

SPEAKING NOTES: CAROLINA MÜLLER-MÖHL FOR “WOMEN OF IMPACT”, 1.10.2017

Zurich Film Festival, NZZ Festivalounge

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Guest,

It is my pleasure, to welcome you to this year’s “Women of Impact” also in the name of my Co-host Nadja Schildknecht, who is currently still busy: running the Zurich Film Festival! I am so glad that so many found their way here It’s a full room! I’m looking forward to some interesting conversations!

Before we do that, let me give you some food for thought: What’s your favourite book these days? The one that has kept me awake is: “Sapiens – a short history of human kind”. In a very insightful chapter, Professor Harari looks into hierarchies in human societies. He concludes that – and I quote – “most political + societal hierarchies lack a logical or biological basis. They are only nurtured by myths.” Striking example of course, is the hierarchy between men and women, which, as he explains in length, can’t be rationally explained. All common excuses – ranging from different skillsets, to women’s vulnerability caused by giving birth – are easily contradicted.

Why I am quoting Professor Harari? Because tonight, we are putting those myths to the centre of attention, that uphold this hierarchy. And to put it quite frankly: The film industry is one of their greatest upholders. I don’t have to go far into detail, to support my statement – Can you just quickly remember back to the movies that influenced you when you were growing up? In how many of them was the woman just the pretty side-kick? ... or just the damsel in distress? I am thinking about James Bond. Or the original Tri-logy of Star Wars: Only three ‘speaking roles’ for women. Take away Princess Leia and the remaining two characters merely speak 1 minute- Out of 377 minutes in total. Even today’s robots talk more. Before you come at me: Yes, I am aware that times are changing. Last year, 29% of lead characters in the top 100 US films were female. And – I know – even Star Wars had a strong female lead.

But nonetheless: Still today, studies show that female characters in movies play less often working women – and they play less often leaders. Instead, most storylines around female characters focus on their personal life: “chasing a future husband” for example.

We all know: “Seeing is believing.” Little boys and girls all over the world grow up, looking for role models in Film and TV. The representation of society on the screen is what shapes their understanding of the world we live in – and their understanding of what society expects them to be. What do you think it does to a teen’s understanding of our society, if women are only portrayed on a scale between Bond Girl and Desperate Housewife? This clearly exemplifies the need for – not only more women in leading roles – but also more diverse and multi-faceted characters.

Some of you might say: what do you expect of such a male dominated industry? This brings me behind the camera: In 2016, only 17 % of all directors, writers, producers, and editors working on the top 250 films in the US were female. More dramatic even: only 7 percent of directors were women. And that number has not changed much in the last 20 years! This is obviously not just a US problem.

In Germany for example, 84% of all movies in 2015 had a male director. And just as important: a Swiss study of the same year showed that female directors receive significantly fewer film subsidies – which by the way cannot be explained with fewer applications by women! Fortunately, the Swiss Federal Office for Culture just recently introduced a new campaign for more gender equality in national film promotion funds. I am looking forward to seeing results!

Ladies and Gentlemen, I don't want rant about this topic, simply because I want to see more women on screen (which I do), or because I find it unfair, how women are represented on screen (which I also do). But because I want to remind everyone in this room of the potential the film industry has: The potential to stop perpetuating myths that sustain an irrational hierarchy in society and instead promote a picture of lived gender equality.

Using this potential means: offering more diverse role models and heroes to society. Putting strong women in the lead – and drawing more dimensions to female characters. With more female role models to look up to, more girls and women will feel encouraged to claim the career path, that they might otherwise be too insecure to take. More diverse female characters on screen can also reduce “unconscious biases”, that still hinder women from reaching the C-Suite. Society “getting used to” non-stereotypic women on screen will level the path towards gender equality. “Frauenförderung” will only be completely successful, if this change in society takes place. And this is where I see great potential for the film industry to get involved.

Our «Women of Impact» Event, ladies and gentlemen, is so dear to my heart, because it highlights women who are already actively using this potential: Tonight we will hear from 3 of them, who – in their own way – expand the variety of role models. I am looking forward to hear from Nadja Swarovski, how she empowers women and tries to be a role model herself. And of course I am very much looking forward to learn from the experience of Glenn Close – one of the greatest actors I know – and her actor daughter Annie Starke. Their new movie «The Wife» promises to be a movie that does, what we hope for: Provide with a complex female lead that goes far beyond the stereotype, usually seen on screen. And now – I will hand the mic back to Astrid von Stockar. My Co-Host Nadja Schildknecht and I wish you a very insightful evening!