

"The particular man, or should one criticise Man as Man"

A text from the magazine: outside the box #5

Tuesday evening in a middle sized city. Kelly and Andra meet up in their favorite pub. The room is almost filled but a drafty table next to the entrance is still free and the two comrades sit down here. The bar is seated by a group of single men, who look like they are glued to the seats. Anyway "no cities to love" from Sleater Kinney comes out of the speakers and the beer is tasty. Kelly and Andra watch the bartender cleaning around between the tables, beer glasses and barflies.

ANDRA: I have to admit, that watching a man serving other people, satisfies me.

KELLY: What? That poor guy. At best, he is paid 8,50 an hour. For me the low-pay sector is anything but satisfying.

ANDRA: But still, there are far too few cleaning, dish-washing and serving men. Therefore we again had big trouble in our flat community. Daniel strictly didn't want to admit, that we, his female flatmates, are permanently cleaning for him and he rejected all responsibility with the doubtful argument, he wouldn't be disturbed by the dirt.

KELLY: Are you again campaigning against singular representatives of the male species?

ANDRA: OK – You want to dispute?

KELLY: I'm ready.

ANDRA: OK then. Take Arms. Compared to what usually is intended by the term of social criticism, criticising an individual cleaning behaviour is quite lame. By doing so you are not dropping any abstract categories with an heroic gesture and you are not developing any society drafts for an uncertain future. But this is a very concrete critic of everyday life and its participants.

KELLY: I think your critic is anything but "concrete". It's the opposite: you are squeezing individuals to general categories which are inspired by ancient gender clichés. "All men are incapable of cleaning". Hence, all women are not capable of backing into parking space. You are complaining about gender separation and at the same time this separation is the base of your

arguments. But why complaining when there won't change a thing anyway? By the way: My male flatmate is the one who does most of the cleaning in our flat and in addition, he has a cleaning job.

ANDRA: But these "gender clichés" are real. Of course there are some men, having no problem with cleaning, since there was kind of a liberalization of gender roles in late capitalism. But hovering, taking care for others, consoling a friend, managing a family's everyday life, keeping the children's doctor appointments in mind and so on – this still is usually done by women. The patriarchal gender relations are not negotiated nor abstract. It goes through us.

KELLY: But this doesn't mean it's possible to interpret us by referring to relations of gender and dominance relations in general. There are so many biographical breaks, so many individual – usually failed, rarely successful – attempts of dealing with the dominance relations somehow in the history. And that applies for women and for men equally.

She gives a sign to the bartender, that he should change the empty glasses to full ones.

The reality can't be explained easily by dividing it into typical male and typical female. Such an argumentation ignores e.g. completely the particular forms of female actions in the history, which are existing, despite or just because of the degradation of women as passive attachment. It ignores my flatmate. And what is the worst: it ignores me. I am very messy, concerning my cooking skills pasta with tomato sauce is all I can achieve and I love to repair bikes. Am I not a woman because of that?

The bartender silently places two new glasses on the table and removes the empty ones.

ANDRA: But it is not a matter of individual preferences, talents etc.! Of course, they don't match with the gender characters everywhere. It is the social perception that is more crucial: a woman who is skilled in cooking, is not worth to be mentioned, but in case of a man the same thing seems to be exceptional. Subsequently, dad is earning honors for the Christmas dinner and

just becomes TV-chef, while Mum taking care of the unspectacular day-to-day business: preparing meals from Monday to Sunday, finishing the carnival costume, getting a birthday gift and sending a birthday greeting to the mother-in-law. That is how it was in my family.

KELLY: Okay. I exceptionally agree with you. Women are easily supposed to be extremely good in doing something for other persons and also like to do so. This rumor is heavily defended in context with motherhood. It will be immediately punished if someone mentions that the self-abandonment for the cute little can be really annoying. Generally I believe that this topic we are just talking about becomes even more worse if kids come into play.

ANDRA: The small family is still the peak of the conditions ...

KELLY: But, back to the different ratings of behaviour of gender: I observe these “*double standard*” not only “out there” in the rough society but also in feminist scenes and last but not least: in myself. For example if a man helplessly flees the cooker to leave it to his female friends it causes malicious joy and a quick judgement: “This was obvious, he can't do it.” If a woman would do the same it would be less spectacular, maybe nearly subversive: “Awesome, she is cheating on her social role and let the fried eggs burn.” Here again the assumptions overheat. But this time in a feminist intention: all women hate cleaning and if they daily do it anyway, because men deny it or are too stupid, the revolutionary rebellion is growing in themselves. I have to say such romantic ideas do not match with my observing in reality. Here again my argument: to criticize the behaviour of a person as “male” or “female” does not satisfy the complexity of the person and his history.

ANDRA: But the feminism can not be blamed for that. These are the social circumstances. It's hard to avoid that women mistrust men, if they don't take great care with the house work, because of 2000 years of patriarchy. These are contradictions that can not be solved individually.

ANDRA: But one can claim the responsibility to understand something and reflect own gender socialisation. As a man you are raised to

naturally take room, recklessly monologize and fight for your own freedom and individuality, in a way that the (female) counterpart has just the choice to take the reacting role. Men have to become aware that it was never this easy for women, that women have a completely different history, where self-empowerment is less naturally present. That's the reason why I demand all men, to become aware of their becomingness! And to change themselves!

KELLY: Okay, but this also applies for women! They urgently have to change themselves, too: women are penetratingly taking care of their male friends if they fail to handle their life and they take the baby away from their arms, because they claim to be better in calming them down. Women finally have to drop the role of the caring mother, which donates them an identity. Because that society assigns this role to them is one side, but that they often voluntarily slip in this role, is the other side of the medal. To emphasize, that I am the only one who is watching the regular fruit consumption of the common child, is a smart demonstration of power.

ANDRA: But at our home certain things will not happen, if I would not always do them. Thus it is just fair that I am getting angry one day. It could not be the solution that the kids don't have a lunch box with them.

KELLY: Not a solution but a signal! Instead of the constant motherly-passive control I would suggest to let the disaster come and look what happens?!

ANDRA: Than they have not lunch box with them?!

KELLY: Could be! Anyway I think that the woman who criticizes the particular man perpetuates the long-established female role of inability to act. This happens e.g. if she revels in silently-offended harmony with her feminist friends, because a dude was endlessly talking in monologue again. That's why I claim: the one who is criticizing the particular man, can not stay silent about the particular woman.

ANDRA: But women are reflecting about themselves and their gender all the time: as a feeling of insufficiency to the male norm they suck the self-criticism already with the mother milk. As a feminist they are thinking in countless reading

circles and gender workshops about the gender related forms of identity building. Male participants can rarely be found there. Thus don't touch the women.

KELLY: That sounds too much like stagnation, for me. And like cementing the circumstances.

ANDRA: No it's denial.

Silence. Both stare on the old beer in the glasses for a while. The music has stopped too. Suddenly the sound of an approaching, rattling motor comes from the street. It is stalled directly in front of the bar. Shortly after the door is pushed open and a woman with waving hair rushes towards the two comrades.

ANDRA: Finally! My college! Maybe she can explain this to you. Freya, nice that you could still handle to come.

FREYA: Excuse me, I am late! Tomorrow we have copy deadline in the radio station and my good old wagon is not the youngest anymore. *Towards Kelly:* Oh, I haven't introduced me yet: I am Freya Lombardi.

KELLY: *Kelly,* nice to meet you! And you are exercising the "particular" criticism as battlefield of feminism, too?

FREYA: You can say so! Since 1983.

KELLY AND ANDRA: My year of birth!

FREYA: The cause was an immensely emotional tohuwabohu with my beloved Traugott at this time ...

KELLY: Oha! Next Level: subject twosome relationship!

ANDRA: But this is what we are talking about all the time!

FREYA: Actually an open and progressive dude, political activist and lawyer for human rights, is caring for his small daughter twice a week and is honestly working on good relationship to my friend Irmtraut, who he was love with before me. And he is absolutely okay with me having my own life, my job, my time planing, my friends. This was not so obviously for me, if you take my former relationships into account. - And one day Traugott flies the coop, goes back to Irmtraut and refuses to talk to me. And me, I am sitting at home racking my brain about what I could have done wrong.

KELLY: That is the dark game of love, baby ...

ANDRA: Here I can tell stories, too. And they all

sound like that: a woman and a man, both incredible sophisticated and gender-sensitive, get closer to each other. Die woman interprets the affection of the other as interest. Something like love is resulting. Die woman has learned in her socialization to adapt to the other, if she interprets the signs of the counterpart as interest. For her, finding compromises and getting involved with the particular person, is part of every kind of relationship. But she also has learn in this society, that she is only classified as wholesome person alongside a man. Because of all that, she is interested in or at least open to a reliable relationship to the man. - But shortly after the the man pulls out suddenly. He is explaining only a little and lays the blame on his unstable constitution. He is overloaded and psychologically not able for a permanent relationship. Sometimes he works himself up into compassion demanding phrases like – I am such a bad person usw. The truth is: in that moment, when the relations seems to turn into something serious, he suddenly sees is freedom under threat. His idea of himself is that of autonomous loner, who wants to have fun, but no togetherness. The woman is the fooled one.

KELLY: Sounds like a bad movie.

FREYA, ANDRA: But it is the reality.

FREYA: At least, I did not wanted to accept my role of the surrendered forsaken one. I read *Michael Kohlhaas* and went to Traugott and claimed my right of a reaction from him. I wanted to break out of the shameful isolation and contacted Irmtraut ad Traugotts ex-girlfriends. I wanted solidarity among the dumped women! I no linger wanted accept, that love in our society often means self-destruction and a feeling of insufficiency for women.

Finally the confrontation changed nothing in the relationship of Traugott and me. He sneaked out of the situation with stammering and self-pity. The freedom he claimed from me now consists of traveling from one relationship to the other. Finally he renamed himself into Wilfried and moved with his current love affair to Latin America. I don't know what he finally become.

All stare again into their empty glasses. Now "Freedom out of a mans mouth" from the Lessie

Singers comes out of the speakers.

ANDRA gets into the song:

There is something wrong with that thing
You can't say this in other words
You pronounced the "f-word"
Nobody can bare this
Why I am so overreacting
Seems to be mysterious for you
Why you blather about things that you are a
priori having
And not being able to bare
I can't understand
Maybe it is in the genes

KELLY gets into the song, too:

It is not my fault
And you are also free of guilt
It is not my fault
It is an allergic reaction
It is pure physical reaction
That every time I hear the word "freedom"
Out of a mans mouth
I have to puke

FREYA meanwhile: At least I have changed.
Because I did not give up and did not felt like
victim anymore, but more like a person that
fighting for their rights and acting. This role is
not provided for women in this story. This was a
great step for me and for the female humankind.
KELLY: At best for the *heterosexual* female
humankind! Who only fells in love with man can
only be bailed by man. The image of femininity
that you are creating here has nothing to do with
me, again.

ANDRA: But the society, the production
conditions are heterosexually organized.

KELLY: This is again one of your hasty
generalizations! The separation into "male" and
"female" is not only linked to "men" and
"woman". It goes through all of us today. -
Damned, we are going in circles! Now we
reached my cleaning flatmate again. Anyway, the
problem with criticizing the particular man
shows up again. It is based on experience, which
is primarily individual. With experience one can't
catch the truth.

ANDRA: One can, if several people experience

the same. For the women's movement the
experience always serves as a starting point for
the ideational self realization and the interchange
between women. Precisely because they can not
come back to the world explanations from the
history books, in which they don't appear. From
experience interchange woman deduce
generalized claims and feminist principles. Voilà.
All this is the benefit if criticizing the particular
man!

*Clinking on the neighbor table. A chair is
crashing to the floor. A pale woman all in black
has turned around to the comrades and shouts
with roaring voice:*

I have enough now!

FREYA: Please, not her! She has been annoying
me before!

KELLY excited: Now it starts again! *To the
barkeeper:* Another round!

ANDRA: Hey, did you also invited a college?
*Kelly grins meaningful. The barkeeper puts four
new beers on the table and sweeps up the shards
of the glass, which was broken by the woman in
black.*

women-groups nor from the state. If something
doesn't suit me, I say it! Now for example: This
endless combing through private relationships
between men and women, this looking through
one's dirty laundry – this isn't apolitical strategy.
It is a step backwards into the private life,
whereon the female has always been reduced! I
told you before, Freya! And I also told the
feminist movement. And because you did not
want hear this, there is no feminist movement
any more today, but a huge market of self-help
literature for relationships and communication
trainers, who drill you to even harder to work on
yourself. As if capitalism would not do this
enough. Instead of criticising the social relations
of production, today's feminism is playing
individual identity games. But society will not
really change through non-violent
communication in the couple, nor through the
transformation of middle-class nuclear families
into post-civil house projects.

FREYA: You're way off, Schwarze Botin
(~=Black Female Messenger)!

ANDRA: Die Schwarze Botin!

FREYA: Discussing with a man about his

patriarchal behaviour, is indeed a political strategy! And I told you this 30 years ago, too!
KELLY: So for me individual fights are not really political. But I see, that it is still necessary to challenge the gender conflicts in the private domain. In order to become aware of one's self as a women and the mechanism inhibiting her. To prompt sensitisation of men. And to not accept that a transformation in gender relations can only begin in the future.

ANDRA: Now you are getting closer to the point!

DIE SCHWARZE BOTIN TO FREYA: And I am tired of this! We probably had too many of these discussions.

FREYA: Actually I am also tired of this. But we have to admit, that we did not really solve all those questions.

DIE SCHWARZE BOTIN: Of course not, otherwise we would live in a different society!

FREYA: Don't start with this again. But it's true, apparently the achievements of feminism are still that fragile and marginal, every generation of feminists has to deal with similar questions.

It is pretty late. The barkeeper friendly and insistently directs the last people at the bar to leave. Clumsy and grumpy they meet his demand. Finally he gets the four women to pay. All of them are quite drunk by now. While leaving:

KELLY: However I have to admit, not everything is still like it was in the eighties. A man taking offence at a women making her own decisions about her life, is not as often as you were describing, Freya. At least not in our sphere. Rather I also see men quarrelling: with the relentless rigidity of neoliberalism, with their male role and with the idea that this role is somehow contradicts them in relation to feminism, which they do support. I imagine that being a man theses days isn't easy as well...

ANDRA, FREYA: Our hears bleed!

ANDRA: Of course, criticising the particular man is nothing you can always dig out and warm it up again. It has to be updated! And especially for our milieu I detect diverse forms in which patriarchy lives on.

FREYA, DIE SCHWARZE BOTIN: Oh really, which for example?

ANDRA: When a man illuminates me how

feminism works.

KELLY: I know that! *Imitates male speaker:* "We don't have to talk about gender here, we all are already emancipated."

ANDRA also imitates male speaker: "Sorry, you did not gender just now. You have to make explicit that you are also talking about women."

KELLY: "Go get a recommendation for an introduction by my feminist friends."

ANDRA: "Don't be so fixated on me, emancipate yourself!"

FREYA interrupting her: Sorry, to disappoint you. This "argument" has also been there at that time. My first big love kicked my out of our shared flat with the reason that I should begin with making my own experiences.

KELLY: You have also experienced this? And I have always fought against the thesis that it would all be because of my past self, my mother or whatever reason...

DIE SCHWARZE BOTIN: Well, not everything...

FREYA: ... but some, my dear. You will find out! I have to go anyway, I have my first appointment in five hours.

DIE SCHWARZE BOTIN: I am also going.

FREYA: Should I take you somewhere?

DIE SCHWARZE BOTIN: No, I prefer walking.

FREYA: Well, nice to meet you.

ANDRA, KELLY: Yes, thanks for the interesting evening!

FREYA: And if something happens, send me a text via WhatsApp. Ciao!

She rushes to her car and drives off. Andra and Kelly watch her driving away. When they turn around, Schwarze Botin has also vanished. They look at each other with a questioning look.

KELLY: Anyway, how did the fight in your flatshare end?

ANDRA: We discussed it fully. We also talked a lot about what we were taught and what we were not taught when we were young. That women and men have been taught different skills is not only bad. You can learn a lot from each other.

KELLY: Wonderful! A reconciliation in little!

ANDRA: Don't be snappy! At least there is a small chance of solution in these daily struggles. Nobody can stand all these contradictions.

KELLY: You are right again. But I still don't share your critic of the particular man!

ANDRA: And I don't share your questionable counter-arguments.

KELLY: Hey, there's still light in the new bar over there.

ANDRA: Let's go!

Freya Lombardi is the main character of the movie Der Beginn aller Schrecken ist Liebe ("the beginning of all horror is love") by Helke Sander from 1983. Freya's position, that feminist policy needs solidarity between women and a political view of the private (romantic) relationships, can be found in a radical form in Helke Sander article Über Beziehungen zwischen Liebesverhältnissen und Mittelstreckenraketen ("About relationships between relations of love and intermediate-range missiles"), Courage No. 4/1980.

Die Schwarze Botin ("the black (female) messenger") was a feminist magazine, which has been published among others by Brigitte Classen, Gabriele Goettle and Elfriede Jelinek in West-Berlin from 1976 to 1987. It started many controversies in the second-wave of the feminist movement, when calling for a boycott of the 'Emma', criticising an essentialist women-solidarity and standing up for a radical feminist critic of the social totality. The arguments used in the text can be found among others in the harsh validation of the feminist movement Wünsche nach Kraft durch Freude ("Wishes for power through happiness ") by Brigitte Classen and Uta Ruge, Die Schwarze Botin No. 19/1983.

Freiheit aus einem Männermund (Kotzen) ("Freedom from a man's mouth (vomiting)") is a

great song of the band Lassie Singers (1988-1998) which sadly does not exist anymore.

No Cities to Love is the newest album of the riot girl punk band Sleater Kinney. It has been released in January 2015 and is their first album after their reunion. They separated temporally in 2006.

"Vielleicht einfach mal das Unglück kommen lassen und gucken, was dann passiert?" ("Maybe just let the misfortune come about and see what happens next?") is the last sentence of the readable text Das Unglück zurückschlagen, bevor es eingetroffen ist. Notizen zur überbordenden Brüchigkeit weiblicher Subjektwerdung ("Fighting back the misfortune before it comes about. Notes about the prevailing fragility of female becoming a subject") by the Tagediebin, published in McGuffin Kassiber #5/2014.

This article is put together from discussion by editorial staff and by my reading of Svende Merians Der Tod des Märchenprinzen ("Death of the fairy tale prince") and Arlie Rusel Hochschilds The Second Shift. An interview with Karina Korecky about feminist history writing at the radiostation FSK also helped focussing my thoughts. Through my interest in theatrical forms of expression, I came across Caryl Churchills TOP GIRLS, in which societal conflicts are disputed by letting historical female personalities get together. Overlaps between living and dead persons are not mere coincidences.