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Women in New York (1977)

A group of women in New York in the 1930s occupy themselves with parties and trips to fashion shows, hairdressers and "figure salons". Their lives revolve around beauty and health—the wealthy men who pay for it all are never seen, but are the main topic of conversation. All the women are fixated on their husbands or lovers, and live through them and for them. Therefore it is a catastrophe for Mary Haynes



Women in New York

(Christa Berndl) when she discovers, thanks to the spying of her friend Sylvia (Margit Carstensen) that her husband Steven has a mistress, Chrystal (Barbara Sukowa), who is more interested in Steven's bank account than she is in him. Mary and Steven separate, and Chrystal becomes the new Mrs. Haynes. But Chrystal soon has a new lover. At a party a year after the divorce, Mary experiences a belated triumph: she is able to expose Chrystal in front of all her friends.

Fassbinder directed this successful 1936 play by the late author-politician Claire Booth Luce in the fall of 1976 at the Hamburger Schauspielhaus, and subsequently adapted and directed it for television with cameraman Michael Ballhaus. The women move around in rooms decorated in Art-Deco and are themselves turned into decorative objects, status symbols, who are differentiated from one another more by outward appearance (younger, older, prettier, plainer) than by personality. They are totally dependent upon the value-system of their men, but never rebel. They participate in games of intrigue, calumny, speculation and gossip, always at the expense of their women friends, never the men. This

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dependency, which exists not only in fact but in their minds, makes the play depressing. Fassbinder goes out of his way to make the women unsympathetic: he augments their hysteria to the point where it is insufferable. Because of the socially determined oppression of women, there is inevitable subjugation.

The Women's Ensemble of the Hamburger Schauspielhaus mastered the many roles in the twelve scenes of the play brilliantly. If I remember correctly, each scene was filmed without a break. Fassbinder employs conventional camera arrangements and only seldom is there an ironic visual commentary; the most obvious is in the first scene, in which we see in the foreground an aquarium full of fish while the incessantly chattering women play cards.

Women in New York (1977)
(Frauen in New York)

Television version of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's production for the German Playhouse in Hamburg.

Screenplay	Clare Booth: "The Women"/translated by Nora Gray
Camera Operator	Michael Ballhaus
Editor	Wolfgang Kerhutt
Sound	Horst Faahs
Set Design	Rolf Glittenberg
Costumes	Frieda Parmeggiani
TV adaptation	Dieter Meichsner
Production	Norddeutscher Rundfunk

Cast: Christa Berndl (Mary, Mrs. Stephen Haines), Margit Carstensen (Sylvia, Mrs. Howard Fowler), Anne-Marie Kuster (Peggy, Mrs. John Day), Eva Mattes (Edith, Mrs. Phelps Potter), Angela Schmid (Nancy Blake/Princess Tamara/Miss Trimmerback), Heide Grubl (Jane/gymnastics instructor, desperate girl), Ehmi Bessel (Mrs. Wagstaff/Ingrid, the cook/first directress/Miss Watts, secretary/second lady), Susanne Werth

(first hairdresser, first saleswoman, first girl), Carola Schwarz (second hairdresser, second saleswoman/Helene, lady's maid), Irm Hermann (Olga, manicurist/Miriam), Adelheid Muther (Euphie/mannequin/cigarette girl), Ilse Bally (woman in mud pack/second directress/first lady), Andrea Grosske (Miss Fordyce, tutor/Luca, cleaning woman/Maggie, cook/widow), Christina Prior (little Mary), Gisela Uhlen (Mrs. Morehead/Comtesse de Lage), Barbara Sukowa (Crystal Allen), Henny Zschoppe (nurse), Sabine Wegener (debutante).

Filmed in 7 days in Hamburg in March, 1977.
Running time, 111 mins. 10 secs.; 16 mm, color.
Cost: 320,000 DM.