

Suddenly, One Summer: *Frauen und Film* since 1974

Annette Brauerhoch

This journal is now the oldest existing feminist journal on film anywhere.¹

Berlin Film Festival, 1974. So much is certain. Not even founder Helke Sander is certain exactly when a press release announcing the arrival of the new journal, *Frauen und Film*, was circulated. Gesine Stempel has pointed out: "In those days the Berlin Film Festival took place in the summer. All you have to do is find out whether the festival of 1974 was in June or July. I still own the first issue, produced single-handedly by Helke Sander, hand-typed and held together by two paper clips. The press didn't take much notice, but amongst those present at the launch I remember Sabine Zurmühl, later editor of *Courage*, Erika Gregor, from Forum des Jungen Film and Magdalena Kemper (then and to this day radio correspondent at the Sender Freies Berlin, today called Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg). The second issue, which I'm sure you have, has reprints of the hostile review of one journalist who attended the conference. I remember it taking place in the West Berlin Europa Center half way through the festival."²

The first issues of *Frauen und Film* were written on a typewriter in the Deutsche Kinemathek office and generally designed and produced under conditions, "which would have given our male colleagues nervous breakdowns."³ Improvisation has always been a feature of the journal, often out of necessity, later advanced to a credo by Sander's slogan: "I like chaos, but I don't know whether chaos likes me." To this day, *Frauen und Film* has no office, no editorial address, not even a letterhead. It is published without academic or institutional affiliation. In 2012, however, a webpage was established.⁴ The journal started out as a quarterly, and, up to issue 27 (1981), Helke Sander was the only editor; subsequently, editorial collectives with addresses in Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Paris appear on the masthead. In the course of its existence, the journal has shifted from a quarterly to a bi-annual, annual, and then bi-yearly publication. The latest issues state, laconically under the date of publication: appearance irregular. And that is how things stand at the moment.

Frauen und Film was first distributed by the women's collective *Brot und Rosen*, went briefly on to the *Orlando Women's Press* before *Rotbuch Verlag*, a leftist publish-

er, agreed to take on the project with its 7th issue. "Although that issue was twice reprinted and sold over 3000 copies, the publishing house generally had to subsidize the printing costs and was never able to pay contributors"⁵ – conditions which have not changed over the last forty years. *Stroemfeld/Roter Stern* started publishing *Frauen und Film* in 1983 and is to be thanked for its continuing support and solidarity, as it still publishes the journal to this day.

The journal's name is partly a tribute to its North-American sister publication *Women & Film*. More important in the German context, however, is its reference to history. In the 1950s the journal *Film und Frau* was an influential women's magazine in post-war Germany and considered to be a trendsetter. Founded in 1946, it addressed fun-starved, luxury-deprived, hard-working women as consumers whose desires went beyond food and home, even if, in reality, they often still worked for sheer survival. The journal's gold letters and its depictions of style and glamour were intimately connected to the world of film stars. And yet the magazine's representation of female stardom only served to demonstrate that even actresses were "only women" working publically in film and their private kitchens alike. The magazine promoted a return to housewifery, after the emancipated war and immediate post-war years, a message that was sugarcoated with the icing of stardom brought down to the level of "everywoman."⁶ In an ironic twist, *Frauen und Film* inverted the title of this landmark magazine, which continued to exist until 1967. By reversing the original "Film and Woman" to "Women and Film," the iconic image of "woman" was replaced with a collective "women," and the gaze was re-directed from women to film. Typographical changes were programmatic, too. For the first issue, the connecting word "and" was symbolized by the upheld mirror: a sign for the female sex, signifying the spirit of battle and equal to the upturned fist. Later issues showed the title in handwriting rather than formatted typographical letters.

The short foreword to the first issue was "borrowed" from Nelly Kaplan: "At the beginning of film history women were pioneers alongside men. This is a fact mentioned by only a few film historical works. The women were quickly dispensed with. Where in film production are they?"⁷ Before developing a program to "examine the workings of a patriarchal culture in film, to recognize and define the beginnings of a feminist culture, to adopt its questions and develop them further,"⁸ *Frauen und Film* sought to provide a platform to fight "sexism in the media," which was described as not just a matter of immediate struggle: "It resides in image composition, framing, iconography" and is "present also in areas in which there are no women present, for instance the way the news is organized."⁹ From the beginning, the concern was a recovery of history, a rewriting and re-evaluation of women's contribution to film history, a re/consideration of the working conditions of women in the industry, an analysis of current film productions, and a recognition of the social relevance of film. By drawing attention to stars like Asta Nielsen, film sociologists like Emilie Altenloh, or film

critics like Malwine Rennert, *Frauen und Film* acknowledged female pioneers and at the same time sought to make up for the failure of the first women's movement of the 20th century to take account of film and cinema as their medium.

Frauen und Film grew out of the same kind of activism that had led to the first International Women's Film Seminar held in the Kino Arsenal in Berlin in 1973, an event at which, to Helke Sander's surprise, "there were already enough of us to be able to fill a whole festival with our films."¹⁰ Those women working in film, radio, and television found in the journal a forum for the fight against sexism in the film industry as well as in dominant forms of representation. Almost a sort of trade paper, it strove to examine and improve women's working conditions in the industry, to heighten visibility, as well as to create an audience for feminist films. Miriam Hansen observed: "During this first phase, film practice was part of a larger strategy to build a public sphere for feminist politics [...]."¹¹ The focus was on educational possibilities, the accessibility of technology, and the visibility of alternative film. These aims went hand in hand with the longer-reaching tasks: how to distribute and exhibit films made by women in an era when the so-called "Autorenkino" dominated German cinema. To this day, those articles in *Frauen und Film* offer important insights into production conditions for women in the 1970s; similarly, they throw light, in a sporadic and non-chronological fashion, on the history of West Germany through an examination of its film culture.

The journal's beginnings were fuelled by energy derived from feminist protest against male chauvinism in the student movement of 1968. In film terms, that is, it was against exclusion and sexism in the leftist "Berliner Arbeiterfilm" (Berlin proletariat films) and against practices in film and television that primarily supported male directors, often disregarding ideas developed by female filmmakers, and paved the way for a "New German Cinema." *Frauen und Film* took issue with film politics as well as the politics of the auteur. Hildegard Westbelt, founder of Chaos Film (1979) – a distribution company for films by women – and initiator of the first cinema for women in Berlin, "Initiative Frauen im Kino" (1977), recalls the impact the journal made upon its appearance:

I will never forget the press conference for the first issue of *Frauen und Film*. It was a hot day in June. I believe that those pages, hectographed on blue paper (and the + between *Frauen und Film* was, quite in the spirit of the times, represented by a Venus mirror) will remain the most important publication in my own personal library, [...] my initiation to being political.¹²

And filmmaker Eva Heldmann remembers:

All of a sudden there was something concerning me. I was a student interested in film. But not before the appearance of *Frauen und Film* had I found a feminist perspective in print. It was electrifying. It was visible if only in leftist

bookstores. It had unusual covers, feminist collages by Sarah Schuman. Here I found opinions, reports and statements from filmmakers and film critics alike – more often than not all in one and the same person. And a solidarity never experienced before. It was fresh, new, and present – and it was not Hollywood!¹³

In the course of its forty years of existence, *Frauen und Film* developed from a hand-typed hectographed manifesto to a journal of academic film theory. It introduced, in the 1970s, a response from female filmgoers and (initially) women who were mainly documentary filmmakers to a film cultural scene highly dominated by the so-called *Autorenfilm*. Heavily funded, *Autorenfilm* made inroads for a male-dominated auteurist cinema, the likes of Schlöndorff, Wenders, Herzog, Kluge, and Fassbinder. These names, to this day, seem more synonymous with New German Cinema than Jutta Brückner or Ula Stöckl ever were. The journal pointed to inadequacies in funding policies, reported on film festivals, promoted experimental films by women, and introduced female filmmakers. The focus was on Germany and Europe, East and West. In comparison to North American fellow travelers, analyses of the workings of patriarchy in cinema and representation were not primarily derived from Hollywood. For instance, the second issue was almost exclusively devoted to a popular film from the GDR, Heiner Carow's *DIE LEGENDE VON PAUL UND PAULA* (1973).¹⁴

Other issues of the journal examined the commercially successful new wave of male-directed “women’s films” in the late seventies (for instance no. 19, 1979), the situation of women editors in the industry (no. 9, 1976), the practice of film funding, the question of feminist criticism (what is it and what is it good for?), and questions around pornography (particularly discussing *THE STORY OF O* no. 7, 1976 and no. 30, 1981). It also kept an ongoing interest in feminist counter traditions, actresses, the female spectator, and the female cinemagoer. Issue 28 in 1981 (“Trauer muß Sappho tragen?”) presented an “avant-queer” approach to film studies and injected lesbian perspectives into the feminist discussions. For quite some time, film criticism and the desire to make feminist films went hand in hand, and women professionals, who analyzed the field of film production, history, and reception, shaped the journal. This connection between filmmakers and their critical focus on production conditions with a more theoretically informed examination and re-evaluation of film history became looser as the years progressed. Ultimately, the balance tipped more to the side of theory.

In 1983, the Berlin editors declared the journal’s end. They believed that *Frauen und Film* with its feminist goals had, in postfeminist times, outlived its function. However, the Frankfurt group – Gertrud Koch, Karola Gramann, Heide Schlüppmann – were convinced that feminist criticism was far from obsolete. They took over the journal, adding even more theory to the existing critical feminist public interventions. In a specific inflection of Frankfurt School thought, the new group

of editors not only vested greater interest in theory but also in a theoretically inflected and motivated historiography. According to a review by Miriam Hansen, "what distinguishes the journal among its international cousins [...] is its theoretical affiliation with the Frankfurt School, its eclectic and often revisionist attempt to develop a feminist approach from that tradition."¹⁵

Feminist theory's initial engagement with male-dominated cinema was thus extended to male-dominated theory; but *Frauen und Film* also engaged critically with feminism itself. Long before German universities were ready to open themselves to the academic institutionalization of film and women's studies, *Frauen und Film* adopted, as its task, the translation of texts by Anglo-Saxon feminist film scholars and their introduction to its German feminist audience. This in turn not only created a framework for defining *Frauen und Film's* own theoretical position but also provided the groundwork for a future introduction of feminist film theory into course curricula in universities across the country. As Anglo-Saxon feminist film theory was strongly influenced by French psychoanalytic thought, its introduction contributed to a critical examination, in particular, of Lacan's influence; this added a further dimension to those ideas drawn from psychoanalytic theory by Critical Theory or Jean-Paul Sartre's psychoanalytic existentialism.¹⁶

The recovery of film history was an ongoing project for *Frauen und Film* (the theme issue for instance in no. 41, 1986), but the journal's historiography was particularly concerned with the specific implications of the Nazi legacy as it extended into the film culture of the 1950s (no. 35, 1983). Furthermore, the journal provided its own take on "fascinating fascism," particularly with a very strong critique of the film historical renaissance of Leni Riefenstahl (nos. 44-45, 1988). Translations of British and American texts brought questions of genre into focus (horror in no. 49, 1990, comedy in no. 53, 1992, war films in no. 61, 2000) as well as topics like masquerade (no. 38, 1985) and masochism (no. 39, 1985). These special issues used film to analyze the social and psychological constellations at stake. The journal's editorial perspective always brought the particular inflection of the Frankfurt School tradition of thinking and (redemptive) criticism to the French-influenced Anglo-American theoretical perspective, insisting above all "upon the responsibility of the feminist critic to trace patterns of ideology even in her own fascination."¹⁷

At the time when the PorNO campaign in the US and Germany (for instance in Alice Schwarzer's journal *EMMA*) was at its height, *Frauen und Film* programmatically published a theme issue on "Sexuality in the workplace" and proclaimed in the introduction: "we are all for it."¹⁸ To contest sexual harassment does not mean that the workplace can be cleared of sexuality as such. Instead of reproducing conservative ideals of love in marriage and relationships, criticism of sex in the workplace should aim at sublating those repressed and deformed forms of sexuality that can no longer be distinguished from the sheer mechanics of

power.¹⁹ Long before the arrival of animal studies in film, issue no. 47 (1989) looked at "man, woman and animal" (citing the title of a film by Valie Export) with, amongst others, an essay on racist metonymies and animal metaphors in Fritz Hippler's *DER EWIGE JUDE* (*THE ETERNAL JEW*, 1940) as well as a look at the early films by Nell Shipman.²⁰ In the 1990s, topics included issues on fathers and daughters (no. 48, 1990), aging (nos. 50-51, 1991), ethnicity and gender (nos. 54-55, 1994 and no. 60, 1997), and extended to medial aspects of color and music (nos. 58-59, 1996). All these issues begin with one or two translations of English or French texts by feminist scholars (for instance, Anne Friedberg, Régine Mihal Friedman, Teresa de Lauretis, Tania Modleski, Mary Ann Doane, Maureen Turim, Richard Dyer) and continue with texts by members of the editorial board and other contributors, many of them recurring authors such as filmmaker theorist Noll Brinckmann, psychoanalyst Mechthild Zeul, film critic and theorist Karsten Witte, filmmaker Jutta Brückner, and many others. Throughout, the ongoing (re)examination of German film history is inflected by the critical concerns of the Frankfurt school: accepting certain aspects of cinema as a mass institution without a deterministic denouncement of mass pleasures as subject only to repressive ideology. Instead, the journal locates, within those structures, inroads for recognizing and enjoying pleasures the description of which goes beyond a mere reading against the grain and the manifestations of which are more than a fateful turning of oppression into pleasure as diagnosed in instances of female masochism.²¹ In the issue on fathers and daughters, feminist examinations of structural negations of the female gaze in cinema, for instance, which result in a form of identification which turns the female spectator into a "father-daughter" are complemented with a (re)turn to content: How does cinema in its father-daughter narrations address its own patriarchal implications? How is the restricted space left to female autonomy visualized in films like *THE HEIRESS* (William Wyler, 1949) or *CHINATOWN* (Roman Polanski, 1974)? Stories ranging from a realization of incestuous desire to the disempowerment of the patriarch can all be read as stories of cinema about itself and its libidinous relation to women. The apriority of the apparatus becomes transparent for the founding myths of (bourgeois) history.²²

The digital divide and its implications for the discipline of film and media studies on the one hand and feminism and gender studies on the other were addressed in no. 64 "The Old and the New" (2004) and no. 65 "Celluloid & Co" (2006).²³ These issues examined the relationship between "Women, Film, and Media" or "Film Studies and Media Studies," and included texts about the pragmatics of digital film technology and the relation between art and technology.

Frauen und Film became a widely read and internationally recognized film journal, particularly in the US. Some essays that first appeared in *Frauen und Film* later appeared in American journals such as *October*, *Cinema Journal*, or *New German Critique* and vice versa. The journal never acquired an academic affiliation. As the

second Frankfurt generation of editors (Annette Brauerhoch, Heike Klippel, and Renate Lippert) continue the editorial work alongside their academic positions, *Frauen und Film* provides a forum for critical views outside of – and free from – academic institutions. While the frequency of publication has decreased, the volume of each issue has increased. The politics of naming persist in an insistence on material and sociological entities, (female) spectatorship with its components of identification, fantasy, and history. This is why in 2000, *Frauen und Film* celebrated its 25th anniversary programmatically with a film festival rather than a conference, in the conviction that no theory can survive without its subject: film, cinema, and its audiences.²⁴

In 2011, with issue 66, *Frauen und Film* returned to a once central concern: sexuality. Observing that in times of “naked truth on every channel,” the emancipatory interrogation of love and sexuality that marked 1970s film cultures seems to have disappeared in contemporary cinema as much as interest in questions of sexuality from film theory, a call for papers went out to examine the state of sexuality in current film culture. Interestingly, the papers received showed an ambivalent divide between a focus on pornography and on love and romance. Sexuality, in fact, seems to have disappeared. Historically, *Frauen und Film* had focused its critical reflections on predominantly male imaginations of female sexuality in film. Questions about “emancipated sexuality” in the 1970s, and the demand that female filmmakers represent female desire on screen, expanded into questions about cinema as a place in which gender hierarchies could be undermined in the interests of female as well as male audiences. In the sexuality issue, questions about how to approach sexuality in the cinema, with its new modes of spectatorship, dispersed into an interrogation of sexuality across various media. With the enormous diversification of the ways in which images are now watched and received, the significance of the Dark Room has diminished and with it, perhaps, the role of sexuality in the cinema as “liberation,” “subversion,” utopia, or hope.

The forthcoming issue (no. 67, 2015) takes on the urgent theme of migration, on topical, theoretical, and media technological levels, operating on the assumption that there is an intrinsic connection between cinema and migration. According to guest editor Nanna Heidenreich:

Films not only show how migration is imagined but reveal how society, politics, law and the police force deal with it. Technological images give migration a form and format. The history-forming power of films and videos suggests the need to engage in film from the perspective of migration itself. Video in particular has been addressed as the medium of migration – not as a medium of representation, but of time: creating images, sounds and montages not of but from within movements of migration. Historically these movements can be seen as a form of media avant-garde – from the VCRs and video shops of

the so called “guest workers” to digital recordings by the “Harragas,” who film their passage across the Mediterranean, images which then circulate on YouTube, in music videos, in documentaries and in cinematic narratives.²⁵

The issue thus discusses migration on the “big screen,” in exhibition spaces and in “minor formats.”

Despite the general trend in which changing media landscapes and shifting relations between film and “the media” are incorporated into institutional names, *Frauen und Film* cannot imagine changing its name to *Gender and Media*.

Frauen und Film is edited by Annette Brauerhoch, Heike Klippel, Gertrud Koch, Renate Lippert, Heide Schlüpmann.