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The Audience in Mind: women audiences and film programs in 1910s Mannheim Germany

In this paper I will focus on the period of the transition from the short film program of the “cinema of attractions” to the dominance of the long feature film, i.e. from 1906-1914 as defined by Charlie Keil in his Early american cinema in transition. As Ben Brewster has argued the point of time in which the transition and the shift from one period to another is detected varies from country to country (66-68). American sources place the transition between the cinema of attractions and the cinema of narrative integration about five years earlier as for example Corinna Müller does for German film history. Brewster argues that this is more than a misunderstanding: the discrepancy lies in the kind of vantage point the different authors use: Whereas Keil for example is talking about a stylistic shift, Müller is talking about economic and institutional changes in Germany film history (which is of course linked to stylistic shifts). Therefore she places the turning point according to a change in film length, i.e. when longer feature films began to supersede the short films (66-68).

With the research presented in this paper I try to figure out why the longer feature film began to dominate the program in Germany around 1911/1912 and why it became so popular. And on the other hand how the presence of women in the cinema (the place where they first entered the public sphere on a massive scale) influenced the practice of programming. So I will deal with the relatively new topic of the cinema-program (and its structural changes) as a mode of exhibition and I will try to connect this to the role the female audience played in shaping this format. I account for a reciprocal relation between female spectators and the film industry’s local programming practice to describe the transitional period and I pose questions like: How does the female audience affect the changes of the program patterns, the modification of genres and their meaning within the structure of the program and does it finally bring about a change in the mode of reception. And on the other hand how does the cinematographical program represent and influence the female identity, and cater to women’s wishes and needs.

I suppose that there is a correlation between the emergence of a female audience and the establishment of the longer narrative film. Looking at the program, what was shown and how it was structured can give good insights in which audiences were aimed at. So if women build a major part of the audience, this firstly must have had consequences for the program and secondly one might arrive at the conclusion that the change of the programming patterns, e.i. the emerge of the *Kino-Dramen* (film drama) and the emergence of a female audience might correlate. I would like to trace and disentangle this web of correlations.

One must ask for the reasons why the early cinema, which was characterised by diversity regarding class, gender and cultural issues and which formed a kind of alternative public sphere (Hansen 228-246), was displaced by an institutionalised, state monitored and nationalised German cinema during the time of WW 1. Taking into account that this change of film forms and programming practices was not a teleological evolution, I guess “the audience” might be another useful and insightful category to explain the changes of the program. So the category of „the audience“ becomes a compliment to narrative, economic and technical influences (as explained by Müller). Besides, changes in the composition of film programs reveal emerging practices of cinema-going, a changing relation among showmen, distributors, audiences, and the city they are all part of.

The research for this article is based on two major historical sources: The first one is the sociological dissertation about the cinema audience of Imperial Germany by the German author Emilie Altenloh from the year 1914. The second selection of sources are the program ads from the cinemas of the city of Mannheim along with other information about the socio-economic structure of the city, the city where Altenloh conducted her empirical research.

Considering both, (Altenlohs study and data about Mannheim) I can compare their historical information. And consequently I can show the reciprocal relation between female spectators and the film industry’s local programming practice to describe the transitional period and its changes as revealed by the example of Mannheim.

The first German attempt to study the cinema audience: Emilie Altenloh’s “A Sociology of the Cinema and the Audience”

Emilie Altenloh was born in July 1888. She studied political economy (*Nationalökonomie*) and attended law courses in Munich, Kiel, Vienna and Heidelberg where she graduated. She was one of the first women receiving a doctoral degree at a German university. She hands in her dissertation Zur Soziologie des Kinos . Die Kino-Unternehmung und die sozialen Schichten ihrer Besucher (cited below as Altenloh 1914) with the famous sociologist Alfred

Weber in Heidelberg in July 1913. In a letter to a friend Alfred Weber talks about her as the “*Kinematographenmädels*” something like “the cinema gal”, so one might suppose that he was not convinced by the relevance of her project. Her dissertation was one of the first dissertations on film in general and the first one written by a woman. She conducted her empirical research in Mannheim with a female colleague called Else Biram, who was working about artistic education and urban consumption of art. According to Biram and to the title of films that were shown in Mannheim during the time of her survey and mentioned by Altenloh in her book, we can assume that she collected her empirical data between mid 1911 and mid 1912. So I will focus on that period, too.

While today’s film historians only recently started to label the period prior to WW I as the transitional era Altenloh herself was fully aware that she carried out her research in a period of major transformations, not only in film economy but also in the social and cultural practice of movie-going. Her study, which appeared partly in an English translation as “A sociology of cinema and the audiences” in Screen in 2001 (cited below as Altenloh 2001), is divided into two parts, the first is called “The Production”, and deals with the economic organisation of film production and the films as such. Here she talks about the developments of film techniques, about the economic organization of the film industry, about different types and genres of films and about the legal conditions and censorship. The second, and with regards to this article the more insightful, part is called “The audience”. After putting the new form of entertainment called cinema into a wider historical and cultural context, she talks about the social composition of the audience but also about the attitudes of cinema-goers towards life in general and cultural issues, which she links to cinema going in general and to their preferences regarding special films and genres. To collect the empirical data for the second part she carried out a survey by asking 2400 participants questions about frequency of cinema attendance, about favourite films and genres and favourite cinema venues. She carried out the questioning personally or through professional institutions, in schools and other organisations. Altenloh admits in her book that her data is not very complete regarding higher class people like students, intellectuals or military people, but states that the data about working class people and women are more complete and therefore allow for comparisons (Altenloh 1914, 3). With regards to the value of her exact empirical data some contemporary critics and also today’s film historians are somewhat sceptical, because of her inaccurate methodology which doesn’t comply today’s standards of doing empirical research in social science. Those critics doubt the exact proportions of her findings about the different social groups. However the value of her study is not so much based on the exact figures and proportions but it lies in the

general insights into the contemporary audiences' preferences and disposition. So all in all her study, which combines the empirical with the theoretical, is a quite unique and early example of doing empirical research on the audience of mass media and an early attempt to theorize the cinema audience. So, as the beginning of German film sociology it offers a detailed image of spectators stratification which can be taken as a good starting point for further research on early cinema audiences. (For a more detailed introduction into Altenloh's study in English cf. Hake 45-53)

By browsing to recent German literature with regards to early cinema audiences one could get the impression that it is still somehow a matter of belief whom it really consists of. Until the seventies it was stated that proletarians built the main part of the audience, but one has refrained from the thesis of early cinema as a merely proletarian amusement now. Besides workers, children are often named to be the main clientele of early cinema (cf. Müller), whereas newer inquiries relying on local studies stress that the audience was rather heterogeneous. Martin Loiperdinger for example writes: "The most significant feature of cinema-going before World War I was not its proletarian origins (however significant a proportion this represented) but its class and gender diversity." (Loiperdinger 44, cf. also Kessler/Warth) Bourgeois circles were attracted and, of course, women. Concerning the stratification of the audience Altenloh's probably most important insight is the social diversity and heterogeneity of the audience during the transitional era. As early as in 1913 she challenges the general assumption of cinema as a mainly proletarian sphere, "the cinema has stopped being exclusively the theatre of the little man", she writes (Altenloh 1914, 19). With regard to cinema class boundaries were blurred because cinema as a new leisure activity appeals especially to "modern men", as she calls them. She puts cinema in the larger context of the ongoing process of modernization which is characterized by catchwords like distraction, fragmentation, alienation. And she regards cinema as a symptom of the alteration of the cultural, the working and the leisure sphere and as the place where modernity is experienced best. She writes: "What seems to me more crucial, however, is that both the cinema and those who visit it are typical products of our times, characterized by constant preoccupation and a state of nervous restlessness." (Altenloh 2001, 257) Without explicitly using these terms, she defines the cinema audience of her time as a modern mass audience. Besides, unlike her contemporaries who often disapproved or simply neglected the presence of women in the cinema Altenloh particularly stresses the enthusiasm of women with regard to cinema. For working-class women going to the cinema quickly became a habit, "the cinema becomes an important component in the existence of these women", she writes (275).

Some of them went to the cinema once or even several times a week, even more frequently than their male counterparts. Although her inquiry in most part refrains from bourgeois worries about the dangerous cultural influence of the cinema Altenloh's tone is in some part similar to those the writers of the cinema reform movement used: She doesn't concede a real interest in films to the working class women, instead she traces back their habit of cinema-going to a certain boredom which goes along with "their comparative lack of interest in educational and political activities such as occupied the leisure time of their male counterparts" (Hansen 241). She writes: "While men might be at an election meeting, women will go to the local picture house, and will meet with their husband after the performance." (Altenloh 2001, 275). She admits that working class women can get somehow "addicted" (She uses the term *Kinosucht*) to going to the cinema but this assumption is free from those moralistic concerns that we can find the works of the predominantly male cinema reformers. She writes: "As time goes on, however, the cinema as stopgap becomes an important component in the existence of these women: they become gripped with a real enthusiasm for it." (275). Instead, Altenloh sees the benefit of cinema for working class women: In the cinema, they could get distraction from their hard everyday work in the factory, there these women "live in another world, a world of luxury and excess which makes them forget their dull daily routine." (275). Concerning their favorite leisure time activities working class women therefore offered a much more uniform picture as working class men: Going to the cinema was their favorite pastime activity.

Shop girls, secretaries and other subworkers subsumed by Altenloh into the category of the female clerical assistants were also fond of cinema. These women usually went to the better and more elegant cinemas and they liked love-stories and/or films depicting the glamour of cosmopolitan metropolis circles especially those "whose content they can relate to most easily to their own lives and circumstances"(283). In contrast to the Red Indian stories and historic drama those women doesn't show so much enthusiasm for Altenloh describes the film these women were fond of as follows: "These films' narratives usually involve the destiny of an ordinary woman who, after many misguided adventures, ends up either in moral turpitude or 'in silent happiness'" (283). And she cites a few film titles those younger women mentioned in her survey Mother's Rose, One woman's suffering, The Clerkess or Women's Destinies. According to Altenloh all the films these women liked feature emotional conflicts experienced by a woman. Therefore Asta Nielsen was extremely popular among this segment of the female audience and was passionately admired by them. (283). Altenloh traces this enthusiasm for Asta Nielsen's films back to the fact that her passionate character and the

images of guilt and ultimate destiny shown in her films correspond to an outlook on life these women and girls already had. (283)

But not only working class women appreciate cinema women from the upper classes went to the cinema, too.(Altenloh 2001, 285) They went there even more often than workers and female clerical assistants, because their time was, according to Altenloh, not limited by any occupation. For them cinema offered a good means to bring some “sensational stimuli” and some adventurous diversion into their carefree and somewhat boring everyday life, she argues. Those bourgeois women used cinema and the films like a fashion magazine, as a kind of window to the world and an intermission from shopping (285). But with regards to their favored films they shared the same taste with the previously mentioned working women.

So one could summarize that the taste of the women from all social classes Altenloh questioned was largely homogeneous. Kessler and Warth write: “Preferences, habits, pleasures and meanings do not stay within clearly demarcated class confinements but across and transcend borders to form unexpected alliances, demonstrating that class affiliation may not always be the most decisive social category determining the meaning cinema acquires for its audiences” (124). This especially true for the female segment of the audience. And to reduce it to a common denominator one could say that women from all social backgrounds liked to watch films in which conflicts of a woman’s life were displayed.

Concerning those women’s genres and the taste of the female audience of Imperial Germany’s cinema I follow the research of Heide Schlüpmann who detect a ‘secret conspiracy’ between the women’s movement and the films of Imperial Germany. In her study Unheimlichkeit des Blicks (The Uncanny Gaze) she hinted at the correlation of the female audience and the films of the beginning teens: She is of the opinion that early films are capable to incorporate a kind of female gaze, i.e. that a female point of view can be detected during the time of transition from the cinema of attraction to the narrative cinema from 1909 on to 1913. Predominantly in the so-called social dramas the female moviegoer could „see herself“, her everyday-life, her milieu and her experiences. According to Schlüpmann this great affinity is based on films, that deal with male norms, female reality and gender differences. Additional research I carried out in the trade press and especially in women’s magazines and fashion magazines like “Die Dame” (“The Lady”) and “Die Elegante Welt” (“The Elegant World”) or the fan paper “Illustrierte Kino-Woche” (“Cine-Week Illustrated”) gave proof to the thesis that the female clientele, in particular those women from the middle and upper classes who had read these magazines, were especially attracted to the cinema and that they preferred the kind of films Altenloh described. These magazines also highlighted Asta Nielsen’s status as a favored star

and the potential for identification (*Identifikationspotential*) that is inherent in the characters she portrayed..

The city of Mannheim and its cinema topography

The city of Mannheim is located in the south-west of Germany where the river Rhine and Neckar meet. Today it is primarily known for its location near to the huge chemical company of the BASF. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Mannheim underwent a massive upswing because of the ongoing process of the industrialisation. Mannheim became a real boomtown. A lot of new workers from the countryside moved to the city because of the new industries. Mannheim was connected to the railway, a big industrial harbour and many new factories especially steelworks and chemical industries were build. The industrial „reserve army” that fed the new factories mainly lived in the suburbs, near the factories. Around 1900 residential areas only for worker and their families were build there. Many of these new workers were confronted with overpopulation and housing shortage and they had to face conflict that arose therefrom. Within fifteen years, between 1885 and 1900 Mannheim’s population increased about 82 percent. And around 1910 Mannheim had around 217 000 inhabitants.

On the other hand Mannheim also had a substantial higher social class: a long-established bourgeoisie because of Mannheim’s status as a residential town for the grand duke of Baden. Compared to the working classes the members of this social segment lived in totally different world: they resided in the noble part of the city centre near the palace of the grand duke, which was clearly separated from the workers areas. Between the two areas the neighbourhood of the middle classes was located, were the petty bourgeois, the tradesmen and the craftsmen lived and worked. To sum up: Mannheim was a city with a mixed social stratification and a strong working class.

Concerning the number and locations of cinema my research confirmed the information Altenloh provided in her dissertation (cf. Altenloh 2001, 253-255). In 1911 Mannheim had twelve cinemas. Their majority, that means 7, was located in suburban areas where the industrial workers lived with their families. These cinemas were small, mostly between 50 and 200 seats, and not very comfortably equipped and in some incidences located side by side, predominantly in the thoroughfares. The inner city, which means the more bourgeois neighbourhoods with their shopping areas had 5 cinemas. Two of them were quite large and elegantly furnished and they could house from 700 up to 2000 people. They had a proper

orchestra, always tried to show the latest and most successful films and gave themselves an air of nobility. And they were mainly frequented by a walk-in patronage that went to the city center for shopping or business purposes.

According to Altenloh Mannheim's women from all classes like to attend cinema shows in those two more elegant cinemas in the inner city. The smaller suburban cinemas were frequented mainly by workers, primarily male workers, and school children, which means people from the neighborhood who lived nearby. Municipal archival records which can be found in the municipal archive often deal with incidents relating to trouble between the cinema owners and the police because of the presentation of forbidden thrilling, sexual explicit or sensational films or the presence of children in the audience.

In this article I want to focus on the inner city cinema and especially of the two bigger and more noble inner city theatres, the Union-theatre and the Saalbau theatre. The Saalbau was the biggest cinema of Mannheim and a former variety theatre and preens itself to be the "biggest and most elegant cinema in Germany". The Union-Theater was the oldest cinema of Mannheim and was owned by the Germany production company PAGU that started as a theatre chain. In an ad from 1911 it boasts his "luxurious but dignified interiors" and soon claims to be the "most elegant cinema in Germany", too. Both cinemas advertised their programmes in the local newspaper "Mannheimer Generalanzeiger" twice a week, whenever it changed. Whereas the smaller workers cinemas hardly every used the newspapers to announce their programs. But as Altenloh writes that the female moviegoers mostly went to these more elegant theatres this data will do for my purpose.

Before I continue I would like to address the issue of using cinema programs in research about early cinema: Although the program as a mode of exhibition has been an unattended topic until now, it can be very significant because developments previously thought to be autonomous on the production side (that is, films as media products), on the distribution side (which films were delivered by whom) and the reception side (exhibition and audience), converge in the concrete programs as well as in their changes. So the approach which may be called programming history is capable to transcend previous approaches, and it is able to merge different aspects regarding changes in film form and gender. The empirically substantiated analysis of the cinema program is able to supplement existing research and to provide new ways in doing research in early cinema. Another advantage is the wider perspective when looking at developments in film history (For an introduction into the program as an exhibition format cf. de Klerk). While many other researchers based their argument of the relation between women and early film on the basis of single films, the

approach of program analysis is able to mirror this correlation in its total bandwidth and is not restricted to single film events or the film production of one single country.

Cinema Programs in Mannheim during the time of Altenloh's survey, 1911-1912

Articles in the trade papers told the cinema owners that every showmen should know his audience when composing his program. F. Paul Liesegang writes in his Handbuch der praktischen Kinematographie (Handbook of practical cinematography) from 1908 : „There is no universal formula to compile a program. Above all you have to keep your audience in mind when choosing the films.” He specifies: „In an industrial city, where one mainly counts on workers you have to choose different films than in a rural town or a military base.” (231). According to that the local cinema owners tried to cater the interest of their special audience. But on the one hand attending upon the interest of their special audiences had not been so easy for local showmen in the time of the short film program because of the special distribution system then. Most of the time the theatre owners had to rent complete programs from one distributor if they didn't choose to by film themselves and rent them out again (cf. Müller 47-72 for distribution systems in early German cinema). On the other hand, of course, local showmen had a greater freedom in planning their cinema shows by choosing the musical accompaniment, adding live performances or a lecture. Furthermore they could sequence the films within a single program which could create intended and sometimes unintended effect. The adaptation of the program to a local audience became in some ways easier with the implementation of the “longer feature film”, a term used by Müller, into the short-film program around 1911. She calls these kind of films which all had a length about 1000m (like American three-reelers) “longer” feature films to distinguish them from the full-feature-length (*abendfüllend*) films. As these longer films were rented in the so-called *Monopol-System*, a German distribution system which granted exhibitors with the exclusive right to regionally show a special film rented as a *Monopolfilm* (cf. Müller 126-157). Exhibitors could now choose a single film and rent it separately from the program. If they saw that their audience liked a special group of films they certainly tried to book similar films. And as you will see most of the films we are now talking about were such *Monopolfilms*.

At the beginning of 1911 the classical *Nummernprogramm* (short film program), which showed around 12 shorts of all genres, is still prevailing in Mannheim.

But already in the first two month two special films were promoted prominently and used as teasers within the program. These two films can be considered as initial films of a new genre and precursors for the program changes. On January 28, 1911 the famous Asta Nielsen movie

Abgründe (1910, The Abyss) was released in Mannheim as the first of those so called *Monopolfilms* and with 45 minutes running time it was longer than most of the films before. In this film Asta Nielsen was playing the piano teacher Magda who falls in love with the artiste and womanizer Rudolph. Her social descent culminates in the murder of the unfaithful lover. As contemporary critics noticed this film has not only marked a turning in film economy but also in the artistic development of the film drama. It turned out to be a real smash hit in Mannheim but was contemporary banned because of the salaciousness of the so-called Goucho dance performed by Nielsen. After its re-release in Mannheim in February it was even more successful.

On February, 16, 1911 the film Die weiße Sklavin II (1911, The White Slave II), a Danish production, and the beginning of a surge of films about vice traffickers and white slavery, was shown in Mannheim. This film is considered by Altenloh as an initial film for the whole following development. She writes: „A change for the cinema program, an upswing for the whole industry was the release of the first modern sensational drama „Die weiße Sklavin“. (Altenloh 1914, 9) Although she talks about the first part of Die weiße Sklavin, the true change occurred on a massive scale with the 930 m long second part. With this film, a noticeable boom of longer films started and the changes in the program pattern started. But these two films, which marked the beginning of the surge of the so-called social dramas and *Sittendramas* are formative in another way also, as Altenloh remarks: „What is symptomatic for this new genre is the social momentum. Indeed, the affection to that is so deep, that the word social became the most common word in the ads.“ (Altenloh 1914, 9). A little later in her study she elaborates on what is exactly meant by that: “Social issues are in the focal point of the attention. These dramas usually describe a woman’s struggle between her natural, sensual instincts and the social condition she faces that contradict these instincts.”(Altenloh 2001, 259).

For the programs of Mannheim it can be stated that those social dramas, *Sittendramas*, sometimes also called sensational dramas, which all had a length of about 1000ms, and that almost all deal with the fate and fortune of women, increasingly dominate the programs. Browsing through the ads in the newspaper it becomes evident at a glance that these films were prominently advertised to attract the audience. In the ads they were presented within the *Nummernprogramm* as a special attraction and as a reason to watch that special program.

This matches up with the fact that Altenloh ascribes the success of certain programs to the dramas that were showed within. She writes: “If one looks at those programs that have proven

especially popular, this success can usually be traced to particular dramas“.(Altenloh 2001, 259)

In the summer of 1911 social, *Sitten-*, and sensational dramas became extremely popular in Mannheim and they are not missing in any program shown.

In April, 22, 1911 there is for an example the sensational drama Das gefährliche Alter (1911, A dangerous age), a drama about an elderly women still looking for love based on a popular book by Karen Michaelis. In June the films Die Morphinisten (1911, The Morphinists), „a psycho-pathological drama from modern life” as the ads says, and Auf Abwegen (1911, Gone Astray), “a modern *Sittendrama*“ were heavily advertised. In August 1911 the audience could for example watch the film Das Modell (1911, The Model, which means the girl who presents clothing in a warehouse), a film that draws a “shaking, but true picture of many metropolitan existences”. This film was very popular: The local newspaper indicates that 8736 people wanted to see this picture in the Saalbau theatre on the first day of its exhibition and surely a lot of them were women. A week later Die Ballhaus-Anna (1911, Ballroom Anna), “a demimonde drama from Berlin” as the advert says, was shown, in which a girl that has become the slave of money ruins her lover. In general “demi-monde” films became a real a fad in Mannheim. The German film Verirrte Seelen (1911, Estrayed Souls), shown in October „a realistic demi-monde drama“ was so popular that the Saalbau theatre had to prolongate it for another week.

At the end of August, for example, Roman eines Blumenmädchens (1911, Novel of a Flower Girl) by Vitascope was shown . The well-known image of flower girl recalls notions of a small-town and/or poor girl trying to earn a living by selling flowers in the streets and meeting the right but most likely wrong man in the end. In this version of the story a young innocent orphan girl falls in love with a painter, then she gets hypnotised by an evil friend of his. The painter rescues her but his father doesn’t allow him to marry her. After a lot of “emotional conflicts” as Altenloh calls it, both lovers are going to die. For the female audience of Mannheim the fate of this girl on screen came close to the experiences many of them had made before, because a lot of the female workers and servants originally came from rural areas to the big city and they knew well about the problems earning one’s living and finding the “right” guy. Let me just remark that Mannheim had an extremely high percentage of unmarried women with illegitimate children at that time. In general these films refer to current events that could have taken place this ways and they all take place in the present. Their “up-to-dateness” was thus used as an advertising point in the newspaper ads.

The trend of social drama continues in September with the Danish *Sittendrama Der Aviatiker und die Frau des Journalisten* (1911, The Pilot and the Wife of the Journalist), a jealousy drama, the German production *Gestrandet* (1911, Stranded), a “fate of life of a misunderstood woman” and the German drama *Sündige Liebe* (1911, Sinful Love), „a modern tableau of manners from the elegant world“, about a woman who loves two men and in the end is forced to commit suicide. That film was extremely popular in Mannheim and was shown in both inner city cinemas who promoted it with great efforts.

Additionally it is striking that in September the local newspaper also advertised a lecture for women with the title “Schrei nach Lebensglück” (“Scream for happiness in life”). Doesn’t that sound like a title of a social drama? And indeed Altenloh cites in her study the text of an ad for a film, called *Schrei nach Lebensglück*, (1912, Scream for happiness in life) (Altenloh 1914, 24) and on march 30, 1912 a film with this very title was shown in the Saalbau theatre in Mannheim. Although in this case the lecture didn’t borrow the title from the film (but maybe vice versa or both titles are based on a book) this occasionally happened. During that period in German film history it was common to borrow the ideas for films from other popular media, not only from literature but even more often from popular dime novels (*Kolportageliteratur*), reportages, feuilleton or other newspaper stories. These incidents, like the white slave episodes or the warehouse stories, circulated in several media products and, already popularized, were shown on screen. This small coincidence that can be found in Mannheim hints to a larger connection between those films, the everyday experience of the women of those days and the social reality of that time. It shows how well these films fit into the lives and everyday experiences of the women in the audience and how they build up a connection to them via mere the titles of the films. Altenloh regards this, too, as a reason for the popularity of cinema and assumes that the interest in cinema is not so different from the interest in printed news and weekly reports: “Certainly one major reason for this is the devotion to and immersion in the present. Film drama enters and touches people’s everyday life.” (Altenloh 2001, 258).

In 1912 the stories about the fates of adult women and young ladies, dramas from the milieu of artists, actors and the demi-monde, and of life in the big city, like *Nellys Abenteuer in der großen Stadt* (1912, Nelly’s Adventures in the big city) shown on February 13 or *Unter den Rädern der Großstadt* (1912, Under the Wheels of the Metropolis) shown June 29, are still very popular and frequently dominating the program. Stories about rich heiresses and aristocrats were often programmed, for example Danish film *Die Liebe des gnädigen Fräuleins* (1911, Love of the young Lady), „a modern tableau of manners from the elegant

world” or Ohne mütterliche Liebe (1912, Without motherly love) an Italian production and a „thrilling sensational drama from the aristocracy“ (16.7.).

In particular dramas about society circles and especially their in (night-)life in Berlin became popular: In an ad for Funken unter der Asche (1912, Fire under the Ashes), shown May, 12, 1912 one can read “a woman’s fate from Berlin West“ and “a realistic image from the elegant but worm-eaten circles of Berlin West“.

For the women in the audience those films taking place in different social milieus offered a chance to risk an undisguised look at alternative lifestyles for women especially with respect to gender relations. Films taking place in the metropolis provide women with a way to explore spaces that were normally barred to them. Along with that, different social spaces were opened up to women by films which feature images of women from different social milieus. like prostitutes, or noble ladies (cf. Hansen, Stamp).

Asta Nielsen was particularly popular in Mannheim in those days. Altenloh hints at that several times in her study. She writes that all women no matter from which social class were especially fans of Asta Nielsen and her films (Altenloh 2001, 259, 283, 285). In 1911 and 1912, too, all the films starring Asta Nielsen from Abgründe and Heißes Blut (1911, Hot Blood) at the beginning of 1911 to Kinder des Generals (1912, Children of the General) and Das Mädchen ohne Vaterland (1912, The Girl without a fatherland) at the end of 1912, were shown in Mannheim and they were heavily promoted. We can often find several big ads that exclusively hint at her films. Those ads were the biggest placed by the cinemas, and often include detailed descriptions of the film plot and images of Asta Nielsen. The long exhibiting periods of her films in which she embodied unconventional, free-spirited and very individual women, also indicate that Asta Nielsen’s films were extremely popular. According to the management of the Union-Theatre the film In dem großen Augenblick (1911, On an Important Moment) even caused a traffic jam when it was shown in September 1911. Some of her films from 1911 were even re-released in 1912 like Nachtfalter (1911, The Moth) and Abgründe. In contrast to the inner city cinemas Asta Nielsen was not at all popular among the visitors of the suburban venues. Altenloh mentions that the attendance of a program dropped below average when the film Zu tode gehetzt (1912, Harried to death) was shown (Altenloh 2001, 259).

Around 1912 there are several films, telling stories about mothers. These films with mothers as leading characters present a rather conservative image of women, a different image from that pictured in the films I presented before. As early as January, 27, 1912, a film with the title Mütter verzaget nicht (1912, Mothers don’t despond) „an affecting drama, a sad fate from the

metropolis“ with Henny Porten, was shown. It was produced by the Messter company with the aid of the “Berlin centre for the welfare of mothers and babies” and dealt with the wife of a drunkard who asked for help at this centre. On February 21. the audience could watch the French drama Der Mütter Los (1912, The Lot of Mothers) , in June there was Die Leiden einer Mutter (1912, Sufferings of a Mother) by Pathé Frères. At the end of the year a German film with the programmatic title Mama - - ! Oder Roman aus dem Leben einer Schauspielerin (1912, Mum - - ! Or A Novel from the Life of an Actress) was shown.

So, as we have seen by looking at the mere titles and the content of the longer feature films nearly all the longer feature films that dominated the programs and that were heavily advertised deal with stories of women. Sometimes ladies, sometimes poor girls, sometimes models or prostitutes, sometimes mothers; sometimes they show the problems of marriage, sometimes the problems of getting married properly, but almost all the films offered the female audience the chance to watch female attempts to lead a life of their own, to act out their love and their sexuality. Sometimes they succeed sometimes they loose, but every time they try.

So one could certainly say that in this time, that means the years 1911 and 1912, in this town, Mannheim, the local showmen tried to cater to a predominantly female audience in choosing their programs.

The image of womanhood that is exhibited in the various films differs a lot. We have society ladies, mothers and even prostitutes. Although the emancipatory potential of one single film might remain questionably and assailable, the female movie-goers generally had the chance to see that there were choices and alternatives of different female lifestyles not at least because of the program patterns. So for women from different social environments the program as such, which can combine different female images in one show, offers the chance to acquaint themselves with the lives of other women.

However, the fact that these films mainly catered to the interests of women can again affirmed by Altenloh. She states: „Films that allow members of an audience to make a connection with their own social environment, whether depicting life as it is or as they wish it could be, are most popular and allow for greater emotional identification.” (Altenloh 2001, 259) As I have shown, women could find their life as it is or as they wish it could be in the programs of the cinema in Mannheim during the years 1911/1912. So if you look at the titles and the content of the longer feature films, it gets clear why women were so attracted to *Kinodramen* and cinema in general: It offers insights into the lives of other women they never had the chance to see before. That leads us to the others sides of this relationship: to the women.

On the other hand one could assume that women had these programs in mind when they went to the cinema: Altenloh relates some statements by several women, but to avoid circular argument, I'll give some other statements from other sources that give proof to my thesis that women were especially attracted to cinema dramas. In September 1915 in the trade paper *Lichtbild-Bühne* an author called Dorothea Goebeler published an article called "Women and film". There she writes: „What would a film drama be without a woman? It couldn't exist without her, it needs her favour, as a spectator. There is no film drama, in which a woman is not playing a significant role. We can find her on the silver screen with all her virtues and weaknesses.” (26). And that's exactly what is so important for Goebeler: Unlike in the theatre drama, in a cinema drama not only the heroine is portrayed but also the quite normal woman and her everyday's fate. As she specifies: The wife of the drunkard, the sorrowful mother, the young girl with a heart full of first love, the widow and the deserted wife, or the muse of an artist. “There is no part of women's life film doesn't show.”, she says (38). The women in the audience find their lives in all these faces and emotions on the screen. But the woman in the audience not only watches the fate on screen with a distant attitude, she witnesses, follows and understands all that, because she knows it from her own experience So Goebeler concludes her article: “No wonder that the most avid devotees of cinema are women.” (38).

The fact that women noticed and acclaimed this change in the program pattern around 1911/1912 is again proven by another article with the title: „Die mondaine Frau im Lichtspielhause“ („The sophisticated lady in the cinema“) from 1912. The author Nanny Lutze is stating enthusiastically: „And in nearly all the pictures a woman is playing the leading role!” (38). And then she exclaims: „It is a piece of life; a extract, an episode – maybe!? – from our being!” (38). With regard to the social stratification of the female audience she especially stresses the importance of cinema for ladies (*mondaine Frauen*), as herself. And while Lutze describes how she turns around and watches the emotions on the faces of the women in the audience she recognizes that these longer feature films have a unifying and solidarising effect on the female audience: All women regardless to which social class they belong feel for the women and their fates on the screen, because each woman be she a worker or a sophisticated women remains a woman, a mother, a lover in the end. Each fate on screen has some connection (to say it with Altenloh's words) to their own fates, which is above all a woman's fate. But Lutze is not naïve, she recognizes that the images of women portrayed in film dramas are sometimes hyperbolic and schematic but that doesn't belittle their value for her. In this rare document written by a female hand we can observe that contemporary women were not so much concerned with cinema as means for women's

emancipation but as a means for producing solidarity among women and as a means to reassure their womanhood. So women in the audience formed a kind of alternative public sphere by sharing collective images and by watching their collective fate represented on screen. Therefore the preferences of women beyond all class stratifications were widely homogenous, as Altenloh detected.

As I have pointed out, a direct address to the female audience can be verified (at least in Mannheim). In this time of transition, the program in Mannheim catered to the interests of women in the audience and their desire to „see themselves“. The local showmen had the audience in mind when internationally produced and widely distributed films were programmed in a special location. Cinema was an integral part of women's life, and the film industry in its attempt to be profitable, catered to the needs and the interests of this segment of the audience.

So one might conclude that the program of the years 1911/1912 already hints at the fact that the acceptance of the long feature film might be achieved by a detour via the female audience. The presence of women in the audience might have – even unwillingly - helped to establish the long feature as central to the institutionalised cinema program and to institutionalise cinema as a mass practice.

So I come to the end with a short outlook on the next years of cinema and on what needs to be scrutinized: Although the change of the program patterns turned out to be positive for the female segment of the audience at the beginning, in the long-run the variety of the program was embanked by the implementation of the feature-length films. So, was the way for a consistent message, i.e. the reduction of diversity in the program and the implementation of the ideal spectator of classical cinema, paved via the female audience and their preferences? It seems as if for a short time around 1911/1913 the cinema catered to the wishes and needs of the female audience, but after that with the emergence of the *Autorenfilm* (adaption from theater plays and famous writers) and with the beginning of the war, a time when women naturally formed an important part of the audience, I suppose that a paradigm shift occurred: The female perspective of early film is displaced by an increasing orientation of the film production towards patriarchal and bourgeois norms and aesthetic standards, which tend to integrate film into the bourgeois cosmos of culture and art. This came along with a recovery of the public sphere and the effort to discipline the audience behaviour (cf. Kessler/Warth 123-124). This got down to a change of the mode of reception, i.e. from an interactive and sensual event (with open possibilities to choose in the *Nummernprogramm*) to a contemplative and more private consumption of film as we know it until the twenties. Maybe this could be

achieved more easily against the background of a female audience. And as I have pointed out, the program of the years 1911/1912 already hints to the fact that the female audience might have been the catalyst of these changes.

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