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Beyond the Habitual

Studying the gender balance in the
Nordic feature film releases of 2012

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ABSTRACT

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SUMMARY:

With the feature film releases of the Nordic countries in 2012 as a starting point, the thesis tentatively disserts the gender balance among lead roles and key positions of 98 films. A quantitative method is used for data on gender shares. The qualitative part of the study is a narrative analysis of the plot summaries. Both the quantitative and qualitative material proved gender imbalance, according to who made the films, as well as who were portrayed. Men held an average of 78% of the key positions and 64% of the lead roles. In general, women were depicted in more passive positions or were active subjects in relation to men. The dominant and active male subject are found in all discourses in the qualitative study, which may connect to the dominance of male filmmakers and the normalisation of men as both consumers and narrative protagonists.

KEYWORDS: film, culture studies, gender balance, Nordic countries, narrative analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

During the Göteborg International Film Festival (GIFF) 2014, I participated at a seminar. We were five panel members, discussing the new report *Gender Balance in the Film Industry* from the media and information centre Nordicom.¹ Different sample sets were presented, some sets showing statistics over time and some including a particular year. The Nordic countries have a global reputation as a region which has come far concerning gender equality. This, we argued, could cause a state of complacency, which may slow down or even stop continuous progress in working towards discrimination and power imbalance, caused by gender as well as age, sexuality and so forth. Our aim was to lift this agenda. My presentation consisted of a statistical pilot study which the present thesis derives from. The statistics concerned sensitive subjects and thus may seem provocative. They were meant to spark a debate and propose questions.

Obviously, different agendas flourished in the seminar hall. During the question time, a representative of the film industry queried the validity of my statistics. The aspect of the question was whether the statistical results could be classified as a ‘truth’. Regardless that the question of the accuracy of statistics will inevitably be raised, our positions are different as well as what type of answers we seek. For that reason, it is of great value to be absolutely clear about my intentions with the present thesis. It is *not* to tell an absolute truth. Trying to capture cinema as a whole, entirely including its infinite complexity, will not be possible. Still, certain signifying structures can however be unveiled with theoretical help, and thus give a deeper understanding for the importance of continuous research on power (im-)balance within cultural expressions. By managing, rather than rejecting or disparaging, former studies within the field and using them in a broader context, the wish is for the study to emphasise this deeper understanding. It may contribute by a widened academic perspective on a complex subject. A perspective, which in my opinion could be of benefit to nuance the image of cinema in a macro perspective – during one year, in one country, region or for a certain social

¹ <http://www.nordicom.gu.se/> (2014-03-10) The report can be found on http://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/medieforskning-statistik/7099_ngmf_filmseminar_giff20140129.pdf (2014-03-10)

category. With cultural studies, the aim is to further enrich and elucidate the cultural and signifying importance of cinema.²

1.2 Purpose

The objectives with the present study are to detect norms and power relations out of the empirical material; the film releases during one year. The starting point of the study is data on the releases of feature films in the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) during 2012, and plot summaries totalling of 98 films. The result is a comparing study of the Nordic countries: on the one hand a quantitative, looking at the gender balance among the key positions (director, producer and scriptwriter), related to the balance among the lead roles. On the other hand a qualitative; what is shown on the silver screen³ analysed through narrative analysis of plot summaries.

Apart from the gender distribution on key positions and in lead roles, the problem statements to be examined are as follows:

- What similarities, differences and patterns can be found in the quantitative material?
- Which discourses on gender can be deduced by themes, stereotypes and/or motives in the qualitative material, and what depictions stay in the margin?
- How can an uneven gender balance among the key positions be related to the content of the films?

Themes and stereotypes are examined qualitatively from the plot summaries. The quantitative aspect of the study adds another dimension to the culture analysis by stating who tells the story of whom, with a gender perspective. The idea is to link traditional media analysis and former analyses of the industry to the cultural studies tradition of content-centred research. The desired result of this fusion is to build bridges between different research traditions, results and methods for analysis. This, to accomplish a both broader and deeper interpretation of cinema as a very complex signifying, cultural practice, surrounded by different contexts. In a wider cultural studies perspective, the material can thus prove imbalance, norms and naturalisation in primarily a gender perspective. The theoretical approach of cultural studies implies that the context is crucial to the analysis. That means on the one hand to relate the

² The term 'cinema' implies the visual and artistic experience of watching a film, as well as the arena for it. 'Film', though, refers to a certain film as an artefact. It is also used for titles such as 'Film Theoretician' or in the term 'film industry'.

³ Silver screen is a metonym for describing the screen on which a film used to be projected in the cinema.

films to each other in a national and international context, and on the other hand as parts of signifying practices in society.

It is a reasonable assumption that role models and depictions are interrelated to gender identification, and thus are of significant importance when it comes to cinema as a medium. An analysis of the cinematic releases, based on the question of *who is telling a story about who*, is therefore of theoretical relevance. It has a scientific role to play, by bringing quantitative and qualitative empiricism and analysis together.

1.3. Limitation, Material and Methods

The methods are applied tentatively – the statistics and the material have been selected, compiled, examined and analysed with curiosity and an attempted open mind for the content and meaning of the material. The hypothesis; that men dominate the film industry both in front of and behind the camera, has been borne out in the analysis. Nevertheless, the statistics and plot summaries leave space for questions about what similarities, differences and repeated patterns, as well as ambivalences, are to be found in the material. My identity as Swedish has consequences on the Swedish bias concerning primarily theoreticians, which is discussed in paragraph 6.4.

1.3.1 Quantitative Material

From the Nordic film institutes and the Icelandic Film Centre, statistics concerning domestic film premieres in each country during 2012 have been obtained.⁴ The information concerns key positions and lead roles of each film. ‘Key positions’ refer to the triad with the main artistic influence on the production; the director, producer and scriptwriter. They can be said to control the out lines of how the story is being told. The two highest listed cast members are registered as lead roles in each film. This decision has been made to make all films somehow in fairness comparable. It is reasonable to assume that most films have more than one person in the centre of narrative, but a minority have as many as four. To count by two is thus an even, simple and reasonable number.

1.3.2. Qualitative Material

⁴ The Swedish Film Institute, <http://www.sfi.se/>, The Norwegian Film Institute, <http://www.nfi.no/>, The Danish Film institute, <http://www.dfi.dk/>, The Finnish Film Foundation, <http://ses.fi/>, Icelandic Film Centre, <http://www.icelandicfilmcentre.is/> [2014-03-24]

Plot summaries are the basis for the qualitative material. Most desirable would have been to watch and analyse all 98 films – that is though not doable within the limitations of this study. The plot summaries are retrieved from each national film institute and the Icelandic Film Centre. In lack of information, the relevant production company has been used as source.⁵

1.3.3. Quantitative Method

The statistics on key positions and lead roles are counted by ‘gender shares’. A film with two women as leads, counts as one (1) female share and zero (0) male shares. One of each sex is counted as 0,5 shares each. For the key positions, it depends on how many persons are holding each position, as it varies. Usually, one person holds each position. Even if the same person holds several functions, each key position is counted as a full share. One person on the position thus means one (1) share, two people sharing means 0,5 per person and so on.

As an example, see Figure 1.1: Iceland, with a production totalling four films, has 0,5 female shares for leads, versus 3,5 male shares. Director: 1 versus 3 shares, Producer: 0,75 versus 3,25 and Scriptwriter: 0,5 versus 3,5 shares.

Country	Leading part (shares)		Director (shares)		Producer (shares)		Scriptwriter (shares)		Number of films
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Denmark	8,5	11,5	5	15	7,5	12	3,67	16,33	20
Finland	9	17	4	22	3,5	22,5	5,5	20,5	26
Iceland	0,5	3,5	1	3	0,75	3,25	0,5	3,5	4
Norway	4,5	12,5	3	14	3,5	13,5	4,5	12,5	17
Sweden	12,5	18,5	2	29	14,83	16,17	5,66	25,34	31
Total, Nordic countries	35	63	15	83	30,08	67,42	19,83	78,17	98

Figure 1.1.

Only the domestic feature films are counted, which means no short films or documentaries. The choice of feature films only has been made to make the statistics more comparable, between films and countries. Since lead roles are part of the study, it would have been complicated if documentaries had been included. Taking support from for instance the reports

⁵ Listings of the 98 titles are to be found in the Appendix section, p. 47

from the Swedish Film Institute *Hur svårt kan det vara? (How Hard Can it Be?)*⁶ and *00-talets regidebutanter och jämställdheten (The Debuting Directors of the 2000's and Equality)*,⁷ another reason is the broader commercial, economic and audience impact of feature film rather than short film and documentary.⁸

1.3.4. Qualitative Method

To make a qualitative analysis of the plot summaries, narrative analysis is used as described by Göran Bergström and Kristina Boréus in *Textens mening och makt (Meaning and Power in Texts)*.⁹ It includes partly the components of the event, i.e. *what* is told, and partly the discursive element, i.e. *how* it is told. The term 'narrative' here implies the organising of events into a plot. The narrative regulates processes of understanding and communicates a discursive sense-making to the reader. A categorical and form-based analysis is used. This implies to focus stylistic characteristics, as well as special features and keywords, made visible by studying the structure. The wish is to outline the limits of discourses to these narratives. The method is thus to move from 'what' to 'how', in order to discover patterns, structures and sense-making.¹⁰

⁶ Hermele, Vanja (ed.): *Hur svårt kan det vara?* (Svenska filminstitutet 2004)

⁷ Svenska filminstitutet: *00-talets regidebutanter och jämställdheten* (Svenska filminstitutet 2010) p.2

⁸ All Swedish titles are translated by the author for increased perception of the contents

⁹ Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina: *Textens mening och makt* (Lund: Studentlitteratur 2012, 3rd ed.)

¹⁰ Bergström & Boréus, *Textens mening och makt*, kap 6.

2. FIELD OF RESEARCH

The aim is to reach the complexity of the subject by combining several approaches from media and cultural studies. The starting points are reports concerning the industry and media analyses from the Swedish film institute and w.i.f.t. Sweden, and a doctoral thesis deriving from cultural studies by Ingrid Lindell. Gender studies and film theory make a framework for the cultural analysis.

The present thesis is written in collaboration with Nordicom; a media information centre at the University of Gothenburg. In 2014, Nordicom prepares the upcoming twentieth anniversary of UN Women's fourth world conference on women, which took place in Beijing, 1995. The project of Nordicom within these plans is the Nordic Gender and Media Forum, collecting gender based statistics of the Nordic media industry.¹¹ The thesis thus takes its basis in issues on human rights. UN Women's conference resulted in a 'platform of action', where visual media were attributed as an important part in development of self-identities and gender equality. The conference claimed for instance that

*Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. In addition, violent and degrading or pornographic media products are also negatively affecting women and their participation in society. Programming that reinforces women's traditional roles can be equally limiting.*¹²

Nordicom aligns the attention of the anniversary of the Beijing conference via reports on media and gender balance in the Nordic countries, in different sectors such as the cinema and film industry. Cinema is included, being a widespread cultural event with significant economical and commercial power. Cinema also connects with the forming of identity as a source of possible subject or gender positions.

2.1. Stacy L. Smith on Gender Portrayals in Popular Films

American Media Researcher Stacy L. Smith has carried out extensive studies on gender presentations and portrayals on cinema and television, primarily focusing children as

¹¹ <http://www.nordicgenderandmediaforum.se/> [2014-03-24]

¹² <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/media.htm> [2014-03-24]

spectators. The research by Smith is part of the Geena Davis Institute for Gender and Media.¹³ The aim is to draw attention to the stereotyped representations of gender dominating cinema and television, and encourage a change in a positive direction coherent with UN Women's platform of action as described above. As Smith herself puts it:

*[H]eavy exposure to these skewed patterns may become so normal to audiences that they do not see the need for gender parity in the media or industry change. Future research should explore these potential linkages and the role cinematic content plays in young viewers' development.*¹⁴

The main problems shown by Smith, are how portraits of women on screen partly is characterised by stereotypes and partly of sexualisation and objectification. The prevalence of sexualising content is measured by how often characters have tight clothing or are portrayed naked or in a sexually provocative manner. The sexualisation and depiction of unrealistic body ideals were more frequent regarding teenagers and young adults.¹⁵ The repetitive female stereotypes Smith found were 'young and sexy' or alternatively 'old and domesticated'. Smith also found that girl spectators more often identify with and show appreciation for male characters, than conversely for boy spectators with female characters. This seem to devolve upon that male characters are complex and interesting to a larger extent than female characters. According to Smith, these are increasing factors, linked to the gender (im-)balance behind the camera.¹⁶ Smith has also found that the presence of women *does* make a balancing difference on the prevalence in the casts. Furthermore, sexualisation decreases when scriptwriters and/or directors are female.¹⁷ Smith thus motivates the possibilities of the positive change her research could contribute with:

There are multiple pathways to changing the nature of gender portrayals on the silver screen. The easiest, however, may be working with content creators. When

¹³ The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media is an American, research-based organisation, working to reduce stereotyping and gender imbalance within the media and entertainment industry: <http://www.seejane.org/> [2014-03-10]

¹⁴ Smith, Stacy L. et al: Gender Disparity On Screen and Behind the Camera in Family Films: http://thegeenadavisinstitute.net/downloads/FullStudy_GenderDisparityFamilyFilms.pdf (USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism) [2014-03-10]

¹⁵ Smith, Stacy L. et al. *Gender Inequality in Cinematic Content?* (USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism,

¹⁶ Smith, Stacy L. et al. *Gender Inequality in 500 Popular Films* (USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, 2013)

¹⁷ *ibid.*

*females occupy leadership positions behind the camera the number of roles for girls/women on screen increases significantly. Executives responsible for greenlighting pictures are encouraged to think about gender diversification in their hiring practices of above-the-line personnel.*¹⁸

It does not seem easy to establish more women behind the camera practically, though. This is shown via interviews with persons with economic and artistic responsibility within the audiovisual sector. Smith has found several economic connections, such as lower average budgets for films starring women, than those starring men. The answers from the respondents insinuate a generally strong conviction that men and boys have no interest in women or girls in lead roles, and that the respondents value the commercial power highly as a factor of interest. Too high, to dare change whose story is being told on cinema and television.

The interviews indicate ambivalence, due to the fact that the respondents in eight cases of ten consider that sexualised characters *do have* the ability of affecting children spectators. Still, many refer the dominating stereotyped portraits to market interests and tradition; insinuating that it is something ‘all of us’ automatically like and consider as beautiful, and thus it would not be trustworthy to change.¹⁹ Smith emphasises the connection between the key positions and the content. She asks for qualitative studies on experiences of both men and women from working on these positions.²⁰

Smith also refers to a variety of studies in the field, studying the impact of audiovisual media and acceptance of gender stereotypes, primarily among children:

*If stereotyping effects can be found in response to commercials, TV shows, and highly edited films, it becomes important to examine the role of family films that are embraced by the masses at the box office and brought into the home via [...] other models of masculine and feminine ideals.*²¹

¹⁸ Smith, Stacy L. et al: *Gender Disparity On Screen and Behind the Camera in Family Films*. 'Greenlighted' films refer to films recommended for children.

¹⁹ Smith, Stacy L, 'Sell by date? Examining the Shelf Life and Effects of Female Actors in Popular Films' p. 24-56 in (ed.) Kaufman, James C. & Simonton, Dean Keith: *The Social Science of Cinema* (Oxford University press 2014) p.39.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.47

²¹ *ibid.*, p.44

Generally, the studies point towards that consuming and receiving stereotyped, traditional gender portrayals, contribute to a repressive impact on confidence and the ability to challenge these images for the spectator. Smith's research emphasises the benefits of continuous studies on identification and representation, in relation to reception of visual narratives. The purpose in the studies of Smith has a relevance for the present thesis as well, by problematising and elucidating how gender is represented and reproduced. The extensive research performed by Smith faces shortage in the Nordic countries, and the present study is taking part in filling the void. Below, some earlier parts are outlined.

2.2. To See and Be Seen – a Comparable Study

By using empirical data to contextualise and analyse the relation to media and visual experiences in Late Modernity, the doctoral thesis by Culture and Media researcher Ingrid Lindell, *Att se och synas (To See and Be Seen)* is of significant importance for the present thesis.²² *To See and Be Seen* is a role model for the present study and the objective is to reach comparison between the two, Lindell's and the present thesis, to some extent. This is accomplished by similar methods; both the quantitative and the qualitative. The gender perspective and cultural analysis is also shared, with social and cultural context as a central function for the analysis. The material and analysis are naturally to quite different extents. Lindell examines cinema as a cultural event in both a macro and micro perspective. The interest in cultural studies of signifying practices and the contextual significance for that process, is consistently of importance in the doctoral thesis. The empirical material in the thesis consists of all films shown in Sweden during one year, 1996, in terms of all films shown on television, cinema and the Göteborg International Film Festival (GIFF). Lindell also brings a cultural studies perspective to the offer of films, by looking at reviews of the films as well as summaries in the catalogues of GIFF and the Swedish Film Institute. When it comes to content, Lindell finds prominent stereotyped images of women, as well as an evident underrepresentation of women – mainly among directors, but also according to the balance of who talks about whom. An overrepresentation hence appears, of especially films by male directors starring men. In the plot summaries, the female stereotypes emerged in terms of frequently prevalent rape or women exposed to violence. These results derive from an offer of broad, commercial forums and genres as well as art house cinema. The analysis of female

²² Lindell, Ingrid: *Att se och synas* (Göteborg: Makadam 2004)

stereotypes with basis in plot summaries, brings myths and discourses produced at the discursive field of cinema into light, which is an important aspect in the present study as well.

2.3. Focusing the Swedish Film Agreement

The reports from the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) and Women in Film and Television (w.i.f.t.) Sweden are in one sense the kind of qualitative studies on key positions that Stacy L. Smith asks for. *Män, män, män och en och annan kvinna (Men, Men, Men and the Occasional Woman)*,²³ *Hur svårt kan det vara? (How Hard Can It Be?)*,²⁴ *00-talets regidebutanter och jämställdheten (The Debuting Directors of the 2000's and Equality)*²⁵ and *Inför nästa tagning (Before the Next Shot)*²⁶ from SFI, together form a political foundation for the present study. They present voices from the film industry and consider the implementation of Swedish film politics, through mainly the Swedish film agreement, as it was formulated until 2012.²⁷ The reports discuss mostly issues of working behind the camera, but touch aspects of content as well, and claim the importance of striving for a diversity in both narratives and cast. The focus is thus signifying practices in cinema – to highlight stories and by that possess the ability to show who owns the power of storytelling, as well as who is visible on screen. The reports indicate that a paragraph on equality in a policy is a beginning of a statement, but not enough to actually *achieve* equality. Even the mentioning of quotas is opposed, and the opposing argument that 'fewer women apply for financial support' has its actual basis in a web of complex relations of different aspects of filmmaking.

Men, Men, Men and the Occasional Woman concludes that politics is an important tool to achieve a stable process of change in the film industry, in the long term. The Director and Feminist Margareta Vinterheden points out that diversity among images does matter, by highlighting who gets to be visible and has power to portray. In *How Hard Can It Be?*, Feminist Critic Vanja Hermele states that the statistics concerning gender balance look worse if the statistics on documentary, short films and children's cinema are withdrawn. Additionally, the statistics showed that applying men were given higher financial support than applying women. Aligning with Lindell (2004),²⁸ Hermele points out the essentialist

²³ Hermele, Vanja (ed.): *Män, män, män och en och annan kvinna* (Svenska filminstitutet 2002)

²⁴ Hermele, Vanja (ed.): *Hur svårt kan det vara?* (Svenska filminstitutet 2004)

²⁵ Svenska filminstitutet: *00-talets regidebutanter och jämställdheten* (Svenska filminstitutet 2010)

²⁶ Wik, Annika: *Inför nästa tagning* (Svenska filminstitutet 2012)

²⁷ At the time of writing, the film agreement of 2013 is running, for further information see the website of SFI: <http://www.sfi.se/Documents/Filmavtalet/Filmavtalet/2013%20%C3%A5rs%20filmavtal.pdf> [2014-03-10]

²⁸ Lindell: *Att se och synas* (2004)

perception of engendered female or male narratives. Hermele marks the importance of avoiding expectations for particular 'female' storytelling, since that view rather maintains prevailing hierarchies,²⁹ which also is an important point in the present thesis.

In *The Debuting Directors of the 2000's and Equality*, it is concluded that gender balance has been reached within academic education in filmmaking and cinema in Sweden. Something seems to happen on the way to becoming a director though. Men direct film with higher risk-taking financially while women, according to the report, are "very much underrepresented regarding background in film-making" concerning debuting directors.³⁰ Feature film directors are often recruited from music video-making or the commercial sector, where film-makers learn to handle big budgets and advanced technology, and male dominance prevails. Hence, a barrier before equality in the chairs of directors is revealed. *Before the Next Shot* raises the issues from the former reports and advocates continuous initiatives from primarily SFI to empower women's filmmaking. The reports found that during the period of study, films supported by SFI had a more equal gender balance in general, since men made films without support to a much larger extent than women. Considering the solid analysis and mapping of factors maintaining inequality concerning possibilities to act on the filmmaking field, based on gender, the reports can be regarded as relevant. Primarily missing in my opinion, is an intersectional approach concerning factor such as ethnicity, sexuality, disability or age.

2.4. w.i.f.t.: "The Bearer of the Norm is the Last to Discover it"³¹

The Swedish branch of w.i.f.t. has during the 2000's published several writings that discuss (in-)equality within the Swedish film industry from different points of view. The varying academic fields of theory in the writings give a good introduction to the complex contexts which surround cinema as an industry as well as a cultural event, and give width to the outlook from the perspectives of former reports. *Att göra som man brukar (Acting Out of Habit)*³² adds a philosophical approach to the industry and notes, as indicated by the title, that conscience of gender does not arrive automatically within the filmmaking business. Philosopher and Equality Consultant Eva Marks concludes that the habit reigns over decisions, and indirectly leads to discrimination in work processes.

²⁹ Hermele, Vanja (ed.): *Hur svårt kan det vara?* (Svenska filminstitutet 2004) p. 93-94

³⁰ Svenska filminstitutet: *00-talets regidebutanter och jämställdheten* (2010) p. 8

³¹ Lantz, Jenny: *Om kvalitet - synen på kvalitetsbegreppet inom filmbranschen* (wift Sverige, Stockholm 2007) p.21

³² Mark, Eva: *Att göra som man brukar: om beslutsprocesser i filmbranschen* (Stockholm: wift Sweden 2006)

Jenny Lantz, researcher in Business Management, Organisation and Leadership, uses in *Om kvalitet (On Quality)* a social-constructionist theoretical structure by imaging a socially constructed, and thereby changeable, meaning of knowledge. This view is significant for the perception of a socially constructed gender. The report summarises witnessing from an unequal industry, related to the former theme of acting habitually. The conclusion is thus; as long as the perception of life of men takes precedence when it comes to storytelling and representation politics, the offer of films remains one-sided. Similar to the studies by Smith, the conclusion concerns market interests surrounding film production and how structures are maintained in obedience to naturalise the male consumer. Lantz elucidates a connection between the quality concept and the way men's perception of life dominates in two dimensions: as decision-makers both artistically and on the economic level. The market interest is connected to the male consumer and implies a prevail of interpretation. In the view of Lantz, this prerogative belongs to men while women are stuck in the margin. Overall, the w.i.f.t. reports describe how provocative it is for those owning power to let it go.

Hence, here lies a field of various theoretical areas and scientific characteristics. The objective is to combine the broad approaches of the reports and studies. It is important in order to elucidate the broad spectrum which studies of cinema naturally concern. On the one hand, cinema is to a large extent organisation and politics, the structures behind the camera. On the other, the collective understanding of cinema is rather as a cultural artefact, event and/or entertainment. The implication of that visual product is not deniable to anyone; certainly not for cineasts, viewers and cinemagoers, nor to the filmmakers themselves. The contact between both understandings and functions of cinema are easily let go, by abandoning oneself to either the features of narrative analysis *or* organisation analysis. Somewhere, these two should be able to join together.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACH

There are several fruitful academic perspectives to join in on, including film theory, gender studies, cultural history, sociology, media studies and cultural studies. They intersect each other by methods and theoretical descent. Using them crossways hopefully gives the study an interesting and creative character.

As mentioned in the opening, the intention is not to set up in opposition or diminish the former political work. Film Theoretician Tessa Perkins comes to assistance in the argumentation, emphasising how cinema sets a cultural agenda by different ways of reflecting the world and tell stories. A theoretical perspective may thus be a tool of subversion; to understand cinema in a sociocultural context. Theory deepens the understanding of representational politics within cinema. Perkins also states that no signifying practice is completely outside of ideology.³³ A cultural studies perspective elucidates how delusive it is to let statistics stand on its own. Put in a context, though, more than a simplified ‘truth’ derives. Theoretical approach is therefore needed to reach a broader and deeper understanding for what certain statistics and/or textual information can tell, with context and intertextual connections added.

3.1. The Cultural Studies ‘Way of Doing it’

The cultural studies approach forms the theoretical foundation for the present study. This is claimed by leaning on, among others, description of cultural studies by Professor in Media and Communication Studies Johan Fornäs, as a tradition centring signifying practices and interpretations of these. Critical theory and interdisciplinary studies also take centre stage.³⁴ Lindell joins the conceptual framework of cultural studies as well, focusing the individualisation of Late Modern society, related to self identity and the active spectator,³⁵ further related to cultural expressions, cultural power in media and the repeated features of the film range.³⁶ Basically, self identity derives from signifying structures and dominating cultural expressions among what is offered.

³³ Perkins, Tessa: ‘Who (and what) is it for?’ in Gledhill, Christine & Williams, Linda (ed.): *Reinventing Film Studies* (London:Arnold 2000)

³⁴ Fornäs, Johan: *Kultur* (2012) Malmö: Liber

³⁵ See further in Giddens, Anthony: *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity 1991)

³⁶ Lindell: *Att se och synas* p.19

An early developer of the cultural studies tradition, Raymond Williams, presents in *The Long Revolution* fundamental theses on how society and culture can be studied through dissecting perspective of individuals, groups, institutions and society, related to each other and cultural processes. This shows the close connection of cultural studies to sociological studies of society via institutions and organisations. “[...] [T]he significance of any activity must be sought in terms of the whole organisation, which is more than the sum of its separable parts.”³⁷ Hence, recognition of groups in society lays the foundation for cultural studies. Culture can thus be characterised by signifying practices.³⁸ The outcome derives from the historical aspect of the individual and society, and thus how to describe and analyse culture and cultural events. The essence of this thesis is to emphasise the relationships which form the understanding of appearance, such as culture and cultural events, but also phenomena and eras. A keyword is *pattern*; discovering patterns is the beginning of a cultural analysis and along with the relationships between these patterns, unexpected identities and correspondences again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind. This presentation of cultural studies is linked to the tentative way of examining a problem or phenomenon.

An aspect of the present study is the historical context of signifying practices. That implies to propose the question *why*: Why does it matter how and why people go to the movies? Media History researcher Anne Friedberg claims that the functions of spectatorship marks Post Modernity: the ability and tendency to produce a virtual ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’, as well as the commodification of a virtual gaze. The presence of cinematic experiences, Friedberg states, causes a distorted perception of presence and self identity.³⁹ Friedberg argues that the inability to hold on to the past pervades post modernity and is beneficial to cinema as a cultural event, since cinema provides a nostalgic image of history. Friedberg and the other above described theoretical approaches provide historical background to the forthcoming analysis.

3.2. Representation, Power and Difference

Shortly, cinema can be described as communication between (the maker of) the film and the spectator. It is thus an art naturally filled with representation. This argumentation has its roots in how Film Theoretician Bill Nichols describes the way films mediate symbolic formations

³⁷ Williams, Raymond: *The Long Revolution*, [New ed.], (Broadview Press, Orchard Park, NY, 2001) p. 65

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Friedberg, Anne: *Window Shopping* (Los Angeles: University of California Press 1993) p.2

of communication, related to which context – social and historic – the film belongs and refers to. The theoretical question is; who is representing what, to whom, and why?⁴⁰ Nichols presents different theoretical approaches to seek the answer for *what* cinema is, *how* it works and *why* it affects its spectators.⁴¹ Nichols argues that visual culture is an important domain for questions on identity and differences to get activated. Film theory, according to Nichols, represents how power relations and structures for pleasure and producing of meaning are made visible in two senses.⁴²

Perkins pointed out the ideological aspect of cinema as a signifying practice, saying that representation politics indeed can strive for a change, but not the least maintain the established order.⁴³ Thus, film theory may be helpful for reflecting, examining and challenging what the audience is *assumed* to like and long for,⁴⁴ as Smith elucidates too on maintaining gender stereotypes in popular cinema and television. Cinema contributes to the circulation of meaning and it is possible to see the ways in which film plays a role in the process of negotiation; as documents which provide empirical evidence.⁴⁵ Based on her own research, Perkins argues that the significance of representation becomes more apparent for pariah groups in the margin – the ‘unrepresentable’.⁴⁶

The nestor within Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall, contributes with the input on cultural studies, as well as representation politics, that culture is all about shared meanings, connected to language in a broad sense. Language thence not necessarily consists of words and grammar but signs and symbols, together forming a ‘text’. Via representation in this system of signs, meaning is produced. In my view, cinema is a ‘cultural language’ and shared meanings in itself. Thus, meanings as well as rules, norms and conventions are created within the representational system of cinema.⁴⁷ Who tells about whom consequently moves further on to *how* and *why*. Who is telling determines how it is being told, and how it is being told also depends on who is the subject of narrative. This draws the argument towards the ‘preferred meaning’ of an image, and creates dichotomised differences through representation. A

⁴⁰ Nichols, Bill: ‘Film theory and the revolt against master narratives in (ed.) Gledhill, Christine & Williams, Linda: *Reinventing Film Studies* (London:Arnold 2000), p.43.

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.35

⁴² *ibid.* p.48

⁴³ Perkins: *Who (and what) is it for?*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.82

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.84

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.91

⁴⁷ Hall, Stuart (ed.): *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997) p. 3-5

discourse is formed, apparently connected to power. The discourse about ‘the Other’ exaggerates and simplifies a group or person, connected to a certain social category such as gender or ethnicity, which fixes the difference and thus maintains a social and symbolic order. This difference, or ‘otherification’, sets up a barrier between the normal and the deviant within the signifying practice. Hence, representation directs a power which creates a symbolic exile for the marginalised. Representation can claim a hegemony and normalise the storyteller or the observing gaze. This power balance is essential to have in mind when analysing issues of representation and visual cultures. Otherification within representation is related to stereotyping – the reducing of a person to a few traits or characteristics, which appears as fixed by nature.⁴⁸ This claims for the next theoretical approach.

3.3. Cinema and Feminism

In the present thesis, it is my choice to use ‘gender’ in favour of ‘sex’ in order to linguistically underline the difference between the biological sex and the socially constructed gender. Gender can be described as common perceptions of proper manners and attributes implied by the biological sex, as well as positions of power. This argument aligns with the term ‘gender contract’, coined by Yvonne Hirdman, Professor in Contemporary History. The term describes how men and women act out of gender relations. Since gender is under constant negotiation, the willing of the parties to accept or change affects the content of the contract. The contract creates social patterns; systems of gender, which implies the separation of genders as well as the male norm.⁴⁹

Impossible to disregard when speaking in terms of feminist theories on cinema is the 1975 essay by Film Theoretician Laura Mulvey, on spectatorship and feminist theory according to pleasure in cinema, proposing the question of who is looking and who is to be looked at.⁵⁰ Mulvey has a psychoanalytical point of view based on subject and object of gaze – but the theory is applicable on post feminist theory too, since the male norm and the naturalisation of the male gaze on women as objects are the theoretical cores in the essay. Gender and Cultural Studies researcher Jackie Stacey claims in *Star gazing* a former discrepancy between film theory and cultural studies, caused by different traditions to examine the matter of feminist

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p. 258-263

⁴⁹ Hirdman, Yvonne: ‘Genussystemet’, *Demokrati och makt i Sverige*. Maktutredningens huvudrapport, SOU 1990:44.

⁵⁰ Mulvey, Laura: ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’, *Screen* 16, 3: 6-18 (1975)

analyses of film.⁵¹ Stacey enhances cultural studies as an academic tradition with a view on the spectator as a social, independent subject, inscribed by discursive formations, and as such dependent on cultural and historical contexts.⁵² Psychoanalytical theory does however not necessarily oppose the more ethnographical methods of cultural studies.⁵³ Researcher in Modern Languages and Literatures, Teresa de Lauretis, represents in *Alice doesn't* a view which later has been criticised, but in my opinion has points of value. Namely, commercially dominant Hollywood cinema constructs and reproduces conventions within narrative, which construct a particular spectator position.⁵⁴ de Lauretis claims that hegemonic discourse on women in commercially dominant cinema contains ideological effects, whose political function contains the sexual exploitation of women as gender; the oppressed female sexuality.⁵⁵ Lindell refers to naturalisation as hegemonic control as well, by presenting a certain phenomenon (e.g. gender) as permanent, to explain the position of woman as the Other in narratives.⁵⁶ Without claiming medial manipulation, Lindell focuses cultural power and reproduced gender hierarchy in cinema.⁵⁷ Lindell also argues the abilities of spectators to both accept hegemonic values and challenge them, which is a more nuanced perspective than the one of de Lauretis. Although Stacey is dissociating from the textual analysis of spectatorship in advantage of the empirical or ethnographical, she admits this too.⁵⁸ Stacey concludes that identification depends on historical context and social changes. My view is to see the combination as fruitful, as Stacey does. This by using empery to a larger extent than dichotomised values more common within psychoanalytic theory – film theory in a cultural studies ‘way of doing it’. The present study focuses on representation, but leans on analysis of both the reproduced ideals and the power of repeating. In accordance with the conclusion of Lindell I wish to keep an open mind for the ability of spectators to receive and reflect, but even so they (we) are dependent on what is offered.

3.4. Discourse as a Complementary Tool

The theoretical approaches and terms presented above lays the foundation for the present study. The aim is to focus *what* is told and *how* it is, in the analysis. The different views

⁵¹ Stacey, Jackie: *Star gazing : Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship* (London: Routledge 1994)

⁵² *ibid.*, p.47

⁵³ For further information on psychoanalytical theory in feminist film theory, see de Lauretis, Teresa: *Alice doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1984)

⁵⁴ de Lauretis: *Alice doesn't*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.26

⁵⁶ Lindell: *Att se och synas*, p.21

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 19

⁵⁸ Stacey: *Star gazing*, p.21-23

connect through the description of cinematic releases as a discursive field. By using discourse as a term, I would like to collect the theoretical approaches to twist and turn the politics of representation in the material.

Discourse could, according to Stuart Hall, shortly be described as a ‘way of talking about’ a particular topic of practice.⁵⁹ Discursive formations define what is appropriate, sayable, visible and true in a specific discursive field such as cinema.⁶⁰ Lindell uses the term of discourse to deduce cultural anxiety and conflicting messages within discursive fields.⁶¹ This by relating ‘the little cinematic event’ to ‘the great cinematic event’.⁶² Stacey claims that discourse implies the process of reading a text in a given context. The interactive level is consequently crucial for the understanding of discourses within cultural processes, as a way of combining ethnography with psychoanalytic theory to break dichotomous thinking.⁶³

⁵⁹ For further information on discourse as a term, see Foucault, Michel: *The Discourse on Language*, appears as an appendix to the *Archaeology of Knowledge* trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 215–37

⁶⁰ Evans, Jessica & Hall, Stuart (ed.): *Visual Culture: The reader* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd 1999). s.312

⁶¹ Lindell: *Att se och synas*, p.29

⁶² *ibid*, p.41 and p. 141. Lindell explains the term 'cinematic event' as referring to the intertextuality which define the signifying practices of cinema as part of a medial landscape. This is the comprehension I relate to when using the term.

⁶³ Stacey: *Star gazing*, p.41-42

4. QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Statistics can be great tools to concretise problems related to gender imbalance and how they still remain in the film industry as well as in society. The shortest version of the quantitative conclusion is thus simply that men make film about men to a larger extent than vice versa. Not only do men tell stories about mostly men – stories about women are also told more often by men, than women. Here, it is again important not to fall aside to essentialist or deterministic terms. Women do not necessarily tell more ‘true’ stories about women than men due to biological sex, in general. But, when seeing such a bias on the behalf of men it is close at hand to assume that there is also a bias in the stories being told. It implies an unequal culture in film-making and implicitly suggests the assumption that stories by men as being more interesting and top-grossing than stories by women, just as Smith has concluded.

Since the thesis inscribes itself to the cultural studies tradition, one of the most important objectives is to underline cinema as an industry surrounded by different contexts and parameters and their effects on both spectators and filmmakers. Signifying practices in cinema could obviously be analysed by more variables than lead roles and key positions, such as posters, average ratings, marketing, country of origin, narrative, semiotics, target group or genre – for example. Analysing all films released in 2012 can therefore implicate many aspects and contents, why the context is significant.

The quantitative study is presented through graphic illustrations of the key findings within the statistical material. Starting with the Nordic countries in general, an overview is proposed of the gender balance among key positions and lead roles. Further, the variables are set against each other in terms of dissecting to what extent male directors, producers and scriptwriters have made films with men in lead roles, and conversely concerning women in lead roles. After the graphical presentation, the data is analysed and discussed from different points of view. Illustrations from the field of research presented in chapter two are used as comparison and subject of discussion.

4.1. Presenting the Statistics

The gender share system is converted to percentile shares to make it more readable. The total amount of shares for each country, function by function is visible in Figure 1.1, see paragraph

1.3.3.

It is problematic to collect this type of data, since films can be major or minor productions for each country. The statistics are however based on the listings of feature films which are major productions from the national film institutes and the Icelandic Film Centre. Sweden has the highest number of films (31) and is somehow comparable with Denmark (20), Finland (26) and Norway (17). Iceland, however, has a smaller production of four (4) films which in a sense makes their statistics uneven in comparison.

4.2. Analysing and Considering the Results

4.2.1. Key positions and lead roles, percentage

Notably, Sweden has the lowest amount of female directors for feature films, even though the shares for producers are almost completely even. The other countries have more similar shares on all positions, with an average of about 80% men and 20% women on all three key positions.

Country	Leading part		Director		Producer		Scriptwriter		Number of films
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Denmark	43%	58%	25%	75%	38%	60%	18%	82%	20
Finland	35%	65%	15%	85%	13%	87%	21%	79%	26
Iceland	13%	88%	25%	75%	19%	81%	13%	88%	4
Norway	26%	74%	18%	82%	21%	79%	26%	74%	17
Sweden	40%	60%	6%	94%	48%	52%	18%	82%	31
Total, Nordic countries	36%	64%	15%	85%	31%	69%	20%	80%	98

Figure 2.1.

4.2.2. Same gender on lead and key positions, one by one.

The graphic shows to what extent films had a male director (Figure 2.2.), producer (Figure 2.3.) or scriptwriter (Figure 2.4) in combination with two male lead roles (red columns). This is shown in relation to the levels for women on each key position, as well of both lead roles (blue columns). By showing the statistics together, the male dominance according to who talks about whom, is remarkable. Neither Iceland nor Norway have any female key position ‘telling a story’ about two women in the top cast, compared to around 75 % and 40 % of films with any male key position telling a story of two leading men.

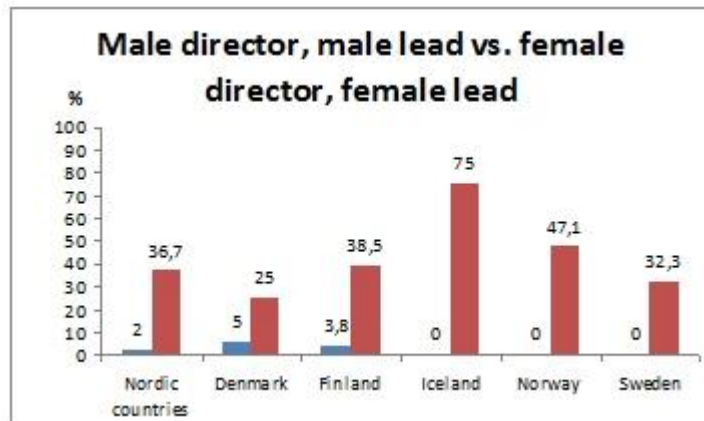


Figure 2.2.

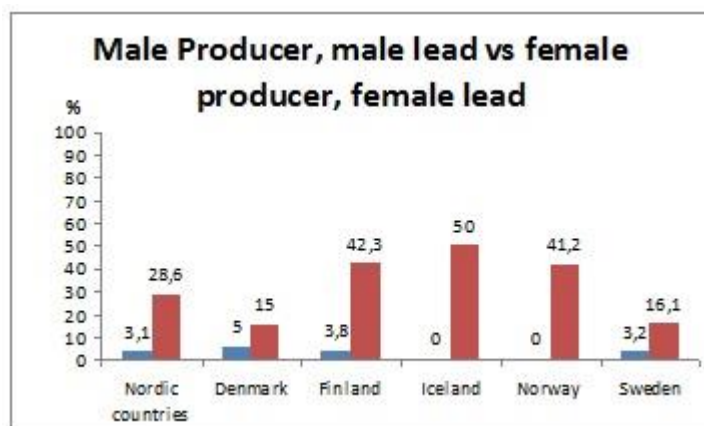


Figure 2.3.

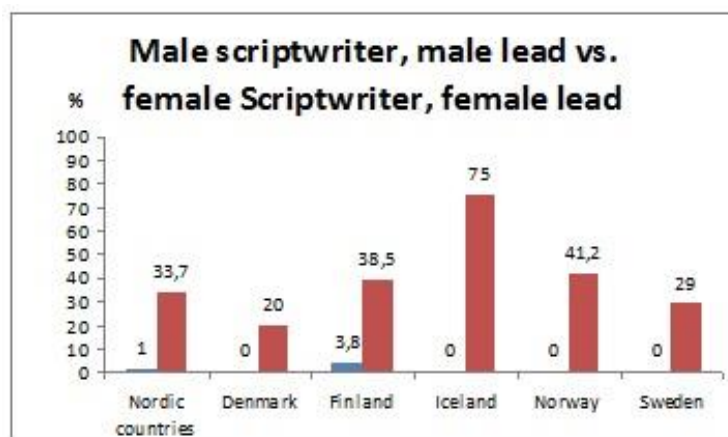


Figure 2.4.

4.2.3. Same gender on all positions.

It may seem picky to study such a needle's eye as total dominance of one gender on all three key positions and *two* lead roles. When the numbers occur, however, it is in a different light. Namely, 26 out of 98 films are dominated by men on all five positions (Figure 2.5, red

columns). Conversely for women is one (1) film (Figure 2.6, red columns), visible as 3,8 % of the production in Finland – that is the one and only film.⁶⁴ The result is consequently 26 % against 1%. The context thus plays the leading role in these statistics. However, comparing with Figures 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4, it is visible that Finland did not have any other film where a woman on *any* of the key positions ‘told a story’ on two female lead roles.



Figure 2.5.

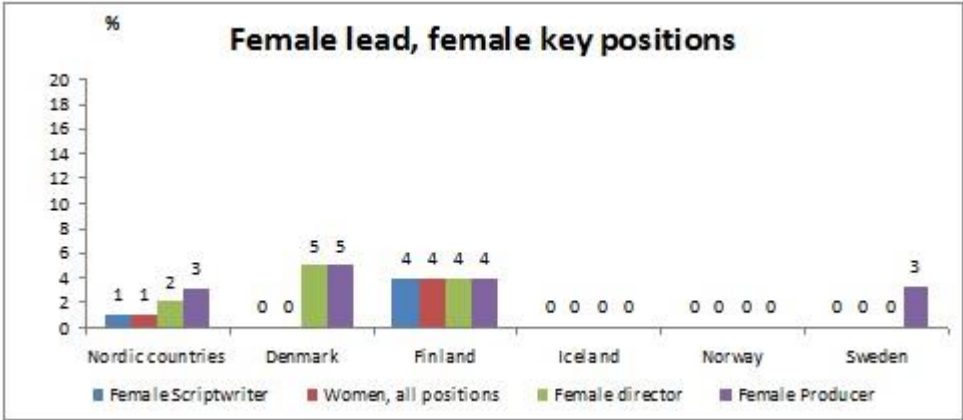


Figure 2.6.

4.3. The Paradox of the Producer

Gender expert Moa Elf Karlén emphasises in the w.i.f.t. report *Acting Out of Habit* the significant function of the producer in the process towards gender balance and equality in the film industry, based on the power of putting the film team together and setting the wages.⁶⁵ Among the Swedish film releases in 2012, six years after the analysis by Elf Karlén was

⁶⁴ This very film is *Tähtitaivas talon yllä/Stars above*. Director and scriptwriter: Saara Cantell. Finland 2012. Pystymetsä Oy

⁶⁵ Elf Karlén, Moa in Marks, Eva: *Att göra som man brukar : om beslutsprocesser i filmbranschen* (Stockholm: wift Sweden 2006), p.61

published, a gender balance has actually been obtained among producers (Figure 2.1), but paradoxically enough it does not seem to have affected the statistics of the directors. Without a bigger time range it is hard to draw any further conclusions than the contradiction in such a majority of directors being men in 2012. There are several possibilities for analysing the imbalance, such as the problems mentioned in *The Debuting Directors of the 2000's and Equality*, on recruiting of directors. According to the report, men dominate other parts of the film industry, such as commercials, and have experiences of other positions in film production to a larger extent than women, which facilitates the step over to the chair of the director at a feature film or films with bigger risk-taking.⁶⁶ The imbalance between producers and directors could imply different catchment areas, and thus should be put to further analysis.

4.4. Perspective Over Time

The narrow time range is a significant factor for the study. The material consists of film releases during one year; films which have been under production and given financial support during different periods of time. Consequently, they have been affected differently by gender balance work processes and other political incentives. This aspect must not be ignored. It can however be emphasised that the average balance in all countries, both separately and in general, follows a very similar pattern with little variation. In fact, the balance between men and women on the key positions is strikingly often around an 80/20-share distribution, by percentage. The exceptions are producers in Finland and Sweden, for the better, and directors in Sweden, for the worse. Despite the absent time perspective, the Nordic countries have had significantly similar distribution. A bit too similar to be a coincidence. In addition, the difference within the distribution of producers in Finland and Sweden is still on the behalf of men, not to mention the distribution of Swedish directors. The conclusion therefore still has a clear point.

4.5. Economic Aspects – Risk-taking and Commercial Impact

Hermele emphasises in *How Hard Can it Be?* that in 2004, there still had never been a predominant distribution of women as feature filmmakers in Sweden, which is the type of film with the most money circulating. This background is partly the reason for involving only feature films in the present study. The statistics can consequently not be compensated by higher levels of women in commercially weaker genres such as documentary or short film.

⁶⁶ Svenska filminstitutet: *00-talets regidebutanter*, p.9

Feature films dominate the releases and men dominate feature film. This aspect is also raised by Doctor in Political Science, Maria Jansson, in the w.i.f.t. report *The Fast Track*.⁶⁷

The connection with different pathways to the chair of the director has been mentioned above. It is a key position where men have benefits from experience of film-making positions to a larger extent than women, even though the higher education, at least in Sweden, has reached balanced levels. Thence, it is not only about educational quotas, but undeniably the economic and financial factor as well, since different films reach out in varying magnitudes. The economical structures can also not be neglected. Structural problems in receiving money has also been emphasised by Hermele in *How Hard Can it Be?* and Smith, who both see a pattern with the naturalised male consumer and the naturalisation of men both working in film industry and as lead roles. Structures thus may hinder the diversity of stories being told and mediated, if women keep on being shunted aside and make productions with lower budgets than men.

4.6. Summing Up and Looking Ahead

Both *How hard can it be?* and *To see and be seen* were published in 2004, ten years before the present thesis. They introduce similar statistics, both in range and levels of gender imbalance. The main difference of content in my statistics is the counting-in of three key positions, to avoid any exaggerative venerating of directors. A retrospective thought has been the possibility of including cinematographers, to get the aesthetic perspective of the cinematic gaze. There are of course many ways in which the statistics could have included more details or analysed more variables, in a higher level of complexity. A study over time could provide a different perspective on the results, but the male to female ratio on each position in the distribution of 2012 is 'true' due to its context. The mentioned conditions are caused by the limited capacity of a bachelor thesis. In a widened covering, it could however be rewarding to examine a development over time, including the same variables.

If women are becoming increasingly space-taking and creatively daring in film-making, and increase in number of making short films, the numbers of women making feature films will increase too, in a close future. Analyses until now, however, indicate a barrier between the

⁶⁷ Jansson, Maria: *The Fast Track: om vägar till jämställdheten i filmbranschen* (Stockholm: wift Sweden 2011) p.62

world of short film and the one of feature film. The latter seem harder for women to get through to than men. It could be caused by the socio-cultural atmosphere within the industry, or it could be the trap of traditional gender roles within family formation that declines the increase of female filmmakers.

Cinema as a phenomenon differs on several levels from other art forms. What fascinate and involve spectators as well as film-makers is perhaps the unique mixture of former existing art forms within cinema. Acting and theatre; literature, poetry and language; painting, performance and architecture; music and sound effects; the performing body and dance; all united in the visual experience and the virtual, mobile gaze. Cinema is a place for nostalgia, fantasy, ideals and escapism, as argued by Friedberg.⁶⁸ Apart from these complex artistic contexts, cinema is also an arena for new technology. At the start, the very possibility to show moving pictures, and onwards; contemporary 3D technology, visual effects and (computerised) animation. The fusion of all these features and dimensions creates a considerable labour market and is consequently a major economic factor. Cinema, and mainly commercial features, consists of projects with budgets in sizes of big to enormous. These three factors – the artistic, the technological and the economic – interact within complex social and historical contexts, and complicate a precise statistical analysis. To ‘count heads’ on both key positions and lead roles, does not capture all these complex connections. It does make available, however, the general structures which the film industry consists of. The statistics thus bind together a geographical region of five countries, close to one another geographically and culturally.

Hence, the structures introduced above lead to a wider and deeper look at the content. In order to do this, the perspective on cinema as fusion of arts and complex signifying practice, connected to the hard working artists and team members as well as to the pop corn munching spectator at home or at the movies, is crucial for the qualitative study. The narrative analysis examines an aspect of content in the films released in 2012. The plot summaries are where representation is to be examined in the present thesis, and the area of the macro as well as micro perspective on the depicted gender positions.

⁶⁸ Friedberg: *Window Shopping*

5. QUALITATIVE STUDY

The interesting aspect of a qualitative analysis of the public plot summaries, is how the supposedly ‘neutral’ description is constituted in catalogued texts on the film plots.⁶⁹ The plot summaries are not reviews, but descriptions with a neutral approach, where the plot is summed up and the question about quality is absent. It should be emphasised, though, that the texts have a marketing and interest-waking purpose. The feminist discussions of Lindell, de Lauretis and Stacey are important tools in dissecting the material qualitatively, especially read intertextual. With a collective basis in Mulvey's essay on the male gaze, the discussion may help to unveil the hegemonic control and naturalisation within the material. From the cultural studies point of view, it is useful to experience the normal and deviant in this way. Using psychoanalytic tools in order to regard the positions of subject and object, as Stacey and Lindell, and at the same time bring a tentative approach and a view of the spectator as active, has been significant to the analysis and the way of addressing the material. The approach of Stacey and Lindell also tally with the arguing of Perkins that cinema never could stay completely outside ideology. That is the core and purpose of this study.

The actual conditions for the production of the plot summaries have certainly differed. The texts may have been written early or late in the production. Who wrote, and how, may depend on the dignity and limitations of the production – in a film with extensive budget proportions, there might be plenty of time to write and rewrite the plot summaries for an entire PR unit. In smaller productions, though, the plot summary might be a sideline for a team under heavy time and budget pressure. All plot summaries, however, have a similar structure, consisting of a structured plot and abstract, often including some kind of complication of the narrative. Most summaries have the length of about 400 characters. The gender of the characters has never been presumed. The analysis is based on clear facts in the texts, which sometimes have left gaps. To explain these patterns and subject positions, the analysis is presented via discourses and counter discourses.

Referring to Williams way of laying the foundation of culture studies, the analysis has its focus on patterns within the empiric material of the 98 plot summaries. Set independently from the actual cinematic narrative, the plot summaries are available for all who seeks information about the film. Often, it is the same or similar text wherever information about

⁶⁹ In the *Appendix* section, p.45, three plot summaries are presented as examples out of the material.

the film is available. Via these few lines, a feature film is supposed to be summed up in an intelligible and interesting way. There lies also the point of interest for an analysis in cultural studies – how contexts surround all signifying practices. The analysis of the narratives focuses how gender is produced, which means what narrative features and characters are highlighted, and *how*. The cinematic quality or coherence with the plot summaries are not at all evaluated. It is absolutely significant to bring this understanding to the reading and analysis. The cultural studies point of view puts its interest to these plot summaries from a macro perspective, the 2012 ‘cinematic event’ in the Nordic countries. This structure is supposed to complement the numerical and statistical facts which were presented earlier in the thesis.

5.1. The Film Releases of 2012 at a Macro Level: a Discursive Field

The perspective of the analysis is to regard the film releases as a discursive field, to study how gender is ‘spoken of’. The main questions for the analysis are how power and order are maintained by hegemonic patterns, how difference is created and what counter discourses can be found. These questions refer to on the one hand dominating discourses within the narratives, on the other whether counter discourses can be found, and in that case how they challenge or resist the dominating pattern. A good help is the presentation by Lindell of ‘commutation tests’, which imply to hypothetically change the gender of a certain character to sense to what extent the epithets are engendered and thereby deduce whether the characteristics are gender-bound.⁷⁰ Finding what representation is missing or who stays in the margin is facilitated by this method. My definition of counter discourse is as a challenge of the norm and the hegemonic pattern in the material. It is however important to emphasise that a counter discourse might just as well end up in a new stereotyping manner. A general observation of the material is that the counter discourses often challenge a glorified or entirely positive, stereotyped gender position. Even so, the counter discourses may contain an ambivalence or an ambivalent area; even though they read the dominant discourse ‘against the grain’, the challenging of hegemony does not always imply a favour for the one(-s) in the margin, or a step forward when it comes to diversity in (gender) representation.

The objective is to study what is said about gender, and how, through narratives. By using the term gender contract, coined by Hirdman, negotiations and power positions are examined. This by proposing questions to the material such as how gender is spoken about; what stories

⁷⁰ Lindell: *Att se och synas*, p.124

on gender can be found in different perspectives; how characters, features, actions and conceptions are engendered and what patterns may be interpreted. The intertextual connections between the texts are matters of interest. The intention with the theoretical perspective is to give a wide and broad comprehension of the film releases, where patterns are presented in order to introduce representation politics within signifying practices.

5.2. General Discourses on Gender

Apart from specific narratives and portrayals, general patterns occur concerning the gender positions in the material. It has however soon appeared that women significantly more often are put in the margin than men in the plot summaries. An illustration of this is the way men are more frequently mentioned by name and as active subjects. Based on patterns in the material, the typical plot is roughly of a man fighting for a good cause and/or battle over a woman. Men are to a larger extent depicted as active subjects, which correlates with the statistical results saying that 64% of the lead roles in the Nordic films are played by men (Figure 2.1, see paragraph 2.2.1). Included in this pattern is furthermore that women to a significant extent are included as passive objects only to complicate the narrative (for the male subject). Every so often it means that a woman stays in the periphery, usually as a kind of trophy for a man to win. Quite often, this rivalry is between an implied 'good' man, who thereby is said to deserve the woman, and a 'bad' man, who in several cases unduly has 'stolen' the object of desire. Consequently the hegemonic control places the woman in an objectified, often sexualised, margin where she appears as a token in a game to facilitate the actions of the man or the men.

This type of analysis may tend to focus differences rather than similarities within the representations. As a help to nuance this and embed the analysis on numerical facts the outspoken professions of both men and women have been noted, but only concerning professions explicitly associated with a gendered person. It becomes apparent that women and men indeed share some professions; for instance journalist, teacher and police. Significant differences are however visible as well, such as the male domination of most uniform professions and the criminal sphere. The female domain is somehow more varied, but with a slight excess on the visual and physical professions: several dance teachers appear as well as hostesses, prostitutes and a sex slave. Thus, the conclusion remains: women are consistently

prevalent objects of desire and infatuation for rival male characters.⁷¹

5.3. Protagonists and Anti-heroes – the Implementation of the Gender Contract

Generally, concerning gender positions, the subject positions of men are undoubtedly more prevalent and the gender positions of women are predominantly in the margin. Some subject positions seem engendered, ‘coded’ to one of the sexes, in the material. Since the subject positions often are obvious, so are the positions in the margin. The actors in the margin are often present via women as objects of desire or as parents with more or less outspoken demands on their sons and daughters. These actors are included in order to move the narrative forward, as narrative ‘tools’ for the main subject positions. This could be illustrated by growing up, battle or struggle, which is described in forthcoming paragraphs.

One of the most common subject positions in the material is the classical archetype of the hero. In several narratives a hero figures clearly. A heavy majority of them are men. The roles of the heroes are present in film series such as *Hamilton* (Sweden), *Vares* (Finland) or *Varg Veum* (Norway), where the narratives revolve around important missions accomplished by the hero protagonist. The role often implies a struggle against an antagonist which may be a rival in a love story, the criminal world or lack of freedom, illustrated by e.g. childhood. The hero is the hub of the narrative as an obvious and reasonable problem-solver. In just a few lines, several plot summaries in short provide the story of ‘the perfect man’. An extreme example of this in the material is *Kon-tiki* (Norway),⁷² a film which appears as a potential subject of a thesis in itself, on hero discourses as a topic. The biographical main character is Thor Heyerdahl, a role model for a most archetypical hero. Heyerdahl is depicted as a “handsome and charismatic figure” who appears as a “natural leader” and through his Kon-tiki project, “sacrificed everything, even his marriage”. In a plot summary five times of the average, it is clearly a stereotyped hero who works against all odds by “proving his theory by sailing the legendary voyage himself”. The project is a “quest for truth”, built on “sheer willpower”, which makes Heyerdahl to an explicit “popular hero across the world”. The narrative is wound up with the epic addition that Heyerdahl's “ideas and achievements continue to

⁷¹ The professions I have noted are, without particular order, for men: soldier, businessman, pensioner, police, researcher, rock star, stripper, officer, music journalist, tango king, football player, photographer, priest, film-maker, farmer, thief, robber, assassin, criminal, king, salesman, poet, estate agent, craftsman, pilot, editor, career coach, writer. For women: dancing teacher, police, journalist, researchers' assistant, nurse, TV hostess, prostitute, communications officer, sex slave, marketing professional, AA group leader, teacher, priest, physiologist, hair dresser, camping hostess, queen, farmer, surgeon, model, editor.

⁷² *Kon-tiki*. Directors: Joakim Rønning & Espen Sandberg. Norway 2012. Recorded Picture Company

inspire”, and is connected to a cliché philosophy: “stand up for what you believe in”. The narrative includes all elements to build up the myth about this man to the proportion of a national hero. The plot summary is a textbook example on how a character is heightened to the skies in a way no female subject gets even close to in the material.

A female equivalent to the protagonist is however to be found in the children's film *Ella ja kaverit/Ella and friends* (Finland),⁷³ where the main character is in the centre of a group trying to save their school from closure. Thus, the cooperation within the group is more centred than in most narratives concerning male heroes. Another female equivalent is found in *Nobels testamente/Nobel's last will* (Sweden),⁷⁴ where the main character is attributed with a sharp intellect and good ability of solving problems in the same way as for instance Carl Hamilton in the *Hamilton*-series (Sweden).

The discourse of the hero exaggerates individual strength, independence, reason and working for a good cause against all odds. The counter discourse may thus be to draw this individual confidence to its parody extreme; the anti-hero. A female anti-hero figures in *Äta sova dö/Eat Sleep Die* (Sweden),⁷⁵ in which the lead role maintains a stubborn struggle against the directives of society. Her appearance is not a perfect or successful character, but an underdog determined to succeed. Moreover, the narrative is one out of few in which a parent is portrayed without demands or dominance over his or her son or daughter. A male anti-hero figures in *Hassel – privatspanarna/Roland Hassel* (Sweden),⁷⁶ where the anti-hero cannot let go of his former profession but keeps on struggling with a murder mystery, parallel along with personal trouble and ageing. Challenging for the otherwise often one-dimensional portrayals of gender are the vulnerable gender roles which can be sensed in some narratives. It is a counter discourse included in the persona of the anti-heroes, especially the male anti-heroes since the archetype of a hero is a man. These vulnerable gender roles are also mentioned by Professor in Literature Anders Öhman in the genealogical study *Populärlitteratur (Popular literature)*, from the perspective of changing positions in the ‘whodunit-literature’.⁷⁷ From that point of view it is possible to interpret these counter

⁷³ *Ella ja kaverit/Ella and friends*. Director:Taneli Mustonen. Finland 2012. Snapper Films Oy

⁷⁴ *Nobels testamente/Nobel's last will*. Director: Peter Flinth. Sweden 2012. Yellowbird Films

⁷⁵ *Äta sova dö/Eat Sleep Die*. Director and scriptwriter: Gabriela Pichler. Sweden 2012. Anagram produktion

⁷⁶ *Hassel – privatspanarna/Roland Hassel*. Director and scriptwriter: Måns Månsson. Sweden 2012. Anagram produktion

⁷⁷ Öhman, Anders *Populärlitteratur: de populära genrernas estetik och historia* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2002) p.45

discourses as a tendency in Late Modernity, including heroes who embrace the traditionally female manners. Öhman illustrates his example with love or emotional troubles as well as family conflicts, which are elements found in the plot summary of *Roland Hassel*. Another counter discourse, mentioned by Öhman, is how female lead roles abandon personal trouble in favour of the urge to affirm their professional competencies, also in ‘whodunit-literature’, which Öhman argues as a type of measure for societal changes. This movement is not as clear in my material, but somehow visible in for instance the plot of *Nobels Testamente/Nobel's last will* (Sweden), with the female main character Annika Bengtzon. Men with broken hearts are more frequent, though, where *Roland Hassel* is the best illustration to cohere with the observations by Öhman. Broken hearts among men are emerging several times accompanied by expressions of jealousy or obsession, as in *Jävla pojkar/Bloody boys* (Sweden)⁷⁸ or *Ja saapuu oikea yö/Hush* (Finland).⁷⁹ In these narratives, the ambivalent area is made visible and problematised from the storyteller's point of view: by introducing habit-breaking elements in the depiction of male characters, and problematise the possibility for men to deal with these personal troubles.

Furthermore, the gender contract gets visible in the narratives overall by the fact that men to a larger extent than women are portrayed as having a choice as active subjects. This emerges in different ways within all the discourses gone through in the forthcoming paragraphs. Difference and hierarchies are, from a gender perspective, portrayed most clearly through active subject or passive object positions. Female characters are often included as desired, passively depicted objects for one or more male subjects. In these portrayals a frequent dimension of contest is found between two male rivals. Illustrations of this are the summaries of *Mammas pojkar/Metal Brothers* (Sweden)⁸⁰ and *Hulluna Saraan/Love and other troubles* (Finland),⁸¹ which both depict the infatuation of two male family members to a female dancing teacher. *Marco Macaco/Marco Macaco – Let's go bananas!* (Denmark),⁸² *Kulman Pojat/Fanatics*⁸³ and *Miss Farkku Suomi/Miss Blue Jeans* (Finland)⁸⁴ depict the jealousy of a protagonist when the person he is in love with chooses the ‘wrong’ guy. The one-dimensional

⁷⁸ *Jävla pojkar/Bloody boys*. Director and scriptwriter: Shaker K Taher. Sweden 2012. Shake Film

⁷⁹ *Ja saapuu oikea yö/Hush*. Director: Jyri Kähönen. Finland 2012. Helsinki Filmi Oy

⁸⁰ *Mammas pojkar/Metal Brothers*. Director and scriptwriter: Ulf Malmros. Sweden 2012. BOB Film Sweden AB

⁸¹ *Hulluna Saraan/Love and other troubles*. Director and scriptwriter: Samuli Valkama. Finland 2012. Bronson Club

⁸² *Marco Macaco/Marco Macaco – Let's go bananas!*. Director and scriptwriter: Jan Rahbeck. Denmark 2012. Nice Ninja Productions

⁸³ *Kulman Pojat/Fanatics*. Director and scriptwriter: Teppo Airaksinen. Finland 2012. Bronson Club

⁸⁴ *Miss Farkku Suomi/Miss Blue Jeans*. Director and scriptwriter: Matti Kinnunen. Finland 2012. Periferia Productions Ky

depiction of women is problematic, as property or tokens in a game subordinate to men as the active, independent and unbound subject. The primary theme in the plot summaries is the male struggle of the protagonist, where the woman is the ‘reward’.

There is an obvious lack of diversity in the plots, especially when it comes to female subjects. Frequently, active women relate to men in their vicinity. Seldom by rivalry or contest, which as mentioned is often the case for male protagonists. The female characters are rather depicted as dependent on men by their side. An illustration of this is *Frost* (Iceland)⁸⁵ or *En kongelig affære/A royal affair* (Denmark),⁸⁶ where heterosexual couples act in a joint purpose and/or struggle against evil powers together. Another example is *Marie Krøyer/The Passion of Marie Krøyer* (Denmark),⁸⁷ where the plot centres around a female lead role, but her development consists in leaving an unhappy marriage in favour for a new relation to a man. Even in a film such as *Tähtitaivas talon yllä/Stars Above* (Finland), including women both behind and in front of the camera, the plot describes women who clearly relate their lives and actions to men. All three women portrayed as lead roles and subjects moving the plot forward are portrayed as dependent on relations to men. Clearly, to let women perform as lead roles may ultimately be a counter discourse of importance since most plots offer male-dominated narratives. Nevertheless, the plots present an overall image of women as more likely to achieve happiness and perform active, reasonable actions with a man by her side, to complement her and make her happy. It is close at hand to adduce the classical dichotomy of nature and culture to illustrate how this narrative distinguish the sexes, in favour for a meta narrative on the reasonable man and the emotional woman. Naturally, several male characters relate to women among the plot summaries. The choices of the male subjects are however to a larger extent declared as independent and reasonable, than the actions of the female subjects.

The overall narrative on the heterosexual, marital relations has the function of depicting the woman as a whole person only with a man by her side to relate to and act on. Using Teresa de Lauretis psychoanalytic view on how cinema constructs and reproduces conventions within narrative, these summaries may be said to produce both perceptions of the hetero norm and the marital relation as sacred. The ideological effects of oppressing and sexualisation of women, proclaimed by de Lauretis, are also notable via the objectification and passivity of

⁸⁵ *Frost*. Director: Reynir Lyngdal. Iceland 2012. Kisi Production

⁸⁶ *En kongelig affære/A royal affair*. Director: Nikolaj Arcel. Denmark 2012. Zentropa

⁸⁷ *Marie Krøyer/The Passion of Marie Krøyer*. Director: Bille August. Denmark, Sweden 2012. SF Film

female individuals, putting women in the margin of representation.

The most common roles for women in the material are as mothers or partners, and thereby defined out of their relation to the family. Thus, it is visible how the man as an active subject 'gets into' narratives including active female characters, in another way than women are portrayed in films including male characters. Other frequent depictions of women are as mothers relating to their sons and/or male partners. Even the plot of *Sover Dolly på ryggen/Almost Perfect* (Denmark),⁸⁸ a film on having children without a partner, is paradoxically clinging to the woman's choice of partner.

5.4. Groups as Subjects

Apart from individuals, some narratives depict groups acting as subjects. In two cases soldiers, two cases inhabitants in neighbourhoods, one case a rock band, one case a criminal network, and in one case a politically active group. Also, in one case, *Mona* (Iceland),⁸⁹ neither groups nor individuals are mentioned, but "the ancient mystery of women, a deep but short-lived passion and human metamorphoses". Furthermore, family and/or friendship relations are in several cases focused in a way that the general narrative treats the relations within the group(-s) as a macro narrative, including the individual actions at a subordinate micro level within the narrative. These discourses on groups start from either tensions within a group or the opposite – how the strength of the group creates synergy and development. Those narratives have their focus on cooperation and the collective strength, often signed by sentiment. To narrate a group may thus romanticize them, especially in connoted masculine domains, by putting the collective before the individual and thereby imply moral and loyalty towards each other as group members as well as 'the good cause'; may it be a political statement or to wage war. In the plots on soldiers, the rock band, the criminal network and the political group, gender is absent in the summaries. An interpretation is that it is for the reader to suppose the groups to consist of men.

Group oriented or relation based plots are presented in *Sune i Grekland – all inclusive/Tosh in Greece* (Sweden),⁹⁰ where family relations and conflicts are focused, *Den skaldede*

⁸⁸ *Sover Dolly på ryggen/Almost Perfect*. Director: Hella Joof. Denmark 2012. Blenkov & Schonemann Pictures

⁸⁹ *Mona*. Director: Inara Kolmane. Iceland, Latvia 2012. Filmu studija Delvini

⁹⁰ *Sune i Grekland – all inclusive/Tosh in Greece*. Director and scriptwriter: Hannes Holm. Sweden 2012. Eyeworks Sweden

frisør/Love is All You Need (Denmark),⁹¹ where family members relate to each other in a web of relations, where the relations between femininity or masculinity to ageing is the theme, or *Kvarteret Skatan reser till Laholm/High Rise Life – The Movie* (Sweden),⁹² which is centred around tensions within a group of friends. In the plots on relation dramas, centring individual relations and conflicts, it is clear what conflicts and complications are moving the plot forward, as well as the gender of the members.

5.5. To Grow up or Put Things Right

Recurring in the narratives is for the dramaturgy to build on how someone or something will go through a change and get ‘corrected’. This type of narration may say something about hegemonic control, norms and naturalised positions, via *how* something or someone can be improved by correction to the norm, as well as what is shown or not.

Growing up is a recurring theme in the plot summaries. There are some plots on teenagers, for instance *Kohta 18/Almost 18* (Finland),⁹³ *Skvis/Squeeze* (Norway)⁹⁴ or *Max Pinlig 3 – på Roskilde* (Denmark).⁹⁵ The common point between them is to centre the plot around teenage characters and their relations to each other as well as their families. The growing up-theme thus emerges through complications within the relations in different ways. Yet, another discourse on growing up concerns almost only male characters; to let go of the dominant mother and in some cases the father. As mentioned above, mothers are repeatedly portrayed as dominant and holding back their sons or daughters. This theme can be found in plots of *10 timer til paradiset/Teddy Bear*,⁹⁶ *Max Pinlig 3 – på Roskilde* (Denmark) and *Mammas pojkar/Metal Brothers* (Sweden). Dominant fathers are mentioned in for instance *Gummi T/Jelly T* (Denmark).⁹⁷ In *Undskyld jeg forstyrrer/Excuse Me* (Denmark)⁹⁸ an adult, subdued woman seeks her father, which makes this plot the exception which proves the rule; that stories about irresponsible, immature adults, subdued by their parents and incapable of taking responsibility for their own lives and their own relations, are all about men. Women are seldom portrayed as careless or sloppy. This fact gets even more interesting set against the

⁹¹ *Den skaldede frisør/Love is All You Need*. Director and scriptwriter: Susanne Bier. Denmark 2012. Zentropa

⁹² *Kvarteret Skatan reser till Laholm/High Rise Life – The Movie*. Director and scriptwriter: Mikael Syrén. Sweden 2012. Svensk Filmindustri

⁹³ *Kohta 18/Almost 18*. Director and scriptwriter: Maarit Lalli. Finland 2012. Huh huh

⁹⁴ *Skvis/Squeeze*. Director and scriptwriter: Kathrine Haugen. Norway 2012. Filimo Film

⁹⁵ *Max Pinlig 3 – på Roskilde*. Director and scriptwriter: Lotte Svendsen. Denmark 2012. Asta Film

⁹⁶ *10 timer til paradiset/Teddy Bear*. Director and scriptwriter: Mads Matthiesen. Denmark 2012. SF Film

⁹⁷ *Gummi T/Jelly T*. Director: Michael Hegner. Denmark 2012. Crone Film

⁹⁸ *Undskyld jeg forstyrrer/Excuse Me*. Director and scriptwriter: Henrik Ruben Genz. Denmark 2012. Fine & Mellow

recurring narrative on teenage girls, as in *Skvis/Squeeze* (Norway), *You & me forever* (Denmark),⁹⁹ *Kohta 18/Almost 18* (Finland) or *Bitchkram/Bitch Hug* (Sweden),¹⁰⁰ who all seek their identity and are in a narrative of a clear focus on growing up, mostly due to love stories and/or sex clearly present. The other way of growing up for female subjects is to find love and enter a partner relationship, just as described in paragraph 5.3, on women whose activity is dependent on the presence of men. These patterns together create a meta narrative telling that girls grow up to women as teenagers, while men are at risk of remaining in the care of their mother and/or drifting into bachelor life urged by sexuality and desire. This is an unflattering meta narrative for either gender. Especially in light of the contradiction it implies, on how women to such large extent are depicted as passive and objectified in relation to men. It is an image which does not tally with the depiction of women as the more mature gender.

Another way of ‘correction’ for the characters within the narratives is how characters – female as well as male – are described as a bit outside of the normal. They are described in terms of confused, absent-minded, ill or lonely. The narratives imply that they are supposed to get corrected, often via new love or friendships. This correction can happen in connection with some of the above described scenarios; letting go of a parent, leave a bad relationship (mainly women) or end the bachelor life (mainly men).

The by routine depicted sex and love relationships, which appear in most of the narratives which include love and relations as a theme in some way, are challenged by the friendship between an elderly man and a young woman in *Lycka till och ta hand om varandra/Good Luck. And Take Care of Each Other* (Sweden),¹⁰¹ as well as in the only plot summary on a relation which deviates from the hetero norm; *Pojktanten/She Male Snails* (Sweden).¹⁰² Another counter discourse is simply on keeping on being oneself instead of jumping through someone else’s hoops, as in *Gummi T/Jelly T* (Denmark). A couple of plots also illustrate how old friendship is set against new love relations in order to complicate the narrative.

5.6. Family Relations

Family is a frequently centred domain within the narratives and as such a place of gender

⁹⁹ *You & me forever*. Director and scriptwriter: Kaspar Munk. Denmark 2012. Nimbus Film

¹⁰⁰ *Bitchkram/Bitch Hug*. Director and scriptwriter: Andreas Öhman. Sweden 2012. Filmlance

¹⁰¹ *Lycka till och ta hand om varandra/Good Luck. And Take Care of Each Other*. Director: Jens Sjögren. Sweden 2012. Acne Film

¹⁰² *Pojktanten/She Male Snails*. Director and scriptwriter: Ester Martin Bergsmark. Sweden 2012. Upfront Films

representation. Both nuclear families and single parents are portrayed. Other formations of families and relations than the heterosexual are however conspicuously absent. When it comes to the relations to mothers, the topic is generally for sons to settle free from control and dominance. The most common depictions of mothers are as dominant while fathers are either authority figures, projecting ideals on their sons, or portrayed as absent, alcoholic or in another way lacking of responsibility in their relations to sons or daughters. The discourse on fathers treats an endeavour for the parent and child to get closer. Coherent with the gender distribution in the material overall, the relation between sons and parents are more frequently depicted than between parents and daughters. The discourse on ‘the bad parent’ also differs depending on whether a mother or father is depicted. Fathers are in several cases attributed with alcoholism and/or general absence. The recurring factor of the absent mother is instead given guilt of having abandoned the biological father of her son or daughter in favour of another man. In conclusion, even the betrayal of a parent is engendered, insofar it is mentioned in the plot summaries.

5.7. Conclusion: Who Talks About Whom?

The starting point was to look at the material without marking the films as directed by women or men, to avoid unnecessary unconscious tendencies in analysing and evaluating the material. After a first draft and mapping, this marking was however made to make a further analysis. It can be concluded that among the films by the female directors several include complex and interesting female subject positions. The films are 15 in number as well as 15 % of the total number of releases, and thus quickly gone through. All films directed by women, except *Hamilton – I nationens intresse/Agent Hamilton – In the Interest of the Nation* (Sweden)¹⁰³ and *Hvidsten gruppen/This Life* (Denmark)¹⁰⁴ are made by women on at least one of the other key positions. A majority are made with at least one woman on all three key positions. As mentioned before, it is important to avoid essentialist manners of female or male narratives. The results show that the film starring the stereotyped hero Hamilton is made by a female director, which conflicts the template that women would make films on solely women. A woman has directed *Vicevæerten/A Caretaker’s tale* (Denmark)¹⁰⁵ as well, where the plot summary in typical gender stereotyping terms describes how an elderly man ‘finds’ a ‘happy and willing’ girl, surrounded by objectifying connotations.

¹⁰³ *Hamilton – I nationens intresse/Agent Hamilton – In the Interest of the Nation*. Director: Kathrine Windfeld. Sweden 2012. Pampas

¹⁰⁴ *Hvidsten gruppen/This Life*. Director: Anne-Grethe Bjarup Riis. Denmark 2012. Regner Grasten Film

¹⁰⁵ *Vicevæerten/A Caretaker’s tale*. Director: Katrine Wiedemann. Denmark 2012. Zentropa

The meta narrative on men consists of the following features: Men are often portrayed as irresponsible in spite of their adult age. Men are in several plot summaries portrayed as criminals in different ways; comic or dramatic. In the material, men have overall a smaller tendency to take responsibility of their lives than women, but a greater need to actively settle free. Paradoxically, the gender depicted as more powerful is thereby depicted as more tending to settle free (often from the mother). The general meta narrative is thus that the lack of freedom of men in most cases is connected to a woman; either his (dominant) mother or a (pregnant) partner. Vulnerable masculinity is a more common motive than vulnerable femininity. Men are generally stereotyped as:

- Dependent on and domesticated by the mother
- Good-hearted, brave and reasonable hero
- Criminal or alcoholic 'tough guy'

The counter discourses consists of the vulnerability, visible in the portrayals; those who reveal the cracks in the facades of the characters, caused by the private (emotional) life.

The meta narrative on women depicts a gender in the margin or as a dramaturgical 'spice' to move the narrative forward. The subjective actions of women are often connected to relations with one or several men. Growing up often involves women to enter a romantic relationship. The general picture of a woman is as responsible and mature, though in need of a man to fulfil herself. Women are generally stereotyped as:

- Object of desire and/or a trophy for men to fight for
- Mothers or partners, namely out of her role in the family
- Object exposed to violence, murder or oppression

The counter discourses are to be found within the vulnerable women; those who are severely ill or have soft spots in their personality, but also in terms of women as independently active subjects and professionals, as well as more emotionally complex than men.

Counter discourses can be combined with stereotyping or oppressing depictions, concerning both men and women. It is a crucial conclusion of the analysis to emphasise that the stereotyped gender positions are detrimental for all genders. The maintaining of order can seem hard to let go; as stated in the report from w.i.f.t. the bearer of the norm is the last to discover it, habitual acting need conscience and analysis to break up from. Above all, holders of power are not keen to let it go. Even so, when the stereotyped gender positions are splitting

at the seams it is rewarding for all to let go of the templates and tolerate more flexible gender positions.

The conclusions from the analysis are to some extent coherent with the conclusions from the reports by SFI and w.i.f.t, with their emphasis on the naturalisation of men's perception of life as filmmakers and storytellers, as well as norm of the market interest and consumers. This is close connected to 'who talks about whom' in the stories. As cinema is a matter of representation and thus communication, it is crucial to imagine who the receiver of the message is thought to be. As discussed in the reports of SFI and w.i.f.t. as well as the studies by Smith and Lindell, men's perception of life are prevailing. Obvious in the present thesis is the way of depicting men as dominant and active in favour of the more passive and dependent women. The taken for granted consumer of films as well as the norm of a human being or narrative protagonist is male. This is one of the most significant conclusions, prevalent in all discourses in one way or another.

The feminist discussions of Lindell, de Lauretis and Stacey, which I have tried to read intertextual, are important tools in dissecting the material qualitatively. The discussion I cherish is, with basis in Mulvey's essay on the male gaze, a way of unveiling the hegemonic control and naturalisation. From the cultural studies point of view it is useful to experience the normal and deviant in this way. To use psychoanalytic tools in order to regard the subject and object positions, as Stacey and Lindell, and at the same time bring a tentative approach and a view of the spectator as active has been significant to my analysis and to my way of addressing the material. The somehow post feminist approach of Stacey and Lindell also tally with the arguing of Perkins that cinema never could stay completely outside ideology. That is the core of this study and the purpose of it.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Summing up, who talks about whom in film? The purpose within the seminar mentioned in the opening, as well as with the thesis, was to spark a debate by contributing with a cultural analysis of a complex topic. The point of both start and end has thus inevitably been that all films are different, just as all spectators are. The objective has been to start filling a gap between studying content, common within the humanities and cultural studies, and studying structures quantitatively, which is more common in the social sciences and media studies. The perspective of cultural studies contributes with an approach on identification connected to signifying practices. Using the three problem statements which have guided the study, the aim is thus to sum up the thesis by themes, review whether the purpose is carried out and 'raise' the thesis to a broader perspective.

6.1. What Similarities, Differences and Patterns Can be Found in the Quantitative Material?

It has been exciting to confront structures with the statistics. The average gender balance on all key positions was approximately 78 % men and 22 % women. 26 of the 98 films were made with men on all key positions and two men as lead roles. Conversely for women on all key positions and lead roles was one single film. The 15 films directed by women had in almost all cases women on other key positions as well. The statistics can thus be said to show a barrier for women to get into the feature film market, which the reports from SFI and w.i.f.t. as well as the studies of Smith support. These data on structure could definitely be raised by more extensive studies on offered films, as the one by Lindell (2004). It could be rewarding with the approach Smith has in her studies, to do interviews with people of responsibility in the industry and thus put the perspective into involving an economic and/or organisational level. The studies Smith carries out are of significant importance for explaining representation out of structures in both content and industry. The present study could be seen as a pilot study for this function among the Nordic countries. Who is visible and what representations are shown on screen is connected with the people with production responsibility. Cultural studies has a great opportunity to contribute in scientifically examining cinema as a complex signifying practice, as all studies presented in chapter two, Field of Research.

6.2. Which Discourses on Gender Can be Deduced by Themes, Stereotypes and/or Motives in the Qualitative Material, and What Depictions Stays in the Margin?

The analysis gives a macro perspective on plot summaries. Individual plot summaries are treated primarily by the patterns they constitute with the others. Men generally dominate among the active subject positions in the plot summaries. Men were to a larger extent portrayed as active and free of choice, but on the contrary depicted as more immature and inhibited by their parents than women, in general. Women were mostly depicted as dependent on men in their vicinity when active, and more often than men exposed to violence. In the present thesis, different stereotypes have been found to some extent and to some extent the same. Most important is perhaps the way men still dominate in storytelling as well as within the narratives. It is generally expressed for instance by women exposed to violence in the narratives, and men acting it out. Studying these structures over time is an important part in this type of studies. The studies of Smith on North American popular cinema are interesting examples for comparison.

The vulnerable gender positions are generally more common within the depictions of masculinity and male characters. As concluded in chapter five, paragraph 5.7, men are on the one hand more frequently depicted as dominant, protagonists and active subjects. On the other, they are also depicted as immature, irresponsible and/or vulnerable, as in broken-hearted etc. This counter discourse contains ambivalence via the correction discourse often subscribed to it. The repetition of vulnerable masculinity seems still to end up in a correction to the normal and present the story of a masculine norm, which the protagonist or anti-hero is supposed to get corrected into. These are discourses which could do with a deepened analysis of the meta narrative on male characters, how masculinity is depicted and the ambivalences within as well as related to depictions of femininity and queer themes.

6.3. How Can an Uneven Gender Balance Among the Key Positions be Related To the Content of the Films?

The question concerns potential connections between the quantitative and the qualitative material, and simple answers can not be stated. According to the reports on the film industry from SFI and w.i.f.t. Sweden, as well as the studies of Smith and Lindell, connections have appeared between who are behind films – the storytellers – and what or who are later shown. Not the least of interest, UN Women sets the question of identification on the agenda of important equality issues. It is a question of complex structures, concerning identification and role models, structures which have been confirmed in the reports which the present thesis takes its support from. Looking at the structures of men's prevalence as a majority among

originators of storytelling, and later the discourses on gender which was found, a possible interpretation is that the structures of habitual practice in the favour of men behind the cameras, reflect the stories told on screen. In chapter two, *Field of Research*, it was mentioned that the doctoral thesis by Lindell is in some ways a role model for the present study. To lean on former studies on the field, follow them up and embed for future studies is a crucial and conscious purpose with the study. Its basis in both political instruments and theory as well as practice within humanities and social science implies many possibilities but also enhances the importance of following up as well as get followed up. To not leave this subject unattended, which might be both sensitive but also crucial due to its thematic of social structures, left to chance.

6.4. Problematic Issues and Further On

An aspect which unfortunately did not get more space in the thesis, is the intersectional perspective.¹⁰⁶ A unilateral gender perspective is in a way provided with blinders. Power hierarchies are connected to aspects such as class and ethnicity as well, which have not been raised in particular neither in the film debate nor the studies which this essay takes its support from. 'Counting heads' is however easier when it comes to gender than ethnicity or class, according to the methods of this study. Queer themes have not been explicitly present in the material. Even so, the endeavour has been to avoid giving in to a manner of polarized norms.

The thesis includes a predominantly Swedish perspective, brought in to the analysis via the reports from SFI and w.i.f.t. The limitations of the study have not allowed a bigger covering of the Nordic research terrain in this matter. The natural choice, due to my personal ethnicity as Swedish, has been to take note of the work done in Sweden in order to illustrate and contextualise. The aim has nevertheless been to weigh the countries equally in the analysis, since my conviction is that the contexts can be applicable on all countries. A difficulty in doing the study has furthermore been not to include my own pre understanding of the films, via to either have watched them or knowing about the plot, director, or other conditions and contexts surrounding them. It is however always a scientific challenge for anyone to keep unbiased before the material.

¹⁰⁶ Intersectionality, from the verb 'to intersect'. It is used to analyse how different power imbalances interact. Lykke, Nina: *Intersektionalitet - Ett användbart begrepp för genusforskningen*. Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift 1:47-56 (2003). Summary in English.

The question touched in the opening of the thesis – what can be considered as a ‘truth’, is relevant within the framework of the present thesis because of the approach within cultural studies to texts as representations of a socially constituted reality. In my opinion, it is an interesting question in a philosophy of science point of view. The purpose of the study is to approach a topic which is complex and contains several perspectives, to say something about the relation between film-makers and content with a theoretical approach. As mentioned, it would have been interesting to watch all films if the limitations would have permitted. In a more extensive study, it would be possible to gain more perspectives on the complex phenomenon contemporary cinema is. Still, limitations are essential to achieve comprehension of research. It is purposeful to try to explain a part of a complex system. In this study, the choice fell on the reading of plot summaries and interest in how the films communicate meaning and what meta narrative they produce together – what image of gender is brought forward? These questions are more relevant for me than the ‘truth’ about *the* image of men and women in film.

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Appendix

Selection of Plot Summaries

Kon-Tiki. Directors: Joakim Rønning, Espen Sandberg. Norway 2012, Recorded Picture Company. Retrieved on <http://www.nfi.no/36853/kon-tiki>, 2014-03-24

In 1947, the world is gripped with excitement as the young Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl embarks on an astonishing expedition - a journey of 4,300 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean on the Kon-Tiki raft. From his days living in the Marquesas with his wife Liv, Thor suspected that the South Sea Islands had been settled by ancient South Americans from thousands of miles to the east. Despite his inability to swim and fear of water, Thor decides to prove his theory by sailing the legendary voyage himself.

After replicating the design of an ancient raft in balsa wood, Thor and five fellow adventurers set sail from Peru. Their only modern equipment is a radio, and they take a parrot along for company. A natural leader, Thor uses the stars and the oceans current to navigate the raft. After three dangerous months on the open sea, encountering raging storms, sharks, and all the dangers the Ocean can muster, the exhausted crew sight Polynesia and make a triumphant landing.

Having sacrificed everything for his mission, even his marriage, the success of the Kon-Tiki expedition proves bittersweet for Thor.

Half a century ago, young Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl became one of history's most famous men with the Kon-Tiki voyage, an astonishing journey of 4,300 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean on a balsawood raft. But this is not the whole story.

A handsome and charismatic figure, Thor developed a theory that Polynesia had been settled by peoples travelling east from South America, not west from Asia as previously thought. No-one in the scientific community took him seriously, to say nothing of having it published. After an American professor jokingly told Thor to try sailing from Peru to Polynesia on a balsawood raft, Thor realized that this is what he must do. He decided to prove his theory by sailing the legendary voyage himself.

Christening his raft Kon-Tiki after a sun-god, Thor set sail from Peru along with five daring crew, none of whom knew each other. Only one knew how to sail. Though he was afraid of water and couldn't swim, Thor was willing to sacrifice everything and everyone to prove himself right.

This film is about a man who starts out cataloging Nature in an attempt to understand it, but ends up surrendering himself to it in his quest for truth. We witness how Thor, through sheer willpower, proved his theory right and became a popular hero across the world. But we also witness the price that he and those around him had to pay.

Thor's epic voyage was spectacular and captured the public imagination. He loved the thrill of endeavor, and opened the world's eyes to both the harsh and serene beauties of the natural world. His documentary of the journey won an Oscar, and his book was translated into 70 languages and sold over 50 million copies around the world. Thor's ideas and achievements continue to inspire today.

Kon-Tiki spans Norway, Polynesia, America, Peru and the Pacific Ocean. Its a story about choosing adventure, about daring to stand up for what you believe in and simply going for it, even when everyone says its impossible. It is an incredible journey that forever changed the men who took part in it.

Hassel - Privatspanarna / Roland Hassel. Director: Måns Månsson. Sweden 2012, Anagram Produktion AB.

Swedish: Retrieved on <http://www.sfi.se/sv/svensk-filmdatabas/Item/?type=MOVIE&itemid=73463>, 2014-03-24

Den pensionerade kriminalinspektören Roland Hassel uppslukas alltmer av Palmemordet och söker förgäves svar hos Ring P1:s Tappas Fågelberg, Göran Lambertzs advokatjour och konspirationsteoretikern Sven Anér. Stockholmspolisens eventuella skuld i det olösta statsministermordet drar den gamle TV-hjälten till privatspanarna och deras tvångsmässigt regisserade rekonstruktioner av skotten på Sveavägen. Det är i de obetydliga detaljerna som de söker gåtans lösning: gärningsmannens fladdrande byxa, Lisbeths kroppsvidring och fall, dolda hissar och förpreparerade gömställen. Återskapandet av mordet på 25-årsdagen utvecklas till en terapeutisk seans, en outhärlig ritual för ensamma medelålders män och kanske det mest livskraftiga som återstår av en sedan länge avsmnad mordutredning.

English: Retrieved on

<http://www.sfi.se/en-GB/Swedish-film-database/Item/?type=MOVIE&itemid=73463>, 2014-03-24

Roland Hassel, now a retired police detective, cannot let go of the unsolved 1986 murder of Sweden's Prime Minister, Olof Palme. In this study of the powerlessness of the Swedish male, the popular fictional character Hassel is desperate to get his hands on the \$10 million reward for information leading to the arrest of Palme's murderer.

Marie Krøyer / The Passion of Marie. Director: Bille August. Denmark 2012, SF Film Production ApS, Köpenhamn. Retrieved on

<http://www.dfi.dk/Filmhuset/Cinematket/Billetter-og-program/Film.aspx?filmID=v1018669>, 2014-03-24

Danish: Marie lever et tilsyneladende idyllisk og lykkeligt liv med ægtefællen, den verdensberømte maler P.S. Krøyer. Men i virkeligheden er hun og deres lille datter ved at kvæles i skyggetilværelsen af den mani-depressive og selvoptagede mand. Da Marie i et pusterum i Toscana møder den unge lidenskabelige svenske komponist, Hugo Alfvén, begynder hun at følge sine egne drømme og længsler.

English: Marie Krøyer was married to the great Danish painter P.S. Krøyer. At the peak of their

marriage, Krøyer's mental illness is getting more severe and their dream of sharing a life as artists is crumbling and turning to frustration and sorrow. For Marie, it is the frustration of being torn between her roles of wife, mother and artist; of not being able to express herself through her art and the sorrow of seeing her beloved husband slowly changing and slipping further into insanity. To get some peace and regain strength, mother and daughter take a vacation where Marie meets and falls in love with Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén. Marie boldly leaves her husband for her new love, knowing only little of the world-shattering choices that lie ahead of her.

List of Films

Denmark

10 timer til Paradis
Den skaldede frisør
En kongelig affære
Far til fire – Til Søs
Fuglejagten
Gummi T
Hvidsten Gruppen
Kapringen
Lærkevej - til døden os skiller
Marco Macaco
Marie Krøyer
Max Pinlig på Roskilde
Min søsters børn alene
hjemme
Over kanten
Sover Dolly på ryggen?
Talenttyven
Undskyld jeg forstyrrer
Viceværten
Volcano
You and Me Forever

Finland

3 simoa
Ella ja kaverit
Hulluna Saraan
Härmä
Iron sky
Ja saapuu oikea yö
Juoppohullun päiväkirja
Kohta 18
Kulman pojat
Käräjävuorentie
Miss Farkku-Suomi
Nightmare – Painajainen merellä
Niko 2 – lentäjäljekset
Puhdistus
Rakkauden rasvaprosentti
Rat King
Risto Rämpääjä ja viileä Venla
Saunavieras
Taistelu näsilinnasta
Tie pohjoiseen
Tähtitaivas talon yllä
Vares – Kaidan tien kulkijat
Vares – Pimeyden tango
Vares – uhkapelimerkki
Veden peili
Vuosaari

Iceland

Black's Game
Frost
Mona
The Deep

Norway

90 minutter
Flukt
Fuck Up
Inn i mørket
Into the White
Kompani Orheim
Kon-Tiki
Mer eller mindre mann
Reisen til Julestjernen
Skvis
Som du ser meg
Thale
Tina & Bettina – The Movie
Uskyld
Varg Veum – De døde har det godt
Varg Veum – Kalde hjerter
Wide Blue Yonder

Sweden

Avalon
Bekas
Bitchkram
Blondie
Call Girl
Cockpit
Dom över död man
En fiende att dö för
En gång i Phuket
Flimmer
Hamilton - I nationens intresse
Hamilton 2 - men inte om det gäller din dotter
Hassel - Privatspanarna
Hypnotisören
Inte ens det förflutna
Isdraken
Isolerad
Jävla pojkar
Katinkas kalas
Kvarteret Skatan reser till Laholm
Lycka till och ta hand om varandra
Mammas pojkar
Mörkt vatten
Nobels testamente
Pojktanten
Sean Banan - Inuti Seanfrika
Shoo bre
Snabba cash II
Sune i Grekland - all inclusive
Villa Thalassa - helgen vecka 48
Äta sova dö

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