

## 37 - BODIES , BODIES DOCILE AND HOMOSEXUALITY: A FILM REVIEW OF SENHORITAS EM UNIFORME

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### INTRODUCTION

Ladies in Uniform (1931) was directed by Leontine Sagan and has its origin in the novel Mädchen Manuela written by Christa Winsloe, who made use of her own experience when after the death of her mother, was sent to a boarding school where girls were taught to be disciplined and submissive as well. Her novel was made into a play and debuted in 1930 in Leipzig as Ritter Nérestan, with the title changed to Gestern und Heute when debuting in Berlin with the direction of Leontine. The play made a resounding success and was shown in several locations in Europe, plus the United States and Japan. The same happened with the film, released in November of the following year, it drew attention for its aesthetic form and innovative character, making use of a cast composed entirely of women.

According to Dyer (1990) the film exists completely in copies that are in its best light and beauty and that since it was rediscovery by the feminist movement, the work has been shown in cinemas and on television and is available on video. Moreover, much has been written about it, for in its release at the time it was a critical and audience success both in Germany and abroad. Its relevance is such that all the most important books about the movies from the period mention the movie. However, he goes on saying that the film had to be rediscovered as a lesbian film as in books such as Kracauer (1974) and Eisner (1985) the lesbian characteristics were completely left out. Kracauer focused only on authoritarianism, while Eisner focused on authoritarianism and women's work.

### OBJECT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study object is the discourse of pioneer movie lesbian cinema, Ladies in Uniform (1931), about homosexuality. The theoretical framework for the methodological issues of the semiotic analysis based on the thinking of Charles Sanders Peirce on object, sign and interpreter and film analysis model Structural / Significant proposed by Antonio Moreno in "The Character Gay in Brazilian Cinema". The book "Now You See It. Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film." Richard Dyer serves as a theoretical basis for the analysis of the film.

### METHODOLOGY

Using the Structural/Significant analysis with a defined object: homosexuality, the qualification of the speech content is done with the homosexual character as the focus of the Narrative Language and Gestural Language leading to the speech through the words and actions of the characters. It takes into account the fixed structure of the film, the explicit message through the semantic analysis (the denotative or how the film leads the character within its plot and what it says explicitly about the Object) and the implicit message across the pragmatic analysis (the connotative sense or what the film leads the viewer to judge in relation to the discourse exposed) on homosexuality. At the end is found the Content of the Speech, the Resulting and the Filmic Portrait.

The analysis on the significance level is done in the narrative center and gestural, considering the history according to the signifier (the explicit development) and signified (what it induces thinking or speech ends) referring to homosexuality. According to Moreno (1995), at the narrative language, you understand the words and actions of the characters, the mechanical aspects and technical aspects of the character driving him/her inside the plot are revealed, which contributes to the expression and understanding of such character and its speech. The Gestural Language comprises the gestural and sub gestural employed both in composition and in the characterization of the character. At the structural level are found the simplest elements of identification (title, genre, synopsis and cast).

It takes into account aspects such as the lesbian character's position in the plot (if it is leading or supporting), the social context of the character (the social class to which it belongs), the type of narrative (linear, flashback or reverse), the type of interpretation (natural, imposed, modern or theatrical), the type of assembly (linear, flashback or parallel), the emphasis of the film punctuation (positioning of the character in the film plan according to the discourse and narration used), the type of gesture (non-existent, stereotypical or not stereotyped), the sub gesture (the props, makeup and garment of the character) and the discourse through the use of gestures.

After collecting the data adjectives are added to the central focus of the analysis conducting to the content of the discourse, which has three possible classifications for the vector R of Resulting: R1 - Content pejorative (full of stereotypes in gesture and narrative contributing to the perpetuation of prejudice), R2 Content non pejorative (humanistic treatment making contribution to the discussion and expansion of the social space of the homosexual individual) and R3 Dubious (there are doubts about how it is treated). Such vectors are used to measure the density of the film and provide it to reach the Filmic Portrait, a conclusive summary through a text, reducer and explanatory, which is prepared according to the data collected and observed on the discourse of the film in question. The conclusion is done by crossing the Filmic Portrait data, being exposed the dominant model of representation in the film analyzed regarding to how was the characterization of the character or lesbian characters.

### THE ANALYSIS

1) Structural Analysis (syntactic)

Title: Ladies in Uniform, Leontine Sagan, 1931, 88 minutes, 35mm, Black and White, Sound.

Genre: Drama

Cast and Characters: Hertha Thiele (Manuela Von Meinhardis), Ellen Schwanneke (Ilse von Westhagen), Ilse Winter (Marga von Rasso), Charlotte WITTHAUER (Ilse Von Treischke), Erika-Margo Biebrach (Lilli von Kattner), Margarete (Ethel) Reschke (Oda von Oldensleben), Ilse Vigdor (Anneliese von Beckendorf), Dora Thalmer (Mariechen von Ecke), Gertrude Lalsky (Aunt Manuela), Dorothea Wieck (Fräulein von Bernburg), Emilia Unda (Director), Mars Hein (Duchess), Hedwig Schlichter (Fraulein von Kesten), Lene Berdolt (Fraulein von Gaerschner), Lisi Scherbach (Mademoiselle Oeuillet), Margory Bødker (Miss

Evans), Erika Mann (Fraulein von Atems) and Else Ehser (wardrobe Lady).

Synopsis: The film centers on the relationship between Manuela von Meinhardis and Fraulein von Bernburg, pupil and teacher respectively in a private school for army officers' daughters. Manuela's mother died shortly before and like most school girls, Manuela loves von Bernburg, the only one of the teachers who do not agree with the director rigid methods. For Manuela and von Bernburg, however, the relationship goes beyond a passion by the girl, although von Bernburg tries to deny it. It is when Manuela getting the lead role in the school production of the play by Schiller, *Don Carlos*, during the celebration party, drunk, declares her love for the teacher. The director forbids that von Bernburg has any contact with the young girl and this makes Manuela please despair and things almost ends tragically.

## 2) Significant Analysis

### 2.1 Narrative Language - Denotation and connotation

Fixed elements of character and narrative

Social context of homosexual: Teacher and student at a boarding school for army officers daughters.

Position the plot: The two main characters at the plot.

Narrative Features

Kind of narrative: Linear.

Interpretation type: Natural

Assembly Type: Linear.

Emphasis of the film punctuation: Dry cuts throughout the film; Close-ups in the scene where von Bernburg gives goodnight kisses at the students in the dorm, emphasis on Manuela by positioning the camera and light, creating a romantic atmosphere and eroticism; Merger plans at the end of the film with the faces of Manuela and von Bernburg in close-up.

### The Story of the Film

The film begins with scenes of external columns, statues, monuments and marching youth, referring to a phallic and military world. Inside the school, there comes a girl of fourteen, or according to her fourteen and a half, called Manuela von Meinhardis that after her mother's death is brought by her aunt, Excellenz von Ehrenhardt, to the boarding school run by the old Prussian call Oberin. Hearing her aunt mention her sister, her deceased mother, Manuela gets emotional and cries. Shortly after she leaves the room.

Outside the room one of the students observes and sees Manuela going up the stairs, she warns that ladder is prohibited for students. Then she presents herself as her guardian and says her name is Marga von Rassow. Manuela's aunt leaves the room, asks her to behave and honor the family name, saying goodbye then. Marga tells her the rules, disciplines applied to exercise the control of their Docile Bodies. Then Manuela presents herself to other students and when she says that she is at Fraulein von Bernburg's dorm is warned not to fall in love with the teacher.

Manuela goes to a room where she meets a lady who works there and who puts her clothes in a closet, combs and holds her hair in accordance with the rules of the school and makes her wear a dress, school uniform, which Manuela finds out it is a used ones. The woman says that a new dress for each student would be uneconomical as said by von Kesten. Manuela notices there is something written and discovers that the previous owner probably had a crush on Fraulein von Bernburg.

When leaving the room, she comes across a teacher who was watching from a distance before they met. Von Bernburg inspect her clothes and hair and says that she requires discipline, while the young woman shows nervousness.

Some girls see photographs, others sing, hear music, one of them shows the photos pasted on her closet door and a student, Marga, confiscate items from Manuela that she says are forbidden at the boarding school. One of the students, Edelgard approaches and introduces herself to Manuela offering help. The other girls start fighting for a book with pictures until they are caught and reprimanded by Fraulein von Kesten, she shows Manuela a book of merits and demerits and advises that those who receive five demerits in a four-week period have no vacation, that resembles with what Foucault wrote (2000) about the permanent observatory of the prisons in which the individual is observed and their behavior are noted throughout the detention time, the institutionalization of the power to punish.

Von Kesten takes the bills to Oberin and she claims that they need to save even more money. Von Kesten says the children are already complaining of hunger and Oberin makes a speech about Prussianism and how these child of soldiers may become mothers of soldiers and also need discipline and not luxury, because poverty ennobles. Meanwhile the girls talk about food and how they would never send their daughters to a place like that.

The students are in the school bathroom when Ilse calls all of them to see what one of the girls, Maria, can do. Maria suspects they want to laugh at her, but Ilse says that is not the case and asks her to take a deep breath. When she does, inflating the chest, her clothes buttons burst open and they all begin to laugh at her. Ilse opens further her clothes better showing the girl's body shape underneath the underwear and comments about it, since she has a body with more developed breasts, at a time of discovery of the development of the bodies which is interrupted by the arrival of one of the teachers.

Von Bernburg surprises Manuela and Edelgard embraced and sat alone in the room and Eldegard explains that Manuela was sad because she misses her mother who died. She goes away and the teacher talks to Manuela, asking her to be convinced that she is happy there.

All the students anxiously await at their beds for the time when they will receive a kiss from von Bernburg. The teacher kisses each of them on the forehead, until it comes the turn of Manuela. The teacher and the student remain looking at each other for a few seconds very close until the pupil throws her arms around her neck. Von Bernburg takes Manuela's arms to then hold her neck and kiss her on the mouth. Then she goes away and Manuela goes to sleep seemingly happy.

A meeting is shown between Oberin and teachers and all have the opinion that should be rigid to educate the students, except Von Bernburg. And then you see the teacher's class in which she asks Manuela to recite the second verse of a poem and the young girl can not do it. But when she meets Edelgard soon after she says she knew the verses and in front of the teacher she can not remember it. That's when she is warned that von Bernburg wants to talk to her and she gets so nervous that tells the colleague she will faint.

They talk, laugh and then von Bernburg gives one of her clothes to her as a gift, Manuela hugs her and starts to cry. The two start talking and the teacher wants to know why the student is always crying, but the pupil says it is very difficult to tell that. Then she says that when at night she goes into the bedroom to say goodnight to her, then turns away from her bed, she stares at von Bernburg's door wanting to get up and go to her, but she is not allowed to do that, says that then she thinks of when she gets older and has to leave the school and the teacher gives good night kisses on others and ends by saying that loves her and can never go to her room, talk to her and hold her hands. The teacher replies that she can not make exceptions or others would be jealous, but think about her often.

The students stage a play, *Don Carlos, Infant of Spain* by Friedrich Schiller. The main role, Don Carlos, is performed by Manuela. Ilse, who had tried to send a letter complaining of hunger was just discovered and is no longer taking part at the play.

She decides to pack up and leave, but ends up being convinced by von Bernburg to stay.

After the play, the teacher goes to Manuela praising her performance and says that she may strive to become a real artist. The girls celebrate the success and get drunk with punch. Manuela, as amended by drink, decides to declare her love for the teacher and ends up isolated from other students. Von Bernburg is warned that she is putting her position at risk because of the girl, but says she can not stand injustice.

When Manuela wakes up, she does not remember how she got to that isolated room. The director goes talk to her and says that she is the worst student who she ever had in the school and she will know her punishment later. But the girl have no idea about what's going on and why she is being punished.

All students, including Manuela, present themselves during the visit of the Duchess that helps keeping the school running with her money. But the students are not allowed to talk to her. Oberin tells von Bernburg that if it were not for the visit of the Duchess, she would have kicked out Manuela. The teacher says she knows the children better than her and loves them. Meanwhile, Edelgard tries to talk to Manuela, but she is prevented and scolded by von Kesten who says she does not deserve being defended and that she is too young to understand, but in the future she will understand and for that reason should not approach Manuela and later she will thank that.

Fräulein von Bernburg then says to the director "What you call sin, Principal, I call love, which has thousands of forms" and concludes by saying that at this age the girls need a mother's care and she will talk to Manuela for her to take this idea out of her head. Oberin says that the contact between the two must be ended and she forbids her to talk to Manuela. When von Bernburg leaves the room she finds the student in the hallway and asks her to wait in her office.

When entering the room she comes across the crying girl, warns that she will be punished and locked for a while, isolated, and that they can no longer see each other. Manuela is desolate and the teacher says she needs to be cured, that she can't like her that much. The student says goodbye to the teacher and gets out of her room. Von Bernburg rushes to the door calling for Manuela, but the door opens and she bumps into the principal. She says she can not afford revolutionary ideas in the school, so the teacher resigns and says she can no longer continue there, she can no longer see her frightening the children.

Bernburg seems to sense that something tragic is going to happen with Manuela and immediately sets out to find the young, as well as other students are already doing. The pupil, feeling rejected by the woman she's in love, climbs to the highest point of the stairs to throw herself, but is prevented by her companions.

The girls carry Manuela and Frau Oberin is informed that Manuela tried to throw herself from the ladder. Von Bernburg says they should be grateful because the children prevented a tragedy which the two would regret for the rest of their lives. The principal goes away slowly walking silently with heavy footsteps as all the students observe. Already away from all she seems to cry for a short time and continues to walk down the aisle until everything is dim and the film ends.

Connotation: Although the end of the film appears to be linked to the logic of crime and punishment, as Manuela needed to be punished for her homosexual feelings, there is a critical behind it by reading the elements. What the film leads us to think is that the real punishment, unlike the tragic final common to homosexual characters from the beginning of cinema to the present day, it seems to fall on the director of the boarding school. She, in the end, seems to be aware of the size of her actions, speechless and walking slowly away from the students. The final message is that an innocent young girl almost lost her life due to the conservatism that was the catalyst of a near tragedy.

## 2.2 Sign Language

Fixed elements of Sign Language

Type of gesture: Not stereotypical (Natural).

Sub gestural: None.

Features: Even having strict rules imposed regarding clothing, the characters retain their femininity characteristics.

## 3) Filmic Portrait

Content of speech: Non pejorative (Humanist)

Resulting Found R2 - Speech non pejorative contributing to raising questions for a humanistic discussion of homosexuality.

Filmic Portrait: Ladies in Uniform debates the issue of homosexuality in a rigid and conservative society through the microcosm of the boarding school. Because of the humanistic treatment that is given to the subject, it contributes to deepening the debate about homosexuality and a better understanding and acceptance.

## CONCLUSION

Inside the boarding school is applied a strong coercion, uninterrupted, on the body of these girls across disciplines in constant training exercises for the creation of docile bodies. Each one of them has a place within the demarcated disciplinary space, keeping them from aggrupation. All activities are strictly monitored and controlled even in gestural and sub gestural levels, seeking the production of useful behaviors and generating a docility through exercise, in repetitive tasks and subjection.

Manuela dares not to subject, dares to rebel against this dressage when speaking to the whole school, even in the presence of the principal, about the feelings she has for the teacher. But as explained by Dyer (1990) is important to remember that gay films are not what they would be if our society was not a society obsessed with heterosexuality, but what could be done within it given the restrictions and limitations imposed. Ladies in Uniform (1931) was the first film to address openly the issue of female homosexuality centrally and positively, openly and honestly, unlike many lesbians films produced later.

The film contribution is not restricted to its pioneering that puts it in lists and books about the movies of the period and/or lesbian cinema, but transcends being an example of addressing that avoids the use of stereotypes and makes use of a positive approach, as well as critical, to build the image of the lesbian character.

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### **BODIES , BODIES DOCILE AND HOMOSEXUALITY: A FILM REVIEW OF SENHORITAS EM UNIFORME**

#### **ABSTRACT**

*Ladies in Uniform* (1931) is a German pioneer lesbian film portraying a boarding school for military's daughters in which is applied the order and authority that cannot be challenged and is rooted in strict discipline, working on the creation of what Foucault called docile bodies, ie, useful and obedient subjects. Within such an environment freedom is restricted, the students have leisure activities that were identified as appropriate for women at the time, such as singing, dancing and theater and dare a little in the discovery of body image and the development of the body, but a student makes the most courageous act, challenging the rules and daring to get involved romantically with one of her teachers and so, the purpose of the survey is to unravel the film discourse on homosexuality. To this end, it is grounded on the semiotic analysis and the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce about the object, sign and interpreter and uses the film analysis model Structural/Significant proposed by Antonio Moreno in "A Personagem Homossexual no Cinema Brasileiro" (1995). The theoretical basis is taken from the book "Now You See It. Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film" (1990) from Richard Dyer, allowing it to theoretically substantiate the analysis of the film. After is done the qualification of the speech content in relation to the homosexual characters, it is possible to arrive to the conclusion that the movie contributes to a positive image of lesbian sexuality as it portrays this as natural.

**KEYWORDS:** Cinema; Lesbian; Ladies in Uniform.

### **CORPS, CORPS DOCILES ET HOMOSEXUALITE : UNE CRITIQUE DE FILM SENHORITAS EM UNIFORME**

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

*Mädchen in Uniform* (1931) est un film allemand lesbien pionnier dépeignant un pensionnat pour les filles des militaires dans lequel il est appliqué à l'ordre et l'autorité énergique de chemin et qui est enracinée dans une discipline stricte, à travailler sur la création de Foucault appelait corps dociles, à savoir, utiles et sujets obéissants. Dans une telle liberté de l'environnement est limité, les élèves jouent les activités de loisirs qui ont été identifiés comme étant appropriée pour les femmes de l'époque, telles que le chant, la danse et le théâtre et osent un peu dans la découverte de l'image corporelle et le développement du corps, mais l'un d'eux fait le plus audacieux de tous, défiant les règles et oser participer romantique avec un de ses professeurs et donc le but de l'enquête est de démêler le discours de travail sur l'homosexualité. À cette fin, une partie de l'analyse sémiotique ancrée dans la pensée de Charles Sanders Peirce à l'objet, signe et interprète et utilise le modèle d'analyse de film structurel/importants proposés par Antonio Moreno dans "A Personagem Homossexual no Cinema Brasileiro" (1995). La base théorique est tiré du livre "Now You See It. Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film" (1990) Richard Dyer, permettant théoriquement étayer l'analyse du travail. Fait la qualification de la teneur de la parole en fonction des personnages homosexuels peut alors venir à la conclusion que le travail contribue à une image positive de la sexualité lesbienne en présentant cela comme naturel.

**MOTS-CLÉS:** Cinéma; Lesbienne; Mädchen in Uniform.

### **CUERPOS, CUERPOS DÓCILES Y HOMOSEXUALIDAD: UNA REVISIÓN DE LA PELÍCULA SENHORITAS EM UNIFORME**

#### **RESUMEN**

*Muchachas de Uniforme* (1931) es una película alemán pionera de lesbianas que retrata un internado para hijas de militares en que se aplica la orden y autoridad de manera contundente y que tiene sus raíces en una estricta disciplina, trabajando en la creación de lo que Foucault llama cuerpos dóciles, es decir, útiles y súbditos obedientes. Como la libertad en tal ambiente es restringida, las estudiantes desempeñan actividades de ocio que eran identificadas como apropiadas para las mujeres de la época, tales como canto, baile y teatro y se atreven un poco en el descubrimiento de la imagen corporal y el desarrollo del cuerpo, pero una de ellas hace el más atrevido de todos, desafiando las reglas atrevese a involucrarse sentimentalmente con una de sus profesoras y por lo tanto, el objetivo de la investigación es de desentrañar el discurso de la película sobre la homosexualidad. Para tanto, parte del análisis semiótico basado en el pensamiento de Charles Sanders Peirce al objeto, signo e intérprete y utiliza el modelo de análisis de cine estructural/significativo propuesto por Antonio Moreno en "A Personagem Homossexual no Cinema Brasileiro" (1995). La base teórica se ha tomado del libro "Now You See It. Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film" (1990) Richard Dyer, permitiendo teóricamente fundamentar el análisis de la obra. Hecha la calificación del contenido del discurso en función de las personajes homosexuales luego se llega a la conclusión de que la película contribuye a una imagen positiva de la sexualidad lesbiana por retratar esto como natural.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Cine; Lesbianas; Muchachas de Uniforme.

### **CORPOS, CORPOS DÓCEIS E HOMOSSEXUALIDADE: UMA ANÁLISE DO FILME SENHORITAS EM UNIFORME**

#### **RESUMO**

*Senhoritas em Uniforme* (1931) é um filme alemão pioneiro do cinema lésbico que retrata um colégio interno para filhas de militares, colégio no qual é aplicada a ordem e autoridade de maneira contundente e que é alicerçado na disciplina rígida, atuando na criação do que Foucault chamou de corpos dóceis, ou seja, sujeitos úteis e obedientes. Dentro de tal ambiente a liberdade é restringida, então desempenham atividades de lazer que eram identificadas como apropriadas ao sexo feminino na época, como canto, dança e teatro e atrevem-se um pouco na descoberta da imagem corporal e o desenvolvimento do corpo, mas uma das alunas comete o maior atrevimento de todos, desafiando as regras e ousando envolver-se romanticamente com uma de suas professoras e assim, o objetivo da pesquisa realizada é desvendar o discurso da obra sobre a homossexualidade. Para tal, parte da análise semiótica embasada no pensamento de Charles Sanders Peirce em relação ao objeto, signo e interpretante e utiliza o modelo de análise fílmica Estrutural/Significativa proposto por Antônio do Nascimento Moreno em "A Personagem Homossexual no Cinema Brasileiro" (1995). O embasamento teórico é retirado do livro "Now You See It. Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film" (1990) de Richard Dyer, o que permite fundamentar teoricamente a análise da obra. Feita a qualificação do teor do discurso em função das personagens homossexuais, é possível então chegar à conclusão de que a obra contribui para uma imagem positiva dos homossexuais ao retratar esta sexualidade como natural.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Cinema; Lésbico; Senhoritas em Uniforme.