FEMINISM IN THE FILMS OF NEW GERMAN COMEDY

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Kristie Foell, advisor

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate if the feminist films of the New German Comedy were truly feminist films in the way that their counterparts of the 1970s and 1980s were. Through my research I have concluded that the films made in present day Germany are feminist films of today and much different from the films that were made during the height of the women’s feminist movement. Sherry Hormann’s films do not reflect the political situation, but are based more on the family. Katja von Garnier’s films do have both a political as well as personal subject matter which was prevalent with feminist films of the past. The films of the New German Comedy do, indeed, reflect not only the times in which they were made, but they also are made for the twentieth and twenty-first century woman.
“I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore…”

– Georgia O’Keefe
To my parents,

Jim and Laura,

Who have guided and encouraged

From day one.
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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION INTO THE INFLUENCES OF FEMINISM IN GERMAN CINEMA

In 2001, the most successful film ever to be produced in the German film industry was released: *Der Schuh des Manitus*. The main female role in the film is one of a bimbo. The only typical characteristic that she is missing is long golden blond locks, but she should have them. She is also missing the majority of her dress and could use some extra material to cover up that plunging neckline.

It is not surprising that a film such as *Der Schuh des Manitus* that parodies its people in such a way would be so successful; it is, after all, a comedy about the Germans and one that only they can truly understand. I am interested, however, to know how such a drastic role reversal of the female character can take place. There have been many films produced before *Der Schuh des Manitus* with female characters who have broken from the typical bimbo role and have been strong, powerful women produced by women filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s. These films clearly showed that there was feminism in film. While it is clear that the female bimbo in *Der Schuh des Manitus* is a parody, it does call into question the role of feminism in “New German Comedy.” One wonders whether feminism has taken a step backwards or if it is still possible to make a meaningful feminist film in this genre.

Over the years, German film has changed drastically. The comedy that was originally produced in the early 1900s both on stage and on film traded on racial and political jokes that referenced Jews.¹ More than 100 years later, the focus of comedy has changed, but the jokes still

¹ In the article, “Strangers in Disguise: Role-Play Beyond Identity Politics in Anarchic Film Comedy”, Deniz Göktürk discusses the lives of the Marx Brothers and their role in ethnic comedy, which centered on their life experiences as Jewish immigrants in New York City. Their jokes often centered on misunderstandings, loss of home and identity, displacement, and other common experiences that immigrants would have in their new environments.
reflect the times and politically important issues in Germany. For example, jokes in the German comedies of the 1990s center on the gay community and the trouble Germans have with finding the right partner and settling down. As comedy evolved, the roles that women have played also changed; they even began to direct films with commercial success. Wives, mothers, and sexual objects have not altogether been replaced, but there are now women who have careers and are activists. Not only have they encompassed feminist roles, but roles that were also typically played and lived by men: There are now roles where women have affairs and have trouble deciding if they can or want to settle down. While there has been some major advancement for women, some roles, like the one in Der Schuh des Manitus can also be recognized by the audience as a caricature of persistent stereotypes. Time will tell whether women will continually be set back or advance. Let’s review how post-war German film reached this point.

1. The Rise of New German Cinema

In the 1950s, Hollywood had a monopoly on the distribution of films in Germany, allowing for mainly American films to be shown in the theaters. *Heimatfilme* were the most popular German films produced during this time. In the 1960s, the *Heimatfilme* were replaced by other film genres: crime, adventure, and westerns (Bergfelder 67). These genres of film led to the Oberhausen Manifesto. Twenty-six directors called into question many aspects of the film industry, most especially the films that were being produced. It was important to reject *Opas Kino*, the term used to describe the generation before, but also to allow the German film industry to advance. This idea of a new and different cinema was based on the French idea of *auteur*; a

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2 In his book, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s*, Bergfelder writes that out of all the genres produced during the 1950s, *Heimatfilme*, melodramas, operettas, and comedies, a quarter of the films produced were *Heimatfilme*. 
term coined by François Truffaut, who believed that cinema was an art form. The director, like many other artists, had the personal freedom to express his own ideas. Truffaut did not believe that all directors made personal statements within their films. Those who did, he called auteurs. The idea of the German Autor and Autorenkino agreed with this idea of auteurism and saw the director as the creator of the film. It was also understood that the director used the film as an extension of his personality to express himself, giving the films that he produced his own unique mark (Knight 52-4).

The Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962 was an outcry for the directors to set standards for the films that they would be producing. Those who signed the Manifesto knew that they would need certain freedoms that they would not normally have with economic and vested interests. The signatories demanded freedom from these investors in order to have the artistic independence they deemed necessary (Knight 54). In the 1960s the film industry received a boost from the government. There were new means of funding available in the following areas: the Berlin Förderung, the Filmförderungsanstalt, the Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, and the Federal Ministry of the Interior’s film prizes. Unfortunately, the system had its flaws and took a while before it could be applied to all areas of filmmaking (Elsaesser 199-200).

The Oberhausen Manifesto called for new types of training institutes to develop the next generation of filmmakers; driven by this ideal, Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz established the Ulm Film Institute in the 1960s. The teaching styles at this institute were very different from the conventional style of learning. Instead of specializing in one specific area of film, the students would have a well-rounded education and learn about every aspect of filmmaking. They would become Filmautoren, who would have much more control over all areas of the films that they would eventually produce or make. Most importantly the films that were made would be seen as
a form of artistic expression and not as a product meant to please a consumer audience. In 1966 the Berlin film school opened its doors to students and followed the practices that Kluge and Reitz had set up in Ulm (Knight 54-5).

The following era in German film was termed New German Cinema. The films produced during this time were anti-commercial. The filmmakers tried to understand and answer questions and issues that had not been addressed. German history and the family were among the main themes of the films. Within the films there were many different subplots that tried to address the following: loss within the family from personal memories and childhood experiences, *Heimat* and exile, and the Nazi past. Many films portrayed the nation as female and the idea of identity as male, such as Helma Sanders-Brahms *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter* (Elsaesser 208-10).

It cannot be stated that the New German Cinema was strictly German. The main components of this movement were German: the directors, actors, and stories. However, while Hollywood was not as influential within the German film industry as it had been or later would be, it still influenced the New German Cinema. Wim Wenders’s road movies *Alice in the Cities* (1974), *Wrong Move* (1975), and *Kings of the Road* (1976) are examples of the Hollywood influence. Cowboy and gangster genres as well as American music, particularly Rock’n’Roll, were all important. Wenders’s film company, which he started in 1976, Road Movies Filmproduktion, Inc. is just another example of the fascination with American culture (Rossberg).

The choice of films that the directors wanted to produce also helped to define the movement of New German Cinema. There were still many unanswered questions at this time about Germany’s national identity. Several films were produced to help answer the questions: Helma Sander-Brahms’s 1980 production *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter* and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s 1978 production *Hitler – ein Film aus Deutschland* are just two. The image that the
German cinema had within the European community greatly changed: it had “a new model of production (based on the so-called Filmförderungsystem), a new function for authorship (the so-called Autorenfilm), new patterns of exhibition (the role of television, the kommunale Kino initiative)” (Elsaesser 194-6). The films of post 1974 also concentrated on political topics of the time, which won them both critical and public response (Elsaesser 196).

The directors of the New German Cinema such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Alexander Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders, and others wanted to be taken very seriously. Fassbinder said in an interview for *Time*: “We had nothing, and we started with nothing… For a generation nobody made important films in Germany. Until us” (Knight 56). The films that were made were considered to be of a higher quality than those made for financial success. These were the Autorenfilme (Knight 54).

In 1971, thirteen auteurs set up their own production company to help promote their films: Filmverlag der Autoren. Basis Film, another company, was set up in the 1970s in order to produce auteur films as well. “They identified the Autorenfilm as essential to the survival of a national film culture and a need to ‘fight for the recognition of film as a cultural property… with an author whose rights must be protected and whose artistic freedom is inalienable’” (Knight 56).

Unfortunately, many of the so-called auteur films that were made failed to reach the German as well as the international stage. The political messages and agendas seemed to have lost some of their potency because the films were now under state funding. In the late 1970s, many of the directors were interested in establishing a rapport with the audience as well as establishing their own self-image and credibility. Some of the directors felt that the system
needed to be changed, hence the Hamburg Declaration of 1979. For the first time, the directors began to concentrate on making films for the audiences in Germany, as

…directors sought more active ways of responding to what they perceived to be particular audience expectations, such as social relevance and intervention in local problems by documenting communities in distress or regions in decline and by taking up ecological issues or the plight of disadvantaged groups or ethnic minorities. (Elsaesser 201)

The main staple of the New German Cinema was the narrative (Elsaesser 201). Many of the directors of this period used literary sources as the basis for their films and included their personal expression or interpretation within their films. Two examples include Schlöndorff and von Trotta’s film Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum and Schlöndorff’s Der Junge Törless. Some of the adaptations were critically well received, while others were not (Knight 57).

One of the biggest developments within the New German Cinema was the influence of television within the film industry. The Television Framework Agreement between the Film Subsidy Board and the television networks stated which stations would air feature films. Development funds and screenwriting subsidies were also part of the agreement (Elsaesser 202). The audience that had previously been supportive of the film industry was becoming more supportive of television, even though television saturation did not arrive until much later in Germany. The directors of this time period knew that they would need to make films that would reach the younger audiences. The technique that had been previously used to film changed. Instead of working in a studio, directors began working outside and even on the streets. Smaller production units were also used (Elsaesser 198).

The audience that regularly watched television was not necessarily the audience that the New German Cinema would have considered ideal. This audience was the family, many of whom no longer went to the cinema. The filmmakers were concerned that they would be
subjected to the “mercy of the programming” (Elsaesser 202). However, the directors profited and even those films that were not considered mainstream were shown on television. This opened a new door for directors and films, such as minority and special interest groups, which were not quite so popular at this time. One of these groups was women filmmakers (Elsaesser 201-2).

2. Women Directors

There were many women during the New German Cinema who were trying not only to work in the film industry, but more importantly to make films. Many of these women had studied with and worked under important male directors. Women directors began to break into the film industry with the *auteur* film in the 1970s. Helke Sander was a very important figure not only because of the films that she made, but also because of the work she did to help advance women in German society. In 1973, along with Claudia von Alemann, Sander organized the International Women’s Film Seminar, the first of its kind. A year later she founded the magazine *frauen und film*. It would become one of the best and most important ways for women to discuss film and all areas of production, distribution, and exhibition. Sander felt that women had the ability to produce great films and should be able to do just that. Film was an excellent way for women to represent themselves (Sieglohr 193). Even though Sander says that women can represent themselves through film, she does not consider herself a feminist filmmaker, but rather a filmmaker who takes a stand in favor of feminist issues. It is obvious that Sander was concerned with the aesthetic quality of film, which does overlap with the *Autoren* agenda (Smith 259).
One of the most prominent female German filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s was Margarethe von Trotta. She made such notable pieces as *Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (*The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, 1975, with Schlöndorff), *Das zweite Erwachen der Christa Klages* (*The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*, 1978), *Die bleierne Zeit* (*Marianne and Juliane*, 1981), and *Heller Wahn* (*Sheer Madness*, 1983) (“Margarethe”). These films not only had important political situations of the time as main themes, but also had strong feminist women in the lead roles.

Von Trotta was very interested in making films of substance that dealt with real issues, similar to those of Ingmar Bergman, one of the directors who had influenced her. Von Trotta recognized the difficulties that women filmmakers face and instead of beginning as a director, worked as an actress for sometime. She once said the following: “I think it is always a little bit more difficult when you are a woman making a film. You are criticized more than your male colleagues are… In general I would say a woman has more difficulties” (Levitin 83-4).

Margarethe von Trotta met and began to work with Volker Schlöndorff, her future husband, in the mid-1960s. She spent many years working with him, not solely as an actress and assistant, but also as a co-director and screenwriter (Levitin 78). Conflicts between the two developed when they worked together on 1975’s *Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*, a film that is normally solely credited to him. They both had different ideas of the direction of the film. She wanted to work with motivation and Schlöndorff was more interested in the external action. This led them to go separate ways (Quart 94).

*Die Verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* is an example of a film that deals with the importance of individual legal rights. This film is based on the novel by Heinrich Böll, which was also based on a contemporary situation. While the female character within the film,
Katharina, is a strong woman, the main issue is her love affair with a man, Ludwig. When they first meet, they fall madly in love with one another. What Katharina does not know about him when she sleeps with him is that he is a bank robber, whom the police mistake for a terrorist. When the police come searching for Ludwig, he has already left her apartment. This does not stop them from terrorizing her and humiliating her, calling into question the supposed democracy that she as a citizen lives in and what can happen to an average person in this system. The film also addresses violence and the legal rights and limitations of Germany’s police and the rights of Germany’s citizens (*Verlorene*).

Another example of von Trotta’s work, which she made without her husband Schlöndorff, includes the important feminist piece *Die bleierne Zeit*. This film is based on the lives of two sisters, Christiane and Gudrun Ensslin. The latter was a member of the terrorist group Baader-Meinhof. She died in Stammheim prison in 1977 under mysterious circumstances (Knight 136). *Die bleierne Zeit* is a very important film because the women in the film are not only the main characters, but also do not have the typical roles as wives or sexual objects. In the film, Marianne and Juliane have a different way of approaching the fight for justice, as well as what they consider just and fair. The film is really about terrorism and the role that Marianne plays in fighting for the rights of Palestinians. Not only is Marianne a terrorist, she has left her husband and son to join this group. Juliane, her sister, is a journalist for a feminist magazine fighting for the rights of women in Germany. Marianne ends up in jail because of her terrorist activities. The relationship is difficult for both sisters because they are trying to cope with their differences. There are growing signs of struggle within the film that ultimately lead only to respect and love. It is traumatic when Marianne dies in prison and Juliane must struggle with her loss. She ends up leaving her partner of many years in order to focus on the investigation of
Marianne’s death. Thus politics draws her away from personal and family ties, just as it did Marianne (*Die bleierne Zeit*). Yet, by the end of the film, the sisters have come to better understand themselves as well as each other.

Unlike Margarethe von Trotta, many women in film have also worked collectively. Women called on other women for pure need, not because they only wanted to work with other women or only wanted to produce films based solely on specific female topics. A certain stereotype follows: Feminism seems to be the term that comes up the most when these women and their films are discussed, even if the women do not consider themselves feminists or their films part of that movement. Many of these women have also been interviewed by or have written for publications devoted solely to the feminist movement. “Consequently, women filmmakers tend to be referred to as ‘feminist directors’ and their work viewed more as a genre, with the term *Frauenfilm* being applied to films as diverse as those by Ottinger, Sander and von Trotta” (Knight 67).

3. “New German Comedy”

At the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, the New German Cinema lost some of its momentum even though the directors of the time were interested in continuing the *auteur* films (Elsaesser 203). One of the main reasons was the death in 1982 of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, an influential figure within the movement. Equally important was the fact that the American entertainment market now had a stronger following and the New German Cinema

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3 According to Julia Knight in her book, *Women and the New German Cinema*, for some female directors, collectivism was a political as well as personal statement to be made and was not solely done because of need. Other women, such as Jutta Brückner say that she enjoys working with other women. Finally some women needed to pool resources together with other women in order to produce a film.
could no longer compete with it. The influence of this power house brought about the birth of comedy, and even a simple shift in audience taste. For the first time in quite some time, German films were enjoying commercial success in the German theater. Both of these genres, the Hollywood comedy as well as the New German Cinema, were the forerunners of the *neue deutsche Komödie* of the 1990s which will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 2: THE TREATMENT OF GENDER IN THE HISTORY OF GERMAN COMEDY

“In the narrative of German film history the very term German comedy seems to be an oxymoron” (Horak 29). Post-war Germany produced film, theater, and television dramas and tragedies to help explain and understand past historical events. To many critics and foreigners it seemed that Germany and the Germans had more of an interest in tragedy and death and a bias against the genre of film comedy, particularly with the advent of the New German Cinema and its pretensions to “high art.” Many of the comedies produced in Germany were often criticized by classical film critics for being inferior to American or French comedies, or called non-comical altogether. The Germans could not produce a successful comedy in the decades after 1945 (Horak 29).

However, comedy had been very popular in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth Century. Between 1914 and 1915, close to 100 comedies were produced in Germany and in 1928 around forty comedies were made. Many of the important directors and actors of the time such as Ernst Lubitsch and Heinrich Bolten-Baeckers would produce more than a handful of comedies, but also continue to make comedies well into the 1920s. The style of comedy was part of the silent film era and had elements of physical comedy and grotesque humor, with the audience enjoying the characters’ physical struggles. Within these comedies, there was also humor based on the lower working class (Horak 30-2).

The comedy produced in Germany has been subject to the different historical periods of German history. Films that were produced during the Kaiserreich were considered “liberating, risking transgressions of social and sexual taboos, thus allowing audiences to experience moments of subversive pleasure” (Horak 30).
Throughout the 1920s, Heinrich Bolten-Baekers, who had produced over twenty comedies between 1913 and 1915, continued to make comedies with origins in the (Jewish) working class humor of East Berlin. These films starred Leo Peukert and Anna Müller-Lincke, who specialized in typical German *Hausfrau* roles, as well as silly mothers, difficult mother-in-laws, and straitlaced wives (Horak 30-1).

Ernst Lubitsch parodied the Bavarian comedies in his films *Mayer auf der Alm* (1913), *Mayer aus Berlin* (1919), and *Kohlhiesel's Töchter* (1920). Not only did Lubitsch make those type of comedies, but he also made comedies that addressed German-Jewish issues, with specifically Jewish farces in the films. In two of his films, *Der Stolz der Firma* (1914) and *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (1916), Jewish men defy the social norms by climbing the social ladder and marrying the boss’s daughter. Lubitsch was not the only director to use Jewish humor in his films. Max Mack, Richard Eichberg, Wilhelm Thiele, and even Billy Wilder made films of this nature as well. Earlier in his career, Eichberg made detective melodramas before switching to light sex comedies and even had a cross-dresser in his film *Der Fürst von Pappenheim* (1927). Wilhelm Thiele specialized in light comedy such as the film *Hurrah! ich lebe!* which was made in 1927. Later in his career, he would become Ufa’s most successful musical comedy director. He made such notable films as *Die drei von der Tankstelle* (1930) and *Die Privatsekretärin* (1931). The films that Billy Wilder made such as 1931’s *Ihre Hoheit befiehlt* and 1933’s *Madame wünscht keine Kinder* would be considered characteristically Jewish, cynical, and sentimental (Horak 31-2).

One of the last important actors and directors of the time to leave after Nazi occupation was Reinhold Schünzel, who had begun his career around World War I. He would make many light comedies dealing with Jewish humor, similar to Lubitsch. *Hallo Caesar*, which he made in
1926, also shows the influence of the American slapstick comedy in the German film industry. Schünzel had been labeled as a ‘half-Jew’, but still produced two successful films under Joseph Goebbels’s Propaganda ministry: *Viktor und Viktoria* (1933) and *Amphitryon* (1935), two sound era comedies which discuss the definition of gender. Schünzel quickly left for Hollywood when his film *Land der Liebe* (1933) was banned in Germany (Horak 34).

When the Third Reich came into being, comedy was still produced, but it was a different type of comedy. The film industry under the Nazis was “ethnically cleansed” because Jewish actors and directors could no longer work under the regime. Fascist ideology was a main concern of these films:

> Indeed, comedy functioned to make German film audiences emotionally pliable for a propagandistic consensus constructed across all media discourses. Through a double aesthetic strategy of separation and integration, politically and morally unacceptable characters are separated from the social fabric, while characters who represent the rigorous institutionalization of fascism’s class and gender norms are integrated into the community (Horak 34).

While some comedic films not only tried to persuade the audience of the evils of the Jewish people, others, like the Zarah Leander films, tried to help the audience forget about the war and all of the horrors that were associated with it (Horak 34).

One of the most important comedic actors of the decade was Heinz Erhardt. He starred in such films as *Witwer mit fünf Töchtern* and *Der Haustyrann*. He was influenced by the great actor of the 1930s, Heinz Rühmann, who was one of the most popular comedians of his time, having a career which spanned through the 1950s. The characters that Erhardt portrayed were not the typical heroes that one would expect. He was not a young, handsome, erotic type but depicted many “downtrodden and infantile husbands/fathers trapped in an anal stage of development.” This is what Kracauer observes in 1920s films, and he takes this as a major

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4 He even made a comeback in Wim Wenders 1992 film *In weiter ferne, so nah.*
reason for the German psychic longing for a father/Führer figure. Kracauer watched many films in order to better understand the German mindset. He concluded that the Germans were longing for a strong male figure and that this longing can even be seen after World War II and into the 1950s. Erhardt’s characters were of the lower class and were not interested in bettering themselves (Horak 34-5).

The atypical hero continued to be portrayed and produced even into the 1980s. Otto Waalkes, who plays Otto in the Otto films, is another example of this type. He is not a highly developed person, but instead a grown-up with the mind of an eight year-old, who is interested in fecal humor and has pre-pubescent ideas about sex. The Otto films are not the only films that deal with surreal notions of sex. The 1988 film Oedipussi also addresses the influence that the mother can have on her son’s sex life and understanding. Oedipussi starred and was directed by the same person: Vicco von Bülow, who was better known as Loriot. The main male character in this film is a fifty-year-old who lives at home with his mother. He cannot have any type of relationship, let alone a sexual one. The woman whom he is interested in also lives at home, making the situation very taxing (Horak 35).

The 1960s also saw a rise in two genres: sexual comedy and pornographic films. Many of these films were negatively criticized by some reviewers because they were not art cinema and too closely mimicked their American counterparts, but were well received by audiences. Some of these films include Maran Gosov’s Engelchen, Spieker’s Wilde Reiter GmbH, and Ulrich Schamoni’s Alle Jahre wieder. This movement, which cannot be equally compared to the New German Cinema, was nevertheless important. A positive development in the portrayal and development in sexual relationships and understanding was reached. German audiences were now willing to address issues that had been repressed under previous regimes (Horak 35).
Lubitsch and Wilder helped pave the way for a new generation of filmmakers, who could make films about sex and sexuality which were not vulgar. Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder were rediscovered in the late 1960s by a new German audience. In 1968, Lubitsch films were presented at The Berlin Film Festival and within the next couple of years West Berlin television premiered many of Lubitsch’s American films, including The Shop Around the Corner. The rediscovery of Billy Wilder happened slightly earlier. His films were regularly screened and were even reviewed in Filmkritik. In the early 1980s, his 1961 film One, Two, Three was commercially re-released to huge commercial success. Other German exiles were also re-released and had regular screenings at the Munich Filmmuseum where Doris Dörrie was a regular audience member (Horak 35).

Dörrie’s film, Männer (1986), is a perfect example of a sexual comedy that does not deal with vulgar content, but instead addresses sexuality elegantly (Horak 36). In the film, the lives of two different men are explored: Julius and Stephan. Julius is a very successful designer who is married, but also having an affair with his secretary. Stephan is a graphic designer, but works at a fast food restaurant by choice. He is having an affair with Julius’s wife, Paula. Julius is outraged to find out that his wife is having an affair with Stephan and wants to know why his wife is attracted to such a man. He decides to also ‘drop out’, befriends Stephan, and moves in with him. Julius, however, sabotages Stephan’s life by turning him into himself. Stephan gets a job at an advertising company and, because he has cleaned up his act, loses Paula. Julius then returns home to his wife (Knight 158).

The film, like many previous female filmmakers’ productions such as Margarethe von Trotta, deals with personal relationships. However, the film Männer specifically deals with the male behavior of Germany’s 1968 generation. Dörrie once said: “I wanted to know what
happened to those people, how they established themselves, what they do now.” In order for her to make the film, Dörrie conducted research by eavesdropping on men’s conversations. Her research and film show that the male 1968 generation now leads a life of conformity and not one of rebellion. One need only look at Stephan who quickly changes from a hippie to yuppie (Knight 158-9). Männer met with both financial and commercial success, which was a surprise to Dörrie herself. The German press wrote that the film had “enrapturing charm and disarmingly funny dialogue, comparable with classics like Billy Wilder and Ernst Lubitsch” (Knight 159). The film also paved the way for the 1990s Beziehungskomödie.

This new birth of comedy was under the influence of directors of the post-68ers, who had no personal recollection of the Nazis. These filmmakers included Sönke Wortmann, Rainer Kaufmann, and Detlev Buck (Horak 35-6). Many of the topics in this new genre however, such as previous topics from the New German Cinema, revealed the issues that troubled the German society at the time. Within this new genre of comedy, there were several sub-genres: relationship comedies, East-West comedies, and gender-bender comedies. Some of the figures of comedy, such as the mother and gay male, now had a different role and meaning. There was also a lot of “boy humor” in these films and the role of the woman changed (Moeller 196-207).

The male character and his sexual confusion were depicted in German comedy, as Sönke Wortmann’s Der bewegte Mann showed. Instead of the woman as an object, the male character, played by Til Schweiger, is the desired object of every character. He is tall, sexy, handsome, and well built. While his character is heterosexual and has a girlfriend, not only his gay friend, but the gay community is interested in him. They do what they can to be near him as well as try to sleep with him. This objectification takes on a new twist when Til Schweiger’s character takes drugs and ends up posing naked like a statue at his gay friend’s house on the coffee table. His
pregnant girlfriend, his gay friend, and his gay friend’s lover all discover him. For one of the first times, the male gaze is not focused on the female body and her sexuality, but on the male’s (Moeller 200).

Another type of idea that was produced in Beziehungskomödien was the Identitätskrise. Unlike the New German Cinema, the focus of identity was not as much of a national one, but more of a personal one. The identity question was also internationally and culturally influenced.

A prime example of the Identitätskrise is Rainer Kaufmann’s Stadtgespräch. The main character of the film, Monika Krauss (Katja Riemann) is a disc jockey for a radio station. Her main job is to help people with their relationships, which is ironic because she herself is not involved with anyone at the beginning of the film and is also not interested in anyone. When Monika finally agrees to go on a date, she meets someone who is absolutely wonderful. The only problem is that her charming, romantic, and financially stable boyfriend is also married to a friend of hers. The situation gets even more complicated when the wife moves in with Monika after she finds out that her husband is cheating on her. Monika is stuck and has to question what her role is in this story. Is she a woman in love with a man or is she a friend who would never want to hurt her friend? What does Monika want? Is she willing to destroy her friendship for love? By the end of the film, the whole city is listening as Monika apologizes to her girlfriend and dumps her boyfriend, having conquered her crisis. Once again, the male, in this case the gay male, and not the female of the film is objectified. The gay character (Moritz Bleibtreu) is seen only in his underwear, whereas Monika’s character is fully-clothed. Monika is instead seen as a
human with flaws that she must overcome. By the end of the film, she has grown up and is strong, independent, and her own person. She does not need a man to define her (Stadtgespräch).

Many of these actors became household names with the rise in popularity of the comedic films of the 1990s. The stars of this era were young and sexy and gave the film industry a new edge and definition. Katja Riemann from Stadtgespräch, Veronica Ferres, Thomas Heinze, and Til Schweiger became the faces of comedy. They continued to work on comedic films throughout the decade (Moeller 197).

This new era of film was produced mostly by a generation of filmmakers different from the filmmakers of the New German Cinema. One of the influences on these new filmmakers and the German comedy genre was the rising interest in America and all things American. These German comedies, which were influenced by the American genre of “screwball comedy” and fast repartee, were produced with German jokes and parodies. The films produced under the New German Cinema directors could have a wider audience appeal abroad because they relied more on images and less on dialogue. Commercial success was also something which began to interest these new directors of comedy. Other films by some of the prominent directors of the New German Cinema were also produced in the 1990s. However, these films did not have the same commercial success as the new German comedy films did.

During the 1990s, there was a rise in English language titles for German comedies. The titles showed an even closer tie to the American film industry. Some of the titles included: Mr.
Bluesman, Go Trabi Go, Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door, Workaholic, and I Was on Mars (Moeller 198). Mr. Bluesman and Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door not only fit into the category of comedy, but also the category of road movie. The road movie showed the interest and relationship to the American culture. This was not the first time that the road movie was made by a German filmmaker. One need only look at Wim Wenders and his film Kings of the Road, which was made in 1976. This film is also a buddy movie because it focuses on two men, Bruno and Robert, and the comfort that they find in each other as they travel in a truck between East and West Germany (Rossberg). There is however, a significant difference between the road movies produced by Wenders and those produced by Buck. In Wenders’s film, he admires and critiques the U.S., its culture, and the film genre. The films made by Buck and other directors during the 1990s were just ordinary slapstick comedies with no real critique, admiration or message behind them. The intention was to make money at the box office.

Another sub-genre that was already discussed and which is closely related to comedy and the road movie was the Kumpel-Komödie or buddy film, also a product of Hollywood. Many of the main characters of buddy films were male such as in Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door. There were some buddy films that had female main characters, but these were not as prevalent. These films, such as Widows and bandits (discussed in the following chapters) had a more feminist perspective, portraying how weak the male partner can be, the mistakes he can make, and the emotional deficit that men possess (Horak 199).

There is one area in the comedy film that Hollywood could not possibly have influenced: the East-West comedy. This sub-genre was not as popular as the other previously mentioned ones. A fair amount of films were produced portraying the differences within the country because of the political situation in Germany and the stereotypes that continued to plague
Germany even after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some of the films that addressed these issues include *Sonnenallee*, *Wir können auch anders*, *Bis zum Horizont und weiter*, *Goodbye, Lenin!*, and *Go Trabi Go* (Moeller 199).

After a period of producing art films, German filmmakers returned to the German comedy and produced the most successful comedy of all time. The evolution of German film continued into the new Millennium, following the previous patterns of different sub-genres and themes. *Der Schuh des Manitus*, which was released in 2001, could have only been made after the East-West comedies. This film’s main topic is not about sex and sexuality like in previous German comedies. *Der Schuh des Manitus* parodies the German culture and its people. It also “brought a whopping eleven million visitors into German cinemas, raising the country’s market share to 18.4 per cent, and making it the most successful German film of all time” (Horak 37). While this statistic may be shocking when one considers that many of the New German Cinema were altogether better films, *Der Schuh des Manitus* was produced at the right time and for the right German audience. This film showed the industry’s development and predicts that the German film industry will only continue to grow stronger and be just as, if not more, successful.

Domestic commercial success is promising for a film industry that has for many years been competing with Hollywood. While the films such as *Der Schuh des Manitus* and other comedies are becoming more commercially successful than they were in the past, other less commercially successful films are still being made. These films, feminist comedies, have important messages like the feminist films of the 1970s and 1980s. They critique and comment on the present day situation of feminism in Germany and show that female filmmakers are still active in comedy. Their films are more or less critically accepted. Two such female directors are Sherry Hormann and Katja von Garnier. Sherry Hormann is a prominent example of a
woman who makes post-feminist comedies, such as buddy films, influenced by great filmmakers as Wim Wenders and other more prominent female filmmakers. Hormann could be considered a conformist; however, her films do show some progress when it comes to women’s issues. She does not feel the need to emphasize being a woman filmmaker in her films. Audience members should also not always need to expect that the films women filmmakers make will be solely feminist or post-feminist films. Hormann’s films show a strength and unity of the female bond as well as courage. A more in depth discussion of her films *Irren ist männlich* and *Widows* is offered in the following chapter. Katja von Garnier’s films are very different from Sherry Hormann’s. She has made: *Abegeschminkt!, bandits*, and *Iron Jawed Angels*. Her films are more interesting to analyze than Hormann’s films because of the political statements that are addressed within the films, similar to the feminist films of the 1970s and 1980s. These films and their political content, make von Garnier’s films not only more interesting, but also demonstrate von Garnier’s understanding of what her female predecessors were trying to do within the film industry; she is trying to do that with her films in this post-feminist age. Her films will be looked at in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 3: TWO OF SHERRY HORMANN’S FILMS

For many years, the female in a frame was a sex object for the male viewer; this was her most powerful, though not her only role. She was not the subject of the film with her own voice or personality. Instead she was placed to be looked at, and the male spectator loved to look.

In German cinema, the change in how the female is portrayed began with the earlier feminist directors of the 1970s and 1980s such as von Trotta and Sander. Von Trotta and Sander not only made films during the New German Cinema era, but their films and their other contributions, such as Sander’s founding of frauen und film, can be considered part of the founding of the women’s/feminist cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. The main characters of their films were women and their stories combined both the political and the personal.

Sherry Hormann is one of the newest female filmmakers from Germany to place herself on the map. She follows such greats as von Trotta, Sander, and Dörrie, who make up the first generation of female filmmakers and fought many different battles and stereotypes not only to become directors, but to direct films about women and for women. Sherry Hormann profits from this. As a director, it seems that Hormann does not need feminism in order to make a film. She did not have to compete with her male peers the same way that her female predecessors did in order to make films. However, the characters and stories of her films show that there is still a necessity to understand not only feminism but also post-feminism today. Two of her films, Irren ist männlich (1996) and Widows (1998), will be discussed in this chapter, both of which can be considered comedies with the latter more of a black comedy.

Hormann can be considered a post-feminist, not only because she is directing films now (i.e., literally “after” the hey-day of second-wave feminism), but also because of the way the
women in her films handle themselves. Hormann exemplifies post-feminism because she uses the struggles that her predecessors had to her advantage; they helped clear the way for future female generations to make films and Hormann is doing just that. What makes her films different from those of von Trotta and Sander is that Hormann does not relate the personal to the political side of the story the same way her predecessors do. The films that were made by von Trotta and Sander show a relationship between the experiences each had as a female film director and the content of the films. A question could almost be raised as to whether or not Hormann understands the importance of placing both on the screen. Not only is Hormann of a different generation than her predecessors and can bring a different understanding of feminism to her films, she is also German-American, which gives her an insight and a different perspective on both cultures. She was born in Kingston, New York in 1960 and moved to Germany in 1966. She began her film career in 1991 and five years later released *Irren ist männlich* (filmportal).

1. *Irren ist männlich*

*Irren ist männlich* came out in 1996, in the middle of a decade that saw the revival of the German comedy and all of its sub-genres: East-West comedy, buddy movies, road movies, the *Identitätsskrise* comedy, relationship and gender-bender comedies. *Irren ist männlich* could be considered both a relationship and *Identitätsskrise* comedy. The film focuses on the relationship between wife and husband, as well as the *Identitätsskrise* that the husband has; there is also a focus on the identity of a woman as wife and mother.

*Irren ist männlich* was praised when it first came out: “Glänzende Komödie um Liebe und Sex, Vertrauen und Verrat” (*Für Sie*). *Hit* wrote “Eine irrwitzige, temporeiche Komödie

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5 Post-feminism will be defined and discussed below.
über den ganz alltäglichen Wahnsinn.” At the center of the film is the wife and mother Bettina, who in order to keep her husband, Thomas, happy and secure in his manliness, has kept a secret from him for several years. He is not the father of their children; his brother Johannes, who is also a priest, is the father. The secret goes untouched for several years until Thomas’s mistress, Susanne, tells him that she wants to have a child and she wants him to be the father. They have been sleeping together for some time, and since she has not conceived, she has had herself tested. She has no fertility problems and tells him that he needs to be tested.

This causes some problems for Thomas. First, his pride is hurt: He thinks he can father another child. He is almost childlike when he goes for the test. Thomas’s irritation doubles when the test comes back for a second time and reveals that he could not in any way be the father of his children. His whole world is shattered and he believes that his wife had an affair and vows to find out who fathered his children. This leads to a whole slew of unbelievable charades. He invites his friend, Philipp, from Spain to visit, not knowing that the man had an accident years earlier and is now schizophrenic. He also invites another old friend, the womanizer Lorenz to the house, having narrowed down to these men his list of possible fathers. Thomas goes so far as to enlist his colleagues of the law firm to help in finding out the father of the children, not revealing that the case involves his family.

Thomas finally realizes towards the very end of the film that his brother must be the father. However, when he returns from his business trip, his girlfriend is miraculously pregnant and the thought that Johannes is the father of his children vanishes. When Thomas breaks the news to his wife Bettina, she acts as if his affair and another child are no big deal. This is because she orchestrated the meeting between Susanne and Johannes.
There are two issues that I would like to address in regards to Johannes and the Catholic Church. While this may address the personal as well as political side of Germany, it is not reflective or similar to von Trotta’s or Sander’s films which focused more on the personal and political side of the female. The first issue is the one of control which Bettina exerts over Johannes. Not only does Bettina have control over Thomas’s life, but she also has control over the priest’s life. Johannes is not only convinced twice to father his brother’s “legitimate” children, but also his illegitimate child. Bettina also convinces him to send his sperm to the laboratory for analysis instead of Thomas’s. Johannes is supposed to be leading a life devoted to the Lord, not to his brother’s wife. The second issue that I would like to address is his vow of celibacy and devotion to the church. This could also be part of Hormann’s comment on the ubiquity and hypocrisy of the Catholic Church in Bavarian life. The setting of the film could only be Bavaria because it reflects just how involved the Catholic Church and the family are in this region of Germany. If this is a comment on Johannes’s vow of celibacy, then Bettina has even more control over him than just the acts of sex. Even though Johannes knows that what he does with Susanne and Bettina is wrong, he also does not seem to think about it too much. He performs the deed to serve the “greater purpose” of family. One wonders whether or not he joined the church because he could not have Bettina for himself.

I would argue that the film *Irren ist männlich* falls under the category of post-feminist film rather than a feminist film because the film was made after the feminist movement. In October 1982, the term “post-feminism” was first used by the *New York Times Magazine* in an article entitled “Voices From the Post-Feminist Generation”, which described how America had reached a post-feminist age, one that directly followed the feminist age and movement. Characteristics of this age included being satisfied with what the feminists had done in the 1970s
and 1980s and believing that women were now equal to men. It is also an age in which women can rejoice that the feminists have accomplished equality. Many people, including author and professor at the University of Michigan, Susan J. Douglas, have trouble with this term. In her article, “Manufacturing Postfeminism” for *In These Times*, Douglas writes the following:

What the hell is postfeminism, anyway? I would think it would refer to a time when complete gender equality has been achieved. That hasn’t happened, of course, but we (especially young women) are supposed to think it has. Postfeminism, as a term, suggests that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism, but that feminism is now irrelevant and even undesirable because it has made millions of women unhappy, unfeminine, childless, lonely, and bitter, prompting them to fill their closets with combat boots and really bad India print skirts. (Douglas)

In the article, Douglas goes on to address how women are corrupted by the media and particularly the influence that it has over the image of the body. Her example is the latest issue of *Vogue*, which happens to instruct the reader on how to get a better, more fit body. She also writes that if women are not bombarded enough with not being fit, then they are bombarded by magazine and television ads on the latest beauty products. While combating the image of beauty and fitness, women must also decide on a career, children, or both. Douglas mentions that the latest issue of *Time* discusses: “Babies vs. Careers.” For Douglas, both of these magazines show a dangerous side to post-feminism because women have not made as much progress as thought and have a long way to go to be considered equal. Such criticism reflects the reality that my generation of women in America must face everyday.

Bettina, the main character of the film, may very well be a post-feminist by this definition. She is a mother and wife and cannot be considered unhappy because she has children. The audience never sees her at work in an office, which would at first indicate a typical nuclear family where the husband works and the wife takes care of the house and children. And yet, many defenders of the terms “feminism” and “post-feminism” would point out, her identity is more than just one of a mother; she is the one who holds the power and secret over her family
and controls her husband’s happiness, something that was not often seen previously in this male dominated industry.

Instead, this bourgeois comedy and the character of Bettina both question just how emancipated and enlightened women really are in today’s society, and also show a new, post-feminist definition of emancipation. There have obviously been many different cycles of emancipation beginning with a first wave of feminism to post-feminism. The double standard that is set within this film, questions just how much progress women have made in a male dominated society and whether or not women will continue to progress or step backwards. This idea of questioning how emancipated a woman is in a post-feminist society relates closely to what post feminism is supposed to do. In her book review of I'll be a postfeminist in a Postpatriarchy, or, Can We Really Imagine Life after Feminism?, Lisa Yaszek writes that most eras which are labeled “post” attempt to look at and analyze the previous era it is following.

Much like other theoretical “posts,” theoretical postfeminism is not just about what historically comes after feminism. Rather, it encompasses a variety of attempts to identify and critique certain problematic assumptions in feminism, just as postmodernism critiques modernism and postcolonialism critiques colonialism… It is not surprising that theoretical postfeminism is characterized by a sustained interest in reassessing feminism through the critical lens of poststructuralist and postmodern thinking. (Yaszek)

While the character of Bettina may attempt to bring issues of post-feminism to the screen, the political side of Bettina is not as strong as what the female filmmakers did in the 1970s and 1980s. Bettina shows no interest in the women’s political movement or a desire to be an equal to Thomas.

This film reveals society’s double standard because Thomas can have an affair, but Bettina cannot. Her true opinion of the situation must be masked by indifference. It also shows how outraged he becomes just at the idea of her having an affair and how calm and comfortable
she is for the majority of the film. It is almost as if she is not allowed to be upset at his infidelity. She is supposed to not do things that are not morally correct.

Bettina is the center of sanity in the insanity of the film. While she must keep her secret from her husband, she is and remains in control of the whole situation. Another double standard is set not only within the film, but also reflects reality. Bettina’s power within the film is shown as deceptive, but she is also clever and even subtly sophisticated when it comes to helping Thomas. This is part of reality that is portrayed comically in *Irren ist männlich*. While it is an enjoyable film that everyone would laugh at, it is difficult to see that Bettina’s power must be underhanded in order for her to control the situation, and it could even be seen as a backward step in the feminist movement. I would argue, however, that this is not necessarily a backward step, but reflects society’s understanding of how a wife and mother should behave today. Bettina defines post-feminism and the understanding that the equality that many of the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s worked so hard to get, does not exist.

The film can also be defined as a social critique because of the moral values it treats as well as the fear of being caught and its prejudices. The moral issues are more than clear in the film: lying and cheating. Johannes and Bettina have a fear of being caught and so does Susanne once she enters into the world of deception. There is also a fear of losing the world and life that a person has come to understand and this is Thomas’s problem. He fears what he does not know and fears knowing the truth. Thomas fears that his wife may have allowed him to live a lie for thirteen years and now he will have to start another life. No one wants to lose it all and start again. While he does attempt to figure out what really went on, he also soon forgets what could be when Susanne tells him that she is pregnant (Jaspar).
Much like many of the film heroines who came before *Irren ist männlich*, Bettina is a strong woman who can successfully assess the situation and take action. However, unlike other more feminist films, this film is not about the wife having a career or fighting for her legal rights. She is laboring to keep her husband satisfied and not orchestrating his satisfaction solely for her benefit; she puts her needs on hold in order to keep order within his life. Susanne on the other hand does not put her needs on hold and is an emancipated character. The solidification of her being more of a feminist than Bettina is the fact that she wants to have a child but not a husband or a partner to help raise the child. All that she wants is Thomas’s sperm. This means that she is just using him and once she reaches her goal, she will not need him any more (*Irren*).

Bettina’s character is one of modernity and one that fits into post-feminist society and at the same time critiques the feminist movement. The audience sees the depiction of a strong female character, Bettina, and the power that she has. While she may be deceitful, she does it with the best interests of her husband in mind. She keeps her family together and holds onto the control that she has. With this power and her secret, Bettina does not fit the normal definition of a wife and mother. The normal dominant male in a patriarchal society is not present within this film; Thomas thinks that he is in charge, but it is only by the grace of his wife.

The dominant female is an important one for Hormann. While this dominant female may not encompass as much power as she would like, her strength and the position that she holds as wife and mother and not as an activist is important. Hormann continues with the deconstruction of a typical male society in another post-feminist era film, *Widows*, which will be discussed next.
2. *Widows*

As we shall see in this next film, *Widows*, three female protagonists play a key role.

At the center of this film are three different women, none of whom are truly happy with their lives. Maria is married to her third husband, Konrad. Even though she is married, she continually sleeps around with other men. Elisabeth is married to her older husband Charles, both of whom are successful lawyers. Molly has three children with her husband Erich who is hiding his love affair with Sandi, although he is not hiding it very well.

Once again, the film follows three women who in some way have given up something that they want or desire in order that their husbands will have what they want and enjoy. For Molly’s husband, it is a family and for Elisabeth’s, it is the lack thereof. For Maria, who wants nothing but to be rich instead of the poor girl she once was, it is allowing her husband to walk all over her. Through the course of the film, it is obvious that these women are also post-feminist women. They are not solely wives and mothers, but women who plot for the sake of their own advantage. This is where the similarities end because these women are also much different from Bettina in *Irren ist männlich*.

All three women attend a funeral early in the film, which is a foreshadowing of what will occur later on in the film. Molly soon discovers that Erich is having an affair. When she invites Maria and Elisabeth over for a girls’ night, she talks about how wonderful it would be to be a widow. In Molly’s opinion being a widow is a very nice change. The widow can finally understand herself better and other people can see her for the woman she is and not defined as a mother and wife. Molly is not interested in getting a divorce because it is too much work. When Maria suggests killing Erich, Molly comments that that would not be a bad idea. As the other
two women leave they both comment that being a widow would allow them to be *unabhängig*, *frei*, *glücklich*.

Soon Molly takes this idea to the extreme. She begins writing and sending out her husband’s death notices as well as shopping for a coffin. After Molly has done this, she becomes upset because she knows that their relationship is not what it once was. This is the beginning of her emancipation. Molly realizes that she is no longer happy with Erich and that it is time for change in her life. This is, of course, a better decision than just staying with Erich, even though he is spending the majority of his time with Sandi. By the end of the film, Molly has stood up for herself as well as for her children. She wants to start her own business and Elisabeth, Maria, and her son Benny will help her. Molly does not say that she will not take Erich back, but lets him know what is and is not acceptable and what will no longer be a part of her or her children’s lives.

Elisabeth is the privileged one of the group. Her parents were very rich and because both she and her husband are lawyers and have no children, they have plenty of money. Nonetheless, her life is still lacking a form of pleasure. When her husband leaves for a business trip to London, she ends up having an affair with one of her clients. While this may be the first affair that she has ever had, Charles realizes it when he comes back. She thought that she was unhappy; however, with Charles’s death, she realizes that she truly did love him. It is unclear if Elisabeth felt oppressed in her marriage to Charles or just bored with her monotonous life. In any event, she needed to have the affair in order to see if she was truly missing anything. Elisabeth was not and sadly, she lost Charles in the end.

Maria married to have money, not necessarily to be happy. When her husband tells her that they will be able to work together on his fitness machine, Maria is very excited. However,
when Maria tries to make arrangements and get help for them, Konrad is not interested in what she has to say. When Konrad finds out that she slept with Molly’s son, Benny, he kicks her out and calls her names. Maria tries to get into contact with Konrad to tell him that she was having trouble with the machine. He tells her that he is not interested in her help. When Konrad tries to use the machine, he ends up killing himself. The initial audience reaction that the director would like the viewer to feel when Konrad dies would be one of *Schadenfreude*; it would seem that justice was served. This type of situation, in which a male is served his own due process, is not often seen within film; it assumes a female viewer.

One of the most interesting aspects of the film is the plotting that Molly does in order to fake her own husband’s death. Everyone but Molly ends up a widow, even though it was her idea in the beginning. Lying and deceit once again play a role in Sherry Hormann’s film. However, this situation is different from the one in *Irren ist männlich*. The same double standard does not apply in this situation because the idea of Molly having an affair is never addressed. Both Molly and her husband Erich are deceitful to each other; however, Molly’s deceit affects everyone in their circle of friends, causing them to question her sanity. Once Molly finds her courage and takes control, Erich takes more notice of her and the fact that he wants to be part of their lives after the situation than he had in a long time. She stands up for herself and her family, a message which is quite clear.

The most emancipated woman in the whole film is the next generation, Molly’s daughter Lily. At Charles’s funeral, Lily does not sit still and listen to the eulogy. Instead she disappears underneath the casket. She then pops out from underneath and begins to do a tap dance in front of everyone, interrupting the minister. When she is done, she takes a bow, a signal that she is proud of herself and the dance that she performed for Charles. The director is showing the
audience that Lily is not following the rules that her mother or her mother’s generation follow. She is taking charge of her life and doing what she wants to do; she is setting her own rules that she will obey.

In the film, *Widows*, Sherry Hormann comments on the lack of enjoyment that the three women have. It takes some time for all three to begin to enjoy their lives. By the end of the film, the audience sees Maria enjoying her life. She is making up her own rules and while they may interrupt and cause a commotion, she is enjoying herself and her life. This is a very interesting comment on the post-feminist society of today; Hormann is obviously trying to relay not only the importance of enjoying one’s life, but the lack thereof in many women’s lives. This film, however, still does not emphasize the personal and political the way that her female predecessors’ films did.

3. Hormann as Post-Feminist Director

Sherry Hormann is a post-feminist director because she was not part of the generation of women who struggled just to be able to work on films. Instead, she was able to study film because she chose to and wanted to, as well as had the ability to make films. Hormann’s comedies show who the post-feminists of today’s society are: not only women who are housewives and mothers, such as Bettina and Molly, but who also hold a job as a lawyer, such as Elisabeth. Her films also show the audience the female has not progressed as much as is thought or liked; the process is still continuing.

I am of the opinion that Hormann’s films simply reflect the given reality of the women’s situation in Germany, much like von Trotta and Sander’s films did. What makes Hormann’s
films different is the lack of personal and political. Her predecessors truly defined their films and female characters with both of these films. Hormann lacks these strong connections to her characters. This can be seen in both *Irren ist männlich* and *Widows*; two films in which the females in some way do not or cannot enjoy their lives to the fullest. Instead, in *Irren ist männlich*, Bettina must allow the male to think that he is in charge. Bettina tries to situate herself as comfortably as possible within the conditions she is given. In *Widows*, it is not so much about the male thinking he is in control, as it is allowing the female to simply have fun and enjoy the life and choose the life that she wants to lead.

The next chapter of this thesis focuses on another female German filmmaker, Katja von Garnier. Her films are very different from the two discussed in this chapter; her film *bandits* can be considered a strong post-feminist film that does not take a step backward, but shows progression within the feminist movement. The film allows the female character to make an even greater step forward. The women in the film are not dependent on any male; they are dependent on themselves and each other. It also criticizes the very conditions under which women, and other people, live. *Iron Jawed Angels*, another film that will be discussed in the following chapter, also discusses women’s rights as well as their rights in marriage.
Katja von Garnier is one of the newest female German filmmakers to hit the film scene not only in Germany, but also in America. Her films are quite different from the other female-directed films that were made before her time. Some of the same issues such as love and romance and female relationships are shown within her films. However, her style rivals more of what some of her male predecessors have done only with more feminist themes. In this chapter, I will discuss her films bandits and Iron Jawed Angels, two films that could only have been made after the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s and in today’s post-feminist society.

1. *Abgeschminkt!*

Katja von Garnier began studying at the Munich Academy for Film and Television in 1990. That same year, she set up her own production company VELA – X with a fellow female student from the Academy, Ewa Karlström. This company was not what helped to make her a household name. It was her film, *Abgeschminkt!* which catapulted her into the spotlight. *Abgeschminkt!* was von Garnier’s first notable film and also her diploma project. It showed not only much talent but also much promise for her future films and the directions that she would later take: the friendships between women and the problems that they have finding the right partner and falling in love. Von Garnier has been quoted as saying that in this romantic comedy, “many women recognize themselves and… men can learn a few things” (h-o). The film was a sensation in Germany and 1.2 million viewers saw the film. It also stayed within the top ten of the German film charts for five months. After such success, it was then sold to twenty-seven countries and shown around the world. It even landed in the number one spot in Italy. For
*Abgeschminkt!*, von Garnier won an Academy Award for Best Student Film 1994, the
*Bundesfilmpreis*, an Ernst Lubitsch Award for Best Comedy Achievement, a Bavarian Film
Award, and an Uppsala Film Festival Award.

The film is a romantic comedy set in the 1990s about a cartoonist named Frenzy and her
friend Maischa. Maischa’s problem is that she cannot resist a good-looking man. Only once
Maischa is dating that good-looking man, she is not interested anymore. Frenzy, on the other
hand, feels that most men either are very arrogant or have some sort of self-esteem issue. More
important to her is her career. She will lose her job unless her comics become more optimistic.
The problem is that her life and her love interests are anything but optimistic. There is some
encouragement when Maischa announces that she has a date with René. However, there is more
promise for Maischa than Frenzy; she falls instantly in love with René and convinces Frenzy to
entertain René’s friend, Mark. Frenzy, who is supposed to be the mature one, and Mark, the silly,
childish one, take an instant dislike to one another. Frenzy’s situation is not as pessimistic as she
thinks at the beginning of the evening. Mark turns out to be the prince charming she is looking
for, which also helps her cartoons to become more optimistic. Maischa, sadly, is not as
successful as Frenzy and realizes that René is just a jerk (*Abgeschminkt!*).

These strong beginnings not only led to a successful film, but demonstrated that Katja
von Garnier had formed a relationship and understanding with the female audience, something
that her female predecessors showed. She could identify with other women especially when it
came to the trials of love relationships, place this identification on the big screen, and female
audience members could watch her stories films with appreciation. This set the stage for her
next project, which was *bandits* (h-o).
2. *bandits*

The idea behind *bandits* took a while to form. Originally von Garnier was supposed to work on the twenty million dollar Hollywood script, *Moonlight and Valentino*. However, because of artistic differences with the film studio, von Garnier said that she could not direct the film, which is based on a woman who loses her husband and how she must cope with her loss. Once again, a recurring theme of a woman and her relationships were central to the film (h-o).

Instead, in 1995, she conceptualized *bandits*. Filming for *bandits* began a year later.

This is what Katja von Garnier once said about her film:

> The film *Hair* by Milos Forman has been my absolute number one movie since I was twelve and is still my favourite. Music films are something that have always fascinated me. Well, and music anyway. It helps one in getting over bad moods and makes sadness sometimes turn into an event. My next film, namely, the one after *Making up!* was somehow due. And I wanted it to be a music film. But it’s not only about visually extravagant music; the music is important as an outlet for pent-up emotions, for the dramatic creative key note of the movie, in whose center the developing friendship of the four women stands. When I wrote the script I occupied myself a lot with mythology in order to find out what really makes a hero’s story. The characters in our movie had to be greater than life – exactly cinema characters (h-o).

It is difficult to classify this film because it combines so many different elements from many different genres. The film was made towards the end of a decade that saw a revival in German comedy. This film is not primarily a comedy. It does, however, take the elements from typical male films, such as the buddy film and road movie, which were part of the German comedy revival, and make them successful for a film about and for women. It is a film about four women and the bonds that they form over a period of time. It is a road movie because the four main characters try to escape from and stay out of prison for the duration of the film by driving away and leaving the past. It is a buddy movie, a film which normally focuses only on the relationship between two male friends; this focuses on four women. *bandits* is also a musical.
Some of the scenes within the film are not choreographed, which is similar to regular non-diegetic music or soundtracks in many films. However, the final scene within the film where the bandits give their final performance is choreographed the way any number would be in a musical.

The four main female characters of the film bandits all have very significant first names, with several of the names having religious meanings. The name “Marie” is associated with both Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary, representing the “whore/virgin” dichotomy in many cultural representations of women. The name “Luna” comes from the moon and could hint at such things are lunacy and being mentally unbalanced. The name also implies a traditional Teutonic goddess. “Angel” can be associated with the air or air spirit and taking flight into heaven. In the film, Angel does take flight and is also an air-head. Finally, there is “Emma” – a name that is not only a classic, but a name that normally defines a plain Hausfrau. The name could be linked to Alice Schwarzer’s magazine Emma, which was a counter to all of the feminine magazines of the time. Emma was a magazine that was not solely based on fashion and make-up and dealt with other issues.

Emma, Luna, Angel, and Marie are all very different. However, they fit well together and form a team that is unstoppable. Luna is the doer, who acts solely on her pent up emotions; moon cycles once again come to mind. She is the one who is cocky and has an aggressive attitude. Angel has a lot of confidence issues and is unsure of herself. She is feminine and does things without thinking about the consequences, such as talking with the police. She is the ultimate downfall of the group. Emma is always calm; she is rational and takes time to think and plan, so that they can avoid being captured. Marie is like the mother figure. She keeps Luna under control and notices minor details, such as when Luna leaves the group. Marie also has the great idea of taking a hostage in order to escape the police.
Luna, Marie, and Angel have been together for a while before Emma is placed in prison. All four have been charged with different crimes: Luna for robbery, Marie for killing her husband, and Emma for killing the man who beat her and killed her child. Angel is a scam artist. From the beginning, Luna demonstrates her distrust. She does not want someone new in the group, knowing that the dynamics would change. Emma counters this lack of friendship by telling Luna that she would not want to discuss her problems with her. Emma’s opinion of Luna changes slightly after Luna tries to help Marie. Luna removes some of the knives that Marie places under her sleeves. When this first intervention does not help and Marie tries to kill herself by cutting her wrists, Luna rounds up the prison officials in order to get Marie the medical attention she needs.

Until this time, Emma has been very antisocial. However, when her last appeal to get out of prison fails, Emma resorts to playing the drums to let out some of her anger and frustration. While Luna, Angel, and Marie are looking for a drummer, Luna wants no part in having Emma as a member of the band. Luna plays it cool and only hints that Emma can play decently. The final solidifying tie comes when the whole prison is searched for drugs. They rebel against the search and sing in protest about how they would like to fly away, but cannot because they are not birds. While it may be understood that they would like to leave the prison, this is the first statement made by the four women that they would like to leave their situation. They do not have the means or the power that they would like to have, but the bandits still want to make a statement.

*bandits* is based on trust. The women are given an opportunity to form a band and practice their songs for the policeman’s ball. When the prison director expresses concern about the group, he is told that he can count on the women to be ready to play at the concert. As later
seen, his concerns were justified because they escape. However, these women cannot trust the officials, when they themselves show doubt not only within themselves but with their trusted friends.

While they may have bonded, the first practice gets off to a rocky start because Luna feels threatened in her role as leader. Luna causes more problems for herself and the band because Emma is counting the beat. Luna can be described as the alpha female and it is very important for her to assert dominance, even if she is mostly talk and turns into a child that needs to be nurtured and coddled by Marie.

In the next scene they proceed to the ball hand-cuffed. All of the other prisoners are cheering the women on as they get into the van. These well wishes seem to make the women even more nervous as they spend time in the van practicing for their big debut. While the audience watches the guard in the van, they also see the banquet and the woman who will introduce the band. As she gives her speech, she talks about how these women need to be rehabilitated and given a second chance within society. This speech is ironic given the situation with the officer in the van.

The police officer is the typical male antagonist because he is arrogant, cocky, and a chauvinist; he is one of three such figures in bandits. He believes it is his natural right to say whatever he wants or feels and treats the four of them like second-class citizens. The cop takes Marie’s picture of her husband and friends and tears it up, calls the four women whores, and references sexual favors. His actions and words only spur the women on to rebel and break away from this typical treatment that they face. The bandits beat him up before they steal the car and drive away.
Angel’s true character shines within the next few scenes. She is afraid of what will happen when they are caught and wants to call the police in order to explain the situation. She cannot relax and flutters around like a nervous bird trying to convince the other three to turn themselves in. The behavior is reminiscent of the air spirit definition of her name, Angel. This uncertainty will only increase later on.

A second typical male becomes part of the story shortly afterwards. Schwarz is the main detective for the investigation; he is overly confident and likes to take and be in charge. The detective claims that he will catch them before he finishes a package of cigarillos. He has never needed longer than that for any case. This confidence is almost shattered because at one point, when he pulls out his last cigarillo, he puts it back, not wanting to admit that he is close to defeat.

All four plan the next day to go different ways, with Angel having trouble making her own decision. This plan is thwarted by the following incident: Angel discovers several men who are shooting small dogs. Right when the men are ready to release the next dog, the women come together, ambush them, and steal their car and clothes. There is a flash forward to the final scene where Emma, Luna, and Angel perform their final concert and the words from the song “Time is Now”: “break the bough.” This is the beginning of their bond as the bandits, showing their need to survive and break away from what has held them back. They take charge of their lives and the decisions that are affecting them (bandits).

While it seems that they have reached a level of familiarity with one another, Angel will not share her hidden money with the group. This shows that, while these women only have one another to trust, work with, and confide in, it will take them longer than a few days and an escape to fight the demons and fears that each has. Luna and Angel also have no regard for each other or for the other two members of the group. They telephone a journalist and complain that they
are not in the news because of their escape. When they meet the journalist, they are so excited that they do not notice how very nervous Emma is. Angel and Luna want to be recognized for what they have done: They have escaped from prison. Luna and Angel want to be known as women who took a risk and conquered their societal rules. Because the two of them are so ecstatic about an interview with the journalist, Angel spills her plans to go with Emma on the ship. Luckily no one takes notice of what Angel says.

The main focus of the next scene is Marie; but Luna’s and Angel’s activities reinforce the lazy-day, no-worries atmosphere that is suddenly present in their lives. Marie is in a field, surrounded by nothing. The long shot shows Marie jumping up out of her cover from within the wheat. She then begins to run towards the camera waving her arms around. The frame continues to cut quickly between the four characters showing how carefree they are. The only one concerned with moving on is Emma, who is studying a map. The frame then cuts to a medium shot of Luna sitting under a tree and then to a medium long shot of Angel sitting on a fence post painting her nails. The frame cuts to Marie running in the field. Instead of a head-on shot, the audience now sees Marie from the right side as she is running in the field. Marie spins around in the field in a medium close-up and then falls backwards into the field of wheat. The audience sees Marie in a medium long shot hugging a big tree with a smile on her face. Gone are the police, prison walls, uniforms, work and most importantly confinement. She is carefree, innocent, and has the freedom to play, laugh, and hug a tree. She seems truly happy in this new environment, something that the viewer does not see when she is in prison, trying to kill herself.

The president of Gold Records, the first company to place the group’s music on the radio, is the final example of the male chauvinist in the film. He tries to take advantage of the women and not pay them for the test song; he even belittles them, comparing them to the Rolling Stones
and saying that they are not even close to achieving such greatness. In order to get the president’s attention, because he is too busy and interested in snorting drugs, they spill coffee on his rug and break his dishes. The frame shows the president as he turns his back on the group, not interested in giving them any money for their song. Close-up and medium shots show Luna deliberately turn her coffee cup over and spill the coffee, and Angel dramatically drop her coffee cup on the floor. Emma takes over and begins to bargain for the money they deserve, but he is not interested in giving them a sum close to what they want. Finally, Angel agrees to the smaller sum and signs her name to the contract happily. The medium close-up shows the other three sign their names before the camera then focuses on the president who has his back turned towards the women. They ultimately have the last laugh because the president does not notice what they have done. His secretary, a woman, has to point out that he does not have the rights to distribute their music.

With this victory, Emma, Luna, Angel, and Marie get a little overconfident. When a band in the bar they are in takes a break, they take over and play their own songs. What they do not realize is that the male bartender recognizes them and calls the police. The bandits are too busy entertaining the crowd and putting on a concert to notice the police. This is a dream come true for the women because they have a crowd who is not only interested in their music but who are also thoroughly enjoying themselves and the music.

Before all four women take the stage, Marie surprises the other three and goes on stage to play the piano. The scene changes to a dreamlike sequence and within this scene we see the four women in a new light. The frames continually change from focusing on one or all of the women to focusing in on the erogenous zones of the women, such as Angel’s knee or torso. The opening shot shows a medium close-up of Angel and in the background the audience can hear the bandits
singing. The camera follows the movement of Angel’s hand slowly before it then switches to a medium shot of Luna. The audience sees Angel’s hand as she snaps along to the beat, before switching back to a low-angle medium shot of Luna on stage singing. The frame slowly rotates from the left side of Luna to the right before then switching back to the upper torso of Angel, and then follows Angel’s backside as she walks toward Luna and joins her and Emma. The audience then has a medium shot of the three women on stage and in the background they can see Marie on the piano. This slightly sexual scene continues for just a little bit longer before it turns back to reality.

All four have on glittery red dresses, their hair is done, and they have makeup on. They look like they stepped out of the 1920s. Within their time in prison, they never looked or felt this feminine. Ideally, they do not want to be seen as sex objects when they do not choose to be seen as such. It is alright to be seen as a sex object if and when the female wants to be one and is in control of the situation. It is easy to see with the shot sequence that these women can be and want to be looked at as sexual objects. The audience only needs to pay attention to the close-up shots of Angel’s body. The idea of wanting to be sexually attractive can be seen later on when Angel comes on to West.

This glorification that the women feel does not last long because the women must leave. Emma takes control of the situation and pulls out her gun. She will not allow the police director to be in control of the situation and their futures. Following Marie’s suggestion, they take a hostage. Luna chooses West, the American with whom Angel had previously spoken. He has a certain attractiveness about him; he is tall and thin with longish dirty-blond hair and well dressed in a blazer. West remains calm and quickly goes on stage with hands up in the air. Even when Emma places the gun in his face, West shows no sign of fear. At two different points within the
film, West sleeps with Angel and then with Luna. It is obvious that Angel is very intent on sleeping with West, while his encounter with Luna was more impulsive. While West may cause some problems within the group, ultimately he will not be able to come between the women. He gets to live out some of his fantasies with Luna and Angel and they get to release some tension, fear and anxiety. However, once that is over, they have no more use for him. Order within the group is restored once West has been dropped off at the nearest train station.

The next important scene shows the musical aspect of the film. While on the run from the police, the four women and West get stuck in traffic on a bridge. Once the women are recognized by a little girl, Angel gets out to sign autographs. Keeping a low profile is not something that she would even consider, even though Emma looks completely uncomfortable. Soon everyone who is trapped on the bridge is dancing along with the bandits and singing their songs. The sequence is shot primarily in long shots and medium shots of the individual bandits dancing on the bridge in order to give the feeling of space, freedom, and public notoriety. This scene gives an illusion of power that the women feel they have. They are the center of attention and the only reason that the people would get up and dance would be because of them. However, this new found glory is short lived. The police attempt to capture the bandits who narrowly escape.

When Marie dies of a heart attack shortly afterwards while the women are driving away, Luna collapses. The center of Luna’s universe is gone and she shows signs of emotions and fear. Everyone is upset, but Emma acts quickly knowing that something is not right on the bridge. Emma must think for Luna and remind her of what Marie wanted when she died. During the scene in the bar, Marie had declared that she did not want to be eaten by worms: She wants to
burn. When they begin to burn the car, using the distraction to “disappear” by jumping from the bridge, the final scene is shown.

Emma’s weakness is her child’s photo. It is the only whole piece that she has left. This weakness lands Emma in prison again because she does not jump from the bridge with Luna and Angel. The other two safely get away from the police and it could be interpreted that the water is a sign of rebirth and a force that allows them to regroup and concentrate on what is important: getting Emma out of prison, even if it is dangerous.

When Emma is in interrogation, she will not talk. Schwarz tries to insult and threaten her, but it does not work. Instead she spits water in his face, showing him that he will never have power over her or the others. Once again, the final scene is shown.

With the members of bandits dispersing, Luna must take charge of Emma’s rescue. Angel is still the ditzy one of the group and has no idea how to shoot a gun and randomly shoots. She is the “least” bandit of the group. Angel wants to be one and wants to believe in running away, acting dangerous, and getting what she wants, but she is still a good person. Even when Angel is supposed to be guarding Schwarz, she drops her weapon after he tells her she can and smokes a cigarette.

After they have officially rescued Emma, Schwarz’s female partner tells Luna, *gern geschehen*. This throws into question her loyalty. Would she really say that if she did not want to see the bandits succeed? I believe that she does want to see the bandits succeed. The detective knows all of their histories and situations and can make a very informed guess as to what they are trying to do and why. While she may be committed to her job, she is more committed to these women and to their fight.
One of the nicest and simplest scenes within the film comes towards the end. Emma and Angel are sitting together in front of a television store window. The televisions are replaying scenes from within the movie, with the final scene being Marie’s death foreshadowing what will happen. When Angel attempts to confess her part in Emma’s arrest, Emma just finishes her story for her. Not only is Emma understanding about what has happened to her and forgives her, she also does not tell Luna what they were talking about. Before the scene ends, Emma mentions that she would like to decide when she dies, foreshadowing what will happen later.

The final scene in the film is the final concert that the remaining bandits will perform. Not only are they on the roof while performing the concert, but they are in a port city. Throughout the concert more and more people continue to gather to hear the music. There are many ships that pass by the women as they are performing. The ships signal the end of their time as the bandits and as prisoners within society. The first time that the audience sees Angel and Luna leap from the roof is when they are signing the following words: “Baby, don’t forget to catch me.” The three women are playing the song for the audience, the only ones who have believed and supported them. This concert is for them.

The police slowly begin to arrive and surround the concert area, while Angel tosses some flowers into the air. This is done in slow motion. These flowers represent Marie and Angel is asking the people not to forget the fourth member. A ship also passes in the background, and many already know that Marie’s ship has come and gone.

The crowd begins to sing along as the women remove the guitars and Emma steps away from the drums. This is a signal of the end of their lives and an official end to the group bandits. As the three gather on the edge, Emma throws her drumsticks to the audience. Angel, Luna, and Emma all jump together. This scene is done in slow motion. The scene changes and the viewer
sees them running towards their ship. We watch them fall again, Luna body surf, run toward the ship, Angel body surf, and then run towards the ship. It is important to see them finally break away from everything that has held them back over the course of the film: the police, their crimes, lack of money and means to escape and themselves. They are finally truly free of everything that has ever held them back. Marie is standing on the deck of the ship waiting for the three others to join them. She is in a red dress, one similar to what they wore while entertaining the patrons of the bar.

The frame shifts abruptly to Schwarz, and while the audience does not hear him speak, it sees him yelling into a megaphone. At the steps of the ship, all three turn around and show themselves to the world one final time. Schwarz’s female partner is there with tears in her eyes. She knows that it will end badly because the police are prepared to take decisive action. As the bandits pull out their hidden guns and throw them away, signaling that they are done with the life they have led and are ready to die, the police shoot at them. The final scene shows the three hands of Luna, Angel, and Emma reaching for Marie’s hand. The bandits have accomplished what they wanted. They decided when they would die and have not allowed society to determine when that would happen. Freedom for them does equal death, which for them is desirable (bandits).

There are many important themes in the film. Friendship and the bond between these four women is paramount. Another theme is the importance of music and the way that these women can express themselves through the music. In the beginning, all four think that the only commonality is the music. They soon realize, however, that there is more to their situation than just the music. At first, Emma wants nothing to do with the band. But when she realizes that is a way out of the prison, she plays the drums. The music allows all of them to vent their frustration
and anger in the hope that they might be able to find a solution to prison, their situations, and their lives. There is also a theme of trying to find their identity, which is connected closely with the music. They identify themselves as women, female musicians, prisoners, and wanting to escape. Each of these is closely linked to the other and closely linked to the other women in the group “bandits”. A common interest in escaping helps to solidify their friendship and the music.

Liberation is another theme within this film. These women liberate themselves from prison and from a life that they are not happy with. They liberate themselves from the constraints of normal societal behavior and from their own societal rules. The theme of liberation is closely linked to rebellion. They are criminals but instead of trying to reform themselves after they escape, they continue with some of their old habits and create new traditions along the way.

Another interesting theme in the film is the relationship that the four women have to West, the American “cowboy” of the film. His name alone is symbolic of America and what lies west of Germany. He is, first and foremost, an American who will never truly be able to fit within German society. On that level, the women can connect with him. West also seems to only be interested in being the hostage and getting sexual compensation. He is the James Dean look-a-like rebel, but his rebellion falls short in comparison to that of Emma, Luna, Angel, and Marie. He is not rebellious or cool enough to divide the group.

One of the interesting questions that is raised as this final scene takes place is whether or not the bandits get due process within the judicial system. Schwarz orders the officers to shoot because the three women pull out their guns and point them in the police officers’ direction. I believe that they get what they desire, even if at the end of the film they are dead and they did not get due process. In the final scene of bandits these three women have the power. The gun is
a nice phallic symbol. In their hands, they hold the power to decide whether they live or die, whether they will go to prison for their crimes or not. Emma, Luna, and Angel will not become the victims of society’s laws and judicial system. They will not be conquered, but will themselves conquer the system. They also know that, when they run to the ship and challenge the police, the police will shoot. Emma, Luna, and Angel have complete control of the situation. The three want to join Marie. The determination and perseverance of these four women, is what I believe threatens the male public. They took over a male role and defined it as their own.

On June 28, 1997 bandits premiered at the Munich Film Festival. There was some positive criticism for the film. Filmdienst wrote the following about the film:

"bandits is a musical drama, entirely characterized by the rhythm of its music, which condenses themes like friendship, life and death to catchy and popular numbers. The sound and picture levels continuously merge each other in an illusionary play which above all distinguishes itself by the affection for main characters. (h-o)"

One of the reasons that the film was criticized was because of the “video clip aesthetics” (h-o). Most of the critics felt that the style with which von Garnier had made the film turned bandits into another non-descript music video. There were many different “single scenes in ‘bandits’, especially musical inserts, [that] only last a few seconds” (h-o).

Many of the critics felt that this film was just another women’s liberation film. Jasmin Tabatabai, one of the actresses, had this to say about the film in response to such criticisms:

"bandits was a film not meant to be against men, but just made for women. Women were the center of interest, and women made the decisions. This was apparently a threat… Today I would do it quite differently. Today I would go on the offensive and deliberately say: ‘In fact, this is a women’s film! Made by women and for women. And for cool men. You got a problem with that?’ (h-o.)"

"bandits does have some of the same elements that many of the women’s liberation films had in the 1970s and 1980s. First and foremost, this is a film created, written, directed by a
woman. The film is about four female characters, but not typical female characters. Three of these women are not mothers and none are homemakers. Instead, they are “bad girls,” women who have committed crimes and have had tough lives. They will never fit into society the way that society wants them to fit in. The four characters are strong and determined women, much like the female characters of the 1970s and 1980s. They know that they do not want to spend the rest of their lives in prison. For them and for many other characters portrayed, this is not the life that they envision for themselves. They, like many other musicians, want to make music and want to be famous. Luna, Emma, Marie, and Angel achieve this goal, which is something that they never thought would happen.

The image of women is completely different from the ideal stereotypes that were defined by an earlier society: these women are the definitions of post-feminists. None of them embrace the role of the married housewife with kid; these women would never fit into a normal family setting. The four characters are also different from the characters of Sherry Hormann’s films. All of Hormann’s characters are strong female characters. However, the women in bandits demonstrate that they are not dependent in any way on the male, nor do they believe in obeying the typical rules set by the patriarchal society.

It is nice to see more powerful women in a film directed by a female. These women have certain characteristics that make it easy for the female audience to identify with them: there is an idea of trying to escape the reality that they do not want to be in. However, their image is more of a hard, kick-ass image and not something softer like many women are (bandits).

The portrayal of strong, rebellious women can be seen in von Garnier’s follow-up film Iron Jawed Angels. This film is different because it is based on actual historical events. Garnier is conscious of the debt she owes to previous generations of feminists: in fact she can pursue an
independent career, manage her own finances, even make post-feminist films if she wants to, because of the suffragists and the women from the 1970s and 1980s in the German film industry.

3. *Iron Jawed Angels*

Like many German directors before her, von Garnier has attempted to cross over to Hollywood. Von Garnier seems to be willing to rise to the challenge and began her American directorial career with an HBO film, *Iron Jawed Angels*. It is a film which is appropriately about the women’s suffrage movement in the United States, with strong and determined women portrayed by some of today’s most notable actresses: Hilary Swank, Frances O’Connor, and Anjelica Huston. Their goal is to get women the vote and they stop at nothing in order to achieve this, even placing their lives at risk. However, while their image could be seen as troublemakers who defy law and order, they are not hard criminals like their counterparts in *bandits*. The characters of Alice Paul and Lucy Burns conform better to society, even though they will not settle for anything but the right to vote.

The film focuses on Paul, portrayed by Hilary Swank. In the opening scene, a flash forward shows what will happen later on and flashbacks show Paul as a little girl playing chess. This gives the impression that even as a little girl, Alice Paul was smart and interested in things intellectual. These flashbacks and flashforwards give the audience a portion of the story of Alice Paul’s life out of order. They help the audience get to know and understand her better. A modern element in the film is the music. It opens with music from Vertical Horizon playing in the background. Lauryn Hill, Sarah McLachlan, and others who dominated the late 1990s music scene are part of the soundtrack (*Angels*).
The beginning of the film takes place in Philadelphia in 1912. The character portrayed by Anjelica Huston, Carrie Catt, a leader of the National American Women Suffrage Association, is not interested in meeting Alice Paul. Carrie has little interest in meeting someone who is radical and calls Paul dumb because she wants a constitutional amendment so that women will have the right to vote. For Carrie, it is enough that the women have the right to vote in some states. She is not interested in upsetting the balance. Carrie Catt is the antagonist of the film because for her it is acceptable that only some states gave women the right to vote.

The next scene shows Alice Paul walking down the street. The main focus is on Alice Paul, giving her the air of importance. The other people she passes are insignificant in comparison and as they pass her by, they walk at a speed faster than humanly possible. Before this scene ends, Paul stops in front of a window shop to look at a hat. There is still a side to her that wants to be feminine. She is joined shortly by Lucy Burns, one of the women she will work with closely to get the amendment to the constitution. Paul and Lucy discuss the hat and who should wear it, Paul thinking that the hat is more her style than Lucy’s. They end up flipping a coin for the hat, a theme that will repeatedly play out within the film, with Lucy winning. Paul and Lucy discuss some things over lunch and Paul says that she does not want to be a girl. She wants to “play with the lads” in Washington. She is determined to win.

The coin toss is used to help decide major events within the film. They flip the coin in front of the White House as well to see who will go to other states to fight for suffrage. It symbolizes their life as something that has happened rather quickly, but also something that has to do with risk taking and chance. These two elements come in and out of their lives throughout the film and is often something that cannot be easily controlled or determined. The coin also
symbolizes the gamble that these two women are taking. They are gambling not only for themselves, but also for other women within the country.

Burns and Paul meet with Catt and another woman from the NAWSA. Catt is not interested in a history lesson of the women’s suffrage movement, nor does she want to be second-guessed. She demands respect, even if she is the butt of many jokes throughout the film. Paul pushes for what she wants and is firm, aggressive, and polite. Catt has no interest in wasting time and believes that the amendment will not pass the Senate. NAWSA does not want to be represented by rebellious women. Paul says that she does not consider herself above the law and with that statement she gets the approval she needs to set up in Washington and have a parade to support the women’s right to vote. However, she is told that she must raise her own funds. Paul and the other women are up to the challenge; however, they have no source of income and it is questionable how they will raise funds when other people are not even interested in giving women the right to vote.

Another scene shows Burns coming back from her police meeting and acknowledging that the police will not offer them protection for the parade. Burns demonstrates for the others just how the officer acted towards her. It is a display that is typically male, with nose wiping gestures and hocking sounds. These demonstrations are done with fast cuts as if the camera would then go to another scene, only Lucy Burns is still standing in the same spot and it is the same camera angle. This has a very nice overall effect. While the men might be mocking the women for the idea of suffrage and the constitutional amendment, this same mockery is turned right around on the men and their behavior.

At a party Paul meets Ben Wiseman, a sketch artist for *The Washington Post*, and Inez Millholland. Paul interrupts their conversation, but is soon the center of it and of what will
happen later on. Lucy Burns joins the three as they sit at a bar and discuss the new image of a suffragist. She is supposed to be young, beautiful, smart, and educated, everything that the old image is not. Both Paul and Burns would like to have someone ride in on horseback for the parade that they are planning. But instead of the male counterpart of a cowboy or a military official, they want this image to also be a warrior, a herald. They want Inez to be their Joan of Arc. The camera flashes forward to show Inez on horseback with her crown of gold leaves and angel’s wings (*Angels*).

Wisemen and Paul walk down the street discussing the right to vote. Paul believes that the right to vote will give women self-respect, but she does not hold illusions, thinking that there are some women who are good and bad. As Wisemen continues to argue with her, Paul makes accurate points stating that women are legitimate citizens who don’t get to make the laws, but who must obey them. Paul thinks that it is ridiculous that women can only vote in nine states. While Wisemen may enjoy their talk, he is more interested in trying to get a dinner date. But she remains elusive, focusing solely on the situation at hand. Burns tells Paul that if she does not want Ben, she will take him. Once again, the film flashes forward to what Inez will look like on horseback. The scene flashes back to Paul sitting at Susan B. Anthony’s desk, believing that the desk is talking to her. It is not telling her how to pass the constitutional amendment, but to just get it done.

In the next scene, the audience sees the parade. It is a grand event with floats, instruments, flags, banners, cars, women and children of different ethnicities, and women with their college robes and sashes. There are many spectators, especially men. Even the black suffragists, who were told that they must march in a separate unit, join the other women and march in unison with them. This ideal situation and environment is only short lived. The male
audience tells the women that they should go home to their mothers. They also make indecent comments and begin to throw things such as food and bottles. The scene quickly cuts to President Wilson coming into town and not being welcomed by anyone. It is beginning to show the importance that these women have to members of the community. The scene then quickly cuts back to the riot that has broken out on the streets with the police officers ignoring the women’s cries for help.

The women then turn to lobbying the senators when a meeting with President Wilson does not go well. Burns says that the women should know which senators supported what bills. She also says that it is important for them to learn the names of their children. Lucy Burns is an extremely savvy politician; she is playing games along with the senators in order to accomplish the goal.

In one of the earlier scenes, Lucy Burns tries to talk to Senator Leighton’s wife, Emily, who is one of the most interesting characters within the film. In the beginning, Emily tells Burns that she does not have a head for politics. Leighton is fearful and uncertain of herself. When her husband comes over to get Emily, she follows him right along. It is obvious from this interaction that Senator Leighton is the dominant one in the family. Emily Leighton is the typical wife: she is doting and tends to his and the children’s needs without considering her own.

Emily Leighton must come to terms with her husband’s blatant statement of the inferiority of women in the next scene. He comes home and apologizes for being late, which is nice of him. He says that the senators spent many hours discussing suffrage only in the end to vote it down. This is because they know that women have their hands full raising children (Angels). His comment is completely derogatory and would fit well in bandits with the policeman, West, or the executive from Gold Records (bandits). Katja von Garnier portrays
Senator Leighton as one of many antagonists who will not support the suffrage movement. His appearance at first is benevolent. However, he is patronizing and someone whom his wife cannot truly trust. This is evident when he takes away her allowance money because of her donations to Paul and only allows her to charge things at the grocer’s. Following this scene, he takes the children away from his wife as well. When Emily mentions that she will pick them up, he says that she will do no such thing, indicating his disgust for her support of the suffrage movement; he withholds the children as a form of punishment. The senator also indicates that she would not be able to fight for her children because she has no money or lawyer. They are his children and the power that he has over his wife and their life is evident.

One of the most interesting scenes within the film is when Paul and Ben have dinner together. He brings his son instead of his editor as promised. While this is something that should have upset Paul, it does not seem to bother her. She spends her time tying the son’s shoe and allowing Ben to order what they will eat for dinner. Paul is no longer playing the part of a suffragist who wants results, but a woman who wants to be taken care of and who is probably tired of being lonely, which is something that Burns confronts her about later that night. While these women are powerful, forceful, and aggressive, they are also women.

In a later scene, Ben Wisemen takes Alice Paul on another date. He convinces her to stop working and come with him. He wants to teach her how to drive. The audience watches her struggle with the steering wheel as well as the brakes. It also sees a medium close-up of Wisemen convincing Paul to remove her hat; this was something that he could not convince her to do when they went out to dinner. The audience then sees Ben Wisemen trying to teach Alice Paul how to dance; they first see him lightly touch her chin and raise her head. Then they see his hand touch hers in a close-up shot and bring her hand to his shoulder. Von Garnier artfully
thematizes “togetherness” and “separateness” as she not only cuts back and forth between the
Wisemen and Paul dance and Paul alone in the bathtub, but also shows each, Wisemen and Paul,
dancing alone with the other watching.

The scene in the bath tub is a very important one. It is mostly made up of close-up shots
of Paul’s face. Paul is reliving the time she spent with Wisemen. The flashbacks are comprised
of close-ups, medium shots, and even extreme long shots. What makes the flashbacks so
interesting is that the audience does not hear Wiseman and Paul talking. The audience can only
understand the story that Paul is telling by watching what took place. The same is also true of
the bath tub scene, which can be considered very sexual and one can even contemplate whether
or not Alice Paul masturbates to the memory of the two of them. This can be derived from the
close-up scenes of her biting her lip, closing her eyes, her hand running down her leg before
disappearing into the water, and her feet clenching the faucets. All of these shots are very short
and only shown for brief seconds at a time before the audience then sees Paul and Wisemen
dancing in the field.

For example, the frame then moves to a close-up shot of Alice Paul’s hand on the edge of
the bath tub. The shot then changes to a close-up of Wisemen’s hand on Paul’s lower back. The
audience then sees a medium shot of Paul and Wisemen dancing before the shot then changes to
close-up of Alice Paul opening her eyes in the bath tub. The shot then changes back to a medium
shot of the two dancing. The audience then sees a medium shot of Wisemen’s and Paul’s legs as
they are dancing. What is interesting to note is that Wisemen is leading Paul and deciding the
direction that they will dance in. This is of course normal on the dance floor, but up until now in
the film, it was obvious that Paul had been making most of the decisions in their relationship.
The frame then switches back to the two of them. In this long shot they are back on the
dock dancing, before the audience sees them in a medium long shot of them dancing in the field.
It quickly changes to a close-up of Alice Paul’s face in the bath tub. Her eyes are closed and she
slowly moves her head from one side to the other. The camera then changes to a medium shot of
Wisemen and Paul laughing. The frame quickly changes to a close-up of her lips before quickly
changing back to the two of them in the same medium shot. The camera then changes back to a
close-up of Alice Paul’s lips before it shows the audience her feet grasping the faucet on the bath
tub. The next two shots are of them dancing. The frame returns to the long shot of them dancing
in the field. An extreme long shot follows and the figures are barely visible in the field where
they are dancing.

The two scenes that are interwoven among each other are very important within the film.
They show another side of Paul; in the dancing scene she is more feminine and allows herself to
be caught up and enjoy the moment with Wisemen. In the bath tub scene, it could be argued that
she is masturbating to the memory of their date. This is significant because she’s trading this
“self pleasure” for the actual partnership—but it could be argued that this is better than nothing.
Her rejection of Wiseman doesn’t mean she is “sexless,” just focused. What is important to note
is that in both scenes there is no dialog. All of what the audience sees and understands is
conveyed solely with action and facial expression.

The climax of the film shows the political powers trying to draw attention away from the
suffrage movement. Many of the women who begin to picket outside of the White House are
arrested for obstructing traffic. This is a ludicrous allegation because they were doing nothing of
the sort. The lack of due process within this judicial system is anything but fair, turning these
women once again into the subaltern of the film. Once in prison to serve their time, there is a
whole new level of being treated as a lesser person. Almost as soon as Alice Paul is arrested, she begins a hunger strike because she knows that she is not being treated fairly.

Senator Leighton’s attitude towards the women and their cause changes when he sees his wife in prison. He becomes more compassionate when he thinks that his wife has been force fed by the prison doctors. Emily slips him a piece of paper that Alice Paul wrote, and he takes the news to the press. This news unites Carrie Catt with her fellow suffragists, and she takes action to get the situation remedied. Ultimately, the bad publicity has the desired affect: it does get the suffragists out of prison and even more into the spotlight.

Their time in prison also allows for a bonding experience, for the women in the prison and other suffragists outside of prison. One of these bonds can be seen later when Carrie Catt gives up her seat to allow Alice Paul to sit down. While the women may not speak to one another, there is an understanding of what Alice Paul suffered in order to help get the vote (Angels).

In contrast to bandits, Iron Jawed Angels has a happy ending: they succeed in getting the right to vote. These women have struggled and sacrificed for the greater good of their peers and the generations to follow. Their gift is one of the greatest that could be offered to other women: the chance at equality. What Katja von Garnier has done is also quite similar. She has broken down barriers for future generations of female filmmakers. These next generations can still continue to make films with feminist undertones and messages. However, these films can, but do not always have to have a political message. They can show a woman who wants not only to have a career, but who also wants to find love and happiness.
CONCLUSION

The women’s movement, regardless of where it was, was and still is important to all women today. It is important for this generation to know what women went through in order for my generation and those to follow to have such equalities as the right to vote. Such events both in the United States and in Germany have been documented time and again. Many of the most important directors and films were made in the 1970s and 1980s when the women’s movement was a highly discussed topic. The films that were made during this time by such remarkable filmmakers as Margarethe von Trotta, Helke Sanders-Brahms, and Jutta Brückner, are very different films from present day filmmakers Katja von Garnier and Sherry Hormann.

The progression that women have made in film should be looked at beginning with the women of the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the women filmmakers who worked during the 1970s and 1980s based their films on an image of woman who was different from her contemporary counterparts and what was previous seen. Not only did the films by women filmmakers have the women as main characters, but the women were not solely housewives, mothers, or sexual objects. These films were women affirming: Women were looked at by other women from behind the camera, an important distinction in this male dominated film industry. Many of the themes in these films discussed not only the personal side, but also the political side of her story, in accordance with the 68 slogan, “the personal is political.” One need only look at the films by Margarethe von Trotta and her work to see that she brought both personal as well as political themes to her work and specifically geared her films toward the female audience. In 1996 the Goethe Institute in Vancouver called her the most important German female filmmaker: “Her films give a clear emphasis to feminine aspects: the fates of women form the clear focus of her pictures – albeit the fates of women who intervene very deliberately in political activity. She is
an unambiguous part of the tradition of the political film, which takes a topical or historical event as its ‘fuse,’ so to speak, to give a personal judgment of the state of society” (Levitin 78). This personal feel is something that could also be seen with other female filmmakers such as Helke Sanders and Ulrike Ottinger (Kaplan 106-7).

The filmmakers of today, particularly Sherry Hormann and Katja von Garnier are also making films where the woman is looked at by another woman behind the camera. However their films, particularly Hormann’s films are much different than the women filmmakers’ films of the 1970s and 1980s. It could even be commented that Hormann did not understand or missed some of the subtle hints left by her predecessors. Hormann’s films are not composed of both the personal and political the way that Dorrie’s or others films are. Irren ist männlich, in particular, could be looked at as a step backwards for women. Bettina is first and foremost a mother and housewife. While she is in charge of the situation, her power is based solely on her ability to outsmart her husband sneakily. The lengths that Bettina goes to to keep her secret from her husband make the film comedic. It truly is funny and well-done—but it is not particularly political or feminist.

When one looks at the films of Katja von Garnier, particularly bandits, the same argument could also be addressed: there is less of an emphasis on the political in her film in comparison with earlier women’s films; bandits is not made to draw attention to the plight of prisoners, as was von Trotta’s Die bleierne Zeit. However, bandits is geared more towards the female audience than Irren ist männlich is. The female has the ability to encompass roles that were traditionally dominated by males like road movies and buddy movies. Women are capable of having fun, being adventurous, and taking on characteristics associated that even to this day remain part of the male roles. The female is not dependent on the male, but only dependent on
herself and other women. The music is also an important aspect within *bandits*. Not only does it bond the women, but it allows them to express themselves and call upon each other to unite. This idea of strength and unification is important not only within the film, but is also geared toward the female audience.

By contrast, *Iron Jawed Angels* has a very obvious political message, but also combines the personal with the political. This is something very similar to the feminist films of the 1970s and 1980s. What is also closely related is the motif. One example is the coin toss, which is seen continuously throughout the film. It carries an important message, one of hope and change, like many of its predecessors.

The women in films being produced today are not necessarily the best representation: there are no women in politics, universities or corporate settings. This hopefully will come into being and send an even better political message. As long as von Garnier continues in the direction she started and influences other female directors, then it will not be long before women of this nature will be the main characters in the German film industry. All of the women in the films discussed do not embody the stereotypical roles that were once dominant, which is important. These portrayals can be both approval of where the women’s movement has taken or placed women within society, or it can be a criticism that women have not really come as far as they think they have. Women such as Katja von Garnier and Sherry Hormann have not allowed themselves or their films to fit within the definition that was previously written by males nor do they completely fit into the definition of a feminist film. Instead, these women have written their own definition and set their own standard, changing some of the expectations. The female’s ever evolving role in film continues to change positively into a woman that women in today’s society can be proud of: an image they can claim as their own.
**FILMOGRAPHY**


Levitin, Jacquelin, Judith Plessis and Valerie Raoul, eds. *Women Filmmakers:


<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0903137/>.


