men generally being open to erotic interests of an (attractive) woman and would therefore rise suspicion to their sexual identity by a non plausible disinterest. The “mistaken identity of gender” (meaning a non heterosexual attraction) often causes embarrassing situations for at least one of the involved parties, because on the one hand she is not what she claims to be (and therefore being discovered) and on the other hand neither can nor will fulfil the allocated role of this claimed identity.

Ossi Oswald *résumé* of her disguise act, “**I don’t want to be a Man**” is put at an end of an odyssey through a man’s world. Not only does she have to drink and smoke like a man, no, the women cover her with their coats and expect Ossi heavily loaded to manoeuvre her way through to the cloakroom. The attention of the women at the soiree only then becomes inconvenient to her when their arisen expectations turn into stress: Ossi is expected to fulfil every duty that is considered to be those of a cavalier and this is just too much for her. Ernst Lubitsch deliberately carries his ironic act to the extreme by letting Ossi being thrown out of the lady’s room by raging women and her not bringing up the courage to go for the men’s room.⁵ By this clearly defined bathroom rules it becomes obvious: for a woman like Ossi who wears men’s clothes and therefore has the rights and duties of men there is no room.

⁵ Concerning this Lubitsch film also look at: Heide Schlüpmann, “Ich möchte kein Mann sein“, Ernst Lubitsch, Sigmund Freud und die frühe deutsche Komödie, in: KINtop. Jahrbuch zur Erforschung des frühen Films. Früher Film in Deutschland 1. Basel Frankfurt/ Main 1993, pp. 75-93.

During this night Ossi meets her guardian who has forbidden her – as a woman – to drink and smoke and other “unwomanly” behaviour. He does not recognize her but gets to like this young man very much and they close friendship over a drink. In a cosy twosome cuddled together – they even kiss! – and eventually completely drunk brought home by a coachman. The clearly obvious homosexual component of this hearty friendship between men does not arise neither embarrassment nor an escape tendency among those involved. To the contrary, in the morning after unspectacularly discovering Ossi’s true identity their reciprocal apparently homosexual attraction changes into an obvious equal heterosexual relationship.

Just a short time later a film was shot that not only did juggle with a homosexual hint but picked out homosexuality as a central topic in a serious drama. “**Anders als die anderen [Different from the Others]**” (Richard Oswald, **1919**) shows the fate of a gay musician who gets black mailed because of his homosexuality and eventually takes his own life. The film – casting Magnus Hirschfeld – commented on section 175⁶ of the German law and calls for its abolishment. Lesbian were not a topic but it could be assumed that at first showing⁷ also lesbians were among the viewers.⁸

In **1928**⁹ the scandal play “**Die Büchse der Pandora [Pandora’s Box]**” (Georg Wilhelm Pabst) was put into film under the same title by Frank Wedekind¹⁰: Lulu is

⁶ Section 175 was later portrayed and discussed in the TV documentary “**Die Homosexuellen - Paragraph 175**” (1965) [see footnote 34], the documentary „**Rosa Winkel? Das ist doch schon lange vorbei...**“, Germany **1975/76**, directed by Peter Recht, Detlef Stoffel, Christiane Schmerl [<http://www.glbtc.com/arts/symbols.html>, 2005], the British production “**Desire - Sexuality in Germany 1910-1945**” UK **1989**, directed by Stuart Marshall, in which **Hilde Radusch** is seen, see Hilde Radusch also in “**Muß es denn gleich beides sein?**” Germany **1985**, by Pieke Biermann and Petra Haffter; the documentary concerning the Hamburg area „**Verzaubert - Drittes Reich und Wirtschaftswunder - Geschichten vom anderen Ufer**“ by Dorothee von Diepenbrock, Jörg Fockele, Jens Golombek, Dirk Hauska, Sylke Jehna, Claudia Kaltenbach, Ulrich Prehn, Johanna Reutter and Kathrin Schmersahl, Germany **1994**, and the co-produciton „**Paragraph 175**“, UK/Germany/USA **1999**, directed by Jeffrey Friedman, Robert Epstein. In the latter **Annette Eick** was interviewed as the only lesbian. See concerning Eick also “**Immortal Muse**”, UK **2005**, R: Sue Giovanni.

⁷ The first showing was on May 28th 1919 in Berlin. Therefore see the program of the Bonn summer cinema: international silent movie festival. 20th Bonn Sommerkino. Bonn 2004, p. 32. „[The film was banned on 8/18/1920 “with the proviso that the showing would be allowed for certain group of people which include physicians and medical personnel, in educational and scientific institutions.”] Source, for example: http://www.wernerkuespert.de/html/anders_als_die_anderen.html, 2005.

⁸ In 1927 Magnus Hirschfeld shot and directed a film “Gesetze der Liebe: Schuldlos geächtet!” [“Laws of love – innocently proscribed!”]. Only the last episode remained which is an uncut short version of “Anders als die anderen”. See 20th Bonn summer cinema.

⁹ The first showing was on February 9th 1929 in Berlin. Concerning the early Wedekind film also turn to: Ilona Brennicke / Joe Hembus, *Klassiker des deutschen Stummfilms 1910-1930*. With pictures from copies by Gerhard Ullmann and a preface by Xaver Schwarzenberger. Munich 1983, pp. 150-156.

¹⁰ The film bases on the „Lulu“ dramas „Die Büchse der Pandora“ (published in 1903) and „Erdgeist“ (published in 1895). Already an 1923 there was a film of the latter: “**Erdgeist**”. Germany **1923**. Director: Leopold Jessner. Remakes: Austria **1962**: “**Lulu**” Director: Rolf Thiele and **1979** as a German Italian Co-production “**Lulu**” Director: Walerian Borowczyk.

charming all men with her appeal and so brings ruin upon them and eventually is murdered as a prostitute. The countess Geschwitz is immensely fond of Lulu and in the depiction of her character (as an independent costume designer, very determined and obviously courting Lulu) is regarded as the prototype of lesbians in film as they are known today.¹¹ Although Pabst as against to the plays very much abridged Geschwitz's character the lesbian desire is visible in those few scenes.¹² One of her first appearances shows her smoking, dressed with a bow-tie and casually leaned against a piano as she watches Lulu and Alwa with a stern face. Later on the countess Geschwitz and Lulu dance together on the wedding of the latter. Whereas for Lulu it seems to be a provocative sort of fun the countess seems to be very solemn and vulnerable. Cuts towards the watching countess illustrate her desire since she permanently keeps her eyes on Lulu. As there are drinks offered to the guests the countess runs up to Lulu, hugs her and hastily turns away. When Lulu is sentenced because of murder to her husband and has to flee it is the countess who gives her passport to her. And even more often, each time Lulu gets into trouble it will be Geschwitz helping her out. Unscrupulously Lulu talks her into seeing to Rodrigos, to flirt with him and to give in to his overtures so that he will not betray Lulu to the police. There is no other reason why the countess should take on all this except that she loves Lulu.

The first film explicitly featuring lesbian desire – **“Mädchen in Uniform [Girls in Uniform]”** (director: Leontine Sagan, overall director: Carl Froelich¹³) in **1931** at the same time is an all time international classic that represents a milestone in German film history.¹⁴ **“Girls in Uniform”** bases on the autobiographically influenced play **“Gestern und heute [Yesterday and today]”** by Christa Winsloe.¹⁵ The film takes place

¹¹ See Karin Jurschik, *Der andere Blick*, in: 100 Jahre Frauen & Kino. Bielefeld 1996. pp. 32-40, p. 33.

¹² Therefore also see Rosi Kreische, *Lesbische Liebe im Film bis 1950*, in: *Eldorado*, op.cit., p. 190f.

¹³ In this case Froelich Toeplitz suggests to speak of „co-directory“. Hertha Thiele had regarded Froelich as the real director whereas Dorothea Wieck assigned Sagan to this function. Toeplitz – whose five volumes of film history is still considered a standard – had his difficulties with the lesbian content that even he could not have overseen: „Manuela's exaggerated love of Miss von Bernburg belongs to the field of psychology, yes possibly even borders on pathology.“Compare: Jerzy Toeplitz, *Geschichte des Films*. Bd. 2: 1928-1933. Berlin 1992 (Polish first in 1955, German first in 1972), p. 217f.

¹⁴ According to Huebner this film set off a scandal in the 30s. This probably was the reason why already during after war times a number of directors wanted to use the material for a film until in 1957 Geza von Radvanyi did it with Romy Schneider and Lilly Palmer. Despite that Huebner also claimed that the draft came from F. D. Adam whereas according to all other sources F. D. Andam (i.e. Friedrich Dammann, www.filmportal.de, 2005) wrote the script together with Christa Winsloe. Compare Michael O. Huebner, *Lilli Palmer. Ihre Filme - ihr Leben*. Munich 1986, pp. 129 -134.

¹⁵ Winsloe wanted to show that in Prussian boarding schools the loving girl's soul would be destroyed. Despite of that the films ends with Manuela being saved. Thus after the showing of the film Winsloe

around the turn of the century and tells the tale of the young girl Manuela von Meinhardis who within the strict girls boarding school falls for the friendly teacher Miss von Bernburg. When after a stage presentation Manuela slightly tipsy announces that she loves Miss von Bernburg the mother superior, personifying manners and order, considers this as a scandal and threatens to take on certain actions. Therefore Manuela in despair wants to jump of the flight of stairs into the depth of death but is saved.

In addition to the soft-focusing lens a number of close-ups of Manuela's face full of adoration and dedication aim at her emotional bond with Miss von Bernburg. The lonely girl, just having to come to terms with this unfamiliar surrounding, is especially open to the warmth of the friendly teacher. This not necessarily erotic attraction between those two women gets an additional shimmering note when the camera shows all the girls in the dormitory. Standing next to their beds, their eyes closed, their lips pursed to receive the hoped for kiss the girls wait for the appearance of their beloved teacher. "She snogs everyone – wonderful!" the girl of the bed next to Manuela's excitedly whispers to her. But Manuela will not be kissed by Miss von Bernburg chastely on the forehead like all the others, no, Miss von Bernburg takes Manuela's face into her hands and kisses her on her lips.

The girl's feelings especially for this teacher but also for each other has been admitted so much room and so many pictures so that the willing film watching viewer of the 21st century is asking wistfully which way lesbian film history would have gone without the 'Third Reich'.¹⁶

Neither the explosive topic of Prussian pitilessness which makes up the second motive of the play, was greeted full heartedly by the Nazi's nor the lesbian content. The film was forbidden and at this time was only shown abroad.¹⁷

rewrote the play "Gestern und heute [yesterday and today]", that before had been on stage as "Ritter Nérestan [knight Nérestan]", into a novel with the title "Das Mädchen Manuela [The Girl Manuela]" (published in 1933 in Amsterdam, therefore go to [Christa Winsloe](#) that many years later (the Nazis had banned it in 1933!) was published with the title "Mädchen in Uniform [Girls in Uniform]" by the publishing company Frauenoffensive and then by Daphne. Therefore see the epilogue by Susanne Amrain, Christa Winsloe - die berühmte Unbekannte, in: Christa Winsloe, Mädchen in Uniform. Göttingen 1999, pp. 275-281, p. 276.

¹⁶ The first showing was on November 27th 1931 in Berlin. Compare www.filmportal.de, 2005.

¹⁷ Concerning the stage and perception history of "Mädchen in Uniform" and "Anna und Elisabeth" see Heide Schlüpmann, Karola Gramann, Momente erotischer Utopie - ästhetisierte Verdrängung, in: Frauen und Film (fuf), 28/1981, p. 28-47, and Rainer Rother, Rückblick auf Preußen? Zweimal „Mädchen in Uniform“, in: filmwärts 22/1992, pp. 47-53.

“**Anna und Elisabeth [Anna and Elizabeth]**” (Frank Wysbar) **1933** took up the success of “**Girls in Uniform**” but the affection between the two protagonists is possibly read as a platonic friendship. It is very interesting that once again Hertha Thiele (i.e. Manuela von Meinhardis) and Dorothea Wieck (i.e. Miss von Bernburg) act together. Anna (Hertha Thiele) has the reputation to work miracles. The paralysed Elisabeth (Dorothea Wieck) desperately asks Anna to work such a miracle on her. Again with soft-focusing lens and heart throbbing pain the emotional intensity between those two women is put into scene but this time the subtle erotic would not want to really take a grip. Heavy, glutinous and dark the drama mirrors itself in its gloomy decor and costumes. Hardly being finished in Italy this film was forbidden by the Nazi's.¹⁸

In the same year “**Victor und Victoria [Victor and Victoria]**” by Reinhold Schünzel was made.¹⁹ Out of financial despair Susanne acts as a man that again at the variety pretends to be a woman. Soon Viktor/Susanne falls for Robert, for whom she will not be considered as a man. Living this conflict at this point there remains nothing left to do for her than to compete with him in his masculinity. Thus, in a dive after a flirtatious exchange of views between her and another woman a vivacious pub fight since the companion of her flirt partner not only is a giant but also lacks an essential portion of humour... Robert, already knowing that Viktor actually is Susanne (sure, otherwise he would get a gay touch) protects Viktor by more or less starting the brawl. Both of them fight back energetically until all person present are involved and they can more or less steal away unseen.

Another really beautiful scene is certainly indirectly built around Robert again. Viktor aka Susanne is furiously jealous of the mundane Lady Elinor who threatens to snatch away Robert. Viktor wants to go to the bottom of this fear and in his/her absurdly desperate Viktor almost make the Lady fall for her/him.²⁰

¹⁸ Schlüpmann, Gramann, 1981, a. a. O., p. 43. Concerning questions of film censorship turn to Ursula von Keitz, Filme vor Gericht. Theorie und Praxis der Filmprüfung in Deutschland 1920 bis 1938, auf: <http://www.deutsches-filminstitut.de>, 2004.

¹⁹ Despite his Jewish faith the actor (among others in “Different from the Others” 1919, where he acts as the blackmailer!) and director was under special protection of Hitler for some time. Because of increasing difficulties he emigrated into the US in 1937. For detail of his biography turn to <http://www.deutsches-filminstitut.de/dt2tp0052.htm>, 2005.

²⁰ The film and Schünzel's script – there also exists a French version of his film, “**Georges et Georgette**” – was the draft among others for “**First a Girl**” Great Britain **1935**. Director: Victor Saville; for “**Viktor und Viktoria**” West Germany **1957**. Director: Karl Anton and for “**Victor/ Victoria**” USA **1982**. Director: Blake Edwards. In Edward's film the character of Robert (played by James Garner with King Marchand as the name of his role) shows explicitly more open features; though he is a self declared Macho he becomes unsure of his sexual identity when Victoria shows herself as Victor.

The oncoming national socialistic Government did make any film production impossible that would be relevant for lesbian film history and its destruction of politically and socially not wanted representations could still be felt far into the fifties.

1.1 Again Girls in Uniform

Not until **1958** did an obviously lesbian topic come into the limelight of a new film. Besides some foreign remakes²¹ Geza von Radvanyi tried Winsloe's „**Mädchen in Uniform [Girls in Uniform]**“. Almost all critics agree that this drama plays down Prussian Rules and takes the sharpness out of the draft.²² Stefanie Hetze even came to the conclusion that Radvanyi “did make the conflicts around the here too called “appalling” close relationship between Manuela and Miss von Bernburg hardly believable”.²³ I do not agree with this conclusion although I highly regard Hetze's pioneering and brilliantly written book. The erotic tense between Manuela von Meinhardis (here Romy Schneider, sic!) and Miss von Bernburg (the reserved but swirling Lilly Palmer) are simply not to be overseen!²⁴ Miss von Bernburg rehearses with Manuela her theatre script, which the teacher still considers to be “quite unsteady”. Not the also passionate Don Carlos of the version of 1931 here stands before the teacher, no, this time it even is Romeo, making compliments to Julia. (More obvious the play could not have been chosen!) And with this rehearsal Manuela is so much into her role that she – did you see it – kiss her idolised teacher, her Miss von Bernburg right on her lips! Therefore the camera closes up to both of them, turns around them, watches them from all sides like lovers. Admittedly the content of this film matches the twee film contents of the fifties. Radvanyi thinks the melodramatic character of the story more valuable than the social and political background.

Certainly the incontrovertible laws of gender attraction will be reinstated in the end: his instinct (= I only react to women, so he has to be a woman) was right. Here Victor (Julie Andrews) does not stir much attention with the female audience.

²¹ Thus in Mexiko „**Muchachas en Uniforme**“ **1951** („Girls without Love“), in Japan “**Onna No Sono**” **1954** (“The Garden of Women”) were made.

²² Compare as further examples Rother, Rückblick, op.cit. p. 48: “but conventional like a history film the version of 1958” and Axel Schock, Manuela Kay, Out im Kino. Das lesbisch-schwule Filmlexikon, Berlin 2003, p. 234:” very much softer and unlesbian than the original”.

²³ Compare Stefanie Hetze, Happy-End für wen? Kino und lesbische Frauen. Frankfurt /Main 1986, p. 26.

1.2 The Seventies

After that again there was a huge time jump until a German film with a clearly lesbian content was made. The “Oberhausener Manifest”²⁵ that was supposed to draw an end to the production of sentimental film in idealised regional setting (German: “Heimatfilm”) in 1962 for a long time did not have a noticeable influence on the heterosexual dominance of subjects.

In **1970** Eberhard Itzenplitz produced an accusing portrait “**Bambule**” on the conditions in correction institutes after a play and the script of Ulrike Meinhof. Since Ulrike Meinhof got into the headlines as an RAF member (red army fraction: a terrorist cell in Germany) the TV production was not aired as planned on May 24th 1970 in the ARD but only on **May 24th 1994** in Südwestfunk.²⁶ In her play Ulrike Meinhof wanted to point out the inhuman structure in those institutions. Irene, telling her story to a tutor, fails in the outside world and also cannot come over the fact that the girl she loves works as a hooker. With resignation she voluntarily turns back into safekeeping since she feels that the living conditions outside do not give her a choice. After she running away from the institute she lives with the two friends Heidi and Jynette which have also been at the institution until they were of age. But also Heidi is working as a prostitute. In a WDR feature from August 12th 1969 Meinhof describes the economical Situation of the two women and brings the bad payment and discrimination with the example of Jynette down to the point: “Men’s work because Jynette is a lesbian. Women’s payment – she is a woman”.²⁷

In **1970** with the direction of Jess Franco a French German Spanish co-produced sex film was made “**Vampiros Lesbos [Vampyros Lesbos]**”, that places the attraction between two women into a mysterious erotic frame of seduction in which the seduced eventually seems to be the one to which the seducing woman is left. What here

²⁴ Daniela Sobek does agree with me: Daniela Sobek, Lexikon lesbischer Frauen im Film. Munich 2000, p. 188.

²⁵ In 1962 26 filmmakers (**exclusively** men) signed a statement in Oberhausen at the Western German Short film festival which among other things said: “(...) We declare that we claim to create the new German film. This film needs new freedom. Freedom from conventions usual in the film industry. Freedom from the influence of commercial partners (...)” Cited after Ulrich Gregor, Geschichte des Films ab 1960. Munich 1978, p. 122f.

²⁶ Compare: Lexikon des internationalen Films, Reinbek near Hamburg 1995; also see <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bambule>, 2005

²⁷ Clips from the feature “Jynette, Irene, Monika – Fürsorgeerziehung aus der Sicht von drei ehemaligen Berliner Heimmädchen” by and with Ulrike Meinhof. Date of broadcast: 8-12-1969 WDR, on: Frauenstimmen. Stimmen des 20. Jahrhunderts. Deutsches Historisches Museum / Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv / Süddeutscher Rundfunk (Ed.) CD 1997.

sounds interesting is not as trashy put into scene as would be expected regarding the genre.²⁸

At the Berlinale **1971** “**Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt** [It’s not the Homosexual who is perverted, but the situation, in which he lives]”²⁹ by Rosa von Praunheim was shown. For the first time the situation of gay men was shown in a documentary. A short time later Praunheim toured through different western German cities. There also came a lot of women to the showings and to the TV-discussions afterwards. When on January 15th 1973 the documentary was supposed to run in ARD censoring the Bayerische Rundfunk split from the ARD and did not show the documentary in Bavaria.³⁰

Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s “**Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant** [The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant]” (1971) shows the failure of a lesbian relationship in cool and harsh pictures. The fashion designer Petra cannot keep the freedom loving Karin in the relationship and breaks apart because of the separation. It is not being a lesbian that is in the focus of the story but the loneliness and Isolation of Petra von Kant who tries to keep her lover bound to her and makes demands on her life. Films like this do not put into scene the lesbian protagonists as victims of a discriminating surrounding but start with the structures of the relationship, with them being together and how it fails because of loneliness, demands and claim of power. Margit Carstensen (Petra von Kant) and Eva Mattes acting as her daughter in 1973, were awarded the Bundesfilmpreis for best actresses³¹, although a critic found Carstensen would declaim in highly supernatural and theatrical speech. “In important parts she really speaks in iambus. (...) And again Fassbinder took the so called good taste for a ride.”³²

Around Fassbinder in **1972** Peer Raben’s biographic illustrated broadsheet “**Adele Spitzeder**” was made, portraying the clever strategies of a female alternative banker in the end of the 19th century. First Spitzeder tricks the furious banks and lives her

²⁸ Although the film was made in a co-production with Spain and France, I included it in this research since it was shot in German and therefore it matched the criteria mentioned above. Beside this one in the seventies Jess Franco shot a number of other sex films in which almost ever a lesbian hint occured. Here “Vampyros Lesbos” shall stand for all the other productions.

²⁹ Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt. D & B: Rosa von Praunheim. Date of first showing Berlinale 1971.

³⁰ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexualit%C3%A4t_im_Fersehen, 2005. This is also confirmed by Rosa von Praunheim in his email from 2005-04-20.

³¹ Also see <http://www.deutscherfilmpreis.de>, 2005.

live however she pleases. Certainly a lesbian love life belongs to such a life style. She falls but her sexuality is not the subject of the accusations. In a completely different way in the same year Robert van Ackeren shows a lesbian couple. A man pushes into the relationship of the night club dancers “**Harlis**” and Pera and stirs up jealousy, drama and heterosexual bed scenes, that seem to be more sexual than the lesbian counterpart half-heartedly put into scene. For a while we watch an eternal triangle but the film cannot hide its heterosexual dominance. It is not untypical that male directors made / make films on women and lesbian love.³³

The first lesbian TV fictional film productions were preceded by two documentaries.³⁴ In **1973** Eva Mützel produced a portrayal of a handful of women with the title “**Zärtlichkeit und Rebellion – Zur Situation der homosexuellen Frau**”³⁵ for the ZDF. In front of a camera Lesbians talk about their relationships, their politically feminist demands and their experience with their surrounding. Shortly after that women of the Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin (HAW) initiated another very much more critical documentary with WDR, that was directed by a man but determined by a radical women group: “**...Und wir nehmen uns unser Recht! Lesbierinnen in Deutschland**”³⁶ (**1974**). With these two portraits the foundation stone for a public discussion about lesbian life in the broadcasting companies under public law was laid.

"Anna und Edith" (Gerrit Neuhaus), made in 1975, is regarded as the first German TV production featuring the love of women. According to Perincioli the script by Christina Perincioli was too radical for the ZDF (second German television) so that she as the director was substituted by a man.³⁷ As the editor in charge Alexandra von Grote³⁸ - signed this intervention. As far as she remembers Perincioli was lacking an

³² Compare the quotation with Robert Fischer/ Joe Hembus, *Der neue deutsche Film 1960 – 1980*. Preface Douglas Sirk. Munich 1981, p. 76f.

³³ Further look at Julia Knight, *Frauen und der Neue Deutsche Film*. Aus dem Engl. von Fabienne Quennet. Marburg 1995 (= *Aufblende. Schriften zum Film*, Bd. 8), p. 84.

³⁴ For Comparison: The first documentary on gay men “**Die Homosexuellen – Paragraph 175** [the homosexuals – section 175]” by Peter von Zahn was already broadcasted for the first time on **May 24th 1965** in WDR. In Law school class in Cologne **one** (!) gay man lay himself open to the questions of the students – there were a few single women among them.

³⁵ *Zärtlichkeit und Rebellion – Zur Situation der homosexuellen Frau*. West Germany 1973. D: Eva Mützel. First broadcast: August 1973, ZDF.

³⁶ *...Und wir nehmen uns unser Recht! Lesbierinnen in Deutschland*. West Germany 1974. D: Claus Ferdinand Sigfried. First broadcast: 1974-01-14, WDR. The film was aimed to mobilise lesbian women. During the program the address of the HAW was shown.

³⁷ Compare Stefanie Hetze, *Happy-end für wen?*, op.cit., p. 149.

³⁸ That is the later director of “**Weggehen um anzukommen** [Depart to Arrive]” (1981) and “**Novembermond** [Novembermoon]” (1984).

appropriate directing concept. The fear Perincioli could not complete the project in due time had been the reason for this decision.³⁹ -Co-writer Cillie Rentmeister assimilated this experience of deprivation of power with the song "Für Frau Dr. A"⁴⁰, published on the LP of the "Flying Lesbians"⁴¹, the first lesbian German women's rock-band. **"Anna and Edith"** in the first place is a political agitative film. Anna splits up with her carping husband, who absolutely wants a child and she moves in with her colleague and superior Edith, who rather classical has a secret affair with her boss that is actually known by everyone. The self-confident Edith is put under pressure by the women at the office because their working conditions become worse and worse. The employees demand more staff. During this industrial action Anna and Edith start a relationship that will not be secret for long and is used by their boss as a means against their industrial action. But the women see through this and with the help of their colleagues fight back. **"Anna und Edith"** can be read as a political address, almost every dialogue contains a political matter of concern.

Here the lesbian content rather is a further coup against prevailing restrictive women's roles and images. Rather unspectacular during a day out the two women kiss which leads to more but that we will not see.

At the beginning of the seventies more and more women turn to directing. Ula Stöckl's **"Erikas Leidenschaften [Erika's Passion]"**⁴² (1976) is an encounter of two friend in a sort of a dramatic play for a studio theatre. After four years Franziska comes back and congratulates Erika for her birthday in their former apartment. During the following hours they remember and discuss their differences, their expectations and wishes. Despite the heterosexual relationships they both had during all the times the women are very fond of each other. Without being explicitly mentioned a very deep friendship takes room that from time to time manifest itself

³⁹ According to a telephone call between Alexandra von Grote and me on December 3th 2005.

⁴⁰ According to a telephone call between Christina Perincioli, Cillie Rentmeister and me on August 30th 2004.

⁴¹ The "Flying Lesbians" were probably founded as the first lesbian German rock-band in Berlin in 1973. Also see <http://www.sterneck.net/cybertribe/musik/flying-lesbians/index.php>, 2005. Their founding year is controversial.

⁴² Already in 1968 Ula Stöckl made **"Neun Leben hat die Katze [The Cat has nine Lives]"**, a feminist film which was – among heterosexual discourses – about friendship between women. Katharina and Anne treat each other "tenderly like sisters" (compare Claudia Lenssen, "When love goes right, nothing goes wrong ...". "Neun Leben hat die Katze", "Ein ganz perfektes Ehepaar", "Erikas Leidenschaften", in: *Frauen und Film* 12/1977, pp. 12-18, p. 12.); the film maker Alf Brustllin warned, the "next step would already be slightly lesbian". Quoted after Renate Möhrmann, *Die Frau mit der Kamera. Filmemacherinnen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Situation, Perspektiven, zehn exemplarische Lebensläufe*. Munich Vienna 1980, p. 54.

laughing or crying together. At dinner they think about how it would have been if one of them, Franziska would have been a man. "I would have loved you", Franziska says. "I would have, too", Erika answers – and they both bend their heads to come a bit closer to each other. "As a man? Or as a woman?", Franziska wants to know. "As a man", Erika replies. Later Franziska recapitulates that Erika could not love women because she still loved "him" – and "him" does not mean a certain man, but a man that she has made herself of a man.

In **1976/77** Gaby Kubach's ARD production "**Ende der Beherrschung**" was made. Again, this film shows the friendship between two very different women. Elisabeth accompanies the non-conformist Carmen to Holland for an abortion and brings her back to her own home. Carmen's craving for attention and care brings up conflicts in Elisabeth, who lives in a heterosexual relationship. Eventually it comes to a row between Elisabeth, Carmen and her boyfriend. Here again the friendship between women is pictured as being very intense and thus their relationship gets into a "lesbian light", but which could quite easily explained differently. The visibility of lesbians in cinema and TV at the beginning of this decade just on its way to come to life just a few years later was threatened to seep away in ambiguity.

Although in the seventies the results of the cultural revolution of the students and women/lesbian movement in this country could be felt as well as the movements in the USA the new liberal system did not only lead to more permissive productions but also to stereotyped trashy sex-films. With this wave of films a lot of lesbian women turned up that either only turned to a woman until a man appeared, or were subject to a lesbian sexual harassment or did harass themselves. Especially films presenting secluded surroundings of living as you can already take from their titles were very popular: "**Frauengefängnis [Caged Women]**" (1975), "**Frauen im Liebeslager [Love Camp]**", "**Greta – Haus ohne Männer [Greta the torturer]**", "**Liebesbriefe einer portugiesischen Nonne [Love letters from a Portuguese nun]**" (all from **1976**) by Jess Franco to only mention a few out of the many. Before Michael Thomas (i.e. Erwin C. Dietrich) Jess Franco was one of the most studios "sexploitation" directors in German film. Prisons, correction camps, convents and boarding schools being the sets for different sexual realisations.

Wolfgang Petersen – now being internationally known through films like “**Air Force One**”⁴³ (1997) or “**Troja**”⁴⁴ (2004) – together with the Swiss author Alexander Ziegler brought his novel “**Die Konsequenz [Consequence]**”⁴⁵ to the screens in **1977**. An actor imprisoned because of the seduction of a minor produces a play and starts a relationship with the young leading man coming from outside. The parents of the latter enforce the accommodation in a correction institute where because of his homosexuality the young Thomas is subject to permanent humiliation. This TV production is a constant accusation and ends very disillusioning.

This broadcast also gained a lot of interest among lesbians that hardly saw anything like it. Since the Bayerische Rundfunk again did split from program of the ARD the film got more attention than Bavaria could prevent.⁴⁶

“**Madame X – die absolute Herrscherin [Madame X – an absolute Ruler]**” in **1977** was one of the first long films of film maker Ulrike Ottinger. The ruler Madame X by telegram calls all women to her on her junk to give up their former life and sail the seas as pirates. Nine women follow her call. About Madame X a lot of discourses on feminism and relationship structures are executed. Although the pirate and her ship and entourage is slyly treated ironically but at the same time she is put into scene in an experimental way. Therefore up to today the film is approachable to a rather small circle of people but among experts it is held as a classic in feminist film that forward-looking turned away from patriarchal narrative structures and developed its own style.⁴⁷ Thus for instance the unconventionally displayed approach between Madame X and her new playmate as a denial of classical narrative patterns: instead of groaning common to mainstream productions this scene is attributed with the sound of a purring cat. The main means of communication of the ruler is an animal roar.⁴⁸ Those patterns are not accessible to everyone. Monika Treut tells from a split in the audience at the show in 1981. Either they reacted fascinated or openly aggressive.⁴⁹

⁴³ Air Force One. USA 1997. D: Wolfgang Petersen. B: Andrew W. Marlowe. On board of an airplane Harrison Ford as President of the United States fights terrorists.

⁴⁴ Troy. USA 2004. D: Wolfgang Petersen, B: Homer, David Benioff. Hollywood adaption of Homer.

⁴⁵ Die Konsequenz. BRD 1977. D: Wolfgang Petersen B: Alexander Ziegler, Wolfgang Petersen.

⁴⁶ Concerning this film go to Hermann J. Huber, Gewalt & Leidenschaft. Das Lexikon Homosexualität in Film und Video. Berlin 1989², p. 98f and compare Axel Schock, Manuela Kay, Out im Kino, op.cit., p. 200.

⁴⁷ Compare Karola Gramann and Heide Schlüpmann, Frauenbewegung und Film – die letzten zwanzig Jahre, in: Der Frauenfilm. Filme von und für Frauen. By Gudrun Lukasz-Aden, Christel Strobel. Munich 1985. pp. 251-266, p. 253 + 265.

⁴⁸ Also see Andrea Weiss, Vampires & Violets. Lesbians in Film. New York 1993 (1992), pp. 128-132.

⁴⁹ Compare: Monika Treut, Ein Nachtrag zu Ulrike Ottingers Film “Madame X”, in: fuf 28/1981, pp. 15-21, p. 15.

The ZDF brought the Döblin production “**Die beiden Feundinnen und ihr Giftmord (1978)**” onto the screen. The authentic report shows the impossibility of self-determination in Berlin in the twenties.⁵⁰ Brutality and egocentricity of her husband drives Elli Link to rid herself from him by repeated doses of arsenic. She finds compassion and warmth with her also married friend Grete Bende. Soon she is passionately fond of her. The production offers very much space to the depiction of every day life in a marriage and suggests that the two women would not have started an affair if their marriage life would have been differently.

1.3 The Eighties

Perhaps Alexandra von Grote’s “**Weggehen um anzukommen [Depart to Arrive]**” (1981) could be regarded as the beginning of a new decade of lesbian films. In its content “**Depart to Arrive**” is similarly simple as its title. A woman cannot come over the separation from her lover and with a van she drives to the south of France, where she hope to find her self again. Woven into the pictures of the landscape are memories of their love, but also of their quarrels. With “**Depart to Arrive**” Alexandra von Grote created the first drama of a clearly lesbian relationship that was directed by a woman, that was shown all over the country and did not in any way question or explain the sexual orientation of its protagonist. After all there was lesbian sex in this film that did try not to expose itself to a male view. But those sex scenes turned out to be stiff and artificial that probably was due to the lack of acting talent and to the untrained directing.⁵¹ But it is still remarkable that here it was about getting over a split up whereas later films rather dealt with two women finding each other and by varying this in any thinkable way drew their apparently steady thrill.

In a German Austrian co-production of 1982 director Peter Hajek traces down the critically ironic emancipation aim of the women’s movement. A woman splits up with

⁵⁰ “The basis of Döblins study was the case of Ella Klein / Margarethe Nebbe that was heard at Berlin district court in March 1923. It stirred major attention not the least through the more than 600, in parts very drastic letters of those women that were submitted as evidence.” Compare Ira Lorf, Ein massives Stück Leben. Zur Neuausgabe von Alfred Döblins “Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord”, March 2002, at www.literaturkritik.de.

⁵¹ Compare Hetze’s correct criticism: “Their sexuality is displayed in clean, harmonic pictures – two flawless bodies in sky-blue shadowed bedspreads – that dispassionately caress each other in defined and approved places with a soft underlying music and during this moan full of relish”, Stefanie Hetze, p. 118f. Or furiously Karola Gramann and Heide Schlüpmann: “In the obligatory bed scene eventually the film manages a family friendly blend of David Hamilton and Clementine”, Karola Gramann, Heide Schlüpmann, “Wärst du doch in Düsseldorf geblieben ...” to “Weggehen um anzukommen”, in: *Frauen und Film* 32/1982, p. 55f, p. 56.

her man because she does not like the sex with him any more. Instead she discovers her lust with the freshly grown lesbian and friend Debbie. But certainly the heterosexual woman Nina wants to go back to Mick. Besides, he was thrown out of a feminist bookstore during her phase of finding, since he only wanted to find out more about the sexuality of his girlfriend... **“Sei zärtlich, Pinguin [Be Gentle, Penguin]”** mirrors the male lack of understanding for female needs (for room of their own), reduces them to absurdity and seems to let heterosexuality win over all differences, that were worked out during the film.

In **1984** von Grote made **“Novembermond [Novembermoon]”**, an anti war film, that takes place during the Nazi occupation in France and again topics the love between two women. The French Ferial gives home to the Jew November with whom she has a relationship. To be as inconspicuous as possible she collaborates with occupying forces and after the war is brutally called to account. This is a Nazi drama that, although thrilling from the start and sounds pioneering but loses its effect due to a miscast main part (as in “Depart to Arrive” Gabriele Osburg).⁵²

In the DDR in **1985** with **“Claire Berolina”**(Klaus Gendries) a memorial was left for the artistic life of **Claire Waldoff**. It is obvious that Waldoff was into a deep friendship with Oli von Roedern. Von Roedern lived with Waldoff or at least always was there when she was there. If it was about a heterosexual relationship theirs would be clear and there would be not need for further scenes. But probably there would not only be one faded out embrace that leads to a kiss. Waldoff’s relationship to a woman just runs with it, gives nuances to cabaret shows or comments on experiences with the national socialistic movement. Sadly the portrait only shows one scene of Claire Waldoff’s life⁵³, to which relationships to women belonged as well as her presence on stage and her “big mouth”.

In **1985** Monika Treut was at the peak of her creative powers with camerawoman and film maker Elfi Mikesch. Together they shot the **“Verführung: Die grausame Frau [Seduction: The Cruel Woman]”** inspired by Leopold Sacher-Masoch. But Wanda is not that cruel. In a gallery she presents her guests the incarnation of her most secret

⁵² Concerning this compare Julia Knight: “The fact, that there is war, November’s race and the political tendencies of her father are minor. Altogether they just work for the enhancement of the dramatic thrill, in which the love story happens (...)For the little the film really says about lesbian sexuality – despite the sensitive depiction of the relationship – November and Ferial could easily be replaced by a heterosexual couple”, Knight, 1995, op.cit., p. 131.

⁵³ Also see the portrait **“Claire Waldoff – Wer schmeißt denn da mit Lehm?”** FRG **2000**. Directed by Elisabeth Publig.

wishes and dreams. While in her job Wanda acts out the "domina", in her private life she has to come to terms with her sceptic and finally jealous lover, because her American lover turned up, too. Mikesch embeds the story, that partly consists of loose associative episodes, into stylish pictures with her usual brilliant camera work (slant perspective, shimmering light etc.). Matching the film Monika Treut published "Die grausame Frau. Zum Frauenbild bei de Sade und Sacher-Masoch".⁵⁴ Working on sadomasochistic topics fell on fertile ground in the mid eighties. Everywhere particularly (lesbian) sexuality was discussed and so called "cosy sex" was questioned. Krista Beinstein's "Obszöne Frauen"⁵⁵ caused conflicts in German feminist bookstores, while with her PorNo debate Alice Schwarzer fought for regulative laws.⁵⁶

Interestingly enough the Bayerische Rundfunk, that in 1977 turned off the joined program of the ARD because of "Konsequenz" by Wolfgang Petersen, in 1987 with the film "**Nichts ist wie es ist**" (K. H. Kramberg, Maria Kramberg) produced a literature novel with an indisputable lesbian content. The photographer Ulla Gambiani travels to Lapland and on her way picks up a playmate. The story is told out of the view of the photographer, who domineering and egocentric does not care for the needs of her protégé. But when her lover falls for a lost survivalist the artificial idyll breaks apart. A play for a studio theatre between three people, among which the photographer plays the central role and leads the narrative. She loses her lover but not her identity.

In **1988** Ulrike Ottinger continued her style with a little less experimentally produced story: "**Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia**". On the one hand she opened the stage for Mongolian people on their horses and on the other hand she told a relaxed bed story between two women that travel with the Trans-Siberian train and are abducted by Amazons.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Monika Treut, Die grausame Frau. Zum Frauenbild bei de Sade und Sacher-Masoch. Basel and Frankfurt/Main 1984.

⁵⁵ Krista Beinstein, Obszöne Frauen. Vienna 1986. The book of photographs among others shows women, that let themselves be humiliated by other women. The book gained a lot of attention, because the photographs would never have made their way into feminist bookstores if they were made by men.

⁵⁶ This biographic page concerning Alice Schwarzer lets her PorNo debate start in 1987: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/biografien/SchwarzerAlice/>, 2005.

⁵⁷ For Ottinger this was her last (lesbian) film; after that she basically spent her time with productions for theatre and documentaries. <http://www.ulrikeottinger.com>, 2005. Concerning Ulrike Ottinger also go to Renate Fischetti, Das neue Kino. Ach Porträts von deutschen Regisseurinnen. Frankfurt/Main 1992.

Again Monika Treut pressed ahead and in “**Die Jungfrauenmaschine [The Virgin Machine]**” (1988) made it clear even to last provincial lesbian, that not any woman that sleeps with you does this without paying for it. Treut lets naive Dorothee Müller from Hamburg – looking for romantic love – in progressive San Francisco pay highly for the time with her adored woman; much to her surprise the performance artist Ramona simply charges her for everything. “**My Father is Coming**” (1990/91) was also shot in the USA. The story goes about an unsuccessful actress that all of a sudden is surprised by the sudden visit of her Bavarian (!) father leads him to believe in her successful career as well as a conformist heterosexual life. But she has an affair with a waitress and is interested in Joe, who tells that he is a transsexual. Although Treut shoots her films with funding from Germany, her films basically concentrate on an idealised America, where she can execute all her experiments with gender roles quite effortless.⁵⁸

1.4 The End of an Era and a new Beginning? – The Nineties

In 1991 Percy Adlon produced “**Salmonberries**” and cast the lesbian folk icon k.d. lang as the taciturn main character Kotzebue. But her attempt to come closer to a austere German sticks fast right from the start and lets the film turn into a torture to the audience. Kotzebue is on a quest to find her true identity. A librarian helps her but refuses all intimacy that even the film itself cannot handle. Although Kotzebue joins Roswita on her trip in a process of coming to terms with her past to Germany they stay strangers to each other.

At the same time Claus-Michael Rohne shot his final film for the School for Television and Film in Munich: “**Unter Kollegen**”.⁵⁹ The lesbian Ulrike Folkerts, who only a few years later was outed by the “Stern”⁶⁰, here she acts out the more or less apparent part of a lesbian relationship. At a company outing her lover flirts with anyone that is still alive. The lesbian relationship – not explicitly mentioned – not at last becomes

⁵⁸ Therefore also compare Anat Pick, New Queer Cinema and lesbian films, in: New Queer Cinema. A Critical Reader. Edited by Michele Aaron. Edinburgh 2004, pp. 103-118, p. 113: “Her American Dream is a utopian one.”

⁵⁹ As a co-production with the NDR broadcasted there on April 14th 1991. Source: www.filmportal.de, 2005.

⁶⁰ According to the Bund lesbischer und schwuler JournalistInnen (BLSJ) Folkerts had already in 1998 admitted to her lesbianism; the “Stern” did mention that ahead of this with her agreement: <http://www.blsj.de/aktionen/outen.htm>, 2005.

obvious when this Daniela shortly after that starts an affair with the wife of the new superior.

During the nineties there is a breakthrough for women's film. Women get more major roles, they stand not for anything any more and love, who they want. That can also be seen in lesbian relevant productions. "**Mein ist dein ganzes Herz [Your Heart is all mine]**" (1992, Elke Götz) slyly satirise the life of a conservative bookkeeper, that lives together with her possessive mother. When Hilde falls for the really cool butcher, who also brings her into "the scene", she has to decide between her mother and her new love.

Great attention was caused by "**Kommt Mausi raus? [Will Mausi Be Coming Out?]**" in 1994 by Angelina Maccarone and Alexander Scherer. This entertaining coming out story without frills of a young and shy student was broadcast at prime time by the Erstes Deutsches Fernsehen⁶¹, right after the news and gathered many lesbians in front of their televisions. Coming right out of the province to Hamburg she falls for the first woman gets to know in the sub and with whom she spends a night. But Jo does not want a relationship with her. When Mausi had hardly come over this she happily falls in love with Yumiko. And very soon Mausi discovers that she wants to tell her mother about her being a lesbian. But – how to do it? After a couple of attempts she tells her mother her "secret" but has to discover, that her mother is not impressed. Inge Meysel [a well known German TV-actress of the fifties and sixties] was also like this, she comments on Mausi's confession and easily turns back to her local gossip, that seems to be much more interesting to her. Through this Mausi grows up to face her fears and thus realises that they were groundless.

During the following years some lesbian film allusions come and go but were drowned by the heterosexual mainstream. In Sandra Nettelbeck's portrait of a group of young people, whose lives seem to be "**Unbeständig und kühl [Loose Ends]**" (1996) occurs a young lesbian that with her fear of commitment and alcoholism destroys any serious relationship. In a drunken state she crashes her car and dies because of her injuries. Her lover (Sandra Nettelbeck herself) can be with her in hospital when she dies. The mentioned films of the nineties were mostly shown on

⁶¹ Date of first broadcast on June 7th 1995 at 8.15 p.m. in ARD.

television and – with a few exceptions on festivals – were basically closed to a cinema audience and its critics.⁶²

For funding reasons the oncoming lesbians had to settle for the homely screen. Dagmar Hirtz, up to this point rather known as a film editor, with the coming out drama “**Die Konkurrentin (FL 89)**” (1997) set another milestone in the history of German lesbian film. The experienced Katharina works as a management consultant as is assisted by the young and dynamic Maren, who at first seems to be a competitor threatens to take her job. But instead they soon work together and even come closer in their private life. First this production revived old internal clichés of the seventies / eighties lesbian movement, that said that lesbians were better and would act with “more solidarity” than other people and secondly its message did leave no doubt that a lesbian relationship was at least equal if not better than a heterosexual.

In the same year Angelina Maccarone, with making “**Will Mausi Be Coming Out?**” she still had a man as a director in her team, could make “**Alles wird gut**” [**Everything Will Be Fine**] (1997), her first own television film production. A young Afro-German tries to win back her ex-lover and on her way falls in love with another Afro-German woman, that “unfortunately” (still) is a heterosexual. But certainly they will love each other in the end. Compared with other German films Maccarone worked refreshingly relaxed, decorated the apartment of the heterosexual woman with a couple of sex toys and ironically displayed their reservation through an absurd heterosexual relationship structure. Maccarone, in her political, anti-racist film relies on classic film language and thus filled old and habitual view with new and refreshing contents.⁶³

At the same time Bernd Böhlich produced “**Das Hochzeitsgeschenk**” (1997) after a book by Claudia Pütz, who worked together with Katharina Eckart on the script. Although the film had a star cast (for example Gudrun Landgrebe being the mother of the lesbian) it loses through an inhibited story of a young and successful woman, who does not dare to tell her bigoted family of her being a lesbian and therefore denies and humbles her girlfriend. The dialogues are bulky, the story is a bit stale – altogether a disappointing film.

⁶² With this I understand, that a cinema film is more highly regarded than a television production. A film seen at the cinema is more respected than a film that was “only” shown on television.

⁶³ Therefore go to Jan Hans, Angelmac. Die Regisseurin Angelina Maccarone, in: Michael Töteberg (Ed.), Szenenwechsel. Momentaufnahmen des jungen deutschen Films. Reinbek near Hamburg 1999, pp. 145-151, p. 146.

With Max Färberböck's "**Aimée & Jaguar**" (1998) a film reached the cinemas in 1999⁶⁴, that not only told an authentic lesbian love story but also one, that happened during the Nazi's and with a German star cast. The film bases on the book with the same title by Erica Fischer, who not only used the remaining (love) letters between the Jewish Resistance fighter Felice Schragenheim and 'Arian' wearer of the 'mother's cross' Lilly Wust⁶⁵ but also the memories of the Lilly Wust herself.⁶⁶ Erica Fischer's depiction – a naive wearer of the 'mother's cross' falls in love with a Jewish Resistance fighter, hides her for some time, but cannot save her from the Nazi's and glorifies their short relationship as a single and great tragically ending love – caused intense criticism with contemporary witnesses. Schragenheim had been dependent on Wust, they said, not deep love but fear of being discovered had been the reason for this relationship. In addition, one contemporary witness suspects, Wust could have betrayed Schragenheim to the Nazi's. Her jealousy and her attempt to visit her in Theresienstadt could even have meant Schragenheim's death penalty.⁶⁷ In a second edition from 1998 Fischer changed a few episodes but kept the basic meaning of this touching love story.⁶⁸ Watching the film you can only suspect all these controversies if you knew all the different editions of the book: In the final sequence the aged Lilly Wust meets her also aged former house maid, that had been called up for special services by the authorities to do this job, in the park. Wust remembers the reaction of her former maid on her revelation, that she had visited Schragenheim in Theresienstadt: "Do you know, what you've done, Lilly?" Ilse asks shakenly. But Lilly does not understand her and instead she wants to know if Ilse has been in bed with Felice once more. Fate had betrayed her, the old woman Wust summarises bitterly. But Ilse would not let her get away with it. First it had been Hitler, now fate, with her always something big was to blame. No, it was she herself, who had betrayed her. Now Lilly is embarrassed.

⁶⁴ Premiere at Berlinale 1999.

⁶⁵ After her speech on the occasion of awarding the Bundesverdienstkreuz to Lilly Wust many journalists tried to get her story. In the nineties you could almost speak of a media hype: In Germany in 1994 the WDR produced a documentary on Wust "**Das kurze Glück zum langen Traum**", D: Sabine Stadtmüller. Under the heading "**Wenn Frauen Frauen lieben**" Alfred Biolek invited Lilly Wust to join Maren Kroymann in 1994. In Britain Catrine Clay produced the documentary "**Love Story. Berlin 1942**" in 1997.

⁶⁶ Erica Fischer, *Aimée & Jaguar. Eine Liebesgeschichte, Berlin 1943. Cologne 1994.*

⁶⁷ Compare Esther Dischereit, *Die Geschichte hinter der Geschichte von Aimée und Jaguar: Zwischen Abhängigkeit, Prostitution und Widerstand*, on www.hagalil.com/archiv/99/10/jaguar.htm, 2005, or also Katharina Sperber, *Eine andere Vision: Schmerzhaftes Erinnerungen einer Überlebenden*, auf www.berlin-judentum.de/frauen/predski.htm, 2005, first printed in *Frankfurter Rundschau* on 2003-01-07.

⁶⁸ At the same place.

Juliane Köhler, the actress playing Lilly Wust, as well as Maria Schrader, acting Felice Schragenheim, were honoured with the Filmband in gold for their performance – in German film history such an honour had not been given to a film with an obvious lesbian content since “**The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant**”.

1.5 The new Millennium

After a number of year in prison a young woman comes back and searches her in the meantime the “**fremde Freundin**” [**Unknown Friend**] (1999). Ellen had beaten Katrin’s boyfriend to death, didn’t she? In a tense play for a small stage Ellen forces Katrin to remember and despite her resistance it now not only turns out that Ellen liked her friend Katrin more than just the average but also, that Katrin and not Ellen was responsible for the death of the boyfriend. Director Anne Hoegh Krohn dissects with a razor blade a seemingly sacrosanct friendship between two women.

Maybe it were the viewing figures of these public broadcasts, that moved specifically RTL to a number of films with a lesbian content. In 1999 with “**Zärtliche Begierde**” (Michael Keusch) a comedy emerged about a wife, feeling neglected, who falls in love with her motorbike riding lesbian neighbour. They start an affair, but eventually she turns back to her remorseful husband. It stays open, if the lesbian neighbour disappears from her life completely or not. The interesting thing about this shallow marriage comedy is the permanent superiority of the lesbian: she is independent and self-assured, integrated into Hamburg lesbian scene and even in her pain of loss seems to more capable of living her life and not at last more fair than the heterosexually acting ones – although even she dreamed of a life for two and a cosy home.

In Austria Wolfgang Murnberger made “**Zwei Frauen, ein Mann und ein Baby** [**A Baby, oh Baby**]”. A lesbian couple would like to have a baby. Iris hires a man and every starts quite well, but unfortunately her girlfriend Sandra falls in love with him and splits up with her. The underlying message here is, that in a lesbian relationship at least one of them could be a bisexual. The heterosexual story runs parallel with Iris’ experiences at the Vienna lesbian scene. After a wild gay and lesbian clubbing event the key cutting service has to jump in because awkwardly the keys for the handcuffs got lost in the chaos and she is chained to her new lover ... And in the end Iris and Sandra find back together after all, in front of the altar, that was actually

planned for the father of the child. The irritating heterosexual story certainly is designed to broaden up the audience and all together takes too much space. Despite being rather a minor set, a Vienna gay/ lesbian bar is the central place, in which all strings run together, in which hearts open up, news are commented upon and analysed or new contacts are made. The clubbing event does not belong to their usual life, although Iris and Sandra are known lesbians to everyone around them and are more or sometimes less accepted. The event represents a decadent gay world that is strange even to Iris when she goes there.

RTL realised the potential⁶⁹ and let one of their main serial detectives, Sabrina, in **“Doppelter Einsatz: Blutroter Mond”** (2000, Torsten C. Fischer) spend a night with the suspected woman. After all the lesbian is not the one to be arrested, but Sabrina feels betrayed and therefore certainly cannot stay together with her. The broadcasting companies under public law followed with **“Lieb mich!”** (2000) by Maris Pfeiffer. The married mother of a small boy starts an affair with his self-assured teacher and by doing so runs herself into many doubts about her own life. But in the end – and apparently this is still essential for the German television audience in 2000 – she goes back to her family.

At the beginning of the new millennium the two brothers Donatello and Fosco Dubini made **“Die Reise nach Kafiristan [Journey to Kafiristan]”** (2001), a road movie, that tells about the authentic journey, that the Jewish author Annemarie Schwarzenbach with the ethnologist Ella Maillart did in spring 1939 to Afghanistan. The film does not claim to be biographic, but – according to the press release⁷⁰ – concentrates among other things on “friendship and relationship”. But sadly the snippets of information are incomprehensible without knowing the biography; the friendship between Maillart and Schwarzenbach stays mostly cold and the night, that Schwarzenbach spends with the invalid daughter of the ambassador in Teheran is out of relation and therefore hardly comprehensible.⁷¹ The pictures, that were supposed to introduce two very interesting women are “lifeless, boring”⁷².

⁶⁹ At another broadcast of “Zwei Frauen, ein Mann und ein Baby” in summer 2003 RTL reached 13,9% of their expected audience (= 15 – 49 year olds). Compare:

http://www.ipm.ch/downloads/monatsber/Monatsbericht_TV_Juli03.pdf.

⁷⁰ Go to the press release on <http://www.moviereations.de/presse/kafiristan.pdf>, 2005

⁷¹ For a closer look on life and work of Annemarie Schwarzenbach go to the documentary **“Annemarie Schwarzenbach – Schweizerin und Rebellin 1908 – 1942”**. Switzerland 2001. D: Carole Bonstein.

⁷² Compare the criticism by Detlef Kühn in epd film 12/2002, p. 48.

Eternal triangle have always been a favourite with “makers” of films, because they cover so many different audiences. That was probably the reason why “**Affäre zu dritt**” (Sat 1, **2003**, Josh Broecker) was produced. In this film a coroner has an affair with a colleague of her husband, but does not understand herself as a lesbian or bisexual. In the end in a dangerous situation the policewoman (the lover) does not save her rivals life and thus loses her lover, who cannot forgive her although her badly injured husband survives. If you substituted her lover Franziska by a man there would not be anything to say about this film.

Other than that the ZDF production “**Liebe und Verlangen**” (**2003**, Judith Kennel) almost meant a ray of hope to the tormented lesbian television audience in Germany. A married housewife and mother falls in love with a lesbian teacher. Her husband is headmaster at the teacher’s school. The dramatic love story takes place in a small town near Cologne and stirs up hostility and perfidious reports, that almost destroy the life of the teacher. Explicitly through this film it becomes clear, that the lesbian in German television is rather treated as a single existence. The putative lesbians are all loners, have few or no friends and live outside any feminist consciousness. The women have no support by any whatsoever structured ‘scene’, they do not know anything about help lines, self-help groups or solidarity. Today’s absence of a politically active women (lesbian) movement is exceptionally well readable in these productions. By stepping out of a negatively associated lesbian surrounding the lesbian comes closer to the “normal” and receives pleasant features.⁷³ At least the two women leave the town together in the end and start a new life together. With this they go with happy endings à la Hollywood: The escape from a disturbing world brings cosy togetherness; but neither (marriage like) relationship structures are questioned nor the conflict of the “outside” and “inside” solved.

In her interesting project “**Die Ritterinnen [Gallant Girls]**” (**2003**) filmmaker Barbara Teufel in a half documentary way looks back to a group of autonomous left-wing women, that in Berlin at the end of the eighties wanted to change the world. In scenic plays Teufel shows the political atmosphere of breaking up, left-wing love and live and the activities and conflicts. Those scenes are interwoven by interviews with the “real” women looking back. If possibly a rare example of feminist reflection, this film

⁷³ Compare: Hans Krahl, Sexualität, Homosexualität, Geschlechterrollen. Mediale Konstruktionen und Strategien des Umgangs mit Homosexualität in Film und Fernsehen. In: FORUM Homosexualität und Literatur 29, 1997, pp. 5-46.

raises some questions concerning the portrayed time, which it does not answer thoroughly.

Five “**Schöne Frauen [Beautiful Women]**” (Sathyan Ramesh) meet – also in **2003** – at casting, try their ability to deal with rivalry, have fun together and turn their back on their roles in the film. In the first scene one of them, Geno, was introduced as living a lesbian relationship. Even if the following conflicts mostly are about men, the lesbian relationship is naturally equal and is equally treated. Friendships between women, that come up, are supposed to be deep and finally the coolest and the saddest spend a night together. After all lesbian attraction seems to be a real opportunity in serious productions.

“**Nachbarinnen [Wanted!]**” (**2003**) also tells a story about two completely different women coming close to each other. The frustrated Dora has comforted herself in her pain after a break up and secluded herself. She would very much like to hand over Jola to the police to be able to keep suppressing undisturbed, but she cannot do it. Jola, a Polish woman in love with life was looking for hide at Dora’s after an exchange of shots with her attacking boss. Despite Dora’s feelings towards this situation she more and more feels attracted by Jola and invents lies to keep her with her, although she had been trying to drive Jola away. That both women spend a night together the film only mentions unspectacularly in passing. That is not what this is all about. It is about being able to admit being close with another person without wanting to chain the other to oneself. And Jola also does not want to be used as an anchor by a lonely and hurt woman. “**Wanted!**” is a cautiously filmed love comedy about fears, closeness and communication, that raises interest to the further work of directing novice Meletzky.

Certainly “**Abgefahren**” (**2004**, Jakob Schäubfelen) is not a lesbian film, because its superficial entertainment only is a vehicle for its star, Felicitas Woll of the series “Berlin, Berlin”⁷⁴. Also in the first season of the series there was a lesbian, Rosalie, played by Sandra Borgmann, who sometimes threatened to steal charismatic Felicitas Woll her show. Since the series was able to get good viewing figures (there was an average of three million people watching⁷⁵), Woll's role as Lolle was transposed into the character of Mia in “Abgefahren”. Mia as well is slightly chaotic and does not really know if she wants the man or the woman, but in the end she

⁷⁴ “Berlin, Berlin”. Serial ARD. First relay (26 episodes) first broadcast in March/April 2002.

certainly goes for the man. She dreams of a career as a racing driver, carefully carries on with cool driver Sherin and then seemingly is taken in by the chauvinist racing driver Cosmo, who naturally turns out to support women and simply being a nice guy. Therefore Sherin turns into the bad lesbian and not at least this makes her fail as the object of love.

1.6 A short Résumé

The politically motivated women's films of the seventies / eighties are far away. The short flickering of lesbian orientated film and television productions from the beginning and middle of the nineties have also faded away. Single signs to cover the (latest) women's / lesbian movement or with its history drown in conventional mainstream productions, that more and more often build in lesbian parts into more or – mostly still – less nice stories. Samanta Maria Schmidt even speaks of a “casualness of the lesbian on verbal level”.⁷⁶ It seems to be the trend to treat relationships between women similarly to heterosexual relationships. Even if the productions leave quantity as well as quality to be desired it leaves hope, that film traditional depiction of couples will be reformed also in the heterosexual part. Lesbians still do not play an decisive part in German film productions, neither in front nor behind a camera. Is there nothing (more) to tell about “lesbian live in itself”? Or does nobody want to hear or see (more of) it? It is only produced, that brings in money. There also seem to be no gender debates in German films; the question of gender is widely ignored. That is how the future of the national (German-speaking) film-making limits itself. Captured in a black hole nothing gets outside, that would be worth to discover.

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⁷⁵ Source: <http://www.serienjunkies.de/news/853.html>, 2004

⁷⁶ Samanta Maria Schmidt, *Lesbenlust und Kinoliebe*. Kirchlinteln 2005, p. 21.

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