



Image repair: A case study of Thierry Frémaux and the Cannes Film Festival



Martha M. Lauzen

Television, Film & New Media, San Diego State University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 September 2015

Received in revised form 2 November 2015

Accepted 6 November 2015

Available online 18 December 2015

Keywords:

Image repair strategies

William L. Benoit

Women film directors

Cannes Film Festival

Thierry Frémaux

ABSTRACT

The Cannes Film Festival and its General Delegate or artistic director, Thierry Frémaux, have drawn sharp and on-going criticism from more than one feminist group concerning the under-representation of films directed by women in its most prestigious competition for the Palme d'Or. Using William L. Benoit's theory of image repair as its framework, this analysis considers Frémaux's responses to accusations of sexism in the Festival's film selection process. A close reading of articles appearing in English-language newspapers, and entertainment trade publications and websites from 2010 through 2015, reveals that Frémaux has used a variety of strategies including denial, reducing offensiveness, differentiation, and transcendence. The analysis finds that Frémaux's efforts have been largely ineffective in repairing his image due to a lack of mortification, no promise of corrective action, and claims that are revealed to be inaccurate and uninformed.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

As arguably the most important film festival in the world, the Festival de Cannes provides copious visibility and thus credibility for films screened during the annual event and their filmmakers. Kent Jones, director of the New York Film Festival, remarked that Cannes is “the one place that everybody wants” to screen their films (Donadio, 2015). The individual who wields a great deal of influence over the selection process, particularly of international films, is Thierry Frémaux (Satran, 2012). As the Festival's General Delegate or artistic director, he is “responsible for selecting 50 films from nearly 2,000 submissions” (Terrero, 2015), and fewer than half that number for the event's most prestigious competition, the Palme d'Or.

But the Festival's high profile, and the attendant renown that surrounds Frémaux, also make them targets of industry critics who believe that the Festival and its architects should act as responsible and even visionary leaders in the film industry. Feminist groups have repeatedly denounced the Festival and Frémaux for failing to include or adequately represent the films of women directors in the competition for the Palme d'Or, resulting in a worldwide shaming of the organization and its General Delegate.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine Frémaux's responses to accusations of sexism in the Festival's film selection process using Benoit's (1997b) theory of image repair as its framework. While the artistic director and Festival have not violated any laws, they are at odds with a cultural zeitgeist favoring greater gender and racial diversity in media products, such as television programs and films, and in venues promoting those products such as film festivals. With increasing frequency, activists and activist groups are calling upon media organizations and events under-representing women and/or minority groups to publicly defend and justify their choices.

E-mail address: lauzen@mail.sdsu.edu

2. The representation of women directors at Cannes and the backlash

The Cannes Film Festival's record of including films directed by women in its main competition over the last six years has ranged from a low of no films to a high of four films. In 2010, no films directed by women were included in the prestigious competition for the Palme d'Or. The 64th Festival held in 2011 featured a record four films out of 20 directed by women in this competition. The films included Naomi Kawase's *Hanezu*, Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty*, Maiwenn's *Polisse*, and Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.

In 2012, once again, the Festival failed to feature a single film directed by a woman in competition. In 2013, only one film directed by a woman was included in the main competition, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi's *A Castle in Italy*. One year later in 2014, Naomi Kawase's *Still the Water* and Alice Rohrwacher's *Le Meraviglie* were selected.

Most recently in 2015, two of the 19 films chosen for the competition were directed by women, Valérie Donzelli's *Marguerite et Julien* and Maiwenn's *Mon Roi*. Jane Campion is the only woman to ever win the Palme d'Or. She won the coveted prize for *The Piano* in 1993.

A look at the bigger picture of women's representation as filmmakers reveals that while the mainstream U.S. film industry continues to shun women as directors, independently produced films, particularly documentaries, employ women in greater numbers. According to the latest *Celluloid Ceiling* study of women's behind-the-scenes employment on the top 250 domestic grossing films, women comprised 7% of directors in 2014 (Lauzen, 2015b). However, a study of women working on independently and domestically produced films screening at more than 20 high-profile festivals in the United States found that women accounted for 18% of directors working on narrative features and 29% of those directing documentaries in 2014–2015 (Lauzen, 2015a). Internationally, women comprised 7.8% of directors working on films released in the UK in 2013 (Directors UK, 2013), and 21% of film directors working on French film productions in 2010 (Wollywood Woman, 2012).

The complete absence of films by women directors or the inclusion of only one or two films with women directors in the main competition prompts legitimate questions regarding the equity of the selection process. As Debra Zimmerman, executive director of Women Make Movies, a distributor of documentaries made by women, told the *Huffington Post's* Satran (2012), "There probably are many fewer films submitted by women than there are films submitted by men, but you can look at every other festival in the world, and won't find another one with no female-directed movies."

As the number of films directed by women in the main competition at Cannes has generally remained low, the Festival has attracted the attention of more than one feminist group. The absence of women directors in the 22 officially selected movies of 2012 prompted the French feminist group, La Barbe, to pen an open letter about the Festival's commitment to "masculine values" (La Barbe, 2012). The letter, published in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, read in part,

With great understanding of the monumental importance of such an event, you were able to dissuade women from aspiring to set foot in this closely-guarded world. Above all, never let the girls think they can one day have the presumptuousness to make movies or to climb those famous Festival Palace steps, except when attached to the arm of a prince charming. (La Barbe, 2012)

Stateside, Melissa Silverstein, founder of the *indieWIRE* website, *WomenandHollywood.com*, started a similar petition on *Change.org* asking the jurors of the Festival to "commit to transparency and equality in the selection process of these films." Silverstein (2012) continued, "We judge films as human beings, shaped by our own perspectives and experiences. It is vital, therefore, that there be equality and diversity at the point of selection."

Subsequent media reports featured headlines touting the Festival's under-representation of women. Satran's (2012) *Huffington Post* article ran under the headline, "Cannes 2012 Sexist? Lack of Women Directors in Competition Spurs Outrage." The headline for a *Reuters* article (Collett-White, 2012) read, "Regret but No Surprise Cannes Lacks Women Directors." A 2014 *France 24* article declared, "Cannes Film Festival Faces Down Critics, Once Again" (Frosch, 2014). In 2015, an *Entertainment Weekly* headline proclaimed, "Cannes Chief Deflects Gender-Inequity Criticism: 'Attack the Oscars, Not the Festival'" (Terrero, 2015).

3. Methods

This analysis considers Frémaux's remarks as reported in English-language newspapers, and entertainment trade publications and websites from January 2010 through December 2015. No claim is made that every article about Frémaux and his responses to these allegations is included in this analysis. Because of the high-profile nature of the artistic director and the Festival, many media outlets reported essentially the same stories and quotations made by Frémaux. Thus, this analysis incorporates those media reports over 500 words featuring comments that are representative of Frémaux's reactions to the accusations of sexism. A close reading of these statements was conducted by the author to identify the image repair strategies the artistic director used in defending his and the Festival's film choices in the main competition. This approach follows the methods employed by previous researchers applying Benoit's theory (Benoit, 2014).

Benoit's (1997b, [Benoit, 2014]2014) theory of image repair posits that individuals and organizations employ a variety of verbal strategies when they have been accused of some action(s) considered to be offensive. These message strategies include denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. Denial suggests that the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/138660>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/138660>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)