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Not so Silent: Women in Cinema before Sound
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1
Not so Silent
Women in Cinema before Sound

Edited by

Sofia Bull and Astrid Söderbergh Widding
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Studying Women and the Silent Screen
Astrid Söderbergh Widding & Sofia Bull

“The work of the Women and the Silent Screen Conferences […] is to collectively create a new realm of cinema history, neither 'the' history nor 'a' history, but a strange double world”. This double world, the world of cinematification, is the subject of Jane Gaines’ introductory article, the keynote speech of the Stockholm conference in 2008. In her conclusion, this concept of cinematification is turned into the term of *cinemelogratification*, something that she argues that the early female audiences actually had, but for which we as scholars are searching anew.

Monica Dall’Asta attempts to frame a feminist film historiography beyond “the great divide” between essentialism and constructionism. She argues for a history that also includes “the films that were never made” or never officially screened, and which clearly demonstrate that so-called “historical failures” are often failures—as Dall’Asta puts it—of history itself.

Rosanna Maule, finally, deals with a matter that kept reappearing during the conference: the question of transnationalism in relation to feminist film history. She argues that postcolonial perspectives on nationhood are necessary to widen “the discussion of gender politics in the transnational scenario of early cinema”. These three contributions, aiming at framing anew the question of how to write feminist film history, also serve as a kind of theoretical introduction to the following thematic sections.

The question of female authorship, perhaps the most classical question in the study of women and the silent screen, has often been assigned almost exclusively to the role of the director. In the second section of this volume, Pioneering authorships, Marcela Amaral deals with one of those classic pioneers: director Alice Guy. Her argument, however, that "a narrative effort" can be seen in her films and that they contribute to introducing narrativity in early cinema, widens the scope from her pioneering role alone. By proposing a reading of the newly rediscovered Umanità by Elvira Giallanella, especially its reflection on feminine subjectivity, Micaela Veronesi reintroduces this unknown female pioneer into the history of Italian cinema.

But not only directors are addressed in this section, but also women’s writings for film as novelists and scriptwriters. The Italian theme continues with Domenico Spinosa’s discussion of Italian women’s early writings on the didactic task of the new medium—the first results of research still in progress—whereas Luigia Annunziata analyzes an Italian novelist, Matilde Serao, who was also the first Italian intellectual to write about the new medium. In writing on Frances Marion’s screenplays, Claus Tieber—like
Marcela Amaral—also deals with the question of the development of classical Hollywood narrative.

Finally, two papers discuss a topic generally ignored within the history of early cinema, namely the inter-titles. Anke Brouwers discusses Anita Loos as scriptwriter and author through inter-titles, whereas Sofia Bull deals with Alva Lundin and inter-titles as aesthetic device. Thus, the contributions to this section contain not only biographies, but also texts highly related to different contexts and questions of style.

In the section on divas and intertexts, an important subtext also lies in what Victoria Duckett in her contribution has called “typing in tandem”. Duckett has written her piece “in tandem” with Elena Mosconi, in order to demonstrate the usefulness of collaboration within academia, and the importance of a common political vision. Their articles deal with melodramas—with focus on the particular question of how to create feelings and emotions through acting style and intertextual references to art.

Dominique Nasta and Muriel Andrin have gone one step further in actually writing their contribution together. They deal with emotions—what they call fiction emotions and artefact emotions—the latter also containing an intertextual dimension.

Sarah Keller—who is writing on one of the women pioneers, Germaine Dulac—also discusses an intertextual, or rather intermedial, phenomenon: how visual devices in her cinema refer to and make use of other media. “The play of oppositions and correspondences” dealt with by Keller addresses this central question on juxtaposing different perspectives, be it in the exchange between scholars or between different texts or media.

The next section, National and Transnational Stardom, deals with national stars who have actually travelled transnationally, but also with cultural ideas that travel, thus contributing in another way to the idea of transnational stardom even for national stars who may never have left their home country.

Jaakko Seppälä and Ansje van Beusekom both write on the reception of a particular star in another country: Seppälä on Mary Pickford in Finnish film culture and Beusekom on Asta Nielsen in the Netherlands. In Beusekom’s contribution, there are several references to an intermedial context—in this case between theatre and film. Seppälä’s text—and to some extent Beusekom’s—also refer to trade press and fan magazines; this theme is further developed in the Fashion and Fandom section.

Erin Kelley’s article on Anna May Wong discusses the transnational celebrity of an Asian star in Hollywood. Kelley’s article also connects to the next section, where both Nina Cartier and Phil Powrie analyse representations of ethnicity in American cinema. In Kelley’s piece, however, yet another dimension to transnationality is added, as the American–Chinese ac-
tress Wong also appeared in a British film; her transnational career thus in-
cludes both the Asian, American and European horizon.

In Yuan Chen’s article, the question is turned upside–down; the transna-
tional perspective here has nothing to do with crossing borders. Her analysis
deals with a Chinese star in China, who is read as ”Westernized”. Like Chen,
Selin Tüzün Gül also deals with a non–Western context, in this case ac-
tresses as part of the Turkish modernization project, within a cultural context
where women were not supposed to have the kind of roles that they actually
had in film industry.

In the section on the performance of ”femininity”, the authors deal with rep-
resentations of women on the silent screen from various perspectives, and in
particular how expectations of ”femininity” have been fulfilled or on the
contrary rejected.

Both Cartier and Powrie discuss issues of blackness. Cartier’s article fo-
cuses on how uplift ideologies limit the space opened up for female desire in
silent era race films, whereas Powrie in his paper, co–written with Éric Re-
billard, examines how questions of race restricts the character portrayal in
Josephine Baker’s first feature film La Sirène des Tropiques, and discusses
the complex interplay between blackness and whiteness in the film, particu-
larly in relation to male lead Pierre Batcheff.

Miya Tokumitsu in her article offers a thorough analysis of the swooning
of Louise Brooks in Tagebuch einer Verlorenen, and demonstrates how it
reveals “the unstable status of femininity in Western representation”. In
Laura Horak’s text on the Biograph Boy, an earlier unstable moment in film
history is analysed: “a momentous transitional era for American gender
norms and the burgeoning film industry” in the 1910s. And Hélène Fleck-
inger writes about the “first French vamp”, the ambiguous Irma Vep charac-
ter in Les Vampires, contravening “the norms of the fantastic like those of
femininity”. This section also bridges over to the two following ones, with
studies of personas and stars.

In his contribution to this volume, Charlie Kiel puts stardom in a quite dif-
ferent context than the usual ones, namely the logic of brand names and
companies. His argument is that the movie company actually formed the star
persona. This argument is repeated from an opposite position in Tricia
Welsh’s article, where she describes how Gloria Swanson went to Triangle.
Together, these articles describe the field of tension between star and com-
pany; who actually forms what? Welsh also deals with the fact that Swanson
initially started as a comedienne but after a while wanted to get more serious
roles. Her problems in this case are well comparable to the former section
about expectations and female stereotypes.

Kristen Anderson Wagner deals in her article with the relation between si-
lent comediennes and new women—but from a slightly different perspective
than the ones evoked before. According to her, the most important aspect is how the actual historical audiences read those performers. Annette Förster on the other hand launches the hypothesis that all these performers were—or at least might have been—stars from the outset, eventually turning into acting or producing.

The last section of the book, on fashion and fandom, deals with representations in fan magazines, in three of the cases specifically related to fashion. Andrea Haller argues in her article that modernity has been an important parameter for the centrality of fashion in cinema studies. Cinema and fashion alike have been considered as “models of the experience of modernity”. This is true even of the concept of physiognomy, another returning concept in this connection. The articles deal with different national contexts: Andrea Haller as well as Mila Ganeva writes on Germany: Haller on fandom and Ganeva on a close relationship between fashion journalism and screenwriting. The articles also deal with certain myths connected to female stars in the silent era: Thérèse Andersson writes on a Swedish film star, Anna Q Nilsson, who went to the United States but whose “Swedishness” was foregrounded by the press, whereas Mary Desjardins analyses myths of madness in relation to American silent stars.

The diversity of subjects in this volume also reveals both the complexity and the problems of the field of research that the Women and the Silent Screen Conferences represent. Not only do they deal with well-known, concrete issues within feminist scholarship, such as pioneers or stars. But they also have to do with a more fundamental question: that of the medium as such in its early years, and its conceptualisation within a feminist scholarly framework. This clearly reveals that other horizons may be opened towards early cinema, where the form and function of the medium may no longer be separated from questions of gender, reality or spectatorship. Rather, the scope of research has to be broadened, even from a gender perspective, to contain the moving image in its entirety. If the legacy of feminist theory, as Jane Gaines argues in her introductory article, has been “the transformation of the academically abject—thoughts and feelings—into its very basis”, feminism as such may still be a useful framework not least in theorizing early cinema, which might widen the scholarly outlook from the films only to contain a much broader horizon. To quote Gaines again, finally: “The continued vitality of silent cinema studies is testimony to our conviction, however, that the silent moving image and its acoustic supplement can go where word will not and cannot go”.

18
Framing Feminist Film History
Women and the Cinematification of the World

Jane M. Gaines

In a 1926 article titled “The Public’s Pleasure,” British critic Iris Barry wrote: “[...] Now one thing never to be lost sight of in considering the cinema is that it exists for the purpose of pleasing women.” Cinema existing to please women? Here is a productive starting point for the Women and the Silent Screen conferences, a declaration of the era’s expectations for women coincident with the expectations for the new cinematograph. What were these expectations? To be refined as well as to refine others, to be transformed (or just to feel so) and to transform the world. In Barry’s statement of purpose we recall the uplifting and improving momentum, the high ideals and aspirations that moviegoing seemed to have encouraged in a class of women. This would be the class whose interest was not perhaps in pleasure as feminists would later define it but whose interest was in finding pleasure through pleasing others, but also in averting displeasure.

So not surprisingly, Barry’s article turns out to be less about viewing pleasures and more about proper subject matter, which is why displeasure is really the operative concept here. The article is about the stories she disdains and her hope that the public would some day ask for “slightly better dreams.” In the body of the essay, along with her lists of exceptional titles, we find, however, an old complaint. Encapsulated in one small contrast is a topic I want to open out—a topic not unfamiliar to motion picture theory and history, a topic rich and compelling yet fraught with political as well as philosophical problems. Iris Barry, like so many other reformers, then as now, complains that the tiresome “love and marriage business” on the screen gives us “soothing syrup, not reality.” “Not reality.” “Here we go again,” you say. What in the world do we do with the “reality” that audiences expect, the “reality” that they have historically been encouraged to expect in the cinema? What is meant by this “expectation of reality”?

The question of the “expectation of reality” is highly ideological. The official cultural version of what is “real and true” has been internalized as what each of us tests against what is thought to be a “my reality.” The problem arises when one perceives a discrepancy between “my reality,” that which is

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2 See, for example, “Play to the Ladies.” The Nickelodeon Vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1909): 33–34.
4 Barry, 134.
5 Barry, 131.
felt to be one’s own, and some other “reality” (which might or might not be
the official social reality). Most often, the official “reality” becomes one’s
own, a function of hegemony, as we know. But not always. Sometimes one’s
own “my reality” is militantly held against official realities, especially when
“my reality” is empowered by the “our reality” of the minority group, a
group estranged from the official, often privileged, “reality of others.” Later,
however, I will discuss how this “reality of others” is reversed when, as the
material of domestic melodrama, it fascinates cultural and social class out-
siders. There, we will need to ask how the depiction of the harsh “reality of
others,” so often the subject matter of naturalism or documentary realism, is
drawn down into fictional melodrama, so often faulted for its abandonment
of the very social “reality” from which it may be drawing. This kind of ideo-
logical operation that dismisses melodrama is most clear with the move from
“my reality is not your reality” to “your reality is not reality” at all. By now
it should be clear that I am discussing how “reality” functions as a rhetorical
trump card, which should explain Iris Barry’s usage above. In Iris Barry’s
complaint, “not reality,” the sugary Hollywood dramatization rejected as
“not reality” is not necessarily measured against another’s lived “reality.”
Instead, it appears to be measured against an ideal “reality,” one that may be
synonymous with nothing other than “better things.”

It is difficult to know from silent film era commentary what is actually meant
by the term “reality,” especially with so many “realities” anticipated in the first
two decades of the appearance of motion photography. The very promise, in
Louis Lumière’s terms, “to bring the world to the world,” invited the compari-
son between the screen depiction and the event depicted, as well as this world
and that world, ours and not ours. How quickly, we ask ourselves, does the mo-
tion picture credited with the achievement of the realist goal come to be criti-
cized for failing to reach that goal? Clearly such apparently achieved aesthetic
realism invited comparisons. But oddly enough as soon as the moving image is
credited with achieving a nineteenth century standard of photographic realism, it
becomes subject to judgment by different criteria, criteria cloaked by the term
“realism.” If we cannot be comprehensive here, we can at least start a short list
of some of the kinds of “realities” that may be referenced in silent era discourse.
There may be the “social realities” or the topicalities of domestic worlds, some-
times political events, sometimes a woman’s own sense of lived reality. There is
everyday or daily life reality, not to mention the brutal realities of existence, and
the reality always antithetical to the apparently unreal (itself sometimes fantasy,
sometimes falsehood, sometimes hyperbole). Here I want to begin with the
question of the “realities” that we also find repeatedly coupled with the term
“the world,” often synonymous with “everything” as in “everything in it,” para-
doxically both microcosmic domestic worlds and the macrocosmic global. This
starting point will also be my ending point. Thus, the silent cinema spectator
seeking “reality” in the cinema parallels you and me, you and me as historians
seeking that spectator’s “reality,” reaching for, by means of our own histo-
riographic method, the so–called “historical reality” that our method can never totally deliver but that it continues to seek. In her 1934 University of Chicago lectures, modernist writer Gertrude Stein said this about the vaunting ambition of traditional historiography to know absolutely “everything”: “…how can an historian who knows everything really knows everything that has really been happening how can he come to have the feeling that the only existence the man he is describing has is the one he has been giving to him. After all the historian who really knows everything and an historian really does he really does how can he have the creation of some one who has no existing except that the historian who is writing has at the moment of writing and therefore has as recognition at the moment of writing being writing…Well I am sure I do not know.”  

Gertrude Stein, critiquing and parodying historiography with her stream of consciousness wit, tells us what we know but that we don’t want to say. And this is that the historian brings this realm of the historic into existence. The work of the Women and the Silent Screen Conferences, however, is to collectively create a new realm of cinema history, neither “the” history nor “a” history, but a strange double world. I say “strange” as well as “double” because there is an eeriness about the way in which the former reality of the historical past impinges on our present reality. Perhaps Gilles Deleuze captures something of what we might call the eerie “here– but– no–longer– here” aspect of the historical realm when he effectively says that it exists at the same time that it does not exist. This existing non–existence of the historical past is demonstrable in the case of the silent film era which comes into existence for us all over again with every screening. Again, like the silent cinema spectator, we posit another world continuous with and as full as our own, and in this positing, whether we would say so or not, we admit to having something somewhat like what post–colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak has called “empirical desires.” These are the desires to see and to know in detail, in us desires culminating in the writing of historical articles and books, in them (our historical subjects), desires culminating in more movie–going, sometimes scenario writing, and sometimes moviemaking. What is more important, their empirical desires are linked to a worldview, which brings me to my title.

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8 Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 251 – 253, is here much more subtle about the problem that deconstruction has had with empirical knowledge. Footnote # 84, 251, quotes Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 75: “What certitude of essence must guide the empirical investigation?…Without venturing up to the perilous necessity of the question or the arché–question ’what is,’ let us take shelter in the field of grammatological knowledge.” But in this section her reference to the “empirical” (her quotation marks) is paired with the discussion of “desire” (also hers), with more attention to a slippage between “desire” and “interests,” which is part of her critique of Marxist philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucald.
“Women and the Cinematification of the World” is an attempt to probe their worldview, to grasp the empirical expectations placed on the machine that claimed to envelop everything. Cinematification references the nineteenth-century anticipation Mary Ann Doane has described as the “guarantee that anything and everything—any moment whatever—is representable, cinematographic.” 9 Another way of putting this is to say that what sets the cinema century apart is that it was first century in which everything was cinematographable, the first in which every moment could have been motion photographed.10 Antonia Dixon and her brother William Kennedy Laurie Dickson, looking ahead in 1894, wrote in their co-authored *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kineto–Phonograph*: “All the kingdoms of the world, with their wealth of color, outline and sound, shall be brought into the elastic scope of individual requirement at the wave of a nineteenth-century wand.”11 What strikes us in the Dixons is of course the imperializing imagination, the old conquering stance of Anglo culture in the Victorian era. But the magical cinematographic mastery of absolutely everything promises something else that we see in the reformers, theatre owners, critics, producers, and players from the silent era. Think of theatre owners like African American Anna L. Tucker who opened with her husband the Pacific Theatre for blacks only in New Haven, Connecticut in 1914.12 Or, as Jan Olsson tells us, Mrs. Anna Mozart who managed as many as fourteen theatres in Los Angeles and started by showing titles from the Lumières’ first program.13

There was, we suspect, some irresistibly contagious utopianism at the moment of the inception of cinema worldwide, and women were not immune to this, not only in their “uplift” agendas, but in their risky economic ventures, scandalous affairs with powerful men, and in nothing more than leaving a small town and taking a train to the city. We want to know what the cinema had to do with the encouragement of aspirations, encouragement against the reality of the impossibility of leaving and the difficulty of undertaking anything that you were not expected to do. Cinematification as utopianism I find spelled out in Georg Lukács’s 1913 remarks published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* where he says: “‘Everything is possible’; this is the worldview of the ‘cinema,’ and because it technically expresses absolute reality… (albeit only

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10 In Jean–Luc Godard and Yousef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*. Trans. John Howe (New York: Berg, 2005), Ishaghpour, 4, in conversation with Godard quotes Godard as having said that it was the cinema that made “the twentieth century exist.”
empirical) in every individual moment, the validity of possibility is cancelled out as a category opposed to reality.¹⁴ So, at this moment when, perhaps just for a moment, “possibility” is thought not antithetical to “reality,” when everything seems possible, this productive antithesis is expressed in a sweeping historical phenomenon: the advent of cinema. This is what I am calling the expectation of the cinematification of the world as well as worlds within that world. Cinematification is both making everything into cinema and cinema thought to contain everything, a very historically flavored world view describing their time, not ours. But world cinematification is still somehow our historical problem (as well as our opportunity), the daunting task of studying it taken up by the Women and the Silent Screen Conferences where the shift of emphases signals that we no longer study what we called “women and cinema” in the 1970s.¹⁵ Now, in our most cross-national phase, women and cinematification positions us to deal with the expectant, exhilarating world view of modernization which includes modernization as the transformation of lives. And at the same time we are charged to not neglect the failures of modern democratization, to note that while some select lives have been transformed, others have not.¹⁶ And finally, to us has fallen the job of studying the genres that celebrated and registered the new conditions for women—the wild comedies and serial queen heroics.¹⁷ More paradoxically, and closer to my topic here, we study the domestic melodrama which made genre lessons out of the raw material of the failures of possibility in women’s lives. This is the melodrama that narrativized the disjunction between the hoped for new possibilities and the stubborn old social realities hardened by gender inequality. The most interesting question of all is which fosters which—these social failures or the

¹⁵ For a comprehensive overview of these developments see Alison Butler, “Feminist Perspectives in Film Studies,” in The Sage Handbook of Film Studies, ed. James Donald and Michael Renov (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 2008), 391 – 407.
¹⁶ Thomas Elsaesser, “Melodrama: Culture of Complaint of the Missing Universal of Social Justice?” Keynote Address, “Film Melodrama Revisited” Conference, Universite Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium (November 2009) has described melodrama as connected to a “crisis in Western democracy” in which persons live out the consequences of society’s failure to deliver the promised ideals of equality and justice. For the relation between cinema and “modernity” (the “shorthand” for economic, social, and psychological change), Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, “Introduction” in Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1.
genres that made narratives out of the discrepancies between cherished dreams and destitute lives.

For some women, the “possibility not at odds with reality” world view coincided with the local imagination of national and regional cinemas as well as the economic conditions favorable to starting small companies. Among these were the Italians Elvira Notari and Elvira Giallanella in the region of Naples, the Czech Thea Cervenkova, who Jindriska Blahova tells us started a company in Prague that lasted from 1918 to 1923 and the Egyptian Bahiga Hafez when she worked as producer, director, and musical scorer on a sound as well as a silent version of *Al–Dahaia/The Victims* (1932). Here the phenomenon that Karen Mahar has noted in the U.S. case is relevant. The number of women in the U.S. who announced that they were starting companies or allowed their names to be used as the basis for the foundation of companies—women–named companies far outnumbered independent companies started by male producers in the silent era.

And where exactly did it occur to these women producers, like Chinese–American Marion E. Wong that they, too, could use this “nineteenth century magic wand”? It must have occurred to them in the darkened interior of the motion picture theatre which is one reason we privilege this historical location and begin with the *spettatrice*, as Neopolitan critic Matilde Serao termed her in 1916. But the most important thing that can be said about the breathless “expectation of reality,” of everything suddenly “seeable,” is the first principle of its qualification: everything was not seeable.

1) *Our documentary interest in their documentary interest:* Although the first historical movement of Antonia Dixon’s “nineteenth century wand” wished the cinematification of everything, the turning of everything in to cinema, not everything could be turned into cinema. Not absolutely everything in the world, and certainly not in the first decade. This crucial insight is Heide Schlüpmann’s, found in her reconsideration of the moment at which the non–fiction *actualité*,
dominant at the beginning, that is, from 1895, begins to give way to the fiction film, which starts to occur around 1907. Why, she asks, when the actualité was so successful and numerically dominant did the fiction film so quickly come to ascendance? Many explanations have been offered for this, including the argument that fiction films, made on an assembly line basis, were cheaper to produce than actualités whose production depended upon the uncertainty of disasters breaking out. But Schlüpmann’s feminist reasoning is more interesting. Without denying the early fascination with the documentary mode of the actualité, in fact building on it, she argues that the first fiction films were, as she says “fuelled by the same interest,” and that they therefore were also a kind of documentation “albeit by other means.” Why? The early fiction film shows exactly the phenomena not seen in the actualité that purported to show all. What we do not see in the exterior landscapes and streets peopled by tourists and workers she says is “waking up in the morning in their cramped quarters or feudal boudoirs,” or “washing, bathing or getting dressed.” Neither do we see them “as a family at the table, in the kitchen or in some attic room. We do not see how they love, quarrel or dream….” Another way of putting this would be to say that we do not see that “other reality,” the “reality of others,” often working–class others as in, for instance, the British film There’s Good in the Worst of Us (1914), directed by Ethlye Batley, to which I will momentarily return.

Note also what happens here to the established narrative of film history when documentary is awarded a more dominant position. Schlüpmann’s argument for seeing the impulse of the actualité as extending further into the domain of fiction film poses a direct challenge to the received historical narrative in which the fiction film is inevitably dominant from its inception. This is a challenge much like Alison McMahan’s argument for reversing the order of the silent to sound film which allows us to accommodate the earlier success of the post-synchronized phonoscènes directed by Alice Guy Blaché at the French Gaumont company between 1902 and 1906. Placing more emphasis on Alice Guy Blaché, then, produces a new narrative order: sound to silent to sound.

24 Schlüpmann, 33.
25 Schlüpmann, 34.
26 Alison McMahan, “Beginnings,” in Elizabeth Ezra, ed. European Cinema (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23, argues that with an alternative narrative, that of what she calls “incomplete to complete mechanization,” we might be able to accommodate the technological fact of synchronized sound as appearing chronologically before silent cinema. See Alison McMahan, Alice Guy Blaché: Lost Visionary of the Cinema (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), 48, where she says that Guy directed more than one hundred of these scenes for the Gaumont chronophone.
In the new narrative that extends the documentary impulse, the complete cinematification of the world could not be achieved by the *actualité* alone but required the supplementary enactment of the fictioned film. In answer to a documentary fascination on the part of early audiences (who have already been established as curious spectators), the fiction film comes into being as a means of extending the exploratory territory of the cinematograph. Complete cinematification meant extension into the world of the home and, as we know, finally pushing on into the hitherto unseen and uncharted terrain of the psyche.

But there is a second, corollary question that arises here and anticipates a later historical development. Let us follow Schlüpmann for now and call it the censorship of sensitive material. Fiction here effectively operates as a disclaimer, a useful defense against censorship: The fictional frame placed around the controversial, intimate stuff of the “lives of others” says, “We can show you this scandalous situation because it’s ‘not true.’”

2) *Telling all without exactly telling anything.* But there would be practical problems as well that arise from the aspiration to go everywhere and show everything. Cumbersome cinematographic equipment, Schlüpmann says, could not enter the privacy of people’s homes, thus the practical prohibition that would legislate against documenting the socio–emotional material of familial relations. But, we say, once inside these borders, a second censoring, now a self–censoring and obfuscating tendency would develop; ingenious symbolics are resorted to, and another theory is required. The fiction whose goal was originally documentary “show all” now perfects strategies for disguising and denying what it appears to have shown. Because even when purporting to show all, the fiction film, extension of the *actualité*, did not and could not show all, not absolutely everything. Once inside domestic worlds some situations were found to be too much at odds with the rosy “our reality” of official cultures, too “unreal” (as it would be said) to record or to exhibit. As we know, it would be the real historical circumstances of women and children, the lived conditions of the household that could not be shown. Now what we want to know is what happens when we map the impetus of documentary interest onto feminist melodrama theory. We have a slightly adjusted paradigm: movement from the outside showing to the

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28 Schlüpmann, 35, says “Yet the project of recreating the private and intimate sphere in the “home” of the cinema was not only hindered by problems that originated in front of the camera. It was also hindered by the social taboo surrounding any glimpse of privacy and intimacy.”
inside, telling all, and from telling all to telling even more without exactly telling anything.\textsuperscript{30}

In Anglo feminist theory these too terrible conditions of the household have been understood as the raw material of melodrama, a kind of play on “raw” emotion as material. And here is where we need to ask what the fiction does to the raw material as well as what the raw material does to the fiction.\textsuperscript{31} Angela Dalle Vacche has raised this question in her recent book on the Italian silent diva film in the years 1913—1921. The diva genre, she says was never “escapist melodrama,” certainly not in the way the genre surveyed “major social problems,” the way it dared to take up “prostitution, adultery, and out–of–wedlock births.” One can see, she says, a “‘documentary streak’ buried in the diva film’s overcrowded wardrobes…” \textsuperscript{32} “Buried” is relevant here because Dalle Vacche observes something that other scholars have also discovered in so many national cinemas in the silent era: The contemporary commentary on these films avoids mention of these social problem topics. With reviews focusing only on the narrative and style of acting in the diva film, “references to prostitution, rape, or orphanages were usually absent,” Dalle Vacche says.\textsuperscript{33} The briefest inventory of melodramas from the first decades of cinema, especially those produced, written, and directed by women, confirm this assessment. I have already mentioned the British There’s Good in the Worst of Us (1914), which resonates with the Italian Assunta Spina (1913), directed by Francesca Bertini and Gustavo Serena. Both domestic melodramas are about women whose partners are in prison, although the British film turns out to be about the husband who returns to jail to insure that his wife receives her charity money and the Italian about the suitor sent to prison for spousal battery, the crime against her that Assunta’s beauty provokes. Adding to the social issue inventory, Shelley Stamp has confirmed director–producer Lois Weber’s interest in taking the material for her photoplays from the headlines, and it is well known that she did not shy away from stories about prostitution, social welfare, and the scandal of abortion.\textsuperscript{34} Still, these few examples are only a beginning. One of our most pressing research needs is to investigate the range of social issue material that women directors, producers, and writers have dared to submit to melo-

\textsuperscript{30} The oblique reference here is to Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (1974; repr. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), the fullest elaboration of the idea that melodrama is inclined to “say all” at the same time that it cannot “utter the unspeakable”, 4.

\textsuperscript{31} One often finds the assumption that cultural texts do something with or to the “raw material” that both is that from which it draws and its content, and I fall back on this for wont of a better concept. See, for instance, Fredric Jameson, A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present (London and New York: Verso, 2002), who refers to the “raw empiricities of the content”, 208.

\textsuperscript{32} Angela Dalle Vacche, Diva: Deviance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema (Austin: University of Texas, 2008), 253.

\textsuperscript{33} Dalle Vacche, 254.

dramatization. One could mention the issue of the unwed mother’s punishment for infanticide that Finnish reformer Minna Canth raised in her play Anna–Lissa, adapted by the Finnish film industry in the silent era, an extant copy of which is in Helsinki. There is Santanotte/Holy Night (1922), produced and directed by Elvira Notari, which is as its core a young working class woman’s struggle with an abusive alcoholic father. 35 Or, to give another example, La Marâtre/The Stepmother (Gaumont, 1906), attributed to director Alice Guy Blaché, which features the French police discovering evidence of physical abuse on a young boy. And yet “child abuse”, “spousal battery” and “alcoholism” are our contemporary political feminist points of entry into these films which come to us from a world that would obviously not have recognized familial discord in these unfamiliar terms.

Here is indeed the question, to paraphrase Christine Gledhill, of the “material of the world” that “melodrama seeks to melodramatize.” 36 The question of what melodrama seeks and finds to melodramatize is important one for feminist theory and historiography as we turn to the project of comparative world cinemas. As we know, the construct “women” does not, has not and cannot contain all the women in the world, then and now, in its theoretical purview. As historian Joan Scott has said, referring to “women” in earlier centuries, “It’s not just that women have different kinds of possibilities in their lives, but that ‘women’ is something different in each of these moments.”37 Does their differential then constitute our object of study? One century after the earliest globalization that was silent film distribution we want to know if cinematification was and continues to be world melodramatization. Much is at stake here in the field since both Gledhill and Linda Williams have argued that the dominant form (originally exported and now imported back to the U.S. from the rest of the world) was not classical narrative realist fiction, but melodrama. 38 Gledhill has recently refined her understanding of melodrama which she now sees as an overarching mode, a “genre–producing machine”—from the family romance to the woman’s film to the male melodrama action film. 39 What, then do we do with realism, the much–

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35 This film is newly restored, thanks to Monica Dall’Asta and others, and it premiered at the “Non Solo Dive?” “No More Divas” conference in Bologna, Italy, in December, 2007.
36 Christine Gledhill, “Introduction,” in Christine Gledhill, ed. Home is Where the Heart Is (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 31, who also tells us that this material “will shift.”
38 Linda Williams, Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 16, argues that melodrama has historically been the “norm, rather than the exception” in American cinema. The first to assert this position was Michael Walker who in “Melodrama and the American Cinema,” Movie 29/30 (Summer 1982), 2, says that melodrama is for American cinema the “most important generic root.”
maligned aesthetic that delivers the film world that says it is the same as the world from which it was drawn, but that has this long standing association with documentary interest in the social world?  

40 Progress has been made in challenging the earlier idea that cinematic realism and theatrical melodrama parted company and one now hears that melodrama and realism need each other.  

41 But if realism and melodrama are co–dependent, where exactly is melodrama’s challenge to aesthetic realism’s assertion that everything is ultimately representable, that its narrative logic delivers “truth,” and that its mise–en–scène reveals all?  

42 On what grounds, if any, does melodrama challenge the “what you see is what you get” of classical narrative realism, which it would need to do at the same time that it requires the raw material of women’s oppression, what we could call the harsh “reality of others.” If melodrama seeks recourse to realism it is a necessity born of the need to underline the most desperate of situations, to explain the intensity of suffering, and to warn harsh consequences. But the answer to the question “on what grounds does melodrama challenge,” I think, cannot finally be answered with reference to an analysis of the genre or the modality. Melodrama’s opportunity to challenge again (nearly three centuries after its French revolutionary moment) has been given to it, given to it again by feminism.  

43 Melodrama’s second revolutionary opportunity comes from the way film feminism has in recent decades awarded melodrama privileged access to historical realities, access to those lived dilemmas that have defined women’s conditions of existence: to abandon the burdens of the family or to be slave to them; to accept its suffocating protection or to languish alone; to abort a fetus or to starve a child.

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40 Here, the definition of documentary I like to use is Jean–Louis Comolli, “Documentary Journey to the Land of the Head Shrinkers,” October 90 (Fall 1999), 40, where he says that the documentary film “draws its power from its very difficulty, wholly derived from the fact that the real doesn’t give film the time to forget it, that the world presses on, that it is through contact with the world that cinema is made.”

41 Williams, 38, says “Melodrama borrows from realism but realism serves the melodrama of pathos and action.” Referring to the history of criticism that has followed the move from theatrical to motion picture melodrama, Gledhill, 229, says of realism that it “first worked in cooperation with melodrama and then disowned it.”

42 Ben Singer, Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 49–50, explains that the realism of represented social conditions to which I refer here would be understood in the silent era as closer to the tradition of “naturalism.” If stage melodrama was thought to be “realistic,” however, this was because, paradoxically, the detailed, seemingly authentic depiction of the most improbable of circumstances found expression in what he calls “spectacular diegetic realism.” Also see 176–177, where he sorts out the often confusing set of questions having to do with diegetic realism.

To understand how melodrama was awarded privileged access to the real historical, we need to return briefly to debates in the 1970s. Recall that this is where, in readings of such 1950s American films as *Imitation of Life*, melodrama’s opportunity is found in the gap between the so-called “reality” of the oppression of women and the expression of it. In the famous hydraulic hermeneutic, you will recall, “the failure” to “realistically” represent or “say” causes melodrama to resort to the overflow aesthetics of “excess.” Further, in this theory, as oppression is concealed and disguised, the film becomes narratively inconsistent and even incoherent. But wait a minute, not exactly, Laura Mulvey objected at the time. The highly ideological concealment of the structural “incoherence” produced by women’s contradictory situation is melodrama’s reason for being. This, she argued, most likely thinking of the widow who cannot be both mother and lover in Douglas Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* (1955). Ideological contradiction, Mulvey says, is not concealed, but is rather the very overt content of melodrama. Here we would understand ideological contradiction, for instance, in the expectations placed on women to be sexual as well as pure, to be a mother and yet to give up a child, and to work day and night but to receive no pay for love’s labor.

One wants to know if, after having moved on from the psychoanalytic theory fundamental to Anglo American melodrama theory in the 1970s, we still stand behind it. How, we want to know, would we explain melodramatic symbolics without it? And are aspects of Marxist feminism still left standing? It would after all be Marxist historical materialism that won’t let go of the revolutionary possibilities of melodrama, won’t let go of the two basic tactics of the mode: to dichotomize and to cry out, or to accuse and to triumph, and would want to recall the theatrical history of the French revolutionary dramas that incited the crowd. And would insist on the final material determinations of women’s emotional and economic conditions while monitoring the persistent ideology of “she asked for it.”

The contradictory conditions of women’s lives and the nuanced differences between these contradictions, culture to culture, are perhaps the one constant we can count on as we survey the melodramatization of this world material. One wants to know finally if we, as feminist historians and critics are also, as Mulvey says, “trapped in the Chinese box” that characterizes

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44 In Elsaesser, 67, we find the first inkling of the way “reality” enters the melodrama text when he says that in such 1950s films as *Imitation of Life* there is a “gap” opened “between the emotions and the reality they seek to reach.”

45 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith later seems to refine Elsaesser as: “The laying out of the problems ‘realistically’ always allows for the generating of an excess which cannot be accommodated. The more the plots press towards a resolution the harder it is to accommodate the excess.” “Minnelli and Melodrama,” in *Home is Where the Heart Is*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 73.

46 Laura Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama,” in *Home is Where the Heart Is*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 75.
melodrama itself.\textsuperscript{47} After all, melodrama form is brutal as it “forces” its dichotomy, patient as it allows every victim to cry out, generous as it awards the moral victory to the lesser, but yet uncompromisingly conservative in its judgments and in its enforcement of the moral code. In case after case, film after film melodrama, the covert is made overt only to be again concealed. In Anglo–American silent melodrama theory the paradigm articulated by Peter Brooks, that organizes our study is still the paradoxical concept that unspeakable acts are as spoken as they are unspoken.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Cinemelografia}

And this brings me to that other construct that organizes the bi-annual Women and the Silent Screen conferences—silence. As we study the women who do not all fit into the category “woman,” we also study the silence that was never exactly silence. There is, to carry over my concern about the real historical, a double silence to silent domestic melodrama—the production of silent motion pictures that took up topics about which societies remained silent—infanticide, illegitimacy, adultery. Silent film melodrama significantly keeps these secrets (no word of them spoken), the very secrets that it is desperate to divulge. Brooks, we recall, noted the similarity between the “text of muteness” and the project of deconstruction: Nothing is what it says it is; everything is other than what it appears to be. Signs and their usual meanings are estranged, their union postponed indefinitely.\textsuperscript{49} The whole process of signification is in upheaval with one sign system taking over for another. A scar is never just a scar nor a stained dress just a dress, and an ice flow is never just an ice flow. And the watchword of post-structuralism at its height: “There is no reality to be known except through signs.” Melodrama theory, at its height, however, reversed this high theory prohibition: The only way to know reality would be through the signs in excess of signs. Profound as well as poignant are Foucault’s thoughts on the problem of using linguistic signs to describe a painting: “It is,” he says, “not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say.” He goes further, “And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying…”\textsuperscript{50} Here is the wonderful, terrible double failure of silent melodrama—of the word to express so much, but also of moving pictures and music to contain so many worlds even in their more complex systems. The continued vitality of silent cinema studies is testimony to our conviction, however, that the silent moving image and its acoustic supplement can go where

\textsuperscript{47} Mulvey, 75.
\textsuperscript{48} Brooks, \textit{The Melodramatic Imagination}, 4.
\textsuperscript{49} Brooks, \textit{The Melodramatic Imagination}, 66–67; 77–78.
\textsuperscript{50} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Order of Things} (New York: Random House, 1973), 9.
word will not and cannot go. 51 Hence the perfect balanced paradox of melodrama’s wordlessness: unspeakable acts unspoken but expressed elsewhere in another register. In Italian, there is a word for this phenomenon, a word far more melodious to the ear than any in English. It is cinemelografia, the visual language of music on the screen.52

Asta Nielsen, it should be recalled, objected that there were too many words in the American silent photoplay.53 The practice of filling the screen with words, she thought, did not leave enough to either the skilled actress or to the active audience.54 Consider now, for us, the centrality of Asta Nielsen as a paradigm whose early works are the prototype for Schlüpmann’s argument that it is the “failure of the female narrative perspective” that produces the “tragic structure into which melodrama forces all of reality.”55 This paradigm allows feminism to put its more revolutionary foot forward as we imagine the moment when this perspective was ascendant.56 For this is the paradigm that both explains the dichotomized delivery of domestic melodrama and allows feminism a foot in the door and another chance to redress social inequalities.

51 Foucault, 9, comparing language to painting (and we can imagine cinema), says “It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say.”

52 See Dalle Vacche, 55

53 Marguerite Engberg, Asta Nielsen, Europe’s First Film Star (Berkeley, CA: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 1996), 18


55 Heide Schlüpmann, “Asta Nielsen and Female Narration: The Early Films,” A Second Life: Early German Cinema’s First Decades, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 118–122; Schlüpmann argues in “Early German Cinema: Melodrama: Social Drama,” eds. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, Popular European Cinema (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 207, that German melodramas took their scenarios not from life but the “tragic structure into which they compressed all reality ultimately consisted in nothing other than the collapse of the female narrative perspective within the restrictions of the dramatic form.” See also forthcoming English translation of Heide Schlüpmann, Unheimlichkeit des Blicks as Reason of the Heart: The Drama of Early German Cinema, trans. Inga Pollman (Champaign–Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010). (Contrast this with Anglo-American theory in which it is the narrative move from misrecognition to final recognition of the misrecognized innocence of the heroine that structures melodrama.) In the one, the woman is awarded power only on the symbolic basis of her higher morality; in the other, the woman (Asta Nielsen) organizes the narrative in her own terms. Recall Judith Mayne’s early argument that the early cinema “primitive” narrator was female, a position suggesting that it is within our theoretical power to reinstate her as well as to extend her reign. See Judith Mayne, The Woman at the Keyhole (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

56 There are other reasons, including honoring the work of the Asta Nielsen Kinematek in Hamburg, Germany, and their restoration and circulation of 35mm prints of her films, including Die BorsenKonigin/The Queen of the Stock Exchange. But finally, on the occasion of Women and the Silent Screen in Scandinavia, it seems fitting that we single out the early Danish portion of Asta Nielsen’s remarkable career.
The Abysses of Life

If we consider Nielsen’s career in the way that Annette Förster has looked at what she calls the “careerographies” of Canadian–American Nell Shipman, Dutch comedienne Adriënné Solser, and French actress–director Musidora, it is in the beginning that we see the female narrative perspective asserted.57 We would need to begin with Nielsen’s first Danish film *Afgrunden*, in English, *The Abyss*, 1910.58 But to further reinforce the vitality of this paradigm for us, consider the worldwide ramifications—the national cinemas that took up the central female paradigm from Nielsen. The Italian diva directly descends from Asta Nielsen and the Mexican cinema actress–director–producer, Mimi Derba descends from the Italians, citing Lyda Borelli and Pina Minechelli as her models.59 But we are only beginning to see how widely Asta Nielsen’s paradigm was distributed. Irela Nuñez tells us that Stefania Socha, newly arrived in Lima, Peru from Poland opened an “Acting for Film” academy there. Three years later, in 1929, she produced and directed the fourth Peruvian feature length fiction film, titled *Los abismos de la vida/The Abysses of Life*.60 While Nielsen’s piano teacher sinks to the status of bar maid who shoots the gaucho who has seduced and abandoned her, Bertha, the character in Socha’s film drops from her social class heights when she has an affair with her chauffeur. The unscrupulous chauffeur takes Bertha to a Chinese herbalist to terminate her pregnancy. In a narrative turn that suggests that *Los abismos* meets Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Cheat* (1915), Bertha solicits the help of the Chinese herbalist who fails in his attempt to poison the chauffeur, and shoots both himself and the chauffeur when he is discovered. Perhaps *Los abismos de la vida/The Abysses of Life* tells us even more than Asta Nielsen’s 1910 film about the social depths to which women could drop, sometimes as the result of irresistible erotic attraction across class. But note how the device of the woman dropping in class status works to both explore “other reality” worlds out of bounds to middle class spectators at the same time that the device worked to caution and control young women. *The Abyss* paradigm explores the moral underclass to which proper women could not gain access in the first two decades of the last century, but into which they may have feared they would fall. But also, for Asta Nielsen, the underclass was the “other reality” of the working class worlds of want and hardship from which she came. Not surprisingly, Socha’s film *los abis-

58 See Dalle Vacche on Asta Nielsen, 147–57.
60 Irela Nuñez, “Stephanie Socha,” in Gaines and Vatsal, eds.
mos, was a scandal in Peru; Asta Nielsen’s The Abyss was cut and retitled Woman Always Pays in its 1912 US release.61

The late silent film release date of Los abismos de la vida (1929) testifies to something that post–colonial theorist Rey Chow has urged that we consider in revamping comparative approaches to world cultures. Comparison, as she sees it, should now include a “critique of the uneven distribution of cultural capital,” but here the literary studies model cannot finally imagine the historical situation of world cinematification where sound arrived so unevenly.62 For in the contemporary circuit of women and the silent screen, the technological progress narrative is reversed and India, Peru, and especially China where the silent era extends into the mid 1930s, become now highly prized and privileged sites of research. Crucial for us become films like the 1932 Al–Dahaia/The Victims, newly restored by the Egyptian film archive in Cairo. Actress Bahiga Hafez, to whom I earlier referred, produced the film first in a silent and then in a sound version, scoring a sound track and directing the sound segments several years later when sound equipment became available in Egypt.63

Two developments in feminism put pressure on our theories of women and the cinematification of the world. One, the field has gone beyond the woman and cinema paradigm in which the avant–garde was the privileged feminist aesthetic and turned in recent years to documentary and melodrama as more fertile, particularly as modes of knowing women’s socio–emotional historical condition. Second, we see a companion development in First World feminism’s old hope of internationalizing feminism against the uneven development of both the nations of the world and the development of cultural theory. Here let me stand back from my argument and say that this tendency to want to excavate the contradictory raw material of women’s lives out of which melodramas are made may be entirely too dependent on a metaphor of industrial production. Yet this tendency is persistent, and it comes not only from the historical materialism in our own critical tradition but from historical spectators as well. Let us return in conclusion to the historical condition of female spectatorship where German sociologist Emilie Altenloh, in 1914, tells us that the audiences she studied were drawn to

61 Engeberg, 14, says that although a Toledo, Ohio, company bought six of Nielsen’s films that year, these feature films were never distributed widely in the U.S. before World War I.
62 Rey Chow, Sentimental Fabulations (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), argues that global distribution in the first decade of cinema mass circulated a gendered time bomb. In Chow’s terms, “a visibility of visibility—a visibility that is the condition of possibility for what becomes visible” (11). In Schülpmann’s terms this visibility receives “worldwide dissemination.” But here we come to a familiar theoretical juncture: we want to know all over again whether melodrama is reactionary or progressive. Schülpmann solves the problem by aligning Asta Nielsen with the Danish social drama and German melodrama with the compromised Henny Porten (See Schülpmann, 2010, forthcoming).
63 Magdi Abdel Rahman “Al–Dahaia–An Egyptian Case History in the Restoration of Nitrate Film,” in Roger Smither, ed. This Film is Dangerous: A Celebration of Nitrate Film (London: Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film, 2002), 369–374.
something similar to this. She concludes that their “interest in newspaper articles[…] was not all that different from interest in cine–dramas.” Interpreting the female spectator’s interests as centered on her own life in the present, Altenloh concludes that “Film drama comes to the people by entering their everyday life.” We are returned to Schlüpmann’s “documentary interest in fiction” perhaps documentary fascination, a theoretical insight all the more significant and interesting in its proximity to young German female audiences observed in 1914. We can go further, even, and argue that we are using the spectator herself as definitive source of important theoretical ideas, a possibility opened up by collections such as Antonia Lant’s recently published The Velvet Seat: Writings by Women from the First Fifty Years of Cinema where we discover Matilde Serao’s theory of the silent spettatrice.

Serao, writing in Naples in 1916 in L’Arte Muta about the spettatrice as a “creature of the crowd” suggests a theory of spectatorship in which darkness and anonymity produce what she calls a “bizarre miracle.” This is the miracle of feeling as one, unanimity in anonymity, which she thus describes:

I sat in a corner, in the dark, silent and still, like all my neighbors; and my anonymous and unknown persona became like many others, anonymous and unknown, who were sitting in front of, behind, or beside me. I was like them, an ordinary spectator, without preconceptions, without prejudices, without any sort of bond to anything or anybody. I did not have any ideas or opinions, nothing of anything crammed my mind, which became pure and childlike, spending so little money, staying in that darkness, in that silent and stationary anticipation. And do you know what happened? I experienced the very same impressions felt by my neighbor on my left, who, now urbanized, had formerly been, I think, a little provincial. And when the lady sitting in front of me laughed, I laughed too because in the dark everybody was laughing; and if the lady behind me cried, I started crying like her and like all the others who were doing the same. And so I became a perfect spettatrice (translated spectatrix)…

Here is a theory of mass culture that doesn’t know the theory of the construction of the gendered spectator. The utopianism of cinematification, the worldview of possibility not at odds with reality, imagines community and unanimity in anonymity. One thinks here of Richard Dyer’s recent theorization of the “historicity

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65 Also quoted in Heide Schlüpmann, Reason of the Heart, which suggests that this theory has built the German female audience into the theory of “documentary interest”.


67 Serao, 99.

68 Serao, 98; Perhaps this is what Lant means by “cross–class” fusion in Lant, ed. The Red Velvet Seat, 37.
of feelings,” which he says is not about the individual as the center of discourse, about feelings we alone feel alone, but rather about shared feeling, or “living within the limits of cultural construction of thought and feeling.”69 But Dyer continues, effectively reconceptualizing the approach to the history of genres, an approach in which viewers, then and now, belong to the same or similar “structures of feeling.”70 We begin to think of feelings as having histories, those feelings often felt together, as a strange historical coincidence. Like melodramatic coincidence, of course, our historical coincidence with silent cinema spectators is ingeniously plotted—it comes, after all, from our methodological construct. Historical coincidence is the phenomenon of writing the historical narrative in terms of the most pressing needs of the historical present. This is an issue that I have raised before with the question, “Are they Us?”, an inescapable question that forces us to think of how we use what we know of our gendered selves to access the silent cinema that has ceased to speak to us because of its arcane emotional standpoint, its peculiar encryption.71 We crack its affective code with extreme difficulty. So accompanying the possibility of historical coincidence is the total unlikelihood of historical re–feeling.72 We strain to feel but feel unable to feel exactly as they felt.

Yet what other way is there? One uses one’s own historically produced emotions to study the historicity of the emotions of others. Feminism, of course, originally gave scholars, both female and male, permission to turn their expertise in emotions into professional insights; the legacy of feminist theory has been the transformation of the academically abject—thoughts and feelings—into its very basis. This is particularly true for the study of melodrama, so often criticized for its “datedness,” for the way it wears the specificity of its emotional “historicity” too obviously. The question of our relatedness to the historical moment of silent cinematification may hinge on the development of an historical empathy, the perfection of a cinemelografic sensibility, a highly developed feel for the visual language of musical gesture.

72 Thomas Elsaesser (“Early German Cinema: A Second Life?” in Elsaesser, A Second Life, 13) puts it this way in reference to viewing early German silent cinema: “At times, one has the feeling of no longer possessing the cultural or emotional key to unlock their brittle charm.”
Conclusion: cinemelogratification

There is finally one other way in which the kind of historical research we do is academically unique and specialized. In addition to the requisite knowledge of other emotional realities, feelings historically felt made coincident, the historiographic methodology we use has its perfect parallel in its object of study itself. Indeed, if the cinematograph was early understood as a historiographic machine, we find that our object of study, not uncoincidentally, has the same goal as the historiography of it, as I started out by saying.73 We are familiar with the early fascination with itself that turned the cinematograph around and onto the phenomenon of the cinematograph—onto itself. But here, consider the streamed images of spectators exiting the new Claremont Theatre at 135th and Broadway, New York, NY, March 12, 1915, we have the phenomenon before right us.74 This Thomas Edison Company actualité is the kind of historical object that stirs the deepest of our “empirical desires.” The very subjects of our inquiry within the subject of our inquiry, what is more, acknowledging the historiographic machine at the same time that they are turned into the cinematographed. Here is the strange phenomenon of unanimity in anonymity, and, one suspects from the expressions on the faces of the viewers filing out, “cinema existing for the purpose of pleasing of women.” For the briefest moment, our rarefied empirical cravings are stirred by the object that appears to be revealing so much to us (temporarily disregarding whether it is or not).75 Here is historical coincidence: we are as gratified as they appear to be. If we could formulate this: for what they have had and for what we still search (in our darkened house) is cinemelogratification, the pursuit of which, as we know, is a highly cultivated craving.


75 I take the concept of empirical desires as never satisfied “cravings” from Alice Guy’s Madame a des envies/Madame Must Have Her Cravings (Gaumont, 1906), developed in “Empirical Desires,” address delivered at “Cinematic Desires” Conference, CUNY Graduate Center, March 4, 2010.
What It Means to Be a Woman: Theorizing Feminist Film History Beyond the Essentialism/Constructionism Divide

Monica Dall’Asta

Under what conditions can a feminist film historiography be imagined and practised today? How should we conceptualize the relationship between a feminist–oriented historiographical work like the Women Film Pioneers project, and the recent theoretical perspectives such as those raised within the framework of gender studies? Or, more precisely, how do we conceive of our work on women film pioneers at a moment like the present, when the very idea of “women” no longer appears to describe a unified, unproblematic reality and emerges instead as an intellectual artifact or a sociocultural construction? The purpose of this paper is then to interrogate our practice of feminist historiography in light of recent gender criticism of traditional sexual categories. This seems an unavoidable task, as one of the most important results of that critique during the last two decades or so has been the deconstruction and even the displacement of what had constituted—and still to my eyes necessarily constitutes—the basic category of any feminist discourse—that is, the concept and category of “women.”

I could gauge the contradictory effects of the sophisticated philosophical discourse put forward by the so–called “anti–essentialist” gender theorists during a film and gender studies conference that was held in Turin in 2006. This was the first scholarly event of this kind to ever take place in Italy; yet it proved to be well in tune with the most recent developments of postmodern gender theory, especially when both Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane—who had just delivered two very brilliant presentations—were abruptly asked to justify their use of the term “women” as if it were a “natural,” self–explanatory category, and were consequently questioned about their enduring belief in the tenability of a feminist critical position.

Of course, to erase “women” from discourse, and to impede their political action was not what Judith Butler had in mind when she advanced her now widely accepted theory of gender as a sociocultural construct. Following the critique

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76 Initiated at the end of last century by Jane Gaines, the Women Film Pioneers project now counts dozens correspondents throughout the whole world. One major, but not exclusive purpose of the project is the production of a Sourcebook in two volumes, forthcoming.
of those authors who, like bell hooks and Monique Wittig, as early as the late 1970s and the early 1980s, were already questioning what was then perceived as obvious evidence of a natural similarity among women, Butler provided powerful means to analyse the numerous, subtle ways in which the normative binary opposition of “male” and “female” works to repress and restrain the individual’s performance and expectations to a limited range of possibilities, much in the same way as other social and economic categories such as race and class. Her critique of what she portrays as an allegedly monolithic, essentialist account of sexual difference offered by traditional feminist theory cannot be easily dismissed, yet at the same time it would be unfair not to recognize the significant role this very concept of sexual difference has played in the elaboration and practice of queer theory itself. In a way, the groundbreaking feminist gesture of claiming difference to claim parity has fuelled an uninterrupted process of gender differentiation that has ended up disrupting the original apparent integrity of just that collective subject who first identified itself through sexual difference.

The effort to overcome the aporia revealed by the constructionist critique in the feminist discourse has originated a number of interesting contributions, aimed at preserving the theoretical possibility of naming such subject as “the women,” without incurring in the fallacies of universalism—a task that appears crucial not just for the sake of philosophy but primarily for its consequences in terms of political action.

Of course there can be many ways to claim the grounding of a discourse specifically concerned with women. In a recent essay, Jane Gaines sets forth one very powerful argument by elaborating Walter Benjamin’s vision of historiography as a continuous practice of connecting the present to the past through a

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search for resemblance and similarities across time. “Are we them?” and “are they us?” thus become the decisive questions to be asked in a process that aims at once to interrogate and construct identity, a never-ending process that does not take for granted the existence of any stable feminine essence, but engages itself in a continuous reworking of identity. I agree with Jane Gaines that Benjamin’s theory of history can offer an exceptional range of intellectual tools useful for constructing a feminist film historiography. In the final part of this article, I will offer additional possibilities along these same lines.

To begin, however, I would like to focus on another important contribution, emerging directly from the most classical tradition of feminist philosophy. My reference here is to Iris Marion Young’s essay on “Gender as Seriality,”83 which despite its wide circulation does not appear to have been thoroughly appreciated with regard to its far-reaching implications for women’s history. Drawn from Jean-Paul Sartre’s Critique de la raison dialectique,84 the notion of “seriality” invoked by Young seems to be particularly suitable to deal with the quantitative dimension that represents a most peculiar methodological aspect of the Women Film Pioneers project. The term “seriality” is employed by Sartre to indicate a somewhat “weak” mode of collectivity, a “passive” way of being together as opposed to the “active” mode that characterizes the “group” form.85 While groups are constituted through a process of mutual recognition among individuals who feel they share significant aspects of their experience, and therefore ally themselves to undertake a common project, such a conscious, active experience of self-reflection in the collective is not at all necessary to be part of a series. Instead, the individuals within a series are passively unified simply by the fact that their actions are heavily conditioned and restrained by a particular set of material structures, which form what Sartre defines as “the milieu of action”.86 Women for instance, Young argues, are passively positioned into a

85 “A group is a collection of persons who recognize themselves and one another as in a unified relation with one another […a] self-consciously, mutually acknowledging collective with a self-conscious purpose.” Young 723–724.
86 “Unlike a group, which forms around actively shared objectives, a series is a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects around which their actions are oriented or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of the others. […] Sartre calls the series a practico–inert reality. The series is structured by actions linked to practico–inert objects. Social objects and their effects are the results of human action; they are practical. But as material they also constitute constraints on and resistances to action that make them experienced as inert. […] Sartre calls the system of practico–inert objects and the material results of actions in relation
series by a particular set, historically and geographically determined, of gender codes and rules that define the way in which objects, spaces and representations function in relation to them. To be a woman, in other words— or a feminine subject in the properly Foucaultian sense of one who is subjected— one does not need to recognize herself in any sort of abstract feminine nature, it suffices to be recognized as such from the outside, and be consequently subjected to a preconstituted set of socially defined rules and material conditions.

I find this a particularly valuable response to the essentialist impasse, in that, to quote Young, the concept of seriality allows “disconnecting gender from identity” and promotes the adoption of a method based on intersectionality, on the premise that each individual finds her or himself at the intersection of different, multiple series, such as those formed by class, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. “Membership in the series does not define one’s identity,” Young writes. Moreover, “conceptualizing gender as seriality avoids” the problem of addressing womanhood as an idealistic universal or an essence because it does not claim to identify specific attributes that all women have. There is a unity to the series of women, but it is a passive unity, one that does not arise from the individuals called women but rather positions them through the material organization of social relations as enabled and constrained by the structural relations of enforced heterosexuality and the sexual division of labor. No doubt this new formulation of the notion of gender presents some strong similitudes with Butler’s constructionist approach, whose project of producing a “feminist genealogy of the category of women” rests on the argument that one becomes a woman only by absorbing and espousing pre–existing interpretations of femininity. Yet there are at least a couple of important specifications. In the first place, Young’s emphasis on the collective dimension of the series helps to keep open a possibility for political action, through the idea that those who are passively positioned in the same series can become aware of their condition, and thus eventually unify themselves in a group to pursue a common goal. Secondly, the concept of seriality seems to encourage the adoption of a more distinctively historical approach. In fact, while Butler’s discourse is essentially aimed to analyse the ways in which the concept of “woman” is constructed in language, Young’s emphasis on the material structures that restrain and condition the individuals’ performances allows a much more definite histori-

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88 Young, 733
89 Young, 733.
cal interrogation of the concrete ways in which an assorted series of empirical, bodily subjects finds itself submitted to similar constrictions and rules.

So what are the advantages that a similar conception can offer to the methodology of feminist film history? In my view, its interest is twofold. On the one hand, by presenting seriality as a passive way to be part of a collective, the constrictive aspects of gender are highlighted. Obviously, this can also be argued with regards to the constructionist approach, but where Butler is especially interested in “undoing gender” as a premise for the multiplication of transgender identities, the serial paradigm is more concerned with the analysis of how power relations work in given material conditions.

Such view can be extremely useful for us as we attempt to make sense of women’s contradictory position in the film industry at the beginning of the last century, as we try to understand their experience vis-à-vis the set of constrictive sociocultural rules that defined the limits within which they were meant to act and operate, or in other words, the prescribed limits of their performative and expressive possibilities. Though, as it has been argued, silent cinema did likely represent a somewhat favorable environment for women’s agency, especially in comparison with the film industries of the following decades, a sheer quantitative analysis can easily reveal how small a minority this production was when compared to its male counterpart. In other words, if a major result of this research has been the discovery that the women working in the early film industry, in both creative and managerial roles, were many more than ever suspected, we still have to acknowledge that in many cases their non-actress filmographies remain very thin.

This seems to be particularly true with regard to the European context—albeit several relevant internal specifications are still to be described—and strongly suggests the need to understand the constrictive dimension of gender in geopolitical terms. For instance, if we certainly know how to deal with such figures as Alice Guy, Elvira Notari, or Germaine Dulac, that is to say with those women for whom the authorship argument has been repeatedly advanced, the question emerges of how to deal with the much larger number of women filmmakers who, throughout their entire lives, were only able to direct, write, produce, distribute, and so on, not more that a handful of films,

or even one single film. Several more questions arise. For instance, why were so many of them also actresses? Could this indicate that women’s access to direction, production, and sometimes even screenwriting, was dependent on their previous entry into the film industry in a more traditionally feminine role, such as that of an actress? At least in the Italian context, the strong identification of women with actresses often implied a severe restriction, not just of their expressive possibilities, but even of their desires, as for instance in the series of women whose attempt to direct or produce films was basically motivated by the wish to transform themselves into divas—more than once, unfortunately, with miserable results. And one could go on by mentioning the large number of women who got into the film business by working as assistants to their husbands, or all those who could attain directorial roles only by setting up independent companies. In other words, women’s access to filmmaking was generally submitted to a number of restrictions and preconditions, which represented as many serious limitations to what Jane Gaines has called their “desire to make movies.”

This is obviously a very strong argument against the adoption of an auteurist approach whatsoever in the methodology of women’s film history. And hence we come to a second aspect of the serial paradigm that can be quite useful for

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94 To mention just a few interesting cases, a list of Italian filmmakers who managed to bring one single film to the screen would include for instance the names of Elvira Giallanella (p/d/w), Eleonora Duse (w/a), Matilde Serao (w), Diana D’Amore (d/w/a), Anna Fougaz (w/a), Vera Sylva (p/a), Lina Cazzulino Ferraris (w), while the filmographies of Bianca Virginia Camagni (p/d/w/a), Fabienne Fabrèges (p/d/w/a) and Daisy Sylvan (p/d/a) get up to a total of two titles. In France, the series of the single-title filmmakers includes figures like Georgette Leblanc (p/w/a), Marie-Louise Iribe (d/a), Jeanne Bruno-Ruby (d/w), and Renée Carl (d/a). In Britain, somehow proportionally to the exceptional multiplication of figures that has been recently recorded in that country thanks to the work of the Women’s Film History Network UK – Ireland (see for more information the http://womenandsilentbritishcinema.wordpress.com website), the single-film series also escalates to include such names as Mary Marsh Allen (p/a), Mrs Bertram Broooke (p), Countess [Ina?] Bubna (p/a), Ivy Duke (w/a), Frances Grant (d/w), Kate Gurney (w), Isobel Johnston (w), Jessie Robertson (w), Marie Stopes (w), Diana Torr (w), and May Wynne (w/a), while Mrs Sidney Groom (w), Rosina Henley (w), Peggy Hyland (p/d), Dale Laurence (w), Daisy Martin (w), Helena Milais (w), Mary O’Connor (w) all participate into the two-title series.

95 See for instance the extremely short enterprises of Diana D’Amore (d/a), Fabienne Fabrèges (d/p/a), Daisy Sylvan (d/p/a), Bianca Maria Guidetti Conti (p/a), Berta Nelson (p/a), Elsa Tornielli (p/a), Maria Campi (p/a) who went on experiencing direction or production from a more or less established career as actresses. For more on some of these figures, see Alberto Friedemann, “Imprenditoria femminile nel cinema torinese,” in Non solo dive. Pionieri del cinema italiano, 195–227.

96 In fact, this seems to be the general rule in the case of women’s cinema. In Italy, the only major exceptions to such condition are those of Francesca Bertini (who played the lead first at the Celio and then at the Caesar film companies) and Eleonora Duse (whose sole, bitterly unsuccessful film was produced by Ambrosio). Most of the women who turned to film direction could do so only by creating their own companies, from Elvira Notari to Diana Karemne, Elettra Raggio, Gemma Bellincioni, Bianca Virginia Camagni, Daisy Sylvan, and the recently discovered Elvira Giallanella.

97 Gaines, “Of Cabbages and Authorship,”
the purposes of this research. What is specific to the concept of seriality is the
way in which it allows us to detect collectives, there where we were accustomed
to see just individuals. This does not mean to imply that collectives have to be
the only focus of attention at the expense of individuals, but rather that individu-
als are constantly seen in relation to a collective. The peculiar novelty of the
Women Film Pioneers project is, exactly, to shift attention to the exclusive con-
sideration of individual, isolated points of excellence to the multiple reality of
the series. In the framework of this project, the study of individual figures is a
necessary precondition for serial construction, since the detection of similarities
is strongly dependent on the comparison of single case studies. I would like to
stress that in such perspective the inclusion in the series does not preclude iso-
lation. As contradictory as it may seem, the paradox is in fact perfectly coherent
with Sartre’s notion of the series as a passive form of collectivity, wherein individ-
uals can share similar experiences without being aware of it—for, as he
writes, a series is simply a “plurality of isolations.” Moreover, even though we
can legitimately doubt that women filmmakers did work in isolation from other
women, the paucity of historical documentation that always characterizes
women’s history tends inevitably to transform them into what Walter Benjamin
would call “monads,” that is, unconnected historical images that can become
meaningful only when put in relation with other similar, isolated images, so as to
produce what he suggestively terms a “constellation.”

So in a way the task of a serial historiography should be that of drawing as
many constellations as possible in the obscured firmament of women’s cinema.
Now, my feeling is that a significant number of such constellations can be put in
place on the basis of recurrences that highlight the constrictive aspects of gender
positioning. Consider for instance the high rate of failures these women faced in
their careers: how are we to explain that so many of them just managed to direct
or produce one single film? It is telling that a great majority of women directors
could produce their films only by setting up independent companies, which,
however, were generally short–term and did not survive the global process of
industrial consolidation begun in the second half of the 1910s. The story of Lois
Weber is a case in point here, as is that of Alice Guy Blaché, yet the pattern is
very much the same also in Europe, where the women who had embraced film
direction and production during the 1910s were progressively pushed out of
business too, as cinema became more and more institutionalized. The serial
recurrence of negative coincidences prompts us to look for more general expla-
nations, which in turn can lead us to ask more general questions. If we explain
the unfortunate destinies of so many women’s companies during the 1920s as
the result of the consolidation of power structures in the film industry, we may

98 Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, 256.
100 See, with particular regard to the American context, Ward Mahar, Women Filmmakers in
Early Hollywood.
end up asking if a similar transformation also took place in this period in other economic fields, and with similar effects on women’s agency. Moving from one question to the next, we might end up connecting individual destinies with a more general framework of women’s history, building up a relation between even the smallest of these figures and, say, the backlash against feminism that emerged in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{101}

Sometimes—as Annette Förster has stated with regard to Adrienne Sölser, Musidora and Nell Shipman\textsuperscript{102}—the stories of these women are made up of both fame and failure; but sometimes, alas, there is just failure. The examination of such a series is a particularly challenging task, which nonetheless might result in some real surprises. In fact, one interesting aspect of the serial paradigm is that it allows us to explain failures not simply as a result of individual limitation, but by interrogating the limits and constrictions of a specific sociocultural context. It is far too easy to smile at the naïveté, or artlessness, or excessive ambition of some such unfortunate attempts, which were regularly crushed by critics in unsympathetic reviews (in Italy, some typical cases are those of Fabienne Fabrèges, Diana D’Amore, Gemma Bellincioni, Elsa Tornielli) but how hard could it have been for a woman at the beginning of last century, to even imagine becoming a filmmaker? In Italy, for example, women who were willing to start a production company had to deal with the so-called rule of “marital authorization,” a law that obliged them to have their financial projects previously authorized by either their husbands or their fathers.\textsuperscript{103} Often they had received no formal education whatever and had to be self-taught. How can we be surprised, then, by their gaze at stardom as a unique and much desirable prospect of liberation and personal autonomy?

Yet, even those who succeeded in acquiring such much–yearned–for star status, ended up subjected to its rules and restrictions. Just think of two exceptional failures, as are those of Eleonora Duse and Georgette Leblanc: their challenging attempts to stretch the interpretative scope of their respective star personas—Duse by appearing at sixty–three in a completely unglamorous role of an old mother; Leblanc, on the contrary, by proudly impersonating at the age of fifty–four the character of an irresistible femme fatale—were both doomed to fall flat, leaving no space for any future film projects they had in mind.\textsuperscript{104} We


\textsuperscript{104} For more details on Duse’s and Leblanc’s film experiences, respectively in \textit{Cenere} (Febo Mari, 196) and \textit{L’Inhumaine} (Marcel L’Herbier, 1924), see Elena Dagrada, “La tentazione del silenzio: Eleonora Duse e \textit{Cenere}” in \textit{Non solo dive}, 81–92, and Maureen Shanahan, “Indeterminate and Inhuman: Georgette Leblanc’s in \textit{L’Inhumaine} (1924)”, \textit{Cinema Journal}, no. 4, 2004, 53–75.
can only dream of what they might have accomplished in the cinema had they been able to pursue their plans, none of which ever saw the light simply because they had too boldly challenged the codes of gender representation.

This is enough to say that the history of women’s cinema cannot deal solely with the films that did come into existence, but it has to open up itself to also include—to quote Godard—“the films that were never made”\(^{105}\): projects that remained at the fantasy stage, stories that were just imagined and never accomplished. This is a completely different history than what we are accustomed to write, for it is based on the premise that what came into factual existence is just a minimal portion of all that was attempted—of all that was dreamed and desired. It is a (hi)story that invites us to work using creative hypotheses and even imagination—or, to quote Jane Gaines once again, by fictioning the women we study\(^{106}\)—for it is actually in our imagination that we finally become more similar to them.

Such fictioning is also operational in the process of series composition, meaning that the interest of this new historiography rests entirely in the possibility of connecting together figures who never found themselves in any factual relation to each other, who never worked together, who always remained sealed off from one another precisely by virtue of their failure—and sometimes their refusal—to meet the stereotyped expectations of a culture that certainly had some very clear ideas about what a woman should—or, rather, should not—be or do. So it is suggestive to read along these lines the intriguing, yet extremely mysterious case of Elvira Giallanella, whose extraordinary antiwar film of 1919, *Umanità*, was one of the most unfortunate productions of Italian silent cinema as a whole. Micaela Veronesi has reconstructed as precisely as possible the vicissitudes of this quite unique film, which was completely ignored by the critics and was perhaps never officially screened in front of an audience, and which, nonetheless, is of the greatest value for us, in that it represents a most courageous attempt by a woman director to use cinema for pedagogical purposes, with the intention to infuse the younger generations with the hatred of war.\(^{107}\) Clearly, Giallanella had made her film with the hope that it might help eradicate war from history, and clearly she failed. But there are beautiful failures that are more valuable than many a success: for they show how, too often than not, it is history itself that fails.

I thank Kim Tomadjoglou for her generous help in revising the English of this article.

\(^{105}\) The quote is of course from Godard’s video series *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998); see for a discussion Dall’Asta, “The (Im)possible History”, in *Forever Godard*, edited by Michael Temple, James Williams, Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004).


\(^{107}\) See Micaela Veronesi’s article in this volume.
Feminist Film History and the (Un)problematic Treatment of Transnationalism in Early Cinema

Rosanna Maule

While transnationality was an important dimension of cinema’s early decades, it has only recently become a subject of inquiry for scholars specialized in this period of film history. This paper illustrates the ways in which feminist discourse addresses and problematizes the transnational in early cinema. The asynchronous and varying articulation of gender and modernity within different contexts of film production and reception around the world is a central issue in the feminist take on transnationalism. Feminist approaches to early cinema underscore the complex articulation of transnationalism by investigating women’s participation in modernity at the interface of local, global, sub-national, national and global practices of film production and reception.

Feminist historiography and the Western paradigm of transnationalism

The constitution of early cinema as an area of research follows the epistemological and methodological shifts within the discipline of film studies during the 1970s and the 1980s. The scholarship on early cinema is the product of two reactions, the first against teleological or aesthetically informed positions in film discourse positing the narrative form and classical cinema as normative models, the second against the passive paradigm of spectatorship implicit in these models and analyzed within apparatus theory. At the outset, the goal was to identify film practices and modes distinct from those found

in narrative classical cinema and to problematize the conceptual and methodological approaches linked with that model. These purposes inaugurated a new historiography, bringing together archival research and conceptual frameworks drawing on, among others, narratology and cultural studies, and characterized by a frankly interdisciplinary orientation.

The historiography on early cinema aims not just to rescue this period of film history from cultural or academic disregard but to understand and contextualize its diversity from classical cinema by stressing the specificity of its exhibition practices, modes of address, and reception. The reconceptualization or abandonment of formal and aesthetic parameters and categories generally associated with narrative and classical film forms plays a fundamental role in this area of studies, and marks the introduction of new concepts that have had a profound impact on film discourse in general. This methodology explains why, while early cinema is comprised within a fairly rigid time frame, its periodization is marked by flexible chronologies relative to the emergence and life span of specific film systems or techniques, and diachronically reverberating in the classical period of film history, as well as in pre- or post- cinematic eras or phenomena.109

The interest of feminist scholars in this period of film history has to do with the epistemological and methodological possibilities implicit in positing early cinema as a different type of cinema. The first decades of film practices offer a new terrain of investigation to explore women’s operative margins within the socio-cultural contexts and ideological forces that contribute to constitute cinema as a patriarchal cultural industry and system of representation. This type of investigation developed in two directions: on the one hand, the study of women film pioneers; on the other hand, a new theorization of female subjectivity within the framework of pre-classical film modes and reception practices. This purpose subsumes most of the feminist work on early cinema produced during the 1990s. The work of Giuliana Bruno, Anne Friedberg, Miriam B. Hansen, and Lauren Rabinovitz,110 among others,

109 Scholars generally agree on the division of early cinema into two phases, one starting in 1895 and ending between 1906 and 1908, and another, called ‘transitional’ or of narrative integration, and marked by narrative integration, beginning between 1907 and 1909 and ending between 1913 and 1916. Each of these phases is divided into further segments, whose articulation (especially regarding the transitional phase) going from either 1907 or 1909 to 1916, is subject of various interpretations and academic debates. The first phase includes the one-shot/documentary film period (1895–1902) and the multiple-shots/staged films period (1902–1908). Some historians set the beginning and the end of the transitional phase in 1907 (Charles Musser) and 1913 (Charles Keil), respectively. Richard Abel and Rick Altman identify 1910 as a turning point for early film chronology in North American film.

points to a more fluid and active typology of female subjectivity than that associated with classical cinema and theorized by feminist film theorist during the previous two decades.

This focus also explains the distinctive development and position of feminism within the new historiography on early cinema. Film historians, including those working within a feminist framework of discourse, have raised methodological perplexities about the excessive or exclusive emphasis put on gendered identity in this area of feminist historiography, a stress which they view as a problematic refashioning of concerns and positions prominent within apparatus theory.111 Commenting on this issue, Lauren Rabinovitz cautions against “the serious limitations in focusing only on gender in subject formation and on subordinating social theories, economics, and geo–politics in silent cinema’s continuous operations as an industrial practice and commodity.”112 For her part, speaking from the perspective of feminist historiography in general, Janet Staiger insists on the impracticality of that position, noting that "[c]ontemporary identity theory asserts the significance of intersectionality: no specific identity is separable from the complex configuration of identity markers".113

The latest developments within the feminist discourse on early cinema have extended the conceptual frameworks and the analytic boundaries of this historical practice in the directions that Rabinovitz and Staiger point out. The contribution of feminist historiography to the treatment of transnationalism in early film practices is quite unique in that it challenges the Western–centered parameters informing this area of film studies. Feminist scholars assume the temporal or cultural discrepancies existing among practices and concepts of early cinema in different geo–political contexts as discursive and methodological strategies. Jennifer M. Bean, in her introduction to A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema,114 identifies the reformulation of early cinema’s periodization, conventionally set between 1895 and the years immediately preceding World War I, as a distinguishing trait of feminist historiography, which calls into question the methodology lying beneath this area of

112 Lauren Rabinovitz. "Past Imperfect: Feminism and Social Histories of Silent Film" in Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies, 16, no. 1 (2005), 21–34.
studies. From this point of view, she offers that for feminist scholars, 'early cinema’ coincides with ‘silent cinema,’ as it points to discourses, socio-cultural phenomena, and technologies connected with modernity that are still present until the end of the 1920s, most particularly in non-Western cinemas and in cinematic practices conceived outside of the Hollywood paradigm.\textsuperscript{115} The most recent feminist scholarship specialized in Asian early cinema has adopted this temporal asymmetry as its methodological premise.

Zhen Zhang’s discussion of early Chinese cinema is a case in point. Within China, the early phase of film history extends to 1949, to include the pre-revolutionary period preceding the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. Zhang views the 'unwitting parallel’ between this periodization and the one conventionally used in Western film scholarship as an opportunity to 'relocate early Chinese cinema in a broader cinematic modernity’. She writes:

The divergent origins of the term in Euro-American and Chinese contexts, and the discrepancies in periodization respectively, alert us to the heterogeneity of the international film scene in the silent period. Rather than trying to find an equivalent—or contemporaneous—period and practice in Chinese film history that squarely fits the category of early cinema in the West, I choose to use the term heuristically for creating a critical space that negotiates its different valences, temporality, and historicity.\textsuperscript{116}

Catherine Russell, introducing a special issue of \textit{Camera Obscura} on the figure of the New Woman in Chinese, Japanese and Hollywood films of the 1920s and 1930s, defines ‘transnational feminism’ the context within which feminist historians may redeem and recover “women’s discourses that may well have been largely unrecognized at the time”\textsuperscript{117} This framework of discourse, she claims, enables a trans-cultural and diachronic dialogue between early—twenty-first—century transnational feminism and early—twentieth—century transnationalism. Russell considers the latter “clearly a fundamental component of interwar Chinese, Japanese, and Hollywood cinemas, one through which hybrid gendered identities were constructed within Orientalist and nationalist ideologies”.\textsuperscript{118} The different temporalities associated with the transnational context of early cinema also explain the particular articulation of gender and modernity in Latin American films of the silent era, a topic which has been explored notably at the Fourth Edition of the Women and the Silent Screen Conference, held at the University of Guadalajara.

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\textsuperscript{115} Bean, 8–9.
\textsuperscript{116} Zhang’s article was republished in Bean and Negra (2002) and further developed in Zhang’s book \textit{An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1986–1937} (2005).
\textsuperscript{118} Russell, 11.
\end{flushleft}
The problematization of transnationality also characterizes the feminist position vis-à-vis a much-debated topic in the scholarship on early film practices, the discourse on early cinema’s relation to modernity. In stretching the temporal boundaries of early cinema to the end of the silent era and in some cases even beyond then, feminist scholars contextualize early cinema within a vaster idea of modern culture, which in turn involves a rethinking of the rapports between pre- and narrative cinema, or pre-classical and classical film forms. To be sure, the opening of the dominant paradigm of modernity outside of high-art canons and aesthetic criteria is not exclusively found in feminist approaches to early cinema. Yet the perspective from within which feminist historiography tackles the ideological determinants shaping that paradigm, that is, the attempt to theorize female subjectivity outside of Western epistemology and culture through the exploration of its constitutive Otherness, is quite distinctive. In this respect, Miriam Hansen’s concept of vernacular modernism plays within the feminist discussion of modernity. Vernacular modernism appears in several gender-specific or feminist studies of early cinema focusing on non-Western contexts, including Hansen’s own analysis of Shanghai cinema in the 1920s and 1930s. These analyses highlight the pivotal role of female actresses for regulating competing discourses on gendered identity within modernity.

In assuming the temporal discrepancies among manifestations or periodizations of early cinema across the world, this new strand in feminist historiography is also questioning methodologies and criteria in use within feminist approaches to this area of studies. This is the case, for instance, with terms or frameworks traditionally applied to gauge or discuss women’s participation in early film industries, such as the figure of the female film pioneer or the concept of female authorship. For Russell, the abandonment of these methods is necessary when dealing with the international dimension of early cinema.

119 With this concept, Hansen wants ‘[…] to ‘encompass cultural practices that both articulated and mediated the experience of modernity, such as the mass-produced and mass-consumed phenomena of fashion, design, advertising, architecture and urban environment, of photography, radio, and cinema’ (Hansen 1999, 60).


122 Russell remarks this, introducing the aforementioned special issue of Camera Obscura including papers selected from presentations given at the Montreal edition of the Women and the Silent Screen conference, which she co-directed with me in 2004. She makes explicit reference to the Women Film Pioneers Project (WFPP), founded in 1995 with the purpose of forwarding research on women’s contributions to early film practices in a variety of roles. The WFPP has been active in a variety of areas, including, besides archival research and publications, film restoration and preservation, organization of screening series and film distribution at specialized festivals and conferences. The WFPP is now sponsoring a series of sourcebooks on women’s contributions to early film practices divided by continental area. The first, on US Cinema, is due with Illinois Press. The second, on European cinema, is being developed. For discussions on the role of female authorship in early cinema, see, among others, Gaines (2002), Maule (2005), and Rabinovitz (2005).
cinema. Russell’s point is well taken and raises a fundamental issue regarding the project of de–centering Western–focused discourses on transnationalism in early film practices. While both the pioneers’ methods and authorship retain their methodological validity for the study of early cinema, they have little use for comparative analyses of transnational discussions of early cinema. Without suggesting binary divisions between Western and non–Western, or First– and Third World areas, women’s presence in early cinema cannot be evaluated through transnational standards of analysis using figures or approaches informed by Western–capitalist–liberal economic standards or aesthetic categories. A truly comparative transnational history of women in early cinema needs a methodologically diversified analysis of women’s positions within specific cinematic contexts, as well as roles in modern culture and society, utilizing conceptual frameworks not just limited to cultural theory, but also social history. This approach informed the three latest editions of the Women and the Silent Screen conferences and the publications issued from them.

Theorizing the Transnational in Early Cinema

Transnationality and globalization have arguably superseded nationality in the geopolitical discussion of cinema and other media. The connotation of transnationalism as a supranational imagined community within which people, technologies, media images, and ideologies circulate, which the theorization of globalization offers, well suits the borderless scenario of early film practices. Yet the concentration of this scholarship on a contemporary, post–national view of transnationalism makes it hardly applicable to the first decades of the twentieth century. More appropriate is a distinguished strand in the present discourse on transnationalism, derived from revisionist approaches to the concept of nation developed in sociology and cultural theory during the 1970s and the 1980s. In this section, I refer back to this conceptual framework for considering early cinema’s transnational conformation outside of a Western–centered perspective.

This revisionist scholarship on nation questions the modernist paradigm canonized during the 1960s in sociology and political theory, which presented the nation as [I quote from Anthony D. Smith here] “intrinsic to the nature of the modern world and to the revolution of modernity”. Against

123 Russell, 4.
124 From the Montreal edition of the WSS, these publications include Russell’s aforementioned special issue of Camera Obscura (Russell 2005), Russell and Maule’s co–edited dossier of Framework (2005), and a special issue of Cinémas edited by Maule (2005).
this heuristic view of the nation as a state–building process based on social reformism and post–colonial self–determination, this literature proposes a constructionist model, historically contingent upon immanent events as well as long–term phenomena. For constructionist theorists, the nation is the result of people’s affiliation to notions of collective identity, a thesis perfectly synthesized in Benedict Anderson’s statement that the nation is an ‘imagined community’.

This idea of nation was widely influential in film studies during the 1990s, yet almost completely ignored by historians specialized in early cinema and has only recently been recuperated in this area of the discipline through the discussion of transnationalism. An admirable application of this literature to the study of early cinema appears in Ana Lopez’s overview of the relations between cinema and modernity in Latin America between 1896 and 1920 published in Cinema Journal in 2000. In her article, Lopez adopts Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined community’ to describe “the early forms of mediated modernities […] complexly refracted and inflected” that this relationship involved, against what she defines as [here I quote Lopez again]

[… the narratives of Latin American modernity some scholars want to tell, be they tales of foreign technological and ideological domination and inadequate imitation (à la Armand Mattelart and Herbert Schiller) or contemporary chronicles of global mediations (à la Martín Barbero).]

With reference to the introduction of the cinematic apparatus in Latin America, Lopez notes:

[the] new technology was used for the benefit of the imagined national community, to negotiate precisely the conflicts generated by the dilemmas of a modernity that was precariously balanced between indigenous traditions and foreign influences, between nationalist aspirations and internationalist desires.

Most scholars working on Asian cinemas underline the necessity of articulating the national within transnational approaches to early cinema. This claim is the basis of Sheldon Hsiao–peng Lu’s 1997 collection of essays on transnational Chinese cinemas, which includes contributions by the most authoritative scholars in this geo–cultural area. Introducing the book, Hsiao–peng Lu contends that Chinese national cinema can only be understood in its properly transnational context. One must speak of Chinese cinemas in the

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129 Lopez, 48.
130 Lopez, 61.
plural and as transnational in the ongoing process of image-making throughout the twentieth century.

Hsiao-peng Lu adopts a symbolic periodization, from 1896 until 1996, overdetermined by the national/global nexus of the nation-states included within the category of Chinese cinemas and comprised between the beginning of the transnational distribution and consumption of films in China and the year preceding the return of the transnational film industry par excellence, the one based in Hong Kong, to the Mainland.

Yingjin Zhang, in his book on Chinese national cinema, also adopts a national context of analysis, which covers “all films produced in mainland China (including those prior to 1949), Hong Kong and Taiwan”. This “general and potentially comparative framework,” he contends, “enables us to trace the interactions between Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong (all marked by distinctive dialect uses) in early cinema and transnational cinema throughout the twentieth century.” In his introduction, Zhang also justifies the decision to maintain a national, albeit transnationally informed, approach to Chinese cinema at a time when post-national and global discourse studies are predominant in the discipline, as a methodological strategy. Zhang assumes the national as a ‘cinematic project’ that articulates the varied and competing discourses, practices, and regulations connected with the idea of nation. Zhang draws from the constructive theory of nationhood, as well as (with some reservations) to Chris Berry’s idea of national agency, which Berry derives from Judith Butler’s concept of agency as a flexible conceptual framework positing identity as an infinitely iterated and citable concept.

The constructive and performative nature of national identity is a major tenet in post-colonial theories of nation, best exemplified by Homi Bhabha’s view of the nation as a form of cultural affiliation based on the articulation of pedagogic and performative discourses. The pedagogic discourse represents political rationality and produces national narratives. The performative discourse champions the socio-cultural application and experience of the nation. These two discourses, Bhabha suggests, are configured in an ambivalent relationship, which opens a space between the pedagogic and the performative space/language of the nation, the ‘in–between’ space of political and cultural meanings.

This in–between space is a crucial element to consider when addressing the borderless yet highly unequal context of early cinema’s production and distribution. Post-colonial theory is indeed a major conceptual framework in feminist discussions of non-Western gendered identity in transnational early cinema. Yet these studies do not always or directly make reference to the discourse on nation developed within this framework. A case in point is the

132 Zhang makes reference to Chris Berry’s 1998 publication.
abovementioned special issue of *Camera Obscura* on the figure of the New Woman in Chinese, Japanese and Hollywood films of the 1920s and 1930s, edited by Catherine Russell in 2005. In her introduction, Russell opportunistically highlights the emphasis on national discourse emerging from this comparative study of the intersection of gender and transnational modernism in three different cinemas. Commenting especially on the essays focusing on Chinese and Japanese contexts, Russell praises the ways in which they demonstrate how national discourse in these countries is often aligned with a dominant discourse on high modernism, and opposed to the democratic model of vernacular modernism theorized by Miriam B. Hansen. Russell writes:

> Indeed the instantiations of vernacular modernism frequently run counter to the ideals of national culture. Thus the recovery of these new subjectivities hitherto obscured by the dominant discourses of high modernism in both Asia and the West opens up an important new insight into global popular culture.  

Russell is right in underlining that dominant views of modernism run across Western and non-Western divides and it is not conceivable as an exclusive product of Western culture. While the position on national discourse highlighted in the issue of *Camera Obscura* Russell edits effectively eschews essentialist constructions of modernism into Western/non-Western epistemologies, it also overlooks the performative and negotiating aspects of this discourse.

In an article about Asian gendered identity in post-colonial globalization titled “‘green blade in the act of being grazed’: Late Capital, Flexible Bodies, Critical Intelligibility”, Cultural theorist Tani E. Barlow views transnational studies as a sub-specialty of cultural studies meant ‘to diagnose general questions of colonization, decolonization, and economic globalism [by claiming] a supporting historiography rooted in colonial relations particular to the Atlantic basin and historically European colonial holdings’.  

Barlow considers transnational studies as the only area capable of resolving the impasse of feminism in addressing the intersection of gender and race in light of the Enlightenment heritage [an impasse which Chandra Mohanty prospectively as the option between Western and Third-World feminism (1997)]. Barlow underlines the geopolitical and ideological limits subtending the treatment of transnationalism, warning that:

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133 Russell, 6.  
134 Barlow, Tani E., “‘green blade in the act of being grazed’: Late Capital, Flexible Bodies, Critical Intelligibility.” *Differences* 10.3 (1998), 121  
135 Barlow, 119–58.
[...] no historian can reduce to a single epistemic order the diverse experiences of colonial modernity or capitalist postmodernity. Theoretical work at historically singular sites requires painstaking, patient, indecorous deconstruction, just as writing about scholarly strategies requires acknowledging the degree to which one is oneself historically and intellectually a subject in the late-capitalist world.136

Yet for Barlow “this is where the question of national formation in global capital is openly broached and the dilemma of the "transnational" seriously explored”.137 Following Barlow, I suggest that postcolonial understanding of nationhood, emphasizing diversity, hybridism, and transculturation as informing elements of national identity, is a necessary complement to the discussion of gender politics in the transnational scenario of early cinema.

136 Barlow, 120.
137 Barlow precises: ‘The generalizing claims of the project probably rest as much on what it precludes (i.e., east "Asia," subcolonialism and subimperialism, semicolonialism, intra-Asian oppression, Japanese colonialism, the U.S. informal empire, the twentieth century, and so on) as on what it presumes to be normative (culture, cultural flows, transnational corporations, British colonialism, postcolonialism, the nineteenth century, and so on).’ (Ibid).
Pioneering Authorships
Alice Guy and the Narrative Cinema: Narrativity and Pioneering in the Early Cinema

Marcela Amaral

This article raises the subject of narrativity in early cinema, proposing a synthetic analysis of Alice Guy’s contribution for this cinema with some of her films. From what is known about her career, Alice Guy directed more than two hundred films between 1896 and 1920. That represents a very important contribution for the development and the consolidation of narrative cinema. In a period where non–narrative cinema, represented mainly by “actualities,” was the dominant genre, the films of Alice Guy show, from the earliest ones, important signs of the development of narrative.

Choosing two of her most significant films from the French period of her career, from 1896 to 1906, as a basis for analysis, this article proposes that we can identify in these films some elements that can confirm a “narrative effort”, in a period when narrativity was not seen or expected in films. It also proposes a brief study of the importance of Alice Guy’s contribution to the process of narrativity in early films.138 This was a period of transition when actualities, an inherently non–narrative cinema, were gradually replaced by a narrative cinema, based on a proper film language.

As the Brazilian author Flávia Cesarino Costa discusses in her book, this transition happened in phases: an increasing narrative influence can be identified over the whole process, from the first decade to when narrative cinema was established as the dominant genre.

Alice Guy has an important role in film history, not only for this narrative development, but also for her pioneering position as a director. Guy is considered by some authors as the first person to have really occupied this position in the making of a fiction film, La fée aux choux, which according to her was produced in 1896.

This is a much–discussed idea, particularly in terms of the lack of evidence that could give Alice Guy this precedence. Against what Guy affirms in her autobiography and in an interview with Francis Lacassin, some authors argue that it is very improbable that she had made La fée aux choux in 1896—even before Georges Méliès La voiture du poitier, also from 1896—and point instead to the first fictional film ever made. There are also discussions about this version of La fée aux choux that can still be seen today, and whether it is Guy’s real first version.

138 Among other authors, the Brazilian author Flávia Cesarino Costa refers to the first two decades of film history as “First Cinema” (Primeiro Cinema). (Flávia Cesarino Costa, O Primeiro Cinema: Espetáculo, Narração, Domesticação, São Paulo: Editora Página Aberta, 1995)
When Georges Sadoul defines, in his “Dictionnaire des Cinéastes”, Alice Guy as the “first female director” and Georges Méliès as the “first director,” he set what would be criticized in the future as a misconception of Guy’s status. This is a concern raised by the “new historiography of films”, with authors such as Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault worried about the “deletion” that has been set over the work of many women who worked in the various functions of the early cinema. As of today, only about twenty percent of what was made in the first two decades has been recovered, and a huge part of this material remains with unconfirmed identification or even unidentified.

When examining contribution of women to early cinema, we enter into a very uncertain terrain, where it is very difficult to determine precisely who really directed a film. There are many filmmakers wrongly credited in many pictures, leaving many doubts about film credits. In many cases, it has been discovered that male directors have been wrongly credited on a film made by a woman, when usually those men and women have acted in the same period. That was what happened to most of Alice Guy’s films.

Taking into account all these questions and uncertainties that surround the study of the earliest period of films, the analysis of Alice Guy’s cinematography is still an extensive space to be explored and it shows multiple ways to tackle her work. However, the lack of evidence for deeper study on some issues of her cinema has restrained the scope of this article in a certain way. For this reason, this text focuses on an investigation of the matter of narrative in early cinema, and finally proposes a brief analysis of Alice Guy’s contribution for the narrativization of film. The study also proposes an identification of the elements that Guy brought to the film scene and how that induced changes in this cinema.

The intention of this article is to focus on a shorter period of the career of Alice Guy and it will specifically discuss the issue of narrative in her films. As the object of analysis, this article presents a study of two of her most significant films from this period, La fée aux choux and La naissance, la vie et la mort du Christ (or also La Passion), films that display strong evidence of narrative, but in an innovative or uncommon way for that time. The films were chosen from those that can still be seen nowadays, while taking into account the huge amount of Guy's work that has been lost.

La fée aux choux
In a cabbage orchard, the Fairy looks amongst the ripe ones for the next baby to bring out. She moves between the cabbages with her Fairy grace, taking care of the orchard and bringing babies to light.

Based on a French legend about how babies are brought to life, this film tells the story of a fictional character, the Fairy, who charmingly dances for the camera while walking around the cabbage orchard. The single frontal shot and fixed camera reveal characteristics of an early

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139 George Sadoul, Dictionnaire des Cinéastes. (Paris: Microcosme, 1975)
period of cinema, when the theatrical viewpoint was privileged, mainly for technical reasons\textsuperscript{140}. The long shot at a distance from the Fairy is never interrupted by another shot, and the close up couldn’t be used as a dramatic and narrative element. If, on the one hand, technical devices would be gradually introduced to help narrative development, on the other hand, narrativity itself wasn’t the objective of cinema at that time.

However, in \textit{La fée aux choux} we find a scene built on an interesting notion of depth. The character approaches and edges away from the camera, bringing up the dramatic space for the Fairy’s action, who walks through the cabbages, going from one to the other, reaching the back and the front of the scenario and revealing a geography that enforces the fairy-tale idea and the narrative intention.

This film fits perfectly in Tom Gunning’s definition for a dominant model in this period—the “film of synthesis”—where the mix of non-narrative and narrative elements can be observed. As strong evidence of it, in spite of all the representative and dramatic intentions the film reveals, the Fairy refers directly to the viewer to show her orchard of babies. Her body language indicates that she is not only conscious of the presence of the viewer, but she intentionally presents her enchanted orchard to us, which can be also noted when she glances to the camera, helping to break the most important barrier built by the classical narrative cinema.

Yet, there is a minor concern in characterizing the notion of time in the \textit{mise-en-scène}. And the idea of space, however well it is defined, is not connected to any other known geography in the world, not even a known landscape—or even a mystic place, such as heaven or hell—but simply refers to an ethereal orchard, where the “Cabbage Fairy” lives.

Until 1906 then the cinema is related to the spectacle of varieties, that was the main form of exhibiting films, for Charles Musser, the means of representation in the first cinema are (based on) presentations, in the acting style, in the scenario’s design, and in the visual conception, so as it is in the way to represent the time, the space and the narrative.\textsuperscript{141}

It is interesting to observe then, that already in Guy’s first films it is possible to identify strong narrative elements, not often seen in the films exhibited in the \textit{vaudeville}s and other exhibiting spaces at the time. Her films, in fact, are very connected to narrative issues, being supported by the pillars of fiction and representativity from the beginning.

The notion of adaptation in \textit{La fée aux choux}, which is based on folklore, reveals what would turn out to be a tendency of cinema and something fundamental for the transition and consolidation of the narrative genre: the adaptation for

\textsuperscript{140} Jacques Aumont. “O cinema e a encenação” (Lisboa: Edições Texto e Grafa, 2006), 19

\textsuperscript{141} Costa, 2 (author’s translation)
the screen of “pre–seen” stories, already represented in other artistic means, particularly for theatre and literature. A large proportion of Alice Guy’s films, mainly after 1906, when she returned to the United States, were based on adaptations. In 1914, when her husband, Herbert Blaché, founded the U.S. Amusement Company, with Alice Guy as vice–president, they listed their firm objectives in the manifest “The Life of a Photodrama,” in which it is stated what the pre–industrial cinema will strongly support: the need to make out “of cinema a form or art and the need to produce works of art”\textsuperscript{142}; i.e., to justify cinema as a self sustained art, doing it with the adaptation of literature, or with “less risk”, with already seen theatre plays, or with product from other forms of art\textsuperscript{143}.

In 1902, Alice Guy remade \textit{La fée aux choux} under the title of \textit{Sage–femme de première classe}. That was not unusual at that time, when the remake was used by firms to make more films to meet increasing public demand.

The remake at that time was a matter of expediency, and Alice Guy like others used to remake the films of other filmmakers, often applying new techniques to it. That was another form of adaptation that would produce a numerous amount of the same titles, but made by different directors. That would definitely be an important source for future mistakes made in the process of associating films with their real directors.

The importance of \textit{La fée aux choux} for the cinema is then grounded in its contribution to a narrative awakening in film, with its adaptation of narrative mechanisms in a period where narrativity wasn’t being yet thought of as an objective to be reached. In this short film, Alice Guy coordinates some elements that will serve as a basis for the development of narrativity in films and she will carry on the narrative idea to her following works, keeping the essence of this first film, but bringing in new elements for narrative

\textit{La naissance, la vie et la mort du Christ (or La Passion)}

In 1905, Ferdinand Zecca made a passion play, a very common genre at that time, based on some \textit{tableaux} (paintings) about the life of Jesus Christ. In this film, Zecca tried to recreate in each shot one \textit{tableaux vivant} (live paintings), using the camera in the style of filmed theatre, in front of a small scenario of short depth and where the actors move from one to the other side of the frame. This film was very well received by the \textit{vaudeville} audiences, becoming a great success.

Léon Gaumont gave Alice Guy the task of making an “answer” to Zecca’s production for Pathé, his competitor. In 1906, with \textit{La naissance, la vie et la mort du Christ}—also known as \textit{La naissance, la vie, et la mort du Notre–Seigneur Jésus–Christ}, or simply \textit{La Passion}—Guy made one of Gaumont’s biggest productions and the biggest at that time. This film dates from the end of

\textsuperscript{142} Lacassin, Francis. \textit{Pour une contre–histoire du cinéma}. (Lyon: Institut Lumière/Actes Sud, 1994), 41

\textsuperscript{143} Lacassin, 41
an era in the early cinema. As Tom Gunning defines it, between 1895 to 1906–7 is a period when narrative elements start to be consolidated in films.

However, in La Passion, the narrative structure is shown to be more complex than the most common models for this time, such as the “chase-form”, considered the first original narrative form in films. Guy’s La Passion brings a well-developed dramatic structure with a sequential narrative, an elaborated mise-en-scène that includes the direction of the actors, the use of innovative technical “gimmicks” like special effects, and detailed scenarios to reinforce the drama.

However, as the story of Christ brings a chronological order to the narrative, and the whole Christ drama is publicly known, the film in fact presents “episodes” of Jesus’s life, not really looking for linearity, nor for a dramatic unity, but for several dramatic points. The film has twenty-five sequences, most of them filmed as sequence shots. The scenes show intense movement with extras and a good number of actors, and each sequence is dramatically built around one happening in the life of Christ.

It is possible to observe here the tendency towards synthesis that the film brings, but in this case with more complexity. The narrative gains importance by telling a long and well-known story, but above all, the whole film presents the idea of narration, as it is possible to see in the title that it starts with the birth and ends with the death of Christ.

Each sequence in this film brings a unique dramatic structure: inter-titles precede the scenes, telling in advance what will be seen. This structure illustrates perfectly the synthetic film that Gunning refers to. On one hand, each sequence represents a dramatic unity, or, like in the vaudeville, brings one attraction of a “staged actuality” of Christ’s life. It can be distinguished in the acting, visual elements such as the camera angle, and mainly in the importance of each moment chosen to be portrayed.

On the other hand, it is the previous understanding the public has of the story of the Christ that connects the sequences dramatically and guides the viewer through the story as one thing, and the notion of linearity comes along with the juxtaposition of the sequences. This is a fundamental element for the comprehension of the public because, as Musser suggests, it is the awareness the public has of the story, and also the inter-titles that are substituted for the common narration made by a projectionist at that time, that will “explain” to the public of the 20th century what is being told on the screen.

Two cases that illustrate the idea of a mixed structure can be seen in the sequences of the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Le miracle de la fille de Jairo), and the ascent to Mount Golgotha (La monte au Golgotha).

The first sequence presents a mise-en-scène with extras and actors set in place as in a choreography. The scene portrays a group that guards the sick daughter of Jairus, in bed, until the moment her death is revealed. The mother enters in desperation and some people walk around demonstrating their emotions. At this moment, Jesus, brought by Jairus, arrives at the house through one of the back entrances of the scenario and clears the way to the girl. The extras
then move to other places in the scenario, going to the stairs on the left side, to leave the centre of the screen to Jesus.

In the Mount Golgotha scene, there are many extras following Jesus while he is climbing the mountain. They are distributed along the landscape, but always leave the centre of the screen clear for Jesus, who bears the cross. Filmed in a natural setting, something not common at the time for a fiction film, the camera follows the ascension of Christ, and when he crosses the screen, we keep following his hiking from his back, followed by extras. This final camera angle will be kept for some instants before the sequence ends and it will give the picture a stronger idea of depth. The drama is set in this landscape in perspective and reveals the deep and long Calvary of Jesus before his crucifixion.

Alice Guy makes use of technical elements in this film, such as external locations and actors, to insert dramatic and representative notions. These elements reinforce the narrative sense in the film, also supported by camera movements and the use of montage, with cuts in specific points. All of these can be seen as signs of the development of a film language at this time. However, Guy’s choice for using them in a “super production” such as this one, particularly in the genre of Passion Plays, represents a daring idea.

In the sequence of Saint Veronica (Sainte Véronique), in which she cleans Jesus’ face, the editing is used to make obvious the Lord’s traits left on Saint Veronica’s tissue, with a closer shot. In Christ’s funeral sequence (La mise au tombeau), it acquires different meanings related to time–space continuity. In the first shot, people are carrying Jesus’s body to the mausoleum of Joseph of Arimathea, walking through a rocky location where the tomb lies. In a second shot, the body of Jesus is taken to the inside of the tomb. The third shot gets back to the outside, where the Lord’s followers come out from the tomb in sadness.

The montage of La Passion supports with this structure the hybrid narration–attraction. Guy keeps the story the public already knows in chronological order, and the narrative has its own dramatic line. But she also promotes a marriage between technique and aesthetics with the use of cutting, camera movements, detailed and grandiose scenarios, a great number of extras, text screens, episodes and so on, which bring in the idea of separated attractions at each sequence.

La Passion, according to its director, was based in chromos—coloured xylography—on the Passion of Christ, by Tissot (LACASSIN, 1994). The adaptation for a screenplay was made by Louis Feuillade. The idea of creating a screenplay for a film of this proportion is in itself something very interesting to observe in this period of the early cinema. The adaptation of engravings into a film makes it an even more interesting relation for the transposing between different artistic media and different forms of expression. The engravings present the scene as still, like photography, and the cinema gives it a sense of motion combined with narrative meaning.

Furthermore, it is the “super–production” structure that calls itself to our attention, in a film made in the first decade of the cinema. La Passion utilized
three hundred extras in twenty–five scenarios\textsuperscript{144}—in general scenarios with two floors—and some special effects—elements very common to find in the films of Alice Guy. Therefore, this film is considered Guy’s masterpiece for Gaumont.

It is very important to understand the structure in which Gaumont based its film production at this time. Alice Guy was responsible for hiring and setting the crews for each production made by the firm, which had to attend to the increasing demand of the public for films. The crew of her films would be the same for several productions. This film had a very complex structure of production for the period and, according to Lacassin, to direct a mainly masculine crew, besides actors and extras, Alice Guy felt the need to hire an assistant to coordinate the crew, while she could dedicate herself more to the creative process and the direction of scenes. This assistant was Victorin Jasset, who worked in many of her films for Gaumont, and also directed his own films. \textit{La Passion} was, for a long time, wrongly credited to him as director.

Another important collaborator of Guy’s productions was Henri Menéssier. Together they established a long–term partnership that started in France and was carried on to the United States. As Art Director and Set Decorator, Ménessier’s work has great importance for Guy’s pictures, since it brought in many elements that reinforce the dramatic and representational qualities of her films.

Besides the grandiosity of the reproduction of castles, arenas and the cross of the martyrdom, the scenario in \textit{La Passion} is particularly interesting for bringing in doors and windows in the back and in the laterals of the scenes, that could be filled by extras or to contribute to the actors’ mobility during the scene. This geography gives the film sensations of movement, depth and realism that are visible in many moments such as the Pontius Pilatus scene (\textit{Jésus devant Ponce Pilate}).

In this case, for instance, there is a column in the middle of the scene that divides the screen into two fields. On the left, we see Pilatus inside the castle and on the windows, the desperate crowd waiting for Jesus’s sentence. On the right side we see only Jesus.

Other films after \textit{La Passion} would have similar structures. Guy shot many other super–productions in the United States in her studio La Solax, where she applied many of the techniques she started developing with this film and in the French period of her career. \textit{La passion} is particularly important for being the first film with such grandiosity during this period and with this narrative intention.

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\textsuperscript{144} Alison McMahan, \textit{Alice Guy Blaché: Lost visionary of the cinema}. (New York: Continuum, 2002), 102
\end{flushright}
A Woman Wishes to “Make a New World”. *Umanità* by Elvira Giallanella

Micaela Veronesi

Professor: So what do men do Marina?
Marina: They wage war. War is natural.
Professor: An implacable truth. And what do women do?
Marina: The same.
Professor: You wage war, do you?
Marina: We all do, Professor.145

Discovering a movie such as Elvira Giallanella’s *Umanità*, beyond being a notable occurrence for studies on Italian silent cinema, offers a precious starting point for reflections on feminine subjectivity, generally speaking, as on its specific nature in Italian history, at the beginning of the twentieth century. In more detail, two questions arise from this movie. The first and most wide-ranging one directly concerns the existential state of women, and is about pacifism, as a peculiar womanly trait, given a supposed dichotomy between women, seen as more pacifist, and men, seen as being more inclined to war. Actually a rather complex balance lies underneath this point, which must also be seen together with the cultural condition of women in the given historical moment. The second question regards the authoress herself, about whom we have so few records, both on her life, and her career, and most of them have to be inferred from the screening of her movie, which suggests an enigmatic personality.

*Women and pacifism*

146 This film used to lie, forgotten, in the archives of the Cineteca Nazionale (Italian National Film Archive), in Rome, since May 1957, and probably had never been screened for an audience before being presented in Bologna, in December 2007, during the event “Non solo dive. Pionere del cinema italiano”. Its rediscovery, occurred by chance, while searching for quite another thing, has a tight relationship with the Women Film Pioneers project, and coordinated on an international level by Jane Gaines, and in Italy by Monica Dall’Asta. I wouldn’t have paid the due attention to the name of Elvira Giallanella, just flipping through the pages of the volume on Italian silent cinema filmography by Vittorio Martinelli, if I had not been caught into this project by the enthusiasm of Monica Dall’Asta. And if it wasn’t for her professionalism and her tenaciousness maybe we wouldn’t have searched, screened, started to study and at last promoted the film restoration, realized on the initiative of Associazione Orlando (“Orlando” Women’s Association) and the Italian National Film Archive, with the support of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali (Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities). We are amazed and at the same time proud of this set of coincidences and casual encounters, because it is like through our work somehow Elvira came to life again, and completed her project. But I must thank also all the other persons that, in different ways, contributed to this study: Jane Gaines, Franca Farina, Irela Nuñez, Davide Pozzi, Luca Mazzei, and – of course – Silvio Alovisio. A special thank goes to Gianluca Nani who helped me in the translation of this text from Italian to English. At last, a dutiful thought goes to the late lamented Vittorio Martinelli, who first discovered *Umanità*, and included it into his essential movies inventory.
A feminine pacifist thread of thought does exist; nevertheless, it should be considered along with the social context women lived in, before, during, and just after World War I. “At the fall of the XIX century, all women associations, none excluded, used to heighten the everlasting values of peace, harmony, and safeness, of life opposed to death, etc.”

During the 1907 Second Hague Peace Conference “women identified pacifism as their ‘intimate’ policy, considered their biological status of generator of life.”

During this period woman is a weak figure, both as individual and as social subject; she is considered only for her maternal virtues. She is often constricted into clichés expecting her to be beautiful, elegant, graceful, affable… all clichés women themselves agree upon, especially in the middle-class environment, where mass culture is taking shape. The prevailing ideal of woman is mainly based on male fantasies. This is the kind of woman that knows her place—that is to say the home—a place where man can claim refuge and care, without annoyances for his business. A “new woman” sets against this stereotyped woman, according to the phrase coined by Sarah Grand in 1894.

The “new woman” is neither mother nor prostitute, can say no to marriage, and needs to emerge in productive as well as in intellectual spheres.

Besides, since the middle of the nineteenth century, women’s movements for the right to vote began to claim attention, and got themselves talked about. These movements and the resulting debates highlight many issues until then consigned to private life: more than about the matter of suffrage, debating takes interest in parity and equality, and—subsequently—in women’s specific peculiarities.

Commonplaces and deeply-rooted stereotypes weighed on women, as did beliefs about inferior intelligence, and others coming out from anthropological studies, first of all about feminine hysteria, to which is tightly related the

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148 Ibid.
149 These clichés are recurring in 19th century literature, theatre plays and then in movie plots and above all characterize a widespread attitude between women themselves. Think about what Gina Lombroso writes in L’anima della donna (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1921), 42: “more than on emancipating women, I do insist on making men more chivalrous, with the resulting double advantage to refine men and to satisfy women”.
150 Sarah Grand, The Modern Man and Maid (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1898). “First coined in Great Britain, in 1894, by woman novelist Sarah Grand, the term “new woman” was used to describe characters of her stories and to refer to women of her times, and their trying to live in a very different way if compared to their mothers, committing themselves to activities through which declare their independence, their dignity, their right to a public role. Grand kept on rejecting middle-class derived feminine ideals, and defined a “new woman”, a woman that does not agree to being considered a nourishing machine nor a prostitute, that refuses the idea that “women’s place is the house” and looks for a wider world of thinking and acting”. Cf. Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, L’europa e la donna 1780–1920 (Porto Sant’Elpidio: Wizarts, 2003), 134.
151 About inequality between women and men see the outstanding work of Guglielmo Gambarotta, Inchiesta sulla donna (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1899), 24–35, especially the introduction.
persuasion of pretending women to be “quarrelsome and inclined to be touchy”. In some cases, as in Gustave Le Bon’s research about crowds, such a conception even goes so far as to say that the crowd, typical of modern cities, and their life, prove to have “feminine specific” features, that is to say credulity, irrationality and emotional unsteadiness.

Wondering about women at the beginning of the twentieth century and about their being or not being pacifist, we meet a lot of points of view, sometimes opposing and contradicting each other.

Women of the beginning of the 20th century, as well as organizing themselves into movements for suffrage, political and legal rights, gathered into pacifist movements. In Italy we can find organizations such as, for instance, the “Società per il Lavoro delle Donne” and the “Associazione per le Donne”, both established in 1890, aiming at secular education for women, raising consciousness concerning their rights, and awakening them toward pacifist matters. At the beginning of the 20th century pacifism was a form of womanly participation in the public sphere, on a popular basis. Furthermore pacifism was associated to the so called feminine qualities, the desire to nourish and to protect life. During those years, Bertha Von Suttner published the novel Lay Down Your Arms that, starting in 1905, was translated into a dozen languages, and “contributed to make women support the pacifist cause”. Pacifism, maybe because of its spread amongst women, appeared to men as an excessively idealistic and ineluctable trait, not in accordance with male consciousness, and charged by the harsh international situation.

On the threshold of the war, all of Europe became interested by feminist ferment and organized groups of women moved to have their rights acknowledged, but all was stopped by the political crisis and the quick spread of the conflict: as Françoise Thébaud wrote, “1914 could have been women’s year, but it was the year of the war, that brought the sexes back to their place”.

152 According to some positivists, such as novelist Émile Zola (cf. Germinal, 1885) and scholars Max Nordau and Gustave Le Bon, women are provided with an high violent potential: involved in the French Revolution, the raisings of 1848, the Paris Commune of 1870, were the bloodiest, most violent and destructive of all. Cesare Lombroso as well, with regard to the political behavior of women, affirmed that once involved in the revolution “women became terribly furious”. B. Caine and G. Sluga, op. cit., 124–125.
154 “According to both Zola and Le Bon the most terrifying aspect of mob behavior is that it behaves like women when they are affected by hysteria, that’s to say in an irrational and extremest way”. B. Caine and G. Sluga, op. cit., 125.
155 Society for Women’s work.
156 Women Association.
158 Ibid., 151.
159 For the most recent Italian edition see: Berta Von Suttner, Abbasso le armi! Storia di una vita, ed. G. Orlandi and L. Tirone (Torino: Centro Stampa Cavallermaggiore, 1996).
160 B. Caine and G. Sluga, op. cit., 152.
War seemed to bring a kind of sexual equality. Men left for the battlefront and women were left with the tasks of taking care of jobs, houses, and assisting children and soldiers. On one side, the conflict restored social order, as hoped for by anti–feminist movements, but on the other side allowed women to gain access to roles that up to that moment had exclusively been in men’s hands, especially in the sphere of work. The war was an opportunity for the emancipation of women; it’s indisputable, continues Thébaud, that it:

had been for women an unprecedented experience of freedom and responsibility. […] War, out of necessity, breaks the barriers that used to rigorously divide male between women’s jobs, leaving women out of a lot of professions […]. Everywhere, due to the offices women were entrusted with (coffee bars, hotels, banks, trades, administrative offices), made women visible into the public sphere, allowing their honesty and accurateness qualities to be appreciated. […] The majority of women workers gain consciousness of their capabilities, and appreciate the new economic independence.162

In Italy, women’s experience during the conflict even shows revolutionary traits, because it affected the root feminine identity.

In the French and Italian countryside women plough, sow, mow, spray vineyards with copper; discover solidarity between neighboring women, get by with the public administration, go so far, in Piedmont, as to hide young deserters.163

But the Great War also brought an endless sequence of human losses, and even if many feminists were interventionist—so far as to stop their claims and give their support to conscription (mainly in England and in France)—as the conflict went on it more and more revealed its absurdity and cruelty. The horrible slaughter taking place at the battlefront affected the mood of the thousands of women that lost their sons, husbands, boyfriends, and fathers and, with them, much of their hope and chance of sustenance.

In Italy lots of women, mindful of the Libyan War, in 1911, and of the bereavement of sons and husbands, drew up against the war, and took to the streets shouting “bread and peace”. In 1915, the Avanti! newspaper published a call by the International Socialist Women’s Committee, aiming to awaken proletarian women against the war, stressing its useless violence and cruelty; but in other newspapers and magazines, such as La donna, interventionism left the memories of the feminine pacifist tradition in the background, so far—as in Spring 1915—as to heartily advise its women readers against supporting the congress for peace called by Dutch women.164

162 Ibid., 45.
163 Ibid., 52.
164 About the Italian feminine situation see also the really interesting text of those years, Paola Baronchelli Grosson, La donna della Nuova Italia: documenti del contributo femminile alla Guerra (maggio 1915 – maggio 1917) (Milan: Quintieri, 1917).
So we should keep in mind that even if pacifism did not exclude patriotism, many women that used to call and feel themselves patriots, believed that the love of their country had to be expressed by agreeing to the war.165

The history of women is above all the history of different subjectivities, of the limits, during so many years, imposed on their self-consciousness and real opportunities for intellectual independence. For this reason, unambiguous and general conclusions are not easily drawn. To say that women are more inclined to peace than men leads to over-simplification; we can, all the same, refer to a detachment of women from the dogmatism of politics and to a wider view of conflict. That’s why it is so significant, nowadays, to investigate the story of Elvira Giallanella, because it is the effort to unravel a little more the enigma of feminine subjectivity, and learn to achieve a deeper acquaintance of our foremothers and of ourselves.

The enigma of Elvira

*Umanità* was filmed just after the end of World War I. The movie shows the effects of war, as a tragic and catastrophic experience, but also embodies the wish to surpass the trauma, and look upon the future in a fearless way. The movie, nevertheless, reveals some contradictions. The first one is the odd encounter between Giallanella, Golia and Bravetta. The screenplay is an adaptation of the story *Tranquillino dopo la guerra vuol creare il mondo... nuovo*, a text for children, in rhyme, written by Vittorio Emanuele Bravetta, and illustrated by Golia, published in 1915. In the same years Bravetta also worked as a movie scriptwriter (he was at the head of the script department in Ambrosio), but he’s better known as a poet, and a writer of historical and popular novels. He is not new to works for children, and, particularly, he already produced, in 1914, another text, set during the war, *Pentolino alla grrrande Guerra*, illustrated by Golia as well. Bravetta was a dubious individual, male chauvinist, interventionist—he later became a fascist—but from these works of his we can infer how important to him the conviction was that children should not be involved with the atrocities of war.

Golia, in his turn, was a well known humorous illustrator, and a friend of Guido Gozzano. In 1914, together with Caimi (director of “La donna”), he launched “Numero”, a weekly humorous magazine, and cooperated with the most important titles of that time.

Among the three, the least well known is Elvira Giallanella, directress, scriptwriter, and film producer. Born in 1885, she appeared for the first time in a cine magazine in 1917 as co-producer with Aldo Molinari for the production

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165 About the inconsistency of women’s attitude towards the war it could be useful to recall the difference drawn by Jean Bethke Elshtain, between the “many non-fighter” and the “few fierce”, in Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Donne e Guerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991). See also Anna Bravo, ed., *Donne e uomini nelle guerre mondiali* (Bari: Laterza, 1991).
The few pieces of information we have about her come exclusively from contemporary periodicals, from which we can reconstruct just a little part of her professional career. At the end of 1919, Elvira Giallanella established the Liana Films society, whose purpose was to “produce movies for children, with children themselves as leading characters”.

Articles appearing in magazines between September 1919 to March 1920 tell us that after selling her share of Vera Films to Molinari, Elvira moved to Milan to set up on her own, planning to produce a film adapted from *Tranquillino dopo la guerra vuol creare il mondo nuovo*, keeping the title of Bravetta’s poem unchanged. However, what exactly happened in Milan is not clear. One hypothesis is that Elvira knew somebody in the Lombardy main town: she definitely had a professional relationship with a distributor from Milan, an agency called Monopolio Principe, scattered traces of which can be found in most important magazines from that period, between 1918 and 1922.

The “Film” magazine provides a couple more pieces of information regarding Giallanella’s activities. Issue no. 37, November 29th, 1919, announces the opening of *Tanquillino*, also mentioning another movie, *Tomb nuziale*, with regard to which a spectacular set design is mentioned, even describing some examples. Besides, the interest of the female producer in educational matters is highlighted:

Elvira Giallanella took great care of all problems concerned with child psychology, and convinced herself of the need to offer children a movie show that can’t be the same for grown up persons, and that help them to define their disposition and mind, at the same time being entertaining with episodes they love and can understand.168

Again in “Film”, some months later, we read about the imminent issue of the first work of the new publishing house from Milan, founded “thanks to the initiative and wish of a woman, well known in the movie industry environment for her reliability and firm intents, Ms Elvira Giallanella”.169 From the

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166 The fact is deduced from the advertisement of a film of Vera itself (*Lotta di elementi, raffiche d’anime*, directed by Aldo Molinari), appeared in *Film* no. 5 (February 10th, 1917), 5.
167 One of the few facts until now come to light about the cinematographic activity of Giallanella can be found in: R. Mattozzi, *La rassegna del film*, where “Liana Film” is indicated as a production house based in Milan, established in 1919 and property of Elvira Giallanella, and about which a movie entitled *Tranquillino dopo la Guerra vuol fare il mondo nuovo* is noted as its only production; Mattozzi himself gives the news of a second film under production, entitled *Tomba nuziale*. Announcement of setting up of Liana appears for the first time in the magazine *Film* no. 30 (September 30th, 1919), 21, where we get to know how Giallanella dissolved her engagement with Aldo Molinari and Vera Film and established in Milan a film production company of her own, Liana Films, and also about a project for building a cinema set; we also read how the company is already working with films buying, selling and licensing. The establishment of the house is also quoted in *La Vita Cinematografica*, no. 7–8 (February 22nd and 29th, 1920), 119, and in *La Rivista Cinematografica*, no. 6 (March 1920), 62.
168 Cf. “Informazioni, Liana Film” *Film* no. 37 (November 29th, 1919).
169 “About ‘Liana Films’” *Film* no. 8 (February 8th, 1920).
same article we also get to know that Elvira had to discontinue her work because of a disease, and that now, fully recovered, she is leaving for the Carso region, to film Tranquillino, with a tiny troupe, mostly of children, and with the support of the camera operator Sestilio Morescanti.

Anyway, things don’t seem to follow Elvira’s plans. The April 1920 issue of “La rivista cinematografica” foretells that Monopolio Principe, under the F.U.S.E. label, will take care of producing a series of “humorous educational” films, based on the character of Tranquillino, described as “a little kiddy that, after the war, wishes to make a new world”. Also “Film”, of April 1st 1920, features an advertisement page for the opening of Tranquillino, the “first feature of the F.U.S.E. series”. Both in the advertising and in the small piece that appeared in “La rivista cinematografica” the names of the actors are disclosed: a little boy, four years old, Léon Bambouchée (Tranquillino), and a three year-old little girl, Ivonne Leroux (Sirenetta); moreover, it’s emphasized that alongside them there will be “lions, elephants, seals, monkeys, dogs, cats, and trained sheeps”. According to both sources the name of the director is that of a dubious Mr. Edmond Davidson, probably an alias, whereas the camera operator always turns out to be Mr. Sestilio Morescanti, the only unchanged fact, compared with the information of the month before. Besides, the author of the subject is reported, but quoting the misspelled name of Carlo Bravetta. Elvira Giellanella just disappeared, along with Liana Films. The name of Bravetta is misspelled, and dubious names are given to the director, and the little boy starring in Tranquillino. It’s worth noticing that in every circumstance of that period in which the film is quoted, in both primary sources, such as advertising, and secondary sources, such as short news, the title Umanità never appears, but only the one of Tranquillino after the war wishes to make (or create) a new world. The most likely hypothesis is that Giellanella failed to sell her project, and that with the help of Principe, she attempted a repositioning under a different form, which can be defined as less educational and more humorous, exploiting the child star–system and inventing international sounding names to increase credibility, according to the trend of that period. The April 1920 issue of “La vita cinematografica” features the advertisement of a trading company (the Industrial Film, in Trieste), publicizing a huge list of movies, one among which is named Tranquillino, and Vera Film, in Rome, is credited with that feature, and this catchphrase follows: “the renowned little Italian character”. Later on, after April 1920, no more traces can be found about Tranquillino, nor about Elvira Giellanella, whose movie appears to sink into oblivion. The film that eventually survived until today (a 35mm nitrate positive, imbibed and tinted, with unnumbered Italian title cards) must have never been screened for an audience, because, as reported by Martinelli in his record, the film must have never obtained a censorship visa.

Now, a key question is: why did Giellanella, a professional, working in the movie industry for at least three years, based in Rome (one of the few
towns, together with Turin and Naples, still wealthy enough, during those years of crisis and decadence for the Italian film industry) decide to establish a production company in Milan, the less promising market? What kind of connection is there between her and Principe, and his satellite companies? Which kind of commercial contracts led her, at a given moment, to leave her name out of the film advertising? And why does the title Umanità never appear?

Those were years during which lots of production and rental societies used to appear, and disappear, as uncountable as the bankruptcies, advertised but never premiered movies, individuals promising never fulfilled successes... Umanità is one of those films that remained unscreened. But all the evidence leads us to the supposition that Giallanella didn’t aim so much for commercial achievement, given her decision to produce her movie in Milan, but rather cherished a personal dream, in which she deeply believed. Maybe in Milan she could find an investor, and, strengthened by her experience in the promotional field, tried to venture into new activities, with a hope for success that, on the contrary, was never to be met. For this reason, maybe, she found herself forced to sell the movie exploitation rights, or anyway, an easy assumption is that she returned in Rome to try the positioning of her movie in the Italian capital (such a hypothesis would also explain why the reels preserved in the Italian National Film Archive are labeled “Liana Films—Roma”).

A story of unfulfilled dreams, oblivion and failure: the story of Elvira is as well, and above all, the story of a woman, and, as for many other women, tenacity, passion, and farsightedness only let her go so far. At this point one more question arises: why and how did her movie arrive at the Italian National Film Archive, and remained there, unnoticed, for fifty years?

But the mystery of Elvira is still there, waiting to be unfolded.

The adaptation: male poem, female film?

Umanità is faithfully based on Bravetta’s short poem as regards the plot, and on Golia’s illustrations on the iconographic side. But the most interesting facets of the movie are the slightest but fundamental differences from its literary source: most of all the incipit, and the ending, but also some sequences in–between. For instance, the ones presenting the character of the gnome, which plays a definitely narrower part in Bravetta’s work, or the ones starring the little girl, depicted by Bravetta as a little Eve, committing the original sin, and that, on the contrary, Giallanella refuses to present such a character, so much that in the movie it is the little boy that commits the sin leading the story to come to its end.

In the movie, unlike the poem, Tranquillino experiences the trauma of war through a dream. The dream, used as a fictional device to portray the war through the eyes of a child, is a recurring theme, and can be seen in at least other two films of those years, Il sogno patriottico di Cinessino (Gen-
naro Righelli, 1915)\textsuperscript{170} and La Guerra e il sogno di Momi (Segundo de Chomón, 1917).\textsuperscript{171} Both cases refer to movies produced during wartime, whose purpose is halfway between propaganda and the cathartic effort to face the ongoing drama. Moreover, whereas for Momi and Cinessino war is a game, for Tranquillino it’s an incredible scenario, where there is but remains, carcasses, and ruins of a world that is no more, and that nobody can even imagine where to start from to rebuild it. This feeling of helplessness can be found, in an embryonic phase, also in Bravetta’s short poem, but Giallanella develops it, and, what’s more, expresses it with visual strength. What in Golia’s plates appear as allegorical, somehow detached from reality, and stylized with a satirical touch, in the movie are much less indirect representations, photographic images that do not dissemble, but depict ruins as they could be seen at the end of the war.

The film’s locations in fact are war artillery ruins and real remains that the authoress had permission to shoot, in the Carso region.\textsuperscript{172} In other cases, as, for instance, the sequence of the boots, the staging is visually much more powerful than it is in the book. The boots of the soldiers, lined up as in the files of a platoon, but deprived of their content, are a surreal and disturbing vision, conceived by the authors of the book, but intensified in its political message by the directress, who puts on stage the result of the war, seen as the slaughter of an anonymous, lined up and objectified mass.\textsuperscript{173}

The movie begins with a totally new sequence, if compared to its literary source. The first two shots show a set of household objects (a tray, a tea set, cigarettes, and a jam jar), and it looks like they are pictorially arranged, in a way that gives them a peculiar connotation. We can see the two children move along in an interior shot, showing a clear middle–class look, but where, however, the adults are missing, left off–screen. This first element discloses a stylistic leitmotiv of the whole incipit, that is to say some avant–garde traits, both in the choice of the narrative theme (the children steal jam and cigarettes behind their sleeping parents’ backs; the little boy smokes, while he reads the newspaper and lies on the bed), and in the style used by Giallanella to shoot the objects in this prologue.

\textsuperscript{170} The little boy is worried about his dad, who is at the battlefront, and can’t sleep. While playing with toy soldiers, he falls asleep. He dream of a battle, where his father is wounded, but, at the end, turns victorious.

\textsuperscript{171} The little boy is sleeping, and dreams of a war setting, where his toy soldiers come to life, and fight, the harsh way; waking up placates his fears: but, outside, the war is for real.

\textsuperscript{172} See Film (February 26\textsuperscript{7}, 1920), where information is given about the beginning of the shooting, saying that the woman director “left with her tiny troupe to shoot external takes which, with kind permission of the military authority and for production needs, will have the Carso region and the most important places of the – by this time – former battlefields as their background”.

\textsuperscript{173} These kind of strong metaphors are typical of Lucio D’Ambra’s cinema as well, in those years the reference director for sure as regards the figurative aspects of illustrated stories.
Tranquillino falls asleep while reading the newspaper—that carries news with not so encouraging titles, such as “revolution is bursting out, worldwide”, or “the history of each nation is written in blood, built with sacrifices”—and, while sleeping he has a dream that the directress represents with a montage of archive images. The sequence ends with a take of a crowd of men, all assembled for an assembly, where Tranquillino plays a leading role, imagining (by means of a superimposition), to be the speaker haranguing the crowd. At this point the prologue ends, and the story of the film rejoins the beginning of Bravetta’s poem, that is the awful moment of the outbreak of the war.

But why does Giallanella link together the images of a crowd of men in the streets and the destructive power of war?Maybe she makes an equation between masses, socialist parties, revolution, violence and global wars. Maybe such reasoning is not that superficial and, however, has to be set into the historical postwar period. For this point to be fully understood, the mediatice significance that the Bolshevik Revolution had in Italy should be investigated, to understand its impact on the collective imagination.

Giallanella introduces another element missing in the source text, which is the importance of the narrative function assigned to the gnome, a puppet in the children’s room, that comes to life within the dream. On a visual level, there is a specific interest of the directress in creating a fictitious world, a dream world, beginning from a mixture between reality and fantasy. What drifts from the fantasies of the sleeper into his dream is what he saw when awake, coming up again under a different shape. 174 It almost seems that the world of fantasy conceived by Bravetta and Golia, can be accepted by Giallanella only as a dreamlike perspective. 175

If we speak in Proppian terms, the gnome plays the role of the Helper, having the task of being a guide for the children through postwar devastation. Together they go “to the theatre… of war”: it looks like war as a show, for the directress, can be a possible scene only in a dream dimension. And so she turns what in Bravetta’s work 176 is but an idiom—“theatre of war”—into a full–blown theatre, with even a stage, dominated by the disturbing skeleton of a soldier, wrapped up in a flag. This is an original and daring image: the directress puts on stage a kind of an “unknown skeleton”, a symbol of the many “unknown soldiers” that monuments were beginning to celebrate, and

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174 Just remember, in this regard, what Deleuze wrote in The Time Image (London: Continuum, 2005), 54, about “The Bergsonian theory of dreams shows that the dreamer is not at all closed to the sensations of the external and internal world”.

175 It should be noticed, besides the character of the gnome, the jam jar, from which Sirenetta comes out after the outbreak of the war, the same one the little girl was secretly dipping into at the beginning of the film, another element that enters dream from reality, with a changed and impossible function.

176 A difference is represented by the volume of “Universal History”, looked up by Tranquillino in the movie, to find starting point on how to carry out his challenging task, and that, in the poem, is a “Sacred History”.

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humor and satire announced by opening credits turn into black humor. Together with the following image, of the soldiers’ boots, left in a line, but void of any human content, the gruesome theatre Giallanella puts on stage displays in the most disturbing and powerfully allusive way that sense of tragedy of the just ended war.

The gnome continues his guided tour, taking the children behind the wings, in the backstage area, through distressing scenery made of ruins, debris, pieces of ordnance and pieces of abandoned weapons.

Put in front of such destruction, with grave seriousness, Tranquillino assigns himself the task of making a new world. The central part of the film quite closely follows Bravetta’s text, where all Tranquillino’s attempts are unsuccessful, with a climax of tragic helplessness and, as an unstoppable repetitive compulsion, are interrupted or overwhelmed by violence: not just external, but also the violence he has deep inside himself, leading him to act, in turn, in a destructive and cruel way, as when he doesn’t hesitate to bomb the group of animals who dared to criticize “humanity” for his ferocity. It is to be noticed that the weight of responsibility is entirely ascribed to the male character, whilst the female character (actively co–starring in the jam theft scene, seen in the prologue), even with a more practical and purposeful nature, plays mostly a comforting part, and in the end even vanishes from the scene.

The only chance of salvation, amidst so much destruction, seems to come from God, who intervenes in more occasions, and shows himself, in the end, to take Tranquillino up into the sky, to let him watch the world from above.

Whilst Bravetta’s poem ends with both the children ascending to the sky, in the movie there is a kind of epilogue, introduced by a title card reading: “reality”. Just as the prologue artfully depicted the prewar scenery using archive images whose historical provenance is left undisclosed, the epilogue is carried out with a montage showing indefinite shots of chimneys, workers crossing the gate of a factory, work scenes in fields, mines etc.

This ending, conceived as an hymn to reconciling labour, seems to be just like the “apotheosis” that concluded the first movie féeries, with an evident message extolling peace arising from activity, and Jesus as the supreme bearer of these values.

To make a new world

At the end of the war, just like Tranquillino, Elvira Giallanella wishes to make a new world, and to succeed in this purpose uses the tools she has at her disposal: a tale for children, scenery of war ruins and archive images of mass scenes. Her movie blends regressive fantasies and social realism, a moralizing will and the old–fashioned tricks of early film.

These contradictions need to be set into the historical period the female film maker lives in, the uneasy condition women experienced during the first decades of the twentieth century and the confusion characterizing the first
postwar years, that is to say, in different words, that “upside down world” quoted by Françoise Thébaud, making lots of changes possible, above all for the life of women, but even diffusing a lot of insecurity. The reversal of rules and the resulting destabilization can be found in the story of Tranquil-lino as well, a middle-class little boy who used to have no worries (that is amidst the peace and coziness of his home and family), and finds himself with no family, only the company of his girl friend/sister Sirenetta, in a completely destroyed world he attempts, in vain, to rebuild, just to continually fall back into the spiral of hate and violence that made him a survivor. In this upside down world it is possible for children to smoke cigarettes, to keep public talks, to pilot airplanes… exactly as during the war it had been possible for woman to carry out traditionally male tasks, in work as in social activities.

Moreover, the theme of the upside down world is typical of Futurism and, by the way, it is interesting to recall the existence of an at least indirect liaison between the woman film maker and Marinetti’s movement: Aldo e Renato Molinari, her associates in the management of Vera Film, had been the makers, in 1913, of Mondo baldoria, a movie inspired by Palazzeschi’s manifesto, Il controdolore, that all the same was publicly repudiated by Marinetti.

Besides, in Umanità we can find numerous elements close to traditional Catholic morals. What strikes us, above all, is the strange blend caused by the ending, where ideas of peace and brotherhood are confused with ideals of a socialist mould (see the title card “job for everyone—bread for all—idleness for nobody”), and all the same coming to the exaltation of Jesus, seen as an example of who could “sacrifice himself for the ideal of humanity” and preached “not to kill one’s own brothers”, as it is stated by the title card on which the film ends. This mixture is distinctive of Italian women in that period: women in the Socialist Party used to hold a strong liaison with values of brotherhood and social equity belonging to Early Christians and the similar socialist values.

Within this commixture we can meet both a specifically feminine bent for taking ideological sides placed at the outside of political schemes—the way this bent has been defined by Dora Marsden—and the lack of familiarity for women of those years with “making politics”—see the speech of Virginia Woolf, in Three Guineas. To this end, the case of the woman writer Vera

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177 F. Thébaud, op. cit., 43.
178 Cf. Maria Pia Bigaran, Per una donna nuova. Tre giornali di propaganda socialista tra le donne, in “Nuova DWF”, n. 21 (1982), 57.
179 “A very limited number of women, considered individually, is stressing the fact that when we talk about them, the first thing to keep in mind is that they are individuals, and can’t be compared into a class, a sexual genre, or in a «movement».” D. Marsden, The new Free-woman (June 13th, 1913).
Brittain is emblematic, whose writings on the war (letters and diaries) reflect the deep division she lived between an idealist patriotism and the horror of the conflict discovered in hospital wards, before outlining, in her autobiography, a full-blown manifesto against war, expressing a pacifism of a Christian mould, exalting the non-violent nature of women.\footnote{For a description of the case of Vera Brittain see F. Thébaud, \textit{op. cit.}, 64.}

Women have always been cloistered subjects, forced to the fringe of political and social life, plain spectators, but even for this reason often more inclined to judge in more impartial ways. Dora Marsden wrote that there does exist, in some women, a semi-anarchic spirit, that leads them never to feel entirely represented by a party, an ideology, and to retain from everything just what they feel fair, to be curious but never dogmatic, to spend themselves in a cause, but even to change their disposition in case an ideal proves unsatisfying to them. Marsden underlines the individualist disposition of feminine nature as less inclined to comply, bringers of personal needs and wishes.\footnote{Marsden, \textit{op. cit.}, 285–287.}

It is under this perspective that we attempt to better understand the meaning of Elvira Giallanella’s film and her commitment to peace, with her peculiar chemistry of both socialist and Catholic inspired ideas. Just as Virginia Woolf, during the next decade, and in the middle of the thirties, will find herself in trouble in deciding which side to take to prevent war and will give in \textit{Three Guineas} an evasive answer on purpose—because intended to overturn feminine pacifism from a simple attitude to a conscious choice, free, independent, not taken to conform to men, but to give life to different voices and wishes\footnote{Cf. Woolf, \textit{op. cit.}, 146–148 and 187–188.}—in the same way Elvira Giallanella, waiting for the “three guineas” to be spent to make women culturally more autonomous and independent, gets her individuality involved and, with all her limits, tries to make a new world stating her “desire of peace and freedom for the whole world.”\footnote{Ibid., 313.}
The Didactic–Instructive Task of Cinema (1907–1918) in Italian Women’s Writings

Domenico Spinosa

My intention in this contribution is to communicate the first results of a research I am undertaking, still in progress, which aims to draw attention to a number of essays written by Italian women on the question of pedagogy in cinema.

At the beginning of 1990 the historian and linguist Sergio Raffaelli published an article on the “relationship which school education in Italy tried to establish with cinema from an early date”.185 Thanks to this article, a set of writings became known, published between 1909 and 1918, which explored the nature of cinema and suggested that its proper function was educational. In that period within the sphere of cinema theory, a unity of thought was taking shape (not without difficulties) whose objective was to work out a logic for the use of the institution of cinema from an educational point of view. It should be noted that this impulse had a background of culture and concrete historical circumstances which encouraged this view of cinema’s specific role. It is clearly a question of “socialised knowledge”. It has been noted by Francesco Casetti that “theory is also a form of social knowledge: it tells what a group of scholars sees in a given phenomenon and, by means of these scholars, what a larger portion of the population is invited to see in it. “Seeing” here has a double meaning, because it is necessary to define both which aspects of a phenomenon are perceived and why. On the one hand, there is the “appearance” with which things present themselves. On the other hand, there are reasons why they catch our attention. It can thus be said that film theories shed light on both the notion of cinema shared by a certain society and the reasons why this society tends to be interested in films, on both the phenomenon’s characteristics when it enters the collectivity. Both aspects underscore the social nature of the knowledge expounded by a theory. If it is true that the later defines the way movies are watched (as stated above, by a group of “experts” but, through them, also by larger groups of people), then it is also true that a theory testifies to what is seen in films (the social perception of cinema) and the angle from which they are viewed (the conditions of social existence that lie behind this phenomenon).”186

In 1910 two interesting articles were published connected with the problem of the educational use of cinema: they appeared in the Rivista di Pedagogia of

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Pavia, an important periodical with positivist leanings, directed by Saverio De Dominicis, lecturer in pedagogy at the University of Pavia. One of the articles, entitled *Il cinematografo nell’educazione*, was written by Prof. Amalia Campetti. An interesting and innovative aspect of this article concerns the problem of the negative effects of cinema on child psyche—an approach which was to have widespread success in the following decades and become one of the most cultivated issues in all the later research on teaching with audiovisual material.

Right from the start, referring to an episode of attempted cannibalism by some New York children (three twelve to thirteen year-olds, after seeing a film with some scenes of cannibalism, kidnap a child and try to set fire to it, with the intention of roasting and eating it—they were apparently stopped in time), it is clear what Campetti intends to draw attention to: the power of influence which cinema is presumed to possess, considered in these circumstances as a possible vehicle for moral corruption, because it can portray negative episodes and characters in a seductive light, giving an inviting example for imitation by the child. According to Campetti, these “thrusts of emulation” are the product of a double order of factors: on the side of the emulating party there is acting a predisposition towards a “fertile imagination”, while on the side of the emulated party the power of seduction is working, based on the “fascination of an acknowledged superiority”. The youngster will in this way be induced to imitate whatever has captured his admiration.

Starting from this assumption, Campetti attacks the “bad example” given by contemporary cinema productions, which consisted largely of “mimed dramas in gloomy colours, or vulgar farces”, aimed at achieving an emotional “jerk” rather than stimulating thought and above all unable to provide efficacious structures of moral reference for the spectator: the author wonders if, at the end of the viewing, the child has “an urge to blame those who jokingly violate the rules, or feels unconditional enthusiasm for the example that flies in the face of authority.”

She continues: “In the lively demonstration that one can fool one’s superiors and get away with it; that one can triumph over reason with trickery and force, how can young people distinguish for themselves that this is all wrong, wicked and evil? Will they not, on the contrary, come to the opposite conclusion, that in the end anything is allowed if it gratifies the *amour–propre*, and provides bait for one’s real passions?”

Campetti’s main indictment against cinema is therefore that it acts negatively on the child’s development of a “moral discernment”. This influence, according to the writer, is directly proportional to the number of films seen.

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Excessive viewing produces other harmful effects:

- The inability to distinguish between categories of “normality” and “extraordinariness” (“when repeated, certain representations will make them accustomed to exaggeration…, and to the conviction that they are normal and permissible”)

- the inhomogeneous organisation of the child’s thought (“as far as ratiocination is concerned, excessive viewing will aggravate the tendency of the young mind to wonder from thought to thought without order, and eventually it will tire out the child’s psyche with bewildermment and fear, both pitiable and invincible”)—this last accusation is very similar to that which is launched at television, of stimulating the emotional and irrational nature of the child, who becomes unused to ordered, rational reflection.

To support her case, Campetti referred to a pedagogical precept of Giuseppe Segri, an anthropologist of the Spencer school who cultivated an interest for psychology and pedagogy. Segri wrote that: “Evil should never be shown to young children […] because instead of fleeing from it, they will imitate it willingly when the opportunity arises.”

Campetti goes on to indicate, demonstrating a rigidly conventional view of society, that what is shown in films should above all nourish the spirit of subordination towards authority, so that the young audience are in the condition to “observe the weaknesses of their superiors […].” She writes: “To paraphrase a fine judgement of Mazzini on sovereigns, they are like statues: to be admired they must be on their pedestals. Their imperialness is a fact of prestige rather than merit; once their weaknesses are shown, and it is known that they are susceptible to being taken in, then their fine predominance will disappear”. Thus ahead of its time, we can say that technical reproducibility not only eliminated the aura surrounding art, but also limited that of power (just think that royalty was one of the favourite subjects of the Lumière cinema–operators).

Besides the power of synchronised persuasion (cinema brings about immediate imitation), the cinema also demonstrates a capacity for acting in depth, diachronically, inoculating with small doses of poison that will form sediment in the mind of the child, provoking disastrous effects in the long term. “It should not be forgotten,” our writer continues, “that alongside those clearly evident inclinations, there are dormant, latent instincts under determined impulses […]. Nor must we rest in the hope that these children will soon completely forget, as often seems to happen.”

In her conclusion to the article, Campetti also seems to catch onto a fundamental aspect of the cinema, its capacity to create “possible worlds” that seem to possess the same “consistency” as the real world. In fact she defines film representation as images “which impress us with the charm of the possible!”
Later, in October 1915, a new column started to appear in an important magazine in this field, the *Cinematografia italiana ed estera*, which claimed to have the express aim of summarising and completing the debate on educational cinema. Along with a few curious proposals, the years between 1915 and 1918 tended to reconsider issues which had already been looked at. A very striking example was the publication in 1917 of the conference organised by Alice Terracini\(^{188}\) four years earlier, in which the question discussed involved a comparison between the didactic efficaciousness of showing slides or films. But before the publication of Terracini’s conference there were other debates on educational cinema, starting with a short pamphlet by a primary school teacher, Gisella Chelini.\(^{189}\) She made the pedagogical assumption that the educational action should tend to reinforce the centres of the child’s interest (“education must be interesting”, she wrote, and to achieve this it is necessary to “satisfy the wishes of the scholar, and his most pronounced inclinations”, among which the desire to see is undoubtedly the most important). She underlines the central role of vision in the process of infant learning. Referring to Isadora Del Lungo (an important Italian philologist, graduate of the Accademia della Crusca and scholar of Dante, friend of Gabriele Carducci), Chelini retains that “in our schools we only say things, we never think of showing them: it has not yet been understood that nothing can be held in the mind if it has not first been held in sight. And cinema, this universal language which gives pleasure, educates and interests, in its vision of dynamic reality, can answer once and for all to this natural need of the child.” Chelini considers the effectiveness of cinema for teaching partly for its function of reducing the intellectual effort necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. It seems to her, in fact, “thanks to the continuous succession of scenes and views,” that the child arrives at a moral or historical truth without effort.

Going back to the essay by Terracini in 1917, in this booklet the author considered teaching support derived from viewing either animated or stills projection to be among the most modern systems of that “search for ways of assisting the population in learning” which had been activated on account of increased awareness of “the need to spread knowledge among the masses”, given the “increased requirements of modern life”. The cinema is conceived as a simplification of the learning process which is sought through teaching practices that put the act of seeing in the centre of their function which in its turn is seen as the child’s primary cognitive faculty. According to Terracini, “the idea penetrates into the mind of the child as he is incorporated into the physical world; it does not stop there or become fixed with evidence and clarity if the images do not promote the working of perception. The eye, mirror of the soul, is thus the most

\(^{188}\) A. Terracini, *Cinematografo o proiezioni luminose?* (1913), Cooperativa tipografica italiana, Roma, 1917.

valid collaborator of the formation of thought; it vibrates before the real objects or their representations, transmits their images to the brain, lights the vivid flame of thought and continues to feed it.”

On the question of which is better support between films and slides, the author had a propensity for the latter, because films have the handicap of “rapidity of viewing”. Terracini strongly emphasised that “film viewing is too fleeting: the image which it represents cannot make a deep enough impression to leave lasting traces. The vertiginous succession of frames detracts from the exactness of the perception: it is like a synthesis which leaves the mind dazzled by its splendour but unable to hold onto the constituent elements which appear in glimpses, almost contracted and deformed.” The actual film, concentrating a great mass of data in a very short time, risks “provoking numerous errors of conception” in the child, who is not yet able to cope with such a quantity of information: a film “arouses admiration, it stuns, and it sets off an intellectual working process which is fervid, feverish but disordered, because it does not find the necessary cultural preparation in the spectators.” Therefore, since “for the young mind it is essential not to present anything complex”, the projection of slides seems to Terracini to be more suitable than cinema for application in school activities.

It should also be noted that in 1916 a book came out by Angela Buracci, *Cinematografo Educativo*, which claimed to help parents to handle the relationship between their child and cinema, so that, Buracci wrote, “they may choose carefully for children and young people, and be aware of what risks and what benefits there may be from this new form of entertainment […] for the intellectual and moral lives of their children.” This essay will be discussed later in more detail by my colleague, Luca Mazzei.

I would like to conclude with the observation that for almost twenty years, from its first debut in society, films as objects were accompanied by a sort of mental block in defining gender: for example, the masculine designation of “film” in Italian was only definitively adopted in the twenties. This original trans–sexuality of films must be remembered, since it is otherwise difficult to appreciate how slow progress was in the search for a functional identity even for cinema, the new communication machine of the twentieth century.

*I would like to give my warmest thanks to the organisers of the interesting and important Women and the Silent Screen Conference, in particular to Prof. Jane Gaines and Prof. Monica Dall’Asta for inviting me to take part.*

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On Cinema. The Novelist Matilde Serao and the New Medium
Luigia Annunziata

Toute vibrante d’action, de pensées, Mathilde Serao évoque la vie grouillante de Naples, dans le soleil de feu e d’or. Tracer d’elle un portrait n’est pas chose facile. Les aspects sont nombreux, variés comme son talent. [...] Redactrice en chef d’un grand quotidien, femme de coeur qui s’intresse à ses enfants, romancière emerite, elle a tour à tour la faconde âme du journaliste, la douceur attendrée de la mère, la profondeur de l’écrivain qui pense.

This is how Matilde Serao appears to the eyes of Germaine Dulac, in a description whose several handwritten versions (at least eight) are preserved in the Archives of the National Museum of Cinema in Torino. The French director and journalist writes and rewrites almost maniacally the incipit of her article, seeking the most suitable form and vocabulary to outline the complex figure of this writer defined as “exuberante, pétulante, pleine d’ésprit.” And she ponders:

Il faudrait pour donner un croquis exacte de Mathilde Serao en reunir [de ses aspects variés] une série disparate, et les dérouler avec la rapidité de vues cinématographiques. Ce n’est pas dans une seule image que l’on peut fixer les different aspects de sa physionomie mobile[…]

Matilde Serao was born in Patras (Greece) in 1857 where her father, an anti–Bourbon Neapolitan publicist, had sought refuge on account of his political ideas. She spent her childhood in Naples where she grew up amidst a difficult economic situation. She graduated as a teacher and worked in a telegraph office. In the meantime, she was introduced to the political and literary entourage of Naples by her father. She contributed to reviews such as “La Farfalla,” the review of realism and Scapigliatura. The publication of her first novel *Cuore Inferno* in 1881 introduced her to the cultural life of Rome where she contributed to “Capitan Fracassa” and teamed up with Luigi Lodi, Gabriele D’Annunzio and Edoardo Scarfoglio. With the positive reviews of her second novel *Fantasia* in “La Nuova Antologia” Matilde Serao attained success as a writer and journalist. Shortly afterwards she married Edoardo Scarfoglio, a mediocre writer who was nonetheless a ruthless literary critic and strong polemicist, very close to Gabriele D’Annunzio. The relationship was professional as well as romantic. In the Italian capital, they founded the “Corriere di Roma,” which was renamed “Il Mattino” after their subsequent move to Naples. As well as taking care of the ad-

191 Germaine Dulac on Matilde Serao, Germaine Dulac fund of the National Cinema Museum, Turin, u.a. A327/21. I would like to thank Dr. Carla Ceresa for her help during the consultation of the quoted manuscript.
ministration of the newspaper, Matilde Serao regularly published her own political articles under a pseudonym. The union with Scarfoglio was short–lived and in 1904 Serao filed for a divorce and then set about founding her own newspaper, “Il Giorno,” which became a rival of her husband and son’s “Il Mattino.”

The purpose of this brief biographical note is to emphasise the centrality of Serao’s position within Italian cultural life. Undoubtedly, she was an emancipated woman, the first woman to head a newspaper in Italy, and was unafraid to apply for a divorce when she believed her marriage to have failed. “From the beginning to the end of her career as a writer of fiction, Serao was predominantly concerned with women, as the audience and subjects of her work […] Serao’s universe is essentially female. The centrality of the female protagonist in her work is striking, especially when compared to her often cursory delineation of male characters”.

As a journalist, Serao explored political corruption, and the deplorable living conditions of Naples, but also the changes in society. She was to be the first Italian intellectual to write about cinema, charting the effects of cinema on urban life. In March 1906, on the pages of her newspaper “Il Giorno” she published Cinematografeide! The suffix of the neologism that she coined indicates the epidemic character of the new medium. In only a few years, the virus had affected the city of Naples. Serao describes a city invaded by cinemas where people talk only about the new medium, forgetting the problems of the Italian parliament or the state of the city. Here is a very significant passage:


The dreadful machine is not satisfied to await you in the dark of the theatre; it springs out in the sunlight and catches you in movement, tricks you when you least expect it. Are you at the promenade Dante? There comes the cinema and catches you while you chivalrously lecture a beautiful lady about the site, and it immortalized you…. Are you in the park waiting for somebody? There comes the cinema, which catches you in the middle of a conversation and immortalizes your innocent flirting in a film… Where or how to find shelter? No remedy, ladies and gentlemen! Where to save? How to save? No remedy, lecturer, reader!

This description as early as March 1906 of Naples suffering from cinema as a disease is very suggestive. Quoting Giuliana Bruno in *Streetwalking on a ruined map*:

The presence of film in the city affects both sides of the camera. This early description by a woman writer conceives of film as an apparatus: the filmic 'machine' is a mechanism of production and reception, marked by the scopic regime and the passion perceiving. As if rewitnessing the primal scene, all scenes caught by the ubiquitous camera eye are of an erotic nature. Eroticism is the fantasmatic ground of cinema: with a poetic twist, Serao sums up the concept by asserting that flirting is transformed into film.194

After this article, Matilde Serao seems to get tired of cinematografeide. She is the author of numerous films reviews including a roundup of classics so–called 'cinema masterpieces of the Teens'. Serao is often attentive to the issue of spectatorship. For instance, in her review of *Intolerance*, she refers to the spectators, and divides them into three broad categories: those who want to be moved tears or laughter, those who want to be launched into a dream without limits, and those who want to learn, to know, and to judge, guided by reason and discernment. Matilde Serao was appointed by the Neapolitan film distributor in Naples, Gustavo Lombardo, to write an elegant brochure of *Intolerance*. Obviously Serao wrote well about Griffith’s movie and she concluded that it had the merit (she writes “a miracle”) to satisfy the triple desires of the unknown spectator: to think, to dream, to feel.

The second issue that interested Serao was the relationship between writers and the cinema, an issue that obviously concerned her very closely. In her criticism, Serao divides writers into categories, distinguishing between those who scorn the cinema, those who are disappointed by the situation of the arts and unsure of what to think, and finally those she defines as eclectics: those who want to experiment writing for cinema. From her article, it seems that the novels and poetry of the ‘Teens’ were going through an uninteresting period, therefore the most courageous writers were turning to cinema and were attempting to raise this new art–form to the level of high art by turning their gaze to the high and sublime stories of Dante, Goethe or Dumas. Serao herself began by sharing the view of these writers and seeing great literature as a good source for the film, but she then took it upon herself the role of viewer:

Per mesi e mesi […] sono andata a vedere, coi miei occhi mortali, per i miei dodici soldi, per i miei otto soldi, che cosa mi piacesse, che cosa mi piacesse, che cosa mi allettasse, che cosa mi commuovesse, in uno spettacolo cinematografico. Mi sono seduta, in un angolo, allo scuro, in silenzio e in immobilità come tutti gli altri miei vicini; e la mia figura anonima, la mia persona ignota, sono diventate consimili a tanti altri esseri anonimi…

For months and months, and with a feeling of sincere humility, I did only one thing: I went to the movie to take up my role of spectatrix. With my mortal eyes, I went to see, for few cents, or even less, whatever might please, amuse, or move me in a film show. I sat in a corner, in the dark, silent and still, like all my neighbours; and my anonymous and unknown persona became like many others, anonymous and unknown… I was like them, an ordinary spectator, without preconceptions, without prejudices, with out any sort of bond to anything or anybody.195

In the darkness of cinemas, Serao discovered that she experienced the same impressions felt by her neighbour, who could be a shop assistant or a little provincial. She starts crying or laughing exactly when her neighbour laughs or cries. As a spectatrix, she became convinced of a truth: the audience of the cinematograph is made of simple souls with a common spirit. For this simple crowd Serao makes an appeal to the writers, the playwrights, even to herself:

Ah, poeti, romanziatori, drammaturghi, fratelli miei, non cerchiamo ansiosamente e tormentosamente il soggetto raro, il soggetto prezioso, per le nostre films! Lasciamoci andare alla verità delle cose e alla naturalenza delle persone: cerchiamo di narrare, di descrivere, di tratteggiare delle buone storie, balzanti nell’arte nostra dalla vita medesima, e assumenti quella inafferrabile ma palpitante aureola di poesia che sgorgha dal cuore nostro innumerevole.

We should not strive so anxiously and painfully for rare and precious scenarios for our films! Let’s just go to the truth of things and to people’s naturalness. Let’s just tell plain good stories, enriching our craft from life itself and take on that elusive but passionate aura of poetry, which springs from our overflowing heart.

Serao’s opinions about films echo her opinions about literature. In The Encyclopædia Britannica we can read:

She was a naturalist, but her naturalism should be understood in a much wider sense than that which is generally given to it. She was a naturalist because her books reflect life with the utmost simplicity of means, sometimes with an utter neglect of means, and at the same time she is an idealist through her deep sense of the beauty and nobility which humanity can attain, and to which her writings continually aspire. All her work is truly and profoundly Italian; it is the literature of a great mass of individuals, rather than of one peculiarly accentuated individual; the joy and pain of a whole class rather than the perplexities of a unique case or type pulsates through her pages.196

When Serao talks about cinema and writers she refers to the faults and the possibilities of the new medium:

La prima impressione che prova uno scrittore cui si chieda di scrivere per il cinematografo, è un senso di ripugnanza. E si comprende: il poeta, il romanziatore, il commediografo, il giornalista non possono non ritenere la rinuncia alla parola come una diminuzione capitale.

The first impression a writer feels when asked to write for the cinema is a sense of repugnance. It’s easy to understand: the poet, the novelist, the playwright, the journalist cannot consider the subordination of the word as anything other than an abomination. He who is used to penetrating the soul and arousing the passions, doesn’t see in the mimic art a medium able to represent its spirit: and in cinema there are the mechanical aspects which may displease the self–elected high priests of pure Art…197

In Serao’s opinion cinema is a brand new art form that confronts everyone. And despite its deficiencies as an artistic form, cinema has the qualities that attract poets of the medium to devote their lives to the representation of human actions.

She argues that cinema is not well suited to represent scenes of love or pain as literature, but there is a capacity in cinema that she defines as extraordinary or miraculous: the ability to represent the crowd, the collective movements, in large naturalistic scenes.

Matilde Serao expressed these opinions in an interview with “Giornale d’Italia” in 1916. She had reviewed films such as L’inferno, Quo Vadis?, Cabiria and Intolerance. Although her reviews are often suspected to be commissioned, it is thought that she was quite free to choose what to write about.

For example, reviewing Quo Vadis? she wrote:

Niuna forma rappresentativa poteva mai dare una visione più palpitante, più completa, più vera, più bella di ciò che può essere il Quo vadis? vivente, se non quella, spinta sino al prodigio della ricostruzione cinematografica. […] I luoghi, i conviti, i paesaggi, le orgie, gli orrori, il teribile quadro dell’incendio di Roma, l’evidenza del quale non è stata mai raggiunta in alcuna cosa somigliante, destano impressioni ed emozioni indescrivibili.

No representative form could ever give a more palpitating, more complete, more real, more beautiful sensation of what can be the living Quo Vadis?, if not that, push until prodigy reconstruction film. […] Location, conviti, landscapes, orgies, the horrors, the terrible image of Rome burning, evidence of which has never been achieved in resembling anything, convey indescribable impressions and emotions.

197 “Matilde Serao e il cinematografo”, Apollon, February 1th 1916, 32.
In May 1918, Serao intervened with an article called *Consiglio di Famiglia* (Family Council) published in the sarcastic film review “Cin.” In her sarcastic writing style, Serao highlights the negative aspects of film, giving a picture of the negative positions that persisted in 1918. She offers the following warning:


Cinema is trivial. People who work in the cinema are fools and scoundrels. Cinema is immoral. The cinema should be educational. The cinema has to be something else. We must make a new kind of movie. We must drive out the merchants from the temple of cinema. What is censorship doing? The people are being corrupted in cinemas. Reassess cinema. Close the cinemas.198

Serao is concerned that these warnings might influence writers who are attacked by critics and censors. She hopes that cinema can continue to be a wonderful window onto modern life—the recreation of the spirit. If cinema has to be educational, it runs the risk of becoming boring. If it has to be Art, (with a capital A) it runs the risk of becoming abstruse and annoying. If the actors are concerned about aesthetic principles they risk losing sight of the drama of expression. We have sought to focus on Serao’s writing about cinema, but it has to be remembered that she also wrote for cinema: she wrote the screenplay of a film entitled *La mia vita per la tua!* for Caesar Film, directed and interpreted by Emilio Ghione in 1914 (no copies of it are currently available). The writer defines it as “an attempt at cinematographic novel” and in fact, at least according to the critics of the time, it can be said that it remained an attempt. Nevertheless, the publicity that was launched in journals created a climate of great expectation in the public, relying specially on Serao’s name. For instance, *La vita cinematografica* published an interview with Maria Carmi (the protagonist in the role of Elena de Soubies), where the actress claims to be very much captured by the subject of the film, something that has happened to her very few times, and does not miss the opportunity to praise Serao, defining her as capable of writing a “truly cinematographic story.” The complicated story seems to influence the actors, even before the spectators, and the author of the article, reporting her visit to the set during the shooting of the film, writes on having had the inkling that in the studios of Caesar Film, the greatest event in Italian cinematographic art was being prepared.199

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198 Matilde Serao, “Consigli di famiglia”, *Cin*, May 12, 1918, 2.
On the occasion of its first Roman screening, the same journal publishes a review of three whole pages, with a detailed description of the plot. However, the commentary is not at all positive; the story is reputed as too complicated to be followed and understood by the public. The names of Serao, Carmi, Ghione, and Carminati are considered a guarantee for its financial success, but are not sufficient for an artistic one. However, despite the negative review, several film adaptations were made of her literary work.

In his memoirs, the attorney Francesco Soro refers to another unfortunate attempt by the author at a collaboration with the world of cinema: the commission of two original screenplays by David Karenne Film for an equivalent of 16,000 lire. However, when the first text entitled *Il doppio volto* is delivered, Serao does not get remunerated and is forced to threaten with legal action. Unfortunately, not even Serao’s pleading with Diana Karenne brings about any results and, in the end, the author gives up. *Il doppio volto* will be later directed by Giulio Antamoro in 1918 with the American actress Helen Arnold in the main role, but the film turns out to be produced by Polifilms of Naples.

Despite the thematic and geographic closeness with Elvira Notari, Serao always refused to concede the rights of the cinematographic adaptation of her novels to the Neapolitan director. According to Vittorio Martinelli, the writer’s refusal of the requests for the transposition of some of her texts, especially those with the most vivid description of the lower-class and bourgeois circles of Naples, was always a cause of great regret for Notari. However, the writer despised Notari’s films so much that she preferred to concede the rights of *Addio Amore!* and *Castigo* to Floreal, a Roman production company with a very low profile. *Sterminatore Vesevo*, also among those in which Notari was interested, was instead produced by Palatino/Uci, with the Vesuvio being paradoxically reconstructed on the beaches of Civitavecchia.

How could such a rigid attitude towards Notari be explained? Antonia Arslan, a scholar in popular and feminine literature, suggests a key reading that could help to understand an attitude that other literary women of the time seem to share.

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201 The following titles are those that are known to have been inspired by Serao’s works: O Giovannino o la morte (Gino Rossetti, 1914), Addio amore! (Alberto Carlo Lolli, 1916), Castigo (Ubaldo Maria Del Colle, 1917), La mano tagliata (Alberto Degli Abbati, 1919), Dopo il perdono (Ugo De Simone, 1919), Temi il leone (Ubaldo Maria Del Colle, 1919).


It is exactly successful women—and the ‘respectable ones’—the diamond–points of feminine achievement in literature, who prove to be […] uncertain in drawing the theoretical consequences of an emancipationist and social nature, which would seem to be a logical consequence of the cases described in their narratives. It is a phenomenon that can be found […] in Matilde Serao […] and many others […] as if creatively depicting and observing reality, as well as conceiving and accompanying their ‘defeated’ characters, had induced them to a fundamentally negative and self-limiting reflection on themselves and the world. Matilde Serao even denies the existence of the woman question, and speaks ironically about working women with a belittling and contemptuous tone.\footnote{Antonia Arslan, “Ideologia e autorappresentazione”, in Annarita Buttafuoco, Marina Zancan, eds., Svelamento. Sibilla Al eramo. Una biografia intellettuale, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988, 168–171 (quoted in Bruno, Streetwalking on a ruined map, 242–243).}

In any case, despite her unsuccessful attempts at the cinematographic adaptation of her novels and the difficulties in her career as a scriptwriter, it seems that Serao cultivated her interest for cinema until the very end, as it is demonstrated by this late text where she refers to many other unrealized screenplays: In 1926 she writes:


I know the old owner of a huge cinema, who is stuck with drawers full of manuscripts that were paid for but were never turned into films. One of them is mine, to be shown in four nights, where I use Fantomas: it was entitled: Il talismano. I was paid 10,000 lire for it. It was never filmed. And it was the last one. Since then, I’ve had seven films frozen in a special drawer, seven I say, are left, alas, unrealized! No one ever asked for them, no one will ever ask. In order to be brief, I won’t name the titles of these works of mine. And perhaps amongst these compositions unknown to people, there is a masterpiece of cinema. Everything may happen. And this masterpiece will remain unknown. Thus, because of the silent, but always fresh anger at the bottom of my spirit, I have stopped frequenting those gloomy halls for years.\footnote{“Matilde Serao e il cinematografo”, Lo schermo, no 17, 1926, 13.}

The journal “Al Cinemà” reports the news of Matilde Serao’s participation in the realization of Roberto Leone Roberti’s film Napoli che canta in 1926. The film—reflects the columnist—turns out to be:

\footnote{“Matilde Serao e il cinematografo”, Lo schermo, no 17, 1926, 13.}
a real 'film of songs' inasmuch as Neapolitan popular songs are what enliven, not a plot, but a photographic representation of the Neapolitan uses and costumes, the characteristic odd types of the city. In short, Naples’ life [...] “Napoli canta” takes us for a few instants to an atmosphere of dreams and poetry. Its conception and realization by Roberto Roberti and Matilde Serao is praiseworthy. They succeeded in integrating magnificently the scenes with the accompanying melodies, providing an illusion that equals the very reality, or even surpasses it.206

The captions of Napoli che canta are almost all literally drawn from the short-stories and the early sketches that the writer published in 1879 in a collection entitled “Dal Vero”.207 The volume was published in seven editions, the last of which was published in 1916. A great part of the captions of the film comes from a text dedicated to that particular expression, the popular song, which is almost always linked to love. Serao points out.

Amore diverso dal nostro amore grossolano e che può giungere a certe delicate espansioni, sognate solo dalla fantasia del poeta; amore che dona egualmente un garofano ed un colpo di rasoio: amore che non s’inchina, non porta guanti e suona per ore intere la chitarra sotto la finestra dell’amata.

Love that is different from ours, a coarse love that can reach certain delicate expansions, dreamt only by the poet’s fantasy; love that bestows at the same time a carnation and a blow of a raiser: love that does not bow, does not wear gloves, and plays the guitar for hours under the lover’s window.208

The short version of the abovementioned passage appears in one of the captions of the film:

“Nella canzone si parla quasi sempre d’amore… amore che non s’inchina, non porta guanti e suona per ore intere sotto la finestra dell’amata”.

“Popular songs almost always speak of love… love that does not bow, does not wear gloves, and plays the guitar for hours under the lover’s window.”

The caption is followed by the images of a serenade played at the window of a young woman, who is lying down, enjoying the song. This is only one among the numerous instances of written and visual transposition of the very first works of Serao that one comes across in Napoli che canta. It remains to be verified whether the writer, as the article in the journal “Al Cinemà” im-

206 “Il film della canzone: Napoli canta”, Al cinemà, n. 23, June 6, 1926, 7. A copy of the film with captions both in English and Italian has been found in the United States, California, in 2000, restored by George Eastman House and presented at the 22nd edition of Days of Silent Cinema in October 2003.
plies, has directly collaborated in the realization of the film, or she has simply ceded the rights of the collection.

Finally, it is appropriate to conclude by referring to an article Serao dedicated to Rodolfo Valentino, which was, nevertheless, a pretext to once again speak of women, of female spectators. Valentino dies of a peritonitis attack at the age of 31 on August 21, 1926. Two weeks later, Serao publishes a long article about Valentino on her newspaper, but the true subject is, in fact, the female universe. The journalist imagines the mourning of women, of all women, from the adolescent to “the capricious lady,” from “the unhappy provincial wife” to “the romantic seamstress” (and the many female characters of her novels seem to parade in this gallery), grief before which men’s offences are worth nothing. The actor of the magnetic gaze, who enchanted the female public without leaving them any escape, is nothing—the author writes—but a phantom, someone who, despite existing in flesh and blood, has exercised his charm merely through a shadow on the screen, penetrating the hearts of the female spectators. It is exactly this nature of being untouchable and unreachable that has become the center of millions of women’s desire, an image indispensable for enduring every day life. Wondering Matilde Serao writes:

What woman lives without a phantom, be it grand, meager, or petty, what woman can put up with real life if she does not carry in her this undefeated attraction, this faithful devotion, this bond ever stronger as it is almost always based on the spirit, and hardly ever on the senses? What woman does not carry in her, besides her destiny, beyond her time, this phantom, which is at times, unfortunately, a sublime trap of the imagination, a sublime deception of the heart? A woman goes to her death with her phantom…And are men perhaps right to be jealous of the phantom? Ah, yes, perhaps they are right…

Here we find part of Serao’s thoughts on women’s condition, her conformist attitude towards the process of emancipation. A contradictory attitude that is well represented through her position as a separated woman who nevertheless is against divorce, in keeping with her argument that since “no one can change everything, we might as well change nothing,” or rather, do not take

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209 Serao, “Fantasma”, Il Giorno, Sept. 8, 1926. I would like to thank Silvio Alovisio for having shown me the article in question.
away from the woman her only compensation, the only right she is left with: that of suffering for herself and for others. However, the issue of Serao’s relation with feminism is too complex to be confronted in this essay.

After Serao’s death in March 1927, her literary works fell in oblivion for almost 20 years. Pietro Pancrazi edited the first edition of her complete works in 1944. However, it should not be forgotten that cinema first had the merit of drawing attention on Serao’s literature. In 1941, Alberto Consiglio, in an article on “Cinema e Letteratura Popolare,” which appeared on *Film Quotidiano*, invites producers to look at the Neapolitan writer’s novels, at the cinematographic opportunities offered in her works. At the same time, Fauno Film commissions Sergio Amidei with a cinematic adaptation of her novels *Addio Amore!* and *Castigo*, which will be directed by Gianni Franciolini in 1942 with Clara Calamai in the main role. In the same year, Luigi Chiarini’s first film *Via delle cinque lune* comes out, inspired by *O Giovanni o la morte* and based on a script by Chiarini, Umberto Barbaro, and Francesco Pasinetti, which transposes the setting from Naples to Rome. In the same period, other stories of films revolve around Serao: a project of cinematic adaptation of *La virtù di Checchina*, on which Alberto Lattuada works in 1943, and a subject by Luigi Zampa entitled *Notizie sensazionali*, on the tormented sentimental and professional story of the couple Serao–Scarfoglio.

We cannot but hope to come upon new documents, articles, and unedited subjects enabling us to more precisely outline the complex relation between cinema and Serao, this extraordinary author.

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Not quite Classical Hollywood Cinema: the Narrative Structure of Frances Marion’s Screenplays

Claus Tieber

Introduction
At the Women and the Silent Screen conference in 2006, JoAnne Ruvoli gave a presentation about Frances Marion and Mary Pickford. According to Ruvoli their films can be seen as transitional, as an intermediary between the tradition of sentimental literature and modernity. In this article I would like to take up the aspect of seeing Marion as working in-between two different paradigms, but I want to change the focus to the narrative structure of her screenplays. In viewing these films and reading her scripts, it becomes quite clear that their narrative structure is somewhat different from what is commonly regarded as Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC).

Classical Hollywood Narrative
If we consider CHC as the dominant model for fiction film from 1917 on, these films should match its main criteria: cause and effect—therefore a linear, motivated, logical plot, no coincidences and a protagonist who propels the plot by trying to achieve his/her goal. Deviations from this model sometimes are explained with the tradition of sentimental literature or the melodramatic impact on cinema. Alternative models of narration in fiction film are sometimes called “parallelism” or “situational dramaturgy.” But these models are meant to describe fiction films pre–1917, before CHC. It is generally assumed that different forms of storytelling ended in the late 1910s. For the purpose of analyzing the screenplays of Frances Marion, I am therefore introducing a different model.

Dual Focus Narrative/Structure
The concept of Dual Focus Narrative (DFN) was developed by Rick Altman. Altman wanted to analyze the structure of the American film musical and identified different patterns of organizing plot information beneath the commonly analyzed surface. In his new book “A Theory of Narration”, “Dual Focus Structure” is defined like this:

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211 JoAnne Ruvoli, “Frances Marion and Mary Pickford: Early Modern Feminists at Play?”, paper presented at the Fourth International Women and the Silent Screen Conference, University of Guadalajara, Mexico, June 8, 2006.
212 Rick Altman, The American Film Musical. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1987), 19ff
The narrator follows no single character throughout but instead alternates regularly between two groups whose conflict provides the plot. Because the group rather than an individual plays the lead role, individuals are primarily conceived as placeholders, defined by the group, rather than as characters whose development constitutes an independent subject of interest. Succeeding following-units typically portray the two sides engaged in similar activities. This parallelism induces comparison of the two sides, the source of the text’s main rhetorical thrust. Each new pair of following-units is related to the previous pair by the principle of replacement. [...] The text ends when the two sides are reduced to one, by death or expulsion, or through marriage or conversion. 213

According to Altman, Dual Focus Narratives can be found in medieval popular epics as well as in recent comic books, in Gothic novels as well as in Hollywood Westerns. Both models (CHC and DFN) can be of help when analyzing the narrative structure of fiction films (i.e. the organization of plot information, to reduce the term on purpose). In most cases, neither of them can be found in a pure, textbook–like way. Neither do they exclude each other. They are just two different ways of storytelling that can be mixed. The use of each model is not restricted to a certain period of time in film history, although there are times when one or the other becomes dominant. Both models can still be found in Hollywood films today.

In this article I want to analyze the narrative structure of Frances Marion’s screenplays using these two models. In order to get a clearer picture of the specifics of her screenwriting, I have to compare her work to that of her contemporaries.

Daddy Long Legs (1919) is my first case study, a film written by Agnes Christine Johnston, based on the epistolary novel by Jean Webster, directed by Marshall Neilan and starring Mary Pickford. Comparing this film to another Pickford vehicle written by Marion will bring a more accurate picture of Frances Marion’s contribution to film history.

Daddy Long Legs (1919)
The film tells the story of the girl Judy (played by Pickford) who grows up in an orphanage. Then a rich benefactor offers to pay for her education. He wants to remain anonymous, and in return asks only for one letter each month from Judy. At the end Judy has grown up and is the author of a successful book that has made her rich. The anonymous sponsor turns out to be the man Judy has fallen in love with: happy ending.

The film tells its story in a quite interesting way. First we see a baby born into a rich family. Then a baby is taken out of a garbage can. There are a couple of scenes in which the two girls are being compared. There is no continuity in the plot in these scenes; one doesn’t follow the other by cause and

effect. Their “follow pattern”, as Altman puts it, is related to opposites and symmetries, to ideas, not to plot development.

The first time the film shows Judy’s love interest, the man who gives the film its title, Daddy Long Legs, is situated in the middle of the film. The first half of the film is full of funny scenes in which Pickford shows off her attractions, her charm, wit and comical talent. These scenes, however, are not really relevant for the plot. But they are organized according to a pattern that uses opposites, symmetries and parallels as its main principle. Rich and poor, male and female, old and young—these binary structures are used in this film to full effect.

The narrative structure of *Daddy Long Legs* can be described as a “situational dramaturgy”, according to Lea Jacobs and Ben Brewster\(^\text{214}\). The film consists of situations in which Pickford is presented the way her audience loves her. (The film became Pickford’s greatest box office hit so far). But the concept of a situational dramaturgy, which often mentions George Polti’s rather obscure “36 dramatic situations”, does not explain how these situations are put together.\(^\text{215}\)

I want to emphasize in this short glimpse at *Daddy Long Legs* that opposites play a crucial role in this narrative structure. In order to write a screenplay that works in this framework, clear, mostly one-dimensional characters, types, representations of ideas rather than psychologically motivated characters are needed.

The second point I want to stress is the unity of the story in an Aristotelian sense. In CHC this unity can be found in most films. In films like *Daddy Long Legs*, the story is told mostly episodically. There are a lot of scenes taking place in the orphanage with little or no plot information, there are many time gaps, and until the middle of the film, when we see Daddy Long Legs, the anonymous sponsor, for the first time, there is in fact no plot. And finally: Judy in *Daddy Long Legs* is not an active agent of the story. She makes the best of her situation, but she is not in control of her own destiny. Daddy Long Legs is a typical example of the influence of sentimental literature. As Nina Baym defines the genre: “The story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world.”\(^\text{216}\) The passive women was a standard type of sentimental literature, though seldom the protagonist.

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The Love Light (1921)
The Frances Marion film I want to analyze as a case study for the narrative structure of her screenplays is The Love Light from 1921. This is one of the very few films that Marion also directed herself. The Love Light is quite different from other Mary Pickford films, but in terms of narrative structure, themes and issues it is quite typical for Frances Marion.

The film tells the story of Angela who lives in a small fishing village in Italy. The film starts just before the First World War. Giovanni is in love with Angela, but he has to leave for the front. Angela finds a man at the beach who pretends to be Joseph, an American deserter. They fall in love with each other and Angela hides him from the other villagers. But then she finds out that he actually is a German spy and the villagers chase him to death. Angela gives birth to a girl, but the events have driven her into madness and so she is transferred to a convent for treatment while her baby is being raised by another woman. Giovanni comes back from war but he is blind. They fall in love with each other and Angela gets her baby back: happy ending.

This is, apart from all the pathos and sentiment, an extraordinary story for a film dating from 1921; even more so for a Mary Pickford film. At first sight The Love Light looks like CHC: Three acts, a continuous plot with Pickford as a tragic heroine. But if we take a closer look the narrative structure becomes less clear.

Unity of plot
Although the scenes follow each other by cause and effect, it is difficult to make out the plotlines. There is the love story between Giovanni and Angela—he loves her, goes to war, comes back, happy ending—this plotline is only planted in the first act and it commences not before the third act. The love affair between Angela and Joseph, the German spy, takes place only in the second act. The struggle for the baby is part of the third act. The Love Light therefore has three different plotlines, but not one of them continues throughout the whole film.

The third act offers a special problem, because it is a kind of epilogue lasting twenty minutes. It takes place after Joseph’s death. After the tragic end of this relationship a new storyline begins, which in fact is a completely new story, linked to the first act more strongly than to the second, and this connection is constructed on some little plantings at the beginning of the film and on nothing else. The continuity of the plot is rather fragmented and there is no unity of plot.

Situations
The Love Light was made to make Pickford appear in a different light. This was the downright objective of the film. Pickford, who produced the film, did not want to play a child again. The whole third act can be explained by
her wish to play a mother (although she already had played one in *Tess of the Storm Country* in 1914). There is a long funny scene in the first third of the film, in which only animals are shown; the scene has nothing to do with the rest of the film, not even symbolically. And there is a big sea-in-the-storm scene at the end, a big action scene for which Marion’s directing was criticized. Although this scene is better integrated and motivated by the plot then the animal scene, it owes its existence in this form much more to the conventions of melodrama than to the demands of storytelling.

Jeanine Basinger calls these scenes “a series of incidents that stop the plot dead as she (Pickford) caters to her audience.” These incidents or situations where developed solely because Pickford and Marion wanted them to be there and not because they were structurally, psychologically or logically motivated.

**Active agent**

Angela as played by Mary Pickford is in no way a classical Hollywood protagonist whose quest for her goal is propelling the narrative. In the first act she simply does not have any goal. She is presented in the typical Pickford way, as a funny, happy and optimistic young woman. In the second act it becomes her goal to hide Joseph from the villagers. After his death, during the third act, she remains mostly passive. The only situation in which she is getting active is the rescue of her baby from the shipwreck. But in spite of the fact that her baby is not with her, she does not do anything to change this state of affairs. Angela can be seen as an active agent only in the second act. In the rest of the film she remains passive as Pickford is shown in almost all of her films.

With its discontinuities, its passive protagonist and its non– or loosely integrated situations it is difficult to regard *The Love Light* as CHC. Influences of a situational dramaturgy and of melodrama can be identified; the whole story is told that Kevin Brownlow calls “Melodrama with a capital M.” It is still different from a dual focus narrative like *Daddy Long Legs*. Analyzing the elements in these films that could as well have been used for a more dualistic way of storytelling, it becomes obvious how Frances Marion changed the narrative conventions of her day.

**Marion’s characters**

Marion’s screenplays differ from those of her contemporaries: Her scenes are more strongly motivated, they are connected by cause and effect, much more than—for example—the scenes of *Daddy Long Legs* or *Tess of the Storm Coun-

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try. But Marion’s screenplays are not quite CHC, even if we choose to understand the term in a wider sense.

Whereas other screenwriters at the time used dual focus narrative to a great extent, Marion changed this model of storytelling by creating more complex, less binary characters. In other words, Marion broke the rules of DFN by writing characters that—compared to her contemporaries’ work—were motivated more strongly. This applies particularly to her female characters. In the case of *The Love Light* it would have been easy for Marion to set up the characters of Angela and Maria, the woman who takes Angela’s baby as a foster child, in the parallel pattern of a DFN.

Marion could have characterized the two women as opposites: On one side, the good one, who had helped a deserter, and on the other side, the bad baby–snatcher, as it was done in *Daddy Long Legs* and in numerous other contemporary films. Instead, she presents Maria not as the evil antagonist of Angela, but as a woman with a comparably similar tragic history. Maria is not a stereotype of evil; her acts are motivated by the loss of her own child. (Note that both names are biblical. Marion doesn’t make them antagonists simply by the choice of names, like a lot of screenwriters did in the silent era and later on.)

In other cases from *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *Toll of the Sea* to talkies like *Min and Bill* or *The Champ*, Marion never structures her plots by means of complete opposites. She changes this way of storytelling by writing multi-dimensional characters, especially female characters. This does not mean that Marion never created “bad” female characters. But in most cases she motivated their evil behaviour, either by the loss of a baby as in *The Love Light* or by alcohol abuse as in *Stella Maris* or *Min and Bill*.

**Modern elements: Humour and Realism**

JoAnne Ruvoli noted that one of the modern elements in Frances Marion’s and Mary Pickford’s films can be detected in their humour. They brought comic relief to otherwise very sentimental narratives. They changed the whole tone of these stories. Another modern component is the realistic elements in some of Marion’s and Pickford’s films. *Daddy Long Legs* is a film about an orphanage. The life there is not at all depicted as funny. Judy, the character played by Pickford, is found in a garbage can; children are dying in this orphanage. Pickford chose topics that were very realistic at her time. Topics like violence against children or child labour can be found in more than one of Pickford’s films. Compared to films by her contemporaries, Marion’s films—especially those for Pickford—are less rough, which is also an effect of her storytelling, which doesn’t rely on simple opposite characters.

**Marion’s later screenplays**

In her later screenplays, beginning with *Stella Dallas*, but especially in her talkies like *Min and Bill* or *The Champ*, Marion uses the narrative structure of CHC in most, but not in all of her screenplays. A clear three-act structure can be
found, and—most important—an active agent, a female protagonist such as Stella Dallas or Min, or a male hero as in The Champ. The reasons for this change in structure have their roots in the fundamental change of Hollywood’s production process.

Story conferences had become a regular institution in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The transition to sound brought a tendency towards realism and therefore the final abandonment of sentimental or melodramatic forms. Lea Jacobs notes a shift in public taste in during the 1920s, away from sentimental and melodramatic to more naturalistic and realistic forms. It is tempting to regard this development as a linear and straightforward one. But rather than perceiving Frances Marion’s screenplays as part of a similar transformation in storytelling that corresponds to the shift Jacobs mentions, I suggest we should acknowledge Marion’s achievements as successful solutions to the problems she had to tackle; solutions that were influenced by the restrictions and frameworks of her time, but are not confined to them. What Marion achieved could almost be seen as an alternative model of narrative structure in fiction film.

**Conclusion**

Today, screenwriters and audiences are getting exceedingly bored with the blatancy of classical Hollywood storytelling and they are looking for alternatives. I am convinced that Frances Marion’s screenplays can teach us many things: Firstly, it is far more important to solve practical problems than to strictly follow a certain model of screenwriting. In doing so, one can even create a new model as Marion almost did. Secondly, the solution for changing restrictive conventions is to be found in the creation of characters. Writing multi-dimensional characters will not only break down the boundaries of conventions and formulas, but also will help to find new and successful solutions to the structural problems of our times. Marion herself was very aware of the importance of well-developed characters. In her screenwriting manual, published in 1937, she wrote: “Characterization is the most important factor in the film story, and no ingenuity or originality of the plot will save a photoplay, which has inadequate characterizations.” She regarded character more important than plot: “Give me an interesting personality with definite characteristics and I will find a plot inherent in the particular situations into which only his individual traits could naturally lead him.” As a character-centred screenwriter, Frances Marion was indeed a pioneer.

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220 Frances Marion, *How to write and sell film stories.* (New York: Covici – Friede, 1937), 31
221 Ibid., 33
The Name Behind the Titles: Establishing Authorship through Inter–Titles

Anke Brouwers

Silent cinema’s inter–titles\(^{222}\) appear to have been as unpopular with early movie–audiences and critics who initially felt them to be disruptive and redundant, as with film historians who have largely excluded the written title from their research into silent film style and narration.\(^{223}\) This leaves exciting opportunities for future scholarship, for if we agree that the filmic discourse, the means available to filmmakers of the silent era to tell a story, consisted both of the photographic images and the written inter–titles, we can ask a myriad of new questions. We can ask to what degree these inter–titles could influence a film’s narrative, nudge it into a certain direction, just like choices regarding editing, camera–placement, lighting, as well as the actual narrative construction on the level of the plot, shape the way a film story is told. We can wonder whether or not images and inter–titles served the same unifying purpose at all times, and whether or not the specific tone of voice, the way things are put, implied or asserted in the inter–title, resulted in a discernible speaking voice attributable to the personal, recognizable style of a particular writer. We can also think about the mutual dependence of inter–titles and photographic images as they both, to a certain degree, become void and meaningless without the other and gain meaning and focus from their juxtaposition. Additionally, inter–titles continue to pose practical problems and challenges for archivists all over the world confronted with prints that have translated inter–titles. While the historical import of an original print is unquestionable whatever its “nationality,” we must consider the fact that translated inter–titles make the artefact different from its original, because it necessarily offers a different experience to the one intended by its makers; things (meaning) get lost in translation much in the same way the photographic image loses some of its quality with each successive generation of prints.\(^{224}\) Therefore, detail, subtlety, and other properties of the narration may have disappeared in the surviving print. Without the aid of an original continuity script or written

\(^{222}\) During the silent era, the written title between photographic images could be more or less interchangeably referred to as captions, leaders, subtitles, cut–ins or inter–titles. For reasons of clarity I have opted for inter–titles because the term is least subject to confusion. In quotes other terminology may be used.

\(^{223}\) Surely, inter–titles have been addressed, but comparatively speaking only in limited ways. Tom Gunning has recently noted that the academic study of inter–titles has been scant. Inter–titles are usually analysed for plot, seldom for style. See: Gunning, Tom. True Heart Susie, in The Griffith Project, Vol. 10 (1919–46), edited by Paolo Cherchi Usai, 18–27. London, BFI Publishing, 2006, 22.

\(^{224}\) Although this is interesting from a historical point of view, another factor influencing our experience is that most inter–titles are in archaic language and spelling.
outline it comes down to guesswork to determine how good or bad the
title–writing might have been, or what it may have contributed to the film.
The archivist’s (and contemporary audience’s) estimation of the film may
be influenced to an extensive degree by the quality of the surviving inter–
titles. If we take the written titles to be a substantial part of the film, we
have to ask the question whether any film can be considered complete
without them.

This list of questions is by no means exhaustive and my article will not
address them all satisfactorily or even minimally. I will concern myself
with one problem specifically, namely whether we can locate rhetorical
strategies and tendencies that suggest a recognizable personal style, the
stylistic mark of an often neglected creative agent in silent film, the
screen– and/or title–writer. In addition, the suggestion of personal style in
title–writing will lead me to reconsider received notions of cinematic nar-
reration in silent film. I will argue that the creative screenwriter or title writer
could turn the inter–title into a layered, playful, often intertextual environ-
ment for establishing a speaking voice comparable to that of the literary
narrator—addressing the audience with omniscience, authority or amuse-
ment. Such comparison does not suggest the presence of a virtual narrator
in (silent) cinema equivalent or even related to the literary “implied au-
thor” as decisive power behind a text to whom we attribute the narration.
When I suggest we locate a speaking voice that is much like the literary
speaking voice, I take this as a rhetorical strategy taken up by actual writ-
ers, not as the “voice” of a virtual cinematic narrator who somehow en-
compasses every narrative impulse in a film. In rejecting the necessity of
postulating a more or less personalized narrator for every (film) narrative,
my position comes closest to that put forward by David Bordwell, although
my perspective differs slightly precisely because it deals with a explicitly
‘literary’ part of a film, the written inter–title. For now suffice it to stress
that the speaking voice we encounter in a certain style of title–writing from
the mid–teens onward is to be taken as a strategy that allowed writers to
contribute to the narrative relatively free from mediation from other, often
more dominant, agents in the filmmaking process—actors interpreting plot
and character, directors staging and orchestrating the action or visualizing
it with the assistance of set–designers, cameramen, lighting technicians etc.

225 See David Bordwell, Narrative in the Fiction Film (Wisconsin: The University of Wiscon-
sin Press, 1985) and Poetics of Cinema (New York: Routledge, 2008), chap. 3; Tom Gunning,
D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph
(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), Seymour Chatman, Coming to Terms: The
for (part of) the debate.
A brief survey of the history of inter–titles in the silent period will be useful to make my arguments more concrete. Inter–titles met with grave resistance when they first appeared with more frequency in narrative contexts from roughly the end of the primitive period, around 1908. Turning to inter–titles to explain or announce impending action was thought to flag the filmmaker’s failure to convey meaning visually, to disrupt the narrative flow and to disturb the diegetic realism and illusory power of cinema. Moreover, early inter–titles were often redundant, awkwardly phrased or sequentially ill–placed so that they obscured instead of illuminated or annoyed instead of diverted the audience. Throughout the first half of the teens the industry was looking for the best way to present written information both in terms of placement and function, embracing and discarding several proposed solutions to ensure smooth narrative integration. Around the same time screen writing manuals, critics and audiences alike lobbied for the eradication of written titles, claiming a title–less film as the ideal. If that was asking too much, they advised at least a moderate and sensible use.

During this transitional era, with the number of complex literary adaptations and more ambitious or original story lines increasing, the inter–title, either explanatory or dialogue, was not so easily abandoned for it proved too precious a tool to the filmmaker to convey plot information, clarify the tempo–spatial relations between shots, intensify intended emotional response, and present psychological states that were difficult or impossible to present visually. From about 1915 the call for fewer inter–titles voiced in reviews, manuals, and trade papers, turned into a demand for better ones: explanatory inter–titles became more sophisticated in that they no longer summarized impending action but rather established a situation; experiments with function and placement of dialogue titles had resulted in a fairly standardized practice which made narration appear less controlling and imposing. William Everson notes that “as their value became understood, [inter–titles] were incorporated into the actual structure of the film, contributing to its pace and rhythm.” Inter–titles thus became an integral part of narrative cinema. Yet while narration generally became more invisible as it was fitted

227 See Bowser, The Transformation of Cinema, 140.
230 Barry Salt reports that in 1907 and 1908 the use of dialogue inter–titles was extremely rare. Salt, Film Style and Technology. History and Analysis (London: Starword, 1983), 107.
231 Everson, American Silent Film, 128.
into the classical paradigm, a taste arose for the sharp and well-phrased inter-title as a special attraction of its own. Kristin Thompson explains that instead of adhering to a strictly pragmatic, more or less inconspicuous role (i.e. telling the audience what is going to happen next), the “literary” inter-title “contribute[d] something extra to the film.” This “something extra” encompassed voiced attitudes, opinions, asides, jokes or afterthoughts. Inter-titles deliberately became more overt, directly addressing the audience, poking fun at their own function, the story or characters and situations in it, and flaunting their “omniscience,” a type of address typical of Victorian literature. This intentional self-consciousness was tolerated, even encouraged, because it literally counted as an “extra” and could thus be advertised for its added entertainment–value. Anita Loos is credited, then and now, as being the first to radically and consistently put that “something extra” into her titles, and for establishing the “literary” or “Loos-style” title.

Before we take a closer look at Loos’ style of titling, let us first turn to the question of why the inter-title was so attractive a device to screenwriters in the first place. Everson points out that for a long time the inter–title was the only area in which a screenwriter experienced relative freedom and creativity, as the scenarios themselves were more mechanical than creative in nature. In Everson’s contention, the role of the screenwriter remained under-appreciated until the twenties, for the bulk of the scenarios were either written by directors aspiring to a maximum amount of creative control (like Von Stroheim or Griffith in the twenties), adaptations of classical works upon which standard romantic and action–laden patterns were imposed, or star vehicles leaving little room for creativity since they had to be tuned to a star’s established or developing persona. It was by way of the inter–title that the writer could insert “mood” and “atmosphere,” could develop a

233 Thompson names Dickens and Thackeray, but Victorian literature in general, including the 19th century sentimentalists, exhibited this kind of omniscient narration. This literary style seems to have been very influential on various levels of narration, rhetoric, and characterisation, but its influence may have been indirect in that rather than copying from this literature, screen and title–writers borrowed from each other.
234 Bowser, Transformation of Cinema, 143.
235 Loos is mentioned in early accounts of film history and is credited with being “the first” in Lewis Jacobs and William Everson. Her influence is reiterated in recent historical surveys. Lewis Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film. A Critical History (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1968), 221; Everson, American Silent Film, 126; Thompson, Classical Hollywood Style, 187.
236 Everson, American Silent Film, 127.
237 Everson’s account should be taken as slightly overstated for around about 1916 screenplay writing could be sophisticated and precise, even including nudges or cues towards artistic effects as can be judged from scenario manuals. See, Edward Azlant, The Theory, History and Practice of Screenwriting, 1897–1920. (PhD Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin in Madison, 1980).
238 Everson, American Silent Film, 128.
“narrating voice beyond the neutral stating of facts”, thus making highly visible a recognizable personal style at the level of narration. Most radically we can think of inter–titles as a challenge, albeit a subtle and unobtrusive one, to the position of the director as “unifying voice” and to the claim of authorship such a position implies. The specific case of Anita Loos also demands a weakening of Everson’s contention that star vehicle writing necessarily offered limited creative possibilities. I would suggest that in writing dialogue titles for Doug Fairbanks expressing good–natured, dynamic ‘pep,’ Loos contributed to a considerable degree in establishing this star’s persona, conveying through a silent medium how a star would ‘sound’ to the audience. Frances Marion, the scenario writer closely associated with Mary Pickford, for whom she wrote career–defining films such as Poor Little Rich Girl, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and Pollyanna, similarly had a big hand in establishing the way Pickford ‘sounded’ (a lower class, often Irish, sociolect mixed with the spontaneity and sincerity of children’s language). Significantly, Marion was also Pickford’s ghost–writer for her syndicated advice column ‘Daily Talks.’

So, with all other aspects of screenwriting being much more subject to norms and control stemming from the nature of a highly industrialized and commercialized art, the inter–title was an attractive playground. But should we therefore assume that it automatically became a vehicle for personal style? How did a writer achieve this kind of authorial control, how exactly did she manage to insert “mood and atmosphere”? We have put forward that the narrative discourse of a silent film consists both of the photographic images and the written inter–titles. Tom Gunning reminds us that what makes film unique, what sets it apart from other storytelling media (like literature, cartoons and so forth), is the iconic quality of its photographic images. In literature, Gunning asserts, drawing on Genette, showing is one way of telling. Films on the other hand always show something, there is always an overabundance of things to look at in a photographic image, but telling requires some specific handling of the material; it requires structuring and pre–focusing, cueing, nudging and occasionally contrasting, it requires, in short,

240 For me every film offers several authorial roles but these are structured hierarchically. Depending on the situation the most “dominant” author can be usually the director, producer, writer, or star. Authorship is therefore multiple and should be located with a film’s specific “creative cluster”: the specialized agents whose contribution is most significant to a film’s artistic identification and differentiation from other films.
241 Everson contends that next to Fairbanks, William S. Hart similarly exploited the potential of inter–titles to amplify both his screen character and the content of his films. See Everson, American Silent Film, 131.
242 The continuity script, standard practice from about 1914, was a blueprint for filming and there was a significant uniformity in its presentation and form. (See, Janet Staiger, “Blue Prints for Feature Films: Hollywood’s Continuity Scripts,” in The American Film Industry, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 189.
the imposition of narration. Let us bring back to mind why inter–titles were introduced and kept on in the first place: they were meant to structure and clarify cluttered images, to help distil an engaging story from what is shown, to help the director (or whomever) tell the story. Inter–titles were meant to elucidate what was unclear, or too complex to convey by showing alone, and to conjure up what was too expensive or logistically difficult to show. But as we have seen, from the mid–teens, the literary inter–title did much more than that. If a director can be said to implement a narrative voice through a specific handling of the filmic narrative discourse, through editing for instance, as Gunning has shown in the case of D.W. Griffith’s early career at Biograph, or through staging and lighting as in the case of a European director like Feuillade, the screen– or title writer imposes narration through the inter–title, titles being just as indispensable and normatively integrated a part of the silent feature film. Replying to a column in the New York Times they heartily disagreed with—since it still advocated an austere, strictly pragmatic use of inter–titles—Anita Loos and John Emerson defended the profusion of inter–titles in their own work as a way to ensure a sufficiently large “artistic field.”244 Within this “field” the writer could achieve subtlety and complexity, impose careful characterization and realism which could not be done by the actors in the photographic images with pantomime alone. Loos and Emerson concluded that, lest it become a “humorless, unhuman spectacle,” the intellectual as well as artistic potential of any film depended on its (quality) inter–titles.245

While the screenwriter could not control how a director would handle her synopsis, scenario or continuity script, inter–titles (if not changed too drastically after production, added or removed without the writer’s say, or (re)written by someone else)246 were mostly taken verbatim from the written outline. Most scenarists were well aware of the impact inter–titles could have on a narrative, influencing or changing meaning, mood, genre or even

243 Of course, Gunning’s focus on editing as Griffith’s most significant technique to turn image into narrative and to exert authorial control is historically, technically and biographically grounded. Moreover, a director like Griffith (the first film ‘auteur’) wrote most of the titles for his later features himself. Griffith’s penchant for moralizing was mostly done through editorial inter–titles which repeated or clarified the moral lesson to be inferred from the story. This heavy reliance on both word and image, illustrates Griffith’s awareness that inter–titles enhanced his authorial control.


245 Ibid.

246 Inter–titles were a part of the continuity script in that there was an indication of what they would say and where they would go (as well as what they should sound like), but they were revised after editing. See Janet Staiger, “Blue Prints for Feature Films: Hollywood’s Continuity Scripts,” 189. Yet, significantly, in the continuity scripts of influential screenwriters such as Frances Marion for instance, the suggested inter–titles, which often contain jokes or well–crafted sentences, appear unchanged in the finished film.
plot and characterization. On her first (uncredited) writing job for William Brady, Frances Marion saved an un–releasable Alice Brady vehicle “by writing additional scenes…even a new set of subtitles.” She added a short prologue and epilogue and added inter–titles to change the film’s plot and genre from serious costume drama to “slapstick comedy.” Loos made similar claims in 1917 when she contended that she liked it when her funny inter–titles “kidded” the story and turned scripts intended for drama into comedy.

It’s time to make clear my position regarding the theoretical discussion on the nature, status and necessity of constructing a cinematic narrator. I would put my position closest to David Bordwell’s. Bordwell’s claims have remained unchanged since he postulated a theory of narration in his book Narration in the Fiction Film in 1985, a position which he has recently reiterated and elucidated in his most recent book, Poetics of Cinema (2008). Bordwell conceives of narration as a dynamic process providing cues to an audience who, through inferential elaboration, make up the story. This impersonal conception of narration, one that does not need the theoretical, ‘virtual’ presence of a narrator, has ignited fierce debate. I agree with Bordwell that in thinking about cinematic storytelling we should not automatically adapt theories of literary narration, specifically those positing an ’implied’ author, but that we should instead attribute the conceiving, structuring and handling of a film’s story–world to real agents using their particular technical abilities. Yet written inter–titles seem to warrant another look that at least takes into account their unique and specific way of telling a story. Inter–titles are after all read and interpreted, and therefore it may be fruitful to keep the comparison with the literary speaking voice at least in the back of our heads. As a strategy, as a way of presenting a story, the written inter–title shares more than one trait with what Bordwell, in his essay “Three Dimensions of Film Narrative,” attributes to the literary speaking voice. I have argued already that for screenwriters, whose work undergoes a certain and sometimes large degree of mediation or transformation (through interpretation, picturalization, dramatization), the fact that there was limited mediation in the case of written inter–titles presented them with the most direct way to impose narration. Inter–titles could take the creative possibilities in cueing an audience pretty far: commenting on the story, stressing particular plot elements, making notes or asides, directly addressing the audience, all things

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247 Frances Marion, Off with their Heads! (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 32. (I have been unable to find, based on Marion’s own synopsis and those available at the AFI database, what title she is referring to.)
248 Ibid.
250 David Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema, chap. 3.
that a literary speaking voice could and in the case of nineteenth century literature almost always would do. A comparison with this literary device seems not too far-fetched, as the ‘literary’ inter-title would seem a significant exception to the lesser degree of “saliency or pervasiveness,”251 Bordwell attributes to the cinematic voice. From 1915 onwards, we are often extremely aware of a speaking voice addressing us.

Anita Loos liked to boast of her radical inter-titles in contemporary interviews when she recalled: “My most popular inter-title introduced the name of a new character. The name was something like this: “Count Xxerkzsxxv.” Then there was a note, “To those who read titles aloud, you can’t pronounce the count’s name. You can only think it.”252 Loos not only touches upon the vexed linguistic nature of the inter-title as a device to be read, she also gently ridiculed the (probably rather annoying) habit some people had of reading out titles aloud. Edward Azlant has pointed out that inter-titles like this one, which address the audience in their act of reading and interpreting the titles, allow for “the creation of an ironic frame outside the narrative itself,” and that the experience and interpretation of silent films was much more layered and complex than we usually assume.253 The potential for self-consciousness and meta-criticism, always within the standard of course, seems most radical here and was employed most adventurously by powerful personalities who wanted their creative identity asserted. Loos, dubbed by her husband “the mother of comedy titles,”254 delighted in using an authorial voice in her titles which would often be discordant with the images, thus creating indeed a very layered type of narration, double-voiced, judgmental, and always perceivable. Both Thompson and Bordwell point out that such high degree of narrational presence was conventional and codified at the beginning or end of the film or a sequence.255 While this is certainly true, we notice that, especially in longer feature film, the speedy succession of new scenes and sequences allows the inter-title’s speaking voice to restate its presence and importance.

A closer look at the ‘Loos style’ should be illustrative. Loos’ favoured mode was satirical comedy mocking contemporary American everyday life. This inclination made her films, as Kevin Brownlow notes, not merely entertaining but also pertinent and momentous.256 Her scripts for Doug Fairbanks

especially debunked prevalent social norms, mores and institutions, mostly national fads and idiosyncrasies such as vegetarianism, spiritualism, the national 'aristocracy' of vulgar business moguls. At the same time, Brownlow notes, they intended no real or 'engaged' social criticism. Her satire did not spring from “a suppressed social conscience, but from a bubblingly creative sense of fun.” Loos was not struck by the reform fever of the teens (in fact reformers are always mocked or highly dubious) and merely took up socio–culturally relevant subjects to poke fun at. Her scripts did not explore psychological or emotional depths but prefer situation comedy and ironic contrast to make a point or resolve the plot. Essential to her satirical style were her inter–titles that delighted in self–conscious, cheeky, Algonquinesque word–play. This self–assured self–consciousness of narration was assured by inter–titles rife with alliterations, oxymoron, puns, double entendres and comic metaphors that directed attention to their linguistic nature. The narrating voice suggested by these inter–titles was a conspicuous one, playing with the audience’s expectations and delighting in a jocular style of presentation.

A few examples from Loos–Emerson comedies: at the end of Wild and Wooly (Emerson, 1917), an inter–title breaks in and pauses the action to state: “But wait a minute. This will never do. We can’t end a western romance without a wedding,” confronting the audience with genre expectations and reiterating the fabricated nature of filmic narrative. Loos is overtly present and making comments throughout scenes. In His Picture in the Papers (Emerson, 1916) the audience is ordered to note a “hygienic” kiss between two characters. At another point in the film a title “begs leave” from the audience to introduce a rather dull character, or expresses frank emphatic relief when Doug’s character finds a new opportunity to achieve his goal after many failed attempts, exclaiming: “Oh Joy! He will consult the famous female [a clairvoyant], perhaps she can give him a tip on his picture business […]” American Aristocracy (Emerson, 1916) offers its audience assistance in understanding an expensive word just used with a note: “Note: entomologist—high brow term for bug hunter.” After initial introductions at the beginning of Down to Earth (Emerson, 1917), an inter–title reassures the audience that it has not wandered into the wrong screening, confirming “No, this is not a Pathé weekly, it is part of our story. We first meet our boy and girl at a football game.” In the Social Secretary (Emerson, 1916), an inter–title

257 Kevin Brownlow, The Parade’s Gone by…, 275
258 When the rules of classical narration were standardized, overt self–consciousness of narration was almost exclusively comedy’s domain, but a similar visible, or “audible,” if not quite so irreverent speaking voice was often employed throughout more pathetic and sentimental stories, suggesting that the Loos–style title pervaded other genres as well. For instance the insertion of famous quotes, fragments of poems or rhymes or the repetition of pathetic inter–titles to increase the affective response of the audience, as well as intensifying adjectives such as “poor” or “little” (as in “poor Alice” or “little Mary”) are all rather deliberate acts of empathic narration reminiscent of the speaking voice of a sentimental or Victorian novel.
reconfirms its status as guide in the story while punning on the occupation of a character with this interjection: “Now here returns to our story Mayme’s Portuguese count whose lime business has been squeezed by the war.” A later title deadpans with dry logic that, “The count follows up his meeting with Elsie, reflecting that marriage with Elsie may be better than 3 dollars a week.”

Several Loos–Emerson–Fairbanks collaborations show a flair for a hyperbolically alliterative style—as in “Pete prefers Pugilism to pushing Pringle’s products,” from *His Picture in the Papers*, and “Your puny pussy-footing policies are taking the pep out of patriotism,” from *In Again, Out Again* (Emerson, 1917)—or for repeated punning and wisecracking, as in these zingers from *American Aristocracy*: “Mrs. Greene–Rivers is one of the leading spirits of the alcoholic set,” and “Mrs Budhauser seeks a corking opener to break through the bars of society.” These deliberately over–written titles ensure the writer’s constant presence. Puns abound in *Down to Earth* as well: in introducing the line–up of patients at the sanatorium where Doug’s love interest is accommodated, the screenwriter has counted on the audience reading the titles out loud to themselves as they are all puns describing their ailments: “Mrs. Helfer–Eton, Lydia Fuller–Germes, Gordan Jinny.” Later in the film, an inter–title comments on the action with a quote: “‘Sleep, oh gentle sleep/ that shuts up sorrow’s eye’—Shakespeare”; when, a few titles later, the narrating voice starts quoting again, it debunks its own snobbishness by signing with “Shakespeare again.” Towards the end of the film the speaking voice, gleefully displaying its omniscience, deliberately gives away the outcome of the final plot point, the kidnapping of the heroine, with this inter–title: “And they might have pulled this [the kidnapping] off, if Bill had been taking his usual siesta with the others, but as it happened he wasn’t.” We are explicitly reminded we are being told this story by an agent who knows more than the protagonist and the audience combined. The remainder of the film consists of Doug showing off his impressive heroic abilities (winning a fight with one hand!) and the final inter–title before the fade–out displays the usual self–consciousness of narration when it proclaims that, “There’s nothing to do but go finish our nap—the story’s over.”

Irony was another important ingredient of the Loos comedy. Irony was created in two ways: either by having titles undercut their own message (in *American Aristocracy*: “Has America an Aristocracy? We say yes! And to prove it we take you to Narraport–by–the–Sea, where we find some of our finest families whose patents of nobility are founded on such deeds as daring as the canning of soup, the floating of soap and the borating of talcum”), or by having them say one thing and then showing another, extracting humour from incongruence much in the way of what Noel Carroll has termed the
'switch image'. The latter also implies that the images are only funny because of the preceding inter–titles. The importance of Loos’ titles for *American Aristocracy* (Emerson, 1917) can be measured by considering the images without the titles, images that, apart from some Fairbanks acrobatics, are rarely funny in themselves but become so because the titles prime us to ridicule what we see. On the other hand, a title from the same film funny in itself because of an obvious pun, “Mrs Greene–Rivers, one of the leading spirits of the alcoholic set,” becomes even funnier when it is followed by the image of a weary and bored old lady. This discrepancy between what we are told and what we see (or the other way around) once more asserts the importance and power of the voice suggested by the inter–title to influence our interpretation of a story.

Surely, Loos did not ‘invent’ the literary gag; punning, irony and alliteration are common enough rhetorical techniques. But her confident and sustained use of such titles made them into a personal trademark. The Loos formula was essential to Fairbanks’ energetic, mildly rebellious persona and was reprinted by others after the collaboration ended. *When the Clouds Roll By*, directed by Victor Fleming and titled by titles–specialist, Thomas J. Garragh, opens with a teasing, distinctly Loos–ian, inter–title: “It is midnight along New York’s water front. It is also midnight in the Wallstreet district. However, this has nothing to do with our story, except it is likewise midnight uptown where we first meet Daniel Boone Brown—an average young man. Our tale proper opens with the eating of an onion.” For several of the other Fairbanks features not written by Loos or directed by Emerson it is unclear who was responsible for the titles. Moving Picture World reported in December 1916 that by specific request from Fairbanks, Loos was to write all the inter–titles for the features in which he starred, so she may have been responsible for writing, or at least revising inter–titles on scripts she did not author herself. During the twenties, slapstick features—especially those from the Hal Roach studios, scripted by studio stalwart H.M. Walker—would draw on the Loos/Fairbanks wisecracking style, but her influence was already being felt in the late teens, as shown in a two–reel Harold Lloyd comedy from 1918, *Two–Gun Gussie*, with distinctly Loos–ian titles like this one: “Whooping–Cough Charlie, the Sheriff of Pleurisy County, loves the smell of powder—talcum.”

These examples have hopefully shown that the inter–title could weigh on the generic, atmospheric as well as narrative properties of a story, and often did. Surely, with this contention I do not intend to play down the importance of other aspects of screenwriting, such as narrative structure or thematic predilections, as capable of expressing a personal style; I have merely tried to put the spotlights on inter–titles as an understudied aspect of screen narra-

tion. Inter–titles had the power to, as Loos termed it, “kid” the story for comic effect, or (in more dramatic and sentimental stories) to establish mood and elicit sympathy. Her sustained and deliberate use of self–conscious narration both established her personal trademark (which she exploited) and started a “deluge” of Loos–style “literary gags” in other films.260 During the teens inter–titles would eventually be no longer seen as either betraying visual purity or interrupting the action.261 On the contrary, they became relied upon and appreciated to such a degree that they increasingly warranted specialized agents to rewrite or polish them. Some of these title–writers would later even merit individualized credit, a direct attribution of authorship. As inter–titles most directly reflected the style and personality of those who designed and integrated them, thereby making important choices about what information, either explanatory or spoken, was essential to the story, they are worth listening to when considering silent film narration and by extension, silent film authorship.

260 See Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, 221.
Artistic Titles in Artistic Films! Investigating Swedish Art–Titles and the Case of Alva Lundin

Sofia Bull

On the 8th of November 1920, the same day as Mauritz Stiller’s film Erotikon premiered in Sweden, a small article appeared in the film magazine Filmnyheter with the headline: “Erotikon’s titles: artistic supplements to the film”:

Erotikon is clearly an attempt to create a Swedish film comedy that is elegant and neat through and through, and down to the titles the result is very successful. These guiding remarks that accompany the plot are exactly as you want them: witty, clever and funny, at the same time easy and stylistically enjoyable. On top of this, they have been supplied with typographical designs, made by Mrs Alva Lindbom–Lundin who is worthy of great praise. The style of the Erotikon titles is elegant, playful and droll, and they are in excellent harmony with the tone of the film. They certainly call attention to the motto of Swedish quality productions of today: “Artistic titles in artistic films!”

Articles focusing solely on intertitles were far from common in the Swedish press at this time. It seems intertitles for the most part were considered a necessary evil that at most deserved a fleeting comment in film reviews. That Erotikon’s intertitles were deemed worthy of a whole article suggests that they were indeed something out of the ordinary. As mentioned, the intertitles had been provided with illustrations by the previously unknown female artist Alva Lundin (born Lindbom/Lindbohm) and their success became the starting point of her long–lasting career within the Swedish film industry that would last into the 1960s. Lundin created art–titles263 for at least 20 silent films during the 20s and after the transition to sound she continued her work, then as designer of credit sequences for around 400 feature films. On top of this she also created illustrations, graphics and typography

262 (my translation)”Erotikons texter. Konstnärliga supplement till filmen”, Filmnyheter, 8 November 1920, 13)

263 Bordwell use the term “art title” for “the expository title enhanced by a pictorial design” (David Bordwell, “Classical Narration”. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (England: Routledge, 1985), 28. One should however keep in mind that it is unclear whether this term was actually in use at the time. In the Swedish context there doesn’t seem to have existed one common term for this phenomenon during the 1920s, but an article in Filmnyheter from 1924 speak of “artistic titles”. (“En Kartongartist för svenska filmtexter: Lundins ritbyrå med Fru Alva Lundin i spetsen”, Filmnyheter, No.11, 1924, 8) On a similar note, Claire Dupré la Tour has pointed out that the term intertitle actually only “appeared in the early 1920s to differentiate the practice from the then new process of subtitling”. (Claire Dupré la Tour, “Intertitles and titles”, Richard Abel, ed. Encyclopedia of Early Cinema (London: Routledge, 2005) 326f)
for an unknown, but undoubtedly large, number of information– and commercial films.264

This article is a first glimpse of my ongoing research on the career of Alva Lundin that I initiated as part of the Women Film Pioneers Project. It will focus on Lundin’s work as an art–title designer during the 1920s and apart from presenting some of the biographical information I have uncovered, my primary aim is to contextualise her work. I will begin by discussing the general climate for art–titles in Sweden during the 1920s and then go on to consider the fact that Lundin at that time was one of very few female artists in Sweden who could make a living from her skills.

Art–titles in context

In 1920, art–titles were a fairly new phenomenon in Sweden. There are only a few known earlier examples, all made by the artist Arthur Sjögren. A Filmnyheter article from 1924 labels Sjögren as the very first art–title designer in Sweden.265 His career in the film industry was brief; the database of the Swedish Film Institute (Svensk Filmdatabas) only lists three films with intertitle designs by Sjögren. The first is Dunungen (In Quest of Happiness, Ivan Hedqvist, 1919), followed by Carolina Rediviva (The Beloved Fool, Ivan Hedqvist, 1920), and finally the Victor Sjöström film Mästerman (A Lover in Pawn, 1920). However, the above–mentioned article in Filmnyheter actually claims Sjögren to be the creator of art–titles of “several films by Sjöström”, which suggests that the list is incomplete.

Even though Sjögren’s career as art–title designer was short, it definitely deserves more research in the future.266 One issue that needs to be further investigated is the fact that Sjögren also designed the posters to Dunungen and Mästerman—which thus got what we would now call a coherent “graphic profile” with matching titles and promotional material. In comparison, it seems Alva Lundin was never commissioned to create posters or other promotional materials for films. Since Sjögren was an independent artist, it is possible that he might initially have been hired to create the posters for the films, although this is pure speculation. Similarly, I have not been able to find any sources explicitly explaining how Lundin first got “discovered” by the film industry.

In her case I am however able to make a more qualified guess. It seems quite probable that Lundin first got hired by the film company Svensk Filmindustri to design the typography of intertitles. Lundin was a skilled

264 One example being the commercials Ingmar Bergman directed for the soap Bris in the early 1950s.
265 “Filmtexternas utsmyckning: En detalj som börjar ägnas allt mera omsorg”, Filmnyheter, No. 8, 1924, 8.
266 The Filmnyheter article state that “Mrs Alva Lundin really has been the only specialist on titles the last couple of years”, which confirms that Sjögren had left the film industry well by 1924. (ibid, 8).

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calligrapher; her primary source of income was typographical designs for letterheads, diplomas and such.¹²⁶ What is known to be her first intertitle design, the handwritten intertitles in Mauritz Stiller’s film *Herr Arnes Pengar* (*Sir Arne’s Treasure*, 1919), was also of an exclusively typographical nature. It is thus a fair assumption that Stiller (or someone else on the film team) then discovered Lundin’s artistic talent and decided to put it to further use in *Erotikon* the year after.

Lundin’s typographical intertitle design for *Herr Arnes Pengar* reminds us that handwritten intertitles can be seen as an important predecessor to more elaborate art–titles. A majority of the films shown in Swedish cinemas at the time (both Swedish productions and imported films with translated titles) did at the time have printed intertitles. However, during the early summer of 1920 (six months before *Erotikon* premiered), it was debated in the trade magazine *Biografbladet* whether handwritten titles were preferable. The pseudonym “The Reviewer” urged film companies to “hire proper calligraphers—no bunglers, but draughtsmen that knows what they are doing.”²⁶⁸ He was convinced that “printed title cards that are then photographed, can never be as good as handwritten titles.”²⁶⁹ Furthermore, he suggested that such draughtsmen should collaborate with the translator (in the case of imported films), “to be able to decide the style of the titles.”²⁷⁰ Finally, “The Reviewer” professed himself certain “that the audience prefer a film with titles that are aesthetically pleasing than a film with haphazard titles or titles that have been left in the hands of a typesetter.”²⁷¹

Lundin’s titles for *Herr Arnes Pengar* seem to have been made with the same conviction in mind, namely that titles with an individual typographic design made for a more expressive and aesthetically pleasing film. In this case Lundin used a beautiful blackletter font that implied the historic period in which the film was set. The practice of letting lettering indicate the period or setting of the story was already common in Hollywood. David Bordwell have suggested in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* that it probably was “influenced by playbills and illustrated books: narration rendered as typography.”²⁷²

Several Swedish films from the 1920s had intertitles that used typography artistically. As in Hollywood, alternate type–size and typeface were often

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¹²⁶ One article mentions that Lundin’s company usually was commissioned “typing addresses” (“adresstextning”), which could refer to both diplomas and letter–heads. “En Kartongartist för svenska filmtexter: Lundins ritbyrå med Fru Alva Lundin i spetsen”, *Filmnyheter*, No.11, 1924, 8
²⁶⁸ (my translation) “Filmkritiken och filmtexerna”, *Biografbladet*, Year 1, No. 4, 1 April 1920, 9
²⁶⁹ Ibid, 9
²⁷⁰ Ibid, 9
²⁷¹ Ibid, 9
²⁷² Bordwell, 26.
used to simulate sonic qualities. One example of expressive typography that points to the similarities between typographical design and illustrations can be found amongst the title-cards to the film *Två Konungar* (Two Kings, my translation), Elis Ellis, 1925. One title has its letters written in an uneven line, thus suggesting a drunken man’s speech, but there actually exists an alternate version of this particular title-card where the intoxication of the speaker is instead evoked by a drawing of a glass of beer. Although it remains uncertain which version actually ended up in the film, this example shows how either typography or illustrations could sometimes be used to achieve the same result.

Furthermore, some believed that illustrated borders were more apt to make aesthetically pleasing intertitles than handwritten individual typography. In the following issue of *Biografbladet*, Albin Malmström, head of a film laboratory in Stockholm declared that “The Reviewer” was completely wrong in his claims that hand-written title cards were better than printed ones. Although Malmström agreed that the goal was to “make the title harmonize with the content of the film”, he asserted that his technical experience had proven that handwritten text would always look sloppy and uneven in comparison with the neatness of printed text, when blown up on screen. He admitted that the American film industry did have the means to produce very detailed handwritten titles that were aesthetically sufficient, but he emphasized that this was impossible in a Swedish context since the market was too small to cover the costs of such productions. Finally, Malmström concluded that the Swedish film industry instead should borrow another Hollywood practice that was considerably cheaper, namely to provide the titles with borders.

To decorate the titles with borders had been an important move towards art-titles in America quite a few years earlier. This has, for example, been suggested by Barry Salt in *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, when writing on the development of illustrated intertitles in Vitagraph films. Already in 1910 Vitagraph had begun to make “a few films which had special illustrated borders around the intertitles” and Salt suggests that

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274 These title-cards are amongst those in the title-card collection of the Swedish Film Institute Archive. It’s currently unknown who created the titles of *Två Konungar*, but I’m fairly sure they have not been made by Alva Lundin.
275 “Filmkritiken och filintexterna: Ett genmäle”, *Biografbladet*, Year 1, Nr 7, 15 May 1920, 19f
276 Ibid, 19f
277 Ibid, 19f
278 Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 1992), 107ff
this might have been a “response to the new striving after ‘art’ in film-making which had just begun.”

The most striking example of this was *Daisies*, in which the whole plot turned on that flower, and which was present in most of the film scenes in various forms. Here the intertitles had a border of daisies, instead of having the standard ‘picture frame’ style decorative border.

Vitagraph was “fairly typical of American companies in the way they handled intertitles”, but also exceptionally early in toying with illustrated intertitles. According to Salt, “the vogue for illustrated intertitles […] only started in American films in 1916”, but the Vitagraph film *Consuming Passion; or St. Valentine’s Day in Greenaway Land* actually moved on from simple illustrated borders as early as 1911, by adding “drawings of toys and other things which changed in accordance with the course of the narrative” to their title–cards.

The craze for art–titles lasted into the early twenties in America, but as I have already mentioned, that is only when it started in Sweden. The reception of Swedish art–titles in the domestic film magazines was mostly positive, but that this by no means meant that the Swedish film journalists were impressed by the American predecessors. In fact there was a noticeable fear of Americanization, expressed for example in a 1924 *Filmnyheter* article on Lundin’s art–titles:

In America they are willing to spend much effort and money on decorating titles; many companies have a whole department dedicated to their title–card illustrators who are busy from dawn to dusk, creating painting after painting that the texts are later copied into. However, in most cases there is no point in trying to mimic the American title decorations, even though we sometimes see domestic attempts where nobody has considered whether the “novelty” actually is beautiful. The American title–card artists usually create the most horrid things, where cypress trees, engagement rings, moving clouds and sunrises are being repeated over and over again in utter boredom. Luckily, our film companies here at home have managed to avoid the great danger of title decorations that are banal and nonsensical, which would be the result if they are put in the hands of people without artistic taste and sophisticated ideas.

The comparison is of course a great compliment to Lundin as an artist—but should primarily be understood as a defence of the domestic production that felt the competition of imported American film with considerable higher

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279 Ibid, 108
280 Ibid, 108
281 Ibid, 108f
282 Ibid, 108f
283 Ibid, 109
284 (My translation) ”Filmtexternas utsmyckning: En detalj som börjar ägnas allt mera omsorg”, *Filmnyheter*, No. 8, 1924, 8
production values. Although many of Lundin’s intertitles are surprisingly free from simplistic symbols and stereotypes, she also did create some quite predictable decorative titles. One example is the art–titles of Rågens rike (The Kingdom of Rye (my translation), Ivan Johansson, 1929) that simply sport different illustrations of rye.

When considering the debates surrounding art–titles it is important to remember that the very practice of including intertitles was actually quite controversial both in Hollywood and Sweden, albeit during slightly different periods. When it comes to the American context, Kristin Thompson has pointed out that “during the period from 1913 to 1916, there was a widespread belief [in Hollywood] that the film with no inter–titles was the ideal. Scriptwriters seemed to assume that every title in a film betrayed a weak point where its author had failed to convey the situation properly through images.”

Claire Dupré la Tour has, in her text on intertitles in Encyclopedia of Early Cinema, summarized the main criticisms against intertitles in American trade press articles debating the usefulness and limits of titles, stating that they were thought to “(1) [spoil] suspense by giving in advance a summary of the action, (2) [have] an adverse impact on the ‘reality effect’, (3) [be] too frequent or too lengthy, and (4) [lack] explicitness and readability.”

However, with the increasing standardization of the feature film around 1916, intertitles became a less controversial part of the films, partly because films grew longer and more complicated, which made filmmakers convinced that at least occasional inter–titles were necessary, but also because more effort was put into the writing and design of intertitles, which popularized the idea that they could actually contribute to the film’s success.

When it comes to the writing, Anita Loos is always mentioned as the most important figure for this shift in opinion. Loos’s intertitle texts for Griffith’s Intolerance (1916), and for a number of films starring Douglas Fairbanks, soon made witty and cleverly written intertitles fashionable. Typical for the “Loos–style” were “a narrating voice which goes beyond the neutral stating of facts”; intertitles thus started to add something extra to the film narrative, which made them seem less redundant. Similarly, art–titles became another way to motivate and legitimize the use of intertitles, in part by granting “the intertitle a privileged status vis–à–vis the image”, but also because they—like the Loos–style writing—could contribute something to
the narrative by including “a symbolic, sometimes non–diegetic object to convey an idea.” 292

Several Swedish scholars have pointed out that Erotikon’s intertitles were directly inspired by the success of Loos–style titles in USA. 293 They are also a prime example of the type of art–titles that provides new information and guides the audience’s interpretation of the film as a whole. Bo Florin has in his PhD dissertation Den Nationella Stilen: Studier i den svenska filmens guldålder argued that the general plot and staging of the film (including the art–titles) were reminiscent of Hollywood comedies, which made it receive very mixed reviews. 294 According to Florin, Erotikon got “caught in the crossfire”295 between two opposite strands within Swedish film journalism, one that argued that Swedish film should reinvent itself according to international standards (which Erotikon could be said to have done) and one that was fiercely protective of the national style. 296

We can thus conclude that Swedish art–titles were indeed a controversial practice where two different debates actually intersected: that of the very existence of intertitles and that of the Americanization of Swedish film. Considering this, it is no wonder that Mauritz Stiller himself was reluctant to publicly announce the importance of Erotikon’s art–titles. One interview he did even ended up as an article in Filmnyheter with the argumentative headline “Film without titles—a future style to aspire and hope for.”297 The article praises Erotikon for actually having “the smallest amount of titles so far” and then goes on state that Stillier “emphasizes that every purposeful director of course should struggle to gradually rid themselves from the titles. A film without titles would naturally be an ideal—for the future.”298 Furthermore, he is of the opinion that:

[You] can’t forget that the titles always have to be the least important part of a film, even though they of course require the necessary attention. In other words, to build a film around a few beautiful or funny titles would, whatever the literary source they come from, be a severe sin by a director and something which nobody with any sense of artistic reasonability would ever be guilty of. 299

292 Thompson, 187
293 Bo Florin, Den Nationella Stilen: Studier i den svenska filmens guldålder (Stockholm: Aura Förlag, 1997), 149f and Rune Waldekranz, Films Historia: De första hundra åren, Del 1 (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1985), 533
294 Florin, 144f
295 Ibid, 145
296 Ibid, 147
297 “Film utan text – en framtidstro att sträva till och hoppas på”, Filmnyheter, Nr 8, 22 November, 1920, 4
298 (My translation) Ibid. 4
299 (My translation) Ibid. 4
Stiller did however not rid his following films of intertitles, or from art–titles for that matter. On the contrary, a few years later he hired Lundin yet again, this time to create between three– and four hundred art–titles for his two–part adaptation of Selma Lagerlöf’s novel Gösta Berlings Saga: Del 1 och 2 (The Legend of Gosta Berling: Part 1 and 2, 1924). Lundin’s efforts were then admired in several articles. In fact, her art–titles never did receive negative attention, in spite of the various debates raging around intertitles in the Swedish film press throughout the 1920s.

A female artist in context
When going through the articles specifically focused on Lundin and her work, it is noticeable that many of them openly comment on her gender, which for one thing calls for a discussion about Lundin’s status as a female artist working within the film industry.

Although it at this point had become slightly more acceptable for a woman to work as an artist or illustrator in Sweden, it was still unusual. Following a number of fundamental changes in Swedish society, female students had been accepted at the art schools since the middle of the 19th century. Lundin attended the female section of the art school Tekniska skolan during the years 1904–06. Supposedly, Tekniska skolan was slight more accessible for female students because it was the school focused on teaching the applied arts, such as crafts and design. Lundin’s diploma shows that she took courses in, among other things, geometric constructional drawing, shading technique, perspective, free hand drawing, figure drawing and landscape drawing, painting and typography as well as calligraphy.

That she moved on to become an illustrator, not an independent artist, must be seen as typical of students from Tekniska skolan in general, and for female art students in particular. At the time, few women were able to become successful independent artists; most either worked as art teachers or illustrators (if they continued working after their education at all). In particular, female artists were frequent illustrators of fairytales and children’s books, probably because these were genres considered to belong to the “female sphere”. This could perhaps be seen as a parallel to Lundin’s work within the film industry. Much like illustrations of children’s books, film was often considered less prestigious compared to the fine arts. Perhaps this actually made it somewhat easier for her, as a female artist, to sustain such a long and successful career.

300 Ingrid Ingelman, Kvinnliga konstnärer i Sverige (Uppsala: Acta, 1982), 32f
301 Tekniska skolan was later renamed Konstfack (University College of Arts, Crafts and Design).
302 (My translation) Utdrag ur betygshandlingarna från afdn. B. Tekniska skolan för kvinnliga lärjungar: Alva Maria Lindbohm, Stockholm, 26 March 1907, 1
303 Ingelman, 70f
However, even though a female artist working within the film industry would perhaps have been seen as somewhat less “threatening”, it was still uncommon. Two articles about Lundin specifically comment on the fact that she was a woman, something they obviously considered to be unexpected. One article describes Lundin as follows:

Mrs Lundin is an energetic and inventive lady, and the film directors that have had the opportunity of collaborating with her are delighted with her work. This is not surprising when considering that she has an ability to hit the nail on the head that never fails. In addition, she has a sense of humour—something that, according to prevalent prejudice, isn’t that common amongst the female sex.304

Apart from the rather derogative suggestion that it is surprising to find a woman with a sense of humour, this description actually ascribes quite a lot of agency to Lundin. I have not been able to recover any paperwork giving clues about the nature of the collaborations between Lundin and the filmmakers she worked with. The only documents I have come across are lists of title texts that were sent to Lundin by Svensk Filminndustri, but they do not include any notes or instructions about the designs or illustrations.305 The above quoted article is certainly not a completely reliable source, but it does seem to indicate that Lundin was allowed to work quite freely. Lundin is not presented as a mere “hired hand” simply executing the ideas of the director, but rather as a creative collaborator of more equal standing. She is the one with the sense of humour and the ability to hit the nail on the head. The fact that Lundin got her own prominent credit in the opening sequence of Erotikon also suggests that she was considered by Svensk Filminndustri as the sole creator of the art–titles.306

Another article from Filmnyheter, about Lundin’s work with the many art–titles of Gösta Berlings saga, suggests that such artistic freedom and responsibility was indeed uncommon for a woman.307 Firstly, the article points out that the impressive task of creating over 300 titles “required the efforts of an able man for several weeks”, only to humorously note that the man in question actually was a woman. Secondly, it goes on to mention that although Lundin did the work, she was actually assisted by her husband and that the two “young artists” ran their company together.308 It is indeed correct that Alva Lundin and her husband Sven Lundin ran the company Lundins

304 (My translation) Filmnyheter, No. 8, 1924, 8
305 These documents can be found both amongst the general title–card collection and the collection of material from Alva Lundin’s company, both at the Swedish Film Institute Archive.
306 The opening sequence only consists of three credits, the first being the director Mauritz Stiller, followed by that of Alva Lundin and the third being the film company Svensk Filminndustri.
307 Filmnyheter, No.11, 1924,8
308 Ibid, 8
Ritbyrå (Lundin’s Design) together, but the article is incorrect in suggesting that the two of them created inter–titles together. According to Lundin’s relatives, Sven titled himself Manager and only attended to the administrative tasks required to run a company. He was definitely not an artist and Alva was thus in charge of the artistic decisions. The fact that the article is unclear about this work division further suggests that Alva Lundin, as a female artist with much artistic freedom, transgressed normative gender roles. Perhaps the idea that she was dependent on her husband to manage “the task of an able man” seemed reassuring at the time, even though artistically this was not actually the case.

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309Sofia Bull, Interview with Ulla Wickbom (daughter) and Ulf Wickbom (grandson), Stockholm 5 March 2007.
Diva and Intertexts
The European Actress, the Liberty Style, and the Diva on the Silent Screen
Victoria Duckett

Typing in tandem
It is difficult to find examples of co-operative scholarship, particularly in feminist film studies. By this I mean that it is difficult to find scholars writing together, proactively. There are plenty of collections of essays, certainly, but these seem to come together in retrospect and are offered as a sort of reflection upon the dynamics of feminist change. In this sense, it is as though we really do need an editor to tie us together and say yes, we have all been tugging at the same thread, even if we have not known of each others existence and have yet to actually see the films, articles, photographs and so on each of us describe. That seventies moment which Laura Mulvey speaks of in her introduction to Visual and Other Pleasures—that moment when women wrote together collaboratively, anonymously, politically, differently, and optimistically—now seems a long time ago and tied in to a project very different from our own.310 At its most basic level, it attests to a group dynamic we can no longer boast. Practicalities of space and time—or perhaps, actually, of career and of the need to write and research in the first person singular—have stopped us from organizing feminist ‘events’ in the traditional sense of the term. We are now researching and writing the history of women in film and come together at annual festivals and forums such the Women and the Silent Screen conferences. It is in the effort to demonstrate that collaborative work can still be productive and that a shared political vision can still shape the tasks we choose to undertake that our articles (my own and that of my colleague, Elena Mosconi) are offered. Although they have been written independently, they have been typed in tandem. It is hoped that they will be read and understood in this way.

Seeing Stockholm: an anecdote about living
Feminism is not, obviously, only about writing for a common good. We need to describe what it is we are doing and where it is we think we are going. We will begin, therefore, with an anecdote Marc Bloch repeats in The Historian’s Craft. He states:

There is an anecdote which I have already recounted elsewhere: I had gone with Henri Pirenne to Stockholm; we had scarcely arrived, when he said to me: “what shall we go to see first? It seems that there is a new city hall here.

Let’s start there.” Then, as if to ward off my surprise, he added: “If I were an antiquarian, I would have eyes only for old stuff, but I am a historian. Therefore, I love life.” This faculty of understanding the living is, in very truth, the master quality of the historian.311

We want to begin our feminism here: in Stockholm with its civic spaces and avant–garde public arts. Because it is our contention that there is a style of film—a style that, for purposes of clarity and simplicity, we will call the ‘Liberty Style’ of cinema—which was popular up until the end of the First World War and that this style of film had less to do with antiquarian history than it did with a new form of public engagement in the world. In following Bloch and Pirenne we are therefore asking that the avant–garde potential of public art be acknowledged just as we are signalling a methodological choice. In other words, our explanation of what the Liberty Style might be is tied into specific microhistorical case studies drawn from continental Europe—Sarah Bernhardt and Lyda Borelli—and the detailed examination of particular films. Our aim is to demonstrate not just that the European theatrical film can be recuperated from its status as filmed theatre, but that the theatrical actress (particularly the actress from the legitimate theatre and the Continental stage) was able to engage with film in a new, productive, and challenging way.

Our case studies are not random. While Bernhardt and Borelli are very different individuals, they enable France and Italy to come together under the one stylistic model and to be examined within the same time frame. Moreover, they provide a way out of the dead end of diva and/or star studies (or the introversion of cultural studies more generally). Indeed, our work is largely a response to the tendency to discuss the theatrical star in terms of biography and to cast her (it is always a ‘her’) as some kind of disciplinary intruder, as though it was only in theatrical pose or through exaggerated theatrical action that she marked a material presence on film. What we are challenging, therefore, is not just the image of the diva as a reckless and ignorant artist but the idea that the very control and authority she wielded on stage was lost on film. More important than questions we are posing in terms of authorship, however, are those that we are asking about our relationship to film history. Are we able to think beyond the cinema of attractions and narrative cinema as our conceptual models of early film? Can we see the ‘theatrical’ film as a new art or style of expression rather than as an inevitable expression of a retroactive and anachronistic Europe? Because unless and until we recognize that there was not one cinema moving inevitably towards classical American cinema, the theatrical European actress will remain an anachronism, a kind of nineteenth century leftover, the flip side to film and modernist progress. As we suggested above, we are historians and so our task is to contextualize and understand ‘the living.’

The disciplinary debate

Our engagement with questions of theatricality, anachronism, and stardom come (obviously) on the heels of other works. We do not need to repeat the criticisms which theatre historian David Mayer has directed at Nicholas Vardac’s *Stage to Screen* (1949), Roberta Pearson’s *Eloquent Gestures* (1992) or Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs’s *Theatre to Cinema* (1997). Nor too do we want to redress the very selective way in which Charles Musser has more recently recuperated the theatre in his article “Towards a history of theatrical culture: imagining an integrated history of stage and screen.”312 We will instead position our project within the context of Christine Gledhill’s recuperation of ‘theatricality’ in her book *Reframing British Culture: 1918 – 1928, Between Restraint and Passion*. Here, in a thoughtful reflection upon what it means to recuperate a criticised genre or style of film, Gledhill states that she wants:

…to evaluate films for what they *do* rather than what they fail to do. Such an approach questions the relegation of this cinema as ‘old fashioned’, rethinking its relation to the practices and values of its surrounding and preceding cultures, which to a critical intelligentsia appear all too easily as regression from the modernism promised by film.314

Gledhill’s focus is British film in the decade 1918–1928. She engages with the very ‘staginess’ of British film, arguing that the shared perceptual frames of British theatre and cinema provide evidence of a specific cultural practice or imaginary. Hers, then, is a move to recuperate British film from the signs of its theatrical regression. Tying British film in to a model adapted from other historians of British culture (particularly in to David Peters Corbett, writing about post war British painting) she explains that even if English painting between the wars turned from Vorticism and Futurism, it was nevertheless “a response to modernity, rather than a failure of modernist imagination defined by Continental examples.”315

We are turning, then, to this ‘Continental example’ and arguing that even here an ‘old fashioned’ theatrical cinema can be isolated and recognized. Rather than determining a modernist margin, however, this cinema addressed questions which went to the core of contemporary concerns. What was film? Where did it stand in relation to the theatre? Was it a new art? A

315 Ibid.
The works of Bernhardt and Borelli answer these questions in specific and concrete ways. The question, as Gledhill reminds us, is about visible presence and concrete facts. It is about what films do.

**Beginning with Bernhardt**

Sarah Bernhardt is famous for her two narrative films *La Dame aux Camélias* (1911) and *Queen Elizabeth* (1912). As Richard Abel recounts in *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914*, *La Dame aux Camélias* is a two reel condensed version of her famous five act play. It is “perhaps the most regressive of all surviving Film d’Art productions” because of its focus upon studio decors, narrative intertitles and the long take tableaux. *Queen Elizabeth*—described in similar terms—is renowned for the fact that it proved an enormous box office hit, gaining for Zukor the profits that would finance his Famous Players series.316

It is here that discussion about Bernhardt stops. While I have, on other occasions, made some effort to contextualise the costume, tableaux and narratives used in these historical films, today I want to address Bernhardt’s next film, *Sarah Bernhardt à Belle Isle* (*Sarah Bernhardt at Home*, Film d’Art, 1912). Not only does this provide us with a fresh and interesting look at the actress, but it is a film which forces us to ask new questions about the actress and her engagement with the medium. Indeed, the most obvious questions begin with the genre of film itself: if Bernhardt was indeed merely reproducing her theatre on film, why would she bother to make a film which had little or nothing to do with the theatre? Why not take any one of her ‘other’ famous theatrical roles—*Phedre, Cleopatra, Theodora, Jeanne d’Arc*—and bring them to film? And if she was, alternately, only using film as a way to publicize herself, why not take us back stage or introduce us to her cast, give us a glimpse of her famous wardrobes and jewellery or a tour of her atelier in Paris? Why bring us to Belle Isle, her holiday retreat, and show herself walking around windy coastlines collecting flowers? Since this was the first home movie made by a star for film, why not focus a little more on the home? Why all this outside movement, this roaming from place to place, particularly since she obviously found it difficult to walk (her leg would be amputated three years later)? And so on. These are the questions which can be asked of this film. Rather than directing discussion towards the star and publicity, I want to ask what it is we are seeing. Because it is quite obvious that Bernhardt was famous and that a popular audience watched film. It is not so obvious, however, for us today to appreciate what it was she was trying to achieve with film.

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An island landing

I will open my analysis with the film’s establishing opening shot. It shows Bernhardt being rowed to shore from the steamship, *L’Émile Solacroup*. This ship was a famous passenger ship which took people from mainland France to Belle Isle en Mer, an island in Brittany. Reproduced on postcards at the time, the ship pointed to both a growing trade in tourism (and hence also the postcard) and to the expanding reach of steam and rail travel. Indeed, given that the ship was actually named after Solacroup, the famous nineteenth century director of the Paris–Orléans railway, it also points to changes in public mobilization and conceptions of speed and distance. This focus upon newness and novelty was linked, too, to the fact that Victor Laloux had, in 1900 (on the eve of the Exposition Universelle and in a record two years), completed the Gare d’Orsay. As the first electrified railway terminal in the world, it was also considered a masterpiece of industrial architecture. As the implicit starting point of Bernhardt’s journey, we are returned to an image of a modern Paris which she had, in her own turn, helped to define.

Bernhardt arrives by steam (train and boat) to Belle Isle but is then rowed ashore. This is not a landing at the Port de Palais, the ’actual’ port of Belle Isle where Bernhardt would later be photographed, amid large crowds of people. Nor, too, does this image duplicate the images which circulated on postcards of Bernhardt’s arrival at this same beach (the more remote ’Plage de Poulains’) since we no longer have an anonymous, waiting crowd watching her disembark from the row boat.317 Instead, ours is a solitary regard held on an otherwise empty beach. This suggestion of privacy, of a secluded and privileged spectatorship, helps to confirm the idea that this is an intimate and revealing document of a famous actress returning ’home’.

In this same opening scene we can see a small boat to the far left. This is a fishing boat, identifiable through its distinct sails, which recalls the paintings which Maxime Maufra had completed a few years earlier from this same beach.318 Establishing the presence of a local community and suggesting its hardy, resilient nature, we then move on to a shot in which we watch three small rowboats head to shore. Figures wave and although we cannot see precisely who these are, the introductory title has already told us that Bernhardt is travelling with her son, Maurice. We can assume, then, that we have been included in Bernhardt’s group of close intimate friends, that the actress is signalling her awareness of our presence, and that even if she can not really see us (just as we can not really see her, she is both too far away and, anyway, a film), there is a reciprocal acknowledgement of fictional presence.

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318 See, for example, Maufra, *Rentree des bateaux de pêche, Belle–Île–en–Mer*, oil on canvas, 26 x 32, 1910 (Galerie Durand–Ruel, Paris).
This is not an instance in which we imagine ourselves part of a thronging and invisible crowd (the beach is empty) but one in which we can enjoy the fiction of our own uniqueness, our undisturbed importance upon an unnamed beach. Moreover, this is also an instance in which everything we see—the steamship, the fisherman’s boat, the newsreel-type footage of Bernhardt’s arrival—is shot, grouped, and framed entirely for us. Hence in the second shot the steam stops pouring from the funnel just as the fisherman’s boat disappears from sight yet Bernhardt smoothly continues her approach towards us. In this way, we know that Bernhardt is labouring for us, that she is working to produce this public fiction of her private retreat.

In this first shot, as Bernhardt approaches shore in her rowboat, visual meanings change. On the one hand, we have a collage of respective boats (the steamship, the rowboats, and the fishing boat returning us to Maufra). On the other, we also have Bernhardt’s own boat again returning us to impressionist painting, specifically to Edouard Manet’s *Escape of Rochefort* (1881), with its similar composition, indistinct grouping of people on a rowboat coming towards us, as well as its sense of expectant arrival. Yet whereas Manet was painting an event some 6 or 7 years after the fact and reconstructing an escape from an island (Henri Rochefort escaped from the Isle des Pins, Noumea, by stopping a ship whilst on an excursion in 1874, by 1880 he was newly in Paris), Bernhardt’s trip depicts an event as it unfolds and is about an escape of an altogether different sort: Bernhardt escapes to an island, she is less a political than a public prisoner, and she seeks the very isolation that Rochefort obviously disliked.

*Decoration and display*

What, however, are the terms of Bernhardt’s film as a new art? Aren’t we merely seeing a renegotiation of impressionist painting? (Here Maufra and Manet, later I will speak about Claude Monet, John Peter Russell, and Gustave Courbet). In a sense, yes, we are indeed seeing a renegotiation of impressionist painting since film is—of necessity—an art produced *en plein air*, it is representing an ordinary excursion, it marks the passage of time, and focuses upon the description of physical movement. But in *Sarah Bernhardt à Belle–Isle* we are also dealing with film as a decorative art, meaning the photographic image as a reconstructed art object and not just a material document telling us of a given event. Hence, in the next shot Bernhardt’s greyhound rushes forwards to meet her boat. This is the dog in Georges Clairin’s famous portrait of the artist (*Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt*, 1876) given its ‘liberty’; this is his curving tendril tail which ended the curves of her own sinuous body finally freed into actual movement. In other words,
with film we have a movement from inside to outside, a shift from a line that describes movement through dress and pose to the depiction of the movement itself. Thus, on film, the dog rushes to join its mistress just as she waves to her watching audience. Gone is the opulent décor frozen into a formal image of dog and owner; gone, in other words, is the idea that the female artist was best correlated with a seductive interior and the related presumption that woman signals a return to touch and texture alone. Still dressed in white and still the fundamental anchor in the image, Bernhardt’s portrait is brought, through film, quite literally out into the world.

It is important that we keep focused on this renegotiation of women’s role as decorative object and as decorative artist. For in this same image—and later in others—we have Bernhardt carried to the shore, we have her boxes carried uphill for her, we have her being cared for and looked after in a manner very different from traditional images of woman in a rural setting and very different from earlier portraits of women ‘at home’. Indeed, we need only realize the extent to which gendered roles are being essentially reversed (or at least significantly revised) in order to appreciate the extent to which Bernhardt is authoring her own image on film. For example, there is a shot just after her landing on shore where we see men carrying her luggage. This is compositionally and thematically very similar to Jean–Francois Millet’s Peasant women with brushwood (1858). Like the painting, which famously depicts two anonymous women carrying heavy loads of wood on their backs, the film shows men leaning forward, their caps covering their face as they strain against the boxes on their shoulders. Rocks and shrubs line the path they are walking on; we can see the curved points of their heavy clogs as they walk diagonally up, across the screen. Here, as elsewhere, Bernhardt authors her own image by this shift in iconographical reference. Men, it is therefore suggested, anonymously labour for Bernhardt in this rural retreat. Bernhardt is the star, carried off the boat and given flowers, she is the queen arriving at her castle (her house is the fort we see in one of the images). As if to reiterate her point about self–representation and female authorship, Bernhardt has a young female companion rush ahead to take a quick photograph of Bernhardt as they approach her house. Later, in her atelier, Bernhardt selects. Surrounded by busts, she busily moulds a portrait of Edmond Rostand, the playwright whose L’Aiglon she had made famous on the stage a decade earlier. Joined by a female secretary who busies herself with a book, Bernhardt is a professional artist capable now not only of bringing Rostand’s verse to the stage but of materializing his physical form. Later, Bernhardt is shown writing thoughtfully in her study, again attended to by a female maid. And even later, there is the local festivities in which a ‘Breton dance’ is shown. In each instance, it is Bernhardt who is both a patron and a participant: that gendered division between artist and subject is actively refused.

It is not just the agency given to the female artist which is important here, but the fact that the arts are no longer celebrated in their isolation. This had
occurred earlier, in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, when Bernhardt exhibited sculpture in Paris, London, and New York and gained much press and attention through this. Photographs of the period, particularly those by Melandri in 1871, famously show her cross-dressed in a white satin suit as she sculpted or painted in her atelier. This was, clearly, suggestive of both gendered and artistic transgression. By 1901, however, it was explained how “one of the phenomena of the present day is the number of female artists now practising sculpture and the allied arts, practising them steadily”; in 1903 the popular journal *Femina* would feature images of female artists in their respective studios.320 By 1912, therefore, Bernhardt was not proving her literary and/or artistic talents but combining these within the one work, within the one film. Hence it was actually film which—unique amongst the arts—facilitated a plurality of vision and a permeability of artistic borders. Bernhardt’s male companions—those men who follow her along the coast or who join her for lunch or who salute her and/or carry her bags—are the physical bodies who bring a very different sense to the idea of artistic ‘work’.

**Painting and presence**

To turn, now, to painting and to argue that even if we do not have any ‘actual’ images of Bernhardt painting in the film, the visual composition of each scene drew upon works which were familiar to her contemporary audience. I suggested, at the beginning of this paper, that Bernhardt consciously engaged with impressionist painting in the opening shots of the film. And I think that Bernhardt went on to do this throughout the work, choosing to recontextualize familiar images and styles rather than have herself shown ‘actually’ painting. The most obvious instance of this is when Bernhardt inserts herself as protagonist into a shot of the seaside on Belle Isle. Here, she is shown gesturing to a sea in which waves move against the rocks and in which an untouched nature is defined by an uninhabited, windswept coastline. Like Gustave Courbet in the 1870s, presenting a wave in terms of its sensorial impact or, more recently, like Claude Monet or John Russell (both in 1890) painting the effect of water hitting rock on Belle Isle, Bernhardt is defining nature in a way that has many parallels to the shock and sensation we otherwise relate to modern, urban space.321 Where Bernhardt departs from these earlier paintings, however, is in the insertion of herself: she and her companions are actually part of this rugged nature, it is they who intrude upon it and introduce us to it. In this way, Bernhardt demonstrates a subjec-

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321 See, for example, Monet’s *Storm at Belle Isle* and the compositional similarities between this and the shot in which Bernhardt sits on a rock and waves expansively out to sea.
tive engagement in the world: she might return woman to a wild and bountiful nature, but she is very clearly changing its representational meaning.

The same might be said of Bernhardt’s re-working of the landscape: Monet and Vincent Van Gogh present us with fields of poppies only occasionally populated by people. Hence, Monet’s wife and son stroll indistinctly through his 1873 canvas, *Poppy Field near Argenteuil*; these two—and there are another two figures behind them again—might be any mother and son. Bernhardt, however, is instead at the front of the screen in her ‘field of poppies’ presented in the film. Identifiable, and clearly directing the activity of the women who surround her, she again mediates visual meaning. The poppies are therefore replaced by roses and camellias, women pick the flowers and collect huge bundles which they then pile onto a cart. Rather than blend in to the background of the image, women define and determine a physical presence.

Even the picnic Bernhardt depicts in the film represents less a lazy lunchtime meal than a conscious reworking of familiar visual motifs. The camera therefore pans left across a group of men who—in terms of pose and setting—recall Edouard Manet’s famous *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* (1863)—and then onto a table that is compositionally and thematically reminiscent of Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1881). What we are missing, of course, is both Manet’s nude models and Renoir’s sense of relaxed engagement. Instead, a woman (Bernhardt) is there to direct our gaze and to define visual meaning: the camera stops on the lunch table where Bernhardt sits, organizing and choreographing surrounding activity.

This sense of visual transformation—whereby one image slips into another, one history extends and develops another—is best illustrated in the scene just before the film’s conclusion. At this point Bernhardt is finally placed within a ‘public’ (the local Breton community) and celebrated as a patron. After speeches, a ‘Breton dance’ is performed for her by the locals. Bernhardt is in the distance, signing autographs, and it is unclear whether she is even watching the performance. In the foreground, a group of men and women dance around playing musicians. The obvious source for this image is Paul Gauguin’s *Breton Girls Dancing* (1888), where three girls have flowers pinned to their chest and hold hands, their figures describing a circular movement. Behind them is a village, with a church spire and buildings. In Bernhardt’s film the Breton dance has changed in meaning and motivation: a spontaneous act is now a gesture of recognition and an isolated few have become an entire community.

The fiction of the painter’s anonymous presence—or, at least, his capacity to capture the primitive remains of the modern world—has also been denied. Not only do we again have Bernhardt at the centre of the image (if not literally, at least symbolically, for this celebration is for her) but we have activity clearly choreographed for the camera. There is no pretence, as there was with Gauguin, that the Breton community was a spiritually pure peasant
community and Brittany an isolated retreat free from the corruption of the modern world. Instead, Belle Isle and its peasant community is documented and brought forth as a vibrant part of the modern world, dependent upon outside patronage for its sustenance and new technology for its visibility. Indeed, Bernhardt was very public in her support of local activities and initiatives and actively promoted them. The 'danse Bretonne' performed in her honour as benefactor of a local co-operative bakery was not only featured on her film but was publicized on the cover of the journal *Excelsior* in August 1912. In 1911 Bernhardt also famously responded to the storms which destroyed the island's fishing fleet by staging a 'Matinée de Gala'. This was a benefit performance of the play *Pain d'hiver des pêcheurs de Belle–Ile–en–Mer* which also saw the publication of a programme illustrated by Georges Clairin. The change from the image of an untouched utopian retreat to one in which the local community actually celebrated the presence of a female outsider (Bernhardt) indicates the extent to which the notion of an original primitive innocence was being eroded.

Here we must remember that we are on Belle Isle, that is, on an island traditionally celebrated for its cultural and geographic isolation and regarded as a frontier against the Dutch and English. This is where Alexandre Dumas set his novel *The Man in the Iron Mask* (1850) and where his King explains that he wants the fortifications to remain intact upon the Island, but that it is not these which draws him to the place. He accordingly states: “You would not guess what I want to see at Belle–Isle, Monsieur Fouquet; it is the pretty peasants and women of the lands on the sea–shore, who dance so well, and are so seducing with their scarlet petticoats!” It was also here, on Belle Isle, that Dumas had Porthos, one of his characters in the *Three Musketeer's*, die. In an equally famous work (which marks the beginning of his historic dramas) Dumas’s play *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle* (1839) similarly focused upon Gabrielle, an attractive youth from Belle Isle. This is a role which Bernhardt played in November 1872 on her return to the Comédie Française and which was one of the few works by Dumas to remain in the repertory of the Théâtre Française into the twentieth century.

**Conclusion: the woman at the window**

When Bernhardt brought Belle Isle to screen in 1912, however, she was 'playing' no one but herself and she represented the island a little differently from Dumas’s description of musketeers, knights, fishermen, and the Court. It was, certainly, a place in which solitude and silence could be enjoyed. It offered 'savagery, fishermen, sea, and sky’. But it was also what she called 'little and immense’, in that it was a small landmass that expanded forever.

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322 See the reproduction of these images in Dupont–Nivet, op. cit., 200.
outwards, meaning that it moved out to the sea, and out, finally, to America. This is a very different tale, then, of the wranglings between capital and province, Paris and Brittany, described by Dumas. As Bernhardt explained in *Femina*, in an article written in 1904, “Yes, it is small, Belle Isle; but it is savage and it is immense, because Belle Isle is one of the points of the old world, the point where Europe plunges into the Ocean, and this Ocean, with its black rocks and transparent green waves hurls itself infinitely ahead, where I imagine America, and still more worlds!”  

The film concludes with a portrait of Bernhardt. She is indoors, alone with three dogs, seated comfortably as she turns and looks out a window. This is the closest we have been to her; it is an intimate image exposing a quiet moment alone. That it is only at this moment, and through this image, that we finally have Bernhardt fixed calmly, decoratively, within her home is telling. At this point, when she gestures out the window, we might say that she is old, that the camera is still, and that she represents an image of Europe’s anachronistic (and theatrical) collapse. But we might, alternatively, compare this image to that painted by Clairin some forty years earlier and, following Gledhill, ask that we evaluate the film for what it does. *Sarah Bernhardt at home* shows Bernhardt arriving by train, by steamship, and by rowboat. It shows her sculpting, writing, and transforming the visual and narrative meaning of the pictorial and literary arts. Finally, it shows her at home looking out onto the sea and through this, onto America. America was the ‘New World’, a modernity of which Bernhardt certainly imagined herself a part. In other words, this film is not about the decorative arts constructing a sanctuary of a safe and feminine home. It is about a window opening outwards. It is, as Bloch might say, an anecdote about living.

*This paper was originally accompanied by illustrations. You can see them on: www.italiansilentcinema.net/proc/wss2008/duckett*

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Lyda Borelli as a Liberty Icon
Elena Mosconi

The Lady of the Painting
The relationship between the great French actress, Bernhardt, and the Italian Diva, Borelli, is shown in a photograph taken in 1911 in Cesare Tallone’s atelier by the photographer Emilio Sommariva. It is a photograph which depicts an artist painting an actress. Tallone (the painter) is completing an enormous portrait of Lyda Borelli. Borelli, one of the most important actresses in the Italian theatre in the teens, entered film just two years after the completion of this image. She is shown wearing Salomé’s costume, which was a role she famously played on the stage. As we know, this role was written by Oscar Wilde for Sarah Bernhardt but she could not—for reasons of censorship—bring it to the stage. This photograph demonstrates Borelli’s popularity in the 1910s. It also gives evidence of the relationship between Italian theatre and contemporary (that is, modern) European culture.

We do not need to again demonstrate Borelli’s importance to Italian society of the teens. Nor must we reiterate the fact that her fame increased when she left the theatre for cinema in 1918 when she married. As most people know, during these years in Italy a new term—“Borellism”—was invented in order to explain the public notoriety of Borelli’s gestures. Moreover, many historians such as Gian Piero Brunetta, Cristina Jandelli and Angela Dalle Vacche have given exhaustive interpretations of her art and work. In the same vein, we do not need to discuss Borelli’s status as an erotic icon. As it is commonly known, it was Antonio Gramsci, writing in 1917, who reduced her to this, stating that:

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325 Cesare Tallone (1853–1919) was an Italian painter known for portraits and scenes of landscapes. He taught in Milan to a generation of famous painters such as Carlo Carrà, Antonio Sant’Elia, Aroldo Bonzagni and Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo. Emilio Sommariva (1883–1956) was a photographer who lived in Milan, too. His work was devoted to landscape and city pictures, to the photographic reproduction of paintings and portraits, mainly of actresses and artists. His photographs (45000 negatives on glass plates and 2700 original prints) are now in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense of Milan. See: Giovanna Ginex. Ed., Divine. Emilio Sommariva fotografo. Opere scelte 1910–1930 (Busto Arsizio, Varese: Nomos, 2004).
326 Borelli’s career in film was very short but intense: she played 13 films in the years 1913–1918.
It is necessary to study Borelli’s case as an example of sexuality. There is no other way to understand it, to explain it and also to get free from it. [...] This woman is a piece of a prehistoric and primordial humanity. No one can explain Borelli’s art, because it doesn’t exist. Borelli isn’t able to interpret any other creature apart from herself.328

These statements of Gramsci were shared by many critics. Borelli was considered either beautiful or an artist, as if one was an alternative to the other.329

The point of my discussion is very different. I want to ask why and how we can (or should) return to Borelli. That is, I want to ask how might we recuperate an actress who—in comparison with other actors—has been considered, like Bernhardt, to be too theatrical, too boring, too decadent, in a word, too anachronistic for both the cinema and the modernity it helped to inaugurate. Perhaps, as a critic has suggested,330 she inspired other stars, particularly during the twenties and the thirties. That is, her figure was still alive and productive many years after her retirement from the scenes. Or maybe—on the contrary—Borelli was too ‘contemporary’ for her age, meaning that she was actually an inadequate representation of her time and so emerges as an anomalous and theatrical misfit in the eyes of posterity.

In any case, what we must pose is a historical question, a query that authorizes us to look outside the field of cinema and that allows us to investigate the social, political and artistic contexts of Borelli’s fame. In doing this, we are once again engaging with Borelli just as we might engage with Bernhardt. Indeed, it is certainly not by chance that they both refused to devote themselves only to cinema and continued to recite in the theatre and to undertake many other activities. In their opinion, we could argue, cinema was only part of a more complex engagement; it was just one aspect of an attempt to articulate and create a new form of artistic expression. In this sense, their performance stops being boring or decadent or even anachronistic and becomes, instead, the visible testimony of a modern Belle Époque aesthetic.

A Multiple Portrait of the Actress
Let us return to Sommariva’s photograph and consider how it can be read on a variety of different levels. First of all, it is the reproduction of an artistic performance. The photograph shows an articulated set with a play of mise en abîme. The Diva, outside the theatre, plays the role of Salomè, and shows—in her costume and theatrical pose—a moment of dramatic climax.

329 Many critics’ statements are collected in Lyda Borelli (Roma: Museo Internazionale del Cinema e dello Spettacolo, 1993).
But the performance can be appreciated only by the painter: in fact, we as viewers are aware of her artificiality. As in a play on the theatre, therefore, the photograph frames the scene and creates a complex representation of time and space. There is the painter who sees the actress, there is the bi-dimensional space of his painting, and there is also the tridimensional space of Borelli who poses and of the painter’s profile that brings depth to the scene. Furthermore, in the same image there are different temporalities. There is the past that is represented and made immortal in the big portrait, which has been solemnized by the gold-plated frame. There is also a more recent past, the time of Salomè’s and Borelli’s performance. There is an imperfect tense (a past time but not concluded) in the painter who is still completing his work. There is also a present tense (time), the moment of the photographic shot. Finally, there are two more future times: the time of those who in 1911 saw this picture in the Photographic Exposition in Rome and Turin (where it won prizes) and there is a future that becomes up-to-date today, 100 years after the shot.

At another level, and speaking very generally, this photograph reveals an intermedial and intertextual relationship between the classic and the contemporary painting, a relationship between the biblical tradition and its decadent translation in late 19th Century, and between the cultures of the theatre and the opera. Clearly, we must remember here that Strauss composed Salomè and that the music was performed in Italy in 1905.

The picture also offers one final question: who is Borelli in this photograph? And who is the protagonist, the model, or the painter? The title, “in the painter’s atelier”, focuses attention on the painter Tallone. But how could the painter be an artist, without this kind of model? This picture prompts me to ask, then, what Borelli was in the Italian cinema of the Belle Époque. I want to briefly explore, as in Bernhardt’s case, the relationship between Borelli and the other arts.

The Diva’s Gesture

The similarity between Bernhardt and Borelli are outlined in 1915 by a literate, Lucio D’Ambra, who would a few years later write the screenplay of Borelli’s Carnevale. As he stated, “Reine de l’attitude et du geste wrote a poet addressing to Sarah Bernhardt. It is possible to readdress the some words to Lyda Borelli. […] This actress doesn’t express herself only with her voice, her eyes, her face. All her figure is dramatic, eloquent, expressive”.331

Many scholars have spoken about Borelli’s acting. Gerardo Guccini, who is a theatrical historian, has introduced the term “performative acting” in relation to her.332 This means that there are some moments in the diva’s

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331 Lucio D’Ambra, La Tribuna, November 27, 1915.
film—that we can compare to melodrama’s arias—devoted to a particular kind of acting. In these instants, as in moments of dramatic climax, the diva shows an exasperated and antinaturalistic acting, due to different kinds of passions: love, delirium, hysteria, and so on. She generally (and literally) lets her long hair down as she gives herself up to an impulsive and ‘out of order’ performance style. Film historian Mario Verdone has instead laid emphasis on her “decadent acting”, which is a style of performance very close to dannunzianism (a style that comes from Gabriele D’Annunzio, the decadent and symbolist Italian poet). This way of acting is based on “a refined and elegant sensuality, and on plenty of exhausted sighs.”

Other scholars stress her “hysteric and nervous acting”, or her “liberty acting”.

Notwithstanding these differences in how Borelli’s performance style might today be interpreted, the main criticisms of her acting concern the fact that it is repetitive, always the same, as if she really was playing only one character in all of her films. On the contrary, I think that Borelli shows an intentional coherence in her characters. They all belong to a high and decadent social class (even when they have humble origins), and to a contemporary milieu (in fact she tries to avoid historical characters). Indeed, her “plastic” silent art of acting is based on statuary shoulders, a white and pale visage, copper–blonde hair, a sinuous body wrapped in silk or satin clothes, and on large and precise gestures. This means that Borelli shows a performative use of eyes, arms and hands, which amplifies the dramatic power of acting. “In my opinion—writes Borelli—the relationship between beauty and art in film is mainly collected in hands and eyes”.

We can note that, during this period, painters (Boldini, for instance) also gave more importance to hands, as a new way to give emphasis to the female character. The hands can frame the face, in order to highlight a passion, or are an extension of the arms and the feelings of heart. We could show many examples in relation to this.

At the same time, eyes and hair also become more dynamic and vital in order to express pathos. We can think here, for instance, of the Pre-Raphaelite Beata Beatrix (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1864–1870) and recall the importance of Symbolism which brought attention to different elements both of the subject and of the décor. Further, we must also remember that classical acting (in the theatre and in melodrama) is referenced by Borelli, and that this is charged with emphasis, languor and dramatic exhaustion in,

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333 Mario Verdone, “La recitazione del Decadentismo nel cinema italiano ‘muto’”, in L’uomo visible – The Visible Man, ed. Laura Vichi (Udine: Forum, 2002), 357–363. Verdone argues that in Italy there is at the time a kind of decadent attitude spread through literature, picture, graphic arts, social costumes. Cinema only recalls and puts together these models of “inimitable lives” and makes them visible for a wide public.


for example, death scenes enacted by the heroine. These intertextual conjunctions are very broad and complex, as Gian Piero Brunetta, Cristina Jandelli and Angela Dalle Vacche have shown. We can ask, at this point, if Borelli’s and the Diva film in general is explicitly Symbolist, Pre–Raphaelite, or Art Nouveau or if it simply “gives a shape” to a taste that was diffused in European culture. Before trying answer this question, however, let me give a closer look at the kind of intertextual relationship I am commenting upon.

Pictorial Taste

We are today aware of the various ways in which a pictorialist taste was articulated within the Diva film. Let’s consider first the spatial organization of the set, the position of the camera and the length of the shots. According to Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs,\textsuperscript{336} we can note how Borelli’s films depended upon the pictorial taste of the time. In the early films of the Diva there is no shot counter shot, but a spatial articulation of depth which is held for a long time, and this allows audiences to appreciate the actress’s figure and movements. Nevertheless, the set is often fragmented into several parts in order to create dynamic effects. This is evident, for instance, in the frame of a window (or a balcony) that introduces depth, light, or, at least, a connection between a private and a public space, joined through the female character.

An example of this occurs in *Malombra* (Carmine Gallone, 1917). Here, we can observe the back lighting of Marina di Malombra looking at the lake through her room’s window. Silhouette and back lighting effects were often used in Italian cinema of the period—mainly in open air scenes—as quality marks, according to a photographic taste that tried to imitate painting.\textsuperscript{337} Photographic pictorialism—and this is a pictorialism quite different from that described by Brewster and Jacobs above—was publicized in Italy at this time through the review *The Artistic Photography* edited in Turin.

A similar use of a pictorial surface that creates the effect of spatial extension is given by the employment of the mirror in the frame. The mirror’s presence reduplicates the female image, revealing her inner ambiguity. This effect can also be seen in contemporary painting, photograph and theatre.

Water is another pictorial element *par excellence*, as we have seen in the previous examples concerning Bernhardt. Water brings fluidity to the picture, whilst it is also a projection of the thoughts and pathos of the character. The lake’s waters form the figurative environment of Marina di


Malombra, the main character of Fogazzaro’s drama *Malombra*, brought to cinema by Carmine Gallone in 1917. The quiet movement of the water of the lake that is always different, but never changes, suggests the idea of the persistence of the past in the present. So, in her repeatedly sailing up and down the lake’s surface, Marina is able to convert her personality into her ancestor’s one, and thus takes revenge on her relatives.

Besides matching the film’s female character, the lake image can be joined to the boatmen and their work. In this context, it outlines and raises social issues, and so conforms to a figurative tradition proper to Northern Italian painting (i.e. Gaetano Previati, Giovanni Segantini, Pellizza da Volpedo). Many references to modern painting can also be seen in the open air scenes of Borelli’s films. These scenes show an ‘anti-theatrical’ space. Although in Diva films interiors are predominant, many open spaces are also featured, such as gardens. In the natural environment of the wood, as in the cultivated space of the garden of 19th century upper class country villa, the Diva finds the possibility to give free expression to her inner passions, to dance, and to repeatedly renew her engagement with life.

The garden, with its flowers and animals, is also related to Symbolism and to the floral and decorative taste of Art Nouveau. Further, we can notice the way in which the symbolism of the butterfly ties in with this garden motif, in that its metamorphosis entails a veritable ‘flowering’ of woman and of life.

This process of metamorphosis can be likened to that of the old Alba d’Oltrevita, the main character in *Rapsodia Satanica* (Nino Oxilia, 1917), who turns into a young creature before finally transforming back into an old woman at the end of the film. Here the influence of the poet Guido Gozzano, who dedicates a whole (but unfinished) poem to butterflies, might be cited together with the importance of Turinese culture in the spread of the Italian liberty style.

Another recurrent theme in Liberty design—and a presence in gardens, too—is the peacock, a symbol of elegance and magnificence, but also of renewal and acquaintance: its ‘hundred eyes’ symbolically give this animal a consciousness of everything. The peacock tail becomes a decorative motif also in the applied arts and in female clothes. Hence, it appears—for instance—in the hat that Borelli wears in the liberty fantasy of *Carnevalesca* (Amleto Palermi, 1918).

The use of the garden and outdoor pictorial space also provides, more generally, a reference to Spring as the season of rebirth and of flowers. Again, in her films Lyda Borelli is usually surrounded by flowers in many

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338 Guido Gozzano published in March 1914 in the newspaper *La Stampa* some lyrics about *Butterflies, (Epistole entomologiche)*, that he never brought to an end. In 1911 maybe he helped his cousin, Roberto Omega, who worked at the Ambrosio society in carrying out a documentary on butterflies.
shapes and colours. We can cite here *Malombra, La donna nuda, Rapsodia satanica, Carnevalesca*, and so on. Flowers are also always present in decadent culture. A historian of Italian cinema, in 1940, therefore makes a connection between the decadent poetry of Gabriele D’Annunzio in *Paradisiac Poem* (1893) and the acting style of Lyda Borelli, stating (in words which directly reference D’Annunzio): “Isn’t it true that many roses fell from your hands, since you were so tired?”

The Body of the Arts

We could continue to enumerate the relationship between Diva films and contemporary painting, from the Pre–Raphaelites on to Symbolism and then on to Liberty. But this is not enough: Borelli and Diva films also recall film’s relationship with all other arts and modes of expression. Diva films are, in other words, rich with complex references to Liberty culture in general (to its graphics, painting, literature, décor, and so on). They are also, however, continuous attempts to join these arts together, to bring one art to another.

The theatrical and literary origins of many screenplays are quite obvious. We can go further, then, and say that Borelli (such as Duse, Bertini and the other Italian Divas) took an active part in defining the creative process of film. We know from Borelli’s correspondence with Baron Fassini, the Cines chief and main producer, that she gave suggestions in order to put into film the romance of D’Annunzio *Forse che sì, forse che no* (1910). The plot is partially autobiographical, and joins together modernity (expressed through aviation and velocity) with fatal languishing passions, mental illness, suicide. Borelli, who really wanted put romance into the film, and prepared herself to become the fatale Isabella Inghirami, proposed clothes designed by the famous dressmaker Mariano Fortuny. They would have, explains Borelli, “strange decorations and colours and shapes, but they would be entirely very nice and artistic”. The shape of the dresses, in Borelli’s opinion, could help the public to better understand the main character: “I believe that an optical suggestion can steer audiences toward a particular feeling.” Again, there is a continuous overlap between literature and film, between mode and acting in that every art and every symbol changes into another art or symbol through the body of the Diva.

If we consider music, the process is similar. The presence of music in Borelli’s films is relevant, where Borelli often plays piano (in the bourgeois fashion of her characters), or where it becomes a theme or motif in the plot or used at the figurative level. In *Rapsodia Satanica*, for example, Pietro

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Mascagni—one of the main Italian music composer’s of the time—was engaged to compose the film score: the importance of this score is suggested, clearly, in the title of the film (Rapsodia is a musical word). But the importance of music derives from its capability to enhance the synaesthetic power of film, through the body of the Diva.

In this context, we can also consider dance. Indeed, in the same way that music helped to define the meaning and function of the Diva, so too did dance demonstrate both Borelli’s capacity as a dancer and her engagement with the rhythmic function of film (we know that many scenes of the films were taken while an orchestra played). To say it better using Eric de Kuyper’s words, dance lets us move from the physicality of the diva’s body to an order which is more spiritual and immaterial.341

This merging of styles, symbols, and meanings is typical of Symbolism’s poetics. Different materials, arts, and forms meet together in the diva’s body. The diva’s body, in effect, enables the transition between the arts or between modes of expression. We must realize, however, that we are not in a Wagnerian drama, where different arts are expressed by a singular author. On the contrary, the diva on film is a versatile and always changing figure who shifts gestures and poses just as she shifts focus upon different passions or varying arts. We move from one costume to another, from a symbol to a decoration, from a gesture to a flower, from a plastic pose to dance. In this sense I would argue that cinema, particularly the Diva film, is a dynamic form of expression. This dynamism is expressed both through the process of artistic and figural metamorphosis and through the abstractions made (paradoxically) visible by the body of the Diva. Both of these lead, I would further argue, to the Liberty art form.

The Actress as an Artist
We have explored the different ties of Diva film with the figurative and literary culture of Belle Époque. Now we can turn to consider what kind of authorship it expresses. In other words, what really does a “Borelli film” or a “Bernhardt film” mean or represent? Recent debate about authorship in early and feminist cinema has provided theoretical, historiographical and methodological tools342. As everyone knows, this issue has given increasing im-

341 Eric De Kuyper, “Alla ricerca delle tracce dell’«Art nouveau» e del Simbolismo nel cinema dei primi decenni”, in Storia del cinema mondiale. L’Europa: Miti, Luoghi e Divi, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta, vol. 1 of Storia del cinema mondiale (Torino: Einaudi, 1999), 189–194. See also La danza delle avanguardie (Milano: Skira, 2005), catalogue of the exposition occurred in Rovereto (MART), which offers many suggestions about the connections between dance, painting and theatre in the same period.

342 It is impossible to recall here the whole debate; see at least Jane Gaines, “Of Cabbages and Authors”, in A feminist Reader in Early Cinema, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002); Rosanna Maule, “Une histoire sans noms: les femmes et le concept d’auteur dans le cinéma des premiers temps”, CiNéMAS, 16/1
portance to the Foucaultian idea of the author as a function of the text and to the artistic and discursive practices evident in social and cultural contexts. So, returning again to our examples, we have to relate Borelli’s and Bernhardt’s work in film to their theatrical milieu. Since they are both actresses and not writers, their degree of authorship depends mainly on their acting, on their ability in giving a personal interpretation of a given theatrical work. An excellent interpretation makes them earn the status of “artist”. In this context, we would suggest that it is productive, in considering the work of the Diva in film, to shift from the issue of the author to the more undefined one of the “artist”.

The exploration of the female artist has been undertaken by art historians. Still today, there is attention paid to the fact that history has marginalized female artists and it remains necessary to recuperate their work. The difficulties are here similar to those we encounter in film research: the first question relates to whether there exists a specifically ‘female art’. Another question is related to the issue of female absence: why are there so few women artists? A way to move beyond this problem is, in our opinion, to highlight the notion of “artistic intention”. If we address ‘intention’ we can leave behind a series of simple oppositions, such as the high/low divide and the staging/acting binary. In this way, we formulate a new possibility: the possibility that artistic results depend largely on the economic conditions of production and on visibility. Moreover we can pay attention here not only to the result (the “work of art”), but also to the artistic process, and to the idea of what—in the artist’s opinion—a specific form of art in a certain historical moment is.

Let us consider, for instance, Borelli, who insists in calling herself an artist in her cinematographic work just as she did in the theatre. In doing this, she implicitly recognizes film as an art. As a critic argued in 1917, “Lyda Borelli doesn’t express in film a new or a special type of acting, but a new form of her art. It is more effective than expressive, more plastic than impressive, more artistic than true.” Gramsci goes further in stating that “Borelli is the artist par excellence of the film, whose language is only human body in its always changeable plasticity.”

These statements agree with Borelli’s own idea of cinema, as we can infer from her words. On many occasions she outlines the non–realistic attitude of cinema and its capability to make inner psychology visible. The theatrical
performance, with actors and people watching in the public, makes the actress feel the sensations of 'life'; on the contrary, the cinematographic set makes her feel alone and isolated in front of the camera. This introduces a gap that repeatedly frames acting; the lack of speech forces the actress to find a personal way to replace it. As Borelli explained, “The cinema represents with plastic and harmonious acting the absent speech” and inner sensations. Further, beauty and elegance had to accord exactly with the inner psychology of the character. She continues: “The shapes of our gestures, the line of our plastic expression have a rhythm that must be harmonious with the words which they supply.”

On the one hand, Borelli thereby gives a proper definition of what cinema is. On the other hand, she operates artistically through cinema: she gives her own contribution in order to make cinema become an art. This is, again an 'art' which relates to her own intent as an artist; it is not necessarily congruent with what cinema was. During the age of Belle Époque, when the aesthetic movement very much involved an act of personal and visual elaboration, the artist became a mediator between life and art. It was she who applied to quotidian life the refined manners of art, and it was also she who reproduced, in her artistic work, her own quotidian life, filtered by her artistic sensibility. In this sense, we can argue that in the Diva film, the actress is the artist who not only embodies different expressive disciplines, but who is also the figure who enables them to become Art. This is particularly clear as Dalle Vacche points out in the case of the Diva film in Italy, and in all the other countries (generally in Europe) where modernity was new but also related to traditional culture. In Francesco Casetti’s work, there is a model of negotiation that we apply a little differently here: the diva’s body on film is a site of negotiation of what a new art, proper to the new century, can be. Through her body, different cultures, arts and expressive forms interlock.

Towards a “Liberty” Art?
Now we can return to what we posed about Liberty Diva films being full of references to contemporary arts and culture. Perhaps some of these references are explicit quotations, some are involuntary, some belong to a common language of art, or they relate instead to an individual’s artistic intention. Sometimes it is impossible to separate the one from the other, to argue that any one particular influence, language, or style is unique. In any case, because Borelli and Bernhardt are cultivated artists, they pose questions

348 Francesco Casetti, Communicative Negotiation in Cinema and Television (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002). About cinema as art in 20th century, see also Francesco Casetti, Eye of the Century. Film, Experience, Modernity (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Remember that this model of artistic intersection is specific to the Diva. Popular actresses—drawn from the music hall or variety stages—pose different questions and different problems.
about what a new, modern art should be. At the same time, they also suggest the necessity to develop a new art in the new century.

We need to ask, at this point, what kind of art we are dealing with. In Italy we have a debate about the “Liberty style”, the floral and national declina-
tion of the European movement of Art Nouveau, Jugendstil and Modern Style. Liberty is first considered—in the Italian debate—as a decorative more than architectural style (that is to say more “formal” than “substan-
tial”); it develops first in graphics and decoration, but its aim is to contami-
nate all kind of arts and modes of expression. Moreover, Liberty wants to pursue new artistic aims without conflicting with the past; it essentially wants to transform its cultural heritage into new lines, forms, and ideals. If we assume this style as an aesthetic model that implicitly underlined the Diva film and motivated many of the Diva’s ideas about film, we can (per-
haps provocatively) better understand their eclecticism. That is, we can re-
late post impressionism, the pre Raphaelites, Symbolism and Art Nouveau—
as well as the more general taste for decoration—to the Diva film. In this way, the diva can be re–read through a new intermedial lens, as Angela Dalle Vacche suggests.

Let us explain. Liberty did not diffe rentiate between pure arts (the noble arts) and the applied arts—and for this reason it was not accepted by old intellectuals, at least in its early years—but joined together technical skills and artistic spirits. Liberty was also a co–operative art in the sense that it joined different competencies (more than one person worked on any given art object). Liberty art was made by artisans and not by industrialists, mean-
ning that every Liberty object was different and that products were essentially crafts. These aspects we can also find in our examples of the continental Diva film. Moreover, Liberty was a style of art made by the bourgeois (the middle and upper classes) in order to reach a popular audience. Film par-
takes in this same momentum. The years themselves also overlap, in that they both (Liberty and the Diva film) coincide with the Belle Époque, and

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349 See: Francesca Cagianelli and Dario Matteoni, eds., La belle Époque. Arte in Italia 1880–
1915 (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2008); Fabio Benzi, Liberty e Déco. 
Mezzo secolo di stile italiano (1890–1940) (Milano: Federico Motta, 2007; Laura Vinca–
Masini, Il liberty – Art Nouveau (Firenze: Giunti, 1976); Rossana Bossaglia, Il Liberty in 
Italia (Milano: Charta, 1997).

350 “The combination of old and new transpired through the ambivalent and simultaneous 
backward and forward orientation of leaves and flowers in the art nouveau style. It is the 
curve that interests me in the construction of the diva film as a cultural type. The curve, direc-
tionally a mixed form par excellence, can split itself between the avant–garde and the back-
lash. Thus, the curve also echoes cinema’s blurring of the boundaries between high culture 
and popular entertainment, mixing of directions and levels can be assessed through two com-
plementary processes at work in art nouveau itself: on the one hand, the raising of minor arts 
to aesthetic ranking; on the other, the serializations and consequent lowering of icons from 
they have the some spaces of diffusion (we can remember, in Italy, the cities of Turin and Rome). Finally, we must remember that Liberty moved from the atelier to its public, from inside to outside, and from the home (furniture, lamps, windows) to its public exhibition (such as the Paris and Turin Expositions, but also urban ornamental décor, house’s and buildings façades). Again, this was exactly like the cinema, which moved from small to large movie theatres, from a little to a large presence in everyday life and costumes, as the “Borellism” wave illustrates.

Perhaps, at this point, we must acknowledge that the Liberty style and the Diva film are both a little unrealistic and together fail to differentiate true and original art from vulgar imitation. Indeed, as the word itself suggests, Liberty is the style that seeks to make Italian culture a little more free from all kind of ties, and a little more experimental. If this means that art collapses into kitsch or camp, so be it: the point is that our European actresses, properly contextualized, were women who also chose to perform this possibility. In other words—and this is the point which we want to stress—what is ‘really’ anachronistic is not so much their effort to bring the Liberty taste to film, as it is our own incapacity to see what films do. We need to now go on, therefore, to understand if the traces of art nouveau in European cinema can more generally authorize us ask one final and important question: whether the European cinema (headed by the female Diva) was imagined—for a certain period and through a certain “genre” of film by its contemporaries as the true “art nouveau”.

*The paper was originally accompanied by photos. You see them at:*

www.italiansilentcinema.net/proc/wss2008/mosconi
Engaging National Emotions on Screen: European Silent Women in ’Strikingly Effective’ Melodramas
Dominique Nasta & Muriel Andrin

In his “Poetics of Melodrama”, Russian Formalist Sergei Balukhatyi considers that all elements in melodrama “are subordinate to one overriding aesthetic goal: the calling forth of ‘pure’, ‘vivid’ emotions, concurring to an ‘emotional teleology’”351. Situations implying a strong emotional shock, unexpected twists and sharp reversals in the storyline, and ‘strikingly effective situations’ contribute to this teleology. Characters are involved in expressive emotional relationships, which are both universal and primitive, while they express their emotional experiences through impassionate and fully explicit speeches. Beyond these obvious features building emotional teleology, Balukhatyi also brings forth technical principles structuring melodramatic representation: the principle of relief (schematization of plot situations and characters), of contrast and of dynamics co–exist in order to engender what Peter Brooks has defined as the melodramatic mode of excess. The latter is based on the use of rhetorical figures such as hyperbole, antithesis and oxymoron.352

Reorienting Balukhatyi’s general view on melodrama, Boris Tomashevsky insists on the pluridisciplinary or syncretic aspect of melodrama: “grand spectacle par excellence”, it makes constant use of operatic staging and lavish settings, implies musical accompaniment as heritage of pantomime. Besides, “the author of a melodrama had to have the imagination of a painter”.353

Considering that film characters from melodramas are also subject to ‘reversibility’, the ‘vicious’ repents and becomes virtuous through contrastive, polar changes of plot. Yet, contrary to Balukhatyi’s idea, most feminine characters are not always “devoid of individuality, either personal or everyday realistic”; even if they are types and often ‘one-dimensional’, they can also reveal multiple aspects of their personality.

The three films we chose to analyze (Mario Almirante’s La statua di carne (1921), Holger–Madsen’s Towards the Light (1919) and E.A. Dupont’s Pic-

353 Gerould, 130.
cadilly (1929)) make relevant use of feminine types. Their emancipation leads to very complex representations. Literature, painting, theatre, vaudeville and more specific art movements (Symbolism, Art Nouveau or other forms according to specific temporal contexts) consequently influence and define these complex feminine representations.

The above-mentioned films are far from being “famous melodramas”. Towards the Light, an Asta Nielsen vehicle, for instance, has practically never been analyzed genre-wise but more for its framing and camera work. La statua di carne is barely mentioned as part of the Italian divas’ realm. Piccadilly is mostly well known for Dupont’s stylistic mastery and the star status acquired by Anna Mae Wong following the film’s release, its melodramatic identity being downplayed. Yet, these films perfectly exemplify the European melodramatic paradigm: apparently stereotyped characterizations ultimately reveal extremely complex representations, both in their syntactic logic and in their European generic features. Indeed, it is only through the melodramatic filter that these characters and their contribution can be fully understood. Besides, if masculine protagonists often appear to be at the core of the narration, feminine ones eventually prove the motor of the melodramatic plot. Far from standing for idle or passive divas, the characters of Italia Almirante-Manzini, Asta Nielsen and Anna Mae Wong’s deliberately and knowingly act upon their situation, even if they are finally caught up by fate. What will be at stake is to see how they embody an obvious evolution in the creation of a specific emotional discourse.

As we will try to show, this double articulation is actually dependent on what Ed Tan and Nico Frijda have coined as being both fiction emotions (F emotions) and artefact emotions (A emotions). F emotions, on the one hand, are “responses to events in the fictional world” in which “the viewer shares in the feelings of the protagonist” hence creating an empathic emotion. A emotions, on the other hand, “include enjoyment and admiration of the film as a film”, the film being a “manmade artefact”. Feminine characters from our examples will be the theatre of both kinds of emotions provoking a new kind of audience response.

In La statua di carne (1921), a screening of a Teobaldo Cicconi play (1874), Mario Almirante casts his cousin, Italia Almirante Manzini, as the double character Mary and Naomi Keller. Count Paul Santarosa, deceived by his fiancée, Lorina, meets Mary, an artificial flower maker who takes pity on his apparently poor condition; once he gets a job, he withdraws from society. Lorina ultimately learns about him and writes a warning letter to Mary, who later falls ill and dies. After a long trip, Paul returns to his former “world” and meets Naomi, a dancer who strikingly resembles Mary. He pays her to

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act as the perfect portrait of Mary. She falls in love with him while the
memory of Mary still haunts him. After a few narrative twists, Paul provokes
a duel with an old admirer of Naomi. He wins the duel and discovers that he
does love Naomi.

Far from the “hysterical and twisting body language” of Italian divas as
defined by Angela Dalle Vacche, actress Italia Almirante–Manzini acts on a
double and intricate persona. Almirante’s persona conveys emotional tele-
ology through a body both physically and psychologically structured to en-
tail it. Thus, in her first onscreen appearance, she embodies Brooks’ hyper-
bolic instance, through what we have coined in past contributions as being a
synthetic hyperbole. Caught up in a window frame, she is seen watering
some flowers and petting a caged bird, then having an excessive coughing
fit. This introduction reveals her profound nature before she is really intro-
duced by the narration through a necessary syncretic characterization: the
floral element, the mise en abyme through the caged bird, but also the ge-
eric reference of La dame aux camélias seals her narrative fate. Her later
impersonation is similarly characterized, this time by a mask and a glittering
dress at a carnivalesque party. As Dalle Vacche points out, the diva com-
bines two extreme postures, demonstrating that “the diva’s cultural function
was to embody a conflicted answer to major changes within sexual and so-
cial relations”.

Yet, Almirante–Manzini differs from the double articulation of a ‘rigidly elegant and callously flexible’ character.

If Paul is established as the film’s main character, he obviously serves to
highlight Maria’s complex personality. The doppelgänger dynamics further
developed in the double identity of Maria and Naomi, is first introduced by
Paul and his friend David who pretend to be beggars when they first meet
Mary and her girlfriends, returning from work. The core of the emotional
discourse is clearly articulated around the active force of Mary. Their meet-
ing with Paul and David progressively increases Fiction emotion thanks to
dynamic editing devices.

But emotion reaches its peak in the sequence where Mary and Paul are seen
in his new home: they meet and kiss, while a peasant–woman holding a child
in her arms is seen playing the accordion outside of their window. Mary is
obviously torn between real life, her work in the artificial flower factory, and
a dream life with Paul as her everlasting love. The moment seems to entail a
typical Fiction emotion in which we identify with the character’s passion.
Yet, Mary’s representation by the film director also plays on Artefact emo-
tion through synthetic hyperboles: we are shown a painted portrait of hers by

355 Angela Dalle Vacche, Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema (Texas: Uni-
versity of Texas Press, 2008). Italia Almirante–Manzini’s fame was surpassed later on by Pina
Menichelli’s.
356 Angela Dalle Vacche, op.cit., 8.
Paul and she is again surrounded by flowers. The “musical” counterpoint during the kiss enhances the same level of emotion, acting this time as an iterative hyperbole: it repeats the vibration of a kiss under a different, non visual, form.

What is striking in this example is the plurality of emotional manifestations. Beyond synthetic and iterative hyperboles, literal hyperboles also express the character’s physiological state by way of titles. When receiving a letter from Paul’s former fiancée and discovering his double identity, Mary collapses into another coughing fit. The title will read: “When she is nervous or excited she always has a bad spell like that”, foreshadowing her fatal destiny. The representation of her inevitable death also contributes to assign the character a metaphysical dimension. It provokes an oxymoron echoing pictorial syncretic references such as Symbolist painter Giovanni Segantini’s Rose Petal (1891): she dies with her eyes wide open, a “happy death” since she seems to be following the voices that call her (title: “I hear beautiful voices, they are calling... calling”).

The film’s second part revealing Mary’s masked substitute relies on a more carnival–like dimension. The party where Paul meets Naomi clearly is a strikingly effective spectacular scene, creating an Artefact emotion. The debauchery of the party and the constant echo of death are inextricably still linked through Paul’s toast: “I pledge you a toast to death... the death of love!” The image of the dead will haunt Paul and Naomi’s relationship throughout the second part of the story. The resemblance to Belgian symbolist George Rodenbach’s novel “Bruges–La–Morte”, who also inspired Evgenii Bauer’s Daydreams (1915) is more than obvious. When Paul runs to Naomi’s side when she faints at the duel, it is the image of Mary which reappears. We are thus invited, through a binary flashback, to compare both representations. Paul’s revelation of Naomi’s love is expressed through a textual oxymoron: “I have been blind— but you have made me see!” Despite the ’happy ending’ reuniting Paul and Naomi, it is Mary’s image from beyond that vividly impregnates the spectator’s mind.

In accordance to the aesthetics of the late teens, Holger–Madsen’s Mod Lyset/Towards the Light (1919) sets up an even more complex network of feminine characterizations. Holger–Madsen, former actor and acclaimed director of Danish (with Nordisk) and later on German films, seems to have favoured spiritual topics, which were already at the core of well–known films such as Evangeliemandens Liv starring Valdemar Psilander (1915). The film features Nielsen as Countess Ysabel, a decadent aristocrat who experiences a spiritual transformation. Leading a young admirer to suicide and marrying a con who will deceive her, she becomes infatuated with a young charismatic evangelist, Elias Renato (Alf Blütecher). But he resists her temptation and, after a few ‘twists and turns’, she becomes a preacher herself.
The film plays on the ‘phantasmatic link’ which binds Nielsen to her audience for whom she has often stood for perverse and evil characters. Yet, as Heide Schlüpmann and Karola Gramann stressed in their analysis, Nielsen plays on a two–level articulation. She thus highlights the main points of the intrigue, while also making the audience aware of her performative acting. Representing Balazs’ concept of ‘sign language of eroticism’, Nielsen “took leave of rigid linguistic forms by means of gestures and facial expression, behaviour patterns which she clearly displayed”, eventually also revealing “the reality of people”. Dresses and props helped her build a whole repertoirore of characters. Frank Kessler, who goes beyond Balazs’ idea of physiognomy, explains how Nielsen expresses psychological states not only through mimico–gestural acting but also through her dresses and haircut: they work as “precise indications revealing the character’s situation ever since she appears” to the spectator who has to literally “read the clues”. 

Synthetic hyperbole is again used in Holger–Madsen’s characterization. Known for his striking pictorial compositions, “his use of side light, inventive camera angles and close–ups combined with unusual sets”, the Danish director heightens emotional impact through the use of symbolic inserts, the most famous being the one where Ysabel tempts Elias. The latter subsequently appears as Christ tempted by Satan. In this particular sequence, Holger–Madsen intertwinest different types of visual clues provoking a striking Artefact emotion. There are references to pantheist symbolic imagery, to pictorial religious imagery (Christ’s portrait with a lamb which echoes Elias’ gestures) as well as an embedded famous Christian parable, namely that of Elias as a Christ tempted by Satan. Yet, the most striking example of the use of symbolic inserts is situated at the beginning of the film and concerns Ysabel. Nielsen is represented in three dissolving portraits that summarize her ever–changing psychological and moral states. In a comparative hyperbole, Ysabel consecutively appears, in three hypostases, frivolous countess, repent in prayer (both ‘framed’), and finally in her angelic dimension (where the frame disappears). Editing plays a crucial part in the melodramatic composition. The general principle of the film will be a constant comparison between the fates of several characters

François Audé, “Asta Nielsen”, 1895, 13 (December 1993), 54: “Dès ses débuts, fortement marqué de sexualité, le lien fantasmatique unissant Asta Nielsen à ses spectateurs explique qu’on lui ait fait don de plus de perversité qu’il n’est raisonnable. Le public a nourri son image de ses propres spéculations et Asta Nielsen s’est prêtée de bon gré au jeu, aux rôles”.


implied, displaying very clear dynamics of contrast (by the use of natural and/or artificial light).

After the living portraits, the film pursues with a comparative hyperbole of the literal kind ("The frivolous countess, who toys with men and their feelings the same way she played with dolls as a child") establishing Ysabel as an evil character in an antithetic narrative situation. The cross–cutting between the glamorous party (echoing La Statua di carne’s excessive party) and Elias’ incredibly realistic island of beggars from the “sacred territory” further builds the antithetic discourse. The antithesis and cross–cutting will be repeated throughout the film, culminating in the spectacular opposition between the beggar island assaulted by the flames and the priest walking on water.

Simultaneity of action through cross–cutting is but one technique which structures the plot. The film also relies on the character’s predestination or fate, as it can already be seen in the opening 'tableaux vivants' of Ysabel. It is peculiarly true of Felix’s destiny, expressed via a scriptural rhetoric, which emphasizes Ysabel as evil character. His obsession with Ysabel is first seen when she plays with him at a party where she offers him «the hand of the heart». The allusion to the hand comes back as hope ("In the hand you gave me to kiss lies my future and destiny") then as despair in a letter she receives. After his suicide, his dead body, discovered by Elias, lies in her living room and the letter reads: "my love for you meant life to me—now I take death from your beautiful hand". The last sequence is built on a perfect oxymoron since Ysabel simultaneously receives the dead body and the letter.

Predestination also strikes Ysabel, when, after her husband has been arrested and taken to prison, she throws her veil in the flames in an excessive gesture—sealing her fate—or when she is confronted to Felix’s uncle who appears in her own mirror, reminding her “What a man sows he also reaps!” This use of the embedded mirror as an analytical hyperbole is, as Ron Mottram and David Bordwell have shown in their respective studies, typical of Danish early cinema. It allows deep focus and expansion of the playing space but also displays, in this particular case, a painterly use of light and composition.

According to Janet Bergstrom, Nielsen’s characters are always sanctioned for their subversive behaviours so as to move back within social norms in the final scenes, yet “she is never a conventional victim”. The end of Towards

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361 Ysabel’s true nature is systematically expressed, underlined by different kinds of hyperboles and displaying the two forms of emotions. The insert on the spider’s web (symbol of Ysabel’s play with men) plays on metonymical hyperbole, typically referring to artefact emotion "like a fly caught in the golden web of the spider".

the Light reveals Ysabel has converted and married to Elias. She is presented by Holger-Madsen as an independent preacher, addressing her own flock, “an angel” for those listening to her. The comparison is again underlined by the use of **iterative hyperbole**: Ysabel, as announced in the prologue, is now an angel with long blond hair, a star shining for the magi in a pious ending vignette, a *tableau vivant*.

In the English production by German director Ewald André Dupont, *Piccadilly* (1929) the double acting articulation is crafted between two separate characters, confronting late 19th century imagery to 20th cinematic culture. In the screenplay by reputed writer Arnold Bennett, Mabel (played by ‘shimmer dance’ inventor Gilda Gray), the star dancer, is the club’s manager, Valentine’s lover. The latter fires her dancing partner because he is jealous of him. Valentine casts ShoSho (Anna Mae Wong), a Chinese servant as his next dancing star after seeing her suggestively dancing in the scullery. When her act proves to be a hit and Valentine falls for her, Mabel turns jealous. So does Jim, who will ultimately kill ShoSho.

Wong’s ethnicity did not allow her to be the lead cast of the film, yet obviously she steals the part away from Gray’s hands. Her formal integration in the stylistic environments through her silhouette, her striped sweaters, features and haircut, but above all her dancing, make her a perfect impersonation of 1920s experimental art. She is the show.

The spectacular is indeed at the core of the film’s emotional discourse. If it is still conveyed by the appearance of a more traditional Mabel (in her expected dress code—lavish feathers, jewellery as well as her pathetic, highly theatrical acting style), it is reshaped by a more distanced approach. Three essential perspectives entail A emotion: the idea of ‘total design’ in setting, specific visual filmic devices and transitional pre–sound era aesthetics features.

The film’s ‘total design’ was coined by Tim Bergfelder as a concept that emphasized pre–planning the ‘look’ of a film before shooting began, thus involving designers with key aspects of creative control during the production process. In *Piccadilly*, the combined work of Dupont, Alfred Junge and Werner Brandes created a stylistic mood to the film. The design was built for a ‘maximum visual impact while at the same time facilitating the work of the camera’. Art Deco aesthetics proved to what point film is considered as art (A emotion). This is confirmed by the abstract geometry of the set, Werner Brandes’s chiaroscuro lighting and Alfred Junge’s amazing set designs. Such is the case of the Piccadilly dancing club with its circular structure, the fluid yet hierarchical organization of the curved balcony, the curvilinear staircases with swirling banisters, the orchestra, the dancing floor and the dining tables.

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363 In *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema*, ed. Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 82.
Moreover, there are relevant details, such as the transparent snail–like staircase at the end of which Shosho meets Valentine. They also contribute to help foster the forthcoming F emotions. Even the way Valentine discovers Shosho for the first time is conditioned by a spatial delocalization in which the flamboyant dancing hall finally leads to the scullery. Artefact emotion concludes the film with its circular ending (a few newspaper men walking with placards—reading “Life goes on at the Scala”) visually echoing the opening credits’ presentation on the London buses.

If most of the film design relies on this A emotion, the visuals may lead to a more complex scheme; such is the case of the sketching scene when Valentine meets Shosho in his office to discuss the fact that she could be part of the dancing show. Shosho sits on a chair with her striped shirt, short skirt and ruined stockings (exposed in a clearly voyeuristic way by close–ups on her legs), explaining that the last time she danced, there were ‘men and knives’ involved, while Valentine is sketching her portrait on a piece of paper. This scene echoes Wong’s stylized portraits by Paul Klee. Emotional bipolarization is expressed quite simultaneously through the portrait (A emotion) and the detailed title about Shosho’s past (F emotion). The use of the Chinese Buddha mascot is first considered as a prop which conveys Shosho’s exotic identity and her national complicity with Jim: it quickly becomes, via an analytic hyperbole, a narrative element entailing, once found on Valentine’s desk, Jim’s jealousy.

The second parameter structuring this complex emotional discourse is to be found in the use of purely cinematographic devices. Just as in Towards the Light, the elaborate cross–cutting which characterizes the film allows once again a very complex display of different kinds of emotions. If the first dance sequence already indicates the possibility to play on two different registers, the Shosho dance definitely sets things between A and F emotion. Establishing the tension in a comparative hyperbole (Mabel asking Valentine “How do like my dance” just before Shosho’s part starts), the cross–cutting alternates the visual impact of Shosho’s dance with Mabel’s watching. It literally suspends the plot. In a perfect oxymoron, Mabel faints while Shosho triumphs.

The third parameter, related to the pre–sound transitional aesthetics, is obviously expressed through synaesthetic effects. These are present through the multiple subliminal perception instances implied in the musical accompaniment, but also by chromatic occurrences (visible in the restored tinted digital copy). A striking example appears in the confrontation between Mabel and Shosho. In a typically Expressionist vein, Mabel’s shadow appears on the street in a blue tinted image, then confronts Shosho with excessive, passionate gestures. Restrained, Shosho glows in her yellow tinted

364 The effects are very similar to the reflecting light, mirrors and shades of Moholy Nagy’s contemporary photographs.
apartment, surrounded by fetishistic exotic objects (goldfishes, oriental folding screen, transparent window pane with a Fujiyama design), naturally triggering emotion A. The physical confrontation will prove to be a synthetic figural hyperbole.

Shosho (like Mod Lyset’s Ysabel) could have easily fallen yet into another stereotype. Oriental clichés sustain her from the moment she becomes Valentine’s dancer (her Chinese handwriting, the chosen dancing costume, but also the dance itself referring to traditional Chinese and Mongolian dances with Jim playing the Chinese *erhu* as background music). Yet, Dupont helps Anna Mae Wong project her character to still another level, suggesting a co-existence both as stereotype and as modern atypical character. In this context, her Chinese identity is both a mark of her perverse manners and of her ambiguous erotic nature. The sequence in downtown Piccadilly, in which she takes Valentine to a Limehouse joint and he confronts her complex personal universe, finally reveals her true nature. Thus, she is now defined by her links with the downtown community. Her situation is perfectly echoed in the *mise en abyme* of the tipsy woman dancing with a black man, thrown out for her interracial misdemeanours.

Far from numerous stereotyped personas from the twenties, the characters embodied by Almirante–Manzini, Nielsen and Wong clearly incarnate feminine emancipation contributing—in narrative and visually codified terms—to set up a structural category which defines their identity. The way they metamorphose at the end of the plot make this point even more relevant. The three characters are linked to a necessary death; Mary’s death brings her doppelgänger Naomi in the picture; Ysabel’s evil side dies, changing her moral status in a ‘reversible melodramatic twist’; Shosho’s murder by Jim, entailed by melodrama’s moral teleology, reinforces her return to a specific national territory. Yet, whatever their ending, what remains of their presence downplays the masculine characters. It is Mary’s image that pervades in the end; Ysabel’s conversion casts a shadow on Elias’ practice, whereas Valentine is literally pushed away from the resolution of Shosho’s death, the plot focusing more on the ethnical dimension.

What these drastic identity changes as well as the characters’ collective dimension (on which we have purposefully insisted) show is that their conscience is “in phase” with the world. Through their destiny, they convey a new view of the world. The extra and intra-diegetic emotions they provoke render this view relevant. Without the articulation of different types of emotional discourse, their worldview would not be perceived as such.

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In Jean–Paul Sartre’s *Theory of emotions*, true emotion is linked to some kind of belief (*croyance*). Emotion is what someone has to endure; we cannot stop it or prevent its physiological manifestations. Sartre explains “consciousness does not only project affective meanings on the surrounding world; it *experiences* the new world that it has just built. […] It means that, when there is no way out, consciousness takes refuge into the magical world of emotion, it literally dives into it, degrading itself.”367 This belief affects the body itself; “the consciousness which is moved resembles the consciousness which is set to sleep. It is throwing itself into a new world and transforms its body, as synthetic totality, so that it can live and seize this world.”

The films’ endings have this strong projective quality. Our thematic and stylistic analyses are only fully completed when one understands that these devices are ways to project characters’ personalities beyond the situation itself. They become symbols of new existing modes. Yet, this is a temporary state of things, related to the potentialities of the silent screen. Soon, these double, innovative feminine representations will leave the floor to more predictable types.

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367 Jean–Paul Sartre, *Esquisse d’une théorie des émotions* (Paris: Hermann, 1995 – first edition in 1938), 52–54, “L’émotion est un phénomène de croyance. La conscience ne se borne pas à projeter des significations affectives sur le monde qui l’entoure; elle vit le monde nouveau qu’elle vient de constituer. Elle le vit directement, elle s’y intéresse, elle souffre les qualités que les conduites ont ébauchées. Cela signifie que, lorsque toutes les voies étaient barrées, la conscience se précipite dans le monde magique de l’émotion, elle s’y précipite tout entière en se dégradant. La conscience qui s’émue ressemble assez à la conscience qui s’endort. Celle-ci, comme celle-là, se jette dans un monde nouveau et transforme son corps, comme totalité synthétique, de façon qu’elle puisse vivre et saisir ce monde neuf à travers lui.”
“Optical Harmonies”: Sight and Sound in Germaine Dulac’s Integral Cinema

Sarah Keller

In the first shots of Germaine Dulac’s 1928 film *Arabesques*, several bare tree branches scoop downward, swaying gently in a breeze, followed by a shot from the ground looking up to the sky through a tangle of branches. This second shot dissolves into a closer view of the same branches and sky, and at this closer range, the sun forms an areola of light. After another dissolve, the same bright light, closer now, is reversed: that is, rather than looking up through the trees, we realize we now look down at a pool of water in which the bright light reflects and shimmers gently. In this brief, fleeting series of images, Dulac establishes the abstract realm of what she called “integral cinema”—something she has described as “a visual symphony made of rhythmic images.”

The unanchoring of the viewing position within the abstract display of images corroborates the feeling that to make sense of this film, the spectator must reconfigure herself in relation to old viewing habits. After these opening shots, squares of pure light flash across the screen, closer and closer, situating the film’s interest squarely in the realm of the abstract play of shadow, light, and reflection.

The three highly experimental short films Germaine Dulac created in 1928 and 1929—*Thèmes et variations*, *Arabesques*, and *Disque 957*—are often cited as exemplary in terms of demonstrating the visual style Dulac adopted as a result of her theories toward a pure or an integral cinema. Replete with cinematic legerdemain and striking imagery, these films profess Dulac’s profound interest in the “purely visual” elements of cinema. Dulac appears to privilege the visual in her theorizations about the cinema, as well as in her films themselves. Indeed, for Dulac “visuality” is the most basic and necessary condition of cinematographic expressivity, a quality she laments that most commercial films neglect.

It would be a mistake to neglect the importance of Dulac’s privileging of the visual in her films and theories about film as a medium. However, alongside this theoretical and practical emphasis on the visual—even in this set of highly abstract and imagistic films, where visuality seems to be the end rather than the means of cinematic expression—Dulac’s work depends upon not just visuality but a submerged audibility. Even when she insists that “The cinema is a silent art. Silent expression is its categorical rule”, we must remember that

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music is something of an exception to the rule she outlines. While in some of her later work (Celles qui s’en font, e.g.) Dulac directly experiments with sound–on–disc recording and the way in which music or sound might work with images, the idea of musical sounds, cadences, rhythms and harmonies exerts a less–direct but highly important influence on Dulac’s understanding of the cinema even in the silent era. For Dulac, sound is not a counter–valence to visuality; indeed, it shares the same aesthetic principles she embraces within the principle of the visual in her films. Thus collisions between sound and image—“optical harmonies,” a “symphony” of “rhythmic images,” “sonorous visuals,” etc.—dominate the language Dulac uses to describe her film practice. In part because of her investment in questions of medium–specificity, which are filtered through debates about “pure poetry” and “pure cinema,” Dulac inflects her film work with a unique relationship to the “silent” screen, one which she imagines as full of vibrant, sonorously visual symphonies.

Germaine Dulac’s film work touches many genres at once. Her films run to all ends of the generic kaleidoscope: from Impressionist and Surrealist experiments to documentary newsreels to melodramas to serial adventures to pure cinema. By 1923, in the midst of (and intimately related to) her involvement with what would later be known as Impressionist cinema, and having recently completed La Souriante Madame Beudet, Dulac picks up on the discourse surrounding pure cinema. For example, she cites her film’s expression of “ideas, sensations, light…” and notes that the more abstract of these expressions are as highly valuable as those that serve narrative ends. Indeed, the two tendencies (abstraction, narration) work together. The next year, at a conference at the Musée Galliera, Dulac discusses “the expressive processes of cinema, the role of different shots and angles and perspectives, dissolves, superimpositions, blurring, deformations.”

The language of film, for Dulac, depends less upon what happens when (although she worked in narrative forms on a regular basis), and more upon what is expressed, emotionally and aesthetically, through or even despite the exigent surface of the narrative. This language draws directly upon what she saw as the potent, ephemeral qualities of music, which convey in a highly abstract way sensuous information.

371 Germaine Dulac, “Entretein de Germaine Dulac avec Paul Desclaux,” Écrits, 27. While the central discursive feature of La Souriante Madame Beudet is an Impressionist interest in the subjective, introspective state of its eponymous protagonist, the qualities Dulac cites here are those which go beyond the Impressionist tenet of access to the subjective states of its characters. Moreover, Dulac never completely abandons some of the Impressionist strategies of this film in later works, so it is not as if she “develops” away from this initial aesthetic. Instead, she tends to mix strategies for whatever specific cinematic purpose she has at hand.
In order to express cinematic ideas, Dulac uses objects, framings, light, and duration to create a drama enacted through visual elements carefully balanced in shifting oppositions. Her notion of pure cinema depends upon elevating the audience’s ability properly to perceive and appreciate the seventh art. Moreover, for Dulac, cinematic comprehension ought to draw upon a “visual sense, analogous to a musical sense.”\(^{373}\) That is, while a pure cinema requires developing and refining a sense of visual aesthetics, the audience would have a fuller sense of what is required of their engagement with pure cinema by drawing upon their understanding something of music.

Music serves as a special touchstone for Dulac, and as such it directly features in a number of her silent films. In *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, for example, the title character enjoys playing Debussy on the piano, and employs music as an imaginative sonic escape from her husband. His character, moreover, is developed in relation to his appreciation for opera. Revolted by his provincial musical interests, Madame Beudet refuses to go with him to the opera one evening. When she settles in for the night, happily alone and ready to bask in her solitude, she discovers that he has locked her piano. Being denied access to the pleasure of her own music in Monsieur Beudet’s absence, she decides to prepare his revolver for an “accidental suicide.” Music is that important to her. Others of Dulac’s films also present pivotal musical situations. *La Folie des Vaillants* (1925) concerns the musical talent of a gypsy, whose violin charms all who hear it. *L’Invitation au voyage* (1927) and *La Princesse Mandane* (1928) both include key scenes in which characters dance (or decline to dance) to prominently featured bands. Dulac’s films are simply saturated with music that no one in her audience hears.

Besides scenes that feature music directly, Dulac’s films engage musical rhythm on the visual level. Of *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, her former secretary recollects Dulac’s comment about the accumulation of visual rhythm, which builds ultimately toward a climax: “[These are] simple gestures, simple looks by Madame Beudet toward her husband—but one will feel through the course of the film the intensification of these looks […] announcing the final drama. This progression […] works above all through the play of shots and their rhythm.”\(^{374}\) Dulac’s sense of montage is based upon the development of a rhythm according to the needs—whether narrative, documentary, or experimental—of each film. The rhythmic sense—both underscores the narrative movement of *La Souriante Madame Beudet* and generates meanings of its own, founded on conveying a feeling through the (in this case) acceleratory power of rhythms. To borrow a musical term, it is the crescendo of the film’s montage that builds to the cli-

\(^{373}\) Germaine Dulac, “Quelques réflexions sur le ‘Cinéma Pur,’” *Écrits*, 74. My emphasis. Dulac spends a good deal of energy attempting to develop this sensibility in her audience: she lectures extensively throughout France about a selection of films striking in their imagery (e.g., Abel Gance’ *La Roue*) in the 1920s and 1930s.

\(^{374}\) Danou, *op cit.*, 22.
max. Dulac considers herself the orchestrator of that rhythm and of the subsequent emotions it evokes.

In addition to the praxis of her films, Dulac’s theoretical writings often cite music in relation to cinema. Laurent Guido has convincingly categorized Dulac as a key figure embodying the “age of rhythm,” the period of the 1910s–1920s when discourses surrounding the arts, and especially the cinema, were indelibly marked by the question of rhythm therein. In a particularly apposite chapter, Guido traces the use of musical analogy in relation to pure cinema during this period, both through the dominant philosophical concepts in circulation in France at this time and through the writings of important practitioners or critics of cinema, including Dulac. In this context, Guido convincingly demonstrates the often contradictory nature of the comparison drawn between cinema and music in Dulac’s thinking. For instance, rhythm is both concrete, even geometrical in its construction, and numinous, having validity as an expressive technique mainly in the realm of the ineffable, of the fleeting sensation. Similarly, in Richard Abel’s account of the debates around pure cinema in France at the end of the 1920s, he notes that Dulac at that particular moment in her career seems to abandon narrative form altogether, though at other times she had embraced it: “Dulac…imagine[s] a cinema entirely autonomous from narrative […] Dulac now repeatedly defends a non–representational cinema that would bring to the surface from the depths an ´imperceptible music.´” Her abandonment of narrative lines suggests a desire to see how far the musical analogy might stretch.

The comparison with music in fact drives Dulac’s thinking even when it is not stretched to its limits. In part, Dulac asserts the comparison between them in order to raise the cinema to the level of the more established musical art, by association. However, her use of the musical analogy goes well beyond this rationale. It provides a framework, almost paradoxically, for developing her own and the spectator’s sense of the visual. As she notes: “The musician plays with sounds, like the cineaste plays with images.”

376 See Guido, Chapters 3–4 especially.
378 Along these lines, Dulac also frequently compares the cinema to poetry and dance. For example, see Dulac, “Cinéma et poésie,” where she notes: “One has copiously denied in the course of recent inquiries the poetic possibilities of the cinema. This attitude has disconcerted me because the cinema is poetry itself, much more than theatre, much more than spectacle. It is rhythm in its oppositions and concordances. It is harmony.” From the Dulac archive at the Bibliothèque du film (Paris), DULAC Box 311: Folder 3.
379 Dulac, “Aphorismes…” Écrits, 60.
Because Dulac presupposes her audience’s unfamiliarity with the artistic terrain of integral cinema, she draws upon their affinity for musical analogy as a way to strengthen their ability to traverse that terrain.

In her most experimental films, Dulac directly seeks to express her vision of integral cinema. That vision also embodies a sonic sense: optical harmony. *Disque 957*—which Dulac based on two of Frédéric Chopin’s *Preludes* (numbers 5 and 6)—explores the actual spinning of Dulac’s record of Chopin’s music alongside several associated images, creating a rhythm in the visual realm that echoes the rhythms inherent in the record which is its subject and focus. The film begins with an image of the record player and a hand putting the needle to the record. The image cuts to an overhead view of the spinning record. Then, through a series of dissolves, Dulac highlights only certain sectors of the record, masking the rest of the image so as to draw attention to different parts of the disc.

Whether Dulac literally intended Chopin’s music to accompany a screening of this film, she meant the *idea* of this music to accompany it. Being suspicious of musical accompaniment, which was both too variable and too powerful to be ignored, Dulac likewise distrusted synchronized sound in the early days of sound cinema for the distortions that often occurred. (Note, incidentally, that this set of films falls exactly on the threshold of the transition from the silent into the sound era of cinema.) In Dulac’s mind, anyway, although music serves as an apt metaphor for cinematic expression, the visual on its own is sufficient for conveying ideas (musical ideas, too): “the image is already a visual symphony […]. The music must submit to [the image].”

*Disque 957* is underscored by the idea of Chopin’s music, and the images she chooses aim to picture these rhythms. While Dulac both imagines an image’s ability to generate sound (through focus on a record and through, perhaps, the convention of accompanying silent films with music) and essentially demonstrates the ability of the camera to highlight whatever it chooses (through masking), here she also seems to explore the *surface* quality of an image, by highlighting the inaccessibility of what belongs properly to the soundtrack in the image track. Where is the sound? Is it here, on this part of the record? The image of a record is not the sound recorded on it, as Dulac realizes; instead, the image of a sound–making device *associates* sound and image. Of much greater importance, certainly, than *where* the music, is the music’s effect upon us. Dulac uses a musical metaphor and evocative images essentially to create the same sort of mood, reportedly, she found in listening.

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381 Dulac’s interest in the relationship between sound and image finds further expression in the sound era when she makes a series of short films accompanied by popular songs and illustrative of those songs in some way, including *Celles qui s’en font*, featuring the song “À la derrière.”
382 Danou, *op. cit.*, 22.
to her own disque 957 in the first place. The fact that the images pulse and move according to a compelling montage only further corroborates the impulse for music Dulac professes in the context of this film.

The association of sound and image is crucial to Dulac’s sense of visual rhythm and symphonic imagery:

The integral film we dream of composing is a visual symphony made of rhythmic images in which the sensations of an artist coordinate and are projected onto the screen. A musician doesn’t always write under the inspiration of a story; more often it’s under the inspiration of a feeling. The Garden in the rain by Debussy or the Raindrop Prelude by Chopin, for example, are the expressions of a soul which pours its heart out, reacting among objects.383

The objects (i.e., the image of these objects) among which the soul finds expression are the point of fixation for Dulac’s series of abstract films. In content, these films deal with correspondences among sometimes diverse—seeming things, and the camera highlights both these things’ self-sufficient alchemy and the way in which they accrue meaning based on their relationship with each other. The resultant feeling—the soul pouring itself out—finds expression in Dulac’s case through images, but as we have seen, it comes into being with the assistance of the metaphor of music and the sound submerged in the reference to Chopin and others of her favorite composers.

As suggested above, for Dulac, a pure cinema is, after all, a visual phenomenon. Integral cinema is “pure movement or abstract expressions, purely visual, whether lyrical, poetic, psychological.”384 Thus the cinema shouldn’t simply tell stories; it should also express something less causal, based on the drama of harmonies and rhythms in correspondence with the sensations and feelings of her protagonists. Importantly, the sensations of both the film-maker and the protagonists are shared with the audience as a result of rhythm; we feel certain sensations because visual rhythm—any kind of rhythm—is something one feels, even bodily. In fact, sensation is at the heart of Dulac’s admixture of visual and auditory elements. While she depends upon visual images for their ability to mobilize the foundational tools of cinematic écriture, she doesn’t wish to undercut the felt sensation that more aptly derives from rhythmic endeavors like those associated with the aurality of poetry and the sonorous qualities of music. As Guido notes, Dulac draws upon the German Romanticist tradition “which attributes a privileged link between music and the immaterial, the stirrings of the soul.”385 Dulac, he claims, believes in the possibility that the sensibility and sensations accessed by the cinéaste might be conveyed to her audience through the immaterial

385 Guido, 141.
realms of light and movement fashioned into particular rhythms.\footnote{Guido, 157. Guido argues that the debates surrounding \textit{cinéma pur} fall into two camps: those, like Léon Moussinac, who privilege \textit{sentiment}, and those, like Dulac, who privilege \textit{sensation}. He notes that these camps are not dichotomies; instead, they depend upon “a degree of radicality between two forms of sensation: the one part [\textit{sentiment}] which involves always sentiment and the other part [\textit{sensation}] its pure form, which is supposed to be free of it.”} In this way, Dulac draws upon the privileged position of music to access such immaterial realms and then confers that position upon the cinema.

Rhythms are created through the patterning of images in Dulac’s abstract films. For example, in \textit{Thèmes et variations}, where the title itself draws upon musical analogy, the imagery draws upon dance, allowing Dulac to extend the parameters of artistic rhythm through reference to another rhythmic art form. In this film, Dulac’s imagery and editing strive to create meaning through juxtaposition:

This is the effort I have attempted in \textit{Thèmes et variations}, where thanks to the image, a sort of correspondence of rhythm attempts to create a simple pleasure for the eyes, without a story: the movement of machines, of a dancer, a cinegraphic ballet.\footnote{Dulac, “La nouvelle evolution,” \textit{Écrits}, 139.}

At first this juxtaposition seems so straightforward as to be almost banal. Images of a ballerina are crosscut with various pieces of machinery; their movements complement each other, forging a connection between the organic movements of the woman and the mechanical movements of the machinery.

Rather than simply reducing the ballerina to mechanical movement, however, we must remember that Dulac—steeped in modernist fascination for mechanization as well as technology (the cinema most especially)—is also raising mechanical movement to the level of a high art: the ballet.\footnote{This mixture of high and low art in bringing the fascination for the quotidian in contact with the ballet serves as the theme of the infamous collaborative dance performance piece from the previous decade, \textit{Parade}, by Diaghilev, Satie, Cocteau, Picasso, et al.}

Most of the film follows this format of a crosscutting that highlights the relationship between human and machine parts and motions. However, at the very end of the film, the imagery shifts, and Dulac suddenly complicates this simple juxtaposition. Now she includes images of nature—where the ballerina mimics the sprouting of a seed, for example, or where a waterwheel dissolves into water.

Initially these images seem to operate under the same pretension as the earlier imagery—hands are like seeds, etc.—with the difference simply that now the ballerina is compared to natural phenomena rather than mechanical movement. However, the syntax of the film and the presentation of its imagery belie the simplicity of such a formulation. Superimposition, masks, and dissolves become more prevalent, and they link nature, machinery, and images that don’t seem properly to belong to either end of the spectrum from natural to mechanical, like...
a close-up of a bell, or images so abstract as to be indecipherable as objects (as the waterwheel, above). Moreover, the pace of the film slows, and the images compile according to an unrestrictive, suggestive logic. In fact, the “variations” of the title therefore become unbound from the terms of the original themes and re-asserted according to the logic of a visual rhythm. Dulac presses the film into the service of a statement about rhythm itself by mobilizing the complex rhythmic language unique to cinema. The patterns of images rendered through montage possess their own, revelatory logic.

Even Dulac’s narrative films situate both character subjectivity and aesthetic concerns in the tools of the camera, demonstrating a concern with the rhythm specific to the cinematic medium. For instance, in *La Princesse Mandane*, the protagonist spies a bejeweled crown in a strongly protected vault. Dulac renders the crown as a stunningly sharp-focused close-up at first, before letting the image go blurry for a moment. There is a slight shift of the camera from left to right before the crown snaps back into stunning, dazzling sharp focus again. A dance scene which takes place at the same moment elsewhere is cross cut into the action of stealing the crown, and it features similar movement—following the dancers left and right. By capitalizing on the rhythm of the dance but associating it with the realm of the cinematic (a stunning close up), Dulac creates a particular example of cinematic rhythm in the context of narrative.

Dulac consistently imports ideas about music relative to the cinema, as well as their mutual concern for rhythm. She mixes sonic/musical and visual elements in the cinema mainly in two ways: she uses sonic media as a metaphor for how visual images generate affect and meaning, or she mixes the two in an intentional synesthetic blending of the senses. In “Le Succès d’un film?” she depicts visual images in sonic terms:

The image is not only the photographic reproduction of an act or something seen, but also and more so a dramatic harmony, a harmony in which fullness and tone are facts put rightly in the place of visual, sensitive, and expressive elements which compose it, cast in the measure of a movement—rhythm.389 In a silent cinema where she believes “tone” can nonetheless be a fact, Dulac mobilizes principles of sound, harmony, and rhythm in order better to represent the significance of purely visual phenomena. Whether Dulac is working in narrative forms or in forms that more easily allow for the play of oppositions and correspondences, she manages to strike a graphic, rhythmic, musical harmony by juxtaposing the various abstract lines her images take.

National and Transnational Stardom
Lovability and Problematic Gunshots: Mary Pickford, Her Films and Finnish Film Culture
Jaakko Seppälä

Hollywood makes stars because stars sell movies, as Richard Dyer has put it. It goes without saying that this function is not restricted to American markets. When Hollywood films were imported to Finland in increasing numbers in the years following the First World War, names and images of Hollywood stars began to appear on the pages of local papers and magazines. Both Finnish film distributors and exhibitors used stars systematically to advertise the latest motion pictures. Various magazines directed the public’s interest into the private lives of stars by publishing star–related articles. In the new star discourse, Finnish film culture got amalgamated with Hollywood films and promotional material.

In the late 1910s and early 1920s one of the biggest Hollywood stars in Finland was Mary Pickford—“America’s Sweetheart”. Lovability was also a major characteristic of her Finnish star image. However, in 1921 her sweetness was momentarily beclouded by the critical reception of one of her major films. Even though Hollywood kept marketing its products as politically free entertainment, foreign audiences made sense of them on their own terms. Hence, even an actress whose star image was as immaculate as that of Pickford could become a political concern.

*A Star is Born*
In late 1919 *Suomen Kuvalehti*—which at the time was the general interest magazine with the biggest circulation in Finland—published a portrait of Mary Pickford on its front cover. A modest text accompanied this image: “Mary Pickford, one of the most popular and attractive film actresses.”

There is nothing more about her in the issue. In the published image, which seems to be a publicity still, Pickford peeks through a chink of a door. She smiles and looks eye–catching but, I would say, slightly shy. Pickford’s beauty, which is present both in the image and the caption, was to be an important element of her Finnish star image. To what extent the reading public were familiar with Pickford and her films at the time this image was published is not an easy question to answer. On the basis of film censorship documents it appears that in 1919 her major feature films were still unknown in Finland. None of the Pickford films distributed by Arclight Pictures had been seen in the country. However, it is likely that some of the Pickford films distributed by Paramount Pictures had been released in the mid 1910s.

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391 *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 37, 1919, cover.
Furthermore, a number of Finns must have heard rumors about Pickford’s worldwide fame, as many had relatives who had immigrated to the United States. It is also worth pointing out that in 1915 Pickford’s high salary had been discussed in a short-lived film magazine Biograafilehti and she had even been called a star. However, we should not jump to any hasty conclusions. The magazine was not widely read. Furthermore, in Finland such discussions were rare in the late 1910s and so were Pickford films. As Janet Staiger has pointed out, we need to ask whether audiences saw actors as stars. When it comes to Pickford, I do not think they did, not yet. Before the turn of the 1920s star-related publicity material was not widely available in the country.

Considering that Pickford’s private life was not discussed in public, I have reached the conclusion that “America’s Sweetheart” was still, in the terms of Richard deCordova, a picture personality in Finnish film culture. According to deCordova “the intertextuality that constituted the identity of the picture personality was produced and maintained largely by the cinema itself.” This was the situation in Finland in the late 1910s. Images and texts, like the article published in Biograafilehti and the cover of Suomen Kuvalehti, did not much expand this identity as they are related to Pickford’s films and her professional identity. In Finland, the private lives of film actors and actresses were not generally, if at all, discussed in public before the turn of the 1920s.

In the spring of 1920 Suomen Kuvalehti published yet another Pickford photograph on its front cover. This image differs from the earlier one in some significant respects, making it indicative of Pickford’s new status in Finnish film culture. In this image, an elegant-looking Pickford poses for the camera. It is a portrait. In other words, it is an image of Pickford instead of being an image of an actress named Pickford playing a character. Furthermore, an inscription is discernible. The published image is a publicity portrait. As such, it is an indicator of American fan culture coming to Finland. A caption saying “Pickford is the highest paid woman in the world” accompanies this portrait. Nothing is said on the cover about her being an actress. A shift of interest is evident. Pickford is now represented as a person—not as a professional actress.

The shift is also evident in the article on Pickford that is published in this issue titled “The best-paid woman in the world: A description of a visit to

395 Suomen Kuvalehti, issue 12, 1920, cover.
the home of a world famous actress”. Thora Holm, who wrote this text and to whom the image published on the front cover is dedicated, was a journalist working for Swedish film magazine *Filmjournalen*. It seems that *Suomen Kuvalehti* had bought this article and translated it into Finnish. The editorial board clearly expected there to be interest for an article on Pickford. Whether this was because she was widely known as an actress or because readers were supposedly interested in the best-paid woman in the world is a tricky question to answer. The latter is likely but at this time she may also have had admirers in Finland.

As the article’s rubric suggests, Holm writes about her meeting with Pickford and her mother at the star’s home. Several aspects of Pickford’s star image that were to persist throughout the 1920s are present in this early article. This makes it a key text in the study of the development of Pickford’s Finnish star image. The article offers readers, in the words of Jon Burrows, an experience of authentic personality. Holm stresses how Pickford is both ordinary and extraordinary. In the words of Holm, her persona is small and artless. The author says she found it hard to believe the Pickford she talked with was the distinguished film star. She was so modest and pleasant. Small and artless she might have been, but at the same time she was extraordinary. The most marvellous things about Pickford, according to Holm, are her long golden hair, beautiful brown eyes, fine-looking skin and body of a twelve-year-old. Pickford, Holm stresses, receives invitations to marry and from 2000 to 3000 fan letters a day. Here characteristics of childlikeness and womanliness are represented as indicative of Pickford’s real self, which, according to Gaylyn Studlar, was the state of affairs in the United States as well. More intimate revelations concern Pickford’s dreams and hopes. Pickford, for example, had told Holm she wished she could travel to Europe someday for the reason that she received so many letters from there. I suppose there were those who hoped she would also visit Finland. Among the issues mentioned readers learned about Pickford’s career and high salary. Bluntly put, this article was supposed to give the readers an idea of what kind of a person the world famous actress was.

Some of the most persisting myths about Pickford and her career that circulated in the United States were imported to Finland with the publication of Holm’s article. Pickford, just to give an example, had told Holm she had begun her acting career when she was only five years old. This, however, is

396 Thora Holm, “Maailman parhain palkattu nainen: Kuvainskäyminä maailmankuulun näyttelijäluona.”, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, issue 12, 1920, 290.
not true as according to Pickford biographer Eileen Whitfield she was eight years old when she first starred on stage.\(^{399}\) In other words this interview, just like the imported publicity stills and portraits, were building a certain kind of image of Pickford. Pickford’s Finnish star image was, in effect, largely controlled by the Hollywood studios. However, whether something is true or not is beside the point. When it comes to star images what really matters is what is \textit{said} to be true. That is what gets discussed.

\textit{Oh, Little Girl, Never Grow Up}

In the early 1920s more Pickford related articles were published in Finland. One of these appeared in 1921 in the newly founded film magazine \textit{Filmiaitta} (and in its Swedish language edition \textit{Filmrevyn}). The anonymous author of this article depicts Pickford’s beauty and kindness in poetic terms and stresses how these are destined to warm the cockles of one’s heart. Interestingly, next to nothing is said about Pickford’s career and private life. It is as if the author is not willing to make a distinction between Pickford and the characters she plays. This text, even though presumably written by a journalist working for the magazine, is best interpreted as an expression of fandom. As such, the article largely indicates what the attraction was all about. In the light of this text contemporaries saw Pickford as a fairytale princess […] who is good, simple and a natural soul that does not want to know anything about pretence and hypocrisy\(^{400}\). Even though Pickford was a talented woman and many contemporaries knew about her long acting career, success and enormous earnings, she was discussed as a benevolent girl, some even referred to her as a doll.\(^{401}\) The characters she plays in her films are good–hearted girls. In contemporary discussions those characters are always referred to as children and under no circumstances as women. Even though it was possible to think of Pickford as a “child–woman,” my argument is that in the Finnish discourse of the early 1920s her girlish attributes somewhat outweighed more mature ones\(^{402}\). It seems that Finns did not pay as much attention to the private lives of Hollywood stars as they did to their screen performances. Hollywood divorces, drug addictions and murders were discussed in Finnish magazines but star scandals were an unknown phenomenon in Finland.\(^{403}\)


\(^{400}\) Anonymous, "Mary Pickford", \textit{Filmiaitta}, issue 2, 1921, 18.


According to the article published in Filmiaitta Finns now had the pleasure of seeing Pickford in one of her latest roles—that is, as “a young orphaned girl” in *A Romance of the Red Woods*.404 This film directed by Cecil B. DeMille had been released in The United States already in 1917—four years earlier. *A Romance of the Red Woods* was in no way one of Pickford’s latest films as claimed. Because new first-rate Hollywood films, like the ones starring Pickford, were expensive, Finnish distributors and exhibitors could afford them only years after their initial release dates. This conclusion can be reached by comparing Finnish and American released dates of prestige productions and star vehicles. Thus, feature films starring Pickford had not yet been screened in Finland in the late 1910s. A peculiar state of affairs resulted from this disparity between the release dates: Finns knew about Pickford’s career, private life and popularity but had not seen her feature films. This created expectations.

One by one, the anticipated Pickford films were imported to Finland in the early 1920s. No box office records survive from the silent days, but the popularity of these new films cannot only be interpreted solely on the basis of the type and amount of advertisements and criticism published in contemporary magazines and newspapers. We must also take into account the discussions that took place around Pickford and her films in the readers’ sections of Finnish film magazines. When United Artists opened its office in Helsinki it advertised coming attractions with major stars like Pickford.405 Pickford’s films were also advertised in big magazines like *Suomen Kuvalehti*.406 Furthermore, film magazines published a variety of Pickford related questions and answers sent by their readers. One who used the pseudonym “Shimmy”, just to give an example, wanted to know if other readers’ of *Filmiaitta* knew whether Douglas Fairbanks and his wife Pickford were still in Europe.407 Other kinds of Pickford related texts were also published in film magazines. One reader who used the pseudonym Pick Landwart had written a poem celebrating Pickford’s role in *The Poor Little Rich Girl* (Maurice Tourneur, 1917) to be published in *Filmrevyn*.408 Considering the number of advertisements and the quantity and quality of these discussions it seems that most Finns did not mind watching old films as long as they were as good as those starring Pickford as an adolescent girl. This is an important fact to notice because in 1924 one anonymous reviewer wrote about how old anticipated films had often turned out to be disappointments.409

409 Anonymous, “Fimikronikka”, *Ylioppilaslehti* 21 (1924), s. 334.
Dickensian Atmosphere

A Romance of the Red Woods opened in Finland in late 1921. Stella Maris (Marshall Neilan, 1918) soon followed. The anonymous journalist working for Filmiaitta stressed in poetic words what a pleasure it was to see the celestial star in A Romance of the Red Woods. The film, when it comes to Pickford’s role as a brave orphan, seems to have fulfilled all expectations that had been fostered by the press. Stella Maris, on the other hand, was not as easily digested. In late 1921 Filmiaitta published a review of the film written by an anonymous author. In this review Pickford is volubly praised for her dual role in the film. She plays the role of Stella Maris, a young crippled girl, and that of Unity Blake, an insecure orphan who is neither beautiful nor happy like the other character. According to Kevin Brownlow, “for the most beautiful star in the world to play such an ugly character was an act of courage unprecedented in the cinema”.

The plot of Stella Maris, the reviewer argues, is badly inflated. According to him the climax of the film shows a lack of judgement and exemplifies bad taste. At the time when there was no yellow press in Finland and critics felt it was best to neglect inferior films instead of writing negative reviews, this was harsh criticism. In the climax under discussion, Unity shoots her former mistress who is a bitter alcoholic released from imprisonment short time ago. She does this partly as a revenge but also because the woman stands in the way of the love affair of Stella Maris and John Risca who is legally married to this spiteful character. After committing the cold–blooded murder, Unity takes her own life. The suicide takes place off–screen. When the mistress and Unity, who has also been in love with John, lie dead, Stella is happily united with her loved one. “A happy ending is achieved at the cost of two lives”, as Brownlow has put it.

In the review under analysis, the two gunshots are seen as highly problematic. With a different ending, it seems, the film would have been rather good. Just how spectators reacted to this criticised climax is not known. The published review has at the very least directed attention to these awkward aspects. Some, however, seem to have found the film to their liking. One of Filmiaittà’s readers actually began to use “Stella Maris” as her pseudonym on the readers’ section. The review, it seems to me, is best seen as an indirect expression of contemporary attitudes. Many liked Stella Maris, that

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410 Anonymous, "Mary Pickford", Filmiaitta, issue 2, 1921, 18.
413 "Toimituksen huomautus", Filmiaitta, issue 10, 1923, 134.
much is likely, but at least some found the conclusion unacceptable. The purpose of the review was to make them think just that.

The important question is: why did the anonymous reviewer, and supposedly many spectators as well, find these gunshots so problematic when Pickford and her films were loved in general? One might assume that answer relates to the Dickensian atmosphere of *Stella Maris*, although Finns at the time were not against melodrama and tragic endings in general. Numerous Tsarist films, which are famous for melodramatic action and unhappy if not even horrifying endings, were popular and appreciated in Finland. Even in the early 1920s after Finland had gained independence Finnish critics wrote positively about them. In other words there must have been something else in *Stella Maris* that related to Finnish culture in a troubling way.

In Finland *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (John S. Robertson, 1920) premiered around the same time with *Stella Maris*. This is another film with a tragic ending where the leading actor, in this case John Barrymore, plays a double role. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was a tremendous success at the box–office and critics vastly praised it. Barrymore’s acting skills were especially celebrated. It seems to have been acceptable for him to play the obnoxious role of Mr. Hyde. However, although Pickford’s role as Unity showed skill, it was found to be troubling and unattractive. One considerable reason behind this may have been the fact that at the time Barrymore was largely unknown in Finland whereas Pickford had a robust star image as a sweet fairytale princess. Barrymore playing Mr. Hyde gave taste of his considerable acting skills without violating audiences’ expectations. The cruel ending of *Stella Maris* was so uneasy to watch because it was the lovely Pickford playing the role of the murderer who ends up taking her own life. Many Finns must have felt that Unity was not the Pickford they had read about and paid to see.

*They Both Reached for the Gun*

Both *Stella Maris* and *A Romance of the Red Woods* premiered in Finland in late 1921. Pickford handles revolvers in both films, but only *Stella Maris* was criticised for the way in which she does this. Clearly it is worth exploring how Pickford’s star image and the comments published in *Filmiaitta* relate to these gunslinging scenes.

*A Romance of the Red Woods* tells the story of an orphaned girl named Jenny Lawrence who travels to the West to live with her uncle. When preparing for her journey a friend warns her of the dangers lurking in the West by showing her a drawing depicting settlers attacked by Native Americans.

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Jenny pulls out a small revolver and shows it to her friend. This is a statement of her ability to defend herself. However, the gun is so tiny that spectators are hardly impressed. Then she proceeds to demonstrate how the revolver works. At the moment of pulling the trigger she is slightly looking away from her assumed target. In other words Jenny knows how the gun works but she lacks both guts and skill to use it properly. This scene emphasizes Jenny’s vulnerability even while telling about her determination and courage. Here, attributes of Victorian femininity are mixed with characteristics of the new woman.

Later in the film Jenny faces a situation where she is threatened by an outlaw holding a bullwhip. Jenny takes her revolver and aims to shoot. The gun, however, is not loaded and she is too scared to look at her target. Her threatening does not make much of an impact on the outlaw. Being sure Jenny will not be able to shoot, he gives her his huge long barrelled revolver. "Try this one—it’s loaded!", the intertitle says. Instead of grabbing the gun Jenny starts to sob. The outlaw—and presumably spectators as well—were right about her: there is no way she is going to be a killer.

In Jenny’s last gun scene in *A Romance of the Red Woods* she rides a stagecoach that gets robbed by the outlaw and his companion. Being determined at the moment of danger she takes her small revolver and loads it. By now Jenny has spent enough time in the West to have gained more gumption and talent for defending herself. When outside the stagecoach she aims properly at the masked outlaw whom she does not recognise. Then she shoots. She hits the outlaw in the arm wounding him. This wound becomes a vital plot device. It is a stigma in the hand of the outlaw with whom Jenny is falling in love. Later in the film he wants to reform and Jenny protects him from villagers who recognise him from this wound and want him hanged—perhaps Jenny even begins to regret she ever shot at him. All things considered Jenny is a brave good-hearted girl, just the kind of beautiful character Finns of the day expected Pickford to play. Even when handling guns Jenny is true to the star image the audience had learned to take pleasure in.

In the climax of *Stella Maris*, Pickford handles a gun in a different way. In the scene in question mistreated Unity Blake is an angry and bitter character that intrudes her former mistress’s house while she is asleep. In other words here we have Unity breaking the law. Unity stalks in the dark corridors carrying a pistol in her coat pocket though spectators do not know about the gun just yet. Parallel editing is used to indicate that the former mistress wakes to the noises Unity makes. Gloomy low-key lighting emphasises dark tensions. At one point light falls on the eyes of Unity whose face and body are surrounded by vast shadows. She does not blink. Her staring eyes foreground her determinedness. Unity might not know what she is about to face

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but whatever that might be she is ready to go through with it. Looking quietly ahead she opens the door to her former mistress’s bedroom and closes it behind her. There is no way out. When the mistress is fully awake and realises who is in her room she mocks the intruder. She makes clear her intention to go on with her wicked deeds until she has broken Stella Maris’ heart. Unity’s memories of herself being mistreated by this woman are now depicted. Hoping to protect Stella from such sufferings and exacting revenge Unity pulls the trigger of the gun she holds in her pocket. A cloud of smoke bursts in to the room and the former mistress dies. Then Unity shoots herself. This suicide, however, takes place off-screen and spectators learn about it later. The gun in her pocket must be as small as the one seen in A Romance of the Red Woods. However, at close range and when properly aimed it is just as deadly as the one that is held by the outlaw in A Romance in the Red Woods.

In the United States Pickford was loved for playing angels with “dirty faces”. In the early 1920s Finns were eager to see her play such characters. This interest had been fed by material published in magazines. However, Unity was something different—certainly not an angel. Her actions not only violated the audience’s expectations but their morals as well.

**Contextualising the Case**

It seems the actions that Unity takes in the climax of Stella Maris steeply contradicted expectations that had been created by the Finnish press and more conventional Pickford films like A Romance of the Red Woods. Skillfully narrated melodramatic action where lovability is contrasted with brutality in realistic surroundings—like in Stella Maris—truly shocked many Finns of the day. There are interesting cases that prove this. For example, D. W. Griffith’s murky London melodrama Broken Blossoms was relentlessly cut by national film censorship. Explicit sexuality and violent scenes were among issues the film sensors ruled against. Apparently the most violent scenes of Broken Blossoms were at least shortened, although it is not known what exactly was cut. However, even in this cut form the film appalled Filmiaitta’s anonymous reviewer. Witnessing how a father beats her daughter’s love affair to pieces with great enjoyment was, according to this reviewer, so vulgar that audiences would surely detest it. Without these bursts of violence that are contrasted with lovability the reviewer would have liked the film. Broken Blossoms was praised for fine acting and Griffith’s story telling. This criticism is surprisingly similar to that on Stella Maris.

Conversely, the melodramatic scenes in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde were acceptable, even pleasing in all their nastiness, because they were not tied to lovability or to realism for that matter. In Filmiaitta the film was reviewed

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420 Valtion elokuvatarkastamon päätösasiakirja 12169.
421 Anonymous, "Katkenneita kukkasia", Filmiaitta, issue 12, 1923, 156.
unambiguously as a suspense story based on a well-known novel. According to the reviewer, the film told a lot about the dual nature of man. The unpleasant scenes where Jekyll is transformed to Hyde were seen as being depicted with horrifying realism. Yet this realism differed from that of *Stella Maris* and *Broken Blossoms*. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a fantasy film whereas *Stella Maris* and *Broken Blossoms* lack fantasy elements altogether. It seems that there was something in the lifelikeness and recognisability of the events and milieus portrayed in these two films that troubled some Finns.

To understand why the realism of the melodramatic events depicted in *Stella Maris* was seen that troubling it is necessary to contextualise the reception of the film a bit further. In 1918, soon after becoming a sovereign state, Finland faced a civil war. Revolutionary elements, inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, took over the country’s socialist movement and called for a general uprising. It has been estimated that around 36,000 people died during this conflict and many were tortured and mutilated. In the early 1920s when *Stella Maris* and other films discussed in this article were reviewed in *Filmiaitta* the nation was severely traumatized by these events. In my view the Civil War and its aftermath are contextual factors that must have affected the reception of these and other films. However, one needs to be careful in making such assumptions. The events of 1918 were not openly discussed, least of all in film-related articles. In other words, arguments that can be made about the relation of these events to the reception of *Stella Maris* remain hypothetical.

So how could *Stella Maris* relate to the Civil War? The answer is straightforward. Unity Blake is a working class character that rises against her former mistress. Furthermore, she uses violence to drive her cause. To Finns, the scene where the armed working class character intrudes into the upper class home must have been a harsh reminder of the violent events that had taken place in 1918. According to psychohistorian Juha Siltala, armed rebellious women were severely hated by the winning side and it treated them accordingly. Unity Blake, my argument goes, brought uneasy memories to minds of spectators who were looking for escapist entertainment promised by Pickford’s star image. The fact that a happy ending follows Unity’s actions is what *Filmiaitta*’s reviewer referred to when he argued that the film exemplifies bad taste. In real life the consequences had been anything but happy. Here we have an example of a reading created through negotiation of a set of cultural relations that certainly was not predicted by Hollywood studios.

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423 Juha Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* (Keuruu: Juha Siltala ja Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 2009), 16.
425 Juha Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria* (Keuruu: Juha Siltala ja Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 2009), passim.
Pickford’s Star Image in Finnish Film Culture

At the turn of the 1920s the nature of available information concerning Pickford was transformed. Previously her private life had not been discussed on the pages of Finnish magazines. This transformation brought the star into existence. Richard deCordova argues that “with the emergence of the star the question of the player’s existence outside his of her work in film became the primary focus of discourse.”426 Pickford talked about her life and dreams in the interview that was translated into Finnish. Furthermore, in the early 1920s film magazines published questions and answers concerning her identity outside the medium. Pickford’s private life became an important part of this discourse. Now she was a character in a narrative that was separable from her work in any film and this discourse involved people in the cinema outside the movie theatres.427 However, it seems that the private life of Pickford and other Hollywood stars did not weigh as much in Finland as in the United States. Pickford’s work in films was still the primary focus of discussions rather than her life outside the cinema.

Even though her private life was not the main focus of discussion, Pickford’s Finnish star image was surprisingly similar to her American one. One reason for this state of affairs was the fact that a lot of publicity material was imported to Finland. This material, just like the films, was made in Hollywood. However, if we agree that “audiences create meanings through their negotiation of a set of cultural relations that extend well beyond the boundaries of any individual film”, as Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes have put it, we might want to ask why there was no distinctively Finnish conception of Pickford?428 It seems to me that the values at the heart of Pickford’s star image had a great deal to do with this. Her star image, like star images of other stars, was constructed to elicit particular responses. Ideas and morals Pickford expressed in interviews, publicity portraits and other images of her published in Finnish magazines and the films themselves were found endearing. Finns were eager to discuss her films and they wrote poems about her. The climax of Stella Maris excluded, the majority of filmgoers were of the opinion that Pickford was, even when handling guns, just lovable.

Asta Nielsen in the Netherlands: 1920
Ansje van Beusekom

In 1920 Asta Nielsen visited the Netherlands twice: in September, she appeared as the guest of honour at the Internationale Kino Tentoonstelling in Amsterdam; in November, she toured the country with a staged pantomime, La Main. On both occasions she received a warm welcome from the audience that went out to hail her in the street on her tours between the railway stations and the theatres. The press clippings on her reception and on her performance leave no doubt that Asta Nielsen was the best–known film celebrity among the Dutch cinema and theatre audiences in 1920.

Johan Gildemeyer had organized De Internationale Kinotentoonstelling or I.K.T. (International Film Exhibition) in the garden of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. Before the war, Gildemeyer had been the Dutch distributor of films produced by the German PAGU. He had introduced the first Asta Nielsen films in his Union Elite Bioscoop in Amsterdam in 1911. The I.K.T. was a brave try to restore the broken relations in the international film business after World War I. Because the Netherlands had kept their neutrality during the War, the country considered itself afterwards as the best place for negotiations between the former belligerent parties. Queen Wilhelmina had thought so in terms of international politics and Gildemeyer did likewise in terms of film trade. Although the I.K.T. as a whole was regarded as a flop because the Americans stayed away, the French hardly showed up and the Dutch authorities still weren’t prepared to take film seriously, Asta Nielsen’s visit was regarded as a success. Critics compared her welcome to that of Sarah Bernard and her performances doubled the amount of visitors to the exhibition during the week of her performances. According to reports in the trade press the scenes of Engelein and La Dame aux Camellias, that she re–enacted live with the Dutch actor Willem van der Veer, stunned her audience.429 Asta Nielsen surely lived up to the high expectations she had created in her films, films that were familiar to the Dutch movie–going audience in 1920.

The critical reception of the stage play in November, however, also showed disappointment. Although it was obvious there was a star at work when she finally arrived on the scene, the critics had expected to see more of Asta Nielsen herself. “’The Hand’ (La Main) was not strong enough to keep its grip on our throats[…]”, mocked the critic in the NRC.430 The mimed stage act was considered too short and moreover mostly filled with the third–rate acting of Nielsen’s Dutch co–actors, “a bunch of ’variété–Israëlieten’

430 Anonymous, “Tournee Asta Nielsen. De Hand”, Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant, 8 November 1920, Avondblad B.
(3rd–rate actors)”, whose histrionic acting prevented the spectators from feeling taken in. The props and special effects were also managed clumsily. Another critic compared the show with a ‘Fish dinner (Visch diner)’ that consisted of two hors d’oeuvres containing a little portion of expensive fish, followed by a main course of cheap cabbage and potatoes mishmash. The critics felt offended and underestimated and they all claimed to prefer Asta Nielsen on screen instead of on stage. They confessed that on screen her mimic face and swirling body had often moved them to tears.

The question I would like to answer here is not why Gildemeyer invited Asta Nielsen to the IKT or why she was invited to come back and perform on stage. It is pretty obvious that the Dutch impresarios saw in Asta Nielsen a star attraction for their own benefit. Instead, I am more curious about what might have persuaded Asta Nielsen to come to Holland and act on stage. In 1920 she was also engaged in many film projects. Moreover, according to her own memoirs she had not returned to the theatrical stage before 1926 and we find no trace of her visits to Holland at all. Her visits might not have left a big impression on her, considering all the projects in which she was involved in Germany, but a little historical correction based on contemporary press records is appropriate here. I wish to understand her decisions in the context of her situation in WWI and its aftermath. Dutch writings on film and the availability of her films in the Netherlands during this period form the other parameters of this research.

Asta Nielsen from 1916 to 1920: unemployed and drifting

According to her own memoirs, Asta Nielsen Die schweigende Muse, as a Danish actress, living and working in Germany at war, she had hardly been able to work in Germany from 1916 on. She travelled over the world, visiting the Americas by ship with her husband to be, Freddy Wingarhth, while waiting for her divorce from Urban Gad to come through. In New York she visited Fox and Vitagraph in 1917. She attended film shoots but refused to participate in any offered film projects. As we also know from contemporary interviews she rejected the American way of filmmaking and its commercial commitment to entertainment. In her eyes American film was not art: the Americans highly underestimated acting and overestimated beautiful faces and exteriors instead.

Although nobly following her heart, her early rejection of American ways of filmmaking must have cost her a lot. Looking at this rejection from another angle, big contracts might also not have been offered to her because she was quite unknown to American audiences outside New York. The following year, 1917, she

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Therefore, the possibility that Nielsen had not been welcomed in
the US with the honours she was used to in Europe cannot not be excluded: American audiences hardly knew the European diva because her films had poor distribution, if any. Either way, Nielsen was much too much her own woman to fit into the American Studio system that had evolved at the time. Financially, though, not having an American career must have been tough in the years to come. The theatre proved to be a good alternative to fall back on.

As soon as she could travel in 1917, she returned to Europe, first to Den-
mark until the war was over, and afterwards back to Berlin. Nielsen chose passionately for her expressive style of acting that was based on sharing emotions with her audiences. 1920 appears to be a decisive year in which she made a definitive choice between industry à la Hollywood and the art film. With her own company called Art–Film, founded with her new hus-
band, she could not have been more outspoken. Art–Film produced Hamlet in 1920 and Freule Julie in 1921. In 1920 Nielsen was also involved in the following other film projects: Der Reigen and Kurfürstendamm by Richard Oswald, Graf Sylvain’s Rache by Willy Grunwald, and Steuermann Holk (with Paul Wegener) for Maxim films. After years of silence many parts were again at her disposal. Rausch (Strindberg), directed by Ernst Lubitsch, with whom she did not always agree, had brought her back to the German film scene in 1919. Nevertheless, despite all the work, Germany’s economy and film industry was far from stable after the war and her ambitious art project needed money. In the years before 1919 while out of work, suffering from a divorce, and taking a costly trip, she must have spent a lot of money without any money coming in. The Netherlands, compared to Germany, appeared as an oasis nearby where good food and cash were still available. According to her own reports in 1920, the first time she visited the Netherlands was when she returned to Europe with the steamer Frisia, landing in Holland.

Asta Nielsen’s reputation in the Netherlands in 1920
During her visit to the IKT Amsterdam in September 1920, Asta Nielsen was delighted to discover that she was still famous in Holland. Thanks to the Cinema Context database, launched by Karel Dibbets of the University of Amsterdam in 2006, I was able to trace the Asta Nielsen films programmed

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433 The popular reception of the Asta Nielsen films in the United States still has to be investig-
gated. Richard Abel has started to look into this in his trade press research. So far, talking to me at the WWS in Stockholm, June 2008, he has not found clues that her films were widely distributed. Jennifer Bean writes about the problematic distribution of Asta Nielsen films in New York in: Jennifer M.Bean, “ ‘Übers Meer gebracht’ in Amerika, 1912–1914 in: Unmögliche Liebe. Asta Nielsen, ihr Kino ed. Heide Schlüpmann e.a. (Wien: Verlag Fil-
marchiv Austria, 2009), 337–352.
in the Netherlands before 1920. From 1912 on, the name Asta Nielsen was advertised more frequently and for longer in various forms than that of any other screen or stage star. Her name, not the film title, was the most important eye-catcher. A privilege accustomed to stage stars, this was a new phenomenon in the Netherlands for a film star. As Corrina Muller and Martin Loiperdinger pointed out, the industry, Paul Davidson’s PAGU, treated her name as a brand name in order to promote a certain type of long feature film. From 1912 on, the German Monopol e films were manufactured and distributed in a new financing system based on blind selling and block booking. Exclusivity and seriality were among its main aspects and the name Asta Nielsen guaranteed continuity in expectations. She performed as the leading lady in many different roles in the Asta Nielsen Monopole-series of PAGU as well as in other productions. In trade ads as well as in the ads in the newspapers the name Asta Nielsen would therefore function as a mark of recognition and as a label of a certain quality. If there wasn’t a truly great actress at work, this strategy would have failed, and according to contemporary critics she was marvellous. In the Dutch cinema, Asta Nielsen was visible the whole time between 1911 and 1920.

An extraordinary long article on Nielsen as an actress appeared in the literary magazine the *Nieuwe Gids* in 1913, in which the theatre critic Joh. W. Broedelet reported on her tremendous fame, performing every night in New York and St. Petersburg, and at the same time in small Dutch cities like Meppel and Sneek. The article also criticized bulk production wherein the central role of the star seemed to be the only reason to produce a film. Although Broedelet praised Asta Nielsen’s tremendous timing and presence—he had encountered one of the greatest actresses of his time—he considered it a shame she had to show her ’silent’ art in such poor plays like *Die Sünden der Väter*. No better than one was accustomed to in the cinema, this was a cheap melodrama. Only the scenes wherein Asta appeared were worth looking at. In the Dutch writings on Asta Nielsen and her films, this difference in quality between Nielsen and her films would be an everlasting aspect, even as late as 1929.

Due to the War, film imports between 1914 and 1918 were obstructed or were at least risky. Cinemas therefore programmed old stocks of favourite films. The old Asta Nielsen films were available. Moreover, they also could be regarded as Danish, thus neutral. Reckoning with the Netherlands neutral state, they brought with them little risk. If we may believe the ads, Asta

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435 http://www.cinemacontext.nl
Nielsen kept the audience going to the cinema during the difficult war years. Dutch cinemas kept on promoting old Asta Nielsen films as new throughout the war. Abraham Tuschinski, an up-and-coming cinema chain owner and film distributor, managed to present a 'new' Asta Nielsen series every September from 1916 on. The Asta Nielsen series 1916–1917 contained 14 new titles.438 Thanks to this kind of creative programming and recycling, Asta Nielsen films never left the movie theatres for long. The Cinema Context database shows that pre-war films produced in 1914 like *Die Falsche Asta Nielsen* and *Engelein's Hochzeit* were released in 1916 for the first time, while *Engelein*, after its first release in 1914, had reruns every year until 1918 in various programmes. The German films produced for *Neutral* in 1916 were released in the Dutch cinemas in 1918: *Vordertreppe–Hintertreppe*, *Das Weisenhauskind*, *Das Eskimobaby* and *Die Rose der Wildnis. Die Börsenkönigin* of 1916 even had to wait until after the War and was shown in 1919 and 1920.

Cinema Context shows that early Asta Nielsen films of 1911 and 1912 also returned regularly in different programmes throughout the War. This diachronic programming, often in a double bill set-up with more recent productions, meant that the Asta Nielsen films were in competition with more recent productions from various sources. *Im Grossen Augenblick* (1911) was re-released in two movie theatres in The Hague in 1916. In one theatre, Asta Nielsen had to compete with Italian diva Lyda Borelli in *Fior di Male* (1916); in the other, the film shared the program with Franz Hofer's *Das Rose Pantöffelchen*. Asta Nielsen could be seen in programmes with films of Victor Sjöström, Louis Feuillade, Tom Mix and Charlie Chaplin and her films were thus programmed together with Danish, Swedish, American, French and German films.

Although the critics kept Asta Nielsen in high esteem—her lively acting and mood changes expressed in her face and body were considered of the finest quality—the films she had to perform in were gradually more disputed. The Dutch critics raised questions such as: why was she neglected by the industry? Or: Why did no one care to make use of her special skills in good scenarios? The Asta Nielsen films of the late teens were considered even worse than the early ones and according to the critics they often failed to deserve the predicate 'art'. On the contrary: in 1918 Felix Hageman criticized her more recent productions and favoured her early ones: “If we want to be honest, don’t we have to admit that in Asta Nielsen’s dramas the line certainly is not going up?”439 He suggested that the cinemas had better rerun her first films and expected that the audience would come running to see them. The recent Asta Nielsen films were categorized as mainstream 'burgerlijk drama' and Nielsen had to lift up these cheap, flimsy melodramas all by herself.

439 Felix Hageman, “Oude films”, *De Filmwereld* 1 (1918) nr. 43.
Although in 1920 Asta Nielsen was by no means forgotten in the Netherlands, her star status was no longer beyond criticism. Critic Max van Wesel wrote that she had become too old to play little girls. According to his opinion, she like no other had to be aware of the cruelty of the all–seeing camera in combination with the all–revealing lights. Moreover, Charlie Chaplin surpassed her in fame in the newspaper ads. During the film contest at the I.K.T. a jury member noted of the third prize winner, The Cure (Chaplin): ’I would not dare to say that the acting of Charlie Chaplin is less than that of Asta Nielsen.’ From her memoirs we know that she regarded Chaplin as the only American phenomenon worth looking at on screen.

Still, despite these comments it was clear that she still formed a steady class of her own in 1920. Probably without realizing it herself, her visit to Amsterdam in September 1920 can be regarded as a well–timed move in order to keep her reputation in the Netherlands as the first and one of the best movie artists in sound cinema. But maybe it worked the other way round as well: she may have rediscovered herself and her fame and grandness in this quiet niche that Holland was at the time. In order to understand the warm reception in the Netherlands of Nielsen and her ideas on film as art, some explanation of Dutch film culture in the 1920 is necessary.

Dutch film culture after the war

After the war Europe had changed tremendously, but one can say that the Netherlands in comparison with most other European countries had changed the least. While its neighbouring countries were deeply shattered by World War I, the Netherlands remained neutral. Although it suffered from side effects caused by the war, such as men away from home due to mobilization, coal and food shortages, rocketing food prices and obstructions in international trade, its economic and political infrastructure remained intact. Whereas the Allied countries needed the help of the United States to end the conflict and thus had to acknowledge its military and economic supremacy, the Netherlands hardly noticed the presence of the United States in Europe and its influence on changes to come. While Paris and London were invaded by American films from 1915 on, in 1918 Maurits Binger, director of the Hollandia Filmfabriek in Haarlem was still convinced of a dominant position for the Dutch film industry in the international film market after the War. Binger took as its example the pre–war Danish film industry (Ole Olson’s Nordisk). According to the trade press and the first popular bi–weekly on cinema, De Filmwereld, the European pre–war concept of the art film industry still was seriously considered as film’s most important destiny

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442 Maurits Binger, interview in De Filmwereld 1 (1918), 47.
Asta Nielsen was regarded as a pioneer on this royal road to film as art. Asta Nielsen as star perfectly fitted in the concept of film as art industry: she was the greatest actress, the first to know how to use film’s qualities to her advantage, using gestures instead of spoken words, hypnotizing her audiences with her gaze and at the same time appealing to large audiences. According to the Dutch critics—and I emphasize critics, not audiences here—she was always better than the movies she performed in. Expressed for the first time in 1913, this notion became a mantra in the history of Asta Nielsen’s reception in the Netherlands. In 1920 Asta Nielsen herself adopted the same line of thinking: she wished to perform her art in better films and founded her own company, Art–Film. But although she occasionally performed in films based on famous modern plays by Strindberg or Ibsen in 1919 and 1921, they flopped and were criticized for Grunwald’s or Wolff’s dull direction.

In 1927 and 1929 Filmliga protagonists Menno ter Braak, Jo Otten and Simon Koster positioned Asta Nielsen in their own conception of film history. They considered Asta Nielsen a great, tragic artist who performed her art in barren circumstances during the dark ages of film. It was a good thing, though, that the film avant–garde circles embraced her: only their venues programmed old films again after WWI. If we can give one unquestionable credit to the avant–garde film movement that emerged in the 1920s, it is its sense of the heritage of film history, exemplified by the screening of old films for their aesthetic qualities. Early Asta Nielsen films and the Chaplin Mutual shorts certainly belonged to the most successful reruns. However, all Dutch critics from 1913 to 1930 missed the fact that the much praised early Asta Nielsen films were intended as mass art or entertainment by their producer Paul Davidson and their creators Asta Nielsen and Urban Gad. Only later, after 1920, would Nielsen deliberately attempt to create art films.

Film at the end of the 1920s, however, had proved to the most cynical critic its artistic potential in many different forms, but only in the margins of a larger film industry. In 1913, film art was just beginning. In 1920, in some people’s eyes, film as art was on the brink of a splendid future, but in 1930, art as film’s major destiny was readily banished to the margins, even in the Netherlands. The real tragedy, however, was that the later Asta Nielsen films lost their appeal to mass audiences in the 1920s because they were considered too artistic.

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Asta’s choice

When one reads Asta Nielsen’s own statements in her memoirs from the 1920s and 1940s, her complaints about the ‘wrong turn’ filmmaking had taken are very consistent. Recurring themes like the industry that favours looks and story over skilled actors, and its favouring spectacle over psychology, dominate her discourse. She also emphasizes the lack of good scenarios for film that had only became worse after the emergence of the sound film. The lack of good film offers and changed conditions even became her main reason to return entirely to the stage in 1926. Her judgment has never been questioned, but looking at what she actually did on stage may raise some questions. In doing so, I’ll keep my Dutch critics in mind.

Considering her own choice of repertoire for stage plays in the 1920s: *Rita Cavallini* and *La dame aux camellias*, one wonders why she preferred these old models from the 19th century over the more challenging, daring and modern heroines like Hedda Gabler or Freule Julie, parts she actually performed on screen, but as far as we know, never on stage. Especially because she claimed to have left film production and returned to the stage because the quality of the scenarios offered to her grew from bad to worse, I wonder about her own bad choice of repertoire once she re–appeared on stage.

This surprisingly ambivalent picture of modern experimental acting on film versus old–fashioned diva roles on stage, however, raises more questions than my research on Asta Nielsen in the Netherlands in 1920 can answer. I am therefore delighted to inform you that Annette Förster is conducting new research on Asta Nielsen’s theatrical career in Germany. I am sure her choice in 1926 was driven, just like her visits to The Netherlands in 1920, not only by artistic but necessarily economic and pragmatic motives as well. After all, she had to live and support her sister and daughter in Denmark as well.
Dance, Stardom, and the Trans–National Celebrity Status of Anna May Wong

Erin Kelley

I always had to play a slave, temptress, prostitute, or doomed lover. My lines were in ‘Chinglish,’ I was forbidden to kiss Western men, and I always had to die so that the woman with the yellow hair could get the white man.445

– Anna May Wong

Appearing in over sixty feature–length films throughout the course of her forty–year career, Anna May Wong (1905–1961) was branded by the press as the “Chinese girl”, the “little Chinese star,” and the “Chinese flapper.” Whether drowning herself after being abandoned by an American husband in Toll of the Sea, 1922 or exacting revenge on a white man in Daughter of the Dragon, 1931, Wong has been defined by roles in which she played either the passive and pathetic Madame Butterfly or the dangerous and cunning Dragon Lady. Within variations of this racial binary, her characters were typically punished for transgressing racial and social boundaries. Consequently, much of the critical analysis regarding Wong’s acting career emphasizes her achievements as a Chinese–American actress in spite of the limitations prescribed by Hollywood’s racism and the resulting stereotypical Orientalized roles and acting styles imposed on Asian women.

More recently, however, scholars have attempted to propose alternative analyses of Wong’s status as a Chinese–American actress in which she actively challenged Hollywood’s racism through performance strategies. As Yiman Wang has argued, most Asian–American actors were seldom critiqued for their performance skill or performative strategies, being instead viewed solely as an index of a homogenous and exoticized Orient.446 As a result, an actor like Anna May Wong had no choice but to perform a mimetic version of Yellowface inscribed by Hollywood’s Orientalized conventions of portraying the Asian “other.” Yet through the mastery and manipulations of these mimetic forms, her performance worked as a strategy that destabilized the Asian American’s situational dilemma in the 1920s.447

446 Yiman Wang, “The Art of Screen Passing: Anna May Wong’s Yellow Yellowface Performance in the Art Deco Era” Camera Obscura 20, Number 3 (2005), 161.
447 Ibid.
I would like to push this idea further by suggesting that Anna May Wong’s mastery and manipulation of mimetic forms were a symptom of her stardom or what Miriam Hansen calls the “star phenomenon” in which the star system challenges the classical cinematic paradigm as both an industrial norm and a historiographic construct by eluding the formalist focus on narrative. In her book *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship and the American Silent Film* Hansen writes:

> The star phenomenon not only eludes the formalist focus on narrative (principles of thorough motivation, clarity, unity, and closure), but also complicates the psychoanalytic–semiological preoccupation with the illusionist mechanisms of the classical apparatus and the unconscious workings of classical modes of enunciation.

Using Hansen’s argument as a point of departure, I would like to propose an alternative frame for understanding Yiman Wang’s pioneering approach, suggesting instead that Ann May Wong’s transnational celebrity status as a Chinese–American star subverted, complicated, and ultimately transcended the ideological narrative of E.A. Dupont’s 1929 film, *Piccadilly*. Using performance strategies of dance to shape the way her body signifies race, gender, politics, and nationality, Wong cultivated an identity that complicated the classical cinematic paradigm, creating a tension between her star persona, cultural stereotypes, and moments of performance that exceeded narrative intent.

Each of the dance performances located within the film’s text constitutes a specific text in and of itself that contradicts the overarching ideological codes and structures predicated by classical cinema. By analyzing dance as a “performative strategy” of intervention, Wong’s character Sho–Sho disrupts the ideological discourse of emerging classical cinematic codes (by eluding formalist narrative conventions of motivation, clarity, unity, and closure) through the creation of an intertextual dialogue between dance and stardom as she transitions from scullery maid to nightclub dance star. In this article, however, I will focus on Sho–Sho’s scullery dance and her opening night performance in the Piccadilly Club’s ballroom.

One of the challenges of writing about dance is how to define and describe it within the context of *Piccadilly*. Besides functioning as a narrative mechanism that provides visual spectacle, dance is used to create desire. The physicality inherent in dance offers a format in which the stereotypes of white imagination are played out on the Orientalized body of Wong’s character Sho–Sho. The cultivation of Wong’s star image relied on her Chineseness, the recurrence of the Orient as a cinematic motif, and the way in which her body was associated with perceptions of racial character. Thus, by exploiting these gendered stereotypes, Wong’s stardom allowed her to establish as well as manipulate a set of

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449 Ibid.
traits associated with her performance style that could be carried over from one film to the next, allowing her to become both the object of desire as well as the primary agent of narration. In *Piccadilly*, these traits are expressed through Sho-Sho’s dance performance(s) as Wong plays out the Orientalist fantasy by exhibiting herself as an exotic dancer whose body is consumed by not only the white male gaze, but the Asian male gaze, and the white female gaze.

Dance is also utilized as a means of representing the potential for both economic and social mobility as well as the fluidity of movement within a society segregated by race and class. Through a variety of performance spaces in locales such as the ballroom of the Piccadilly Club, the Club’s scullery, and a pub in London’s Limehouse district, dance becomes the medium of interrogation and social juxtaposition. Within the film these locales produce cultural definitions as well as areas of action that have the potential to construct boundaries, creating tension and division between the film’s protagonists. However, by using dance to juxtapose different types of performance spaces and spectatorship, as well as trigger movement between established social spaces, cinematic codes regarding the transgression of racial and social boundaries can be interrogated.

Wong’s performance style in *Piccadilly* not only dictates sanctioned and un-sanctioned modes of mobility and spectatorship, but forces an acknowledgement of the status of the non-white transnational film star by paralleling Sho-Sho’s rise to fame with that of her own. Set in a cabaret in London’s West End the film opens with Mabel Greenfield (Gilda Gray, 1901–1959) and her dance partner Victor Smiles (Cyril Ritchard, 1897–1977) as the featured act of the Piccadilly nightclub. One evening a patron is served his meal on a dirty dish and his complaints disrupt Mabel and Victor’s dance routine. The owner of the club, Valentine Wilmot (Jameson Thomas 1888–1939), goes into the scullery to locate the problem. He discovers a young Chinese maid, Sho-Sho, entertaining her fellow kitchen workers with a sensual dance. Valentine fires Sho-Sho for causing the disruption and Victor for making passes at Mabel. Business, however, begins to suffer as a result of Mabel dancing alone. In an effort to boost business Valentine offers Sho-Sho a chance to perform at the club. Sho-Sho’s dance routine is a huge success and she becomes the star attraction. Soon after Sho-Sho becomes romantically involved with Valentine, but is ultimately murdered at the end of the film by her jealous boyfriend Jim.

This rags-to-riches story of Chinese scullery maid turned Piccadilly nightclub dance star can be used as a model to examine how stardom and narrational strategies contributed to Wong’s public reception. Her arrival in London followed on the heels of the Cinematographic Film Act of 1927, which required British theaters to exhibit a certain number of films per screen per year. As a

result of this political and economic act to protect British–produced films, studios dramatically increased their production to meet the demands of theater owners.\textsuperscript{452} The increase in British film production resulted in an increase of opportunities for Wong to be cast in feature roles outside the Hollywood system, and in 1929 she made her London debut as the Chinese scullery dancer in \textit{Piccadilly}.

Wong’s connection to the immigrant working class audience is perhaps most evident during Sho–Sho’s scullery dance. As previously mentioned, Sho–Sho’s dance is the cause of the disruption in the ballroom as well as the first instance in which Sho–Sho exerts absolute power over the fate and financial success of the Piccadilly club. This scene rearticulates the relationship between spectacle and spectator by removing both Valentine and the film audience from the performance space of the scullery.

Sho–Sho’s dance is for the women working in the scullery, thus making the primacy of the male gaze no longer functional as the dominant discourse. By directly challenging the standard notion of spectacle and spectator, Sho–Sho’s performance elevates the secondary discourse, that of the woman and the female gaze, to the fore.\textsuperscript{453} Her performance represents a moment in the film where the dominant ideological discourse of the white male is rendered strange and unable to properly access the alternate sphere of the working–class. We only become aware of the scullery dance through the disruption it creates in the upper–middle class sphere of the ballroom. Visual access to Sho–Sho’s dance requires movement from the ballroom to the scullery, which also becomes a classed and gendered performance space based upon its intended function and the type of people located with in it. In this case, the working class sphere of the scullery is revealed to be a collective space capable of transgressive acts. Like Valentine, the film audience is not an informed viewer and this is reinforced by our alignment with him as he moves from the ballroom through the kitchen and finally to the scullery.

In the first sequence of establishing shots the camera cuts from Valentine watching the women in the scullery, to the scullery women watching Sho–Sho, to Sho–Sho performing her dance, and then back to the scullery women. As a result, our direct gaze, like Valentine’s, is mitigated by the relationship between Sho–Sho and the working class women of the scullery. Close–up shots of Wong’s sensual dance performance atop the impromptu stage of the scullery table hypnotize her audience. Like the women of the scullery, we too become oblivious of the disruption this performance has caused, completely entranced by Sho–Sho’s dance as she thrusts her hips and swings her waist in slow circular motions.

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid.

Because the life of a star existed outside the confines of individual films and by the publicity that surrounded his/her public and private life, the stars’ presence in a film had the ability to blur the line between the ideological underpinnings of the narrative and the narrative itself. In *Piccadilly* this blurring between the diegetic and non–diegetic narrative is first demonstrated through Sho–Sho’s scullery dance. Our initial access to Sho–Sho is vis–à–vis her status as a working class Chinese immigrant living in the Limehouse district and working in the entertainment district of Piccadilly. Through this social and racial positioning within the narrative, Wong and the character she plays are clearly aligned with Britain’s immigrant working class. As the film progresses, and as Sho–Sho’s success transports her up London’s social ladder, she becomes emblematic of the potential for upward mobility within European society.

Wong’s ability to destabilize boundaries of race, class, and spectatorship by questioning relationships between performance space, codes of desire, objectification, and self–conscious references to performance through the reinvention of her persona abroad, is reified in Sho–Sho’s opening night performance. Through dance Sho–Sho transitions from the working–class sphere of the scullery to the upper–middle class sphere of the ballroom. Establishing herself as a conduit between gendered, raced, and classed boundaries, Sho–Sho becomes the object of desire as well as the spectacle of consumption for a variety of people. Like her performance in the scullery, Sho–Sho directly challenges the standard notion of spectacle and spectator, as her performance proposes a multiplicity of new discourses.

Visually, disruptions in the ideological discourse are illustrated through Wong’s dance performance and the types of relationships it initiates between different members of the audience. Reinforced by camera shots and editing techniques that align the gazes of the audience members through framing and cross–cutting, Sho–Sho’s body becomes the corporeal conduit that simultaneously unites these various spectatorial groups, and makes apparent their power struggle in relationship to different modes of looking vis–à–vis one another.

The scene opens with an establishing shot of Sho–Sho dressed in her exotic dance costume comprised of a sequined bodice and phallic headdress. The camera then cuts to a shot of Jim, Sho–Sho’s boyfriend, who is not only a spectator, but himself a spectacle within the performance, as the musical accompaniment. The camera cuts back to Sho–Sho, this time establishing the spectacle–spectator relationship between herself and Valentine, which, as we soon learn, is based upon the delicate balance between Valentine’s dependence on Sho–Sho as a commodity of dance and the absolute power she wields over him and the financial success of the nightclub.

Sho–Sho’s relationship with Valentine as both the headlining act and his love interest is reinforced through the next two camera shots in which Mabel’s displacement and ultimate marginalization is foreshadowed. In this frame the presence of Sho–Sho’s dancing body is made visible by the shadow it casts on the dance floor. The mise–en–scène, consisting of candles rotating in globes of re-
fracted light, blended with the red tinting, phallic headdress, and gyrating body, highlights Sho–Sho’s embodiment of the imagined threat and potential danger of the Oriental “other”. Sho–Sho’s dancing body as threat to Mabel’s status is underscored by the next sequence of camera shots which crosscut between Mabel’s frightened face, to Sho–Sho’s exotic dance, to the gaze of the male patron’s in the Club, back to Sho–Sho, and finally to the gaze of the female patrons.

Sho–Sho’s new status within the Club’s hierarchy, however, does not elide her relationship with the working class women of the scullery. Towards the end of her performance, as Sho–Sho’s dance is reaching its climax, her friend and co–worker Bessie peeks through the “Staff” door, crossing the working–class–bound space of the scullery into the upper middle–class space of the ballroom. Through her association with Sho–Sho, Bessie becomes a part of the social transitioning. Similarly, through her active participation in the spectacle–spectator relationship established between Sho–Sho’s performance and her voyeuristic viewing of it, Bessie’s status becomes aligned with the Club’s wealthy patrons. As Sho–Sho’s performance comes to an end and the camera does one final pan through the ballroom—capturing the multiplicity of gazes from the club’s audience members including Mabel, Bessie, Jim, and Valentine—it is obvious that the consumption of Sho–Sho’s body, while symbolic of a variety of social, sexual, and class related relationships and contexts, is not representative of one specific ideological discourse. Instead, a reinterpretation of the pre–existing classical discourse with regard to ownership and control over the Orientalized body is played out during Sho–Sho’s dance performance.

While Wong’s portrayal of a Chinese dancer had the capacity to undermine established boundaries of race and class within British society, it also made apparent growing tensions between the British Empire and its colonies with regard to interracial relationships. Wong brings these issues to the fore through Sho–Sho’s mobility as a dancer working in Piccadilly and living in the slums of the Limehouse district. Sho–Sho’s ability to traverse racial, ethnic, and social boundaries, while still maintaining her role as a dancer who unites various spectatorial groups, makes apparent the power struggle with regard to different modes of performance.

Given the narrative arc of the film as presented through Wong’s performance, Sho–Sho’s death at the hands of her jealous Chinese boyfriend—allowing for the restoration of Valentine and Mabel’s relationship—is a weak attempt at reinstating racial and sexual hierarchies within the film. Having systematically disrupted the ideological discourse throughout two–thirds of the film, the eradication of Wong’s character within the last few scenes is both abrupt and unprecedented.

While Piccadilly attempts to present a darker and perhaps more cynical version of the Hollywood narrative of white heterosexual romance, the film’s structure does not necessarily accomplish the traditional modes of resolution and closure. As Claire Johnston has noted:
The drive towards narrative resolution and closure of the dominant discourse in classical cinema traditionally involves the ‘happy ending’ or its inversion, both embodying the notion of unification, the completion of the man by the woman and the myth of sexual complementariness.454

Ultimately, Sho–Sho’s death becomes a byproduct of the classical cinematic paradigm that foregrounds the white–heterosexual romance and condemns interracial relationships. Yet this evaluation of racial and sexual hierarchy in narrative cinema does not take into account the power of Wong’s star persona, who, by playing a Chinese dancer, challenged the implications of this argument by foregrounding cinematic identification between spectacle and spectator vis–à–vis issues of race and gender.455 In Piccadilly Wong’s stardom created as well as subverted classical cinema’s racial and gendered stereotypes through Sho–Sho’s dancing body. Using dance as a tool of interrogation, Wong’s performance strategies represent the systematic refusal of this classical paradigm by destabilizing the boundaries and hierarchies of race, class, and gender through the character of Sho–Sho.

Despite the convenience of closure that Sho–Sho’s death brings to the film, we must acknowledge the ruptures that Wong’s performance strategies created within the narrative—disturbing the conventions of classical cinema—and creating a space in which she had the ability to question established codes of desire between spectatorship, performance space, and the objectification of the female body. Wong’s performance not only initiated an intertextual dialogue between dance and stardom, but gave her career the longevity and fortitude necessary in an industry that was inherently racist.

For the British film industry, Wong’s Chinese–American star presence not only offered a heightened level of charm, charisma, sexuality, and eroticism, but something specifically “non–American.” While Piccadilly’s text is comprised of an ensemble of dance performances that destabilize boundaries of race, class, and spectatorship, it is only through Wong’s portrayal of Sho–Sho as an ethnic working–class heroine attempting to survive in an increasingly bourgeois environment that she becomes emblematic of all people seeking to reinvent themselves. Galvanizing the potential for upward mobility and social acceptance among Europe’s immigrant working class, Wong’s ability to embody the ideological contradictions of classical cinema and then subvert them through the medium of dance highlights the contemporary social tensions of people, who, like her, were grappling with similar issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity.

454 Ibid.

Wang Hanlun, a “Successful” Runaway Nora in the Chinese Film Industry

Yuan Chen

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, China experienced decades of critical reform: internal rebellions, continued fighting against Western imperialism as well as Japanese invasions, and the political revolution which resulted in the abolishment of the emperors’ ruling dynastic system and the establishment of the Republic of China. The change of regime, however, did not practically resolve the social and economic problems that overwhelmed China. To ensure Chinese survival in the modern world and promote China to achieve modernity, Chinese intellectuals realized it was the traditional culture that shackled the development of China. They therefore endeavored to nurture new modern culture through all classes of people. Women were absolutely essential to this process. The following New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement of the 1910s and 1920s, on the one hand, advanced the use of “the less exclusionary vernacular form of the written language” instead of classical Chinese, which was discernible only to the most educated, “helping to spread the message of cultural change”; meanwhile, the movement for women’s emancipation was beginning to gain widespread publicity.

On December 26th, 1923, Lu Xun, the father of modern Chinese literature, gave a talk titled “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?” at the Peking Women’s Normal College. In his response to Henrik Johan Ibsen’s play “A Doll’s House”, Lu Xun stresses considerations which many critics—who generally identified it as the embodiment of the emancipation of women—chose to disregard. “The play ends with the dramatic sound of a door slamming shut. Nora walks away from the security of her household and from all traditionally sacred values of marriage and motherhood”. However, what will happen after she leaves? Will she become a really free individual? Although Lu Xun sees Nora’s leaving as a disillusion, without an economic source, he considers her victory useless. She has only two alternatives: to sell her body or to return to her husband. “The crucial thing for Nora is money,” Lu Xun explained:


458 “The most painful of one’s life is there is no way to go when you wake up from your dream. Those who live in illusion are in happiness; if there is no choice for him/her, it is no better than to keeping him/her in the dream”. Xun Lu, The Talk. qtd. in Nicolas D. Kristof, “China’s Greatest Dissident Writer: Dead but Still Dangerous,” New York Times, August 19, 1990.
Of course, money cannot buy freedom, but freedom can be sold for money. Human beings have one great drawback, which is that they often become hungry. To remedy this drawback, and to avoid making people puppets, the most important thing in society seems to be economic rights. First, there must be a fair sharing between men and women in the family; secondly, men and women must have equal rights in society.\textsuperscript{459}

On the contrary, if Nora has economic rights and gains economic resources apart from selling her body, can she become an independent, chaste woman? In the case study of Wang Hanlun, one of the first generation of Chinese movie stars in the 1920s, who divorced her husband and was driven out by Peng’s family\textsuperscript{460} because she was not allowed to become a film actress, her example comes to encompass a general refusal to conform to Confucian morality. What happened after her leaving is the embodiment of women’s struggle against tradition, modernity, and nationalism. Similar to the situation in early Hollywood, the booming film industry in the 1920s “offered women opportunities that existed in no other workplace”.\textsuperscript{461} Film stars like Wang Hanlun could live a decent life in the expensive Shanghai totally supported by themselves. Having achieved economic independence, is Wang Hanlun a successful runaway Nora in the Chinese film industry?

Chronologically structured by her career, this essay will begin by analyzing the difficult process of women’s appearance on the screen during the early period of Chinese film history and briefly account for the movies in which she starred. The second part is an examination of the possibilities for her to not only become a film star but also open her own film company at the end of the 1920s in Shanghai, China’s earliest modernized city, in which urbanization was related to being divided into separated concession territories of Britain, France, America, Japan and other empires. Finally, the question of why Wang Hanlun and her compeers like Yang Naimei, who also opened a film company under her name, have never been written down as film producers other than film actresses in standard Chinese film historiography will be addressed.

\textit{Difficulties for Women to Appear on Chinese Silver Screen}

Film was first introduced to China no later than August 11, 1896, when a dated public screening was exhibited at “Another Village”, a teahouse in Xu Garden of Shanghai. The audiences only need to spend 0.2\textsuperscript{yuan} to watch a group of shows, including fireworks, conjuring and “Western shadow plays” (\textit{xiyang yingxi})—this name was derived from the traditional Chinese leather silhouette shadow play; for the first audiences, these two kinds of shows

\textsuperscript{460} Wang Hanlun’s original name is Peng Jianqing.
were quite similar, since they both used the principle of light to project images on screen. Viewers would enjoy the shows with tea or snacks and carry on conversations. For both teahouse runners and Chinese audiences, film was only another manner of “magic show”—“the public consumption of a variety of amusing attractions”\footnote{Shuqin Cui, *Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 4.}, sharing the stage with opera, acrobatics, storytelling, and a variety of traditional Chinese performance (*quyi*), aiming to entertaining the public, but not a western scientific or technological achievement.

The standard historiography of Chinese film begins with 1905’s *Conquer Jun Mountain (Ding Jun shan)*, the first film made by a Chinese director—Ren Jingfeng, the owner of FengTai Photo Studio in Beijing. It filmed the famous Beijing opera actor Tan Xinpei playing a piece of the same name opera. Differing from the Lumière Brothers’ experiments of recording daily lives, the earliest Chinese filmmakers or amateurs took Beijing opera episodes as their subject.

In 1913, Zheng Zhengqiu and Zhang Shichuan made the first Chinese feature film, *The Difficult Couple*.\footnote{The Difficult Couple was photographed by Jewish–Russian–American Benjamin Brodsky.} It discloses outmoded conventions and customs and satirizes traditional Confucian doctrines. Although the film raises the issue of female social class in China, ironically all the female characters were played by male actors. In the same year, Yan Shanshan appeared on screen as the first Chinese actress in *Zhuang Zi Tests His Wife*, directed by Li Beihai, written by her husband Li Minwei (Li Beihai’s brother). Nevertheless, Yan just played the minor role of the maid while the director acted as the hero Zhuang Zi and her husband played Zhuang Zi’s wife. Nevertheless, it was perhaps the first Chinese film introduced to America by Benjamin Brodsky.

During the following ten years, actresses were still rarely seen in films. Even if there were, they either played minor roles or they were relatives of those male filmmakers. After the outbreak of World War I, Chinese screens had been flooded by Hollywood movies. The audience must have already been familiar with women’s performance in films. However, why was it so hard for Chinese actresses to get parts in Chinese films? Some relevant clues can be found in Tsui Hark’s film, *Peking Opera Blues* (1986), which is set in 1913 Beijing.

The crucial impact of Chinese opera performance on Chinese film was not only displayed by its style and the audiences’ perception of it (both of which were shown in teahouses at first); but was also reflected from the moral tradition it inherited.

The Chinese title of the film *Dao Ma Dan* translates as *Knife Horse Actresses*, a name used in Peking opera to refer to male actors playing female
warriors. In fact, it is a parody of Chinese opera. The film depicts the adventure of three women from different classes achieving the same commission both for their friendship and saving the nation together. “The gender roles are subverted, with the females appearing ‘masculine’ while the males appear the opposite.” At last, it is the women who become the warriors of the country. Pat Neil is the daughter of the owner of a Chinese opera troupe (where the majority of scenes happen) with an all–male cast. Most of these actors, especially those who play young female characters, behave in a feminine way. Pat Neil, however, learns martial arts by herself, and bravely uses her skills to rescue her companions. Her biggest wish is to be an actress on stage, but it is unacceptable for her traditional father. “Traditionally Chinese women had been largely excluded from the public arena…. Women and men neither were to appear on the same stage, nor allowed to sit together in the audience, if women were admitted at all”. Tsao Wan (starring Brigitte Lin) is the daughter of a warlord who dresses as a man in order to freely attend the opera theater and other public sites. Her real identity is an underground patriotic revolutionary. Although the film is “an unlikely concoction of acrobatic action, screwball comedy, and unabashed romanticism,” intrigued by real history and political events, it reflects certain social realities of the 1910s China.

As Zhang Zhen points out, “[b]efore the coming of the cinema only women from poor or marginal social groups worked as actors, mainly in all–women traveling opera troupes catering to the rural population or lower–class town residents”. Previous to the 1920s, the entire Chinese film industry was dominated by foreign investment. “China at that time was very underdeveloped in economy, science and technology, which held back the development of Chinese film”. Actually, it was not until the establishment of the Motion Picture Department of the Commercial Press in 1917—“the earliest Chinese film company financed solely with domestic capital”—that Chinese entrepreneurs were aware that cinema was also a commerce and a business, not only a playing. The 1920s witnessed the booming growth of the Chinese film market. The successive emergence of the three biggest film studios—Mingxing (Star), Dazhonghua Baihe (Great China/Lily) and Tianyi

468 Daoxin Li, *History of Chinese Film Criticism ( Zhongguo dianying piping shi)*, [China Film Press (Zhongguo dianying chuban she), 2002], 2.
469 Jubin Hu, *Projection a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 44.
set up the complexion of tripartite confrontation in the Chinese film market. “By the mid 1920s more than 180 film companies were set up in big cities”, nearly one third of which were in Shanghai. “And by 1927 there were 151 film production companies” in Shanghai.

On the one hand, filmmakers realized that reliance on stage actors, steeped in classical opera, would not suffice for this new medium. The development of long feature films created a demand for actresses as leading roles rather than scene fillings. On the other hand, the audience required to watch “a beautiful woman (nüxing) acting in the movie”:

Because movies have no sound and words that might assist in expression, everything depends on movements and gestures. The performance is completely real and is completely intolerant of disguise. Thus, women must be sought out to play the female roles that must be included in movies.

An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa is the first Chinese feature film which uses female actors as leading roles. In 1923, Wang Hanlun played the female lead Yu Weiru, a dutiful wife, in An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa for Mingxing Film Company. It is a story about a widow who is incriminated falsely of adultery and driven out by her father–in–law without knowing she is pregnant. Enduring all kinds of hardships, she brings up the son by her own. Finally, her son saves his grandfather from murder. Wang Hanlun’s close–to–life performance deeply impressed the audience. The commercial and artistic success of the film—it “established a primary structure for the family melodrama genre”—not only saved the Star film company from bankruptcy, but also swiftly made Wang Hanlun one of the first generation of Chinese film stars.

Before Wang Hanlun entered the film industry, she worked as a typist for the British and American Tobacco Company, where she was discovered by Ren Xinping, a friend of the director Zhang Shichuan. However, the price for her to become a film actress was renouncing the tins to her family. Wang Hanlun was born Peng Jinqing in a well–to–do family in 1903. She discontinued her studies at the St. Mary’s Missionary School for Women and arranged to marry a comprador from a Japanese company when she was 16. Two years later, Peng divorced her husband because she could not bear his collaborationist, adulterous, and violent conduct. Impecuniously, she taught in a primary school at first and then became a typist after three months’

470 Beverley Jackson, Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up (Berkeley; Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 104.
471 Jackson, 104.
training. After knowing she signed the contract with Star Studio as an actress, her eldest brother, the clan leader of Peng’s family since her father died, accused her of “not obeying women’s discipline, violating family rules, corrupting family morals and insulting ancestors”.\(^{474}\) For this conventional family, where Peng Jianqing was foot-bound when she was a child, her behavior was unacceptable, because they thought to be an actor was no different from being a prostitute. Actually, the term “artist” has an ambiguous meaning, indicating both the sing-song girls and prostitutes in brothels and actors in the early Chinese language.

At that time, women “could be put to death for violating clan rules”.\(^{475}\) To be free from the irrational feudal customs, she made a brave decision to relinquish ties with her family. She changed her family name to “Wang”, which means “king” in Chinese, and adopted her English name Helen as Hanlun for her given name.

After her début in *An Orphan Rescues his Grandfather*, Wang starred in another nine films in the following three years, in which she kept her figure of bitter women, virtuous widows and good mothers. “Most of her films were stories of romance between a man and a woman, and were called “the style of mandarin duck and butterfly.”\(^{476}\) Her characters die or commit suicide in more than half of her films. As what Cui Shuqin points out, “[i]n the early days of the Chinese film industry, the screen image of woman often appeared as an oppressed other to be saved or as a modern identity to be emulated.”\(^{477}\)

Wang’s favorite film was *Divorcée* (1924), produced by the Great Wall Film Studio. The film depicts the story of the wife Wu Zhifang (Wang Hanlun) in a rich and powerful family being abandoned by her adulterous husband. Unsatisfied with being in a slave-like position in the family, she leaves home saying that “I would rather be a bright light in the dark society than be a serf in the vicious family.”\(^{478}\) She becomes a clerk at a bookstore, but is insulted by her boss. Suffering from unjust treatment in society, she cannot help but convert to Buddhism in the remote mountains and finally dies from illness in a nunnery. Wang Hanlun liked this film because *Divorcée* was very close to her life experience.

At that time, Wang earned 140 yuan per month as an actress for the Great Wall Film Studio. She received another 1,000 yuan bonus after finishing the shooting of *Divorcée*. *Liangyou* (The Young Companion), the most popular

\(^{475}\) Jia, 30.
\(^{476}\) Beverley Jackson, *Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up* (Berkeley; Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 117.
fashion magazine through the 1920s to the 1940s, cost 0.4 yuan per issue. The increasing social mobility of women in the whole society, the increasing popularity of film stars and their complete independence in the economy, however, did not ameliorate their social status nor the attitude that people treated artists as low as prostitutes. The same comment which stated a yearning for seeing women playing female roles on the screen, reckoned Wang Hanlun–type of actresses as being “lured by the promise of higher salaries”, also derided the relationship between women and the fledgling film industry: “[a]lmost all of the women who step onto the stage are the wives of actors, lowly women, and prostitutes who generally lead the disgusting lives of streetwalkers”. In conclusion, actresses’ high visibility and various forms of publicity consisted of the biggest conflicts with the traditional Confucian ethics of virtuous women.

Possibilities to Become Businesswomen in the Modernizing Shanghai

Since 1842, when Shanghai became a treaty port, different imperialistic powers—Briton, France, America, and Japan—successively established concession territories in the city. “The foreign communities of Shanghai were not colonies per se of any particular countries or foreign powers. They were self–governing entities unto themselves.” The comparatively loose political circumstances helped the engendering of a free–market environment in Shanghai. Strongly influenced by foreign culture, Shanghai is the earliest modernized city and the capital of fashion in China. “By the 1920s imported automobiles—Talbot, Bugatti, Citroen, Renault, Peugeot, Salmson, and Delahaye—conveyed bankers, brokers, developers, diplomats, gangsters and warlords, their wives and mistresses”. Fu Wenhao (a.k.a Ms. AA), the first woman to receive a driving license in the common concession, played the leading role in one film which was produced by Shanghai Yingxi Film Company (Shanghai shadow play). Shanghai Shadow Play was a family enterprise founded by the painter and director Dan Duyu. His wife Yin Mingzhu played the important role of managing the company and was also a famous film star throughout the silent film era. Actually, she was already well known as Ms. FF (Foreign Fashion) for her stylish guise when she was a student at Shanghai Sino–Western Girl’s School.

480 Beverley Jackson, Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up (Berkeley; Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 7.
481 Beverley Jackson, Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up (Berkeley; Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 14.
The dominance of Hollywood movies served as both a model and a foil for native filmmakers, regardless of their intellectual backgrounds and ideological persuasion. The first Hollywood-produced “talking picture” debuted in the United States in August 1926 and by early 1927 theatres in Shanghai were showing Hollywood “talkies.”

Seeing the majority of her profits enter the accounts of film companies and dissatisfied with being controlled by male directors, Wang Hanlun founded her own independent film company, Hanlun Film Studio, in 1929. She took part of the directing work, played the leading role, and finished the editing of the film An Actress’s Revenge (a.k.a. Blind Love) by herself. In fact, the film has nothing to do with the profession of actresses. It the story of a love triangle, in which two colleagues, Yu Runan and You Wen, fall in love with the same actress, Wang Youlan. But Wang only loves Yu. The angry You beats Yu to blindness. Wang goes to take revenge on Yu. Unfortunately, she is arrested by him. Wang commits suicide at the end. After finishing the production, Wang Hanlun traveled all around China to promote the film. Each screening was accompanied with her live appearance onstage. Her efforts on and off-screen gained her big profits from what turned out to be her last starring movie. Wang Hanlun then disbanded the company and opened the Hanlun Beauty Parlor in the French Concession. As one of the earliest Chinese women to set foot in beauty culture, she was very successful throughout the 1930s until the Japanese occupied Shanghai. It is quite possible that she was also the first Chinese businesswoman. First of all, by the 1930s, their constrained social status and gender discrimination made it very hard for women to attend commercial activities, no matter to say being the leader of a company. Secondly, the emergence of industry in China happened decades later than in capitalistic countries. And Shanghai was the first modernized city in China: “In this sophisticated city, both foreign and Chinese residents had leisure time and money to spend, commodities not found in the countryside and provincial towns.” Around 1894 or 1895, “Japan built the first factories in Shanghai, which were soon copied by other foreign powers to effect the emergence of Shanghai industry.” If there was no industry before at all, how could there be any female entrepreneurs?

**Conclusion: the Struggling Wang Hanlun**

Wang Hanlun “ran away” four times, struggling against tradition, modernity and nationalism through all her life. Her divorce from her husband started

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482 qtd. in Beverley Jackson, *Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up* (Berkeley; Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2005), 103.
484 Jackson, 103.
her first adventure into real society. Working hard as a primary school
teacher, she found it was too difficult to cover her spending in the flourishing
Shanghai with such a humble income. In her memoir she states that “it
was the time when feminist activities were expanding; women and men are
equal, both of whom can work in society.”486 In the series of movements for
women’s emancipation raised by male intellectuals, they thought that
“women had to become more independent if China were to become more
independent. Women’s fate was tied to China’s fate.”487 The requirements
for “modern women” as “an embodiment of national enlightenment implying
the rejection of sociocultural traditions and the acceptance of the advent of
modernity”488 were highly advocated. Nevertheless, Cui Shuqin, in her book
Women through the Lens, proposes a similar problem to Lu Xun’s: “the
question of what a woman can become after she flees the patriarchal house-
hold and signals the call for a modern nation remains unanswered”.489

Her second departure, driven out of Peng’s family, seems to have been the
most successful one. Achieving fames and success in one night, she not only
obtained her own economic rights; through opening her company, she also
began to control the economic resources of others. However, in public dis-
course, under the shadow of feudal doctrine about gender discrimination, her
endeavors did not separate her from a prostitute. Would Lu Xun regard her
as a body–seller to the screen? “The modern woman as a self, however, is
torn between the given identity and a problematic reality”.490 Mahar claims
that it cannot be assumed that because the field of filmmaking was new, it
was ungendered. “All work emerges from some previously gendered con-
text, and the film industry is no exception”.491 The earliest movie industry in
China also emerged within an already masculinized context. In Chinese cul-
ture, masculinity is always equal to patriarchy, symbolizing the prerogative
of absolute domination in the economy and politics. Money secured her in-
dependence; in addition, wealth even drove her to want to be above men.
Although filmmaking has been gendered as masculine, actors, no matter
whether male or female, have been gendered as feminine.

Subsequently, she retired from the film industry because she saw a
moral decline in Chinese national films. Like some other filmmakers, she

486 Hanlun Wang, Gan Kai Hua Dang Nian.(Beijing: Zhongguo dian ying chu ban she: Xin
hua shu dian fa xing, 1984), 107.
487 Jennifer Rudolph, “Chinese Women and Modernity,” ExEAS Teaching Materials & Re-
488 Shuqin Cui, Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cin-
ema (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), xiii.
489 Shuqin Cui, Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cin-
ema (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), xiii.
490 Shuqin Cui, Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cin-
ema (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), xiii.
491 Karen Ward Mahar, Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
realized the educational significance of national films. “Wang Hanlun’s early retirement may have been due to eye problems caused by working under the charcoal lamps used on silent film sets”. She says in her memoir that she wished she could have made some patriotic films, but as a tiny woman, she was too weak to achieve it. During the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, Wang Hanlun refused to cooperate in any collaborative motion pictures or radio broadcasts. Her resistance soon led to the shutting down of her salon.

At last, she was cheated to marry an alleged member of the literati who turned out to be a vulgar alcoholic. Does her move back home signify her final failure? She moved out again very soon. Without obtaining the windy promises of decent betrothal gifts, Wang was forced to sell off her furniture and other personal possessions to survive.

Has she ever been a successful runaway Nora? Her patriotic conduct did not bring her success, but the shutdown of her business to some extend led her to be trapped in another unfortunate marriage. However, because of the change in polity, since the Chinese Communist Party took over the government there have not been any businesswomen in the film industry for nearly half a century. At least, she is a successful runaway Nora in Chinese film history.

The lack of documents is always a big problem when doing research on early films. A widespread electronic version of the list of “the Top 100 of the First in Chinese Film History” indicates that the first Chinese female screenwriter is Pu Shunqing, the wife of Hou Yao (the director of Divorcée), who wrote Cupid’s Puppets in 1925, directed by Hou Yao, produced by Great Wall Film Studio; and the first Chinese female film director is Xie Caizhen, who directed and starred An Orphan’s Cry (1925) for Nanxing (Southern Star) Film Company in the same year. Although their name can be testified in the credits information collected in the three–volume Zhongguo wusheng dianying juben (Scripts of Chinese Silent Film), edited by Chinese Film Archive in 1996, the academic research on these Chinese woman film pioneers is near zero.

Another question we need to pay attention to is why in standard Chinese film historiography Wang Hanlun, or her other compeers such as Yang Nai-mei, have never been written down as filmmakers or the early businesswomen in film industry. Part of the reason is that “in the past researchers had very limited access to extant material due both to inadequate management of the archive and tight government control of material from the Republican

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On the other hand, ideological considerations are hardly negligible. In Chinese film scholarship, Cheng, Jihua, Li Shaobai, and Xing Zuwen’s *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* (The History of Development of Chinese Cinema), first published in Beijing in 1963, has been recognized as the most influential standard Chinese film history. Zhang Yingjin classifies it as the history of film politics: “Cheng’s history is fundamentally a history of the leftist film movement because all historical and textual materials are arranged according to this ideological orientation.” In this two-volume monograph, actually, Wang Hanlun is not even introduced as an actress. Like many other film stars, her name only appears in the parentheses after the name of the roles she played. The few actresses mentioned with a three or four line introduction were those girls born in working-class families, such as Ruan Lingyu, whose father was an “engineering worker” and Wang Renmei, whose father was a “primary school teacher”. Film actors from other classes, such as Wang Hanlun, who came from a bureaucratic family, are ideologically neglected.

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On the Stage and on the Screen: Actresses as one of the Symbols of the Turkish Modernization Project
Selin Tüzün Gül

An Overview of the Socio–Cultural Context of Ottoman Empire in the first years of Cinema and the “woman issue”
In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire went through radical political and cultural changes. Military defeat and the international political context forced the Ottomans to acknowledge Western superiority, and to gain diplomatic acceptance from the West. Thus important structural reforms in administration and the legal system were adopted in order to modernize Ottoman society. In 1839 the Tanzimat (reorganization) firman was declared, which signalled the transformation of a theocratic sultanate to a modern government. This firman had three significant consequences: it increased the interference of foreign countries in the internal affairs of the Ottomans, gave some degree of autonomy to the central bureaucracy, and increased the liberty of non–Muslim communities, particularly in commerce. Moreover, the 1839 reforms had some direct consequences on the lives of elite women living in Istanbul. The increased cosmopolitan character of the capital, the active intellectual and political life after the reforms, and the emergence of the idea of citizenship among some segments of the Muslim community as well as the non–Muslim community had important repercussions on the lives of a few upper–class Muslim women in Istanbul. For instance, the missionary schools founded after 1839 enabled some Muslim women to acquire a modernist education, and some of those—among whom we can mention Halide Edib, Bedia Muşahhit and Neyyire Neyir (Ertuğrul)—played an important role in future Turkish cultural life.

The progress and education of women became closely related to the progress of the nation, particularly owing to women’s role as the mothers of the future generations and the demands of the era. Meanwhile Ziya Gökalp’s Turkish nationalism, which tried to make connections between Western civilization and Turkish national culture, became influential, and pre–Islamic culture became a reference point to justify the reforms concerning women. The male intellectuals who emerged owing to the reforms of the 19th century gave priority to the position of women to prove the harmony of Islam and modernization. Those intellectuals prioritized the “woman issue,” and in Nermin...

499 Ayşe Durakbaş, *Halide Edib Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm*, 3rd edition (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007), 131
500 Durakbaş, 97
501 Durakbaş, 121–123
Abadan’s words launched “the mild revolt of man against the Ottoman patriarchy”. By the end of 19th century, upper class educated women joined the debates about women which had been launched by men. Between 1895 and 1908, ten women’s magazines which brought up the social and political critiques of women were released; between 1913 and 1921, twenty-two other women’s magazines came up, and women’s associations with different social concerns emerged.

The Turkish Republic, founded on 29 October 1923, also gave priority to the position of women in society. The reforms concerning women were seen as an important aspect of the grand modernization project. Atatürk always spoke for women’s right to have the same education opportunities as men because he believed that women had to have different missions in all aspects of social life next to men. On the other hand, he saw an entire structural transformation as a target, and he wanted women to promote national ideals as the future mothers who would bring up future Turkish generations. Thus legal reforms concerning women went into effect. Turkish civil law, a direct copy of Switzerland’s civil law, aimed to provide the legal base for women to become equal citizens. The new republican ideology aimed at a remarkable mentality change about the position of women. Thus different arrangements in social life were made. For example, in secondary school books the restrictions imposed on women during Ottoman times were explained in detail. In harmony with the new republican ideology; Atatürk selected some female figures next to him as leading symbols of modernization. For instance, during the reforms concerning women, he always had his wife Latife Atatürk (Ussaki) next to him. During their marriage, she symbolized the new face of Turkish women as a first lady who was very active in public life. Afet Inan, a young girl eager to learn a foreign language and continue her education, was sent to Switzerland, and after having graduated, she stayed next to Atatürk. She became one of the founders of the Turkish History Foundation, and played an important role in shaping the Republic’s official ideology. Moreover, Atatürk’s adopted daughter Sabiha Gökçen, being the first female pilot soldier, implied Turkish nationalism, and became part of the common consciousness of Turkish people, at least the educated ones living in the cities. Just like Latife Ussaki, Sabiha

502 Woman issue” refers to the debates launched by the Westernization advocates on the position of women in Ottoman society after the second half of the 19th century see Nermin Abadan Unat, “Söylemden Protestoya: Türkiye’de Kadın Hareketlerinin Dönüşümü,” in 75.yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler, ed. Ayşe Berktay Hacimirzaoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 324–326
503 Abadan Unat, 324
504 Durakbaş, 125
Gökçen, and Afet Inan, the pioneers of Turkish cinema and theatre Neyyire Neyir(Ertuğrul), and particularly Bedi Muvahhit, became the symbols of the Turkish Republic’s modern women.

The debates about the Presence of Women on Stage and the screen
Like other monotheistic religions, Islam has severe restrictions on women and female sexuality. The Koran, establishing the normative practices of Islam, represents uncontrolled female sexuality as leading to social chaos (fitna). Thus, in order to prevent chaos, all aspects of social life are arranged around segregation. Men and women are strictly separated in most public areas. Public space belongs to men, and private space belongs to women.507 However, religion is always in interaction with the economic and socio–political structures in a community. Thus Islam may be interpreted differently at a particular time, in a particular geography. Particularly by the end of the 19th century, the educated, nationalist, and mainly male reformists in Ottoman society tried to prove the harmony of Islam and modernization. They brought up polygamy, women’s education, and segregation as the main problems concerning women’s rights.508

Theatre and cinema entered Ottoman society in such a transition period. The first tentative beginnings of a Westernized theatre started in 1868 by an Armenian, Güllü Agop, and finally in 1871 the first Muslim actor, Ayyar Hamza appeared on stage.509 Unlike Western–type theatre, which was introduced to Ottoman society quite late, the cinema entered Ottoman society just a year after the very first film exhibition in Paris in December 1895. However, filmmaking started much later. The Demolition of the Russian Monument in Ayastefanos, filmed in 1914 by Fuat Uzkanay, is regarded as the beginning of Turkish Cinema by many film researchers. Afterwards, some other movies like the Claw (Pence, Sedat Simavi, 1917), Binnaz (Ahmet Fehim Efendi, 1919), The Governess (Mürebbiye, Ahmet Fehim Efendi, 1919), Bican Efendi trilogy (Şadi Fikret Karagözolu, 1921) were made. In 1922, the era of Muhsin Ertuğrul started, which coincides with the first years of the Turkish Republic. Muhsin Ertuğrul, the actor and theatre director, had a monopoly on Turkish cinema until 1939, and stayed as the only director for 17 years.

In Ottoman society as well as in the newly born Turkish Republic, theatre had a more privileged position than cinema. For the male intellectuals who emerged owing to the reforms of the 19th century, theatre was as an indispensable part of Western civilization. The potential of theatre to transform the masses and its educational aspect was underlined by intellectuals like Mehmet Rauf, Kemal Emin, and İbnürrefik Ahmet Nuri in different magazines of the

507 Unat Abadan, 323
508 Deniz Kandiyoti, Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurtaşlar (İstanbul: Metis, 1997), 87
509 Muhsin Ertuğrul, Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın, 2th edition (İstanbul: Remzi, 2007), 22–24

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period, particularly in *Temasa and Theatre.*\(^{510}\) In the first years, theatre audiences were mainly composed of non–Muslim audiences and Muslim male intellectuals. For Muslim women, who could not even be among the theatre audience, being on the stage as an actress was impossible. For instance, in 1909 in Izmir women as well as men were called to come to the play by a newspaper announcement. However, the conservatives surrounded the theatre and threatened any woman who attempted to enter the theatre. Thus, the attempt failed. Despite some attempts after the Second Constitutional Era in 1908, it did not become common for Muslim women to be among the theatre audience until the foundation of the Turkish Republic.\(^{511}\) In such a context, Afife Jale, a pioneering Muslim woman, took part in a play called *Yamaçlar* in 1920, but she was subject to many legal and social pressures.

Contrary to the Ottoman officials, most of the intellectuals of the period saw the presence of women on stage as a sign of progress. When we look at the articles of the intellectuals, we can see that the newly emerging Turkish nationalism played an important role in justifying the presence of women on stage. For instance, in an article called *Tradition: The Devil That Wipes Away All That Is Positive* (*Örf, O Her Makul Şeyi Yutan Ejder*) published in *Temaşa* in 1918, Muhsin Ertuğrul underlined that the most important problem of the theatre was the lack of native Turkish speaking actresses, and he also claimed that theatre with non–Muslim actresses was strange to the audience in terms of language, emotion, and taste. He saw being dependent on minority actresses as a fatal risk for the national theatre as one day or the other they would leave for their national theatre.\(^{512}\)

In a censored interview published in *Temaşa* magazine in 1918, Mehmet Rauf, a well–known writer of the period, gave Japan as a model, and told that the progress of Japan could only be possible when the interdiction of women on stage was cancelled. In the censored part of the article, Rauf said that theatre was life, and neither a perfect life nor theatre could be possible without women in Ottoman society.\(^{513}\) In another article published in *Temasa* magazine, Muhsin Ertuğrul claimed that Turkish theatre did not exist because of the lack of Muslim Turkish women actresses, and he added that in Caucasus the Turkish women had been on stage without becoming immoral, and this was in harmony with Islam, which obliged progress.\(^{514}\) The opinions of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), the founder of modern Turkey, on the presence of women on the stage were similar to the intellectuals of the period. In a personal meeting with the theatre players who were on tour in Izmir, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)


\(^{511}\) Ertuğrul, 2007, p. 33

\(^{512}\) Efdal Seviçli, *Meşrutiyet'ten Cumhuriyete Sinemadan Tiyatroya Muhsin Ertuğrul* (İstanbul: Broy, 1987), 56

\(^{513}\) And, p. 36

\(^{514}\) Seviçli, p. 59
mentioned the urgency of seeing Turkish women on stage not to leave them devoid of theatre, and underlined the pitiful use of the Turkish language by the minority actresses. During this meeting he asked Bedia Muvahhit, then accompanying her actor husband, to act in a play in his presence in Izmir, which was already under the control of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), unlike occupied Istanbul. In his memoires, the actor Vasfi Rıza Zobu mentions that on 11 August 1923 Bedia Muvahhit acted in the presence of Mustafa Kemal in the Palace Cinema in Izmir, and he explains this historical event with sentences implying Turkish nationalism: “Muslim Turkish women achieved their cause”, taking possession of the Turkish stage with the “national will.”

Unlike theatre and opera, cinema did not receive much intellectual attention during its childhood years, and it was not directly subject to the Turkish Republic’s national cultural policies. Thus, some cinema researchers criticize this by qualifying cinema as the “adaptive child” of the Turkish Republic. Another researcher, Nilgün Abisel, analysed the magazine articles and the speeches of politicians between 1928 and 1938 on cinema. After comprehensive archive research, she came to the conclusion that even though the propaganda aspect of cinema was mentioned quite often, there was no attempt to construct a national cinema. Thus she came up with the conclusion that the foreign movies might have been preferred for Westernisation. However, according to Engin Ayça, the Republic nationalized the cinema by placing it under the custody of theatre.

The reasons behind the government’s lack of cinema policy are open to debate. However, we can definitely say that cinema as an art was closely bounded by and dependent on theatre until the end of the 1930s. The era of Muhsin Ertuğrul (1922–39) is also called “the era of theatrical influence” because of the heavy influence of theatre on cinema. Ertuğrul’s inability to create a cinematographic expression, and his long lasting monopoly on Turkish Cinema, have been criticized by different researchers. The cinema researcher Nijat Özön claims that Muhsin Ertuğrul had a simple formula concerning cinema:

515 Gökhan Akçura, Bedia Muvahhit Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Dairesi Yayınları, 1993), 35
516 Vasfi Rıza Zobu, O Günden Bugüne Anılar (İstanbul, Milliyet Yayınları, 1977), 85
517 Alim Şerif Onaran, Türk Sineması, Volume 1 (Ankara: Kıtle, 1994), 102
When the theatre season was closed, he used to take the Municipality’s theatre actors in front of the receiver, and make them repeat a play they had already acted in. Or take any foreign movie, and make an adaption.\textsuperscript{521}

Despite all the negative aspects, it is also the period when many firsts in Turkish cinema history were witnessed, such as the first sound movie, the first Muslim women actresses on the screen, etcetera.\textsuperscript{522} According to cinema researcher Giovanni Scognamillo, Muhsin Ertuğrul continued his cinema activities next to theatre, mainly for commercial reasons. Indeed, he utilized many resources in his movies. He used the examples of foreign theatre and cinema. In the meantime, he turned towards domestic work and sometimes to original scenarios. In fact, more than a particular choice, it was a commercial concern—the repetition of what was liked.\textsuperscript{523} He decided to adapt Halide Edib Adivar’s Independence War novel \textit{The Shirt of Flame} and asked for her authorization. Bedia Muvahhit, the principal actress of \textit{The Shirt of Flame}, explains the story like this:

They wanted to film Mrs. Halide Edib’s novel. Halide Edib told them that only a Turkish woman could perform this role. Ertuğrul Muhsin was a good friend of Muvahhid and me. He came to Muvahhid and asked him if his wife would play. I was very happy. Acting in a movie all of a sudden was something that I did not expect…I said yes. We filmed the movie. They gave me a considerable amount of money for that time, and they liked my performance, they gave me 50 lira more.\textsuperscript{524}

Halide Edib Adivar, being one of the elite women who received private tutoring at home, and a modernist education at a missionary school, was born in Istanbul in 1882. She is not only a prominent Turkish writer, but also a recognized social activist. Particularly after World War I, she became an important political figure, and she provided support to the national movements, particularly through her writing. After the occupation of İzmir by the Greek army on May 16 1919, Adivar delivered a speech at a rally in Sultanahmet, Istanbul. This event established her reputation as a national hero and an advocate for national liberation. As the Allies occupied Istanbul in 1920, she fled to Anatolia with her family to become one of the key female heroes of the national struggle. Despite having divergent ideas with Mustafa Kemal later on, during the war years she was present on various fronts alongside Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and she wrote about her first hand war experience in her book called \textit{The Shirt of Flame}.

While many Turkish cinema history books give credit to Muhsin Ertugrul for the encouragement of Muslim women on the stage, the testimony of the principal actress Bedia Muvahhit in a documentary shows that Halide Edib insisted on

\textsuperscript{521} Öзон, 1995, 22
\textsuperscript{522} For detailed information about the period see Şikran Esen, Türk \textit{Sinemasının Kilometre Taşları}, 2nd edition (İstanbul: Agora, 2010), 22–31
\textsuperscript{523} Scognamillo, 59
\textsuperscript{524} Akçura, 28
the presence of Turkish actresses in the cinema version of her novel. (*Simurg Gerçeğin Peşinde 30 Yolcu*, Samih Rıfat, 1994) The spreading of Turkish nationalism made *The Shirt Of Flame* the ideal novel to justify the presence of Turkish women on the screen. Unlike the femme fatales of the previous silent movies *Mürebbiye* (*The Governess*, Ahmet Fehim Efendi, 1919), *İstanbul'da Bir Facia–ı Aşk* (*A Love Disaster in Istanbul*, Muhsin Ertuğrul, 1922) and *Binnaz* (Sedat Simavi, 1917), *The Shirt of Flame*’s female characters sacrificed themselves for the national mission. The movie is not available today. However, *The Shirt of Flame* is the story of a woman, Ayse, who decided to join the Turkish National Movement “Kuvayı Milliye” in Anatolia who rebelled against the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire by the Allies in the aftermath of the Treaty of Mondros. Other than being a War of Independence story, the movie was about two men who were in love with the same woman. Yet as the story developed, the War of Independence became the leading actor of the story.\footnote{Scognomillo, 68}

It was the first movie about the War of Independence, and the novel, *The Shirt of Flame*, had created deep effects at that moment. According to the theatre and cinema actor and director Ercüment Behzat Lav, the movie documented the unforgettable pain, and the joys of the War of Independence, which were still very fresh in people’s memories at that time.\footnote{Şener, 39} Another researcher believed that the movie had such instances as in a documentary.\footnote{Şener, 39} The movie achieved a high level of success. It received good reviews in terms of its artistic qualities, as well as commercial success. The audiences had to pay for two tickets in order to see the whole movie, which was divided into two parts for commercial reasons.\footnote{Özgüç Agah. *Türk Filmleri Sözlüğü*, II. Edition, Vol:1 (İstanbul: SESAM, 1998), 27}

**The profile of pioneer actresses: Bedia Muvahhit and Neyyire Neyir(Ertuğrul)**

As mentioned above, Neyyire Neyir(Ertuğrul)and Bedia Muvahhit were among the few women who had the opportunity to receive a modernist education at missionary schools at some time during their education. They spoke at least one Latin language, and they were married to men who were active in cultural and social life.

Bedia Muvahhit was born at the turn of the 20th century. She came from a well–off family. She grew up with governesses until the death of her father. She learnt French and Greek at a very young age. Selim Sırı Tarcan, the founder of the Turkish National Olympic Committee, and an intellectual of the period, discovered the brilliance of the young girl, and volunteered to give her private courses. Tarcan explains how he became the private tutor of Bedia like this:

> They were living on the island in winter as well as summer as we did. One day her mother came to visit us with her son Fuadi and daughter Bedia. That day the manners and the attitude of that child did not slip my notice. I saw it

\footnote{Erman Şener, *Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Sinemamız* (İstanbul: Ahmet Sari Matbaası, 1970), 38}
\footnote{Scognomillo, 68}
\footnote{Şener, 39}
as my duty to give a hand to that girl who just turned the age of school, and asked her mother’s authorization to serve the development of her intellectual and physical capacity, and told her that Bedia had the capacity to be a good child for her country. Her mother was pleased with my offer...  

Bedia had her first stage experience when she was just a little girl. She and some other schoolgirls read poems during the interval of a play called “Sultan Cem” which was staged sometime after the beginning of the Second Constitutional Era. Young Bedia read a French poem, and her pronunciation and her calm manners were acclaimed. After the Second Constitutional Era, the women’s associations were founded, and they demanded more rights for women. Owing to their efforts and Mr Osman Mazhar’s, seven young women were employed in the French Telephone Company, and one of them was Bedia Şekip (Muvahhit). She was 14 years old, and still a student at that time, but as the communication was in French, and Bedia was fluent in French, she became one of the first Muslim women who entered the business world at such a young age. (Bilgeler ve Ustalar, Yücel Çakmakli, 1983) What is more, it was technically impossible to answer the phones with a veil at the telephone company, so the women started to work without the veil. Bedia was friends with the intellectuals of the period like the well-known writers Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı. An anecdote about her first years as a young woman with her friends can be found in Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu’s book, Youth and Literature Memories. In the book she is described as a free-spirited, humorous young woman. After graduating from high school, Bedia Şekip (Muvahhit) became a teacher at a high school for girls, and she attracted attention with her daring behaviour, particularly about the veil. She took her veil off at the high school she worked in, despite the legal and social restrictions. Her marriage with Muvahhit Refet, a famous actor of the time, put her in close contact with the theatre milieu and nightlife, and facilitated the start of her career as an actress. In 1930, she acted as a guest actress in Othello staged by a Greek theatre group led by Gavrilidis. Her performance as Desdemona in Greek was so acclaimed that she was invited to Greece with the Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü by the Greek officials. In a magazine called Artist published in 1931, Bedia Muvahhit qualified herself as the representative of Turkish women and the Turkish theatre in Greece. In 1933 she married Ferdi Statzer, an Austrian who was a composer and a pianist, and stayed married to him for 18 years.

529 Akçura, 13
530 Akçura, 19
531 Akçura, 23
533 Akçura, 61
In the documentary *Bilgeler ve Ustalar*, Haldun Dormen, one of the leading figures of Turkish theatre, qualifies Bedia Muvahhit as a revolution on her own because she became an actress overnight due to a single word from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. (*Bilgeler ve Ustalar*, Yücel Çakmakli, 1983) During her long career she acted in classics like *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Imaginary Invalid* as well as in several adaptations like *Deli Saraylı*. According to the poet and critic Cevat Çapan, despite her capacity to act in all types of plays, her most remarkable performances were with actor Vasfi Rıza Zobu in Ahmet Nuri VIII’s adaptations from French vaudeville and comedies. (*Simurg Gerçeğin Peşinde 30 Yolcu*, Samih Rıfat, 1994) As well as being an actress, Bedia Muvahhit also translated and adapted many plays. Being one of the two first Muslim actresses, she must be seen as a historical figure in Turkish cinema as well as in Turkish theatre. Until 1969, she acted in a considerable number of movies. Yet *The Shirt of Flame* was exceptional for her as she thought that she had fulfilled a nationalist mission. (*Bilgeler ve Ustalar*, Yücel Çakmakli, 1983) Like many other intellectuals of her time, Muvahhit preferred theatre to cinema for different reasons. For instance, as an actress, she disliked the editing principle of cinema. What’s more, she thought she was underestimated in cinema, and cinema was unfaithful to her. She gave an example to clarify the issue: despite performing one of the principal roles in a movie called *Ateşten Çingene* filmed in 1968, her name was not mentioned on the poster, and it was written very small in the credits. (*Simurg Gerçeğin Peşinde 30 Yolcu*, Samih Rıfat, 1994) Bedia Muvahhit, had a long lasting career and died in 1994 after being honoured as a state artist by the Turkish Republic in 1987.

Neyyire Neyir, the other female pioneer of Turkish cinema and theatre, was born in 1903 in Istanbul. Her father, who was close to Sultan Abdülhamid, died when she was two years old. Her mother remarried with Manizeh Mehmet Tahir, who was a teacher in Medresseh. When she was 15, her mother also died. She started to attend Teacher Training School (Darul-malumat) at the age of 13. In 1921, she graduated and got her diploma as a teacher. However, she wanted to continue her education to learn a foreign language, and she registered at the American Girl’s College all by herself. In 1922, they were looking for the second Muslim Turkish woman to act in *The Shirt of Flame* through newspaper advertisements, when she was still a student at the American College, and she was the only one who applied. Her talent for fine arts and creative writing was striking even when she was at high school, and owing to her beautiful voice she used to recite the Koran to her friends and teachers. A friend of her, and a famous theatre player of the era mentions that she often used to repeat the well known poet and intellectual Tevfik Fikret’s saying “A nation who leaves its women devoid of education convicts its boys to be spiritually orphaned,” and she used to try to explain the meaning of these words. Tevfik Fikret was among the intellectuals...
who used to claim that the Turkish theatre could rise only if the Turkish women got on the stage.534

Neyyire Neyir was married to Muhsin Ertuğrul, the leading figure of Turkish theatre and cinema. Neyyire Neyir’s birth name was Münire. However, after becoming an actress, she preferred being called Neyyire Neyyir, and after the marriage she started to be known as Neyyire Ertuğrul.535 Neyyire Ertuğrul was the founder of the cinema and theatre magazine Curtain & Stage (Perde ve Sahne). She used to prepare the magazine with her husband, Muhsin Ertuğrul. In the first issue of the magazine she explained why they decided to release such a magazine which gave important clues about her approach to cinema and theatre. According to her, the cinema had such an impact on shaping the tastes and the thoughts of the public that it became impossible to ignore it anymore. It was more effective than any other art. She called the cinema as “the art of the public” not because it originated from the public, but as it had such an influence on the public, and she qualified theatre as “the representative of humanity”. What is more, according to her the cinema replaced the novel, and the book in terms of its educational aspect, and invaded the world in just 45 years.536 Neyyire Ertuğrul believed in the educational aspect of cinema and theatre, and she thought they could be used to inform the public. However she died at the age of 40 in 1943 before realizing many of her projects.

Conclusion
In the second half of the 19th century Turkish nationalism became influential through its attempts to make connections between Western civilization and national culture. The male intellectuals who emerged owing to the reforms of the 19th century gave priority to the position of women to prove the harmony of Islam and modernization. The Turkish Republic, founded on 29 October 1923, also gave priority to the position of women. The progress and the education of women became closely related to the progress of the nation particularly owing to women’s role as the mothers of the future generations. The women as well as men were charged with missions as citizens of the republic. In such a context, the pioneering actresses, particularly Bedia Muvahhit, owing to her long life and career, became leading symbols of modernization. Thus, we can claim that the newly emerging Turkish nationalism in the 19th century served to justify the presence of women in public space as well as on stage, and on screen.

535 Zobu, 1944, 18
536 Muhsin Ertuğrul, Perde Tekrar Açılırken…Neyyire Bir Meşale Yarışında öldü, Perde ve Sahne 22–25 (3rd Year), 1, 18
Performing “Femininity”
I Get Lifted? Delineating Uplift’s Restrictions upon Black Female Desire in Silent Era Race Films

Nina Cartier

Introduction
At the turn of the twentieth century and well beyond, the vast majority of African–Americans still struggled to secure the legislative, economic and human rights granted to them during Reconstruction. As such, they began to develop mass strategies to assist them in demanding those rights and to aid them in coping with the demoralizing effects of second–class citizenship. In the early decades, ideologies of uplift became crucial aspects of those mass strategies, and they formed the basis of many theories purported by the primary agitators of the time: W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells.

Though all the black leaders who led the struggle against the prohibitive, racist practices agreed that ideologies of uplift were essential to the struggle, they disagreed as to how those ideologies should be conceptualized and utilized to the greatest advantage of black people. Dubois conceived of an uplift ideology that insisted on white acceptance of blacks as equal human beings in a desegregated society. In addition to protesting the legal barriers of Jim Crow, he argued for black access to higher education and for blacks’ development of the cultured arts: music, literature, visual arts, etc. His essay, “The Talented Tenth,” epitomized his uplift ideology.\(^{537}\) In contrast, Washington conceived of an uplift ideology that insisted on white recognition of blacks based on merit earned though hard work and uprightness regardless of segregation practices. He scoffed at the development of the cultured arts, preferring that blacks be trained in agriculture and service so that they could earn a living. His autobiography, “Up From Slavery,” best exemplifies his uplift ideology.\(^{538}\) Espousing what many considered a radical viewpoint, Garvey conceived of an uplift ideology based on black solidarity, economic self–
sufficiency, political freedom and separatism. He refused both Duboisian and Washingtonian tactics, agitating for a return to Africa and the fulfillment of black demands by military force, if necessary. “The Declaration of the Rights of the Negro People” makes explicit his uplift ideology.

Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells, all clubwomen and daughters of slave women, mobilized black women’s clubs in order to purport their various ideologies of uplift. While they all agitated for women’s suffrage, Cooper primarily rallied for increased access to education and the protection of black women’s virtue. She espoused many of what later became characterized as DuBoisian views, as she lobbied for black attainment of higher education, not just industrial education.

Terrell espoused many of Washington’s views regarding uplift, until their dissenting interpretations about government response to the Brownsville riot eroded her alliance to him. She led clubs, held various offices and rallied for women’s rights and political reform. Finally, Wells espoused many of DuBois’s views regarding uplift, and spent her career doing race work by lecturing, teaching, and writing.

In theory, all the above–mentioned leaders felt they advanced the cause of all black people, regardless of sex, with their uplift ideologies. In practice, however, they dissented regarding the status of women in the work of uplift. In doing so, they limited the free expression of black women’s sexual desires according to their particular interpretations of uplift. As uplift ideologies continued to flood black mass media, they eventually infiltrated the politics of race films, both in front of and behind the camera.

Critics in the black mass media—newspaper journalists in particular—censured the preponderance of malicious black stereotypes purported as black representations in cinema. As they rallied for increased black access to the means of film production, whose efforts they hoped would counter the racist and exoticized images onscreen, several filmmakers answered the call. However, black discourse surrounding cinema cannot be reduced to pure refutation of negative black representations. Many pioneering black filmmakers, as well as white–owned production companies, sought to capitalize on the great profits they deemed possible in the film industry. The buying

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540 Ibid.
541 Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Perennial, 1984), 87.
542 White, Too Heavy a Load, 49.
543 Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 105.
544 Ibid., 104–07.
546 Stewart, Migrating to the Movies, 189.
power of the black dollar held special interest for them, as these filmmakers and companies became keenly aware of the rise of black urban populations due to the Great Migration and the increasing (although still limited in comparison to whites) discretionary income and leisure time urbanization and the continuing industrialization of the American workplace had now afforded many new migrants.\textsuperscript{547} Race films, then, participated in a complex negotiation: simultaneously depicting positive images of black life, countering stereotypes, inculcating migrants with urbanity, and conveying the ideologies of uplift. In the process, race films’ transfer of these themes onto the screen teemed with paradoxes, as filmmakers struggled to make profits and to satisfy audiences who increasingly demanded aesthetically pleasing and politically accommodating images.\textsuperscript{548}

Focusing on representations of uplift reveals traces of the competing theories put forth by DuBois, Washington and others. In some instances, the films blatantly evoke one camp or the other with a photograph or painting of the theorist prominently featured in the mise–en–scène.\textsuperscript{549} Other films prove less direct, preferring to use intertitles, characters’ occupations, or narrative actions to suggest their uplift messages. However, the repression of black female desires becomes apparent as the cinematic devices of uplift across films are compared to each other, and the dialogic relationship this repression has to ideologies of uplift comes into sharp relief.

Taking cues from film theorists, film historians, and black feminist theorists, one can begin to construct a useful methodology with which to understand silent era race films and their relationships to uplift. Delineating the cinematic structures of signification of uplift ideologies comprises the essential task toward this aim. The goal, ultimately, remains to show how these cinematic structures of uplift ideology “uplift” the entire black race while they paradoxically suppress black female desire. In particular, this study concentrates on three silent era race films: \textit{Within Our Gates} (Oscar Micheaux, 1920); \textit{Body and Soul} (Micheaux, 1924); and \textit{Scar of Shame} (Frank Perugini and the Colored Film Players Corporation, 1927).

\textit{Theoretical Paradigm}

In his theoretical essay “System of a Fragment” (on The Birds)\textsuperscript{550}, Raymond Bellour describes how a fragment, or small portion of a film, can be understood by examining its stylistic methods. Particularly, he focuses on the alternations between repetition and variation within the fragment, and how

\textsuperscript{547} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{548} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{549} Here I am specifically recalling the portrait of Frederick Douglas on Alvin’s wall from \textit{Scar of Shame}, and the images of various black leaders on Martha Jane’s wall from \textit{Body and Soul}. Micheaux scholars have theorized his connections to the uplift strategies of Washington.
symmetry and asymmetry order these alternations. Bellour then proceeds to subdivide the fragment into shots and group them according to the categories of his analysis, governed by the motifs the shots repeat and how they rhyme with one another. To aid him in analysis, he utilizes sketches, shot descriptions, and frame enlargements. Bellour’s approach to close shot by shot analysis ultimately identifies the system of the particular film.

In his article “Race Movies” as Voices of the Black Bourgeoisie: The Scar of Shame, Thomas Cripps engages the cultural and social discourses of uplift as evidenced in Scar and across the entire genre of race films.\(^{551}\) He heralds Scar of Shame as an exemplar of the genre due to its focus on class strife as an obstacle to racial uplift. Cripps describes the manners in which Scar of Shame constructs uplift and its polar opposite, degradation. He argues that race movies were really not about intraracial racism at all, but about class clashes, and that scholars continue to read them in this incorrect manner. The crux of Cripps’ argument rests upon his analysis of the film’s intertitles and the actions of the plot, coupled with a reinterpretation of E. Franklin Fraser’s sociological work Black Bourgeoisie. He argues that the black middle class, like those characters of “higher aims” from Scar, valued “eclectic criteria” when composing their uplift morals and strategies.\(^{552}\) Cripps concludes his argument by presenting the production details that highlight the film’s emphasis on class distinction, not color distinction, to differentiate the aims of the characters and the film’s uplift message.

Like Cripps, Jane Gaines also addresses uplift in Scar of Shame, both in her article “The Scar of Shame: Skin Color and Caste in Black Silent Melodrama” and in her book, Fire and Desire: Mixed Race Movies in the Silent Era. In her article, Gaines engages Scar’s stylistic devices and aesthetic conventions and critiques the cultural and social discourses of uplift.\(^{553}\) She too, considers Scar paradigmatic among race films, and like Cripps, dissects the intertitles. However, Gaines attacks the film’s (and the genre’s) implicit intraracial hierarchies through an extended analysis of its uses of melodrama, mulattas, style as a space for subversion, and the convention of happy endings.\(^{554}\) In Fire, Gaines’ also addresses Body and Soul, and Within Our Gates, considering the disjunction apparent in the final scene of Body and Soul, and providing an extended analysis of the attempted rape scene, the lynching scene, and skin–color coding depicted in Within Our Gates.\(^{555}\)

\(^{552}\) Ibid.
\(^{554}\) Ibid., 143, Chapters 5 & 6.
\(^{555}\) Ibid.
Jacqueline Stewart’s work, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*, provides much needed complexity to the discourses surrounding early black filmmaking, early black audiences, and early black spectatorial practices. Stewart correctly refutes several long-standing notions that 1) all early black cinematic representations were unfavorable; 2) all early black audiences resisted all early black cinematic representations, especially the unflattering stereotypical depictions, and did not patronize the movies in any significant masses; 3) black independent filmmaking came in response to furor over Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*. Additionally, Stewart examines the complex negotiations early black filmgoers and filmmakers may have performed while consuming, celebrating, creating, rejecting, or remaining ambivalent to various black representations in cinema. Her concept of “reconstructive spectatorship” posits a method to interrogate early black audiences’ possible responses to cinema.

Bell Hooks’ work, “The Oppositional Gaze”, provides another concept with which to interrogate black audiences’ possible responses to cinema, but her model focuses specifically on black female spectatorship. She posits the “oppositional gaze,” a restructuring of looking relations that enables black women to critically engage the filmic text by resisting the hegemonic, patriarchal systems inherent in many films. Black women can also read “against” the film, reconstituting the erasure of black female representations and thereby producing a pleasure in creating an authorized gaze that is independent from white male, black male, and white female constructed subject positions. Importantly, Hooks opens the discourses surrounding black female representations in cinema to black women outside of the academy, creating a needed platform upon which all black women can discuss their relationships to films, and validating their long-silenced opinions, thoughts, and criticisms.

Patricia Hill–Collins provides a theory of black feminist thought, as purported in her work of the same title. In a move similar to hooks, Hill–Collins extends her critical paradigm to include the insights of women not in the academy, but whose thoughts and efforts still afford them the label “intellectual.” She conceives of the intersecting oppressions black women face—of class and gender or of race and sexuality as examples—as forming a matrix of domination. This matrix theory enables black women to place shifting emphasis on various oppressions instead of always foregrounding race or...

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556 Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*.
557 Ibid., 94.
559 Ibid.
560 Ibid., 125–27.
562 Ibid., 18.
gender as the primary one. In other words, black women should not have to suffer gender inequity while working toward racial uplift, nor should they have to choose between fighting for equal American citizenship or securing medical insurance for same sex marriages. She purports that efforts to control black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of black women’s oppression, and she offers new ways for black women to conceptualize their own ideas about their sexual politics.  

Insights gleaned from these six scholars, along with the historical contexts of uplift ideologies as described earlier, form the basis of the methodology used to analyze the cinematic structures of signification of uplift ideologies, and to interrogate the manner in which those structures restrict black female desire.

**Within Our Gates**

*Within Our Gates* depicts the travails of Sylvia Landry, a young schoolteacher from the North. She endeavors to raise funds to prevent the closing of the small Southern school where she works in order to bring much needed education to poor black rural families. In telling Sylvia’s story, Micheaux weaves a tale of Sylvia’s woeful past, riddled with near rape and lynching; her present, heavy with the school’s financial troubles and an engagement gone sour; and her future, holding the promise of new love and achievement. A mulatto figure, Sylvia becomes the site of competing discourses surrounding the events of her life, and her characterization enables Micheaux to explore the rich tapestry her complex life presents.

Micheaux was very outspoken about the purposes of his films, stating that he wanted to depict “truth,” or the Negro as he “really was.” Gates typifies his cinematic style in pursuit of this truth, which led him to depict disturbing scenes of multi-generational and multi-gendered white lynch mobs, black female rape at the hand of white gentry, and the struggles of black sharecroppers in the South after Reconstruction alongside images of successful black doctors, military men and righteous schoolteachers. Before Micheaux, the treatment of such material in the hands of white filmmakers had continued to distort or deny the “truth” of these situations, in the eyes of many blacks. The black press complained that white filmmakers most often preferred to depict the history of black/white race relations as dependent on the tight control of a population of lascivious black beasts and infantile black servants who lacked both history and the means to contribute productively to American society, despite the preponderance of black creativity, scientific achievement, and military heroism.  

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563 Ibid., 81, 128.
564 Bowser, Gaines, and Musser, eds., *Oscar Micheaux & His Circle*, 45.
when it suited his narrative or marketing purposes, Micheaux seemed to expose the tensions emanating from the conflicting discourses of race relations that inhere in the depiction of his particular brand of truth. Authorial intention aside, with Gates Micheaux presents a story very much engaged with uplift strategies, and a closer look at its opening scene helps delineate the formal and stylistic devices that comprise uplift’s contours.

The first scene opens with an intertitle, which reads: “At the opening of our drama, we find our characters in the North, where the prejudices and hatreds of the South do not exist— though this does not prevent the occasional lynching of a Negro.” On the surface, the title conveys a wry joke that black audiences in the North would immediately recognize since their lived realities were evidence of the very real prejudices and hatreds they still suffered in the North.

Immediately following the intertitle, the film irises out from black to a long shot of the heroine Sylvia reading while seated at a table in an elegantly appointed parlor. Although the shot functions to visually introduce us to our main protagonist, its proximity to the intertitle provides commentary on one of the film’s markers of uplift, recognition. At its core, the opening intertitle serves many functions: 1) it connects Sylvia to a history of lynching, recognizing the argument many black scholars purport is intimately bound with the imagined history of white female rape at the hands of black men, even as the large population of mulattoes with slave ancestry bespeaks a lineage more in line with actual black female rape at the hands of white men; 2) it collapses the perceived cultural distance of the North from the South, in recognizing that Negroes can get lynched up North, too, not just in the “uncultured” South; 3) and it foreshadows the narrative presentation of the flashback scenes in which Sylvia’s adoptive family is lynched. Since all uplift ideologies concern gaining recognition of the history and humanity of African–Americans, Micheaux’s flat announcement of prejudice and lynching would indicate to black audiences a move towards acknowledging that humanity by acknowledging the actuality of that particular black history which has been hidden from the screen and disregarded by white civil society. The scene continues, cutting to another intertitle, which reads: “Sylvia Landry—a schoolteacher from the South visiting her Northern cousin—is typical of the intelligent Negro of our times. –Evelyn Preer”

As the first shot has already established Sylvia’s prosperity and middle–class standing through its depiction of her in the home’s elegantly appointed interior, this intertitle serves to underscore that depiction. Where in the first shot, the sumptuous cushioned sofa and chairs, the elegant tables and lamps, and the luxurious draperies all serve to connote black prosperity and class, in this intertitle, Sylvia’s intelligence connotes her inclusion in this class. Sylvia’s access to the level of education that would enable her to become a

566 Stewart, Migrating to the Movies, 225.
schoolteacher also connotes her class, for at that historical moment, it was still difficult and expensive for African–Americans to attain higher education. Calling Sylvia “typical” suggests that many Negroes possess intelligence despite their sometimes limited access to this education, and it functions as a gesture of recognizing this fact while undercutting popular, white racist theories that blacks were dumb and uneducable.

The scene then cuts back to a medium close-up of Sylvia still in the parlor engrossed in her reading. Similar to the first shot and preceding intertitle, this shot connotes middle-class standing by depicting Sylvia’s pastime as reading, further underscored by the other books on the table beside her. That she has leisure time, and that she spends it reading further connotes her class status. However in this shot, due to the framing and even lighting, we can assess Sylvia’s physical beauty. Sylvia’s fair complexion, one marker of black beauty, had been apparent from her first shot. This shot accentuates the beauty her complexion had only suggested in the first shot.

Though scholars continue to debate the use of fair-skinned characters as dramatic leads in early race films as problematic, Sylvia’s fair complexion still directly points to the actuality that the black middle class was largely composed of fair-skinned African–Americans. This, in turn, points to the greater accessibility to better education and better career opportunities fair-skinned blacks often enjoyed due to their skin color. As sometimes self-appointed leaders of the race, these fair-skinned blacks often represented the public face of uplift. Theoretically, uplift strategies benefited all blacks, regardless of skin color or class, since its “lifting as we climb” motto suggested that those blacks who had made any strides in education, economics, or legal rights were duty-bound to assist those others of the race who had not yet advanced as far. In practice, such egalitarian notions often smothered under the weight of nepotism and intraracial prejudice stemming from class and color biases. Thus fair-skinned blacks sometimes helped just fair-skinned blacks, so that the cycle repeated to keep those few privileged ones ahead and to further buttress the skewed belief that only the fair-skinned blacks were capable of making any progress, for uplifting themselves individually or for uplifting the race as a whole. Sylvia’s skin color, therefore, acts as a code that transmits this disparity between uplift strategies in theory and in practice. And even as other characters of various skin tones are represented, Micheaux refuses to resolve the ambiguity with which he has presented the relationship between skin color and uplift.

The scene continues for thirteen more shots, primarily even-paced medium close-ups, during which Sylvia and her cousin talk and read her letter;

567 White, Too Heavy a Load, 79.
568 It is interesting to note that DuBois, Washington, Terrell, Cooper and Wells were all fair-skinned; Garvey was dark-skinned.
569 White, Too Heavy a Load, 54–55.
and one intertitle, which introduces Sylvia’s cousin Alma. It reads: “Alma Pritchard, a divorcée, is secretly in love with Conrad and ready to give marriage another try. –Flo Clements.”

In addition to the often cited argument that Alma diametrically opposes Sylvia due to Alma’s darker skin color—which here can also be coded as lesser beauty—and her costume of darker colors instead of Sylvia’s lighter colors, Alma and Sylvia contrast in another way related to uplift: marital status.

On the surface, it would appear that Sylvia and Alma share a common marital status, that of being single. However, even though they are both single, they are not single in the same way nor for the same reason. Since she is engaged, Sylvia’s single status is coded as acceptable because it is temporary. Further, even though we do not know exactly why Sylvia is single, we can effectively rule out one reason: she is not divorced. And, in an oblique nod to her beauty, Sylvia’s desirability as a wife is underscored because she is not a former wife, hence she could still be chaste and virginal, which in this narrative serve as markers not only of female virtue and attractiveness but also of uplift.

Reminiscent of the uplift tenets of DuBois, Washington, Garvey, Cooper, Terrell, and Wells, black women’s roles, marital status and uplift were inextricably bound. While DuBois and Garvey rallied for black women to fulfill their duties as mothers and wives, Cooper, Terrell and Wells lobbied for the protection of black women’s virtue by their men. Thus, unmarried black women were both threats and threatened. In the eyes of DuBois and Garvey, the threat single black women pose was the annihilation of the black race by not marrying and thus not creating future generations: race suicide. In the eyes of the black women’s club movement, single black women were at an even greater disadvantage then married black women, since when their virtue was threatened, they had no one to defend their chastity and honor. It is important to note that in this era in white society, black women were still regarded as highly sexualized beings, unable to be raped and thus available for the unprovoked sexual advances of white men. Additionally, unaccompanied women, also coded as single women in this diegesis, were often prey for the unwanted sexual approaches of all men. Marriage, then, was an integral part of black women’s uplift strategy.

To confine black women’s desires to the institution of marriage was to indirectly suggest that unattached black women who preferred their single status were threats to the black patriarchal order. Since these desires were unsanctioned, they remained outside of the patriarchal order, and thus, unchecked, could weaken marriage’s stronghold on women’s mobility, the expression of their ideas, and the rights of their reproduction. In order for

570 Ibid., 68.
571 Stewart, Migrating to the Movies, 230.
black women to wield any political power, uplift ideologies of this time dictate that black women must marry.

In sharp contrast to Sylvia, Alma’s single status as a divorcée codes her as undesirable and dangerous in this narrative. For even though her status as a single woman could change with her marrying anew, since the dissolution of her previous marriage, Alma will always have been a divorcée. As the narrative offers no motivation for her divorce, we are not able to judge her accordingly—for instance if she was presented as an adulteress, she would be evil. However, evaluating Alma on this basis is not necessary, since it is quite enough narratively to leave ambiguous her reasons for divorce. We merely know from the intertitle that Alma has “tried” marriage, and presumably, failed. Connecting Alma to divorce effectively conjures notions of possible infidelity, impropriety, or other unsuitability for the woman’s role in a marriage according to the Victorian standards of gender economy in the diegesis.572 In all, Alma is not a desirable woman for a wife.

The threat Alma poses to the gender economy of uplift in the narrative becomes evident in the intertitle as well, through her desire for Conrad, Sylvia’s fiancé. Shots of Alma’s heaving chest, leering eyes and snarling mouth connote her jealousy of Sylvia’s impending happiness with Conrad. Her intense reactions to Sylvia’s engagement letter foreshadow the duplicitous schemes that follow as she tries to steal Conrad from Sylvia later in the narrative. Although her plans to win Conrad fail, Alma does indeed thwart Sylvia’s plans to marry, as Conrad refuses Sylvia. In this manner, Alma cannot be recouped in the gender economy of uplift, unlike Sylvia who does eventually marry at the end of the narrative. Alma’s threat comes then, not only in the form of destroying one marriage, but also in destroying the entire institution of marriage by being unable to successfully participate in it or abide by its rules of conduct. As marriage functions as one device by which black women participate in and are affirmed by uplift strategies, Alma’s irreclaimability into the institution of marriage further contrasts her with Sylvia, and diminishes any positive association to uplift Alma can have in the diegesis.

In asserting her desires for Conrad, and taking actions as the pursuer instead of the pursued, Alma violates the Victorian standards of propriety espoused by all of the uplift ideologies. As such, she must be punished in the narrative for her transgressions. However, as Alma tries to atone her wrongs to Sylvia, and to reinscribe herself into those Victorian standards, the narrative does not seem to punish her. Instead, her atonement motivates a flashback explaining Sylvia’s turbulent past, and Micheaux leaves ambiguous how to deal with Alma.

572 Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 47.
Body and Soul chronicles the nightmares of Martha Jane, a pious Southern woman. Following a phantasmagorical distortion of her own repressed desires for Rev. Jenkins, her pastor, during which he rapes and brutalizes her daughter Isabelle and steals Martha Jane’s savings, she feverishly awakens to allow her daughter to marry Sylvester, the man she desires. In telling Martha Jane’s story, Micheaux spins a complex web of pathos–filled flashbacks, never clearly demarcating where the nightmares end and the present begins. A morally righteous figure, Martha Jane becomes the locus of contradictory discourses surrounding her desires, her fears and a black woman’s place in the narrative, and her characterization enables Micheaux to seathingly assess the damaging effects of religious zealousness on the black psyche.

As stated earlier, Micheaux was adamant about publicizing his intent when creating a film; he sought to uncover truths about black life. However, Micheaux was not as vocal about his specific intent when creating Body and Soul. So many scholars utilize his personal history, culled from his novels or even as socially created by Micheaux for promotional purposes, in order to speculate about the meanings of his films.573 Scholars suggest that Micheaux had an antagonistic relationship with religion in general, and black preachers specifically.574 Although this notion informs much of the criticism surrounding Body and Soul, it does not adequately account for the collisions with uplift strategies and the race work of black male clergy this film presents. Nor does this notion of Micheaux’s antagonism elucidate the specific structures of uplift in this film in relation to characters beyond the clergy represented.

However, in analyzing two scenes from Body and Soul, we can uncover how its film system signifies uplift. Just as marriage figures prominently in uplift strategies for women in Gates, so too does it loom large in Body and Soul. However, in two particular scenes from this film, marriage figures quite differently.

In the first scene from Body and Soul concerning marriage and uplift strategies, Martha Jane flatly refuses to let Isabelle marry Sylvester. It opens with an intertitle, the first of five, which reads: “Tatesville—other fish in the sea!” The title may refer to an earlier instance when Martha Jane forced Isabelle to join one of the reverend’s male friends for a walk after church. In the next shot, a close up which fades in from black, Isabelle happily rides with a gleeful Sylvester, refusing her potential “other fish” in favor of him.

For the remainder of the scene, comprised primarily of close–ups and medium–long shots totaling twenty–eight shots, the setting reveals Martha Jane and Isabelle’s sparse home. The film characterizes Isabelle as a timorous girl, pausing and stuttering as she asks her mother for permission to

573 Bowser, Gaines, and Musser, eds., Oscar Micheaux & His Circle, 3–50.
574 Ibid., 103.
marry Sylvester. Dispersed among ten shots, the next three intertitles read: “Syl—Sylvester and I—we” “Would like—to—to marry.” “Mayn’t we?”

The form of Isabelle’s question—may not we—indicates not only her timidity in asking but also her possible foreknowledge of her mother’s negative response. Overall, Micheaux takes eleven shots, nearly half the scene, to depict Isabelle asking Martha Jane for permission, which heightens the suspense of the answer and the gravity of the rejection.

Similar to Alma, Isabelle assumes the role of pursuer in this scene, but this is due to Sylvester’s lack of agency, not deceit. Additionally, she speaks for Sylvester, since his meekness renders him mute. This places Isabelle in an unnatural role, according to the dominant ideologies of uplift, where the man dominates and navigates the marriage process. Sylvester should be the one asking Martha Jane for her daughter’s hand. Since the scene undermines this, Martha Jane’s refusal becomes highly imminent, even before she speaks.

The film blocks the characters so that Martha Jane dominates the frame of the medium shots, with Isabelle and Sylvester’s visual impact barely noticeable at the center and right of the frame. During the close-ups, Martha Jane sometimes seems to spill out of the frame, her ample body cropped awkwardly so that the frame does not fully contain her. In sharp contrast, Isabelle’s slight, waif-like figure barely impacts the edges of the frame during her close-ups, for she is also shorter than Martha Jane. Isabelle’s personality also seems diminutive compared to Martha Jane’s self-assured, obdurate disposition. And although Sylvester is taller than the both of them, his meekness, characterized by his inability to speak or to confront Martha Jane, and his blocking at the far right rear of the frame, present him as the most unassuming character in the narrative.

Before further discussing how Soul signifies uplift, it appears useful to quickly elucidate the other manners in which the film appears to resist the dominant uplift ideologies. Since Soul marks such a departure from Gates and the cinematic structures of signification therein, tracing Soul’s departure delimits the dialogic relationship between the films.

First, uplift strategies in Soul concern neither women’s virtue, nor protection, nor chivalry. Although Martha Jane is pious, her virtue remains ambiguous. Not only do she and other churchwomen lust after the reverend, she treats Sylvester harshly and disregards her daughter’s amorous feelings for him. Further, Sylvester still accepts Isabelle, even after she has been raped by his brother, and thus robbed of her virtue. In the diegesis, her virtue does not symbolize importance for him for it is given no visual primacy in the narrative. Despite her best efforts, Martha Jane fails to protect Isabelle from rape, starvation, and an untimely death. Sylvester lacks interest in protecting Isabelle and in asserting any chivalrous characteristics. He fails to protect her from his brother; he fails to rescue her from accompanying the reverend’s friend; and he fails to speak on his and her behalf to Martha Jane. Vir-
tue, protection and chivalry were the hallmarks of black clubwomen’s uplift ideologies, so to depict them here as lacking narrative import contests their validity. On the surface, this would seem to open up a space for the expression of black female desire, as evidenced by Isabelle’s quest for marriage permission and Martha Jane’s own desire for Rev. Jenkins. However, since Martha Jane refuses Isabelle’s request, and the reverend eventually gets coded as evil, the film effectively closes of this possible space as soon as it has opened.

Second, uplift strategies in Soul concern neither manners, nor education, nor a bourgeois notion of race work. In response to Martha Jane’s use of the word ‘niggah,’ Isabelle chastises her, calling the word “vulgar.” Martha Jane responds with a mocking “oh,” a verbal indication of her physical lack of manners and restraint. Like the churchgoers who, when filled with the “holy ghost” whoop and dance, Martha Jane thrashes about, pulling at her breast at the mention of Rev. Jenkins possible lack of piety. In the diegesis, Isabelle depicted the only character who does not speak in slang. And, the film depicts no one attending school or reading a book; thus, along with the heavy use black Southern vernacular, the film seems to place no importance on education. Accordingly, the film does not depict anyone in the diegesis who seems concerned with race work and the educational or legal aspects therein, as typified by Gates. There are no doctors, no schoolteachers, and no fair–skinned saviors of any kind. The film depicts practically no one spending leisure time doing anything but drinking, gambling, gossiping or attending church. No literature–loving composers seem to inhabit this town. Manners, education and race work also loomed large in uplift ideologies. Women who did not desire to acquire manners and education or perform race work were considered unworthy anomalies. This closed off spaces for the expression black female desire of many working class women, of whom Martha Jane as a washerwoman represents, since they often could not afford school nor did they necessarily concern themselves with bourgeois notions of manners when day to day living was often very difficult to maintain.

Finally, uplift strategies in Soul do not concern romantic love. To be certain, Martha Jane and friends idolize Rev. Jenkins, but their feelings characterize obsession or lust, not romantic love. Rev. Jenkins and his cohort Curley Hinds both desire Isabelle, but their feelings characterize sexual lust and sadistic notions of depraved power. And even though Isabelle and Sylvester appear to enjoy a romantic love, Martha Jane stifles the cultivation of their relationship, crushing their hopes under the heel of her callous disregard for their dreams of marriage. The film and the uplift ideologies converge in dismissing romantic love. Terrell and others felt it frivolous for women to marry solely for love and to overemphasize the development of

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575 White, Too Heavy a Load, 70.
576 Ibid., 72.
one’s beauty as the primary source of pride. Additionally, they frowned upon women seeking their fulfillment in acquiring a mate, even as Terrell and many other female leaders married.

Ironically, as *Soul* appears to be unconcerned with romantic love, the film completely concerns itself with marriage. And the topic of marriage forces the cinematic structures of uplift, as coded in *Soul*, back to the forefront of analysis. Eschewing love altogether, *Soul* ties marriage to uplift through the use of economics. Even as Martha Jane idolizes the reverend and wants Isabelle to marry him, she seems much more concerned with the nest egg she has saved so that Isabelle can begin a comfortable married life. Diegetically, the film codes this emphasis by giving narrative and visual primacy to the big bible where Martha Jane hides the savings. An intertitle, still from the first scene of analysis, emphasizes Martha Jane’s views about marriage. It reads: “What’s that niggah got tu marry on?”

Since Sylvester lacks the piety and appeal of his evil twin Rev. Jenkins, and his mysterious invention produces no income, Martha Jane cannot consider him a possible suitor for Isabelle at all. So intense are her feelings against Sylvester and his financial lack, Martha Jane turns her back to him—and Isabelle’s hope of marrying him—for the remainder of the scene.

The last scene of the film, and the last in this analysis of *Soul*, appears to be an anomaly, at best, and a trite gesture toward positive narrative closure at worst, according to the devices by which the film signifies uplift. In a vast move away from the nonchalance with which it primarily considered uplift, and in a complete reversal from its evaluation of marriage as a financial endeavor, *Soul* marries Sylvester and Isabelle, and happily unites them both with Martha Jane. Even given the tangled flashback structure of the film, the diegetic coupling at the close seems too contrived. A closer look at its formal structures hints at these contrivances.

The scene, comprised of fifteen shots of which about half are long shots, opens with a fade in from black to a long shot of Martha Jane seated in an elegantly appointed parlor. The room contains fringed lamps, a sofa, a chair, a grand piano and decorated windows and walls. The shot features Martha Jane, dressed in an elegant blouse and skirt, seated reading. The mise–en–scène sharply contrasts with the meager, uninviting, dilapidated furniture from her former home. Her new costume contrasts with the frumpy sack dresses and country–checked aprons she formerly wore as well.

As the scene continues, Isabelle and Sylvester enter, returning from their honeymoon. Everyone smiles and laughs, while Isabelle bounces around the room, touching and marveling at the exquisite surroundings. She is dressed elegantly as well, and after she sits down to play the piano, Martha Jane and Sylvester stand arm in arm, grinning. The scene presents almost an inversion of the scene in which Isabelle asks for permission to marry. Not only is everyone gay, but the meek ones display confidence, and the obstinate one displays acceptance. Both Isabelle and Sylvester can now engage Martha Jane,
looking her directly in the eye and holding her gaze. Martha Jane, once the rancorous matriarch, smiles and welcomes their affections.

This scene seems to be an attempt to recuperate the uplift ideologies heretofore aggressively questioned. In allowing Isabelle to marry Sylvester, it provides the necessary coupling to reinscribe Isabelle back under black patriarchal control. She can marry Sylvester now, since the basis of that marriage is no longer romantic love but his financial windfall. Further, Sylvester becomes an attractive suitor because the film depicts him actively engaging Martha Jane, assuming his rightful role as controller of looks, as he can now look Martha Jane directly in the eyes and hold her gaze as he was unable to do before. However, Micheaux complicates these looking relations as Martha Jane keeps the power of her gaze; it may no longer completely cripple Isabelle and Sylvester, but it still commands some authority, as she often looks at Isabelle or Sylvester first, and she is never completely subordinated by their looks as they had previously been to hers.

Scar of Shame

Scar of Shame presents the woes of Louise Howard, a troubled young woman terrorized by her alcoholic stepfather Spike and his abusive friend Eddie, as she seeks to escape their treacherous plans to kidnap her. In telling Louise’s story, Perugini and the Colored Film Players recount her daily horrors, dashed hopes and tragic suicide. A battered soul, Louise becomes a liminal figure where antithetical discourses surrounding her high aspirations collide with her humble origins, and her characterization enables the film to transmit a cautionary tale to those women tempted to attain the luxurious life by any means necessary—and those men who fall prey to their desires. The scene opens with an intertitle, which reads: “One half the world doesn’t know how the other half lives.”

Unlike the intertitles in Gates and Soul, some of the intertitles in Scar of Shame contain images. This intertitle depicts images of stormy clouds in the sky. The scene then fades in from black onto a close up of Louise’s hands scrubbing cloth against a washboard in a tub. The shot then dissolves into a close up Louise’s head and shoulders, looking down with her shoulders bouncing with the washing motion, then raising her head to look in the distance, dreamily. These motions echo Alvin the hero’s similar motions while playing the piano, and connects their dreams to each other through the rhyming of their actions. The shot frames her body against deep black space, abstracting the background.

Since the shot immediately preceding the intertitle depicts Alvin in his elegant boarding room, one can infer that Alvin composes one of the halves to which the intertitle refers. And since the film depicts Louise immediately following the intertitle, one can infer that she composes the other half. However, storm clouds separate the two, so the shots suggest that Alvin and Louise’s relationship will be a troubled one.
Further, Alvin’s preceding shot depicts him in a long shot; the film presents his whole body. In contrast, the film first depicts Louise in parts; hands first, then head and shoulders. Depicting Alvin whole suggests the completeness of his world: he has his room, his piano, and everything he needs to become the “leading composer of the race.” In contrast, the film presents Louise as an abstraction. She lacks completeness, as her hard work as a washerwoman suggests she lacks financial stability. The film underscores her abstraction by presenting her head and shoulders against deep black space, which, unlike the concreteness of Alvin’s room, suggests an unsettling uncertainty about Louise’s place in time and space. The scene continues as the film cuts to an intertitle: “Louise Howard, a Rose of Sharon whose music was all discords.—Lucia Lynn Moses”.

The film depicts this intertitle over an image of bleak terrain with spiky, crumbling structures and some type of evil flying monster swooping down, claws bared over her last name. This intertitle strengthens Louise’s connection to Alvin, by evoking the term music in its description. However, it also underscores their doomed relationship, for Louise’s discordant music evokes sadness and disharmony. The intertitle could also foreshadow Louise’s tumultuous relationship with Eddie, whose intertitle states that his music “was not of the same school” as Alvin’s music; the film intimates that Louise’s discordant music might be the equal partner to Eddie’s music. Also, comparing Louise to a Rose of Sharon evokes a biblical reference to her beauty. Since the film contrasts her beautiful face with her hard working hands, it suggests that her class status will hinder any mobility her beauty may afford her.

Interestingly, this pattern of hero’s shot, intertitle, woman’s shot, repeats much later in the film with Alvin’s star pupil and future wife, Alice Hathaway. This time, intertitle explicitly states her love for Alvin, and the imagery depicts lovebirds locked in a cage on a deserted island. In stark opposition to the depiction of the Louise and Alvin coupling, the depiction of the Alice and Alvin coupling suggests their successful romance. Hence, from the film’s inception, the film presents Louise’s desire for Alvin, and the life he represents, as not only impossible for her to achieve, but dangerous for her to attempt. Depicting Louise as the fractured product of her labor also has the effect of distancing her from the affluent lifestyle Alvin leads, and places Louise again in relief to Alice, whose establishing shot depicts her leaning against a piano with a candelabra prominently featured. Whereas the film presents Louise as an abstraction, first arms then head almost floating in deep black space, it depicts Alice in a concrete space, giving her body a sense of tangibility Louise’s body lacks. The scene continues as the film repeats a close up shot of Louise’s head and shoulders. She sighs, purses her lips and looks off into the distance. The film then cuts to another intertitle, which reads: “Day dreams”
This intertitle repeats the same stormy sky as the first intertitle that linked Louise to Alvin as two halves of a whole. The film cuts to repeat the close up of Louise’s head and shoulders, but varies the editing from a cut to the next shot to a fade to black and dissolve to the next shot. This next shot dissolves into a medium long shot of Louise reclining on a fancy bed of pillows, in an elegant nightgown, smoking. The shot dissolves again, framing Louise closer in the frame as a maid in uniform adjusts her blanket and pillows. Since Louise’s bed does not appear to need any adjusting, the maid’s actions seem overly attentive and frivolous. The scene then cuts to a long shot of the maid attending to articles on the table beside Louise. Her parlor in full view now, the shot depicts the room containing fancy fringed lamps, large windows, an elegant rug, and it appears to be draped in fabric. This shot, a long take as well as a long shot, continues as described here:

A butler in uniform enters, bows to Louise and extends a calling card. Louise motions for the maid to get the card with a flick of her hand, and continues to read her paper. The maid takes the card from the butler, who is about 4 steps away from the bed, and hands it to Louise from right next to her bed. Louise takes the card, reads it, tosses it to her side table, and nods to the maid. The maid tells to butler to admit the caller, and goes back to fluffing Louise’s pillows. The butler announces the gentleman caller, and he enters with flowers, kissing her hand while the butler leaves. She smells the flowers then lets them fall out of her hand to the floor, nonchalantly. The gentlemen, in a plain medium colored suit, falls to one knee, taking her hand. Dissolve.

The actions of the long take seem completely frivolous, with the maid and butler appearing to cater to Louise’s every whim as she lay in he bed like a queen on a throne. Further, the manner in which Louise flicks her hand at her maid and butler, and then drops the flowers to the floor, characterizes her as someone aloof and extravagant, spoiled and lazy.

The shot dissolves into the last shot of the scene, in which the film repeats again the close up of Louise’s head and shoulders, with her sighing and slightly smiling. The repetition of Louise’s head and shoulders serves to underscore the sense that the film is exploring Louise’s psyche. The daydreams announced are her daydreams, and present a stark contrast to her reality.

This shot also foreshadows the scene depicting Alvin’s sumptuously appointed music studio, whose walls are also lined with fabric. More forcefully, the shot rhymes with a later scene in which Louise, now rich due to illegal schemes with Eddie, reclines on her sofa, reading news of Alvin’s escape from prison. In foreshadowing this scene, the film implies that a man with illegal schemes provides the only way for a woman of Louise’s class to become upwardly mobile.

There are several implications for black female desire in this scene that run counter to the ideal of the uplift ideologies. First, the film codes Louise’s
desires for class mobility as deviant and antithetical to the ideologies of working hard to attain one’s fortunes, or the “bootstrap” theory purported by Washington. Second, Louise clearly demonstrates lack of manners and breeding as she attempts to assert her will as a rich woman while the film undermines that will as the frivolity of a spoiled diva. Third, Louise lacks modesty and possible chastity, as she receives gentleman callers in her nightgown. As stated earlier, hard work, manners and virtue were tenets held in high regard by both the men and women who purported uplift ideologies.

The last scene of my analysis proves to be the longest. Due to its length, spanning over one hundred shots, only a few key shots will be discussed. The shots occur after Alvin has received the fake telegram summoning him to his mother’s home.

Over the course of several shots, mostly medium framed, the film reveals that Alvin has not told his mother of his marriage to Louise, since Louise does not belong to their “set,” here coded as their class. After Alvin leaves her, Louise smashes the picture of Alvin’s mother, tearing it to pieces. She then angrily rifles through the dresser drawer, discovering the letter Alvin’s mother had written to him. Rhyming with the first time the film presents the letter, the scene depicts an alternation between extreme close up of the letter and close up of Louise reading the letter. Only Louise’s reactions do not mirror Alvin’s. Taking offense the letter, particularly at the lines which hint at Alvin’s possible infidelity with a woman’s of his own set of whom his mother approves, Louise’s becomes very angry. The film alternates shots of her anger with matted shots of the letter, paying special attention to highlight the lines that cause Louise the most distress. Similar to her actions with the picture, and filmed with the same framing and repetition, Louise angrily tears the letter. Delving further still into the drawer, Louise unfolds their marriage certificate. Already primed for her to tear it, the film again repeats her framing and anger; the shots then depict her tearing the certificate. Finally, the film depicts Louise twisting her band, and then removing her ring, with the same pattern of framing and editing as the previous shots. Interestingly, the reading of the letter first signaled Alvin’s marriage proposal to Louise, since it was during his reading of the letter that he rescued Louise from Spike again. The second reading of the letter performs a similar function only this time it motivates Louise to leave Alvin, dissolving the marriage. In between the letters, the fake telegram draws Alvin away from Louise and toward his mother. In each instance, however, the communication of the mother, who represents the epitome of bourgeois uplift ideologies, functions to suppress Louise’s desire, either through her image, her feelings about caste, or her invocation of her “set.”

These shots have been intercut with scenes of Alvin first driving away from Louise, and then driving back to her. Narratively, the film has already set up that whenever Louise is alone, she is in danger of harm from Spike or Eddie. So Alvin’s choice to leave her alone rather than take her to meet his mother underscores the importance he and his mother place upon class. His hesitation
at the stairs may suggest his discomfort with leaving her alone, since he has already saved her three times, yet the pull of his mother and his caste proves stronger than his concern for Louise. And even though the close ups of Louise's face which register her anger towards and disappointment with Alvin invoke sympathy for her plight, the narrative still underscores greater sympathy for Alvin. The film depicts this greater sympathy through Alvin's coupling with Alice at the end of the narrative, thanks in part to Louise's sacrificial suicide.

Indirectly, these scenes underscore the class tensions evident in uplift ideologies, for “lifting as” one “climbs” necessitates that someone has to be on the top to pull up, and someone has to be on the bottom to be pulled. In theory, all blacks should have benefited from the various uplift strategies; but in practice, inequities abounded. DuBois’ talented tenth theory posited that only one tenth of the black population was fit to lead; this notion often led to the lightest-complexioned tenth, sometimes regardless of ability, gaining greater access to class mobility. Washington’s bootstrap theory tended to ignore that the masses of lower class blacks needed boots to “strap on” before they could utilize their own resources to help themselves out of their own plights. Cooper, Terrell and Wells agitated for group change among the masses of black women, but were often accused of being out of touch with the needs of working-class women, since they were upper middle-class women. Figuring Alvin’s mother prominently in this scene, as well as her letter, evokes these uplift theories since she and Alvin must have already successfully utilized one of these methods to secure their place in the “set”.

Louise presents a danger to those various uplift ideologies. By consorting with people above her class status, Louise threatens to drag them down to her level, as evidenced in Alvin’s descent to a brawler, gunman, convict, and then fugitive. The film only restores Alvin once Ralph Hathaway, as representative of the Law, agrees to give Alvin his daughter Alice anyway, since the “problem” of Louise has ended with her death.

The narrative cannot contain Louise, a woman who has achieved her dreams of luxury through ill-gotten means and threatens to secure Alvin as a husband through blackmail. Since Louise clearly operates in excess of the law of the diegesis, which the film binds with uplift ideologies such as Victorian womanhood, chastity, modesty, and femininity, she must either accept the law or be punished. Unlike Micheaux’s Alma, who similarly transgresses, Louise must pay for her transgressions with her life. Also, unlike Eddie, who ignores Louise’s last dying wish as put forth in her suicide note, Louise must pay for her past sins. The film gives no indication that Eddie will right his wrong, the lie that sent Alvin to jail. In fact, as Eddie tears her suicide note, the film suggests that he may have just escaped his due.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be inferred that while silent era race films seem to open up a space for black female desire, mainly by allowing black women in the
diegesis greater freedom to assert their desires and greater access to class mobility, they promptly contain that space. Instead of fully exploring any benefits such freedoms might afford, these films re-inscribe black female desire under one of the acceptable rubrics of uplift; or they quash that desire under the patriarchal law the various uplift ideologies espouse, albeit it in different manners. The cinematic structures of signification of uplift ideologies, while not always crystal clear about which ideologies they depict, support adherence to these structures, rather than rebellion to them. For in these three films, adherence paves the only way to happiness, while rebellion surely leads to death.
Josephine Baker and Pierre Batcheff in *La Sirène des tropiques* (1927)

Phil Powrie
with Éric Rebillard

*La Sirène des tropiques/The Siren of the Tropics* (1927) was the first of Josephine Baker’s four feature films, made as result of the extraordinary success of *La Revue Nègre* in Paris in 1925. Baker’s co–star was Pierre Batcheff, at the height of his career as one of France’s young leading men. Both Baker and Batcheff were very different from other stars of the 1920s, their common feature, despite many differences, being their Otherness. The focus of this article is the exploration of that Otherness.

Much has been written about Josephine Baker, but few capture the electrifying nature of her performance in *La Revue Nègre* better than the eyewitness account of American poet e e cummings:

She enters through a dense electric twilight, walking backwards on hands and feet, legs and arms stiff, down a huge jungle tree—as a creature neither infrahuman nor superhuman but somehow both: a mysterious unkillable Something, equally non–primitive and uncivilized, or beyond time in the sense that emotion is beyond arithmetic.577

Baker was the star of *La Revue Nègre*, which had taken Paris by storm for a few short weeks in October and November 1925. This was due in large part to Baker, whose more than half–naked body gyrated and jerked in what appeared to be a combination of carefully worked out dance steps and expansive, loose movements, accompanied by comical contortions of her facial features. These included the trademark crossing of her eyes, which, as the following comment indicates, suggested elements of parody and knowing self–irony: “The cross–eyed, goofy, stereotypically blackface grin would become a kind of signature, even when—most effectively when—she was glamorously dressed, so that it seemed a parodic comment on her own beauty, on conventions of beauty, on the culture that had made her famous.”578 She was one of the most iconic figures of the 1920s, synthesizing “Americanism, dance–mania, hedonism, feminism.”579

After a brief European tour, Baker signed up in 1926 at the Folies–Bergère. A number of films were released in 1927, capitalizing on Baker’s success. Part of the Folies–Bergère performances was captured in a film entitled *La Revue des revues/The Review of Reviews* (Joé Francys, released December 1927); it contained selected routines, including Baker’s number ‘Fatou’ with the belt–skirt of bananas. A seven–and–a–half–minute film was released at about the same time, *Le Pompier des Folies–Bergère/The Fireman of the Folies–Bergère* (director unknown), in which a fireman, enthused by the Folies–Bergère, fantasizes that the people he meets in the street are naked women; Baker dances the Charleston briefly in an underground Métro station. The major film of this period, and Baker’s first feature film, was *La Sirène des tropiques*, based on an original idea by the popular novelist Maurice Dekobra, well known for his travelogues and adventure stories. The film was directed by the veteran actor–director Henri Etiévant, and Mario Nalpas. Etiévant’s career had started in 1911; he and Nalpas had co–directed *La Fin de Monte–Carlo/The End of Monte–Carlo* (1926). Baker was contracted by La Centrale cinématographique in early June 1927; Batcheff was contracted a month later, just before the start of production at the recently constituted Studios Réunis in rue Franceur, which brought together Bernard Natan’s group and the Union Française Cinématographique in the best–equipped studios in Paris, refurbished and opened in January 1927. Location shoots included the studios at Épinay for the tropical village; an ill–disguised Fontainebleau forest\(^{580}\) for the scenes in the hills of the “tropics;” Le Havre for the scene where Papitou becomes a stowaway; the Place de la Concorde, where Papitou is discovered by a promoter; and the Mogador theatre for Papitou’s stage performance. Production took place from early July to early November 1927, and the film premiered on 21 December at the Théâtre des Champs–Élysées. We shall consider reactions to the film by reviewers below.

*La Sirène des tropiques* is the first of four feature films starring Baker. Her two next films date from the 1930s: *Zouzou* (Marc Allégret, 1934) and *Princesse Tam–Tam* (Edmond Gréville, 1935). In each of these three films, a simple plot line imitates Baker’s meteoric rise, featuring “protagonists that long for love but get stardom instead of domestic bliss,”\(^{581}\) or, as Phyllis Rose less charitably put it: “An innocent girl from the tropics goes to Paris, where she dances and is transformed into an elegant woman by beautiful clothes;”\(^{582}\) indeed, *La Sirène des tropiques* incorporates part of her Folies–Bergère routine. It is also her best film, according to a recent commentator, because she was able (at least partly) to improvise, articulating a very per-

\(^{580}\) As Baker herself pointed out in an interview a few years later; see Marcel Sauvage, “Les Souvenirs de Joséphine Baker (entretien),” *Pour vous* 104 (1930), 7.


\(^{582}\) Rose, 120.
sonal gestural space quite at odds with those of her time, and close in its specificity to a ritual: “Her almost mechanical savageness, her childlike grimacing, the Chaplinesque side of her character, gave her dancing the strangeness of a ritual, sketching out a radical break in the body language and the behaviour of her time.”

La Revue Nègre played into an early-twentieth-century fascination with “blackness.” This had started with painters such as Picasso prior to the Great War, and had extended into the other arts, with jazz and dance being the focus in the mid–1920s. Much of the discourse focusing on blackness tended to contrast nature with culture, blackness being seen as a marker of the primitive. This was something to be applauded and cultivated for those seeking new types of “authenticity,” and a connection with an eroticism eroded by the Great War. We should perhaps say reconnection rather than connection, as the fascination with blackness, and Baker in particular, is a version of a well-rooted Orientalism, articulated in the mid-nineteenth-century figure of Baudelaire’s Black Venus, whose thick hair evokes “langorous Asia and burning Africa” for the poet, as some commentators pointed out at the time.

Indeed, Baker was called the Black Venus in the caption for the cover of Cinémagazine (February 10, 1928).

However, Baker’s persona is somewhat more complex than the nineteenth-century representations of the black female body analyzed by Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “a body trapped in an image of itself, whose primitivity, exemplified in a childlike comedic posture, sexual deviancy, degradation, and colonization, is intimately linked with sexual difference.” This is because she embodies, as the comment by Klein on the contemporary focus on blackness above might suggest, far more than the primitive side of the simple binary between nature and culture. Rather, she is a complex combination of both nature and culture, which makes her hard to pin down. As Elizabeth Ezra points out, Baker was geographically impossible to locate: “Baker was so popular […] because she was so hard to place; a floating signifier of cultural difference, she represented many different things to different people. […] She could evoke Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and France, by turns or all at once as the occasion required.” And she is equally impossible to pin down in cultural terms, as Carole Sweeney says: “Baker’s per-


585 See Klein, 370.


formances, literally, rehearsed a variety of texts of difference. She could appeal to the modernist artist as much as to the colonial lobbyist, the jazz lover, or the negrophile writer. Her performances provided a locale where colonial fantasy and ideological discrepancy could be played out yet contained.” The complex combination of ideologically loaded “primitive” pastness with a paradoxically almost postmodern modernity is well exemplified in Baker’s brilliantined Eton crop:

In Baker’s era, choosing to process one’s hair helped to signify a break with “country” and older ways, because it involved being serviced by another person, engaging a chemical process and reconstructing the self in order to play a public role, usually within white society. What was at stake in hairstyle was Baker’s public identity as a modernized American woman, which was layered over the Africanist dancing she performed.

It is a combination that also emerges in comments made at the time, such as this anonymous location report from Épinay: “Josephine Baker does a vintage Charleston, a Josephine vintage, and the Negroes [sic] haunted by rhythms from the depths of time begin to wiggle around in time with the music.” We can note that in this comment, Baker is presented as modern, embedded, as it were, in layers of the past. Similarly, in the following report a month earlier, Baker is presented as resolutely modern, interested in cars, speed and movement, emblems of modernity: “Chat with her and she will talk about all manner of things […], automobiles, automobiles, her joie de vivre, her desire for movement on the wide open road.”

An anecdote from the studio encapsulates temporal, geographical and cultural contrasts, as Gaston Ravel and Tony Lekain were directing Madame Récamier (1928) in the same studio, leading Cinémagazine to comment on how Baker was entertaining a group of revolutionary sans–culottes with a Charleston, an incident recalled by Baker a few years later, who drew out the paradox: “Under huts with bright new yellow straw roofs we watched princesses and marchionesses gaily being led to the scaffold […]. The conjunction was curious to say the least. Negroes [sic] and sans–culottes drank like brothers in a corner of the studio.”

Baker’s exotic primitivism, therefore, essentially faced both nostalgically backwards, as well as utopianly forwards, offering “a reconnection with the past, while pointing out a path through to the future.” A similar tension between past and future was part of Pierre Batcheff’s star persona.

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588 Sweeney, 38.
589 Francis, 836.
592 News item in Cinémagazine 40 (1927): 11.
594 Sweeney, 20.
The major points to recall in relation to Batcheff are as follows. First, he was a major star by 1927, with eleven films to his credit. Four of these had appeared in 1927 prior to *La Sirène des tropiques*; while he only had a small role in Abel Gance’s *Napoléon*, premiered in April 1927, he was the lead in both of the following films: *Éducation de prince/A Prince’s Education* (Henri Diamant–Berger, June 1927), *Le Bonheur du jour/The Writing Desk* (Gaston Ravel, trade presentation July 1927, although not on general release until February 1928). Second, he was one of a small group of young stars called *jeunes premiers*, young romantic male leads, fragile and relatively impotent figures on screen; in Batcheff’s case, many of his characters are dominated by older and/or stronger women, and we shall see that this is very much the case with Baker. Third, the passivity evidenced in so many of Batcheff’s characters can be seen as a nostalgic throwback to a period of stability prior to the horrors of the Great War, and the domestic arena untainted by extreme physical violence. Fourth, Batcheff’s characters are frequently passive and immobile, quite different from Baker’s excitable animation. Unlike her, he is almost never a dancer in his films, oddly, given his well–attested love of dancing. Fifth, his characters often seem disconnected from what surrounds them, looking away, or into the far distance, even when with his female partners on screen.

Unlike Baker though he may have been in many respects, Batcheff shared with her a key trait: that of the exotic Other, making him much less like other French *jeunes premiers*, and much more like American matinee idols, such as Rudolf Valentino and Ramon Novarro. Batcheff’s characters are frequently exoticized. At the time of *La Sirène des tropiques* his otherness was more associated with the Slav. He had played Slav characters in two films in 1927: a Russian prince in Raymond Bernard’s *Le Joueur d’échecs/The Chess Player*, released in January that year, and a Silistrian prince six months later in Henri Diamant–Berger’s *Éducation de prince/Education of a Prince*. There were frequent references in the popular press to his Russian origins, and it is more than likely that his films for the Russians of Montreuil, Films Albatros — Jean Epstein’s *Le Double amour/Double Love* (1925), and Marcel L’Herbier’s *Feu Mathias Pascal/The Late Mathias Pascal* (1926) — would have intensified this association; in the former he played opposite Natalie Lissenko, and in the latter opposite her husband, Ivan Mosjoukine. Ralph Schor’s sketch of French attitudes to the Russians shows the eastern–associated difference of the Russians in French eyes of the 1920s: “They were both ascetics and hedonists, fatalists and enterprising, tender and violent; the eyes of these disconcerting beings, full of an exquisite sensitivity, could be shot through with flashes of Asiatic savagery. This was why the Slav soul was so mysterious and charm-

One of his interviewers describes Batcheff’s well-bred elegance, Romantic appearance, and especially “his wonderful eyes with their Slav sensitivity and glimmers of an alert and intelligent mind.” His wife at the time, Denise Tual, frequently talks of his fantastical nature in her memoirs, and of his “Russian atavism.”

We therefore find a complex set of factors with the pairing of these two stars: both were connoted as exotic, but in very different ways. One was an excitable and animated American Black woman; the other was a languorous French White man. That contrast is neatly encapsulated in the account given by Denise Tual of Baker’s tantrums: “She was unbearably capricious, stamping on her glass necklace G-string, demanding a chinchilla cape without which she refused to act. Pierre watched impassively as a young assistant rushed to pick up the false pearls.”

The synopsis of the film is as follows. The Marquis Sévéro wants to divorce his wife and marry his stepdaughter Denise, who loves an engineer in Sévéro’s employ, André Berval. Sévéro sends Berval to prospect his territories in the Antilles, instructing his man there, Alvarez, to ensure that Berval does not return. Berval saves Papitou from being raped by Alvarez, who subsequently ambushes Berval and leaves him for dead. Papitou, who has fallen in love with Berval, saves him, and the two of them catch Alvarez stealing gold from Sévéro’s mines. Meanwhile, the Marchioness and Denise have come to the Antilles, realizing that Berval is in danger. The three of them return to Paris; Papitou, desperate to be with Berval, follows them as a stowaway on a liner. In Paris, she works as a governess, but is spotted dancing by the director of a music-hall who persuades her to join him, promising that he will make sure she can meet Berval. The director tells his friend Sévéro about this, who realizes that he can use it to his advantage. He engineers a meeting at his house, where Denise sees Papitou in Berval’s arms, allowing Sévéro to break off the engagement. The men agree to fight a duel. Sévéro fires first but misses; Berval fires into the air, but Papitou shoots Sévéro from her hiding place at just that moment. Realizing how much Berval loves Denise, however, she sacrifices herself, explaining to Denise the misunderstandings, and returning to the Antilles.

Baker was such an unusual performer that she overshadowed both the storyline and the other actors in La Sirène des tropiques. This was not helped by a very conventional storyline which was criticized by one reviewer for not being more adventurous: “The story is somewhat predictable, and we

599 Tual, 98–9.
would have liked to see more unexpected twists.”600 The reviewer for *Le Figaro* commented that he “could only remember Mademoiselle Josephine Baker,” who was for him “a real revelation […] vivacious, touching and so amusing that the audience were shaken by uncontrollable laughter.”601 For *Cinémagazine*’s reviewer, “the whole point of the film is Josephine Baker’s very personal performance […]. She astonishes and delights.”602

The complex ideological and temporal layering of Baker’s persona, no less than the radical break that her performance marks in contemporary acting, clearly impacts on Batcheff’s persona, who was also connoted as Other through his exotic “languorous” Slavism. Our aim in exploring *La Sirène des tropiques*, then, is to understand what happens when two very different Others work in the same imaginary space.

**The film**

The best example of this in the film is the sequence occurring after the apprehension of the villain Alvarez, when André and Papitou search Alvarez’s office. Papitou sits on Alvarez’s bookcase throwing documents away haphazardly, while André finds the letter from his prospective father–in–law Sévéro asking Alvarez to kill him. They occupy very different parts of the set, Batcheff at the desk, Baker higher up perched on the bookcase. The much–reproduced publicity still is slightly misleading, as there is no such shot in the Kino DVD version of the film, although the still nonetheless manages to suggest different spaces: Baker poses ostentatiously for the camera, looking not at her leading man, but at the papers on the desk, while Batcheff gets on with the matter in hand. But this contrast is far less marked than the principal contrast between very different geographical locations.

The film is structured in such a way that the “tropics” (as the intertitle has it) and everything they represent are contrasted with Paris. There are three broad sections lasting about 20 minutes each: 20 minutes establishing the two locations and the plot; 28 minutes in the tropics; 24 minutes in Paris, with a comic transitional fourteen–minute section devoted to Papitou’s transatlantic voyage prior to this last section.

There are clear and stereotypical echoes between the two locations. Both have their lecherous villain who attempts to rape the damsel in distress; in Paris it is Sévéro, in the tropics it is his henchman Alvarez. Both locations have a communal space — the village in the tropics, and the Place de la Concorde in Paris — and in both cases we see Papitou with children. Both locations have performance spaces in which Papitou dances, the difference between them being one of spaciousness. The village performance space is

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602 Lucien Farnay, “*La Sirène des tropiques*,” *Cinémagazine* 52 (1927): 588.
small and crowded, and the onlookers surround Papitou. The Olympic Palace, on the other, is large and airy, and the spectators are in serried ranks of seats, while Papitou is isolated on stage. Finally, both locations have a violent confrontation between André and the forces of evil, in which André is shown up, only to be rescued by Papitou, who observes what is going on in both cases. In Monte Puebla, André is set upon by Alvarez and his thugs when he confronts them as they steal minerals from Sévèro’s mine, and is rescued by Papitou, who calls the police. In Paris, André is challenged to a duel by Sévèro; he refuses to shoot at Sévèro, who is killed (inexplicably for André, who knows he shot his gun into the air) by Papitou hiding in a nearby tree.

Such parallels serve to emphasize the deeper binary between nature and culture on which the film appears to rest. Parisian spaces are large and airy, with straight lines, as we have already noted where the theatre is concerned. The other main interior, the Sévèro apartment, has tall columns used as framing devices together with door frames, and the panelling has distinctively straight lines and sharp angles. The tropics, on the other hand, are dominated by circular or natural lines, such as the round village huts, the communal space and its round well into which the village boys throw the cat, or the S-shaped tree in which Papitou plays before going to the river to bathe.

However, even if the geographical locations seem to suggest a strong binary, we would contend that the neatness of the binary is undermined. The section of the film located on the transatlantic liner on which the love–struck Papitou stows away to follow André to Paris, serves to link the two locations in the most obviously geographical sense, but equally it disturbs the distinction between culture and nature. The liner itself, as the word suggests, follows a linear trajectory across an unbounded ocean. Moreover, Papitou’s antics make the travellers mill around anarchically through the liner’s ordered spaces; she literally “disorders” the crowd, and their perception of the subaltern, by changing her skin colour. What might have seemed a relatively conventional slapstick routine blurs the boundaries established by the colour of skin, and functions to parody the sophistication of white westerners. Papitou over–determines her blackness by rolling in coal, only to whiten herself with flour in a reversal of black–face, before emerging from her bath like Botticelli’s Venus. The sequence also engages with a central paradox: the crowd seek her, but, as the captain’s averted gaze suggests when Papitou emerges naked from the bath, they do not want to see her; we shall return to the issue of the gaze in our next section.

What began as a simplistic binary between nature and culture therefore turns into a more complex set of relations as a result of this transitional transatlantic sequence. It also retrospectively sheds a different light on what might have seemed to be one of the key markers of “nature” in the nature/culture binary: Papitou’s relationship with animals.
Papitou’s dog Bamboula saves her from Alvarez’s lecherous advances, suggesting the witch’s relationship with her “familiars.” Shortly after this, she rescues a cat that the village children have thrown into the well, as we mentioned above. Returning to her hut, she encourages Bamboula to lick the cat clean, and ends the scene by drawing her father’s attention to “Little Kat,” saying that it will bring her happiness. Neither of these animals is essential to the plot. It would have been just as easy for Papitou to break free of Alvarez and run off without Bamboula’s help; and the scene with the cat is a rather long and maudlin two–minute diversion. It is therefore worth asking ourselves what its purpose might be. A first view could well be the stereotyped correlation between “primitive” peoples and animals, a parallel frequently drawn where Baker was concerned.603 The sequence with her pets, however, articulates a different perspective, which is less “primitiveness” than “innocence;” this is because the point of the sequence is to demonstrate first Papitou’s protective instincts (the cat is defenceless so must be saved), second to demonstrate what might be called a utopian view of nature, in that the dog ends up licking the cat protectively. The sequence is therefore much less about the correlation between Papitou and the animal kingdom, and much more an expression of utopian spaces where normal animal reactions (dogs chase cats) are transcended in a non–violent utopian space of reconciliation between opposites anchored in Papitou’s innocently childlike view of the world, where her desires rule (her greediness for fruit, or her love for André).

This allows us to read what might have seemed like a straightforwardly “colonialist” review in a different light. Cinéa–Ciné pour tous’s reviewer speaks of Baker’s “impulsive nature, fiery and tender,” or of the way in which “her face can reflect mischief or childlike seriousness, joy or suffering, with equal ease.”604 A review in Cahiers du Sud rather more luridly fostered a similar simplistic binary: “Her postures are those of an anxious and entertaining monkey, she grimaces, yells and threatens with teeth bared […]. You bring us the charms and shameless innocence of black virgins dancing under a full moon in a forest full of blood and savage lust.”605 These views apparently articulate the key binary of nature versus culture, unregulated impulsiveness being the opposite of sophisticated manners based on self–restraint. But the story–line where Papitou is concerned is much more about her loss of innocence as she becomes more westernized. This is partly demonstrated in a continuation of the “animal theme” which returns in the final scenes where Papitou wears a very ostentatious animal fur collar.

604 Orta, 31.
Its purpose is partly to differentiate her from André’s fiancée, Denise, dressed in white, and to underline the moral of the story. But it also stresses that Papitou has to some extent lost her roots, been tamed, and in so doing must learn that she cannot do exactly as she pleases. She asks Denise for a memento to remember André, and is given the prayer–book belonging to his mother, which he had showed her when she cared for him on the Monte Puebla. An intertitle spells out the fate of all of Baker’s characters: “Sacrifice is our purest source of joy on earth.” We wish to explore this sacrifice and its association with the gaze in our final section.

The moral

We might wish to argue that her “sacrifice” shows that she is being punished for two reasons. First, she is being punished for her attempt to take away André from Denise. Second, she is being punished for attempting to become a more sophisticated westernized woman; in doing so, she is to some extent betraying Roussseausesque and Orientalist stereotypes of the Noble Savage, not least by her parody of “whiteness” in the transitional sequence on the liner. While both of these arguments are quite plausible, we would wish to argue that her punishment is directly related to issues of performance and agency, and that these are connected to her relationship with Batcheff. Put simply, she is punished for taking control of the gaze. She does this in two ways.

Both Baker and Batcheff are objects of the gaze, but they are misaligned. We as spectators watch Baker watching Batcheff, who watches Baker in turn (as is made very clear in the long sequence in the village when Baker dances, watched by both André and Alvarez). Batcheff’s character, crucially and typically, does not gaze back at the spectator as Baker’s character does. As is the case with many of his films, Batcheff characteristically looks “off,” as we mentioned above. The first way in which Baker takes control of the gaze, then, is the way she draws the audience’s gaze from Batcheff to herself, thereby weakening Batcheff as object of the gaze. Second, she turns Batcheff into an even weaker object of the audience gaze by dominating him in terms of the narrative and the mise–en–scène.

Baker draws the gaze away by being more “Other” than Batcheff; she is black rather than white, and her acting style—by turns excessively comical or excessively tragic—is completely at odds with Batcheff’s considerably more understated style. She is also more obviously active; in so doing she neutralizes his exoticism as the languorous Slav. She constantly moves, darting to and fro across the set, nimbly shinling up trees and furniture, effortlessly scaling rocks; she is protean (parodically white with flour, as well as overdeterminedly black with coal). Batcheff, on the other hand, is relatively static; we tend to see him sitting (with Denise, with Sévéro, at Alvarez’s desk), watching (Papitou dancing, Alvarez stealing). He is vacantly statuesque when contrasted with Baker’s sinuously mercurial kinetics. One ex-
ception is the Monte Puebla sequence, although here his laboured movements across the rocks, due to his injuries, are pointedly contrasted with Papitou’s lithe agility. Batcheff is Other by his passive immobility which turns him into the fetishized pin–up; while Baker is Other by excessive mobility, but also, crucially, by her ability to shift across multiple boundaries so as to play into fetishization, while at the same time interrogating it, for example in the coal and flour sequence. While both of them bare their chest, Baker’s breasts “trump” Batcheff’s open–necked shirt, a familiar device for the male pin–up. Both her breasts and his chest are objects for the gaze of the spectator, but Baker moves around constantly, escaping that gaze, while Batcheff, passive and immobile, lets himself be pinned down. That immobility is a ploy for capturing the gaze of the spectator, of course; but it fails, because even though Baker’s movements on the one hand suggest an escape, they also fascinate in ways that Batcheff’s immobility cannot.

Not only does Baker draw the gaze away from Batcheff through aspects of her performance, then; she also dominates him in the narrative and the mise–en–scène. Papitou controls André: she cares for him when he is hurt on Monte Puebla, in a masochistic–submissive trope familiar in Batcheff’s films. She stands over him again when she promises to help retrieve the compromising situation at the end of the film, and she, rather than André shoots Sévéro in the duel. These events conspire to undermine Batcheff’s agency; he comes across as impotent and not infrequently effeminate. When he arrives in the tropics, for example, he uses a lady’s fan because of the heat; in the fight with Alvarez in the caves of Monte Puebla, André ends up on the floor, saved in the nick of time by the mounted police; and, most tellingly, at the end of the film, when Papitou shoots Sévéro from her hiding place in a tree, the last we see of André is his comical incomprehension that it is he who he has apparently but inexplicably shot Sévéro while shooting his gun in the air.

Finally, by having two Others working against each other, Baker emphasizes not just Batcheff’s effeminacy, but more crucially his status as passive melancholic, anchored in post–war trauma. While “Baker represented the unfettered frenzy of libidinal urges breaking through the nihilism of despair,”\(^\text{606}\) a supremely mobile and indeed upwardly mobile reaffirmation of life after the 1.38 million dead of the Great War, correlativey Batcheff’s Sad Young Man, static in the face of Baker’s “frenzy,” is caught, much more obviously than he would otherwise have been, in masochistic melancholia. Her “blackness” emphasizes his “whiteness,” so that it becomes more than white; it becomes drained, lifeless, the pallor of a ghost, death contrasted with Baker’s spontaneous and frenzied vitality. Baker plays at being a ghost in the sequence on the liner; indeed, the English woman she startles calls her a ghost in an intertitle. Batcheff’s ghostliness is all the more poignant for not

\(^{606}\) Sweeney, 50.
being named. By being placed next to Baker, he becomes a representative of all Sad Young Men dead on the battlefields, and those alive but shell-shocked, the alienated and traumatized younger generation; in a word: survivors. Her “whiteness” is just ludic make-up, an over-determined whiteness that interrogates her skin colour, and in so doing positions her blackness as a thoroughly modern blackness, helped in this by the fact that her skin colour is not as deep as many.

The film therefore cleverly articulates a cultural transition from Old Europe, represented by Batcheff, to Modern America, represented by Baker; from the melancholic, traumatized and effeminate male, to the brashly innocent and desiring female. The final images of Baker are key in this respect: her fur collar exteriorizes her presumed “animal” nature, turning her into a westernized woman whose purpose is the sacrifice of her desire. She has changed from the Black Venus to the fetishized Venus in Furs, object of adoration for the masochistic male; but object rather than subject nevertheless.

607 This chapter is a modified version of an article first published in Studies in French Cinema 8 (2008): 245–64. Part of it was also published as chapter 5 of Pierre Batcheff and Stardom in 1920s French Cinema (Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Our thanks to both for allowing us to republish the material here.
Critical Absences: The Function of Swooning in G.W. Pabst’s Diary of a Lost Girl

Miya Tokumitsu

In his 1929 film, *Diary of a Lost Girl (Tagebuch einer Verlorenen)*, G. W. Pabst curiously has his heroine, Thymian Henning (played by Louise Brooks), become unconscious during three important plot events: her discovery of her father’s affair with their housekeeper, her seduction at age fifteen by her father’s assistant, and her initiation into prostitution. Thymian’s unconsciousness absents the protagonist from pivotal moments in her own history and seems to confuse the narrative by making her personal agency ambiguous, particularly since the story is revealed through her point of view. In fact, these scenes signal to the viewer a variety of cultural tropes more important to the spectatorial experience than narrative clarity. Focusing on the latter two episodes, I will examine how Thymian’s unconsciousness yields a series of reflexive statements—about the potential perversity of film spectatorship, about the questionable conflation of actor and character, and about both the performance and expectations of femininity.

The film is adapted from the 1905 novel, *Diary of a Lost Girl. Of a Dead Girl. (Tagebuch einer Verlorenen. Von einer Toten.)* by Margarete Böhme, who also assisted in writing the film’s screenplay. Although there are fundamental differences between the novel and the film, both tell the story of a young woman who is seduced and impregnated by her father’s assistant, subsequently sent to a reformatory, and later employed as a prostitute. In the film, she finds personal fulfillment as a prostitute, though she ultimately leaves the brothel to live with an older count as his adopted niece. (In the novel, she remains a prostitute, and dies alone and heartbroken.) In his presentation of the story, Pabst secures the spectator’s participation in it by activating several sexually perverse gazes through which to observe Thymian’s tribulations. Throughout the film, the spectator engages with both actress and protagonist in the various roles of voyeur, masochist, sadist, and necrophile. With the exception of a possible masochistic identification with Thymian, these perverse gazes transport the spectator to ever more extreme forms of domination over both the actress, Brooks, and her character.

The swooning spells implicate the spectator in Thymian’s sexual misfortunes at moments that seem to rupture the narrative. This is because the unconscious body on the screen becomes a visual and metaphorical blank space onto which both spectators and other characters within the narrative can

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608 For further analysis on Böhme as both a novelist and screenplay writer, see Margaret MacCarthy, “The Representation of Prostitutes in Literature and Film: Margarete Böhme and G. W. Pabst,” in *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature*, ed. Christiane Schönfeld (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 77–97.
inscribe their own meanings. That this body nonetheless retains the physical appearance of a famous actress, allows the spectator to see or choose to see the fainting victim as either Brooks, Thymian, or a composite of the two. In the latter two fainting scenes, this conflation of Brooks’s body with Thymian’s is crucial for the spectator’s visual pleasure and problematic in that this doubling of identity temporarily breaks his or her absorption in the film’s diegetic world. These are scenes in which the spectator witnesses the inscription of Thymian’s body with meanings not of her choosing (as a pregnant, unwed mother and as a prostitute) by a physically dominant, male character. However, the spectator acts as not just witness to, but as participant in these acts, ultimately embodying the sexual perversions above.609

In the scene of Thymian’s first seduction, she meets Meinert (played by Fritz Rasp), her father’s assistant, in the pharmacy on the ground floor of the family’s house. Earlier that day, Meinert had purloined her diary (a confirmation gift) and wrote in it, instructing her to meet him there, promising to divulge the circumstances surrounding the death of Elisabeth, the Hennings’ first housekeeper. (The audience already knows the sordid truth that Elisabeth, pregnant by Thymian’s father and cast out of the house, has committed suicide). Earlier that day Thymian had glimpsed Elisabeth’s corpse, and run into the house, only to find her father embracing Meta, the new housekeeper, the sight of which made her faint. This incident establishes the swoon as Thymian’s self–removal from sexual knowledge, either concerning others, or as we shall see, concerning herself.

That same evening, Thymian meets Meinert in the pharmacy, and he again promises to reveal the circumstances of Elisabeth’s death. “I’ll tell you everything!” he says. Thymian never learns the details, however, for after Meinert puts his hands on her shoulders, she buries her face in his chest. The two sink to the floor together and Meinert kisses her, causing her to faint. He then carries her up to her room where, after staring down at her unconscious body on the bed, he climbs over her as the camera fades to black (mimicking the fading of Thymian’s own subjectivity). Thus rather than communicating Elisabeth’s history with Henning verbally, Meinert stages a reenactment of it onto Thymian’s completely pliant body. Thymian is therefore physically present for her seduction and first sexual encounter, but mentally absent. As a character, she appears completely denied any subjectivity, converted into a passive venue in which Meinert, and, as we shall see, the spectator, can perform their desires.

However, the swooning female body presents a number of problems for the spectator at exactly the same moment that it appears most sexually available. The gesture contains its own paradox: either Thymian is overwhelmed

by the erotic sensation brought on by contact with the Meinert and then yields to him, or else she is horrified at what is about to happen and protests by removing her conscious self from the situation. Therefore, she gives her body either all too willingly, or not at all. Expanding the question into the spectator’s realm raises issues of identity. If the character onscreen is drained of any subjectivity, the spectator is left to view an insentient body with Brooks’s features. Who exactly is the spectator viewing here: Thymian, Brooks, or some unstable conflation of the two? What exactly does this uninhabited shell of a body represent? The swooning gesture not only encourages and enables the visual enjoyment of the swooner by setting the spectator in a position of power over the object of his or her gaze, but also has the potential to frustrate the spectator and collapse the separation between the worlds of the diegesis and the spectatorial space.

This mental absentia adds another layer of eroticism of this scene by proposing the possibility that both Meinert and the viewer are fulfilling a masochistic wish by Thymian610—and by extension, spectators who identify with her—to be dominated. Such rape fantasies have been discussed as internalizations of a patriarchal ideology that insists upon female submission and only legitimizes forbidden desires by making them acceptable as punishment rather than pleasure.611 The premise of an unconscious participant in a sexual act also channels the violence inherent in Freud’s ‘primal scene,’ in which the child either imagines or witnesses, but does not comprehend, the parents’ intercourse, and considers it an act of aggression on the father’s part. For the child, this misunderstanding of the sex act binds arousal with anxiety as well as shifting identifications with either parent.612 Just as the actual identity of the woman onscreen fluctuates in these scenes, so do ways in which the spectator identifies with her. On the one hand, by presenting a sympathetic character who is subjected to a series of emotional and sexual crises, Pabst encourages this masochistic gaze—precisely because it holds a promise of perverse visual pleasure while at the same time implicating the spectator in Thymian’s story.

At the same time, Meinert’s complete physical domination over Thymian and his necrophilic desire for a de-animated body are sadistic, and the spectator is implicated in his actions. Two shots during the scene of Thymian’s seduction clarify this point. In the pharmacy, when Meinert is speaking to Thymian, the camera zooms in to an extreme close-up Brooks’s face in profile, with her creamy white skin occupying almost half of the frame, and a

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610 Thymian’s masochism is explicit in the novel; for instance, she contemplates the younger Count Osdorff’s white hands, and wistfully imagines them beating her. Margarete Böhme, Tagebuch einer Verlorenen. Von einer Toten (Berlin: F. Fontane, 1907), 59.
glint of light reflecting off her lower lip. Meinert’s face is behind hers, parallel to the screen, filling the rest of the frame. Thus the spectator mirrors Meinert as he moves in on Thymian, and the proximity of the close-up firmly and tightly sandwiches her between Meinert and the spectator. Later in the bedroom, the camera cuts from a shot of Meinert looking down at Thymian’s unconscious body on the bed, to a point of view shot from his position, the high camera angle reinforcing the physical domination unfolding in the scene. By having the spectator both mirror and mimic Meinert’s gazes of Thymian, Pabst binds the spectator’s very act of looking to the perverse acts perpetrated against Thymian’s body by other characters in the film.

In positioning the spectator as dominant observer of the unconscious Thymian, Pabst draws upon the well-established phenomenon of fetishizing unconscious or dead women in literature and art. For example, Elisabeth Bronfen’s analysis of Thomas Hardy’s 1891 novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, shows how a key function of Tess’s unconsciousness during her first sexual encounter with Alec is the reduction of her body to mere sign. Only when her character is denied subjectivity through her body’s deanimation, can she be a metaphor for Alec’s inscription: “…this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as a gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive.” In similar fashion, Thymian is reduced to a figural sign, onto which Meinert traces his own coarse pattern. This scriptorial nature of her seduction is foreshadowed earlier in the film, when Meinert picks up her—still unused—diary and is the first to write in it. Going forward in their respective narratives, both Tess and Thymian re-enter the world as signs forced to bear another’s inscription.615

As we have seen, however, Meinert is not the only one to dominate the body onscreen. Before our eyes, Meinert depletes Thymian of her subjectivity. In these moments of Thymian’s unconsciousness, Pabst presents Brooks, the star actress and celebrity, to the spectator as a metaphorical blank slate for his or her own inscription. The violence of the action on screen is therefore doubled. Parallel to Meinert’s inscription onto Thymian’s body is the spectator’s onto Brooks. Pabst thus fashions the ultimate commodification of his star actress by presenting her as completely submissive and sexually available to the spectator. The mental absentia of the body on the screen also creates a mental distance between subject and object that allows the body to


615 Bronfen, 236.
function as a fetish object. At the same time, this possession of Brooks is frustrated by her de–animated state. Because she is not conscious, she cannot express her consent to being gazed upon and consumed by the spectator. The paradox of the swoon has come home to roost: Brooks, as well as Thymian, give themselves both willingly and not at all.

The filmic embodiment of this paradox also crystallizes around the commodification of the spectator’s gaze. In one shot of a comatose woman, Pabst suspends the narrative progression in order to linger on one of its most erotically charged moments for extended visual enjoyment; he rests the camera on Brooks’s face and body, prolonging the spectator’s fetishistic view of the actress. However, by lingering a bit too long on this woman, and giving the spectator too much of what he or she wants, the illusion of Brooks as Thymian begins to unravel. The spectator wants lasting moments of eroticism; he or she has also paid to see Louise Brooks. Pabst is able to fulfill both desires in these swooning scenes. However, as soon as the spectator recognizes Brooks herself and not as Thymian, his or her absorption in the narrative is ruptured. In recognizing Brooks as herself, the spectator cannot avoid acknowledging his or her position as such, and accepting the fact that the actual woman, Louise Brooks, is elusive to him or her in the real world, and that Thymian is merely a fictional character, unpossessible for just this reason.

Thymian’s third swoon more explicitly layers the necrophilic gaze onto the other sexually perverse gazes activated by Pabst and Brooks. In fact, sex is bound to death throughout the film. The love–affirming, life–creating possibilities of sex are vigorously denied; Elisabeth’s out–of–wedlock pregnancy causes her to drown herself; the sexual union of Thymian and Meinert produces a weak child who dies in a wet nurse’s care; the second housekeeper’s pregnancy by Thymian’s father is not a joyous occasion—her swollen belly serves only as a sign of sexual knowledge and her children are presented merely as economic burdens. The only way that sex serves any positive function is when it can be harnessed as a commodity through prostitution and traded on the subject’s own terms. Hence, as Siegfried Kracauer notes, within the film, the brothel appears as a kind of haven, especially compared with the poisonous bourgeois home and morally hypocritical reformatory. If one reads Thymian as the elder count’s thinly–disguised

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617 See Schlüpmann, “Brothel as Arcadian Space?” Kracauer says that in the film the brothel is like a “health resort” compared to the immoral middle–class space of the home and pharmacy. Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 179.
mistress at the end of the film, then she has made the ultimate sexual trade: giving up control of her body for economic and social advantage.

After she escapes from the reformatory, Thymian arrives at a decadent salon, filled with dancing, drinking pleasure-seekers. After drinking some champagne and changing into a cocktail dress, she is encouraged by a madam to dance with one of the men. As the other couples disappear into separate bedrooms, Thymian, dancing with the same man, begins to go limp. Eventually, her partner leads her to a bedroom, and turns out the light. The scene cuts to the following morning, when Thymian awakens, alone. Only when the madam enters and presents her with an envelope full of cash, does Thymian realize that she has sold her body. Again, at a pivotal point in her own history, Thymian is not mentally present. Again, her body is deanimated, reduced to a metaphor for another’s inscription.

The rhetoric on swooning is closely linked to discourses on female hysteria, orgasm, and death (hysteria having already co-opted the other two by the twentieth century). Swooning was considered to be a specifically female reaction to overwhelming sexual passion, as well as the final stage of an hysterical episode according to the nineteenth-century physician, Jean-Martin Charcot. The swoon marks a denial of knowledge, and the hysteric as well as the orgasmic woman supposedly experienced it as a split between the physical ordeal of the orgasm and the knowledge of it (in Thymian’s case, simply a split between sex and her knowledge of it). However, the swoon was originally conceived of as a frightening, repulsive moment. Believers in hysteria since antiquity endowed the womb with the capacity of movement, and its least animation (or sexual stimulation) was considered just as horrific as the swooning it produces. The fundamental misogyny of hysteria is exemplified by the comments of the Renaissance doctor and writer François Rabelais in his tale of Gargantua: “I call [the womb] animal…by [its movements] is ravished from woman every other sense and movement, as if it were a lipothymy, a swoon, epilepsy, apoplexy, and a real semblance of death” [emphasis added].

This “real semblance of death” returns the discussion to the relationship between women and death. Why is swooning a female phenomenon? The
answer to this question lies in woman’s historical status as object of the male gaze, male imagination, even male medical experimentation. Women, whether fictional characters such as Tess and Thymian or the real–life case studies of Charcot who were on view in his medical theater, are all figures reduced in agency and intellect in order that their bodies be inscribed with meanings not intended by them. The violence inherent in this inscription ultimately results in the object’s death. According to Bronfen:

As each heroine’s body is gazed at, deciphered, imitated, and ultimately replaced by something else, as physical inscription passes into metaphorical inscription or vice versa, the troping involved either engenders the protagonist’s death or results from it.622

Still, it is the very inscription, or imbuing of her body with additional meanings (facilitated by the object’s unconsciousness), that provides the erotic pleasure of these scenes. If these viewings, decipherings, imitations, and replacements ultimately kill the female protagonist, then necrophilia, the most extreme form of sexual domination, is thoroughly satisfied by the gaze system that Pabst establishes in Diary.

This point is further enhanced by the resemblance of Thymian’s second swoon to the final death scene in Pandora’s Box (Pandoras Büchse) of 1929 also directed by Pabst and starring Brooks. In that film, the femme fatale Lulu gets her recompense in the final scene, when she is stabbed to death by the psychosexual killer Jack the Ripper. Both in the film, and in Frank Wedekind’s “Lulu” plays Earth Spirit (Erdgeist) and Pandora’s Box (Pandoras Büchse) which the film adapts, this death is the fulfillment of Lulu’s own masochistic desires. Early in the play, Pandora’s Box, Lulu says, “Every few nights I’d dream that I’d fallen into the hands of a sex maniac.”623 Therefore the stabbing is the single moment in which Lulu is allowed subjectivity and expression of her desires, and is paradoxically, the moment of her death.624 However, in the film, the spectator does not see the knife enter Lulu. Instead, Pabst shows Jack grabbing the knife and then cuts to a close–up shot of Lulu’s hand and arm. As the arm goes from tense to limp, the spectator understands that Lulu is dying. In Diary, the camera zooms in on Thymian’s gradually limp arm while she is dancing in the brothel to indicate the onset of the swoon.

622 Bronfen, 226.
623 Frank Wedekind, “Pandora’s Box,” in Five Tragedies of Sex by Frank Wedekind, trans. Frances Fawcett and Stephen Spender (London: Vision, 1952), 242. Also quoted and discussed in Mary Ann Doane, Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis (New York: Routledge, 1991), 161. Brooks (quoted in Doane, note 41) herself interprets the ending as Lulu receiving the “gift that has been her dream since childhood. Death by a sexual maniac.”
624 Doane, 161–62; note 41. Doane does not entirely agree with this assessment, and reads Jack’s appearance in the film as a coincidental event.
Therefore within Pabst’s visual vocabulary, the sign for swooning and sexualized death are identical. And, as the statement by Rabelais and the conclusions of Charcot demonstrate, the swoon, the female orgasm, and death have been long intertwined in Western thought. Thymian’s two swooning spells and Lulu’s death all signify the eradication of the female character’s subjectivity during sexual encounters. Even if a character’s desire is truly masochistic, like Lulu’s (though Lulu does not revel in her masochism), the woman is not even allowed to enjoy her partner’s cruelty; her subjectivity must be eliminated in the course of the sexual encounter.

Bronfen has discussed this phenomenon as it appears in works of literature and the visual arts, but it has special implications for cinema, especially as it relates to spectatorship and star performances.

Pabst and Brooks maintain the sign of the limp arm for the swoon/death across two films. This continuity not only reaffirms the potency of this sign but also strengthens Brooks’s on–screen persona, by reaffirming her gesture as the sign not just of a narrative event, but also as the index of her performance of that same event across different films. The double meaning of Brooks’s arm, symbolic of a psychosexual event within the narratives and her performance, again pleases and frustrates the spectator’s gaze. The spectator can recognize both the narrative event and the performance of it, but the more he becomes conscious of the latter, the more threatened is his potential absorption in the diegeses of the two films.

Finally, Brooks is not just performing the swoon or death in these scenes, but she is embodying femininity itself. The necrophilic look moves beyond sexual perversion, an excess of dominance; it reaffirms objectification as feminine. The necrophile loves the corpse itself, the de–animated surface of the objectified body, and the unconscious body on the screen demonstrates precisely the unstable status of femininity in Western representation. According to Teresa de Lauretis, Woman is the foundation of representation, its object and support, its telos and its origin. Such representations work as texts disclosing the story of male desire by “performing the absence of woman and producing the woman as text, as pure representation.”

In Diary, in fact in cinema at large, a double–absenting is required, of both character and actress. However, in Diary, Pabst more than fills the vacancy of meaning in Thymian’s unconscious body.

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625 In fact, Gilles Deleuze claims that the sadist and the masochist are destined never to meet. Although they seem, at first, to be perfectly suited, the sadist requires that his or her partner suffer their cruelty. By definition then, the masochist, who enjoys victimization, can never provide the sadist the satisfaction of inflicting pain on an unwilling object. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989), especially 37–46.

Edna “Billy” Foster, the Biograph Boy
Laura Horak

In 1914, two “Biograph kids”—sisters aged fourteen and sixteen—sat down for an interview in *Motography*:

> Flora folded her hands in her lap and offered “Billy’s real name is Edna.” Billy answered the turn of Flora’s head with the explanation, “They always give me boy parts and I like them better than just being a girl. They got a series of boy pictures ready and asked me what name I wanted to have in them and I said ’Billy.’ So the series was named ’The Adventures of Billy’ and I’ve been called ’Billy’ ever since that by everybody.”

Edna, or rather, Billy, Foster acted in over twenty short Biograph films—mostly directed by D.W. Griffith—between 1911 and 1914. In at least fifteen of these films, she played a male role. As the Biograph Company refused to reveal the identity of their actors during this period, reviewers took the plucky young actress for a boy—a review of *The Baby and the Stork* even praised “the appealing and lifelike presentation of the little boy.”

Foster’s boy performances occurred in the midst of a momentous transitional era for American gender norms and the burgeoning film industry. During this period, feminists continued their decades-long struggle for suffrage as well as dress reform—advocating new styles of bloomers for sporting activities and rejecting the restrictive corset. Women joined men in the urban labor force, earning economic independence. In response to the allegedly “feminizing” effects of industrialization, Teddy Roosevelt called for a rejuvenated boy culture, promoted by the international spread of the Scouting movement. Yet in the early teens, the boyish flapper fashions popular after the First World War were still on the horizon. Cinema too, was transitioning from the one- and two-reelers that had sustained the early industry to serials and feature-length films. Acting styles were changing rapidly (and inconsistently) from older melodramatic to newer verisimilar styles. In the midst of these cultural and stylistic changes, what can we make of Foster’s corpus of “boy” performances? Edna Foster’s Biograph films defy current theorizations of cross-dressing in film. They reveal that the conventions of gendered performance in film required a *process* of standardization as the medium distinguished itself from theatrical traditions. Furthermore, the ease of Fos-

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ter’s crossing hints at a broader horizon of cross-gender casting during this period that has received little attention.

Although Foster describes acting in a handful of films with various studios in her Motography interview, only the films caught up in the D.W. Griffith archive fever have been preserved. She first appears in Griffith’s Biograph films at the age of eleven as “Newsboy on the street” in Bobby the Coward (1911). The set of “Billy” films appeared later that year—first A Country Cupid in July, then The Ruling Passion in August, The Adventures of Billy in October, and Billy’s Stratagem in February the next year. Meanwhile, she appeared in dozens of other films, often in smaller parts as “the young son” or a similar role. Although other film studios began publicizing their stars by name during this time, Biograph held out. This ultimately short-lived policy enabled Foster to pass on-screen as a boy quite thoroughly and completely. This makes Foster quite a special case, for later actresses cast in male parts, regardless of the persuasiveness of their cross-gender performance, would surely be “outed” by the credits or public knowledge of their identity.

The existing scholarship on cross-dressing in film focuses almost exclusively on gender disguise within a narrative. In what Chris Straayer calls “the temporary transvestite” genre (such as Some Like It Hot, Victor/Victoria, and many more) a character must disguise him or herself as the opposite gender to get work, to inherit money, to escape the law or even the Mob. A key convention of the genre is that the disguise is always convincing to the characters within the film but never convincing to the film audience. This unpersuasiveness highlights the audience’s superior knowledge, the skill of the performer, the pleasures of reading the multiple levels of masquerade, and intimations of homosexuality. Annette Kuhn and Chris Straayer, in line with gender theorists Judith Butler and Marjorie Garber, celebrate the transgressive possibilities of these performances that challenge the naturalized relationship between the body, sex, and gender. However, the character’s and the actor’s “real” sex is rarely in question. These theories never address a case like Foster’s—a case of genuine passing—in which the audience is never aware that the perceived gender and the sexed body of the actor are at odds. Usually, these cases are by their very nature invisible. Yet with the belated revelation that the boy in these Biograph films is played by a girl, we can read these performances and their reception retroactively. Although the audience at the time may not have experienced a moment of gender trouble, these performances can denaturalize for us what it meant to perform a naturalized masculinity in the past.

Cross–gender casting has a long history in theater. Although men played women more often than the opposite, women too performed their share of
male parts—from the “breeches” roles of the 16th through the 19th century, to
the male impersonators of the vaudeville stage and the “principal boys” of
British Christmas pantomime. As film, like theater, is a medium in which
performers routinely adopt personalities, ages, nationalities, and ethnicities
at odds with their own, when and why was it established that, in film, men
must be played by male–bodied actors and women by female–bodied ac-
tresses? Jacqueline Stewart has described the way early American films
troubled over representing blackness—as, for example, when one white actor
in blackface signified a white man in disguise while another signified a
“real” African–American in the same film, A Close Call (1912), or when a
blackface white actor appeared beside an African–American actor, as in The
Birth of a Nation (1914).631 These inconsistent conventions continued even
longer in depictions of Asians and other ethnicities. However, the conven-
tions of gender performance (and the requirement that actors stick to their
own gender) appear to have been worked out with greater ease—or were
they? If we look in the right places, we see that some of the polymorphous
performance traditions of theater did in fact survive into the first few dec-
ades of film—and that the conventions of “natural” gender performance
were not standardized in film for quite some time.

One of Foster’s films in particular, As in a Looking Glass (1911), reveals
how naturalized Foster’s boyish masculinity was by situating her within a
film about imitating and altering adult masculinity. The film is a temperance
melodrama along the lines of A Drunkard’s Reformation, but instead of
watching the evils of drink play out on stage, the alcoholic father sees his
own son, played by Foster, parody his licentious, brutal behavior. First we
see the father stumble drunkenly home, aggressively flirt with the maid, and
throw a tantrum at the dinner table while the young son (Foster) watches.
Later, the son sets up the family’s living room like a stage. He recruits his
sister to play the maid and two neighbor girls to be the audience. The son
parodies his father’s drunken flirtations with the maid and violent scenes.
The actors and audience break into boisterous laughter. When the father
catches sight of his own abominable actions performed by his son, he re-
forms his ways. The final shot of the film shows the family, happily gathered
around the now–gentle father, in front of the hearth.

The father’s initial manner—broad, violent gestures, insatiable lust, and a
quick temper—are not, Griffith argues, a “natural,” inevitable male em-
bodyment. Male behavior can be retrained into the bourgeois ideal of the
gentleman, characterized corporeally by smaller, slower gestures and con-

631 Jacqueline Stewart, “Mixed Colors: Riddles of Blackness in Preclassical Cinema” in Mi-
grating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity (Berkeley: University of Califor-
nia Press, 2005)
strained movements. Adult masculinity, in this film, can be learned and imitated (by the young son) and relearned and altered (by the father). The son’s performance of drunken adult masculinity is marked in many ways as a performance—by the audience of neighbor girls, by being bracketed by laughter, by the hyperbolic gestures—while Foster’s performance of “boyness”—conveyed by her clothing, hairstyle, lack of make-up, and energetic, unrestrained movements—remains unmarked, such that it is unnoticeable as a specifically gendered “performance.” Foster’s maleness is represented as effortless and natural, whereas the father must think about the kind of masculinity he acts out.

Perhaps in response to an increasing suspicion that girls ought not be playing boys, Foster and her sister Flora assert through the 1914 Motography interview that Billy, née Edna, “really is just like a boy.” Billy, says Flora, likes baseball and rugby and drives a “big Packard.” Flora, who claims she “can’t do any of those boy things,” prefers to read and study and “sew on the veranda.” At Flora’s prompting, Billy flexes her arm for the interviewer, who admits that “It was a muscle that a boy of more than Billy’s age would be proud of; round and hard as the proverbial rock.” While the burgeoning star industry of 1914 made it normal for stars to assert a continuity between their on-screen roles and their own lives, Foster’s insistence on her natural masculinity contrasts with the way athletic serial queens of the period insisted on their real-life femininity. Perhaps Foster, as a young girl, was permitted to act the tomboy, while these twenties-somethings had to dodge accusations of manliness. Or perhaps Foster’s admission of boyishness was a tactical misstep on her part, as she disappears from the record this same year (although her disappearance could also be due to any number of things: hitting puberty, Griffith’s departure from Biograph, the transition to serials and feature films, the war).

The question remains: was Foster alone in her cross-gender performances? Was there a wider horizon of practice during this period that would make Griffith’s decision to consistently cast Foster in boy parts something other than an individual, eccentric one? Although the record is incomplete, it seems that there was. According to Richard deCordova, one of the first actors promoted by the Edison Company was stage actress Cecil Spooner in The Prince and the Pauper (1909). The Edison Kinetogram advertised:

Miss Cecil Spooner was especially employed to enact the difficult role of Tom Canty, the pauper boy, and Edward, the boy prince of Wales in Mark Twain’s celebrated story, The Prince and the Pauper.632

632 The Edison Kinetogram, August 1, 1909, 14, as quoted in Richard deCordova, Picture Personalities (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 42.
Here Spooner’s skill in both gender and class impersonation is trumpeted. It is a clear example of theatrical cross–gender casting practices being adopted in the new medium. Spooner also appeared as Hansel in a film production of Hansel and Gretel that same year. Although the theatrical convention of casting girls in the roles of young boys became less common in later film, it continued to appear sporadically, as when Mary Pickford played Little Lord Fauntleroy in 1921 and in the various film adaptations of Peter Pan. The breeches role—such as Charlotte Cushman’s and Sarah Bernhardt’s famous turns as Hamlet—was revived in film by Asta Nielsen in 1920. Furthermore, Twelfth Night had often provided an opportunity for temporary transvestism on stage, but a 1910 film confused things even further by casting Edith Storey as Sebastian, the long–lost brother who impersonates his sister Viola (played by Florence Turner). Whereas on the Elizabethan stage a boy would have played Viola pretending to be her brother, in this film, Edith Storey played Sebastian pretending to be his sister. Although I don’t consider male–to–female cross–casting practices in this essay, it is worth noting that men also appeared—sometimes uncredited—in comedies cast as old maids, such as female impersonator Gilbert Sarony as An Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken (1901) and James T. Kelly as a female customer in Charlie Chaplin’s The Pawnshop (1916).

Foster was not the only actress who specialized in boy parts. In 1912, The New York Dramatic Mirror praised the young Kalem actress Marin Sais as “particularly good in Indian and boy parts.” The lack of further comment suggests that readers would have been familiar with girls playing “boy parts.” (Interestingly, Sais’s first film was Edith Storey’s Twelfth Night, so perhaps the girl got inspiration or mentorship from the older actress.) Throughout the teens, Edith Storey played a series of roles in which she impersonated men and boys. In Vitagraph’s Billy the Kid (1911), released in the midst of Foster’s Billy series, the advertisement proclaims “‘Billy’ is a girl but the boys on the ranch don’t know it until she is sixteen, then she marries her pal.” The ad provides a picture of Billy on a horse that allows the reader to determine if his or her gender detection is more savvy than the “boys on the ranch.” Three years later, Storey plays a wealthy young woman who swallows a magic seed that changes her gender in A Florida Enchantment (1914). Siobhan Somerville notes that Storey’s male impersonation was “reinforced by numerous profiles in which she was described as an adventurous, tough tomboy affectionately known as ’Billy.’” So, it seems that Foster was not even the only “Billy” around at this time. Although many

634 Billy the Kid Advertisement, New York Dramatic Mirror, August 9, 1911, 23.
of Storey’s parts fall into the “temporary transvestite” genre, her insistence on her off-screen boyishness aligns her in many ways to Foster.

The short career of Billy Foster at the Biograph Company suggests that in early film, as in theater, the actor’s bodily sex need not anchor the actor’s or character’s perceived gender. Her unique example opens the door to a wider set of actresses associated with boy roles during this period. These performers trouble the assumption that gender could be represented on film naturally—instead, these conventions were consolidated through a process of experimentation. So far, these cross-gender practices in silent film have received little attention and I welcome any suggestions of additional examples of girls and women playing at masculinity during the first several decades of cinema. Though marginal, these performances can show us how gender became “natural” in the medium of film.

Hélène Fleckinger

“If […] one wanted at all costs to give a mythical meaning to *Fortunio*, wouldn’t Musidora, whose curiosity indirectly caused the death, be a modern Psyche, without the virginal purity and the chaste ignorance?”

– Trouble Théophile Gautier, Prelude to *Fortunio*. 636

Summer 1915. In the midst of World War I, Louis Feuillade was demobilized and started shooting *Les Vampires* (The Vampires), a great “ciné–roman” (“film–novel) or “serial” in ten episodes, typical of silent films, that Gaumont commissioned him to face the competition from Pathé. Jacques Champreux, grandson of the filmmaker and project manager of the restoration of films for the French Cinémathèque in 1984637, evokes the atmosphere of desolation that pervaded at Gaumont at that time:

There was no coal to heat the studios, no film, no staff—all the men were mobilized—with the result that Feuillade stood before a ruined Gaumont company and before Pathé, which had always been linked to the United States and that announced amid a blaze of publicity the release of *Mystères de New York*. 638

Louis Feuillade improvised day by day. In the difficult context of the war, the narration became chaotic and the filmmaker conceived an action–packed plot that revolved around violent deaths, mysterious disappearances and fierce battles. The film tells of the perilous fight of reporter, Philippe Guérande, and his associate Mazamette, a criminal turned informer, against the “Vampires”, a criminal conspiracy. Feuillade, who wanted to uncover the same success that he had known before the war with *Fantômas* (1913–1914), had a great plan: making a woman, the dangerous Irma Vep, the movie queen. It was an immediate

637 This study focuses on the film the way it was restored by Jacques Champreux from the rare written pieces that he owned (a notebook containing a hundred lines approximately and several versions, and the serial novels published by George Meirs and Louis Feuillade in fascicules). Indeed, only one copy of the film without titles or archive footage was kept at the French film archive. Although the actual copy is probably very close to the original, one should nonetheless view the restored titles with caution.
638 Testimony of J. Champreux in *Le Temps des restaurations* (1989, Vamp Production, 6 min). Musidora also underlines the large part of improvisation that came into the elaboration of the film: “The script is only ever written in your head. Sometimes, mostly rarely, you take a little piece of paper and with your nice, slanting, and regular hand–writing, you take cryptic notes…” Musidora, “Dialogues de jadis”, *Cahiers du cinéma* 160 (November 1964), 40.
success and the vision of the actress Musidora in a hood and black silk stockings designed by Paul Noiret after the uniforms of hotel thieves, made a deep impression on the audience. “Her naked body, tightly sheathed in black, swayed back and forth in the nights of our adolescence like an enormous and delicate butterfly. We were all, out of breath, hunting this butterfly. We did not even lack a net because we had our dream,” wrote Pierre Loiselet.

But who is Irma Vep and what role does this disturbing character play in the construction of the narration? To what extent does Irma Vep, in the image of Fantômas, become “a mysterious and fearsome being”? How does she contribute, by her evil actions, to creating a fantastic effect based on the “brutal and dramatic rupture with daily reality”?

If the character of Irma Vep, a diabolical woman, seems to refer to the history of fantastic литература and to the myth of the femme fatale, between horror and fascination, the first vamp of French cinema, through its ambiguities, paradoxically follows the paths of transgression, if not of the subversion of established norms. What if Irma Vep, as the surrealists suggested, was above all an embodiment of freedom—of wild love and rebellion?

Irma Vep, a diabolical woman

In Louis Feuillade, Maître du cinéma populaire, Patrice Gautier and Francis Lacassin wrote:

The daring in Les Vampires, that Feuillade may not have been fully aware of, lies in the fact that Fantômas is in this case a woman. The work is a hymn to the Witch, to her deadly beauty and to her satanical seduction that enslaves men or the persons she possesses.

Irma Vep, although she only appears in the third episode, Le Crypto-gramme rouge (The Red Cryptogram), is indeed the true inspirer of the Vampires, those kings of darkness who walk “not towards Evil… / TOWARDS THE WORSE!” In fact, the actress Musidora acted as a model for the promotional poster that announced the film’s release in November...
1915. A woman’s face, hidden behind a black hood, big black eyes framed with long eyelashes and, as if encircling the neck of this mysterious face, a red question mark along with the words that follow: “Who? What? When? Where…” The tone is set: a woman will be the heroine of the serial.

Never the official leader, but always the lover or the privileged accomplice of the leaders that succeed one another, Irma Vep asserts herself as an “agitator of ‘pretty bad boys’.” In fact, her name is the anagram of “Vampire”, which makes her a sort of metonymical character, because she is both “all” and “part of” the group. In this manner, it is after having revealed her as a singer at the Chat Huant cabaret that Philippe Guérande finds the hideout of this secret criminal conspiracy. At the café-concert, after her turn onstage, while other women are dancing, she is summoned by the Great Vampire to be filled in on the “business” in hand. And when she comes back to Paris, after that she is believed to be dead, it is with a turbulent ovation that she is welcomed by the criminals.

Thanks to an irresolute identity, Irma Vep plays a crucial role in the different actions that the Vampires take, and she shows herself to be at the origin of most of the new developments. A true “versatile traitor”, Irma takes on various personalities: she becomes, according to the way things develop, Anne-Marie Le Goff—the little Breton maid who breaks into the Guérande’s home to steal the red notebook in which are recorded the Vampires’ crimes; Miss Juliette Berteaux—banker Renoux-Duval’s shorthand typist who organizes the assassination of her senior bank executive Méta- dier so as to seize 300000 Francs; rich baron of Mortesagues’s grand-daughter—a chaste young girl of twenty who, after having put to sleep her hosts of the Parisian high society, robs them of their money and jewels; the young Viscount of Kerlor who goes in search of 200000 Dollars stolen by an American couple; Marie Boissier, the representative of the universal company of Phonographs, then Noémie Patoche, the cousin of switchboard operator of the Parc-Hôtel, with the intention of cheating multimillionaire

645 The shooting, which started in summer 1915, ended in April 1916 and the broadcasting, very irregularly spaced out, started on November 13th 1915 and ended on June 30th 1916.
647 When wondering around in the Paris inner suburbs, Philippe Guérande “suddenly found himself in front of a poster of a young singer. Under the portrait were the words: Irma Vep. […] In the blink of an eye, he noticed that the letters of those two words could also spell ‘Vampire’. There was only one step to take to conclude that the pretty singer was one of their accomplices and he took that step almost immediately. Convinced that he would find those that he had been looking for for so long, he went into one of the buildings and he was not disappointed.” (BIFI, Fonds L. Feuillade, Dossier 7: Les Vampires, “Synopsis et traitements”, épisode III).
648 C. Torquet, Mon Ciné 30 (September 14, 1922): 11. However, Irma is not the only one who disguises herself. The other characters themselves cannot stop dressing up and wearing toupees to manipulate their enemies.
Géo Baldwin; or then again Aurélie Plateau, Philippe Guérande’s fiancée’s and her mother’s neighbour, in charge of keeping on eye on her enemies.

In that way, Irma Vep reveals herself to be the brains and the acting hand of the Vampires.

Beyond the simple contingency that forces Feuillade to regularly kill his male protagonists according to the happenings, she constitutes a link between the different episodes of *Les Vampires*. In fact, it is only after her death, at the very end of the tenth and last episode, *Les noces sanglantes (The Bloody nuptials)*, that the Vampires vanish forever. Irma Vep is the ultimate criminal one must resist: as long as she is alive, the group, although without a male leader, may be born again. But after she is gone, “Guérande and Mazamette the conquerors find peace and happiness again”, for good.

Therefore, Michel Cadé may write: “[…] It matters little that on her arm great Vampires such as Moreno, Satanas and other Venenos follow one another. It is she who is at the centre of the action, she who pulls the strings.”

The character of Irma Vep is crucial to the story of *Les Vampires*. The fantastical effect, based on the “paradoxical combination of the convincing and the irrational” and the expression of a brutal intrusion of mystery into the frame of real life, mainly stems from the eventful narrative style of Louis Feuillade whose imagination is unbridled and inventive. And yet, it truly is Irma who represents, better than all other characters, the disruptive element, the bizarre and the fierce. She takes a particular responsibility in the genesis of the feeling of “the uncanny”, “this category of the frightening that relates to things that have long been familiar”. The vision of her provokes fear and becomes a source of anxiety. So is it from her first appearance at the Chat Huant cabaret, in her singing and mime act, with blackened eyes, sharp teeth and a threatening glare under her black shawl.

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649 In the ciné–roman, Philippe admires Irma’s transformations: “How did she manage to exchange that accent so typical of the suburbs when singing at the Chat Huant for another that makes it seem as though she has never left her Breton village? What humour! And how admirably does this woman play these two different roles I have seen her in.” G. Meirs and L. Feuillade, *Les Vampires 1, La Tête coupée* (Paris: Jules Tallandier, 1916), 162.


652 J. Marigny 1987, 12.

653 According to G. Lenne, “fantastic cinema requires for a framework a world in which the laws are rigorously unchanging, where the impossible crops up without warning.” Thus, “the ‘fantastic’ is born from the clash of the imagination (the unknown, the horrifying) with the real world and […] this brutal rupture provokes a dizziness of the conscience, which expressed itself through fear and terror.” *Le Cinéma “fantastique” et ses mythologies* (Paris: Henri Veyrier, 1985), 28, 91.

Enigmatic and undividable, Irma Vep comes across as the “malicious woman” in the film. Indeed, Musidora tells how the filmmaker asked her to choose between two roles described in the following terms:

One day, Feuillade asked me: “I’m doing an adventure serial, would you like to play the malicious woman or the martyr woman?” I answered without hesitation: “the malicious woman”.

Musidora turns out to be the one who “murders the innocent victim in each episode” in contrast with the other (non–Vampire) women, on the “Good” side, virtuous, sometimes even ingenuous: thus the “excellent Mrs. Guérande” (the reporter’s mother), the sweet and loving Jane Brémontier (Philippe’s fiancée and future Mrs. Guérande), or then again the superstitious and gullible Augustine. Irma Vep embodies a female Fantômas, amoral and unscrupulous. A “[T]errible female bandit”, she has an incalculable number of crimes to her name. In the sixth episode, *Les yeux qui fascinent* (The eyes that mesmerized), while she is under hypnosis, she draws up the awful list to Moreno:

“I, Irma Vep, admit to having been a part of the band of Vampires and to having taken part in the following crimes:

– The murder of the notary of Fontainebleau.
– The murder of Mr. Métadier, senior bank executive of the Renoux–Duval Bank whom I killed with my own hands.
– The murder of dancer Marfa Koutiloff.
– The murder of Doctor Nox.
– The murder, in Anvers, of the Van Koecker family […].”

The list goes on off screen and calls to mind “the sad enumeration/ Of all the unspeakable crimes, / Tortures, violence/ alas still unpunished! / Of Fantômas the criminal.” If vampires display some common characteristics with supernatural creatures—they act at night and commit bloody murders—these characters are not dead beings who come out of their graves to suck the blood of the living but merciless murderers who spread terror and multiply thefts and crimes. Nonetheless, the film truly is, metaphorically, the story of a vampire–woman. “A ghost”, “living on borrowed time” after having survived the explosion of the ship that was to bring her to the penal settlement of Oran, Irma Vep ends up becoming “the ghost–woman from up above, seductive and lethal” that Roger

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655 *Cinémagazine* 27 (July 22, 1921), 7.
657 Newspaper cutting that appears as an insert in episode VIII.
658 Pieced together by J. Champreux.
Caillois describes. “The mesmerizing eyes” are in fact Irma Vep’s more than Moreno’s, as the ciné–roman\textsuperscript{661} suggests explicitly:

He [Moreno] had thought he was only taking a hostage and now, it was he who was a prisoner... A prisoner of those big and pretty black eyes, of those fascinating and unsettling eyes that he had never crossed without feeling turmoil, even when an inflexible hostility darkened their marvelous glare.\textsuperscript{662}

The character of Irma Vep refers to one of the female archetypes of Fantastic literature of the nineteenth century: “the evil femme fatale”, the other side to the “young disembodied, unfortunate beauty”,\textsuperscript{663} two archetypes of which Michel Viegnes underlines the "gynophobia".\textsuperscript{664} “Unless she is a victim, the woman is criminal; passivity is the price to pay for her literary innocence. She can hardly convert to being an active subject without running the risk of being demonized.”\textsuperscript{665}

Irma Vep, oscillating between a figure of fear and of attraction, recalls the figure of the demon–woman, a fantastic version of the femme fatale. The pretty Irma, like all vampire–women, “conceals her monstrous facet under an illusory beauty”\textsuperscript{666}; she embodies dangerous—even lethal—seduction because she provokes, directly or not, the death of all the Vampire leaders. Thus, with her own hands she kills the Great Vampire come to liberate her from Moreno. Moreno is arrested and executed after having joined the Vampires out of love for Irma, Satanas is imprisoned because he took risks by saving Irma from deportation to Algeria and Venenos dies during their nuptials. Like in Fantastic literature, the woman, embodied by Irma Vep, and death are closely linked. By bringing Eros and Thanatos together, the woman becomes both life and death because, in male imagination, as underlined by Simone de Beauvoir, the woman is “the chaos from where everything takes its origins and where everything must one day go back to; she is Nothingness. [...] That night, when man is threatened to be squandered, and that is the other side to fecundity, terror.”\textsuperscript{667}

\textsuperscript{661} Although the volumes published by G. Meirs and L. Feuillade bring interesting extra film elements, one should use them with caution at the risk of over–interpretation: “The adaptation, clumsy, sometimes unfaithful to the plot, padded out the most fugitive image in two or three pages and lent the characters an interior life and past actions that only an experienced medium could have known”, wrote F. Lacassin. \textit{Louis Feuillade} (Paris: Seghers, 1964), 66.


\textsuperscript{663} A. Richter, \textit{Le Fantastique féminin, un art sauvage} (Tournai: La Renaissance du Livre, 2002), 47.

\textsuperscript{664} “Phobia, hatred – and sometimes fear – of women, an individual psychological feature, that one can distinguish from misogyny, more collective and culturally institutionalized”. CLIO, \textit{Les Mots de l’Histoire des femmes} (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2004), 45.


\textsuperscript{666} L. Soubeyran, “La femme dans le cinéma d’horreur”, \textit{Les Cahiers du gerf} 6 (1999), 100.

Ambiguities and contraventions of a vamp

In playing the character of Irma Vep, the actress Musidora became the first “vamp” in the history of French cinema. For that is indeed the role that Louis Feuillade intended to assign her in Les Vampires: “Ah! You know how to seduce men...That is why I need your precious help for my vampiresque wild imaginings in which you personify the femme fatale...irresistible!” The film makes Musidora a “world–famous star” and the myth is born, mistaking the actress with her character Irma.

The same things are remembered about the actress in all the books in which she is mentioned: her daring appearance “in a bathing suit and a black silk hood, worse than being naked, one could say.” Evocations of Musidora–Irma Vep abound and are all the same: her slim brunette beauty, her great velvety eyes made her, for a while, the idol of Paris which hummed: “A silk bathing suit hugs her ivory shapes!” People cannot stop praising complacently her “perfect and perturbing anatomy”, her deep eyes and her photogenic skills. Even Colette, although she underlines Musidora’s “brave humour”, stresses her “beautiful eyes, her long and perfect legs, her striking black and white beauty predestined for cinema”, and describes her as a “brunette fatale”. Photographs of Musidora all emphasize the big black eyes that made her reputation.

In reality, Musidora built herself this vamp image before Les Vampires, as the choice of her stage name shows. It was borrowed form Théophile Gautier, as advised by writer Pierre Louÿs. Her real name being Jeanne Roques, she decided to “take for godmother” the heroine of the short story Fortunio, a young courtesan who kills herself out of love for the handsome and mysterious eponymous character. After Les Vampires, Musidora extends her success on film to the stage with sketches: La Cambriole by Léonce Paco, Le Maillot noir, the fruit of her collaboration with future novelist Germaine Beaumont, and Danse des Vampires, written by her father. Although Musidora did play up this vamp char-

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668 Musidora often claimed that the word “vamp” had been created for her role as Irma Vep. In reality, the term (from the word “vampire” or more precisely the word “Vampir”, a German word of Slavic origins) was created in the United States that same year, in 1915, when Frank Powell released A Fool there was, an adaptation of a Rudyard Kipling short story entitled The Vamp, the diminutive for vampire. See M. Azzopardi, Le Temps des vamps 1915–1965 (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997).
669 Quoted in Musidora 1964, 40.
acter in order to boost her career, she ended up being a prisoner of this image that she had maintained but that also overtook her.

Yet, this vamp image, indissociable from Musidora, paradoxically rubbed off on the character of Irma Vep herself, from whom one only retains the furtive image of her in black stockings (which accounts for less than eight minutes out of approximately six-and-a-half hours of film) and forgets her transgressive nature. For Irma radiates something more than just lethal seduction. She is a nefarious character, at the opposite extreme of the naïve and reassuring blond Pearl While, the “pitiful victim” whose ingenuousness and virtue are never given a rough time in *Les Mystères de New York*. She is also opposed to the character of Diana Monti which Musidora played in another of Feuillade’s serials, *Judex* (1916).

A painting by Romero de Torrès represents Musidora in a languorous pose and recalls Jaque Catelain’s words about his meeting with the actress:

> One evening, L’Herbier asked me to pick him up at this star’s home […]. A little intimidated, I rang the doorbell; someone opened and I discovered, wide-eyed, giving directly on the landing, a room hung with crimson velvet in the middle of which was, face to the door, a large divan covered with the skin of black bears. Even better, lying down on this divan, entirely naked, as white as marble which would have made Canova’s Pauline Borghese or Manet’s famous Olympia blush, was the mistress of the house, motionless, her eyes closed. At her side, there was no Negress, no flowers like on the painter’s canvas but a sombre man who read aloud some passages from the dramatic “Miracle” he is currently writing…

True, the actress does play a sort of femme fatale again but with more discreet eroticism and for a bourgeois function: Diana Monti “is looking for a respectable ending by marrying the unworthy and rich banker. Her hatred for Judex stems from the hero’s opposition to her wedding plans”.

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675 The letters from her fans, from when she was a penfriend to soldiers during the war, show that the actress always kept alive the myth of her being a femme fatale. She became “the woman from the Croix-Rouge for the wounded and depressed”, as Feuillade said (quoted in F. Lacassin 1971, 454), and sent fetishes to her adoptive sons (photos, silk stockings…). See BIFI, Fonds Musidora, Boîte 2, “Lettres d’admirateurs”.

676 F. Lacassin wrote: “She dreamed […] of playing wounded, blond, fragile ingenues, dysfunctional women and no longer men–eaters clad in funerary silk as if to celebrate their lovers’ deaths.” (F. Lacassin 1971, 463). But the press, the public and after that the film historians often only remembered that image of the vamp at the expense of her life as a filmmaker, a writer and a painter.


678 This painting is kept at the Buenos Aires Museum.


It is thus possible to see in Irma Vep “the women with eyes that live”, above all the incarnation of “unashamed freedom”, as Emile Breton suggests: “This feline character, naked under her stockings...Do we really understand today what message this image sent about women wanting to have a non-"ornamental" role in society?” What if Irma Vep’s scandalous audacity reflected an autonomy that was more disturbing than the suggestive revelation of her nudity? Irma kills but she also takes initiatives and decisions, goes from roof to roof—agile and athletic—, drives cars, knows how to work the phonograph, slides along the walls, dresses up as a man... She is an active subject, never a victim.

Irma Vep obeys only her drive and controls her destiny and her body with great ease. She chooses to love freely the men whom she desires. In fact, it is love that guides her, as suggests the scene in which her seals her union with Moreno, at first a rival of the Vampires. In the ciné–roman, when Moreno confesses his love to Irma and asks her to stay with him, she first remains silent, and then declares matter–of–factly: “Why not.” She does not hesitate to kill the Great Vampire herself, probably her lover and also her adoptive father, just after the latter has negotiated her ransom with his rival. Moreno and Irma’s love thrives on this crime. The obvious loving gestures between the two lovers multiply on screen and, later, we see Irma nearly fainting when she learns of Moreno’s execution and refusing physical support from those who caused her loss.

More than a femme fatale, Irma Vep is an adventuress who refuses bourgeois moral standards. More than a “malicious woman”, she is a “woman with wrong morals, in that she goes against the rules of the established order. She embodies contravention of the norms in a society based on repression and that is precisely what makes her a criminal or a demon: she becomes, in her own way, a “witch”. Both intelligent and brave—she outwits most of the traps set for the Vampires by their enemies and she invents dreadful stratagems to get rid of them—Irma Vep comes across as a feminist. In fact, it is what Musidora later calls her...

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684 See BIFI, Fonds L. Feuillade, Dossier 7: *Les Vampires*, “Synopsis et traitements”, épisode VI: “Enrique, sat beside Irma Vep who has not yet woken up from her hypnotical sleep, orders his prisoner to tell him about her life and, on a piece of paper, the young woman writes: “I am a child who has been found. I was named Irma Vep because it is the anagram of Vampire. The man who raised me taught me how to steal and kill. Formerly, I was utterly under his influence. Now, I am no longer afraid of him. Irma Vep.”
685 Term that the feminists of the seventies appropriated to themselves to describe a rebellious woman in a world dominated by men.
686 The actress Musidora was herself closely linked with feminism. Her mother was a great militant for equality between the sexes and for women’s right to vote and she stood for the legislative elections in May 1898, for the 5th arrondissement of Paris. Musidora’s first appearance on screen was in 1913 in *Les Misères de l’aiguille*, a film directed by Armand Guerra
self in the sixties, in the midst of the women’s liberation movement, a small group of “women filmmakers, women in movement, women in revolt” which aims at encouraging women’s voicing of opinions and of the image. They were at the origin of the first women’s film festival organized in France in April 1974. On the campaign poster, the organizers posed in stockings and black hoods, in tribute to this “beautiful and intelligent woman”: “We had nothing against these two things! It actually amused us that they were both an erotic symbol and something else.”

This is how, in spite of himself, Louis Feuillade distinguished himself from his predecessors. Because the “exaggerated simplifications of the characters […] characterized most of the silent cinema”, underlined Pierre Chemartin and Nicolas Dulac. The film industry, in its early days, very often resorted to stereotypes and was full of “simplistic and set feminine figures”. As early as then, it fetishized women by casting them in predefined roles and by representing them according to predetermined types: the naïve and romantic female lead, the unscrupulous seductress, the perfidious shrew, the big–hearted soubrette, and so on. Irma Vep, on the other hand, escaped the male representation of the woman compelled to be passive and solely seen as a sexual object. Neither sweet nor submissive, the character of Irma supplants the myth of femininity, according to Simone de Beauvoir’s formulation: she concretely asserts her independence, even though she does not easily manage to “live fully her condition as a human being”.

“You exist, the only way you know how to” Strangely, Irma Vep manages to escape Louis Feuillade’s moralizing discourse, whose views were quite conformist, even reactionary. “In his conscious life, Feuillade was attentive to the public opinion and very respectful of the estab-

within the context of the Coopérative du Cinéma du Peuple, of anarchiste allegiance, which denounced the exploitation of female domestic workers. Furthermore, Musidora became a great friend of Colette’s, whom she called her “godmother” or her “Great Protector”.

690 P. Chemartin and N. Dulac 2005, 139.
692 A. Breton, Nadja (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 159.
693 See J. Champeroux, “Louis Feuillade poète de la réalité”, L’Avant–Scène 271–272 (1–15 July 1981): 10. Aft er Les Vampires, Feuillade’s moralism and patriotism became more virulent. He then wrote in the Manifesto for La Nouvelle Mission de Judex (1917): “[…] Cinema, far from being a school for crime and vice, can and must, on the contrary, while remaining above all the favorite amusement of the crowd, propagate the moral and healthy ideas and move away from anything that could strike a blow at the soul of the youth and adults.” Quoted in J. Baldizzone, “La destinée critique de Louis Feuillade”, Cahiers de la cinémathèque 48 (winter 1988), 12.
lished order that he only scorned, unbeknownst to him, in the screenings in his own dreams—that is in his films; noted Francis Lacassin. Indeed, in *Les Vampires*, all is in order again: all is well that ends well, the moral is intact, the Vampires are all killed and their hunters find peace again. However, Irma Vep and her accomplices, all along their epic, blow a wind of freedom over the film and, when all is said and done, “fantasy and imagination break the fetters of classical narration”.

In *Les Vampires* like in *Fantômas*, the criminal and not his “loyal enemy” is the one designated to win the audience’s sympathy: it is Irma Vep who retains our attention and not Philippe Guérande, the after–all quite smooth character. Through her character, the narration focuses on the forces of “Evil” and not on the supposed heroes of “Good”: “the initiative is left to the anti–social forces” and the triumphs of their destroyers are precarious and momentary. Like *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires* “reaches a paroxysm of anti–bourgeois frenzy” and one also finds the same “anarchistic heresy” that Irma Vep carries with her. The adventure she represents challenges the distressing unchanging nature of the world and the Vampires’ “anarchistic and critical violence” reveals the political power of the Fantastic. The Fantastic is no longer an approach to the supernatural but to reality, whose representations it defies. The world of *Les Vampires* is one in which dramatic changes can occur anytime, in which it is possible to take one’s own life in one’s own hands, individually and collectively, and to transform it, as shown by Irma Vep’s own journey. In *Les Vampires* like in *Fantômas*:

[...] Feuillade accentuates the confrontations and sharpens the antagonisms until they are reversed. All of the reversals are virtual and ready to happen. The frequent use of make–up and disguises expresses the imminence of sudden social, moral and emotional changes. [...] everything is possible differently, immediately.

This impertinent demystification of the established order is precisely what explains the surrealists’ interest for *Les Vampires*, and in particular for the character of Irma Vep. In *Le trésor des jésuites* (*The Jesuits’ treasure*),

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695 J. Baldizzone 1988, 14.
699 F. Lacassin 1995, 76.
701 Testimonies of their admiration abounded. One evening in July 1917, Breton threw a great bouquet of red roses to Musidora on the scene of Bobino, after a performance of *Maillot noir*. And in 1919, Aragon coined for her the expression “tenth Muse”. “Du sujet”, *Le Film* 149 (January 22, 1919).
written in 1928 at the height of the success of serial films, Breton and Aragon have the character of “Eternity” declare: “We will soon understand that there was nothing more realistic and more poetic at the same time as the ciné–feuilleton that formerly delighted strong spirits. It is in Les mystères de New York, and in Les Vampires that one will have to look for the great reality of this century. Beyond trends, beyond tastes.”

The meeting of the surrealists with Les Vampires is neither fortuitous neither trivial: they find in silent cinema analogies with their own research. “Indifferent towards “avant–gardists”, a definite enemy of film intellectualities”, Louis Feuillade takes the path of a “conscious surrealism”, wrote Ado Kyrou: “Like poisonous flowers, the images of his films fill daily life with the fragrance of complete freedom.” The surrealists, equally hostile to French avant–garde films of the time, discovered in Les Vampires “a direct translation, quite informal, an unusual reality.” Indeed, the film mixes two realities: daily reality, “life as it is”, and fantasizing, the Fantastic, that indisputably agreed with the fabulous surrealist. Les Vampires represents “the future resolution of these two states, seemingly as contradictory as dream and reality, in a sort of absolute reality, a surreality.” “The precursor of fantastic realism”—according to George Franju—Louis Feuillade impregnates Les Vampires with “black, white and silent magic”, “orthochromatic magic, poetry, aestheticism unchanging through time”. The film, “a masterpiece born from a stroke of luck and instinct,” makes the director one of the inventors of automatic writing for the screen.

The ambiguous and ghostly character of Irma Vep, by adopting the only “morale of such implacability: that of the criminals”, inspired surrealism when setting out to destroy. Two revolts met through her: “that of young people just come home from the trench warfare for whom surrealism was to be the gateway to revolution, and that of women proud of being free from all constraints.” In a beautiful text entitled “Les Vampires”, this is how

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702 L. Aragon and A. Breton, Le Trésor des jésuites, quoted in A. and O. Virmaux 1976, 114.
703 “The first years of surrealism correspond to the last years of silent cinema. And there is not only a conformity of the dates but also of the research.” G. Neveux, “De Judex à L’Étoile de mer”, Études cinématographiques 19–20 (2000), 46-47.
705 The surrealists opposed the formal and almost abstract variations. According to them, “cinema is not a sophisticated clockwork toy but it is the terrible and magnificent flag of life.” P. Soupault, “Le cinéma U.S.A.”, in Écrits de cinéma 1918–1931 (Paris: Plon, 1979), 42.
707 Title of a serial by Feuillade in 1911.
709 Quoted in J. Baldizzone 1988, 14.
711 A. Breton quoted in M. Bonnet, André Breton, naissance de l’aventure surréaliste (Paris: José Corti, 1975), 152.
712 É. Breton 1984, 22–23.
Aragon evoked those young people’s state of mind, in the midst of the horrors of the war:

What attracted us was everything that morale forbade us: luxury, parties, the great orchestra of vices, the image of the woman as well but a heroized one, a great adventuress. [...] An entire generation of young people fell in love with Musidora in *Les Vampires*. [...] At this surprising point of moral confusion, where men lived, like these young ones, did they not identify themselves with these splendid bandits, with their ideals and their excuses? [...] Yes, they ran where CRIME called them, the only sun that was not yet soiled.\(^{713}\)

The future surrealists, especially Aragon and Breton, thus saw in Irma Vep a symbol of provocation and eroticism. She resembled the feminine figures that they would later draw: beautiful, young, versatile, surprising, desirable, adulated, who let themselves be approached but who always escaped, inaccessible. Like Mirabelle, the heroine of *Anicet* or *Le Panorama* by Louis Aragon published in 1921:

One can only ever get a glimpse of her. She escapes at the most unexpected moment those who would like to take a closer look at her beauty but who, by an inexplicable spell, had been too mesmerized to notice it all the time she was there. She then retains this prestige linked to seeing only a brief glimpse of her shapes. One never knows, just as she has disappeared, when she will let herself be approached again.\(^{714}\)

In *Les Vampires*, the future surrealists discovered the structure that they would later propose between freedom, rebellion and wild love. As Vincent Gille wrote, “with its consequence: freedom, and its expression: poetry, it could be that love, here included in all its components: the carnal, poetic, human and social, philosophical, spiritual..., says by itself all of the surrealist ambition to change life.”\(^{715}\) For the surrealists, it is in love itself that rebellion is born and the image of the free woman is inseparable from feelings of anger and indignation. Also, Irma Vep could be the one who brings the conscience to a revolutionary surreality. In *Les Vampires*, like in surrealist thought, desire—as embodied by Irma—has a criminal power, violently subversive. The pretty criminal, by her “convulsive beauty”,\(^{716}\) reveals that “there is in love an outlawed principal, an irrepressible sense of crime, disre-

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\(^{716}\) See A. Breton: “Beauty will be convulsive or will not be” (*Nadja* 2005, 161); “Convulsive beauty will be erotic–veiled, explosive–set, magical–adverbial or will not be” (*L’Amour fou*, Paris: Gallimard, 2004, 26).
gard for bans and a taste for destruction”. The character of Irma Vep anticipates the surrealist vision of wild love, her “harmful shadow” and her “mysterious perversions”, mixing eroticism and contravention.

Irma Vep, a free woman, devoid of moral prejudices, mistress of her destiny, cruel and perverse, embodies the surrealist woman, passionately in love. Through her, Feuillade offers a vision of the woman who is “loved and celebrated like the great promise” of emancipation:

“Glory […] to hysteria and its procession of young and naked women who slide along the roofs. The woman’s problem is, to the world, what is most marvellous and unclear. And this inasmuch as faith has it that an uncorrupted man must be able to contribute, not only to the Revolution, but to love.”

Musidora herself was conscious of the extraordinary impact of her character Irma Vep in *Les Vampires*: “Long after I am gone, my youth and my flame will remain printed on screen”. The films based on *Les Vampires* that followed were numerous, up until *Irma Vep* (1996) by Olivier Assayas. The actress “gave to the femme fatale a new poetic tone, summarized Ado Kyrou. Musidora was a body hugged by the black suit of vampires and two eyes, two eyes of lovers of another world looking down on a very human female body”. The character of Irma Vep represented the intrusion of the unexpected and imposed to the world the revolutionary idea that anything is possible, because “each image, everytime, forces you to rethink the whole Universe.”

But if Irma Vep is the first French vamp, she is not only a dangerous seductress. She is above all a dazzling representation of freedom and subversion, as the surrealists correctly perceived through a both poetic and materialistic reading. The character of Irma Vep invites us to rethink the Fantastic as a questioning of reality:

Reality is the apparent lack of contradiction.
The fantastic element is the contradiction that appears in the real.
Love is a state of confusion between the real and the fantastic element. […] The fantastic, the beyond, dream, survival, paradise, hell, poetry, all words to define the concrete.

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721 Quoted in P. Gauthier and F. Lacassin 2006, 70.
Irma Vep contravenes the norms of the fantastic like those of femininity. She escapes the set models and female stereotypes and becomes the incarnation of the surrealist woman—rebellious and passionate. “A traveller/ a ballerina/ […] revolutionary/ intelligent”\textsuperscript{725}, Irma Vep represents the possibility of an emancipation that takes root in wild love.

I would like to pay tribute to Vicki Callahan’s vast amount of fascinating research. My contribution and suggestions are very modest in comparison with her work, which had a great influence on mine.

Thanks to my translator, Céline Dewaele.

Studio Branding and Comic Personas
“Studio Girls”: Female Stars and the Logic of Brand Names
Charlie Keil

Most studies of early film stardom feel compelled to invoke the near–apocryphal account of how Carl Laemmle helped engineer the enticement of Florence Lawrence away from Biograph to garner publicity for his fledgling IMP Company, with historians typically seeing Laemmle’s manoeuvre as a signal development in the industry’s creation of a star system. In this essay, I will not resist the lure of the Laemmle/Lawrence saga, though my reasons for recalling the campaign point to a different conclusion than that which is usually offered. First, let me revisit the campaign to draw forth the requisite details: after securing a new contract for Lawrence, Laemmle made headlines by intimating that her former employer had circulated untrue stories about Lawrence dying in a streetcar accident. (In fact, it was Laemmle himself, likely via his publicist Tom Cochrane, who had planted the false accounts of Lawrence’s untimely demise.) He disproved those rumours in spectacular fashion in a series of ads declaring Lawrence to be not only very much alive, but now IMP’s preeminent star. “We nail a lie!” the ads screamed, and in the process turned Lawrence’s phony death into a springboard for publicizing her new status as an IMP acquisition. But Lawrence was reborn in another way as well, and that is why I have chosen to return to this well–known campaign one more time. In luring Lawrence from Biograph and finding a way to turn a simple case of a new contractual arrangement into a cause célèbre, Laemmle also inaugurated a novel method of promoting actresses: as named commodities that could be traded among companies and peddled to the public as more than just anonymous extensions of the company’s own identity. In killing off “the Biograph Girl,” Laemmle helped usher in a new era of stars with names, at the same time that he ensured those names would increase the economic value of the actresses that bore them.

According to Richard de Cordova’s influential formulation, the picture personality dominates during the transitional era, giving way to the star sometime around 1913.726 The former depends primarily upon the on–screen persona of the performer, while the latter derives its effectiveness from all manner of extra–textual supports, including the publicity generated by interviews, profiles, and the like. Maintaining the anonymity of their performers during the early years of the transitional era allowed the film companies to reap the benefits of fan appreciation of strong performances while limiting the market value of the actors as named (or even nameable) entities. As I

have argued elsewhere in relation to Florence Turner, the emphasis inevitably falls on the picture personality’s demonstration of acting ability when little more than the actress’s performance can serve as the basis of stardom. But once the various production companies started to name their performers outright, the potential for the actors’ identities outside of their on–screen personae to play a role in how the public might respond to them came to the fore. Laemmle’s intervention is of particular interest because it deliberately lifted Lawrence out of a diegesis controlled and defined by Biograph and allowed her to possess a life off–screen, even if the point was proven by threatening that life with its own mortality. By insisting that Florence Lawrence’s identity exceeded the parameters imposed by her branding as the “Biograph Girl,” Laemmle opened the Pandora’s box of stardom.

Controlling actors proved a relatively straightforward proposition as long as they remained exclusively picture personalities: their existence did not extend beyond the screen. That is why the designations of “Biograph Girl,” “Vitagraph Girl,” “Thanhouser Kid,” and the like were so apt. Much like the literal studio brands that appeared affixed to the walls of the sets during these years, the studio monikers attached to the actors signified that they were company property, a mechanism for distinguishing the output of one studio from another. Confined to their roles and strongly identified with a single company, actors during the early years of the transitional period became recognised for the power of their roles, forced by necessity to focus on allegiance to their employer over contract negotiations and promotional ad campaigns.

Laemmle’s exploitation of the Lawrence name represented one of the first significant shifts in that policy. Clearly, she could no longer be the “Biograph Girl” once she switched companies, which accounts in part for the elaborate lengths Laemmle went to eradicate her past persona (symbolically killing it while laying responsibility for its death at the feet of her former employers). But it also complicates our notions of how the picture personality functioned after she ceased to be merely a brand but wasn’t yet a star. I use the pronoun ‘she’ deliberately, because a disproportionate amount of effort was devoted to the fostering of female stars. If, as I hope to demonstrate, the development of screen stardom was an uneven and sometimes contradictory process, spurred and stalled in equal measure by the economic and social anxieties harboured by a still–nascent industry, it was largely a gendered phenomenon as well. As revealed by the scenario of threat and rescue played out in the Lawrence campaign, transitional era stardom was built disproportionately upon the image and persona of the actress, whose paternalistic control by a largely male industry realized itself in the tenacity of the branding logic.

The star image both revealed and resisted the limits of studio control. Reproducible photographs of screen actors, though produced by film manufacturers, had the potential to circulate much more widely than images limited to the exhibition space for moving pictures. The example of the stage offered a precedent for the potential power of these forms of star imagery to spur audience interest. Photographic reproductions of theatrical actresses had been prevalent throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by inexpensive cartes de visites that fans could purchase readily, resulting in the phenomenon of “cartomania”, which crested in the late 1890s.\textsuperscript{728} Renewed interest in the photographic likeness of stage actors became apparent around 1910, spurred by its use in advertising. This coincides with the acceleration in the circulation of photographs of film performers. Kalem famously made lobby card photos of its stars available in 1910, and from that point onward, the photographic likeness of the star, named or not, began to become more prevalent. The photograph is an integral feature in the establishment of a star system, for numerous reasons: most importantly, it detaches the image of the star from its cinematic manifestation. Much like stage performances, the film performance was evanescent. Though possessed of a materiality that stage performances lacked, the filmed performance only existed as long as the spectator’s time in the theatre. Once photographed, the actor occupied a timeframe more elastic than that allowable in the filmic moment and this extended the possibility for contemplation of the star image beyond what was allowed by the film text proper. Moreover, the photograph extended the star persona beyond the confines of any film’s given diegesis. On film, stars were duty-bound to be a character, whereas in the photograph, they could be ‘themselves,’ or at least a representation of a persona not restricted to one dictated by a single role. Photographs of film stars soon began to feature them ‘out of character,’ realigning the emphasis so that the film star was no longer simply the function of a host of roles, but rather possessed the potential to become someone with an identity separate from what had been demonstrated on the screen.

Even so, the link of photo to name was not consistent in the early years of the period. It was not unusual for a photo to appear without any name attached to it, a holdover of the anonymous branding approach companies had adopted at the outset of the transitional era. The famous Kalem lobby card, for example, featured only a roster of actors, no names, except for that of the company that ‘owned’ them. Ironically, one even sees this in the early ads promoting Florence Lawrence’s move to IMP. Employing a photo of Lawrence prominently positioned in the upper corner, the ad copy declares

“She’s an IMP!” even while she remains unnamed. As much as Laemmle’s stunt depended on the naming of Lawrence, he still seemed to wish, on some level, for fans to think of Lawrence as the Imp Girl now that she no longer belonged to Biograph. One should note that Laemmle pursued the same strategy when he lured Mary Pickford to his company in 1911, and that American also ran ads that year featuring actors’ unnamed photos. Other companies, such as Essanay, featured names and photos in their advertisements, while also reminding readers of the roles such actors as Dorothy Phillips and Gladys Field had played in the past, helping to cement the connection between the actor’s name, image, and screen–based picture personality. It was at precisely this time, in fact, that some companies began to provide the names of the players as part of the credits of the films. As exhibitors writing to Moving Picture World pointed out in July of that same year:

Wouldn’t it be a good idea for the manufacturers to each put out a reel introducing individually their company to the public, telling who they are and something about them? We are sure the public is anxious to know these people[...] We think the day is coming when the public will not only want to know who these people are, but will want a program with the cast of the picture just as they do to–day of the stage drama.729

Soon, Lubin would go one step beyond this by having two of its stars, Ormi Hawley and Edwin August, appear on–screen as themselves prior to the beginning of the narrative proper. Standing before a generic background that has no relation to the subsequent diegesis, the two actors share the screen with their names, which appear superimposed over their bodies, the emulation of the theatrical curtain call indicating again the influence of stage precedents.

Why did both the trade journals and the movie companies demonstrate such ambivalence and/or uncertainty in the advancing of star images and names conjointly, and how does this relate to the sustained investment in studio branding during this period? Arguably, studios both feared the economic repercussions of acknowledging in print that stars helped to sell films (The New York Dramatic Mirror said as much in a 1911 article)730 and also were not yet sure that sufficient numbers of fans would recognize their favourites by name. And with some players moving amongst companies, it would not be in a studio’s best interest to invest heavily in promoting the name of the star, only to find that that actor had then decamped to another manufacturer. For that reason especially, perhaps, producers preferred that the chief name recognition be the studio’s rather than that of any individual star. Moreover, the production and distribution logic of the pre–feature era, which entailed the selling of a program of short films through a service, ar-

729 “Naming the Cast,” Moving Picture World, July 29, 1911, 216.
gued for the primacy of a studio’s production qualities over the appeal of any individual actor. All of this would change, of course, with the introduction of features, and stars would become much more prominent in advertising once films were marketed on a per–title basis. In other words, once producers could rationalize the expense stars entailed, by incorporating larger star salaries into a calculation of profitability, the relative resistance to encouraging stars’ popularity seems to have receded. Certainly one can note increasingly pronounced emphasis on the value of the star in film advertising from 1915 onward, precisely the moment when feature filmmaking (and such star–dependent strategies as block–booking) begins to take hold.

But during the transitional years, the palpable fear that a star’s popularity might translate into unreasonable salary demands, driving up the cost of production, found expression at various points within the trade press. For example, in 1912, *The New York Dramatic Mirror* wrote:

> Discussion of the apparent tendency toward a policy of exploiting stars in motion pictures continues to command attention of producers, many of whom look upon the drift as to a rock ahead that may mean great danger to the art. Those who see trouble in the undue featuring of star players have in mind the experience of the theatrical stage, where the exploitation of stars has admittedly proved a handicap and a great deal of nuisance. The craze for stage stars has caused the artificial making of regiments of near stars, whose only claim to special distinction may have been good looks, a scandal, or a “pull”. Deserving and faithful workers in the ranks have been made to suffer thereby, for the reason that the fortunate stars were able to command such munificent rewards that there was little left for their equals or betters.731

While the primary aversion to unbridled star promotion might have been economic, one can note in the *Mirror*’s comments the sentiment that fan interest would not always follow talent, allowing more superficial appeals, such as attractiveness or aspects of the star’s personal life, to overshadow dramatic abilities. As long as film stars remained “picture personalities,” primarily a function of their performances within films produced by their employers, their fame was tightly circumscribed and easily controlled by the producers themselves. The more individuality the producers accorded stars, the more those producers risked stars becoming unmanageable, to the point where the star might even become an autonomous economic entity. This accounts for the repeated insistence on the consonance between the on–screen persona and the off–screen character of actors in transitional–era profiles of picture personalities. (Mabel Normand, for example, is described by *Moving Picture World* as being “just the energetic, enthusiastic, fun–loving girl [in private life] that she typifies each time she appears on the screen.”)732

731 “‘Spectator’s’ Comments,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, January 24, 1912, 32.
But it also explains the revelation that a screen actor’s life is primarily one of discipline and restraint—as when Florence Barker reminds her interviewer in *Photoplay* that her schedule involves rising at 6am and being in bed before 10pm, following a rigorous diet, and abstaining from alcohol. As she puts it, “That doesn’t sound much like the life of an actress, does it? … If your girl readers contemplate becoming motion picture artists, tell them to make up their minds to one thing, first of all, it means work and more work, few pleasures, no dissipations, no late hours, and small pay at the beginning. If you feel you are an artist and must express your art, go in with that determination and if you stick to it, you are sure to win out. But remember, you can never become a star in a day.”

One of the primary reasons for the emphasis on female stars in the early promotion of the picture personality was the knowledge that such stars were a key to building an audience of female spectators. (Whether true or not, *Moving Picture World* felt compelled as early as 1910 to declare that “nothing pleases us so much as to learn that [our publication] is very largely read by women—women who are interested in the picture from all of its principal aspects.”) But coupled with that acknowledgement is a recurring emphasis on the innocence, the lack of guile, and, ultimately, the pliability of female stars. In other words, by asserting the femininity of such stars, producers (either directly through advertising, or by proxy through trade press profiles) seemed to insist on the need for a type of paternal control. The qualities of the female stars—their youth, their diminutive stature and, ultimately, their girlishness—define them as fragile entities in need of protection. (*Photoplay*, for example, refers to Mary Pickford as a “child creature”, to Helen Martin as “one of those pink–and–white, fluffy girls”, and introduces a profile of Florence Lawrence in the following manner: “From every corner of the cozy blue and white room with its colonial rag rugs and flowered cretonnes there was an echo of the girl–woman so many of us have laughed with and cried over.”) This insistence on femininity as a form of arrested development permits the studios to continue exercising control, even as the fame of its young female charges expands. (Hence, as late as 1914, an ad in *Moving Picture World* can declare that “Florence La Badie—the world’s most famous motion picture player [is also] a Thanhouser star.”)

Ultimately, the stars’ marketability would outstrip both the efforts to keep their personae contained within the limits of the child–woman formulation

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738 *Moving Picture World*, December 15, 1914, 1319.
favoured during the picture personality era and the studios’ preference for the branded star. The rhetoric of ownership receded as stars gained increased autonomy (witness the formation of many semi–independent production companies constructed around the talents of a female star, such as early efforts like those by Marion Leonard and Helen Gardner, who in 1913 were advertising their own multi–reel productions). As Adolph Zukor would concede a few years later, “a star is more important than the play [the narrative], for the people know the star and do not commonly know the play.” The model of the star system established within the theatrical world emerged as a useful template for developments within moving pictures. Though initially film production companies sought to replicate the star power of the stage simply by borrowing names from the other medium (resulting in unsuccessful attempts to reproduce the stardom of such theatrical luminaries as Pilar Morin and Cecil Spooner), the true influence of the stage proved to be in showing how star power could be linked to consumerism. For years, stage actresses had helped establish fashion trends that their fans would emulate, and by 1913, one sees the motion pictures adopting such a strategy, though still retaining the brand name designation, with Our Mutual Girl, wherein Norma Phillips wears “the smart clothes of smart people”. Moving Picture World makes the link between on–screen example and fan influence explicit: “While it is not the purpose of the Mutual folks to boost the dressmaker bills of our wives and daughters, they believe that no harm will come to us, and not a little pleasure, if they show us in pictures, what it means to be well dressed from the standpoint of a woman.” As the advertising bible Printer’s Ink would assert in 1917, female consumers exhibited an “emulative eagerness” that stage actresses tapped into by promoting a wide range of fashion and beauty products. Female theatrical stars had paved the way for film actresses by participating in testimonial advertising during the late 19th century. Testimonials experienced another surge of popularity beginning in 1910. (Ironically, and perhaps not coincidentally, manufacturers of consumer products had shifted to brand identification through trade characters, such as the Campbell Soup Kids, in the intervening years.) The same factors that would elevate the stage star–endorsed testimonial at this time (including professionalization of acting as a vocation, promotional efforts on the part of the trade press, and increased interests by fans in the personal preferences and lifestyle choices of favoured stars), eventually led to film stars assuming equivalent roles within the realm of product advertisements. Once the name value of film actresses was firmly established, their usefulness in the promotion of everything from Red Cross Shoes to Ingram’s Milkwood Cream be-

739 Adolph Zukor, “Pleasing Most of the People Most of the Time,” System, October 1918,
481.
741 Philip Francis Nowlan, “Warding Off Saturation Point by Changing Advertising Appeal,”
came apparent, and soon film stars would usurp those from the stage as the preferred focus of testimonial ad campaigns.\(^{742}\)

At the same time, the overt control of picture personalities by their home studios ceased as well. Though stars continued to be managed by production executives and saw their personae carefully crafted in the pages of fan magazines, their newfound economic autonomy changed the terms by which they were promoted. Ironically, as female stars capitalized on their liberation from the strictures of studio–brand anonymity, their bodies increasingly became the site of their fame. To end where we began, we can examine a later ad campaign featuring Florence Lawrence’s return to the company Carl Laemmle built (now Universal Film Manufacturing) in 1915. Using a simple play on words (“Who’s Back?”), the double page ad focuses on the bared back of Lawrence, stating the terms of her value to Universal much more starkly than the first campaign—now named, the female star exerts an appeal both individualized and sexualized, two qualities that will persist for decades to come, relegating the era of the studio girl to a distant past.

\(^{742}\) For more on actresses and testimonials, see Schweitzer.
From Pratfalls to Glamour: Gloria Swanson Goes to Triangle
Tricia Welsch

Although by 1918 she was established as a comic actress with Mack Sennett’s Keystone Film Company, and had made funny pictures with Charlie Chaplin, Bobby Vernon, and her first husband Wallace Beery, Gloria Swanson always felt herself unsuited to comedy. She yearned for the chance to make “serious” films—by which she meant melodramas. Thus, with the boldness that would characterize her entire career, Swanson essayed the first of her many transformations. She asked to be released from her Keystone contract and went across town to the Triangle Film Corporation, where she begged a job from an old friend. What she could not have known was that her private ambitions would fit so easily into her new studio’s needs. This paper considers Swanson’s transition from Keystone comedy performer to leading lady at Triangle in 1918, a time when she learned her trade as a dramatic actress in feature–length productions. Swanson’s Triangle year was a period of experimentation at her new studio as well. An early proponent of efficiency in business operations, Triangle’s production team would work to make Swanson as marketable as possible as quickly as possible. For the eight films Swanson made at Triangle, the company ran test screenings, conducted in–house research, and puzzled out how—or whether—to market Swanson’s reputation for comedy even while crafting a glamorous new persona for her.

That Swanson proved a good candidate for such a makeover was in part due to the kind of Keystone experience she had had. Despite her negative impression of studio head Mack Sennett (who disgusted the rather proper young actress by spitting cigar juice too near her feet), the eleven films Swanson made under his supervision were mostly milder and more restrained than the classic Keystone comedies. There was little in the way of punishing acrobatics to injure her dignity, and she would never—not once—take a pie in the face. Instead, in nine popular two–reelers directed by Clarence Badger, Swanson and juvenile actor Bobby Vernon attracted a wide audience while playing at teenage courtship. They literally played: games of tennis, musical numbers at the piano, at cooking in a kitchen where dishes exploded, games of fetch and chase with the big Great Dane, Keystone Teddy, who was their frequent co–star. The Danger Girl (1916) shows the pattern of Swanson’s Keystone shorts. Bobby gets distracted, and she has to regain his attention, but without compromising her girlish virtue. She first tries pouting, which is adorable but doesn’t work. Then she gets angry and

comes up with a plan to get even, which is even more adorable. With a striking economy of gesture, Swanson communicates a feisty determination to recapture her beau’s wandering attention. Whether she is whacking Bobby over the head with the flowers he tries to give her or hauling off and punching a villain who gets in her way, she flirts with but never quite crosses the line to vulgarity. She can dress like a man and drive a motor car like a speed demon, but it’s all in the service of true love. And she always needs the near–oblivious Bobby to save her from the trouble she’s gotten into along the way.

Swanson would later term these films “light” comedies, and was eager to explain what she meant: “I mean that there were no big fat people or cross–eyed people or skinny people and there were no bathing girls in the picture.” No fat people (like Roscoe Arbuckle). No cross–eyed people (like Ben Turpin, who was rumored to carry insurance in case his eyes ever came uncrossed). And definitely no bathing girls: Swanson probably spent more breath disavowing any connection to the Sennett Bathing Beauties than she denied any other story told about her professional life.

Why was Swanson so insistent on this apparently small point? The answer may have something to do with what it meant to be a film comedienne in the second decade of the last century. Such women were often viewed as morally dubious. Miriam Cooper, Griffith actress and wife of director Raoul Walsh, remembered that “All those girls who did comedy were tough.” They were certainly the subjects of endless gossip. The sheer physical exertion of their labors, according to Alan Dale, provoked speculation: physical comedy was “associated with sexual activity and independence and all kinds of out–of–bounds traits that indicate[d] a girl [wasn’t] nice enough to marry.... [P]ratfalls [implied] that the heroine [was] altogether too physically available.” Beyond this, the women who starred in slapstick comedy often possessed only average looks and would likely not have been offered romantic leads or other opportunities to do anything dramatic or glamorous. Simon Louvish observes that Keystone at least offered these actresses options beyond what conventional roles provided: “Neither child–women nor femmes fatales, they could muck in, indulge in the rough stuff with the male of the species, hammer people over the head and be hammered, giving as good as

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744 Transcript of Kevin Brownlow’s interview with Swanson. Part of this interview appeared in Hollywood, Thames Television 1980; the transcript is held at George Eastman House.
745 She admitted only to having a photo taken with them on the set of A Pullman Bride. Swanson insisted that she could not swim and was afraid of the water—as if their swimming prowess was the main qualification the Beauties possessed. For his part, Sennett professed amusement at the way actresses who had moved on after working for him were eager to deny their roots. Swanson on Swanson, 78.
Skilled Keystone comedienne Louise Fazenda would just have to settle for reading a description of herself as “double–jointed from the neck down” in the papers. It was already easy to be typecast. Then, too, Sennett claimed that mothers were not funny and could not be made to be funny, which further restricted the roles open to women (and set the respectability quotient a bit lower as well). Last but not least, funny women were unimportant. They were in pictures but the pictures were seldom about them. Buster Keaton (who cast his own wife in his films) was famous for saying that he used “three principals—the villain, myself, and the girl, and she was never important.”

Sennett would later describe much of Keystone’s early output dismissively: “The pictures I made then were not much. They were quick, fast comedies with thin plots, and they were immediately consumed, the reels actually worn out, scratched and destroyed, in the grind of the small movie houses.” The demand for this fare was intense; of the 10,000 reels of film produced across the American industry in 1913, one tally suggests that 3,000 were comedies. This steady call for funny movies created in turn a working atmosphere which prized speed and crazy inventiveness over all else. Again, Sennett: “We had to make our short funny pictures fast in order to meet the demand of the theaters, which were increasing by the hundreds every week, and the pictures were sold like gingham for girls’ dresses—at so much per yard. This meant that if we hit the doldrums on account of weather or lack of imagination, we had no money coming in to meet the payroll.”

With this in mind, Sennett craved a steady supply of what he called “roaring extroverts devoted to turmoil” as his players.

Swanson never considered herself adept at comedy, and quickly tired of the limited options open to her as half of Gloria and Bobby. But when Mack Sennett hit a rough patch financially, things got worse for the young actress. Sennett responded to his fiscal crisis by trying to cut as many corners as possible. He dropped players from his roster and issued instructions to monitor the productivity of those remaining on staff. He directed the studio’s general manager to “prepare all companies for immediate production of cheap and speedy stories regardless of quality” and to “try to stretch all sin-

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749 Chicago Tribune, March 7, 1920; quoted in Louvish, 105.
753 Sennett, 99.
754 Ibid, 91.
gle reelers possible into two reelers,” again “regardless of quality.” Any players who balked at being downgraded to one reel status were to be let go. The atmosphere at Keystone, never tranquil under the best of circumstances, now became positively fraught.

Swanson survived the purge (Bobby Vernon did not), and was immediately rushed into *A Pullman Bride* opposite Mack Swain and Chester Conklin, veritable institutions of slapstick by 1917 who were also inveterate scene stealers. Swanson plays a girl hustled into marriage with Swain by her mother, who is convinced that the big man is a successful capitalist. Her rejected suitor Conklin refuses to take no for an answer and accompanies the pair (and Mama) on the honeymoon, which takes place aboard a train. They race through the train, falling in and out of compartments, and staging a food fight in the dining car. A shortage of berths means that Mama has to share a bed with her daughter, and that both men are trying to get in. Desperado Oklahoma Pete is also on board, and his effort to rob the passengers leads to mayhem and gunplay. The action is rougher and faster than Swanson’s Badger–Vernon pictures. Swanson at one point even takes a pratfall, which she executes perfectly. Looking directly ahead, her mouth a small O, she falls straight backward, her timing and self-control exquisite.

She may not have liked slapstick; she may have clamored to try her hand at more dignified and developed roles on screen. But clearly Swanson was making a success of this rough and tumble work. For one thing, she was little enough to be hauled around and hoisted up with ease, and small played well in many comic situations. For another, she had the kind of unruffled persona that also provoked laughs. Swanson later observed that she was a serious young woman with an undeveloped sense of humor, even claiming that she did not get all the jokes in these funny films. She also believed that she could never get the tempo of comedy right (she was wrong about that). But she would later put her finger squarely on one part of what made her Keystone performances successful: “I played all my light comedy like Duse,” adding, “The fact that I was so serious made it twice as funny.” Without the size and middle-aged stodginess that Margaret Dumont brought to her Marx Brothers pictures, Swanson also had something of Dumont’s straight man sensibility. She was—however inadvertently—a hoot.

But she was also wretched. *A Pullman Bride* played havoc with Swanson’s idea of herself as a budding romantic lead, and the chaos off the screen

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755 Sennett telegrams quoted in Louvish, 140–41.
756 As early as her time at Essanay in Chicago, Swanson had claimed she felt like “a cow trying to dance with a toy poodle” when working opposite Charlie Chaplin in *His New Job*. Swanson, 40. She also believed slapstick was not “respectable,” and said she “hated the vulgarity that was just under the surface of it every minute.” Swanson, 78.
757 “I played”: Brownlow interview; “the fact that I was so serious”: unpublished early draft of Swanson’s memoirs, held in the Gloria Swanson Collection at The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, 38.
at Keystone made it clear that there would be more where Conklin and Swain came from. She later groused to anyone who would listen: “I [had] never worked with people like this and they started throwing soup and pies around. I didn’t like it at all... You could kill yourself, get concussion. I wasn’t a tumbler. I’d never practiced any of this sort of nonsense.” The actress thought she had an understanding with Sennett that she was to be featured in more refined comedies, expecting that she would somehow be a part of Keystone without being defined by the studio’s anarchic sensibility. Under the pressure of his tightening belt, however, Sennett was likely in no mood to accommodate what he would almost certainly have seen as Swanson’s pretensions to gentility. When she went to him complaining about her latest picture, he offered to free her from her contract. To hear Swanson tell it, Sennett wanted to make her another Mabel Normand, an idea she rejected imperiously: “I’m sorry, Mr. Sennett,” I said, ‘but I don’t want to be another anybody.”

Swanson could probably see the limited value of Sennett’s offer. Despite her youth, she was by the age of nineteen a seasoned player who had been featured in films at two different studios—three, if you count a single short she made at Universal–Victor in 1917. What’s more, Swanson had negotiated all her own contracts. Always a shrewd and close observer of her environment, Swanson would not have missed the writing on the wall at Keystone. In fact, according to at least one source, she had been angling for a new opportunity for some time. As early as February 1917 a Los Angeles newspaper carried a story titled “Ingenue Peeved Because She is Not a Vampire”:

Out at the Mack Sennett–Keystone Studios is a little girl who bewails the fact that it is her mission in life to make people laugh. She yearns to be a vampire—at least on the screen.... Because she is little, pretty and wears all sorts of dainty costumes to perfection, Miss Swanson... has been inexorably cast as a fun maker.... Probably Mack Sennett knows what he is doing when he keeps Gloria in parts in which she has scored such huge successes. But could you convince the lady that this is wisdom? Not in a million years....Miss Swanson will never be satisfied until she has, for once at least, been a screen vampire and wrung some hero’s heart. In *The Nick of Time Baby*..., it will be noted that Gloria’s hair is loose and curly, her eyes a–sparkle with merriment, and her frock girlish and dainty. That is because Mr. Sennett has ordained it so, but in the accompanying picture you see Gloria as she best likes to be—a full–fledged vampire with hot, glowing eyes that stir your soul.

The Witzel photo shows Swanson with chin up, hair slicked back, deep décolletage, and bare shoulders. Her lips are stained a dark color; her brows are

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758 Brownlow interview.
759 *Swanson on Swanson*, 79.
760 Unnamed newspaper, Gloria Swanson Collection, scrapbook 61.
thin and dark against her very pale face. The photographer Albert Witzel immortalized many a screen star, but at this point in his career he was also shooting inexpensive portfolio shots for aspiring actors. It seems likely that Swanson produced the money for a session with him out of her own pocket, styling herself as audiences would soon know her, and unlikely that Sennett would have been too pleased to see his little comedienne doing so. On the contrary: Sennett’s in–house newsletter publicized the release of The Nick of Time Baby with a picture of Keystone Teddy carrying Gloria and Bobby’s baby out to lunch at the studio cafeteria. Bobby, in this picture playing Gloria’s hapless husband, has forgotten to feed his child. This is hardly the stuff of which glamour stars are made. When the newsletter did deign to run a picture of Swanson looking a bit more soulful than usual, the writer (often Sennett himself) poked gentle fun at her: “Gloria isn’t always tragic but she can be on occasion. The Director has just given [her] a 7:30 call.” Soon enough, however, Gloria Swanson would be finished playing opposite a Great Dane.

She considered her options, knowing there was little chance that she could get cast in dramatic pictures. “In those days,” she would observe, “once you were a villain with a black moustache you were branded. Once you played butlers you played butlers for the rest of your life.” Swanson determined that she would have the best chance if she approached a studio which had both a comedy troupe and a dramatic section; at least she would be nearer to her ambition. So she went to see her old friend Clarence Badger, who had landed (as had Bobby Vernon) across town at Triangle. The Triangle Film Corporation, founded to take advantage of the special talents of D.W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, and Mack Sennett, had survived the departure of its three main directors (Sennett was operating Keystone as an independent venture during Swanson’s tenure there). Film production was humming steadily along at Triangle. Badger graciously offered Swanson a small part in his current short picture. But she was after bigger things—features preferably—and more reliable work than the one–reelers Badger was in a position to provide.

Nonetheless it was because of her comic experience that Jack Conway, an old hand with ten years’ experience in the film industry, offered Swanson the lead in his new Triangle picture. He had seen her in The Danger Girl, he said, and knew that he needed just such a spitfire for the lead in his new film. You Can’t Believe Everything is the story of a feisty young woman, Patria, who is forced (literally) to fight off unwanted suitors, and later falsely

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761 Swanson was just beginning to be pictured in the press wearing the elaborate gowns she favored. See Motion Picture, April 1917 and Motion Picture Classic, March 1918.
762 Mack Sennett Weekly, March 19, 1917, Gloria Swanson Collection.
763 Ibid.
764 Swanson, unpublished manuscript, 38, Gloria Swanson Collection.
765 Swanson on Swanson, 83.
accused of spending the night with one of them. She cannot clear her name without betraying the confidence of another man, her crippled friend Jim, whose long illness has left him so despondent that he attempts suicide. It is Jim’s momentary despair—and her part in his rescue—that Patria will not reveal. Patria’s courageous effort to prevent Jim’s suicide meant that Swanson—a non–swimmer who was terrified of the water—would have to dive into deep water one dark night to save her co–star. The stunt would at least give her a chance to look good while she behaved heroically: the action called for Patria to see her friend go into the water, at which point she was to rip off her evening dress. Under it she would be wearing only a skimpy chemise known as a “teddy bare.” A fifteen foot jump off a dock in the black of night might make for some fabulous lighting opportunities, but the young actress had to screw up all her courage to leap off what felt like the edge of the world. When she came sputtering up from the depths, she felt she had passed her first real acting test.766

The excitement generated on the Triangle lot by the film made the front office take a greater interest in the studio’s new acquisition. They decided to hold back the release of the Conway picture until they could build up interest in Swanson through some strategic casting and publicity.767 She was hurried into her second and third films opposite two of Triangle’s most reliable leading men. William Desmond played her opposite number in Society for Sale, an improbable piece about an American model who tries to buy her way into British society by paying a poor aristocrat to introduce her as his intended bride. Of course the impoverished man falls genuinely in love with her. Everyone is scandalized when the American (Swanson) then runs off with Lord Sheldon, a much older divorced libertine, before the wedding. After a terrible car crash in which the older man dies, Swanson’s character reveals that Sheldon was really her long–lost father. She is of noble birth after all, and has boatloads of money to boot. All ends happily for the couple, who can now marry. Leading man William Desmond was a Triangle stalwart who was featured in ten or eleven pictures a year; he was forty to Swanson’s nineteen when she became his leading lady. But he would have to put up with the star treatment the studio was beginning to give the young actress, and to pose or wait around endlessly for the glamour shots they needed of her. Swanson remembered feeling that both Desmond and her next leading man, J. Barney Sherry, were unenthusiastic about her gobbling up so much time and attention.768 Sherry was another workhorse for the studio, and in Her Decision he would play the husband Swanson takes in order to support her pregnant—and—abandoned sister. Because Swanson’s character, a stenographer, loves another man, the noble Sherry offers to live platonically with

767 Ibid, 89.
768 Ibid, 89–92.
her (though he too is mad with love for her). Eventually Swanson comes to her senses, rejects her faithless beau, and realizes that she loves the selfless and devoted Sherry, who is also her boss. Both Desmond and Sherry were essentially being used in support of the new studio acquisition rather than vice versa.

With three pictures prepared, the studio began what was for Triangle a publicity blitz. *Society for Sale* was released in late April 1918, and *Her Decision* a mere three weeks later. In a time when pictures played for only a few days or at most a week, there was a need for constant turnover to fill theater seats. But even by these standards, Triangle was willing to gamble that Swanson would find—or better yet, create—an audience. Mentions of Swanson in the trade press and fan magazines at this time note that she is “a comedy queen” being introduced in her first dramatic role. But the studio did not seem eager to proclaim Swanson’s earlier incarnation as a Keystone star, lest audiences reject her in more serious roles. So they took a middle course: they would identify her for the benefit of anyone who might recognize the name or the face, thus capitalizing on what good such recognition might do the actress, without belaboring the comedy connection. The formulation “comedy queen” seems to have helped bridge this gap, suggesting that royalty was not too far from the case when describing Swanson.

But by the time of her two June 1918 releases, *Station Content* and the delayed *You Can’t Believe Everything*, the studio appeared to be feeling more confident about the young star’s reception. Now they began claiming her comic background in order to highlight her multiple talents: “Though Gloria Swanson was known to be a very clever comedy actress in Keystone comedies,” one press release states, “very few suspected that she possessed the emotional depth and histrionic power to perform roles of a serious order. [With her last pictures] she immediately sprang into the good graces of metropolitan critics and picture lovers.” Exhibitors were encouraged to post pictures of Swanson in their lobbies to show off her beauty, which (they were told) “merits decided attention.”

That attention was arriving almost before the studio could figure out what to do about it. *Station Content*, Swanson’s fourth feature, had been produced quickly and inexpensively, before the studio had much sense of the actress’ value, and almost everything about it dismayed Triangle’s Reviewing Board, especially in light of the Conway film’s favorable reception. The Reviewing Board was an in-house group that previewed the films and planned advertising strategy. Individual reviewers ranked the various attractions of the film, and divided their numerical rankings by the number of attractions considered

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769 *Motion Picture Classic*, March 1918.
770 Publicity materials for Swanson’s first three Triangle features explicitly use the phrase “comedy queen” to refer to her. See scrapbooks 35, 61, and 79, Gloria Swanson Collection.
771 Scrapbook 79, Gloria Swanson Collection.
772 Ibid.
(which were idiosyncratic but generally included story, setting, acting, and photography). This generated a number—a grade, if you will—for each picture. Based on its grade, the studio would put more (or less) effort into promoting the film. Station Content, the reviewers felt, had dreary sets and a meaningless title (the picture had originally been called The Prodigal Wife, which the Board liked). They gave the film grades ranging between 34 and 61 on a scale of 100. The only thing the members uniformly approved was Swanson’s performance. “This little girl is going to make good,” the Board chair wrote enthusiastically. He continued by saying, “The Board seemed to consider this an ordinary Triangle program picture. However, all the members graded Gloria Swanson’s acting very high... She should be featured, and reference to her splendid acting in Her Decision [the picture she had made with J. Barney Sherry] could be made to great advantage. Box office value is labeled medium and so are the advertising possibilities.”

Intriguingly, what the studio highlighted in the end was a last–minute railway rescue scene, a scenario that was literally familiar to Swanson from her Keystone days. If in Teddy at the Throttle she had been tied to the train tracks and rescued by a dog, at least now Swanson was playing the active one, the heroine with choices to make. Once again, the studio would advertise her beauty, but the publicists for this film also found a productive use for her comedy past: they applauded her physical courage. “Miss Swanson is supposed to dash out of a telegraph office in a stormy night, ride down the dark railroad track on a gas tricycle and flag ’Special No. 14.’ Any studio actress would have quailed” (italics mine), they continued, “at the thought of operating the tricycle and then pitching herself over a cliff after standing in the glaring light of the locomotive to stop its headlong flight to destruction. But Miss Swanson has a record for gameness and daring which she... acquired during her connection with Keystone comedies in which death–defying feats were an ordinary occurrence. She lives up to her record most commendably in this picture.”

The studio also prepared paper throwaways printed with the catchline “Nights with Gloria Swanson, Triangle star, at the throttle.” They seem to have been hoping that viewers would hear the echo of the popular Keystone film’s title and recall Swanson’s attractions.

As early as midsummer of 1918, however, Swanson was finding her time on the “Triangle treadmill” exhausting, and much less glamorous than she had expected. The studio released a very busy program of eighty–four pictures in 1918; Swanson was featured in almost a tenth of Triangle’s programming. She would make four more films (for a total of eight), repeatedly playing a brave and faithful woman, before her Triangle year ended. The studio

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773 Triangle Collection, Cinémathèque Française.
774 Triangle press sheets, Gloria Swanson Collection.
775 Triangle Collection, Cinémathèque Française.
776 Swanson on Swanson, 96.
gle’s promotional campaign advertising “Clean Pictures for Clean People” was part of Hollywood’s belated response to the conflict playing out in Europe. By the summer of 1918 the United States had been at war with Germany for a year, but the clash had not much affected the content of films released to American audiences. Aside from some early “preparedness” films, Hollywood had not made many pictures dealing directly with the hostilities. This was in part due to the government’s initial reluctance to exempt the film industry from heavy wartime duties by giving it the privileged status of a vital industry. The results of this policy soon became clear. War taxes drove admission prices up steeply, and the enormous pressure on average Americans to save their money for war stamps and bonds conflicted with the self–indulgence necessary to procure them an evening’s escape at the movies. The movies began to seem an unthinkable luxury. This led in turn to theatre closings: in the summer of 1918 a third of the ninety–three picture houses in Los Angeles was shuttered because of poor ticket sales. Increasingly, however, as news of the bloody battles fought throughout France made its way across America and families started mourning their casualties, the studios began to produce war pictures for the domestic market, encouraged by the government’s change of heart regarding the industry’s status as essential. Relatively few films made during the war itself featured combat scenes; however, tales of spies and secret agents were told in scores of pictures. These pictures were seldom subtle and often a good deal worse than that, the most rabid heralded by names like The Claws of the Hun, The Kaiser’s Shadow, or The Prussian Cur. A great many featured women caught up in espionage plots, often against their will, and coming to heroic grips with the enemy. The most popular films were those that demonstrated that the average American could have a role to play in the conflict: as Kevin Brownlow has observed, “Audiences preferred propaganda about themselves. The films they went to see suggested that individuals determine the course of history. It was ordinary men and women, as portrayed by well–known players, who caused vast armies to be defeated, spy rings to be exposed, armadas to be destroyed at sea.... Most audiences were aware of the lurid exaggerations, but they loved the actors and actresses who convinced them that it was they, the ordinary members of the public, who held history in their hands.” Triangle’s newest featured player would be quickly positioned as one of these courageous citizens in a trio of melodramatic propaganda pieces.

Those next assignments paired her with director Albert Parker. A transplanted New Yorker who had been a stage actor before he found his place

777Ibid. 92.
778 Kevin Brownlow, The War, the West, and the Wilderness (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 130. The virulent influenza sweeping the nation in fall 1918 would again close theaters, and be responsible for 600,000 deaths.
779 Brownlow, 131.
behind the camera, Parker had already made several films that were typical of Triangle’s wartime output. *From Two to Six* featured a set of stolen submarine plans competing for attention with the romantic trials of a young man who must marry before a deadline or lose his inheritance. (He will marry the young woman who helps him catch the spy and recover the plans.) *For Valour* told of an unselfish young woman who made it possible for her brother to go off to fight and become a war hero while obscuring her own heroic sacrifices for the cause. Self–sacrifice was in fact a major theme of wartime movies. Even if the films themselves had nothing to do explicitly with the war effort, notions of sacrificial glory, altruism, and selflessness were popular and drew audiences to the pictures.

Parker’s two war pictures with Swanson, *Shifting Sands* and *The Secret Code*, would be competently produced dramas of self–sacrifice, blackmail, and personal redemption through patriotism. Both offered Swanson a chance to play a young wife who must resolve her domestic problems even as her actions have larger, international implications. In *Shifting Sands* she is a woman with a secret which she dares not reveal to her wealthy philanthropist–cum–diplomat husband: that she is an ex–convict, wrongly imprisoned for—as studio publicity would have it—“the crime of the shameless woman.”

(Actually, she is framed for robbery by a rejected suitor, but the vaguely “shameless” crime played better on advertising posters.) When the man whose lie sent her away reappears, he is no longer simply a lustful German: now he is a lustful German spy. He tries to blackmail the young woman into giving him state documents in her husband’s possession. Swanson’s character can only unmask Von Holtz by coming clean to her husband about her own past.

Triangle evidently thought it had a sure winner with *Shifting Sands*, which combined matrimonial and patriotic causes while allowing Swanson to move from prison garb to the beautiful gowns expected of a society matron. Sexual blackmail was an inordinately popular motif in movies made during this decade, and the studio was confident that women would recognize the dilemma in which the young wife found herself: “How many homes are standing on SHIFTING SANDS because the husband and wife fail to tell ALL when they are wedded?”

A dividend was that Swanson’s character meets her husband while she is volunteering with the Salvation Army, which meant that religious organizations could be targeted by exhibitors as well as the “patriotic protective leagues” in the community. There was a little

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780 Triangle press sheets, Gloria Swanson Collection.
781 Studio publicists recommended using caricatures in theater lobbies to emphasize the German’s “clutching hand” and “fiendish expression.” When the film was reissued after the war ended, a few quick changes turned the German villain into a British counterfeiter, giving the film a longer shelf life. Triangle press sheets, Gloria Swanson Collection.
782 Ibid.
783 Ibid.
something for everyone here. Yet the studio wanted to make sure that exhibitors did not turn patrons away by an imprecise promotional campaign: “This is not a war picture,” they cautioned. “Emphasize the fact that there are none of the horrors of war embodied. Simply, we have here a vital story of a woman’s soul, crucified by the villainous bestiality of a pitiless persecutor who sank so low as to be treacherous to the country that harbored him, and who finally paid the penalty for his treachery.”  

Audiences thrilled to see topical themes explored on screen in a way that did not disrupt their enjoyment of such melodramatic staples as the revelation of a young woman’s sexual past to her husband.

The studio continued to laud Swanson as a “Triangle discovery” into the fall with the release of *The Secret Code*, which puts her in the role of a Senator’s wife who must navigate the choppy waters of wartime diplomacy when her husband’s female adviser turns out to be (inevitably) a spy for the Germans. This jealous woman persuades the Senator that it is his own wife who is passing state secrets to the Kaiser via encoded messages in the stitching of her crocheting! The ludicrous plot is unraveled when Swanson turns out to be nest–building for the baby she is expecting. The real spy, billed by Triangle publicists as the “Oriental sorceress of Washington,” is especially harrowing because she has infiltrated an American marriage. Of course, it was precisely that threat that made the film appealing to female viewers, who might not otherwise see a clear connection between their lives and the war effort. But everyone could presumably imagine a “female tool of the Germans” in the form of a romantic rival. Publicity campaigns for films like this one were necessarily schizophrenic: on the one hand theater patrons were encouraged to make the screening a “knitting event” by bringing their needles to the show. On the other, xenophobic feelings were roused to fever pitch: “Are you a patriot? Do you hate the subtle machinations and vile schemings of the Huns? Does your blood boil when you think of how German treachery runs through the very marrow of our great body politic? Then you will surely want to see Gloria Swanson as the wife of a U.S. Senator in *The Secret Code*. One shudders to think of a coterie of women shouldering lethal knitting needles coming upon an innocent German–American neighbor on a night out at the movies. Studio advertising consistently suggested that patronizing movies with war themes was a way to display one’s support for the war effort.

Swanson was by turns amused and disgusted by such cinematic fare. She observed that the declaration of war had seemed to authorize grown ups to

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784 Ibid.
785 Ibid.
786 Ibid.
787 Ibid.
788 The Reviewing Board felt pretty confident about this film, which they awarded an overall grade of 79. Triangle Collection, Cinémathèque Française.
act “like children just let out of school. The war became the excuse for doing or not doing anything. People went crazy with foolishness...as if somebody pulled a switch [and] gave them a signal.” She especially rejected the claim that all Germans were evil: “What was I supposed to do, wake up one April morning and start hating my great grandfather, or turn him in to the police?” Her new director Albert Parker delighted Swanson by poking fun at the patriotic scripts the studio provided; she recalled the two of them as having “a perfectly marvelous time.”

The armistice of November 1918 ended the war, and soldiers slowly began returning home. The film industry was left, however, with a backlog of war pictures to push into the re-opened theaters. Business was touch and go for a time. Furthermore, European governments had seized a chance to impose quotas on the importation of American films, and this was a blow that destabilized all but the biggest Hollywood studios. Triangle, never on very firm footing, wobbled. Swanson found herself cast in a last-minute war picture which she later felt was the nadir of her Triangle work. She had a sense of déjà vu: when Keystone got in trouble, it started pumping out shorter, cheaper pictures even faster than usual, with little care for quality. Such was the case with *Wife or Country*, which was directed by an old acquaintance from Essanay days: E. Mason Hopper, also known as “Lightning” for his speedy economy. Hopper was unfazed by the more-than-usually-convoluted plot of the film, in which Swanson played a stenographer whose boss is married to a German agent. Swanson’s character leaves her job when she realizes she is in love with her employer, and is promptly hired by the head of the German spy ring. She exposes the spies; the boss’ remorseful wife (who has earlier saved her husband from Skid Row and helped him turn his life around) swallows poison and dies; and Swanson marries the man she loves. Chalk up another patriotic triumph to the average working woman. In her memoirs Swanson wrongly remembered herself as the character who took poison, but by this point in her Triangle career she may well have felt like it. Hopper led the cast through these shenanigans, as he had back in Chicago, by “scream[ing] himself hoarse,” and his leading lady had only disdain for the film’s “overacted, overdirected, overpatriotic nonsense.” The company barely bothered to advertise these last, tired war pictures, and Swanson could see that Triangle was failing.

All the same, when the company manager let her know that the studio would not be able to exercise its option on her contract, offering Swanson the chance to end her work a few months ahead of schedule, the actress balked. Several months earlier, Cecil B. DeMille had tried to hire Swanson

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789 Swanson, unpublished memoir, unpaged, Gloria Swanson Collection.
790 Ibid.
791 *Swanson on Swanson*, 97.
792 Ibid, 98.
away from Triangle, and the studio had refused to release her from her contract. Swanson had been angry and humiliated: after the company had thwarted her opportunity with DeMille, she was not inclined to release Triangle from any portion of its obligation to her. Bankruptcy may be threatening, but they still owed her several months’ salary, she observed tartly. Then the manager explained that DeMille had several times asked to borrow Swanson from Triangle, and offered to let Famous Players–Lasky know that she would soon be available. Her old hopes reviving, Swanson agreed to move on.793 She was in a better position to do so, as an assessment of her Triangle year makes clear. Her pictures had been enjoyed by audiences, and generally received by critics without scorn if without great enthusiasm. Variety found Shifting Sands, for instance, a “good average attraction.” While Swanson’s role did not require unusual talent, the reviewer noted that the actress “gets all she can out of the part.”794 In later years, she would realize that the door that had closed on her first effort to join DeMille was the best thing that could have happened to her: “It gave me another year and a half of experience. I grew up in that year and a half in leaps and bounds.”795 With the move to Famous Players–Lasky, Swanson would move from Triangle’s norm of “good average” to a higher plane entirely. Better yet, the picture for which DeMille had wanted her had not been especially successful at the box office: “I might never have been heard of [again] if I’d been in the [first] picture.”796 As it happened, she joined DeMille as he was hitting his stride.

Swanson had only one more picture to complete for Triangle before she was free. Everywoman’s Husband is strikingly similar to the films she would soon be making at Famous Players–Lasky, and Triangle may well have looked to DeMille for hints about what he intended to do with Swanson as Triangle’s own war projects dried up. In Everywoman’s Husband a young wife follows her mother’s advice and keeps her new husband on a very short leash, nagging and correcting him constantly. It is not long before he finds a lovely model to keep him company. When the wife learns that her own father took a mistress to escape her mother’s harsh rule at home, she is aghast at what she has done, and sets out to regain her husband’s love. “Handle with care! Fragile! Husband Within!” ran the publicity posters: “A husband is a highly breakable and delicate article....There is always some other woman to make things comfy and attractive for friend husband when wifey paints home sweet home a dull gray color, and runs her husband according

793 Ibid. 98.
794 Variety, August 30, 1918.
795 Swanson, unpublished memoir, 47, Gloria Swanson Collection. Swanson recalls the length of her stay at Triangle as a bit longer than it actually was.
796 Swanson, unpublished memoir, 47–48, Gloria Swanson Collection. It seems likely that the picture for which DeMille first wanted Swanson was Old Wives for New, which Famous Players–Lasky brought out in summer 1918.
to the rules in the book.”

The film, which offered many opportunities for Swanson to deck herself out in the latest, most luxurious gowns, espouses a more conventional morality than the similar DeMille pictures in which she would soon appear: the errant wife does recapture her spouse, despite some fierce competition. *Everywoman’s Husband* also presents an up-to-the-moment consumerist perspective on what keeps a partner attracted and attractive: the most fashionable clothes and most current hairstyles.

In fact, Swanson’s last Triangle feature seems little more than a dress rehearsal for the more sophisticated films she would make with DeMille. Her new director valued Swanson’s ability to play an ordinary young woman who could wear clothes beautifully; this pairing of the average with the lavish and luxuriant is one the two would perfect in their time together. But the groundwork had been laid during Swanson’s stint at Triangle, in a way that served both her plans and the interests of the studio. In her one busy year at Triangle she had successfully made the transition from rough-and-tumble comedienne to elegant leading lady, a move the studio endorsed and designed. Her first few pictures for Triangle had shown her as capable of stopping a runaway train and diving off a darkened pier into deep water, physical feats that recalled her Keystone knockabout days, while the studio gingerly assessed her potential as a featured player. Swanson’s ability to look the part helped determine Triangle’s course. Within a few months of signing her contract it seemed the studio was paying more attention to her costumes than to anything else about her films. Triangle’s Reviewing Board members agreed that she was being “held in leash” by “unsympathetic” roles and “slow” stories in which was she given “no opportunity to do anything” except look beautiful. But they seemed unable to devise any other roles for her, and as the studio’s financial pressures deepened, more inventive stories were less and less likely. Further, as the studio learned just how well Swanson wore clothes, all mention of her comic skill or physical prowess disappeared from her films and their advertising. Even in her war films, despite whatever international crisis is afoot, she is always shown beautifully garbed. In fact, cocooned in increasingly fabulous dresses in film after film, the actress moved less and less.

Swanson’s first day of work for DeMille was the day the Armistice was signed, and she may well have felt that she had won her own private battle to be taken seriously. Yet—though she could not have known it in her 20s—for the rest of her long and restless career, she would do her best work in films that allowed her to wear fabulous clothes and to caper like a Keystone comic. Whenever she managed both to parade and to romp, Gloria Swanson was in her element.

797 Triangle press sheets, Gloria Swanson Collection.
798 Triangle Collection, Cinémathèque Française.
“Ever on the Move”: Silent Comediennes and the New Woman

Kristen Anderson Wagner

When a 1917 magazine article wanted to know “who is the most strenuous [woman in] the photoplay?” the obvious answers of serial queens such as Pearl White and Helen Holmes were quickly dismissed. “No, no, no! You’re all wrong,” the writer insisted.

Diving out of a balloon and flicking a speeding freight train isn’t at all strenuous as Polly Moran knows the word. And Polly, we venture, is the most strenuous thing in or out of skirts. If you want to see the wild, wild woman of the screen, you want to see Polly.

She rides a horse with the reckless abandon that would make Bill Hart look like a nursery jockey. Upstairs, downstairs, over cliffs, from one towering ledge to another—that’s the sort of horse tricks she executes. And she can wield her fists as fast and as effectively as any man you ever saw. She has no aversion to leaping head foremost into a crowd of some twenty gangsters and then cleaning out the entire set. And she can handle a lariat with dexterous skill. Does she rope one object at a time? She does not! She ropes twenty and thirty with one movement, and just to demonstrate her strength, she pulls them all through the city streets and lodges them in jail.799

Looking past the tongue–in–cheek hyperbole of this article (almost certainly written by a studio publicist) one finds a description of a very modern woman. Polly Moran is figured here as strong, assertive, independent, intelligent, and athletic, and able to hold her own alongside men. Her character, Sheriff Nell, was a working woman holding a traditionally masculine job, and Moran herself was known as a gifted and hard–working comedienne. Like serial queens, girl spies, cowgirls, and other action figures of the 1910s, Moran, and comedienes more generally, in many ways were the personification of modernity, with its speed, thrills, energy and vitality. Whether performing wild and dangerous stunts or embracing athletics and automobiles, comedienes’ activities both on–screen and off—linked them to the thrilling and lively modern city and to the iconic figure of the New Woman, and they provided a highly visible example of women who successfully negotiated the modern world, with its constantly changing landscape. These women were often progressive and forward–looking, breaking with the past as they gave female spectators a model for modern femininity. Just as Louise Fazenda was said to have “clubbed her path–way to success, leaving behind her a pallid mass of shocked and bleeding traditions”,800 comedienes showed

799 Unidentified magazine clipping, ca. 1917, Polly Moran clipping file, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL).
women that they didn’t need to be demure and conventionally feminine to succeed—in fact, comediennes seemed to suggest that just the opposite qualities were needed for the modern New Woman to engage fully with the modern world.

The New Woman, of course, was as much cultural construct as lived reality. Originally figured as an antidote to the Victorian–era True Woman, the New Woman came to embody the complex changes taking place in women’s lives in the early 20th century. She was fashionable, young, healthy, attractive and vivacious when figured by Charles Dana Gibson, Howard Chandler Christy and Ziegfeld’s chorines; she was mannish, overbearing, sexually ambiguous, dangerously over-educated and inexcusably neglectful of her husband and children when represented by anti-suffragists and social conservatives. She was, in short, a catch-all symbol for the anxieties and fears that many were feeling as women increasingly made their mark on the public sphere, holding jobs, mixing in heterosocial company, and making ever more vocal demands for equality and enfranchisement. The character types that comediennes played on–screen often mirrored these divergent images of New Woman, from light comediennes and slapstick–ingénues such as Colleen Moore and Mabel Normand, to unruly knockabout types such as Marie Dressler and Alice Howell. However, rather than simply confirming popular stereotypes about New Women, comediennes defused their perceived threat through their comic portrayals. Furthermore, unlike action heroines who typically portrayed one type of New Womanhood—active, young, and attractive—comediennes portrayed a wide range of femininities, from comically overbearing or gawky, to young, pretty and effervescent. As such, they helped broaden the popular conception of New Womanhood, and showed audiences that “New Woman” was a much more inclusive category than many believed.

As a site of struggle over changing gender roles the New Woman was, as Ben Singer describes her, “a particularly striking example of modernity’s characteristic cultural discontinuity.” Comediennes, like the image of the New Woman, stood as visible symbols of the changing gender roles of the early 20th century. By simply engaging in comic performances female comedians were crossing gender boundaries, claiming for themselves a trait—humor—that was typically considered exclusively masculine. Many believed—and still believe—that comedy and femininity are mutually exclusive, because of comedy’s inherent aggressiveness and the reliance of much humor on intellect over emotion. And yet in many ways comedy, modernity and New Womanhood are strikingly similar. Comedy is aggressive. It’s also bold, active and assertive. The comedy found in motion pictures and on the

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vaudeville stage of the 1910s is tantamount to performed modernity, full of speed and thrills.

Just as the icon of the New Woman was gaining prominence in the early 20th century, a new type of comedy was similarly displacing older forms. This so–called “New Humor” was, as theater historian Susan Glenn describes it:

a visceral, fast–paced, direct, physically demonstrative and sometimes violent style of comedy. In contrast to more cerebral, thoughtful and didactic forms of narrative humor, the new humor created joking and laughter for its own sake.802

This new style of comedy found its way into vaudeville and motion picture theaters in the form of slapstick and eccentric comedy, which was violent and anarchic and concerned with disorder and inversion. Rules of acceptable behavior were acknowledged and then broken, as comedians, both male and female, pushed the limits as far as they could. This new type of comedy is perfectly illustrated in a routine performed in the Ziegfeld Follies by comedienne Eva Tanguay, described by a reviewer as “a mimic ball game in which she and the audience pelt each other with soft balls, and for a few minutes the fun is fast and furious.”803 Comedy of the 1910s, just like comediennes, New Women, and the modern world itself, demanded attention; it was not content to sit quietly and demurely on the sidelines.

In many ways, comediennes were uniquely equipped to confront the modern world. Armed with a new style of humor (and perhaps a few soft balls), comediennes engaged in and ultimately triumphed over the shocks and thrills of the modern landscape. As Ben Singer, Jennifer Bean, and others have argued, the turn of the twentieth century was a time of tremendous anxiety, as rapidly changing technologies, expanding cities, and increasing immigration brought about a displacement of 19th–century lifestyles and culture.804 The big city, it seemed, was fraught with peril. In the city, Singer points out, there was a “sense of a radically altered public space, one defined by chance, peril, and shocking impressions rather than by any traditional conception of continuity and self–controlled destiny.”805 Crossing the street could mean risking one’s life, as out–of–control trolleys collided with horse–drawn carriages, and the brand–new menace of automobiles mowed down everyone and everything in their way. Horrible accidents were breathlessly

803 Pittsburgh Leader, 21 March 1910, Eva Tanguay clipping file, NYPL.
804 Singer, Melodrama and Modernity; Jennifer M. Bean, Bodies in Shock: Gender, Genre and the Cinema of Modernity (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1998); Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
805 Singer, Melodrama and Modernity, 70.
reported in the popular press, adding to the sense of danger from all sides. Headlines such as “A Falling Man Kills a Boy,” “Horse Smashed Cable Car Window,” and “Child Choked by a Transom” reinforced the ubiquitousness and unpredictability of violent death in the city.\footnote{Quoted in Singer, \textit{Melodrama and Modernity}, 74–89.}

Anxieties about modern urban living, including fears of bodily peril and sudden and brutal deaths, are frequently acted out in comedies, especially slapstick comedies, with their violent and chaotic situations. In fact, early cinema in general had what Bean describes as a “unique capacity for giving aesthetic expression to the very crisis of which it is a part; that is, to embrace disruption and discontinuity as a premise for titillation.”\footnote{Bean, \textit{Bodies in Shock}, 55.} While a number of early genres—especially action and chase films—embraced disruption and discontinuity, comedy foregrounded these tropes and played them for laughs. A comparison can be drawn between the expression of modernity in action serials and in slapstick comedies. In action series and serials, the commonly used devices of runaway trains, careening cars, and malfunctioning telephones and telegraphs point to the instability and unreliability of modern technology, “its potential to backfire, to generate a world of blind chance.”\footnote{Jennifer M. Bean, “‘Trauma Thrills:’ Notes on Early Action Cinema,” in Yvonne Trasker, ed., \textit{Action and Adventure Cinema} (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.} The restoration of order, however temporary, at the end of each film/episode provides reassurance to the audience that the problems of the modern world are fixable. These films allow audiences to revel in the shocks and thrills of modernity at its most chaotic, and then safely return to normalcy.

By contrast, in slapstick comedy unreliable technology is just one of many unstable factors to be reckoned with. The volatility and disorder at play in slapstick is presented as a fundamental element of the larger world. In the comedy universe \textit{everything} is unstable, including technology, industry, institutions such as marriage and family, the government (particularly the police), and even the laws of physics and physiology. Nothing is restored at the end of a slapstick comedy, because there is no “normal” world to return to. The comedy universe is, indeed, one where the breakdown of machines, order, and society itself are regularly occurring events. As such, comedy is the perfect generic parallel to modernity. As much as audiences might like to believe that the restoration of order and stability found at the end of action films was possible in real life, the change and upheaval begun in the late 19th century instead continued unabated throughout the 1910s and 20s.

The language used in the popular press to describe comediennes—volatile, topsy-turvy, impulsive, impudent—was similar to the language used to describe the modern experience. Comediennes were in many ways
the embodiment of modernity, with their frantic pace, limitless energy and unbounded optimism. In a 1915 review of Eva Tanguay’s act, for example, a writer claims that she “admirably personifies the American ideals of hurry, assurance and impudent disregard for conventions,” and then goes on to say that:

The songs are, after all, inconsequential. They are merely lines upon which the electricity travels…. Miss Tanguay, we have said, is the spirit of the subway rush. But she’s more than that. She is Personality tearing through the line of Art for a touchdown. She is Excitement knocking a homerun in the ninth, with Hysteria on third. She is a Krupp howitzer of Restlessness hurling a 42–centimeter shell into Poise. She is—Eva Tanguay.809

Both stage and screen comediennes, as New Women, were icons of the new modern world. The traits that made a successful comédienne—pep, vitality, energy, an effervescent personality—were ascribed both to the New Woman and to the modern city. And so Dorothy Gish is described as “a little dynamo of energy” and “a rag–time comédienne, with all the pep of a jazz band,”810 Mabel Normand is “a dancing mouse, whirling madly all the time, but without purpose,”811 and Dorothy Devore is “a ’Go–Getter’ of the real kind.”812 Likewise, Constance Talmadge is “the female exponent of pep, so delightfully and naughtily sophisticated, so pretty, so charming, so approximate to mere man’s idea of a mate to lay his slippers out for him at night; but then Constance Talmadge would never lay out his slippers—no, she’d be dragging him off to the theater, then to supper, cabaret, and all.”813 Along with language indicating energy and effervescence, writers frequently used electricity as a metaphor to describe comediennes. Regarding Colleen Moore, one writer claimed that “Her conversation kind of sizzles. She gives a remarkably good imitation of an electric spark.” Another wrote that “Colleen has always been about as calm and reflective as electric current. She goes rushing around all the time you are talking to her and her conversation sizzles. There are no cobwebs in her mind.”814 A newspaper illustration from around 1927 pictures Moore as a live wire, her body coursing with so much “pep” and energy that three large and gruff–looking women have to hold her

809 Dramatic Mirror, January 6, 1915, Eva Tanguay clipping file, NYPL. Italics in original.
810 “Boots” review, Wid’s Daily, 2 March 1919, and “The Hope Chest” review, Wid’s Daily, 12 January 1919, Dorothy Gish clipping file, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (hereafter AMPAS).
811 “Mabel in a Hurry,” Motion Picture Magazine, November 1918, Mabel Normand clipping file, AMPAS.
812 “The Song and Dance Girl,” unidentified magazine clipping, Dorothy Devore clipping file, NYPL.
813 Picture–Play, April 1920, Constance Talmadge clipping file, NYPL.
814 “A Captivating Colleen,” Pictures and Picturegoer, October 1924, 41, and Helen Klumph, “Flapping Her Way to Fame,” Colleen Moore scrapbook #2, AMPAS.
Comediennes are closely aligned with modernity in these examples, as they are said to be infused with the same energy, electricity, and excitement as the modern world. A typical article describes Constance Talmadge, who was perhaps closest of all the screen comediennes to the ideal of the pretty and vivacious New Woman in the late 1910s and early 1920s, in this way:

A saucy, inconsequent little baggage, ever on the move, is Constance, and possessed of an illusive fascination that’s quite irresistible. She races her car like mad—only last week she killed a Ford—and she takes long walks through the Hollywood hills, swims like a fish, sails a boat like an old salt, dances like a nymph—anything as an excuse to be forever on the move. Just like the thrilling modern city and the lively and adaptable New Woman who inhabited it, Talmadge is “forever on the move”, her restless energy a perfect companion and complement to the comedies she appeared in.

Far from being threatened or made vulnerable by the dangers of the modern world, comediennes epitomize the spirit of modernity with their energy and activity, and revel in the sheer joy of their physical interaction with the world around them, engaging their surroundings with physical abandon. They are not refined or reserved. They venture into the city with its inherent shocks and dangers, and they connect with and conquer their surroundings. Their ability to successfully negotiate these spaces is indicative of their ability to negotiate the modern world in general. In Hold Your Breath (1924), Dorothy Devore plays Mabel, an aspiring reporter who ventures out into the city in search of a story. Her first few attempts fail—she chases a fire engine only to watch it return to the station, and when she races back to her editor with news of a plane crash on Broadway she discovers that another reporter has beat her to the story. Finally, Mabel is assigned to interview a wealthy collector about his acquisition of a $50 million bracelet. While inspecting the item in the collector’s hotel room, an organ grinder’s monkey darts into the window and swipes the bracelet. The collector accuses her of theft, prompting her to duck out the window and scale the side of the building in pursuit of the monkey. As Mabel climbs from ledge to ledge she encounters a variety of obstacles, and several times she slips, only to have her falls broken by awnings, flagpoles and other protrusions. Mabel ultimately catches the monkey, returns the bracelet to its owner, and clears her name, and then immediately renounces her career as a reporter in favor of marriage to her long–suffering beau.

While the ending of this film is somewhat unsatisfying, as the scrappy and resourceful Mabel declares of her fiancé, “I guess I’ll let him do the

815 Unidentified clipping, Colleen Moore scrapbook #2, AMPAS.
reporting—and I’ll do the wife–ing,” the audience is still treated to the spectacle of Mabel fearlessly taking on the city. After her first failed attempt to find a story, a dejected Mabel tells her boyfriend, “I guess I’ll never be a reporter, dear. Perhaps it’s better that we get marri—”. Before she can finish her thought she sees an airplane fall from the sky, and she immediately dashes to the scene of the accident, leaving her beau behind. As she tries to fight her way through the crowd she is pushed over into a baby carriage, which gets hooked onto the back of a car. Mabel is pulled down the street and then thrown roughly from the carriage as the car turns. Undaunted, she leaps to her feet, runs back to the plane crash, interviews the pilot, and runs to her editor to tell him the story. Interestingly, she is scooped by another reporter who phoned in the details of the accident while Mabel was heading to the office on foot. Mabel’s link to modernity doesn’t come through technology, especially passive devices such as the telephone. Instead, she embodies the rush and excitement of the city. She runs from story to story, even wearing out the man her boyfriend had hired to follow her and keep her out of trouble. When she decides to chase the bracelet–stealing monkey, she doesn’t rely on elevators, stairs, or ladders; instead, she chooses the most physically demanding route, pulling herself up by her fingertips and swinging her legs up and over ledge after ledge. The policemen following her are unable to keep up with her acrobatic and fearless pursuit, and instead continue their chase from the interior of the hotel. Mabel embodies modernity, and therefore she is able to connect with the city in a way that other characters cannot.

The athleticism, personality and daring ascribed to female comedians showed up in their films in the form of daring stunts and perilous gags. Slapstick and some light comedienne engaged in on–screen stunts and acrobatics that rivaled the exploits of action heroines, including scaling buildings, diving off piers, racing cars, flinging pies, and chasing, and being chased by, all manner of animals. Press accounts of their off–screen physical accomplishments such as swimming, running, driving and dancing were received along with films that included their daring on–screen stunts, with the result that fans understood many comedienne to be exceptionally gifted and courageous athletes.

Jennifer Bean has described how discourses surrounding action heroines worked to “enhance the believability of real peril to the players’ body”817 by, among other things, emphasizing the very real risks the stars took when executing their stunts. Similarly, press reports and studio publicity pointed out that comedienne, too, did their own stunt work, and that they were very often put in peril and even injured. The press let readers know that “Miss [Alice] Howell’s art is not of the make–believe kind,” and that Gale Henry

817 Bean, Bodies in Shock, 98.
was working closely with a live bear in a 1920 film. As with action heroines, stories about broken bones and other on–set mishaps were widely reported. In 1919, Photoplay reported that, “After stopping stove lids, runaway flivvers, rabid motorcycles and fire engines with various parts of her anatomy for two years without even sustaining a bruise, Polly Moran, Keystone comedienne, has finally reached the hospital,” after falling off a horse and breaking her arm while performing a stunt. Another press item told fans about an on–set accident involving Mabel Normand: “You will be glad to know that this clever little comedienne has recovered from a severe accident. A blow from the heel of a shoe, thrown in a comedy rehearsal, fractured her skull, and for a time threatened to prove fatal.” In discussing action stars, Bean argues that articles that draw attention to on–set accidents and the very real dangers inherent in stunt work posit the star as an “exceptional subject of modernity.” The action star and, I would argue, the comedienne, “not only experiences accident but, more importantly, survives and, better yet, thrives on it—her persistence in the face of ceaseless catastrophe raises the threshold of commonly held psychical, physical, and conceptual limits of human motility.” In making a career out of performing stunts that the public knew to be dangerous, and succeeding, both physically and financially, these stars were providing a powerful and highly visible counter–argument to those who claimed that modernity brought about a rise in neurasthenia, shock, eyestrain, nervous stimulation and other physical and mental disorders. The idea that modern life was draining the populace—and especially the female populace—of energy, virility, strength, and mental abilities was forcefully disputed by films that showed women scaling buildings and riding horses over cliffs. That comediennes were risking life and limb in the service of comedy added an element of playful flippancy—not only were these women willingly putting themselves in harm’s way, they were doing so for a laugh.

In fact, despite the various broken bones and run–ins with wild animals, comediennes were said to cheerfully take on the wildest stunts, a logical extension of the good humor required to succeed in comedy. Dorothy Devore, then, “neither balks at dancing on the ledge of the 27th floor of the Paramount Building, nor hesitates in jumping off a fast–moving train”.

819 Untitled, Photoplay, January 1919, Polly Moran clipping file, NYPL.
820 Photo caption, ca 1915, Mabel Normand clipping file.
822 For a discussion of nervous disorders associated with modernity, see Singer, Melodrama and Modernity, 59–99, and Bean, Bodies in Shock, 38–71.
823 Unidentified photo caption, Dorothy Devore clipping file, NYPL.
Fay Tincher “never balks nor protests no matter how difficult her Komic comedy assignment may be,”824 and readers are told of Mabel Normand that “Fearlessness is one of her characteristics. When a thrill is required in a picture nothing daunts her.”825 One reviewer even admitted that “one is forced to admire the nerve of Marie Dressler. For a woman as large as she is and one who has lost the resiliency of youth she takes some risks that are thrilling and nerve wrecking to say the least.”826 This is certainly evidenced in Tillie Wakes Up (1917), in which Dressler’s Tillie is thrown unceremoniously around the rides and attractions of Coney Island like a rag doll, but gamely submits to the inevitable bruises to her body and dignity.

A 1916 description of Constance Talmadge reveals the characteristics that were essential to the New Woman as personified by the screen comedienne:

She is decidedly athletic, splendidly built and has the grace and freedom of movement that comes from muscles in perfect condition. She can run like a deer, dive and swim, and handle her own car, and she is as quick of wit as she is of movement.827

The inclusion of “quick wit” among the standard list of New Woman qualities of athleticism, daring and grace highlights the fact that a sense of humor was an important trait for the comedienne—as–New Woman. In other articles Connie is described as having “the comedy spirit and the rare facility of spoofing herself,”828 and possessing “never–failing wit and delightful good humor.”829 In fact, humor is seen as a specifically modern trait: “The Perfect Flapper of 1924 is exactly what her grandmother would like to have been, could she have dared to laugh as heartily at her sweetheart’s whiskers as they deserved.”830 The freedom to laugh, then, is seen as the difference between the modern girl of 1924 and her grandmother. Dorothy Gish’s sense of humor also linked her to the modern world, as her pep and vitality are attributed to her good humor: “Perhaps Lillian Gish appropriated a trifle more than her share of girlish beauty, but Dorothy sure did get even by grabbing a big piece out of the family funny–bone and keeping it for her very own. It runs all through her anatomy and just won’t let her arms or legs behave.”831

824 “Fay Tincher Game,” unidentified newspaper clipping, June 1915, Fay Tincher clipping file, NYPL.
827 “Norma’s Sister Constance,” Chicago News, 7 September 1916, Constance Talmadge clipping file, NYPL.
828 Walter Vogdes, “Twenty Minutes with Constance,” Select Pictures Magazine, Vol IV, #11, ca. 1918, 5, Constance Talmadge clipping file, AMPAS.
829 Unidentified magazine clipping, ca. 1922, Constance Talmadge clipping file, NYPL.
830 “Colleen Has Definitions For Flapper,” Los Angeles Examiner, July 1924, Colleen Moore scrapbook #2, AMPAS.
831 “The Hope Chest” review, Wid’s Daily, 12 January 1919, Dorothy Gish clipping file, AMPAS.
When describing the personality traits important to a comedienne, Louise Fazenda understandably included humor, but the rest of her description of an ideal comedienne is strikingly similar to the popular conception of the “ideal” New Woman:

Beauty is not essential in a comedienne, it is merely an asset. Personality, adaptability, quickness to grasp the situation, keen insight and a sense of humor to me appear to be the principal requirements, and, of course, a girl has got to take lots of chances, especially in “slap” comedy, and must be a pretty good athlete.832

It’s certainly understandable that a sense of humor would be among the traits required of a comedienne. That humor would be an essential trait of the modern woman is perhaps not surprising, either. Given the frantic pace of the modern world and its ubiquitous shocks, anxieties and nervous ailments, the ability to laugh at oneself and the world at large would be a singularly effective coping strategy.

Some writers even saw humor as a trait unique to the specifically American New Woman. A Boston writer, defending comedienne Charlotte Greenwood from charges of vulgarity in her vaudeville act, argued at length that Greenwood’s humor, far from being vulgar, is in fact distinctly and proudly American:

The quality in American girls which makes Europeans eye them askance is their chummy “open–faced” manner. … [The American girl] is not a snob; she is as willing to be chummy with a count as with a cabby. To her, anyone who enjoys a joke needs no introduction; she takes the whole world into her confidence, thanks to her sense of humor, yet never loses her individuality and her underlying dignity. Her mother would have been gracious to the men she met and excoriated them behind their backs; she tells them what she thinks to their faces. She is not at all the typical “summer girl,” who is athletic and “free” as a ruse to attract men. Still less is she the “mannish” girl, who slaps young men on the back and calls them “Old Sport.” She is, rather, the girl who, when she discovers that the family expects her to be the same fudge–making little miss that she was in short dresses, goes out and finds a “job,” and keeps it, makes all men respect her, and those few who she cares about love her. Her frankness is amazing; it is one of her chief assets.833

Frankness, athleticism, affability, good humor—these are the traits of the American New Woman and the American comedienne, as interpreted by the popular press.

832 “Norma’s Sister Constance,” Chicago News, 7 September 1916, Constance Talmadge clipping file, NYPL.
833 “Miss Greenwood’s Comedy,” Boston Transcript, ca. 1914, Charlotte Greenwood clipping file, NYPL
Comediennes were further linked to modernity and typed as New Women through their hobbies, as reported in the press and through studio publicity. Many of the comediennes’ reported hobbies involved sports, travel, dancing and driving, all of which emphasized women’s increased presence in the public sphere, and also took advantage of the technological and social advances brought about by modernity. Stories about comediennes dancing the night away, swimming for exercise (most likely in controversial one-piece suits), and enjoying the mobility provided by their cars, reinforced the notion that the modern woman could, and did, mix freely in heterosocial society without fear of reproach or reprisal. A tremendous amount of press was given to comediennes’ love of fast cars and reckless driving, a parallel to the earlier icon of the New Woman and her bicycle. A 1914 article titled “Movies’ Speed Queens Hurl Auto Defis” declared that Mabel Normand and Marie Dressler would settle a rivalry by means of a car race, with Normand in her Stutz and Dressler in her Fiat, and “each claim[ing] her car is faster than that of the other.”834 The article reports that when Normand proposed the race, Dressler “laughed joyously and accepted the challenge,” a response which highlights the comedienne’s humor as well as her love of thrills. Other comediennes also were said to enjoy the speed and excitement that came with driving, and the press discourses invariably described them as reckless thrill seekers. Constance Talmadge reportedly “races her car like mad—only last week she killed a Ford,”835 and Louise Fazenda sped about town in a car called “the coop,” one that “travels at an incredible rate of speed for so ancient and battered a car, and Louise manoeuvres [sic] it through mazes of intricate traffic in a fashion which must be cited as masterly.”836 Of course, these driving habits would eventually catch up with some of them: Bebe Daniels was reported to have spent ten days in jail after being arrested for speeding, although vast numbers of visitors and many comforts from home no doubt helped to ease her time behind bars.837

Comediennes were also said to be avid swimmers, hikers, dancers—anything involving speed, energy and athleticism. Marie Prevost was “a daring and skilled athlete, particularly in water sports like swimming and surf board riding,”838 and Louisa Fazenda claimed, “I’m fond of swimming, dancing and driving a car, and when I’m fifty I’ll still be enjoying dance–music,

834 “Movies’ Speed Queens Hurl Auto Defis—Marie Dressler and Mabel Normand to Clash in Big Race Duel,” Los Angeles Evening Herald, 8 May 1914, Mabel Normand clipping file, AMPAS.
837 Regarding Bebe Daniels in Jail,” The Morning Telegraph (New York), 1 May 1921, Bebe Daniels clipping file, AMPAS.
sea–bathing and automobiles—or maybe air–planes!" Constance Talmadge “is the best ballroom dancer, according to masculine report, among the screen stars. She plays a rattling good game of golf and swims like a fish,” and “is one of those slim, clean–limbed girls who can ride a horse, drive a car, sail a boat, and do everything else a good, healthy, out–of–door girl can do,” while Charlotte Greenwood “is an athlete from every point of view…. She drives her own touring car, wins her own tennis matches and swims, dances, golfs and bowls." Colleen Moore was said to swim year round and “claims that the only objection she has to motion pictures is that they interfere with her outdoor life.”

The emphasis on female stars’ athleticism and love of speed and thrills was certainly not unique to comediennes, nor were all comediennes described in these terms (some were said to prefer more traditional activities such as sewing, cooking, and keeping house). However, these discourses firmly aligned comediennes with both the New Woman and modernity. As in their films, comediennes engaged in energetic, exciting activities (with the exception of Alice Howell, who obstinately replied to a fan magazine’s questionnaire by saying that her hobby was “not filling in questionnaires.”) The activities that comediennes were said to enjoy—swimming, dancing, driving, even surfing—were the same as those enjoyed by the stereotypical New Woman and Flapper. In fact, Colleen Moore’s description of “The American Girl of Today” is indistinguishable from a typical fan magazine description of a day in the life of a movie star:

Getting up late, they begin the day with the lip stick. Afterward they play a round of tennis or golf or ride horseback. After lunch they read the latest books and get a thrill out of them. In the afternoon they may sit in on a game of Mah Jongg or bridge. Then have tea and converse freely on psycho–analysis and love. Possibly a drink now and then but that’s just a pose. Being able to order a dinner for two or a brunch. Dance the latest dances all night without getting tired. Drive a car and be up–to–date on all the latest styles. Believe me—it’s not easy!

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839 “What They Want to Do When They Are Fifty,” Motion Picture Magazine, October 1925, 34.
840 Unidentified magazine clipping, ca. 1922, Constance Talmadge clipping file, NYPL.
841 “Convalescing With Constance,” unidentified magazine clipping, Constance Talmadge clipping file, NYPL.
842 Unidentified newspaper clipping, Charlotte Greenwood clipping file, NYPL.
843 “Movies Spoil Her Outdoor Sport,” ca. 1923, Colleen Moore scrapbook #1, AMPAS.
844 “Alice Howell,” Moving Picture World, 29 September 1917, Alice Howell clipping file, NYPL.
Mary Pickford also understood the link between an active lifestyle and the modern woman. In a published plea to her fans to let her trade her famous curls for a more practical bob, Pickford argued that:

> In these outdoor days of swimming, golf, and motoring, a woman is relieved of that constant nagging anxiety of how her hair is standing the strain. Her hair, so to speak, is no longer on her mind to the exclusion of possibly more important matters... We are more mobile, more active and alert. Short hair fits our new character as gracefully as long hair crowned the more dignified behavior of our ancestors.846

In this view, the revolutionary trend of bobbing hair goes hand–in–hand with an active lifestyle; in other words, letting go of past fashions and, presumably, conventions, is an important precursor to engaging in many of the comediennes’ favorite activities. But these activities were not only associated with the New Woman; they were also activities that, like the comediennes themselves, epitomized modernity. Comediennes didn’t just drive cars, they drove fast and recklessly. Their physical activities put them in close contact with men (dancing) or on public display (swimming), and emphasized the speed, energy and mobility that were essential elements of the modern world.

The intense changes taking place in the 1910s and 1920s were no doubt unsettling to a great many people. As cities expanded, immigration increased, and women became increasingly visible in the public sphere, it was clear that social and political roles would be redefined. Comediennes played an active role in redefining women’s place in and relationship to the modern world, as their activity, energy and vitality, both on–screen and off–, were the perfect parallel to modernity. When comediennes embraced daring and dangerous stunts in their films and engaged in thrilling activities off–screen, they provided an example of how women could successfully navigate the modern city, and turn its dangers and threats into fun and excitement.

Ultimately the question of whether we can classify comediennes as New Women is far less important than how audiences at the time read these performers. Whether they saw the athleticism, frankness, humor and daring in the performances of Mabel Normand, Louise Fazenda, Constance Talmadge, Marie Dressler, and others and understood them to embody this new type of femininity is unknown, but highly likely. Not only did comediennes resemble the New Woman as imaged by Gibson, Christy, and Ziegfeld, they also recalled the mannish and overbearing type that represented cultural fears about women’s growing presence and power. Like serial queens, girls spies and cowgirls, comediennes give us an insight into how some of these issues played out on the silent screen.

846 “Please May I Bob My Hair?” Liberty Magazine, 30 June 1928, Mary Pickford clipping file, AMPAS.
Humorous Reflections on Acting, Filmmaking and Genre in Comic Film Productions by Adriënne Solser, Musidora, and Nell Shipman

Annette Förster

The Dutch actress and filmmaker Adriënne Solser used to produce exclusively farces; her French colleague Musidora and their Canadian–born colleague Nell Shipman each made one comic film that mocked their ambitions and careers as actresses and filmmakers. In addition to such humorous self-reflexivity, the three productions that I will discuss in this article have in common that they were produced at the margins of the regular film production of their country at the time. To my knowledge, moreover, very few woman filmmakers directed, wrote and produced comic films in the 1920s, which is another reason for calling special attention to these three productions: Bet naar de Olympiade [Bet goes to the Olympics] (Adriënne Solser & Theo Frenkel Sr., The Netherlands 1928), La Terre des taureaux [The Land of the Bulls] (Musidora & Antonio Cañero, Spain/France 1924), and Something New (Nell Shipman & Bert van Tuyle, USA 1920).

In my PhD dissertation “Histories of Fame and Failure. Adriënne Solser, Musidora, Nell Shipman: Women Acting and Directing in the Silent Cinema in The Netherlands, France and North America” I have argued that each filmmaker in her own way took advantage of the marginality of the production to reflect with a wink on her career and her position as a popular stage and film actress and a filmmaker. In this paper I further explore their humorous reflections on their metiers, and on the options and choices for actresses and filmmakers in the 1920s.

The examination of professional options and choices is central to my research on the careers and oeuvres of the three actresses and filmmakers. To adequately reassess such options and choices, I have developed a three-dimensional approach that allows for thorough historicization as well as for a consideration from interdisciplinary and intertextual perspectives. I have proposed to call this three-dimensional approach careerography, as it consistently moves

847 PhD diss., Utrecht University 2005
through disciplines, media and genres and permanently zigzags between the personal, the professional and the discursive. Careerographies examine careers, oeuvres, and films not as self-contained texts, but for their intertextual permeability, for how they display and substantiate the personal, professional and discursive conditions of their historic existence. Within this framework, each “utterance” may document professional options and choices and versatile ambitions and experiences.849

When I speak of the oeuvres of Adriëtine Solser, Musidora and Nell Shipman, I do not just refer to the corpus of films they produced, directed and acted in for their own production companies. Rather, I broaden the scope to include the parts they played in films made by colleagues, to the performances they created on the stage, and to the texts they wrote for publication or for delivery in person. For the actresses and filmmakers in question, such interdisciplinary references were self-evident effects of their professional versatility, and, within each comic production under scrutiny in this paper, a rich source for creating humour and irony. For this reason, my discussion of each film production will be preceded by a select overview of options and choices referred to.

Adriëtine Solser: reflections on acting and on genre
Adriëtine Solser’s career spanned over five decades, from the mid–1880s to the mid–1930s. Around the turn of the century, Solser worked as a comic stage performer in what in the Netherlands was called “variété”, in France “music-hall” and in the US “vaudeville”, that is to say varied stage programmes offering a range of acts, such as animal acts, acrobat acts and performances by singers, humorists, illusionists and musicians. Such popular stage programmes often additionally included a series of short films, one or two sketches, and a short revue.850 In the course of the 1910s, these sketches and revues expanded to evening-long performances and in the process incorporated the singular acts, while the film programmes, as is well known, became an autonomous mode of entertainment. However, in the Netherlands many cinema programmes included live acts by highly popular Dutch comic performers up until the end of the 1910s, while film remained a staple element of the popular stage programmes and revues. Of these shifts, Solser can be considered an exponent: as soon as music hall acts became incorporated in the revue and humorists began performing in cinemas, Solser went along. Her next career move, from comic stage performer to film actress, could likewise

849 Robert Stam speaks of “utterance” in his discussion of the relevance for film analysis of Bakhtin’s translinguistics, in which texts are considered discursive rather than signifying practices. “And every utterance, for Bakhtin, is tied to an object (e.g. a theme…), to other’s speech about the theme (other films or other discourses treating the same theme, i.e. the filmic and extrafilmic intertext), to a reader, listener, or spectator (its addressee), and to its context.” Stam, Subversive Pleasures, 44.
850 Comic sketches and revues differed from the other acts in that they offered narratives and thematic threads, respectively. Both often drew from topical matter and from common social and cultural knowledge.
be seen as an adaptation to domineering trends. In the specific Dutch context, however, such a move was unusual, because film production was hardly consistent, and within that production hardly a comic tradition. More than that, the films which Solser made for her own production company between 1924 and 1928 constituted exceptions if set against the ambitions cherished by most productions accomplished in Dutch cinema. This was by virtue of the genre Solser chose and the idiosyncratic form of presentation that she created.

The genre was called the “Jordaan–genre”, a nationally specific, comic stage genre that could take on various formats, such as solo acts, sketches, revues, folk plays and films. Its name derived from the Amsterdam folk neighbourhood the Jordaan, whose inhabitants it allegedly portrayed and parodied. Adriënne Solser played on film the character of the Amsterdam woman, be it a fishmonger at the market or the wife of a baker. With this character she transferred to the screen the stage persona that she had developed in solo acts in the revue and between films in cinemas since 1914. In her own films, she spun around this bossy folk woman and her inevitable hen–pecked husband an episodic narrative structure that basically offered a series of comic situations loosely motivated by a topical issue—which was pretty much the structure of the sketches created on the stage by her younger brother Lion Solser in the early 1910s. The form of the presentation in which Solser brought the character and the sketches to the screen, moreover, was idiosyncratic in that she not only played the main character in the film, but additionally used to re–enact it, during the screening, live on the stage, while speaking the dialogue, cracking numerous jokes and singing several sing–a–longs. In such performances, Solser maintained traditions of mixed programming still common in Dutch entertainment in the 1920s, most notably in comic stage acts that made use of film, and in the exhibition of comic films that were accompanied by commentary spoken live on stage by a lecturer. Adriënne Solser, however, was more than a lecturer, as she actually doubled her on–screen character in her live performance.

Humorous self–reflection was a staple ingredient of the stage persona of the Amsterdam folk woman, and became an inextricable constituent of the film character that Adriënne Solser played time and again. As her stage texts reveal, she utilized her hefty physique for creating comic situations and making humorous comments. In her films she turned it into the core motif of the

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851 The most successful Dutch film production company had been the Filmfabriek Hollandia, which, however, had to cease production in 1922. It produced primarily gloomy dramas, hardly any comedies, while comic film in the 1910s was rather intertwined with music–hall and revue. See Geoffrey Donaldson, Of Joy and Sorrow: A Filmography of Dutch Silent Fiction (Amsterdam: Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997).

852 My PhD dissertation offers for the first time a history of the Jordaan–genre, its various formats, its main authors and stage directors, as well as its shifting reception (Förster 2005, 60–80).

853 The stage texts are preserved at the Nederlands Filmmuseum, Archief Adriënne Solser en Lien D'Oliveyra (1904–1952).
comic action, as in her *Bet naar de Olympiade*, in which it fuels the character’s self-promotion as the female representative from the Jordaan neighbourhood to the Olympic Games. Whether wrestling or dressing for swimming, Solser spoofs the character’s heftiness, for instance through filming her image in a distorting mirror. The supposedly masculine sports in which Bet appears can be read as an ironic comment on topical matter: the Amsterdam Olympic Games of 1928 were the first in which women were allowed to take part, but only in athletics.\(^{317}\) Bet’s husband, moreover, is always a scrawny fellow, and the physical contrast between the two emphasises the female character’s robustness. Bet also performs the tasks of a sailor or a fire fighter. In such capacities, the actress shows off her agility, which was quite astonishing for the fifty-five year old woman Solser was at the time and which reveals the physical training that acting demanded. Intertextually, such scenes can be read as references to the American serial queen melodramas, the cinematic subgenre featuring intrepid heroines in modern women’s professions. The film also includes a scene which humorously comments on the requirements for women to dance in the revue. We see Bet on the staircase, which was a fixed element of the apotheosis of the revue, in which its star used to descend flanked by a line up of sparsely dressed chorus girls. In one of her stage texts, Solser remarked that for the revue her legs were too plump. In the film, she staged herself in an on-screen parody of the revue that defied her unfitness for the genre. As the texts with her live commentary to the film are lost, we cannot know for sure if she added to the imagery some remarks to this effect, but given the fact that she used to do so in her stage texts, she might well have done so in her texts for accompanying the films. This scene, much like the distorting mirror scene, is long in comparison to the overall editing pace of the film. To my mind, these are not flaws, but intentional stretches of screen time that allowed Solser to crack additional jokes in her live performance.

Solser’s ambition was to make people laugh with the means she had at her disposal: her generic stage and film persona, her live performance skills, and the complementary use of film for the sake of expanding her field of activity. With this choice of genre, style and presentation, Solser initially placed herself at the margins of Dutch film production, but precisely by doing so carved out a niche where she could do what she wanted and do what she was good at. In contrast to most Dutch film producers in the 1920s, Solser managed to make films and was pretty successful with audiences as well. And in contrast to what Dutch film histories for long have maintained, Solser’s productions can be considered to have been at the heart of Dutch film production of the 1920s, and central to a practically overlooked native *comic* film and stage tradition in The Netherlands.

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\(^{317}\) I learned this information from the Dutch historical television magazine *Andere Tijden*, broadcast on August 3, 2008.
Musidora—reflections on performance and perception

In terms of the shifts in the swiftly changing landscape of popular entertainments around the turn to the 20th century, Musidora belongs to the generation of female performers succeeding that of Adrienne Solser, or rather, succeeding that of her French colleagues Polaire and Mistinguett, who had begun performing in the café-concert in solo acts, but had modified their stage presence to the new requirements of the music-hall and the revue and who additionally used to act in films.\(^{855}\) On stage, Musidora was versatility and ingenuity personified: a comic performer who could sing, dance and act the most diverse characters, from a literary figure like Virginie (from the popular novel, *Paul et Virginie*, by Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre) to a social archetype like the modern tango maniac.\(^{856}\) But also in the films in which she acted concurrently, her roles were extremely diverse and ranged from parts in historic dramas to crime series and comedies. In addition, Musidora expressed her views in the form of caricatures that were published in contemporary papers, and in the form of short stories and fictionalisations of her perception of her métier.\(^{857}\) As an actress of the 1910s, then, Musidora brought to the screen a style of performance and a form of perception rather than a clear-cut stage persona or genre. This style of performance implied a playful reference to the act of acting, while the form of perception assumed a knowledgeable appraisal of the genre in which she appeared.\(^{858}\)

Musidora’s stage acting career ran from 1910 to roughly the mid-1930s, while she acted in films from 1914 until 1926. Until the end of 1916, she was affiliated with Gaumont, where she acted not only in the famous crime series by Louis Feuillade, *Les Vampires* and *Judex*, but also, and this is far less known, in at least fourteen medium length comedies, that contributed to her popularity with audiences no less than the crime series. In 1919, she established her own film company and produced, co-directed and starred in three dramatic feature films: *Vicenta* (1920), *Pour Don Carlos* (1921) and *Soleil et ombre* (1922). Aesthetically, these films were rather ambitious, and they fit in with the then emerging ideals of cinematographic style. But they were also ambitious in terms of audience appeal: Musidora aimed at attracting the mass

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\(^{855}\) For an overview of these shifts in France see also Kelley Conway, *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2004).

\(^{856}\) Throughout the 1910s, Musidora played in at least 17 revues, in illustrious music-halls such as the Bataclan, the Folies Bergère, La Scala and Concerts Mayol, as well as in famous cabarets such as Le Perchoir and La Pie qui chante. She maintained her stage career alongside her work in cinema.

\(^{857}\) Published in, among others, the daily for the performing arts, *Comoedia*, the satirical weekly *Fantasio*, and the film periodical *Le Film*.

\(^{858}\) I derive this insight from the observations of contemporary music hall critics, most notably Curnonsky in *Comoedia* and Louis Laloy in *La Revue Musicale SIM*. Both were particularly concerned to explain to their readership the high level crafts that were indispensable in order to mount revues that were at once spectacular, witty and cultured, as were the requirements in the early 1910s.
public that she had won with her bad women roles, as she used to refer to the female criminals Irma Vep and Diana Monti in the aforementioned crime series. Although the female protagonists in Musidora’s productions were no less adventurous and unconventional, none of them had an impact that could be compared to the prototypes that she had created with Feuillade. The film press, moreover, hardly noticed Musidora’s input as a producer and a codirector, mesmerized as critics still were with her star presence. Musidora’s fourth and farewell production to filmmaking, La terre des taureaux of 1924, graciously and ironically reflects upon these failed ambitions and the reception of her films. Against the backdrop of her career and oeuvre, I consider it significant that she chose a form, a style and a tone that completely deviated from the three dramas that she had made so far.

The form Musidora envisioned for La terre des taureaux was a mixed presentation of live acts and screened film parts. Quite in contrast to most notably Soleil et ombre, a film likewise set in Spain and telling a story of a woman in love with a bullfighter, La terre des taureaux was not a drama, but a mix of semi-factual, comic and romantic adventure sequences. Basically, it lampooned every topic which the earlier film had presented in a dramatic tone and in elaborate and graphic images, from the aesthetics of bull fighting to the fatal connection of love and death. Because of the involvement of Musidora’s then lover, the bullfighter Antonio Cañero, as her co-star and co-director, some film historians have taken the production as an autobiographical reverie. In my opinion, however, it is less about Musidora’s romance with the torero than a humorous reflection on the state of her career: about her star image and acting in cinema and on stage, and about making films with adventurous women’s roles.

According to the synopsis in Musidora’s handwriting, the live scenes were meant to be set in a Paris theatre, whereas the filmed scenes were set in Andalusia. In the live scenes, Musidora planned, for instance, to talk to journalists about the film which she intended to make and to the public to which she meant to recount her experiences. The staged part thus seems to have provided a kind of narrative framing, to which the film parts were used as an expansion of the illusory space of the stage (as was common in mixed stage and film acts in music-hall and revue in the 1910s). The film part is divided in chapters, suggesting that they could be interspersed with live scenes. But because the

860 Musidora stated this in a handwritten and incomplete scenario that is now held at the Bibliothèque du Film in Paris, Fonds Musidora.
862 Also Vicki Callahan addresses the issues of stardom and performance in the film, but pays little attention to its humorous tone and to the ways in which it refers to Musidora’s own career. Neither does she consider the stage parts. See Vicki Callahan, “Screening Musidora: Inscribing Indeterminacy in Film History”, Camera Obscura 48 (2001), 108–28.
863 My analysis is based on the print from the Cinémathèque de Toulouse preserved at the Centre National de la Cinématographie in Bois d’Arcy, France.
The synopsis does not clearly distinguish between stage and film scenes and only contains a few scenes that do not appear in the print, it is unfortunately difficult to reconstruct with certainty the presentation as it was meant and enacted by Musidora. For that reason, I prefer to discuss the film print and the staged scenes apart from each other.

The first chapter of the print consists of semi–factual shots documenting the day before the bullfight and introducing the protagonists of the event: the bulls, the horses, and the various kinds of bullfighters. The second chapter shows the fight and its public, and introduces the female first person narrator, who announces that she is looking for an actor to play in her film about bullfighting. She presents herself as a filmmaker vain enough to believe that the bullfighter of her choice will jump at her proposal right away, but has to face his refusal. In this scene, Musidora ironically comments her status as a filmmaker. The third chapter relates her response and refers to both her star image and her comic film acting. She arranges to meet the bullfighter again, but disguises herself for the occasion as the most ugly, unattractive and clumsy would-be actress imaginable. The chapter is hilarious for its slapstick moments and for the obvious pleasure with which Musidora enacts the opposite of her star image, the dark beauty. The next chapter contains a romantic adventure plot and emphasises the playfulness of adventurous woman’s roles. One shot directly refers to a scene in *Les Vampires*, in which Irma Vep hid underneath a train that started running (on the shooting of which scene Musidora wrote one of her stories). In her film, she is shown standing on the nose of the locomotive, while it frontally approaches the camera. A last filmed chapter is set in the theatre. A title card explicitly refers to “La loge de Musidora” [Musidora’s dressing room] and there are shots of Musidora dancing on the stage. The epilogue is set in Andalusia again: Musidora has decided to stay with Cañero and to learn bullfighting, a performing art which, as Vicki Callahan has suggested, shares a lot with acting, and as I would like to point out, perhaps more with popular stage performance than with film acting, because it depends on the viewer’s knowledgeable appraisal of the genre of performance.

The live acts described in the scenario allowed Musidora to thank her devoted stage public and to mock the film press. One act goes as follows: at the theatre, the director and the public are waiting for Musidora, who is late for the performance. The director fears that she will not come at all. The public keeps waiting patiently, and a woman makes a favourable remark on her live performances: “I like to hear the sound of her voice. The screen and the stage are very different things.” After Musidora has arrived, she offers the public her excuses and recounts her adventures. In the second live act, she receives an interviewer from the film press in her dressing room. He begins talking to her,

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865 Musidora, scenario *La Terre des Taureaux*, BIFI, Fonds Musidora.
while she changes behind a folding screen. He does not ask any questions, but embarks on a long monologue. His parting words are: “My article along these lines will appear tomorrow. It is a revelation for our readers. It is utterly interesting.”\(^{866}\) It seems to me, that Musidora worked some of her experiences into these live acts. That is to say, while her stage public waited to learn her stories and views, the film press was only interested in its own.

In sum, I consider *La terre des taureaux* Musidora’s professional and ironic settlement with a film world and a film press that overlooked her filmmaking aspirations, as well as with a public that ignored the films that she loved to make. The production can be considered marginal in terms of production values as well as in its mixing of live and stage performance. But this marginality offered Musidora the freedom to reflect with gracious humour and without a grain of bitterness on her film acting and directing career, bidding farewell to it in favour of the popular stage that she had never abandoned.

**Nell Shipman—reflections on melodrama and on self-promotion**

Nell Shipman likewise had a career as an actress on stage and in cinema prior to her film producer– and directorship in the 1920s. Between 1908 and 1910, Shipman worked on the stage as an actress with stock companies in cheap melodramas and in American vaudeville. It was in one of those plays that she discovered her affinity with the genre of Northwest drama, that until then was a genre only in popular theatre and literature, not yet in the cinema.\(^{867}\) In 1912, Shipman turned to the cinema, initially venturing into screen writing and by 1915 also into acting in front of the camera. She became a noted Vitagraph actress, and developed a strong skill in self-promotion to establish her screen persona of the outdoors girl in Northwest drama. She also novelised a series for which she had written the scenario, *Under the Crescent*, that was both filmed and published, including fifty-eight production stills, in 1915.\(^{868}\) This illustrates Shipman’s professional versatility, but the novel is also interesting because Shipman reworked one of its narrative devices in an independent film production.

The production in which she did so was the five reel comic subject *Something New*, one of the first projects for her film company Nell Shipman Productions. She would further write, produce, direct, edit and star in two ambitious Northwest dramas and several shorts. Shipman marginalised this film, in her memoirs, as being made “in between pictures”.\(^{869}\) I am certainly not the first scholar to say that *Something New* is much more interesting than that, but

\(^{866}\) Ibid.


\(^{868}\) Nell Shipman, *Under the Crescent* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap 1915). The film series with the same title was produced by Universal and released under the prestigious Gold Seal brand.

\(^{869}\) Shipman 2001, 87
my focus upon how Shipman used the comic mode to ironically reflect on her professional ambitions in acting, writing and genre may be new nonetheless.\textsuperscript{870}

The comic in this semi–feature length film emanated from a meta–discourse on genre, types and plotting, which textually materialized in a framing device of a woman presenting and writing the story. The film opens and ends with shots of a woman sitting behind a typewriter, beneath a huge tree in the open air. This writing woman is said to be searching for “an inspiration” to write “something new”, and she is shown seeing things as if they were happening before her very eyes. She sees two men, one on a horse and one in a car, putting up a wager about the speed of their respective means of transportation. These men do not notice the woman observing them. The effect of the mise–en–scène and the editing in this scene is that the writing woman is situated outside the diegesis, and that she conveys her thoughts directly to the spectators who watch her ponder and find her topic. In the set–up of the scene, we find two of Shipman’s production concerns from other work—the use of outdoor settings and of observation to create fiction, which was a motif in her novel \textit{Under the Crescent}. With this in mind, it is as if Shipman were encouraging spectators to identify the pre–diegetic writing woman with herself as a writer, a scenarist and a producer. More than that, the extra–diegetic writing woman reappears in the final shots, bending over the typewriter, laughing her head off, beaming and looking straight into the camera, conveying to spectators in the direct address mode both her pleasure and her pride in her work.

In the sequences following the opening scene, a shift occurs, which further specifies the writing woman’s interest in the plot she is concocting. She now enters the diegesis as The Writing Lady, that is to say a woman writer on the road in search for “atmosphere”—a term which, in the Shipmanian universe, is connected to impressions and occurrences observed at a remote and rough locale. The Writing Lady selects and presents a series of generic elements and types. These elements are listed, in capital letters and underlined, in the title cards, by which the meta–discourse proceeds and addresses the spectators through the graphic design. We learn that the Writing Lady needs, in consecutive order, a remote setting, the hero and an old father figure, that she craves atmosphere “real, red and raw”, including danger provided by a gang of ban-

dits, and last but not least, that she hopes that “Old George Fate will take a hand”, in short: the generic constituents of sensational melodrama. Once the plot is unfolding, moreover, the Writing Lady repeatedly draws the spectators’ attention to her presence by commenting upon the action in an ironic tone, as, for instance, after she has made the Hero fall in love with the Girl, she comments: “Nothing new about that, but who would change it?”, or, when introducing the bandits and their leader: “He doesn’t look dangerous, but look at his gang”. Graphically such comments are placed between brackets, so that readers/viewers are supposed to distinguish them from the dialogue, which is set between quotation marks, or from the statements made by the implied narrator, which are rendered without any additional signs.

At the point when the Writing Lady, in a second twist, turns into the Girl of her own tale, and is about to be caught in a perilous situation conjured up in the plot, she self-mockingly tells the dog: “I wanted atmosphere and I’ll say I am getting it”. Whereupon the Writing Lady vanishes behind the story’s character of the imperilled girl and the victorious heroine. But, as noted afore, the writing woman reappears at the very end of the film, thus suggesting to be the figure who singlehandedly constructed the melodramatic plot and its types, and, in an auto-referential spiral, assumes responsibility for the scenario and the production of the very film. All of these roles and functions in the making of Something New were performed, in both senses of the work, by Nell Shipman in person.

The writing woman can be seen as Shipman’s reworking of a figure she introduced in her 1915 novelisation of the series Under the Crescent. This figure appears in the foreword to the novel, a first person narrator posing as a reporter interviewing the protagonist of the story that she will tell. Here is another fictional narrator controlling the story within the story and employing direct address in order to engage readers–spectators in its fabrication. The task of the reporter in the novel’s foreword, however, is to lend authenticity to the narrative; she neither keeps up the meta-discourse nor appears in the story. The writing woman in the film, in contrast, performs as the Writing Lady setting up the plot, and then turns into a character in her story. Present as the tale’s instigator, composer, and protagonist, her textual task is not to authenticate the fiction, but rather to emphasize its fabrication as well as to satirize generic elements and fictional characters, her own included. Her self-confident direct address, as well as her entrance into the diegesis and her apparent loss of authorial control, effectively represent, and provide, the dual pleasure which readers–spectators were expected to derive from sensational stage melodrama, as analysed by Ben Singer, that is to say an appreciation of the artificiality of the presentation alongside absorption in the story.

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872 Singer 2001, 176–7
Something New, Shipman invites us to share her witty appreciation and jocular perception of melodramatic plot devices and narrative elements, including devices and elements familiar from Shipman’s previous work as a scriptwriter and a novelist.

The production may be considered marginal within Shipman’s oeuvre and in relation to Hollywood film production to the extent that it was a car commercial turned into a comic subject. The film’s real heroine is indeed the Maxwell car that wins the wager after an incredibly rough ride through the desert. On the other hand, with a budget of over $28,000 it was not the shoestring production that some film scholars have taken it to be. What Shipman—as she wrote—“blushed to recall” was the film’s ending, in which not the car was featured prominently, but the writing woman. Through the comic framing device of the writing woman and her various transformations, Shipman effectively turned Something New from a film promoting the endurance of a car into a humorous self-promotion as a writer, a producer, and an actress in multiple roles. Precisely the marginality of the production, or rather the independence from the pressures of ambition, may have inspired her to do it at the time, and embarrassed her in retrospect.

Conclusion
Producing and directing comic films was not a common option for women in the 1920s. In so far as Solser made the choice consistently, it was idiosyncratic, not just in the Netherlands, but internationally as well. As if she was aware of this, she included a Chaplin–imitation in her Bet naar de Olympiade. Both Musidora and Shipman chose the comic mode to make a statement about their careers: Musidora to bid farewell to styles and forms that had brought her fame and failure in French cinema, Shipman to promote herself as a screenwriter, an actress and a filmmaker in Hollywood. The humorous reflections engendered by these choices differ according to context, but have in common that they occurred in the margins of the national film production in which each of the actresses and filmmakers worked. Being professionals in the entertainment field, Solser, Musidora and Shipman were keen to make the most of the opportunity.

873 See, most notably, Kay Armatage, who does not specify the budget, but assumes that it was “extreme low–budget” because Shipman “stretched the budget for a commercial into a feature–length narrative” (Armatage, The Girl from God’s Country, 153). The figure of $28,000 stems from an undated clipping from the Los Angeles Times in the Marjorie Cole File, Nell Shipman Archive, Albertsons Library, Boise State University (Mss 99, Box 8, Folder 5). An illuminating comparison may be that, at Universal, in 1921, a five–reeler could be produced for a bit over $34,000. See Richard Kosarski, An Evening’s Entertainment. The Age of the Silent Picture 1915–1928 (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press 1994), 111–3.
Fashion and Fandom
Film, Fashion and Female Movie Fandom in Imperial Germany
Andrea Haller

Film, fashion and modernity
In many contemporary writings about the changes modernity brings into the everyday life and experience of people and to the bourgeois social order, cinema and fashion are two of the most prevalent examples used to illustrate these changes. Cinema and fashion are considered as models of the experience of modernity that help to practice the modern way of living by challenging the prevalent notions of acceleration and mobility. Besides, they are both deeply rooted in the present time and are both ephemeral media based on an element of transience. Cinema and fashion epitomize the cultural implications of modernity such as rapidity, diversification, and commercialization as well as the ability to appeal to the masses and the ability to constantly reinvent themselves. Emilie Altenloh writes in her 1914 study of German cinema audiences that “both the cinema and those who visit it are typical products of our times, characterized by constant preoccupation and a state of nervous restlessness. […] Certainly of reason for this [people’s interest for cinema dramas] is the devotion to and the immersion into the present.”

On the other hand, the German sociologist and economist Werner Sombart relates the “wild tempo of changes in fashion” to the psychic disposition of modern men and to his extended mobility: “What is even more important is the fact that with the changes in technology and in the outward living condition […] a new type of men has evolved. Men that wanted to express their inner restlessness and unstableness in the constitution of their outward appearance. We want the change of our articles of daily use. It makes us nervous if we have to wear the same piece of clothing all the time.”

Considering this discursive relation between cinema and the fashion system, it seems to make perfect sense to have a look at the actual intersections between early cinema and fashion.

Hence, I would like to explore these connections and try to link that to early practices of female movie fandom, since women were perceived to be

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876 Sombart, Wirtschaft und Mode in Bovenschen, 89. Translation is mine.
more interested in fashion than men. Therefore I intend to explore, on the one hand, the role fashion and fan magazines played in turning the ordinary female movie–goer into a devoted movie fan, and on the other hand, the role of film stars in popularizing fashion. Therefore I am going to examine fashion magazines like *Die Dame* (The Lady) or the *Elegante Welt* (Elegant World) and the *Illustrierte Kino–Woche* (Cinema–Week Illustrated), the only fan paper of the pre–war era.

**Movie stars and the female fans in Imperial Germany**

Around 1911 the longer feature film, the “one–hour–film” as it was called then, was implemented in the cinema programme. By the end of 1912 the longer feature film had become the main attraction of the programme which now presented a mixture of short films and longer so–called Kinodramen (cine–dramas). These cine–dramas, that were often labelled as social dramas, sensational dramas or Sittendramen (dramas of manners), were extremely popular with female movie–goers as they largely told stories from the real of female experience and mostly displayed the fate of a woman. These cine–dramas offered the female moviegoers the unique chance to “see herself”, her everyday–life, her milieu and her experience, as Heide Schlüpmann has pointed out.877 This “female experience” was mediated by the female actresses who embodied the female characters on screen. And with the longer feature films these screen actresses, who had been mostly uncredited before, became genuine movie–stars. Asta Nielsen and Henny Porten might have been the most noted and popular at that time, but there were numerous others like Wanda Treumann, Lissy Nebuschka, Dorrit Weixler, Erna Morena, Hanni Weisse or Maria Orska, Hella Moja, Maria Carmi and Fern Andra.

So, along with the growing interest in cinema–going that was fostered by the cine–dramas, an active participation of women in the process of reception outside the cinema can be established. Women began to play an important role as movie fans, and they demanded information about films, about the movie business in general and, above all, about the movie stars. The first movie fan magazine, *Illustrierte Kino–Woche*, was launched in 1913.878 The make–up of the magazine, with its numerous reports on fashion, serialised novels, and especially the “letters to the editor” section, as well as the character of the ads, indicate that the majority of the readers were female.

The magazines covered all aspects of the film business, but from its first issue the readers not only passively consumed the latest news about the stars and the films, but they also became active themselves: they sent in letters asking for addresses of actors and actresses to get into personal contact, and they massively participated in polls about the most popular stars (1913 and again


878 In 1916 the name was changed to Illustrierte Filmwoche.
1918). In 1913, the most popular actor was the Norwegian star Waldemar Psilander and Asta Nielsen was the most popular female star. In 1918, Henny Porten was the most popular actress. As the readers, predominantly the female ones, increasingly demanded more information about their favourites, the magazine began to provide them with more information about certain stars. And although they still did not communicate much about the private life of the actors and actresses they tried to appease the hunger of their reader for nearness to “their” stars with anecdotes, reports from the film set and so on. Richard DeCordova stated that the picture personality turns into a real “star” when information about his or her private life is provided in other media, i.e. a secondary, intermedial image is created. This transformation can be observed in the Illustrierte Kinwoche. And one might add that the female movie fans with their numerous inquiries to get to know more about their favourite actresses act as a kind of catalyst for this transformation of an actor into a star as a multimedia Gesamtkunstwerk that represented a special way of living and dressing.

In contrast to the United States, where film fan magazines mushroomed in the nineteen teens, the Illustrierte Filmwoche stayed the only film fan magazine until the end of the First World War. But fashion and women’s magazines increasingly began to provide women with information about films and their stars, too. The most popular fashion journals of Imperial Germany were Die Dame and the Elegante Welt. Both were founded in 1912, at the high peak of the cine–drama. But due to its status as a more “bourgeois” mass communication medium, Die Dame did not report much about film and film stars in the beginning. It had only provided its readers with more information and images about the business since 1915. The Elegante Welt reported from the beginning about film and the stars—but only to a rather moderate extent. But, as readers more and more demanded information about stars and their work, both magazines increasingly turned their attention to cinema and especially film stars around 1915.

The Elegante Welt from the beginning considered cinema as being appropriate to a sophisticated and modern lifestyle. A visit to the cinema was presented as an everyday occurrence for the upper classes that went to the cinema just as they went to opera houses, theatres and nightclubs. The column “Are you still talking?”, for example, showed that cinema going had become a fashionable leisure activity by then. “Are you still talking?” presented fictitious telephone conversations about the latest social events, theatre premieres, celebrity gossip, shopping tips or the latest fashion dances, and it always in-

879 “Unsere Preisfrage: Wer ist die beliebteste Filmschauspielerin?”, Illustrierte Filmwoche, no. 6 (1918).
cluded some paragraphs about the cinema: about its latest first releases, about the stars, etcetera.

But this en passant cinema gossip was not enough for the female readers: already in 1913 we can find numerous requests for more information and pictures of movie stars and countless inquiries how one can get in contact with the stars. And again, Waldemar Psilander and Asta Nielsen were especially in demand. Therefore, the Elegante Welt in 1914 published an accumulative answer to all fans of Asta Nielsen: “Asta–Nielsen–devotees: You can send letters to the cinema–diva to our desk. We are afraid we can’t send you all pictures of her.”881 From 1916 on the Elegante Welt increasingly reported about film and the stars. For example, Maria Orska gave an account of her work in film,882 and the “cinema–king” Max Mack was portrayed working in his studio.883

Besides, it turned out that female movie stars increasingly became fashion and lifestyle role models. The magazines often illustrated their articles about beauty, lifestyle and society topics with images of movie stars which served as the perfect embodiments of all that was fashionable, up–to–date and modern. The Elegante Welt, for example, illustrated an article about vanity units with pictures of the actress Maria Orska,884 and an article about billiards was illustrated with photos of Gunnar Tolnaes.885 Film stars started to become style icons. Even though, Die Dame at first stayed sceptical about real elegance and fashionability in film. In a 1915 article author Ludwig Kainer mocked about the eclectic mixture of all styles, bad copies and fake glamour of the filmic interiors as well as the unsuitable costumes of the actresses. He hence expressed the then common attitude that film was not art but “fake”.886

However, the readers of the magazines demanded to know where the costumes of the actresses came from. And thus the magazines increasingly published film stills and discussed these costumes. In June 1917, for example, a reader asked the Elegante Welt where the dresses Erna Morena wore in her new film Der Schal der Sünde came from.887 In the same issue, “the wonderful dresses from Mannheimer” which the actress Erika Gläsner presented in her new film were the topic of conversation.888

Film producers very soon realised that women were eager to see beautiful dresses and they designed their films accordingly. But even before the fiction film started to become a “life fashion–journal”, fashion was present in the cinema.

881 “Puzzle”, Elegante Welt, no. 7 (1914).
882 “Maria Orska”, Elegante Welt, no. 7 (1916).
884 Elegante Welt, no. 20 (1916).
885 Elegante Welt, no. 18 (1917).
886 Ludwig Kainer, “Eleganz im Film”, Die Dame, no. 4 (1915).
887 “Korrespondenz”, Elegante Welt, no. 12 (1917).
888 “Sprechen Sie noch?”, Elegante Welt, no. 12 (1917).
Fashion films

Newsreels from Pathé and Gaumont or the Éclair Revue always incorporated footage of the latest Paris fashions. The female audience loved these fashion films, as the trade paper Der Kinematograph reported in 1912. In 1913 Der Kinematograph noted that film was the perfect medium to present fashion as it gives a good haptic impression, but it regretted that these fashion films were always too short to really get an impression of the clothes on display. So, it suggested that the producers should trade on the specific advantages of film and present the dresses “in motion”: fashion films should show women entering an automobile or a streetcar, or they should present women sitting between two suitors on a small sofa. They should show, “in short, if these dresses meet the demands of everyday life.” In 1911, a German fashion show was filmed for the first time. The fashion company Leonard Tietz Aktien Gesellschaft from Cologne and Düsseldorf initiated the pictures and they were shown in several cities in the cinemas of the Union theatre chain. The author predicts a great success to these kinds of films since the aesthetic of a fashion show was filmic in itself and therefore made to be shown in the cinema.

Even feature films of that time explicitly dealt with the topic of fashion: for example, the “fashion farces” (Konfektionskomödien) of the early Ernst Lubitsch that took place in the milieu of the department stores and Berlin’s Konfektionsmilieu and others like Gelbstern (Mannequin, 1913) or Die Laune einer Modekönigin (The Caprices of a fashion queen, 1916), just to name a few.

One of the most stunning examples of how film reacted to changes in fashion was the 1911 scandal about the jupe culottes (in German: Hosenrock), which were created by designers Poiret and Drecoll and haunted the feuilletons of the daily press for several weeks. From Berlin it was reported that women wearing the jupe–culottes even caused crowds and traffic jams. Although not many women actually dared to wear these trousers, satirists and cartoonists jumped at it immediately. Moreover, as many as nine films containing the catchword “Hosenrock” were distributed in 1911 in Germany:

890 “Das Kino in der Modeindustrie,” Der Kinematograph, no. 289 (1912).
892 “Die erste große kinematographische Modenrevue,” Lichtbild-Bühne, no.40 (1911).
Schwiegermama im Hosenrock (Mother-in-law Wearing Jupe-culottes), Sieg des Hosenrocks (Triumph of the Jupe-culottes) or Schreckliche Folgen des Hosenrock (Dire Consequences of the Jupe-culottes), just to name a few. Most of them were short slapstick comedies making fun of women wearing these “trousers” or of men mistrustfully reacting to this new trend.

On the other side, fashion houses attempted to incorporate filmic elements into their fashion shows to create a certain “mood”. For example, Die Dame suggested illustrating the presentation of the collection with images from fashionable skiing hotspots and arranging the whole fashion show as a trip to these venues. The mannequin could present travelling clothes while images from a railway journey are projected; on arrival at her hotel room—shown on film—she could present the latest house frocks and pyjamas.894

Fashion in film and the film stars
Apart from these obvious fashion related films, fashion became an important feature for the new cine–dramas, especially for the so–called “dramas from society circles” that had become very popular with the female audience. These films had to show “luxuriant decoration and lavish and fashionable costumes” the Lichtbild–Bühne states in 1917, to offer the audience “insights into the living and loving of the upper circles.”895 Sometimes producers even used the lavish costumes as an advertising point for a film and its star, as in the case of the film Der ausgeliehene Frack (The borrowed tail–coat, 1913) by the Kontinental Kunstfilm and its new star Maria Berthelsen. There the ad says: “Maria Berthelsen, wonderful acting, enchanting exterior, marvellous costumes.” 896 In 1915 the Lichtbild–Bühne even claimed that Fern Andra was so extremely popular with the female audience because of her “delicate taste regarding her costumes, both on the silver screen and in her private life.”897 Although the theatre stars still dominated press coverage and they still set the standards for elegance and fashionability, the filmic “look” was about to conquer the territory of fashion.898 Besides, film and its display of fashion led to a democratization and internationalization of taste. Social theorist as the above quoted Werner Sombart and especially Georg Simmel held that fashion had once been a prerogative of the upper classes and that the change of fashion (Modewechsel) resulted from the attempts of the lower classes to imitate the upper classes. According to Simmel, fashion (Mode) is a product of class distinction and it is characterized by the tension between the imitative instinct and the aspiration for individual differentiation: “Thus fashion on the one hand signifies union with those in the same

894 “Eine Reform der Modenschau. Wirklichkeit und Film,” Die Dame, no. 7 (1917).
895 “Gesellschaftsfilms,” in Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 10 (1917).
896 Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 33 (1913).
897 “Die Erstaufführung im Mozartsaal. Es fiel ein Reif in der Nacht,” Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 44 (1915).
898 “Der Einfluss des Films,” Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 22 (1915).
class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, and, uno acto, the exclusion of all other groups. Now, in the wake of industrialization with the manufactured production of ready-to-wear clothes (Konfektion) that copied haute couture, everybody had the possibility to look fashionable. The new media contributed to the dissemination of the images. Fashion journals and film made fashion visible, if not available, to everybody. Hence, film did not abolish class distinctions but helped to make them less visible and more subtle. According to Sombart, fashion journals, newspapers and especially increased mobility also contributed to a reduction of the differences between the big cities and the country.

Expanding Sombart’s thesis, an article in the Illustrierte Kino-Woche captioned “Cinema, Fashion and Society” pointed out that cinema offered people from small towns and the provinces—i.e. “those who are unable to visit the fashion on tea parties and horse races”—the possibility to make themselves familiar with the latest looks from Paris and the United States: “People from smaller cities only have a sketchy idea of metropolitan elegance. Here the cinema acts—one might say ‘by chance’—as a kind of mediator.”

As evidence, so to speak, for the thesis that the cinema contributed to an internationalization of fashion, the Lichtbild-Bühne reported that the ambassador of Serbia had observed that the women of Belgrade began to dress according to American taste although there had not been any American travellers in Belgrade. Finally, he found out that the cinemas were mainly showing American films. Hence, local women asked in the department stores for “Yankee stuff.” Thus, not only the upper classes but also film stars set the standards for a fashionable look.

901 Cf. Sombart in Bovenschen, 102. in English: Sombart in Purdy, 315 (see n. 2).
902 Johannes Weiß, “Kino, Mode und Gesellschaft,” Illustrierte Kino-Woche, no. 21 (1914).
903 “Der Film und die Kleidermode,” Lichtbild-Bühne, no. 4 (1914).
This international character of film and fashion was only weakened once, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. Fashion and film were exploited for the political agenda, but a look into the film and the fashion magazines shows that these restrictions did not last too long. However, there were attempts to create a specific German kind of fashion. And there were ideas to produce fashion films which should highlight the power and the up-to-dateness of the German fashion industry. One example was the documentary Deutsche Modenschau auf der Deutschen Werkbundausstellung zu Bern (1917) that was heavily advertised in the trade press as “the biggest attraction for he female visitors of every cinema” and “a stunning evidence of the productivity of the German fashion industry”. Cf. “Bemerkenswerte Filmneuheiten: Die Modenschau,” Lichtbild-Bühne, no. 43 (1917).
This international aspect was again intensified by the diversity of the cinema programme with its mixture of all kinds of films from different countries: a drama from Copenhagen was shown together with one from Paris, a Pathé newsreel with a fashion film and the latest pictures of the German Emperor and its family.

The Elegante Welt, too, emphasized the importance of fashion for film and its success with the female audience and it talked about the responsibility of the cinema for educating the taste of the masses. In 1918 fashion journalist Ola Alsen wrote:

Because of its massive expansion and its low entrée fees the cinema especially appeals to the masses. Therefore it is important that ‘taste’ (Geschmack) is cultivated in those films, especially in regards to fashion. […] In good films the lines of the dresses meet all requirements of the latest fashion trends. The experienced and tasteful actress knows at all hours and in all situations to dress up properly.904

The Elegante Welt also hints to the fact that the female movie goers not only concentrated on the story of the film but that they used film as a kind of moving fashion magazine (Modespiegel) that helped them to orient themselves in the world of fashion. And film actresses were accordingly perceived as living and moving fashion models. In this respect, fashion journals and film complemented each other. Therefore, the female audience virtually called for more elaborate and extravagant dresses in the movies: “It is exceedingly boring if an actress changes her dresses only once or twice in a film. Repetition is monotonous.”905 And Ola Alsen wrote: “The female film viewers would be deeply disappointed to watch the same dresses in different films.”906

Thus, in contemporary perception, the film actress was the best example of Simmel’s theory that fashion had become a means of distinction. More than any other woman she had to distinguish herself by her outward appearance since she literally had to sell her image. To be loved by the audience she first and foremost had to catch the audience’s eye, and the best means to achieve that attention was a fashionable appearance.907

This increased orientation of the film production to latest trends might explain why Fern Andra was very often presented as a fashion role model, while Asta Nielsen was never presented in this way in the fashion journals, although she still was one of the most favourite actresses. In her article “Film and Fashion” Asta Nielsen expressed a totally different attitude towards film and fashion.908 She stated that she designed her costumes not with

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904 Ola Alsen, “Die Mode im Film,” Elegante Welt, no. 16 (1918).
905 “Der Film als Modespiegel,” Elegante Welt, no. 23 (1918).
906 Ola Alsen, “Die Mode im Film,” Elegante Welt, no. 16 (1918).
907 Curt Moreck, Sittengeschichte des Kinos (Dresden: Paul Aretz Verlag, 1927), 248.
908 Asta Nielsen, “Film und Mode,” Illustrierte Filmwoche, no. 25 (1918). Also published in Der Kinematograph, no. 433 (1915).
relation to their fashionability but with relation to their visual impression on screen and to the character she embodied. What mattered for her was the body beneath the dress and not the dress itself. Clothing and costumes were not visual attractions per se but props to emphasise bodily expressiveness and to underline the traits of the character she portrayed. For example, she therefore avoided wearing a notably well–fitting gown in tragic scenes, so that the audience would not be distracted by that dress, especially because most women believed that life is not that tragic when wearing a well–fitted dress. Or, to say it in her own words: “A fancy hat does not go well with a broken heart.”

From today’s perspective, however, Nielsen’s way of dressing was very innovative and up–to–date. Her aesthetics of the body resembled that of famous fashion designer Paul Poiret, who also propagated a slim and agile figure. There are even similarities to the fashion concept of Coco Chanel which was also driven by a certain emancipatory impulse represented by simplicity and graphical lines. Nielsen’s way of dressing was ahead of her time and in a way too radical to be perceived as fashionable. Hence, contemporary critics sometimes simply thought that her dresses were ugly. However, the claim for fashionable film costumes carries pitfalls as again Asta Nielsen has noted in her article: films become outdated very quickly and they appear literally old–fashioned shortly after their release. A critic from Berlin reported in 1917 that he had watched a comedy of 1913 and that he was heavily disappointed:

The male comedians were still side–spitting but the females on screen were unintentionally funny. The film diva whose grace and chic I had admired four years ago appeared clumsy and provincial to me now. […] It is no advantage that film reproduces everything without change. The style back then is not the style of today.

However, precise ideas about a specific “cinematic fashion” were quite rare during that time. One exception is Margarete Langen’s article “Film and Fashion” in the Lichtbild–Bühne from 1916: There she reflects about the qualities of different colours on black–and–white film or about the effect of different forms and silhouettes on the filmic image. And she was looking for possibilities to


910 Malwine Rennert, “Asta Nielsen im Kinodrama ‘Die Suffragetten’,” Bild&Film 3, no. 6 (1913/1914).

911 “Film–Konserven,” in Berliner Volkszeitung, quoted in “Pressestimmen,” Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 3 (1917).
combine trendiness, elegance and cinematic aesthetics. The above quoted Ludwig Kainer, who had mocked the fake glamour of filmic costumes, presented some ideas, too. He wrote: “The best and most beautiful film actress fails to impress if she has to act in tasteless and ornate spaces. […] She can not act in her everyday clothes may they even be the most elegant ones. Every film actress needs clothing just for her films; every dress has to be chosen according to its impression in black and white. Her dresses have to be of the most elegant simplicity that allows no tassels, fringes or beading. The good quality of the fabrics and the furs will contribute to build up a beautiful line.”

But not only the film costumes caught the attention of the female readers; they were also interested in the private style of the actresses. Thus, the actresses themselves became fashion role models. In 1917, for example the Elegante Welt published pictures of Pola Negri at the race track in the Berlin Grunewald on which she wears—as the caption said—a dress from the house of Drecoll. But these kinds of “paparazzi” photos were not very common until 1918. More often, the magazines published staged pictures of cinema actresses presenting the latest hat and dress trends. Here they acted as a kind of testimonial for style and elegance. In February 1917, Die Dame for example reserved an entire page for photos of Henny Porten and Erna Morena presenting the latest hats. In May Maria Widal presented coats and in June Lu Synd modelled for new summer hats. What we can observe here is the beginning of the still current trend that actresses act as models for fashion designers, or officiate as brand ambassadors while models turn into film actresses.

However, the readers at that time not only oriented themselves by the stars in regard to fashion of clothing but also in regard to all that belonged to a fashionable and modern lifestyle: they wanted to know how the stars lived, what their homes looked like and how they spent their leisure time. The fan and fashion magazines tried to answer these questions by publishing reports about the “private life” of various male and female stars. For example, the magazines reported about Henny Porten’s sporting habits or about the holiday activities of different stars. They published home stories, for example, of Asta Nielsen and Erna Morena, and illustrated them with semi–private photos of the actresses in their homes and with their children. But all in all, these reports from the “private life” still stayed on the surface and most often reproduced well–known clichés about life as a film star.

912 Margarete Langen, “Mode und Kino,” Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 6 (1916).
913 Ludwig Kainer, “Eleganz im Film,” Die Dame, no. 4 (1915).
914 “Bilder von der Rennbahn,” Elegante Welt, no. 16 (1917).
915 Die Dame, no. 9 (1917).
916 Die Dame, no. 16 (1917).
917 Die Dame, no. 17 (1917).
918 “Henny Porten im Sport”, Illustrierte Kino–Woche, no. 9 (1913).
919 “Wie sich Kinokünstler erholen”, Illustrierte Filmwoche, no. 32/33 (1917).
920 See for example “Bei Asta”, Illustrierte Filmwoche, no. 25 (1918) and “Besuch bei Erna Morena,” Elegante Welt, no. 16 (1916).
Fashion in the cinema

Not only filmic space but also the real space of the cinema was perceived as a space of fashion. Just like department stores, café houses and other spaces of modern consumer society, cinema was a place where women could enjoy their recently gained mobility and where they could watch, show and parade fashion. The German journalist and actress Resi Langer, who made several expeditions into the cinema scene of Berlin, reported in an article about the audience of the elegant cinema palaces of Berlin West that a young lady did not want to sit in a theatre box as usual but in the pit since she wanted everybody to see her new fashionable Bubikopf hairdo.921 The fact that women went to the cinema to show off their latest fashion was also perceived by male observers. In the article “My wife in the film theatre”922 a man describes a visit with his wife in the cinema and he asks for the reasons why women were so fond of the cinema. The first reason for his wife to go to the cinema is, according to her, that she can go there without full dress. The following ironical description of his wife changing her clothes several times and posing in front of the mirror to find the right outfit for the cinema reduces this reason to absurdity. Instead, his wife loves to go to the movies just because she can show her latest dress or latest hairdo in public. Even during the film show his wife was more concerned about her looks and those of the other patrons than about the images on screen. The husband had to listen to long monologues from his wife when the latest hat models were presented on–screen during the newsreel. “Look at these awful hats”, he cited her, “Awful. Fashion is becoming even crazier.” The next film bored his wife and she started to comment about the hats of the ladies in the audience and criticized the hairdo of the “lady in the third row.”

In her insightful study of female movie–going in the United States, Shelley Stamp also noticed that sometimes the act of going to the cinema show itself was even more important than watching the films. She writes: “Women’s tendency to parade themselves at leisure outing shifted visual attention away from the screen and onto the circulation of gazes in lobby areas and entranceways.”923

Perhaps the most obvious signs of fashion in the cinema were the large hats of the female clientele. These large hats—which often blocked the view of other, predominantly male patrons so that they could not see the screen anymore—were the subject of numerous essays, films, cartoons and even poems by then.924

924 See for example Griffith’s Those awful heads (1909). For a filmography of “hat–films” see Catherine Russell and Louis Pelletier, “‘Ladies Please Remove Your Hats’: Fashion, Moving Pictures and Gender Politics of the Public Sphere 1907–1911,” Living Pictures 2, no. 1 (2003), 61–84.
And there were numerous attempts by local cinema owners and appeals from the trade press to force women to take off their hats in the cinema. But women did not care about these restrictions; instead, they used these hats to demonstrate their fashion status. One male author even talked about a veritable competition for the ultimate hat that would succeed in covering the whole screen. The hat, a relatively affordable piece of clothing that allows the wearer to act out her creativity, was not only an accessory for the higher classes but it also allowed women from the lower classes to spice up their outfit easily. Thus, the hat problem was not only a problem of the better cinemas, as the Berliner Allgemeine Zeitung notes. In the cinema, women from the working classes—that were normally excluded from the fashion system and from most of the other venues of entertainment—had the possibility to stage themselves with a minimum of effort and money and to demonstrate their fashionable self-consciousness in public. However, parading fashionable dresses in the cinema and feeling like a movie star was not enough for many of the female cinema lovers; they wanted to become film stars themselves.

**Becoming a movie star**

The establishment of the first film stars and the coverage of their work, their life in the film business and the alluring prospect to wear such beautiful clothes awakened the desire of many young and not so young women to appear on the silver screen themselves. They did not only want to read about it, they wanted to become a part of it.

According to the numerous inquiries in the fashion and fan papers a lot of German women and girls dreamed of being a film star. From 1912 on, women virtually bombarded the editorial offices of the fan and fashion magazines with questions on how they could manage to become a cinema actress. The fashion and fan magazines as well as the trade press concordantly warned the young girls that it would not be easy to become an actress. The Elegante Welt, for example, answered to one request: “As far as our experience goes we can only strongly advise you against taking up the profession of a film actress. Only a few very talented women succeeded as an actress.”

With numerous articles as well as little stories dealing with young girls trying to become actresses, the Illustrierte Filmwoche on the one hand

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926 “Hut ab!”, Der Kinematograph, no. 168 (1910).

927 From Berliner Allgemeinen Zeitung, cited in “Pressestimmen”, Lichtbild–Bühne, no. 28 (1917).

928 See for example Illustrierte Kino–Woche, no. 24 (1913), and Elegante Welt, no. 27 (1913) and numerous others.

929 Elegante Welt, no. 31 (1914).
aroused interest and raised the hope of the female readers that they might be discovered by film producers, while on the other hand, they warned their readers with stories in which someone always tried to take advantage of the girl’s desire to succeed in the film business and in which the girls never fully succeeded in becoming a star.930 These stories especially suggested that the so-called Kinoschulen (cinema schools), where the girls should learn to act, to move and to dress like a film star, had become a major problem. These institutions attracted young girls by promising them a career in the film business. In fact, these “schools” simply served dubious profiteering and at best only squeezed money out of the girls. So, the magazines warned against this kind of education which was never accepted by the film companies. But all these reports about impostors and about the failure of so many girls did not prevent the female film enthusiasts from still dreaming of a career in the film business, and from asking for advice how to become a movie star. In 1917, the Elegante Welt gave up and refused to answer this question any more: “We are no longer able and willing to answer the continual question ‘How can I become a cinema actress?’!”931

Résumé

As we have seen, film and fashion were already inextricably linked in the years before World War I, as both were epitomes of modern consumer society and both relied on the principle of display. Hence, film actresses began to take over the role of fashion icons and role models, not only in regards to questions of clothing fashions but also in regards to their way of living. Besides, the attempts of—and the new possibilities (Konfektion) for—women from all social classes to dress as stylishly as the women they could view in the journals and on the screen finally resulted in the desire to become a movie star. Film and fashion journals contributed to a democratization and internationalization of “taste” and they had become powerful partners in promoting each other and the style of the “modern woman”.

931 Elegante Welt, no. 22 (1917).
Facing the Silent Film Star: Concepts of Beauty and the Camera
Therése Andersson

We didn’t need dialogue. We had faces!
– Norma Desmond, Sunset Blvd.

As the quote from Sunset Blvd. (Billy Wilder, 1950) suggests, the image of the silent film star’s face became somewhat mystified and iconic, referring back to the golden age of early film glamour and notions of the “camera face”. In Sweden throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the idea of the camera face—i.e. the beliefs of how cinematic technique, through the close-up, had the capacity to reveal the actor’s soul and state of mind—occurred. The film camera was thought of as an instrument for truth, registering and refining the beauty of the face. In this article I would like to continue the discussion on early film stars, style and beauty undertaken in my dissertation thesis, particularly in relation to the ideas of the camera face articulated in the Swedish film magazines Filmen and Filmjournalen, focusing on questions of representation and the construction of femininity in connection to the physiognomic discourse current in Sweden at the time. Articles concerning actress Anna Q Nilsson will serve as my point of reference.

The physiognomic principles were invoked as a quasi-scientific system for analysing personality through physical features. This belief can be traced back through history, and was very common during the 19th century, for example. The idea was that the inner virtues of a person were perceptible

932 The object of my thesis was the relationship between film, fashion and beauty concerning different understandings of femininity, with reference to the establishment of the star system and the making of celebrity culture, and how these were expressed textually through magazines and commercial ads in early 20th century Sweden. The period of time framing the discussion, from fin-de-siècle and onwards with specific focus on the 1920s and 1930s, corresponded to the course of publication of the Swedish magazine Filmjournalen. Star studies and reception studies made up the theoretical framework, offering an understanding of the popular press both as a source of knowledge for and as an intermediary of fashion and style, creating a wider network of texts and images and providing a context for how films were presented for Swedish, mainly female, audiences. Film stars were understood as embodying different ideas; represented, negotiated, and incorporated in already existing lines of thoughts, drawing attention to questions of media presentation, and to the ideas appearing behind the beauty ideals and the aesthetics of the time. The discussion on stars was narrowed down to concern three particular themes – consumerism, emancipation and physiognomy – when presupposing femininity as defined by appearance; considering cosmetics and fashion as providing practical, next-to-the-skin tools in this making, while film and journalism are working on a social, discursive level. Beauty Box – Filmstjärnor och skönhetskultur i det tidiga 1900-talets Sverige (Beauty Box – Film Stars and Beauty Culture in Early 20th Century Sweden) (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2006)
through their outer appearance. The face was perceived as especially important, since it was thought of as the most distinct for reading the outer appearance as a representation of inner beauty. In the physiognomic writings of Julien Leclercq from 1899, the principles are summarised as "the science, of which the purpose is to get to know a person’s inner self through the outer, in other words; the soul through the body." Hence, the most initiated were presumed to stay with readings of the face only, as it was understood as manifestly revealing the soul. The physiognomic relationship between outer appearance and inner virtues was recognized as particularly crucial for women, since the principles were normative and gender specific: as such, generating notions of what was suitable for women to think, feel and act. The practice of changing one’s appearance through technologies like cosmetics were seen as insufficient since hair-colour, eyes, ears, chin, mouth, wrinkles, and the profile, were signs of the inner self independent of whether they were natural or consciously shaped. The facial features were as such determining, as a mirror for revealing the soul. In the 1910s and 1920s film stars, as commonly known figures familiar from the screen and magazines, appeared as exceptional examples to practice physiognomic readings on, as Béla Balázs did in his theoretical writings on film and the human face.

In the Swedish context, physiognomic principles were transformed into schemas and developed into readings of female stars as personality types. Both Filmen and Filmjournalen as fan magazines devoted most of their pages to fashionable stars, highlighting appearance, and were further richly illustrated with photographs. Recurring topics on film stars such as career and rise-to-fame stories, romance and wedding gossip, and of course, fashion and beauty articles, were prevalent. The story of Anna Q Nilsson (1888—1974) a stage actress from the small town Ystad in southern Sweden, who emigrated and settled in New York in 1905, follows the rise-to-fame-narrative neatly. In these articles, by emphasising Nilsson’s struggle to become a film actress through hard work; moving to a new country, learning a new language and supporting her self as a fashion model before carrying on to the moving pictures, a correspondence to the idea of America as the land of opportunity is also implied. Nilsson as a starlet got her breakthrough as Molly Pitcher in the picture with the same name, in 1911.

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935 Ibid., 1.
936 Finkelstein, 5 ff, 18 f and 24.
938 Andersson, 30 f.
Pitcher, Sidney Olcotte, 1911). In narrating and presenting these stories combining beauty and success, *Filmen* and *Filmjournalen* actively contributed to ways in which the stars would be perceived.

When studying how different modes of femininity are described and performed through the articles in *Filmen* and *Filmjournalen* on film stars, theoretical notions on performance are applied. Judith Butler’s understanding of gender not as a *being* or essence, beyond history, but as *making*, actively created through social practices is taken into account. Film stars are thus theoretically understood as a focal point to which different ideas were attributed, which in turn were represented and incorporated in already existing lines of thought occurring in early 20th century Sweden. With reference to Teresa de Lauretis’s viewpoint, cosmetics are considered as “technologies of the self”: as technologies for creating and recreating the self, as well as technologies for creating and recreating meanings of femininity. Two contradictory discourses on femininity and identity could be found in the Swedish popular press at the time: an essentialist discourse perceiving identity as determined, and an anti–essentialist discourse regarding identity as a result of construction and performance.

**Beauty and the Camera**

The beautifying practice is historically much disputed and controversial, as it is strongly associated with narcissism, independence and emancipation. Cosmetics were early on connected to certain social spheres, populated equally by prostitutes, actresses and feminists, challenging the moralistic decorum of the times. At the turn of the century, cosmetics were considered unnatural and morally dubious, and in using cosmetics the work of nature or the work of God was regarded to have been manipulated. The criticism in Sweden, articulated mostly by the upper classes—by men as well as women—was however more diverse and part of a larger debate concerning femininity and emancipation. Through the eyes of the critics, beauty care of any kind was connected to narcissism, which in its turn was regarded as a female mental disorder, and which was manifested in the overestimation of oneself and the lack of consideration for others. The use of cosmetics was therefore perceived as vulgar and manipulating, which in the end would result in a shell of de–

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940 Anna Q Nilsson had a very successful career and was voted the most popular woman in Hollywood 1926. She was also the first Swedish actress to receive a star on Hollywood Walk of Fame.
Since the practice of fashion and cosmetics was for a long time considered vulgar and dubious, even the interest in, or, fascination for these things were explained away as blameworthy vanity beyond reason. Women were, however, at the time considered vain by nature, but this vanity could also be conformed and transformed into a fulment of voyeurism for those around, echoing the 19th century pale, bourgeoisie feminine ideal, as well as implicating that this ideal was the superior, true and pure, femininity. This line of argument had strong moral implications for how grooming should be perceived, also pointing to the double standard involved, marking a distinction between dressing up for oneself and dressing up for others. This also implies that the construction had to be invisible and that the cosmetics used had to appear as a natural look, as authenticity. In this way appearance equalled personality; the outward appearance revealed inner virtues, a notion that continues to occur throughout the 1920s in Sweden, and which is further brought up by the popular press.

In early celebrity culture the face was assigned a new commercial value, where photographs of the film star’s face could be utilized in marketing and commercial ads, but the demands on perfection and a flawless look had consequences for portraits and the filmic close-up. The physiognomic principles are thus more specifically related to the aesthetic and cosmetic conditions for the close-up. The attention put to the individual, to the face, through the moving pictures, were at the same time new and media specific, as romanticising the technology of film through claims of soulfulness. In the magazine *Filmen*, in an article from 1920, these ideas of flawlessness and soulfulness are positioned to film stars. In order to manage the scrutiny of the camera and fulfill the demands of perfection, the female star must photograph well:

There are several young women, whose youthfulness would disappear on film. The camera is fickle. It does not photograph as the person herself wished it did. The camera does not show the colours of her hair and her eyes, or her fair complexion; her facial features do not appeal to the camera.

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946 Ekström, 22.
947 See also: Therése Andersson, "Modernity in a Bottle – Female Self–Representation, Fashion and Film in 1920’ Sweden" (forthcoming, 2017)
If the female star in front of the camera does not possess the specific filmic beauty, she is regarded as condemned, and: “if she further lacks soulfulness, intelligence and liveliness, she is a complete disaster. Because it is beauty with is gloss of coordinated talents, which command success in the film.”952 The discussion of the film star’s face, its features and beauty for photographing well, repeat physiognomic principles, and generates further questions on definitions of femininity and how these were embodied and represented. In an article on the success of Marjorie Daw, it is further pointed out that any actress, who wishes to make it in the film business needs to possess a beauty which expresses “intelligence, talent, inspiration, personality, grace, charm and several other rare, and in combination; almost nonexistent outer and inner qualities.”953 In these texts the camera and filmic techniques are presented as the means for distinguishing the uniqueness of the star as something abstract. Similar thoughts on the photographic value of the face are further explored and presented in another article in Filmen as a matter of mathematical principles. In the article an American director explains to the female readers how they could proceed for discovering their own photographic properties in accordance with the ideal camera face. The ideal camera face is said to be a premise that has been practiced for a long time, but something the audiences have been left ignorant of. The readers are then instructed to stand in front of a mirror, and with the help of a set square and a measuring tape calculate the curves, contours and surfaces of their own face.954 The perfect camera face was described as having fixed anatomic proportions, and certain mathematical interrelated conditions, deriving from the bone structure. It is further pointed out that a film star therefore must fulfil these mathematical conditions of beauty in order to gratify the camera. According to the director interviewed the success of a particular film is more or less dependent on the actress’s ability to interpret the plot through facial expressions and signs rather than overly theatrical play. However, this is said to be possible only if the actress has a perfect camera face.955 These concepts of unique filmic beauty in terms of photographic proportions are presented as exceptional, as well as abstract; something that only a few women possess, as something internal and innate, instead of presenting it as rather mainly depending on cinematography and the construction of the beauty ideals of the time.

Like the readings Balázs did of Asta Nielsen and Lillian Gish, the stating of the ”true” face as displayed by the camera, revealing the soul, is in fact, at the same time the carefully made up face. The facial features have been corrected through cosmetics and exact lightning, but are meant to appear as non–fabricated and authentic. The contradiction is apparent; the consciously con-

952 Ibid., 10.
953 “Marjorie Daw – filmens sötaste stjärna” Filmjournalen 3:1921, 82.
954 “Ideal ansiket” Filmen 24:1920, 14.
955 Ibid., 15.
structured is at the same time presumed as essential and the most authentic. The belief of abstract uniqueness of the film stars is however negotiated and translated in other articles, giving the stars more human characteristics, and as such constructing different recognisable femininities. Both Filmen and Filmjournalen appropriated the looks of film stars as guides to different personality types. This practice developed into typologies presenting types like “the sweetheart” and “woman of the world”,\footnote{“Det obestämbara något… Var är popularitetens nyckel – att symbolisera en typ?” Filmjournalen 10:1923, 154.} classifying women according to personality, each symbolising attitudes and traits.

Anna & Co

As mentioned earlier, throughout the 1910s and 1920s Anna Q Nilsson was very famous in Sweden and magazines frequently published articles and interviews, and of course pictures of her. In Filmen and Filmjournalen especially, the female stars from Europe and America are presented as the protagonists of fashion and beauty culture, pointing to discussions concerning aspects such as ethnicity, whiteness and youth. The film stars, who are understood to be under constant visual scrutiny, are considered as standards for what all women could look like if they just put a little time and effort into it, which also illustrates appearance as constructed by commercial products, as well as it is highlights gaze as theoretical notion. Popular style icons in Sweden at the time, concerning fashion, make–up and body ideals were Gloria Swanson and Mary Pickford, and of course Anna Q Nilsson. In Filmjournalen one writer states, with reference to the influence of film stars: “Not least the movies have taught us how to ‘make ourselves beautiful’.”\footnote{“Skönhet, grace och elegans” Filmjournalen 35–37:1925, 587.}

In both Filmen and Filmjournalen stars were often measured in relation to conceptions of what was called Nordic ideals of beauty, i.e. fair skin, blond hair and blue eyes as external signs compared with inner virtues such as kindness and generosity.\footnote{See i.e.; ”På te hos flickorna Gish” Filmjournalen 8:1922, 242 f, ”En pratstund med dansösen – filmstjärnan Mac Murray” Filmen 21:1920, 8 and ”Senaste filmsvärmeriet: Anita Page” Filmjournalen 13:1929, 21.} These references to what is “Nordic” entail negotiations of the transnational relations and especially American influences following Hollywood films. Articles considering actress Anna Q Nilsson are excellent examples of this practice. In an article in Filmen she is presented as:

Miss Nilsson is one of the most beautiful women in the moving pictures, and her true, Swedish, blond hair is one of the reasons to her successful career. Her charm and personality distinguish her as a genuine movie star.\footnote{“Anna Q. Nilsson – Den fagra blomman från Sverige” Filmen 16:1920, 12 f.}

According to Filmen, Nilsson embodies all the components of the national romanticism of an “ideal Nordic woman”:
Her delightful being combined with her beauty—her full red lips, the golden hair capturing the rays of the sun, the delicate complexion so typical of her northern native country, the expressive eyes… she is the fair flower of Sweden.960

Nilsson came to personify a new feminine ideal in the early 1920s Sweden. During the first decades of the century, a change in notions of ideal beauty occurred—moving from the slender, innocent type with a pale complexion that dominated in the 19th century, to the rosy, sound and healthy ideal—all measured according to “Nordic standards” in appearance: i.e. blond hair and blue eyes. The normative system of meaning underlying these new ideals for beauty were classified according to notions of ethnicity and Nordic national romanticism. This is particularly clear in the depiction of not only Anna Q Nilsson, but of Greta Garbo as “the divine” or “the mysterious woman” as well. In Filmjournalen Garbo’s background of growing up in a poor part of Stockholm, and her ethnicity signified by the colour of her hair, are appropriated in the same way as to Nilsson, as biological explanations for her success and popularity,961 which express determinism and essentialism and deny the construction of the image.

These typologies are in addition to notions of appearance and ethnicity constructed according to film characters, resulting in an understanding of every type as reduced to personifying and performing, as well as to possessing, a certain set of characteristics. Besides Anna Q Nilsson as “the fair flower of Sweden”, ingénues like Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish are presented throughout the pages of Filmen and Filmjournalen as just as good–hearted as the women they portray in films, and also as ethereal, emphasising their thin and slender bodies.962 Theda Bara and Alla Nazimova are presented as vampires,963 and a dichotomy between the vampires and ingénues is maintained since they are presented as binary opposites. These opposites are thus broken up as stars like Gloria Swanson, Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo are presented as additional types of femininity, embodying notions of “the glamorous woman” emphasising luxury and lavish fashion; of “the sporty woman” with reference to health, motion and modernity; and of “the mysterious woman” where secretiveness and fashion is seen to be used as protection for that di-

960 Ibid., 12 f.
961 See i.e.; “Vikingarna’ på segertåg i västerled” Filmjournalen 8:1926, 214 and 224, and “Varför segrar Greta Garbo?” Filmen 6:1928, 11.
962 See i.e.; “På deras vanliga lilla sätt. Manér och individuella smådrag ofta säkrare medel till framgång än talang” Filmen 34:1923, 593 and 600, ”En pratstund med Mary Pickfords sminkör” Filmjournalen 7:1925, 137 and ”På te hos flickorna Gish” Filmjournalen 8:1922, 242 f.
963 See i.e.; ”Vamp mot sin vilja – Nita Naldi vill vara god men får inte för regissören” Filmjournalen 11:1923, 182, ”Alla Nazimova som konstnärinnan” Filmjournalen 5:1920, 158 f and ”En portion näs–vishet – År näsan karaktärens spegel?” Filmjournalen 7:1923, 102.
vineness. These additional types of femininity are placed in the field between the two opposites mentioned above. The depictions and typologies presented by Filmen and Filmjournalen thus constituted fixed, ready-to-apply categories of femininity.

Conclusion
Considering the construction of gender, two contradictory discourses were present in Filmen and Filmjournalen during the first few decades of the 20th century: an essentialist discourse perceiving identity as determined, and an anti-essentialist discourse regarding identity as a result of construction and performance. The concepts surrounding beauty culture in Sweden at the time, starting from the dichotomy between appearance as natural or consciously constructed, are paradoxical when presented as simultaneously manipulating and emancipatory. On the one hand: the abstract notions of the perfect camera face mystify the silent film star; the "true" face as revealing the actress' soul, on the other hand, the face is carefully made up through cosmetics accentuating construction. As such, the made up face is thus understood as non-fabricated and authentic.

The belief that the inner virtues of a person are perceptible through the facial features and registered by the camera, translated into readings of the female stars as personality types, and as such defined femininity by appearance. Different modes of femininity are therefore performed through the representation of film stars. Anna Q Nilsson is in accordance with national romanticism depicted as embodying the notion of the ideal Nordic woman, and for example, Gloria Swanson the glamorous American film star. This categorisation of individual types of femininity leads back to 19th century notions of female authenticity, in physiognomic principles with the concept of identity as fixed and determinate, excluding all possibilities for change or development. In opposition to this physiognomic line of thought, modern fashion and beauty culture offered possibilities for change and for creation, as means of self-representation. With reference to Teresa de Lauretis's viewpoint, cosmetics could be considered as technologies of the self; as technologies for creating and recreating one's own self; as well as technologies for creating and recreating meanings of femininity. In connection with Judith Butler's thoughts, de Lauretis's view offers an interesting perspective, where the production of the self is done through continual performance, and there the self is constantly reconstituted. Even if the very practice of putting on make-up in public drew attention and revealed a conscious construction, it questioned the physiognomic idea of female authenticity, and signalled a desire for independence in symbolic terms. Film stars as public figures are found to be caught in the middle of this tension, embodying both these opposite views.

Women between Screenwriting and Fashion Journalism: The Cases of Ruth Goetz and Ola Alsen
Mila Ganeva

I.
With the emergence of the longer narrative film around 1913 and the parallel development of a more sophisticated and socially diverse mass audience, the work of the screenwriter began to gain importance. It was especially in the wake of World War I, between 1918 and 1921, when German film productions experienced a boom and the feature film length was set at about 90 minutes, that the demand for more complex and dramatically coherent film scripts became apparent. This demand was met by a new cohort of authors, working predominantly in the fields of journalism or of Unterhaltungs-, Kolportage- and Trivialliteratur (entertainment literature or pulp fiction) who were used to writing fast and keeping deadlines, and who were also always attuned to the tastes of the contemporary audience. Studies by Karin Bruns and Jürgen Kasten point to the fact, without further elaboration, that film writing in Germany as an emerging professional field attracted numerous prolific journalists and writers of “trivial literature”: E.A. Dupont, Ruth Goetz, and Thea von Harbou. 965 While established literary authors continued to be skeptical toward the aesthetic status of the new mass medium of film and to avoid working for it, screenwriting became known as a new professional field to which aspiring young writers found relatively easy access.

In 1918 the German trade journal, Der Kinematograph, devoted a special issue edited by E.A. Dupont on screenplay writers, an ostensibly marginalized and “worst paid” group within the film industry.966 The writers were referred to exclusively with the masculine form of the noun: “Filmschreiber” or “Filmautor” (film writer, film author). The only woman scenarist featured in this special issue with a short text and a photograph was Ruth Goetz, who wrote:

The film writer is like a ‘violet’ that blooms hidden from sight. The audience does not know anything either about him or his work. Rarely does he get mentioned and he is never seen. If the film is bad, it’s the writer’s fault. If the film is earns the label “good” or “very good,” then the writer is entitled to a


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miniscule credit. This is different for the playwright and if one has started writing for the theater stage, one has quickly to adjust to this reality. [...] I am letting this journal publish my photograph, so that people can at least once see a film writer.  

In reality, however, the participation of women in this branch of the film industry, in screen writing, was unusually high. According to one study, in the lead were Ruth Goetz, Jane Bess, and Fanny Carlsen, each of whom authored the scripts for over 50 films produced in the period 1916–1930; they were followed by Marie Luise Droop, Margaret Maria Langen, and the best-known scriptwriter, Thea von Harbou, with about 20 screenplays each for films that came out in the period 1919–1929. This same study by Jürgen Kasten estimates that 20% of all produced film scripts were authored by women in the earlier phase, 1916–1925, dropping to about 8% in the later years of silent cinema. 

Despite the high percentage of women in screenwriting, female film writers have occupied a blind spot in the film history of Germany and Austria. Apart from Reinhold Keiner’s 1984 monograph on Thea von Harbou and Jürgen Kasten’s groundbreaking article on Jane Bess, there has been no sustained research on women as scriptwriters in silent cinema. This article is conceived as a modest first step in rediscovering and introducing the professional women scenarists in German silent film. The focus is on a specific sub-group of screenwriters—women who concurrently to their careers in the film industry were also well known as fashion journalists, contributing regularly to a variety of mass-circulation magazines such as *Die Dame*, *Elegante Welt*, and *Der Moden–Spiegel*. In order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of silent films of the late teens and early 1920s, this study addresses the following questions: how did screen plays shape emerging popular genres and contribute to the establishment of generic conventions? How did they direct in some very concrete ways the filmic experience of the audience, particularly women? Finally, a closer look at two films—*Die Kleine aus der Konfektion* (1924, The Little Berlin Mannequin, dir. Wolfgang Neff) and *Luxusweibchen* (1925, A Classy Woman, dir. Erich Schönfelder), written respectively by Ruth Goetz and Ola Alsen—demonstrates that the journalists’ expert knowledge in current styles and modes of presentation of clothes

967 See *Der Kinematograph*, Nr. 600, 3 July, 1918: “Der Filmautor ist das “Veilchen,” das im verborgenen blüht. Das Publikum kennt weder ihn noch seine Tätigkeit, Er wird selten erwähnt – doch nie gezeigt. Ist der Film schlecht, trägt der Autor die Schuld. Verdient der Film der Prädikat “gut” oder gar “sehr gut” – dann darf der Autor einen mikroskopisch kleinen Teil auf sein Konto rechnen. Wesentlich diese Punkte unterscheiden den Filmautor von dem Bühnenschriftsteller, und wer je Bühnen– oder Theaterstücke geschrieben hat, muß für den Film auch in diesem Punkte umlernen. Damit man einen Filmautor auch einmal sieht, übergebe ich Ihnen gern mein Bild.” All translations from the original German are mine unless otherwise noted.

was instrumental in the production of popular silent films, in which fashion was not only part of a spectacular mise–en–scène but also served as the raw material for the narrative.

II.

The fashion theme shaped distinct cinematic conventions, creating a separate sub–genre that became known as Konfektionskomödie, or “fashion farce”, whose rise coincided with the flourishing of Berlin’s fashion industry, Konfektion, from around 1900 to the late 1920s. Fashion farces were among the first longer and commercially successful feature movies that came out between 1911 and 1918, including the first productions that featured Ernst Lubitsch, initially as the lead actor, and later as both an actor and director: Die Firma heiratet (1914, “Marriage in the Company”, dir. Carl Wilhelm), Der Stolz der Firma (1914 “The Pride of the Company,” dir. Carl Wilhelm), Der Blusenkönig (1917 “The Blouse King,” dir. Ernst Lubitsch) and Schuhpalast Pinkus (1916, “Shoe Palace Pinkus,” dir. Ernst Lubitsch). Thomas Elsaesser, Sabine Hake and others have also pointed out that his early films show how connected cinema is to commerce, marketing, consumer goods, and fashion, and how the Konfektion milieu as a world of make–believe “effectively mirrors or parodies cinema itself.” However, these early Konfektionskomödien are also remarkable for combining a focus on gender and class issues with visual pleasure and a genuinely democratic perspective. The female characters are endowed with a degree of erotic and social freedom that hardly existed in real life in any class at the time. The stories often center on a star mannequin, a young woman of lower–class background, who at first appears to be easy prey for the men in the company—from the owner down to the sales clerks, who all plot to become her lover. In fact, she very quickly asserts her own will primarily because she is


971 Georg Seeßlen claims that the utopian moment in Wilhelminian as well as later Weimar comedy is tied to the image of the emancipated, pre–active, and socially mobile woman. See Georg Seeßlen, “Das Unterhaltungskino II: Das Spiel mit der Liebe: Aspekte der deutschen Stummfilmkomödie,” in Die Perfektionierung des Scheins: Das Kino der Weimarer Republik im Kontext der Künste, ed. Harro Segeberg (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000), 99–102. For an extended and incisive discussion of early Weimar popular cinema, especially the importance of visual pleasure, see Christian Rogowski, “From Ernst Lubitsch to Joe May: Challenging Kraucuer’s Demonology with Weimar Popular Film,” in Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective, ed. Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2003), 1–23.
smarter, more ambitious, independent, and liberated than anyone had expected.

Throughout the 1920s and the early 1930s, fashion comedies continued to proliferate. They displayed alluring locations, events, and products associated with the modern lifestyle in the German metropolis—fashion salons, fashion parades, and fashionable clothes—all of which were often unaffordable for the lower- and middle-class audience in real life, but could be indulged with ease on the big screen. The protagonists in these films were also appealing to the mass public: there was always the shrewd male shop assistant who knew how to cater to capricious and vain customers; and there was also the ambitious, smart, indispensable female model (“Konfektionsmädel,” “Probiermamsell,” “Gelbstern,” or “Konfektioneuse”) who hoped to acquire middle-class status, to become famous an actress, a film star, or to open her own designer salon.

The study of Konfektionskomödien, on the writing of which well-known fashion journalists collaborated, demonstrates how fashion and film, together, taught the viewers from the screen how to see, analyze, and experience modern life. Admittedly, both media nourished fantasies of unattainable glamour. But they also provided ideas and practical advice, they taught and inspired. What Jeanne Allen has emphasized in her study of the American film and consumerism of the 1930 and 1940s, applies to this early context of the fashion farces as well: These films offered access—“ownership by viewing”—to an otherwise inaccessible material environment, to a way of dressing, living, consuming that is “promised to the viewer ideologically, but awarded only to the eye.” Sabine Hake, however, has complicated our understanding of the close collaboration between film and fashion in the first three decades of the twentieth century by pointing out that this collaboration is predicated upon two parallel processes that she identifies as “spectacularization of the commodity” and “narrativization of consumption.” Within a modernist Fordist culture that validated mass production and mass consumption as forms of democratization, film transferred these ideas into the sphere of fantasy production, into the world of images and stories. In other words, as Hake claims, because of the role of film and other visual arts in the presentation and promotion of products, consumer culture became both a spectacle and a narrative.

Particularly helpful for the current project is Hake’s statement about the affinity between product advertisement and film within modernity, since this statement is applicable to the relationship between fashion and film as well. One could claim that both media—Weimar cinema and the Berlin Konfek-

tion industry—employed display practices that expanded the horizon of visual experience for the mass audience; they addressed real human needs and desires by way of cultivating an imaginary relationship to the material world; and they used images, text, and sound in order to spin out a variety of individual identification scenarios that were part of larger processes of social, ethnic, gender and national identity formation.\footnote{See Hake, "Das Kino, die Werbung und die Avantgarde," 193–4.}

Given these theoretical premises, fashion farces—as a peculiar mix of spectacle and narrative—appear as a practical guide for an audience of increasingly more mobile and often working women, through the practices of fashion that were relevant, with some modification, in their own everyday lives. After all, the German New Woman, as recent studies have pointed out, was not only a surface projection, a passive or imaginary product, but also a “real” subject: she worked outside of the home, had some leisure time, had some money to spend, and thus wanted to know what the up-to-date fabrics, designs, and haircuts were, how make-up and lipstick were applied, and what clothes were to be worn on what occasions. And it was the films to which the female viewers flocked, that satisfied this need. Thus, Konfektionskomödien functioned, in the words of one contemporary observer, as “a live fashion magazine” (“ein lebendiger Modejournal”), as a compendium of suggestions, tips, and updates disseminated to a mass audience at no extra charge.\footnote{Curt Moreck, Sittengeschichte des Kinos (Dresden: Paul Aretz, 1926), 239–40.} True, they offered fantasies beyond reach, but they were a source of practical, usable advice as well.

Conversely, the films’ visual style itself was influenced by emerging forms of popular live entertainment such as the fashion show (“Modenschau”) and the numerous fashion pageants (“Modekonkurrenzen”). Fashion shows incorporated in the films of various genres fulfilled multiple overlapping functions, some direct and obvious, other more subtle and elusive. First, they provided an occasion for direct product placement, and needless to say, designer houses such as Hermann Gerson or Wolff frequently took advantage of this opportunity (the source of the costumes was listed in the credits). Second, the fashion shows became one of the paradigmatic cinematic moments in which the female body was transformed literally into a spectacle, with the camera closing up on the new, fetishized forms—slender torsos and exposed legs. At the same time, the fashion shows within the films constituted significant breaks in the narrative flow, during which the spectators were offered glimpses at the earlier cinema of attraction preserved fragmentarily in the fabric of Weimar’s popular, story-based cinema. On could say that this disruption associated with the fashion show in early Weimar cinema in some ways reflected (even in the most straightforward and trivial narratives) the experience of modernity, which was in its essence an experience of an environment becoming increasingly more distracting, disjunctive, fragmented.
Two Berlin–based fashion journalists, Ruth Goetz and Ola Alsen, distinguished themselves in scriptwriting and the films they wrote may be considered exemplary of the bonds established in the late 1910s and early 1920s between fashion and film, between journalism and scriptwriting, and, finally, between film viewing and consumerism. I will start out by pointing to one difficulty in writing about fashion farces and their scriptwriters. Die Kleine aus der Konfektion (1924) shares the fate of 90% of Weimar films: all copies of it are lost, and Luxusweibchen (1925) is preserved only in a fragment. My insights into these works have been thus informed by limited screening sessions at the film archives and by secondary textual and visual archival materials such as reviews, advertising material in Illustrierter Film–Kurier, stills, and censorship cards.

Here is some biographical information on the two journalists/screen writers:

Ola Alsen (1880 in Bonn—1956 in Munich) (pseudonym for Henriette Alsberg), daughter of the Jewish merchant Lehmann Alsberg, was one of the best-known and most prolific fashion journalists in the 1920s. The 1930 Reichshandbuch der deutschen Gesellschaft identifies her as author of “elegant prose” [‘elegante Prosa”]. She was fashion editor of Elegante Welt, but wrote regularly also for Sport im Bild, Die Dame, Film–Kurier, and, in the period 1921–1924, for the Der Moden–Spiegel, a weekly supplement to Mosse’s Berliner Tageblatt und Handelszeitung. Alsen was a best-selling author of books of advice on cosmetics, make–up, fashion, manners, and beauty. Her novel Das Paradies der Frau: Berliner Roman (1919) sheds light on the workings of the Berlin garment industry after the First World War and the role of women as designers and entrepreneurs. Her 1930 documentation Die Tochter Lots studies the lives and problems of women in prison. Other novels include: Hier wohnt das Glück (1910), Garten der Leidenschaft (1920), Charlotte Bell (1924), Durch Klippen (1924), Ein Mädchen von heute (1925). Alsen also wrote the screenplays for several films: Treibende Kraft (1921, dir. Zoltan Nagy), Des Lebens und der Liebe Wellen (1921, dir. Lorenz Bätz), Monna Wanna (1922, dir. Richard Eichberg), and Luxusweibchen (1924, dir. Erich Schönfelder). Sister of a prominent lawyer, Dr. Max Alsberg, and married to the editor—in-chief of the 8–Uhr–Abendblatt Hanns Schultze, Alsen was a famous socialite who ran one of the most popular salons in Berlin. In 1933, in the hope that she would be spared from persecution, she converted to Christianity. Her brother, Dr. Max Alsberg, committed suicide. Shortly after, Ola Alsen managed to emigrate to England and later to the United States. After the Second World War she returned to Europe, lived in Munich and Zurich and continued to write on fashion for the Swiss independent daily newspaper Die Tat.976

976 The biographical data is based on the following sources: Reichshandbuch der deutschen Gesellschaft: Handbuch der Persönlichkeiten in Wort und Bild, ed. Robert Volz (Berlin:
Ruth Goetz (1886–date of death unknown) was an active contributor to the Modenotizen in Die Dame from 1923 till 1925, before becoming editor for Der Modenspiegel where she worked in the late 1920s and 1930s. From 1925 to 1928 she signed her articles as “Ruth von Schüching.” Goetz pursued a career as a writer, wrote novels and advice books, and is known as the screenplay author for silent films, starting as early as in 1916. One of her first film scripts, Noemi, die blonde Jüdin (1917, dir. Hubert Moest) was included in a 1917 manual entitled Wie schreibe ich einen Film by Wilhelm Adler as a model manuscript (“vorbildliches Probemanuscript”). Other films include the series Die Herrin der Welt (1919, dir. Joe May), Heiratsannoncen (1925, dir. Fritz Kaufmann), Die Kleine aus der Konfektion (1924, dir. Wolfgang Neff), Wie bleibe ich jung und schön (1926, dir. Wolfgang Neff), and Dirnentragödie (1927, dir. Bruno Rahn). Along with Ola Alsen, Ruth Goetz has been recognized by her contemporaries as both one of the first, most influential fashion journalists in Berlin and one of the most prolific scriptwriters.977

Ruth Goetz substantially adapted Josef Wiener–Brausenberg’s novel Warenhausmädchen as she wrote the film script for Die Kleine aus der Konfektion (The Little Berlin Mannequin) directed by Maurice Turner (pseudonym for Wolfgang Neff). In its essence, a comedy of errors and mix–ups, the film starts as a melodrama: poor Trude Schneider (played by star actress Evi Eva) is thrown out of her home, rejected by her lover (who also turns out to be a swindler), Paul Töpfer (Reinhold Schünzel), and saved by a noble industrialist Heinz Köllner (Karl Beckersachs) just as out of desperation she is about to jump in the cold waters of the river Spree. But before the two—the deprived working–class girl and the rich factory owner—are finally united in a happy marriage, the film traces the successful career of Trude, who takes on a job as a mannequin for distinguished Berlin fashion store (Konfektionshaus). The scenes portraying the everyday life of the mannequin with a mixture of realism and fantasy are characteristic for many of the fashion farces of the period—both literary and filmic. It is precisely in these scenes that the expertise and craftsmanship of the fashion journalist as a scriptwriter became apparent, give rise to scenes of pure spectacle and offer the audience an opportunity for closer observation of cuts, styles and accessories.


977 This biography is relying on the following sources: Lexikon des Films, eds. Dr. Kurt Mühsam and Egon Jacobsohn (Berlin: Verlag der Lichtbildbühne, 1926), 65. See also Jürgen Kasten, “Populäre Wunschträume und spannende Abenteuer.” 21; Hätte ich das Kino! Der Schriftsteller und der Stummfilm, ed. Ludwig Greve et. al. (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1976), 308.
Die Kleine aus der Konfektion is characterized repeatedly by the critics at the time as a credible “milieu study” of Berlin’s fashion scene. It offers glimpses at the life and social status of the typical mannequin in a Konfektionshaus, who parades fashionable dresses for upper class customers. The job is less glamorous than it appears: for a minimal pay, Trude is required to put on and take off dozens of outfits a day, yet she is not allowed to talk to the customers or to collect any commission from the sale of clothes.\textsuperscript{978} At the same time, the setting of substantial parts of the film in a garment store is used as an excuse to stage several fashion shows—pure visual extravaganzas that contributed little to the development of the plot but fulfilled other functions. First, as the costumes for the fashion shows were provided by leading Berlin designer houses (de Beyer, Gerson and others, often mentioned by name in the credits and in the printed film programs), the fashion show within the film served as an effective advertisement for these businesses. Secondly, while in reality the seasonal fashion shows in department stores and designer salons charged a considerably high fee for attendance (as if one is going to the theater), the fashion show within film could be enjoyed without extra pay and thus constituted a significant draw for the mass audience.

Die Kleine aus der Konfektion should be seen as part of a trend established in earlier of fashion farces, most notably Gelbstern (1921, “Mannequin,” dir. Wolfgang Neff) and Die kleine Midinette (1921, “The Little Salesgirl,” dir. Wolfgang Neff) (both written by another prolific female scriptwriter, Jane Bess), as well as continued in later works of the same genre such as Jaap Speyer’s Die drei Mannequins (Die drei Probiermamsells) (1926, “The three Mannequins”), Jennys Bummel durch die Männer (1929, “Jenny and Her Men”) and Moritz macht sein Glück (1930, “Moritz Gets Lucky”). Not unlike other works in the genre, what Die Kleine aus der Konfektion lacks in artistic value it makes up in attractiveness for a large and unpretentious audience. Or as the reviewer for Film–Kurier has summed up its merits: “[This is] a film that has given up artistic ambition; but the director has an instinct for the sort of things that attract big audiences. The spectators will come in droves to se this film and its commercial success is guaranteed.”\textsuperscript{979} In most works of the genre, the story is secondary to the spectacle: “A story that flows by in beautiful, well staged pictures, without causing to much excitement.”\textsuperscript{980} And it is this spectacle of fashionable display that constitutes the significant draw of such


\textsuperscript{979} Review of Die Kleine aus der Konfektion for Film–Kurier, 16 April 1924: “Ein Film, der auf jeglichen künstlerischen Ehrgeiz verzichtet; aber der Regisseur hat den Instinkt für das, womit man das große Publikum packt und so ist denn ein Film entstanden, auf den die Zuschauermassen fliegen und der überall ein todsicheres Geschäft verbürgen dürfte.”

\textsuperscript{980} Review of Gelbstern in Filmmkurier, January 28, 1922: “Eine Handlung, die in hübschen, gut inszenierten Bildern vorübergeleitet, ohne sonderliche Aufregungen hervorzubringen.”
films, especially for the female viewers: “Oh, and the moment in which the mannequins appear for long fashion parades, the women in the audience will get more delight for their eyes that they have paid for.”

This tendency to favor the exhibition at the cost of the story or the artistic sophistication is prevalent in the film *Luxusweibchen* (1925) as well. There was hardly anyone with more expert knowledge of the workings of the fashion world than journalist Ola Alsen to write the script. The title character, Harriet von Randow, played by Lia Eibenschütz, presents a second, less frequent but nonetheless popular type of mannequin in the fashion farces of the 1920s: Harriet von Randow is not a working-class girl who rises to the ranks of high society through her employment in a *Konfektionshaus*, but a spoiled upper-class woman, who is suddenly abandoned by her wealthy husband; in order to support herself in the new situation, she is forced to take on a job as a mannequin in a fashion salon (“Modehaus Rainer”). Not only is she successful in her professional career as a mannequin, but her talents and skills help the owner of the salon overcome a difficult financial situation. Needless to say, the two of them fell in love and after a series of comical complications they marry. As in the other fashion farces, here too, the predictable scenario is subordinated to the spectacle of the fashion show. The reviewer for the *Film-Kurier* wrote:

[this film] becomes a *Baedeker*, so to speak, though elegant life in the city. It brings us to night clubs and to fashion salons with their regular fashion shows […] The story is just a pretext the staging of these various events. […] Overall [this film] is a tasteful picture magazine, in which the audience will browse with delight.

Overall, the message of the film is mixed, as is its aesthetics. On the one hand, it preaches moderation as far as the consumption of luxury items is concerned, because this obsession with appearances has catalyzed both break-ups and bankruptcies within the family. On the other hand, the film suggests that fashion could be a viable field for the professional realization of women, but then uses a narrative twist to offer even more lavish scenes of fashion parades prompting the audience to indulge in fantasies presented from the screen.

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982 A similar type of character, a wealthy woman who due to unusual circumstances in her life starts working as a mannequin and quite a successful one, is found in the film *Der Fürst von Pappenheim* (1926, “The Prince of Pappenheim”, dir. Richard Eichenberg).

983 Review of *Luxusweibchen*, *Film-Kurier*, 21 April 1925: “So wird er [der Film] sozusagen zum Bädeker durch die elegante Welt (womit aber nicht die so bekannte Zeitschrift gemeint ist). Er führt in die Welt der Nachtkloake, in die Modehäuser mit den obligaten Modeschauen […] Die Handlung erfüllt ihren Zweck als Vorwand für diese diversen Veranstaltungen zu dienen […]. Alles in allem ein geschmackvolles Bilderalbum, in dem jedes Publikum gern blättern wird.”
As it addressed the questions of cinematic tradition, visual pleasure, and genre, this brief discussion of film and fashion has hopefully brought us to a better and more nuanced understanding of how both media worked. Closely cooperating with each other, especially by incorporating elaborate scenes of fashion shows within the cinematic narratives, film and fashion engaged the senses, molded the tastes, influenced everyday practices, and, ultimately, determined the experience of modernity for mass audiences. And a key role in this process played the fashion journalists and scriptwriters Ruth Goetz and Ola Alsen whose expertise in all matters of fashion was well respected by their contemporaries.
A Method to this Madness? The Myth of the Mad Silent Star

Mary Desjardins

In her 1980 autobiography, Gloria Swanson describes how it dawned on her, only moments after she lost the Academy Award for Best Actress of 1950 to Judy Holliday, that the public expected her to act like the film character Norma Desmond, whom she played in her Oscar-nominated role: "They expected scenes from me, wild sarcastic tantrums. They wanted Norma Desmond, as if I had hooked up sympathetically, disastrously, with the role by playing it." Her feelings were confirmed in the months and years ahead when most of the film offers she received were versions of that mad silent star from Sunset Blvd. Swanson omitted, or may have forgotten by 1980, that she had an early inkling of the public’s misconception about her, at the time of her continent-wide promotional tour for the film. A study of press reports and interviews that served as accounts and commentary on this tour in the months before the national release of Sunset Blvd suggests that the actress was already struggling to create a discourse to counter what was apparently a growing perception that the real, famous star of silent films—Gloria Swanson—might be like the fictional has-been star of silent films—Norma Desmond—that is, excessively narcissistic and violently delusional.

In the course of Swanson’s promotional tour, several newspaper reporters characterize the silent era in Hollywood as a time and place of crazy excess, as well as express surprise that Swanson is still youthful-looking and even recognized after all so many years off the screen. The St. Louis Post—Dispatch of June 4, 1950 reports that it has been hinted that the “neurotic former star of silent films [in Sunset Boulevard] is a “thinly disguised fiction of [Swanson’s] life,” although Swanson denies it and the “facts of her life bear her out.” Perhaps in response to these rumors, Swanson is quoted the next day, June 5, 1950, in the St. Louis Star—Times to say, “I know public taste.... I wasn’t a gal with blinders on, living nothing but pictures, I had other interests.” To the Des Moines Tribune on June 20, 1950, she phrases this thought more dramatically: “I always defied the laws of Hollywood.... when the descent of my career came, I didn’t go amuck.” Swanson’s dramatic self-defense seems to have been warranted in Des Moines—Paramount had arranged for a special “teens only” screening of Sunset Boulevard in that city in late July 1950. Swanson appeared and talked to the group afterwards. Only July 22, the Des Moines Register published some responses of the adolescents, who ranged from eleven to seventeen years old: “I certainly enjoy seeing old actresses come back,” ‘She certainly does excellent acting for a woman her age,’ ‘She’s cer-

984 Gloria Swanson, Swanson on Swanson (New York: Random House, 1980), 488.
tainly a glamour girl for being as old as she is,’ ‘You don’t think anything about her age, because she can act.’” While all the responses are, at best, backhanded compliments that suggest that older stars were right to be apprehensive about the youth demographic Hollywood was starting to cater to more frequently in this period, one response published by the Des Moines paper spoke to what would become Swanson’s nightmare. One teen, very possibly conflating Norma Desmond and Gloria Swanson, responded simply, “she’s nuts.”

Is this teen’s response—“she’s nuts”—a case of spectatorial conflation of actor and part? If so, does that mean that Swanson was such a good actress that she could make audiences believe that she wasn’t, in fact, acting the part of an insane, has–been star? Most critics of the film both now and in 1950 have agreed that Swanson does a superb acting job. They stop short, however, of suggesting that her performance drew inspiration from a “real” state of insanity. Perhaps the teen’s statement suggested to some that Swanson was chosen to star in the film because some aspects of her career trajectory suggested a resemblance to that of Norma Desmond’s. However, the press–release biography of Swanson sent to newspapers and magazines around the country was strategically crafted by the Paramount promotion department to create a perception quite the reverse of this—it constructs Swanson as an actress who had great success in the past as star of silent features, but who is a woman and professional who lives and succeeds in the present, as an actress, businesswoman, fashion designer, health advocate, mother, and grandmother.985

I use the questions that emerged from the press coverage of Swanson’s promotional tour in 1950 as points of departure for this paper—as evidence that by 1950 the yoking of insanity and silent stardom, especially insanity and female silent stardom, not only had credibility, but to use an expression of the daily Hollywood bible, Variety, the idea positively “had legs!” In this context, what seems most interesting to me is that Swanson is seen to have come from somewhere, namely “old Hollywood,” that is also a sometime, old or past. Commentary on Hollywood and its stars had been attempting since the teens to envision the spatial and temporal destiny of “old” or “tired”—where do they go and will they ever come back? One attempt at this employed in the fan magazines of the teens and twenties is related to what anthropologist Grant McCracken calls the creation of “golden age” myths, narratives in which societies can place and protect cherished ideals without having to challenge them.986 The “golden age” myths constructed by fan magazines is evident in their frequent accounts of stars of the teens, such as Florence Lawrence, Marguerite Clark, and Mary Fuller, retiring to idyllic rural spaces, such as farm-

985 See Paramount Studio press release biography of Gloria Swanson, c. 1950, Gloria Swanson clipping files, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.
houses and family plantations. These spaces are governed by the “virtuousness” of an idealized natural world and its circular temporality. The fan magazines cannot claim that these stars have maintained the popularity or good health they once had, but in this “natural” temporality and spatiality, they escape modernity’s consumption cycles that govern fame and fortune as well as replace the old with the latest novelty. Many early stars are “left” in this place to be re–visited nostalgically by later journalists. However, when Gloria Swanson, whose extra–textual persona is constructed to connote a successful present, re–emerges in a 1950 film playing a character (Desmond) suggesting not only the past, but specifically a pathologized passé, then ambivalent, perhaps even irreconcilable, images of the star circulate simultaneously.

At what point did it become likely that questions about the temporal and spatial location of stars, especially female stars from the silent era, would be posed in relation to madness? This question is too large to be answered here, but a look at three female stars from the silent era—Clara Bow, Mae Murray, and Corinne Griffith—and how myths of their “madness” might have functioned in the moment of their initial stardom and/or in the later circulation of their star personas suggest that Norma Desmond was not invented “whole cloth.” The ways these stars were discussed at a various moments in their biographical trajectories as “mad” also suggests some possible points of entry into how the mythology of the insane or mentally unstable silent star provides an extremely flexible discourse for the industry and the public to discuss aspects of female stardom that inspire both anxiety as well as liberatory fantasies. The persistent trope of the “mad” female silent star is a historiographic problem because it has functioned as part of a popular history that negotiates the cultural and social meanings of stardom as a labor category, commodity form, and model for personal identity across a wide sweep of American film history.

Yet, connections between female stars and insanity also seem to be the legacy of mythologies about femininity that, if not ahistorical or timeless, are nonetheless tiresomely persistent throughout the ages. Feminist theorists and historians have pointed out, in spite of any real, physiological origins of many mental illnesses, insanity has long been linked to women in patriarchal conceptions of femininity. In fact, many feminists have argued that, from ancient theology to psychoanalysis to modern popular cultural forms, the pathological is almost always feminized or connected to definitions of the female subject. Woman, in patriarchy, is the repository of the irrational, the abject of a system supposedly based on rational thought and order. In particular, such

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psychological disorders as hysteria and narcissism are associated with femininity in those psychoanalytic theorizations that delineate the contours of femininity in relation to a particular “closeness” to the maternal body—the female subject, having both desired and identified with the maternal body in the movement between pre-Oedipal and Oedipal stages, is thusly too close to her own body to signify anything other than the “desire to desire” to use Mary Ann Doane’s phrase, resulting in a tendency to “speak” through bodily symptoms as a hysteric or take only her own likeness as a love object, as in narcissism.989

The discourses constructed around the personal and career vicissitudes of Clara Bow in the late 1920s and early 1930s illustrate how powerfully ideas about hysteria functioned as explanatory tools for “non–normative” behavior of female stars of that time, especially in relation to industrial imperatives. Despite her continuing popularity in the transition to sound film production, Clara Bow retired from film in 1930 and then again, permanently, in 1932. Between those years of retirements, her retreat to a Glendale, Calif. sanitarium for “electrical treatments” and then to a desert ranch with husband Rex Bell are described as what saved her from further “nervous collapse,” and it is intimated by some press accounts, even from suicide.990 A series of highly publicized problems starting about a year prior to her first retirement—alleged gambling debts, broken engagements and simultaneous love affairs, charging her private secretary with embezzlement—were usually put forth by the press and fan magazines as the immediate catalysts for her distress. However, the strategies already employed since 1926 to promote Bow’s persona in the typology of the flapper had set the stage for this later period of 1929–32 in which “hysteria” or somatization predominates as a way to represent Bow.

Bow is frequently described as “untamed.” Like a wild animal, whose motivations and effects are known only through bodily force, Bow kissed one of her boyfriends so hard that his jaw was “sore for two days,” claims a caption for a 1926 Photoplay photo of the star. In other accounts, her eyes are “two dance-floors of sparkling liveliness.”991 Her hair, as active as Medusa’s, if not as malicious, is compared more than once by Motion Picture writer Ruth Biery to a riot and/or to an ocean—specifically, a “tempestuous riot” in one instance,992 a “riot of waves as free as the sea” in another.993 She is described, as early as 1926,

989 Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987).
992 Ibid.
993 Ruth Biery, “The Love–Life of Clara Bow,” Motion Picture, November 1928, 44–45. See also, Martha H. Patterson, Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895–1915 (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 19–20, for a discussion of how the sexual desire of the “New Woman” was frequently imaged in relation to water.
before she was crowned the “IT Girl,” as an “overcharged” human “dynamo,”
who reads almost “feverishly.”

After Elinor Glyn declares—at the behest of
Bow’s boss, B.P. Schulberg—that Clara personifies that animal magnetism that
Glyn had once seen in Gloria Swanson and Rex the Wonder Horse, the quality
only nameable as “IT,” she is imagined by one fan magazine writer as not one to
merely lie on Glyn’s infamous tiger–skin rug with a rose in her teeth, but to
voraciously eat both the rose and the rug.

Especially powerful was Adela Rogers St. Johns three part Photoplay article about Bow in 1928—in this piece, the mental illness and death of
Bow’s mother in an asylum are revealed to the public and are woven into a
story of Bow as a young girl, escaping to the movies to compensate for the
horror of her impoverished childhood home. Her mother’s mental illness,
while it functions in the story as a literal obstacle to Bow’s ambitions to be
an actress—her mother tries to stab her to death to prevent her from becoming an actress—it also serves as a spur for Bow’s ambitions for stardom and
can be recuperated as part of the path to success. From late 1929 onwards,
when newspaper and magazine writers start to report of Bow’s excessive living, especially in relation to a succession of broken love affairs, including
a few carried on simultaneously and one with a married man, they often em-
phasize Bow’s familial association with madness; however, now the story is
used to explain her troubles rather than celebrate her overcoming obstacles
to success. In addition to reminders of her mother’s struggle with insanity,
Bow is described in a 1931 Motion Picture magazine article as having an
untrained, love–hungry heart which “dictates the moves and counter–moves
of her life.” She is said to have both “devoured love” and have been “de-
voured by it,” language not only reminiscent of the animalistic description of
earlier discourse, but also words that suggest a loss of control or even of
subjectivity. Bow is said to amoral, rather than immoral. Discourses about
her red hair re–appear, too, and like her mother’s mental illness, suggest a
genetic origin of Bow’s “nerves.” One writer went as far as to argue that
“hair–trigger nerves” are “the natural heritage of all redheads.”

The “naturalization” and inevitability of mental disorder in the star’s bi-
ographical trajectory subjects Bow to intense scrutiny, providing the press the
opportunity to suggest the actress learn self–governance and/or get married
and start a family with a man who truly loves her for who she is—and Bow
is rewarded with more praise when she does, in fact, marry actor Rex Bell

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996 Adela Rogers St. John, “My Life Story, as told by Clara Bow.” The article ran in three parts in Photoplay, February 1928, March 1928, and April 1928.
and start a family. The diagnosis of “nerves” and the subsequent prescriptions for Bow’s return to mental health rob Bow of agency, as such prescriptions did for the hysterics of psychoanalytic case studies, and they also serve as a way to avoid blaming the environment of Hollywood for what might in other contexts be considered immoral behavior. This, of course, was a concern to the industry after the star scandals of the early 1920s, in particular, after the drug overdose of Wallace Reid and the possibility that audiences would see the actor’s addiction to drugs as a result of either the social environment of Hollywood or its overworking of performers.

The press contextualization of Clara Bow’s alleged mental status in the late 1920s and early 1930s suggests the way a popular notion of female “hysteria” functioned at a crucial moment in the history of the Hollywood star system—when film regulation, especially in regards to images of female sexuality, was in transition after the creation of the Hays office list of “do’s and don’ts” in 1927 and its opening up of a Hollywood office in 1928. The Hays office, of course, was created (as the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association) as a public relations and self–regulatory response to star scandals earlier in the decade, and it had many functions, from advising about film content to promoting markets for American films abroad. But the opening of an actual office of this body in Hollywood had a symbolic role in the late 1920s—it created what was at least the illusion of an active self–regulatory body in the same geographic location as the stars, and one fan magazine suggested that the frenetic, frenzied, partying lifestyles of “flapper” stars, such as Bow, Joan Crawford, and Alice White, were changing as a result. In other words, the type of sexually free “flapper” exemplified by Bow in both on– and off–screen performances was questioned for its promotability in the social, cultural, and industrial climate of the moment. In addition, the ability of silent stars to succeed in talking films was continually debated at this time. The persistent debate about the viability of stars’ careers in sound films created a generalized sense of panic for acting labor, favoring the studios which had incurred financial debts in the transition to sound and were looking for ways to cut costs, including actors’ salaries. Rumors circulated about Bow’s “mic[rophone] fright”—a term commonly used by the press at the time to identify the alleged loss of self–confidence of certain silent film actors in the face of shooting with sound—and her alleged


1001 Dorothy Manners, “What’s Happened to the ‘Whoopie Sisters?’”, Motion Picture, January 1929, 55, 115.
fright, rather than the industry’s (partially) manufactured panic, was seen as what caused her crying and collapsing on set.1002

Yet, this is an incomplete and simplistic reading: actually, Bow’s “nervous collapse” or hysteria is frequently described in the way the more socially legitimated male neurasthenia was defined—as a depletion of energy from overwork. And many reports pulled no punches in laying the blame on the studio for this. Bow is said to be a “slave to work” in 19291003 and “Paramount’s little slavey” in 1931;1004 her bosses are said to be “indifferent,” “out to make money” and have profited by her commodification as the “IT Girl” (Hall) rather than given her quality stories.1005 One article has her declaring her hatred of the title “IT Girl”1006, and in another she is quoted describing her life as “work, work, work. Go home at night. Can’t sleep. Think too much....” it’s “one picture after another.”1007 If the hysteric can only speak through the body, Clara Bow found her power of the spoken word when she is quoted that if she were to ask Mr. Schulberg the questions he expects her to answer to reporters, “he’d give me a good crack in the face.” She adds: “people don’t know the studios are factories, that you get up at seven and work hard all day under uncomfortable conditions.” Furthermore, people don’t know it “because the studios don’t want them to know it.”1008

The mainstream press and fan magazines constructed Clara Bow as a hysteric, yet provided a venue for her to signal through the flames and speak to both the constructed nature of her star persona as well as her exploitation as labor, something other hysterics and other “scandalous” stars—or their families, like Mrs. Wallace Reid—were rarely able to do. If the star discourse around Clara Bow suggests that contradictions in the star and studio systems could be exposed, at times even within the very same pieces of promotion or reporting that positioned a star as lacking socially–effective agency as a hysteric, the discourses which contributed to a construction of silent star Mae Murray as “crazy lady” provide a more classic and complicit accounting of woman as pathological. While both hysteria and narcissism are equated with a patriarchal notion of femininity, narcissism is supposedly so much a part of femininity as to be normative, and Freud associates this self–love and self–sufficiency with not only infants, perverts, and women, but criminals, cats, and other beasts of prey. Perhaps this is why discourses constructed around a woman’s narcissism provide more comedy than those about hysteria, even though the narcissistic personality can also inspire pathos.

1004 Herbert Howe, “Fallen Idols,” New Movie, January 1931, 36–37, 118.
1005 Ibid.
Mae Murray made headlines throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with press accounts emphasizing an extravagant lifestyle and grandiose self-presentation; her feud with Erich von Stroheim over his refusal to give her close-ups in *The Merry Widow*; the multiple law suits and breaches of contract over employment, real estate, and unpaid bills; her marriage to a prince of dubious royal lineage who was also a scam artist; and the hiding of her son until he was nearly two-years old. In the 1940s, Murray is again a news focus when she joins the Billy Rose Revue, a live variety show featuring Hollywood old-timers, which the press reports as a pathetic, nostalgic enterprise. In 1947, she writes to gossip columnist Hedda Hopper that she wants to get in touch with German producer Erich Pommer to pitch an idea for a film for which she would write and act the part of Mary Magdalene, because “I feel her so strongly—always have—I can make it even greater than my “Merry Widow.” Thank God for imagination and inspiration.”

Pommer, who eventually connected with Murray for a discussion of her plans, was in the process of taking over directing the restoration of the German film industry from Billy Wilder, who would go on to write and direct *Sunset Blvd*. It is unknown whether Pommer shared with Wilder the anecdote about the narcissistic star’s infatuation with powerful, femme fatalish, biblical characters. Murray was quoted after a screening of *Sunset Blvd*, perhaps in denial of any connection of Desmond to herself, as saying, “None of us floozies was that nuts.”

Murray, who got her start as a dancer in the Ziegfeld Follies, was depicted in promotion from the beginning of her career as being overly concerned with appearance and with maintaining a visual image of the Ziegfeld girl who poses her body as if to offer the feminine form as representation of abstract ideals of beauty. A photo of Murray accompanying a 1924 article in *Photoplay* shows her leaning back on a divan, heavily made-up, head tossed back, the ermine-furred train of her dress swirling around her legs. The caption states that Murray is successful in obtaining “bizarre but picturesque effects.” In the article itself, “Mae Murray—A Study in Contradictions,” author Adela Rogers St. Johns describes a star given to self-dramatization, and she struggles whether to explain this characteristic as originating in Murray’s unconscious desires or from misguided social affectations. A mostly complimentary article in a 1922 issue of *Photoplay* had given one origin for those affectations: Murray’s belief that an actress must “keep away from people.... Be in [the crowd] but not of it.” By 1929, Mae

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1009 1947 Letter to Hedda Hopper by Mae Murray, Hedda Hopper clipping file on Mae Murray, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.
Murray is one of the stars Ruth Waterbury, in a *Photoplay* article entitled “Going Hollywood,” identifies as being a victim of “phantasia Hollywoodii.” Waterbury diagnoses this made-up mental illness in any star who has believed too deeply in her or his star mythology.\(^{1013}\) It has caused Murray to believe she really is a queen, and consequently, she has forgotten her old friends. Forgetting one’s friends, or going what the fan magazines in the 1920s and 1930s called “high hat,” was one of the biggest “crimes” of the stars for fans, a sign that narcissism keeps them from being the regular folks they once were and, thus, keeps them far from the reach of fans who want stars with whom they can identify. Murray’s insistence that there is no distance between her and the image is constructed as a delusional and selfish fantasy of self-sufficiency.

The identification of Murray with excessive narcissism and even exhibitionism persists in press and fan magazine accounts throughout the thirties, forties, and fifties. By 1930, Rogers St. John seems to have decided that no one in the younger generation of stars is as bizarre and startling as Murray was in the teens and twenties.\(^{1014}\) No doubt drawing on her own earlier observations of Murray’s self-dramatization, Rogers St. John was also now writing within the context of the many press stories about Murray between 1924 and 1930, including those about Murray’s fights with MGM and director Erich von Stroheim over her desire for more close-ups in *The Merry Widow*, her lawsuits, which included breach of contract charges (some in which she is the victim, some in which she is the perpetrator), as well as stories about her fights with city hall and neighbors over property (which included, at one point, a warrant for Murray’s arrest for breaking and entering), her marriage to a Georgian “prince” David M’Divani, who was also a scam artist in collaboration with his brother (married to former silent star Pola Negri), the hiding of her son with M’Divani until he was almost two years old, and a fight with low-budget Tiffany studios who broke a contract with her because she kept insisting she only play young girl roles. A Tiffany spokesman pointedly remarked to reporters in March 1930 that her refusal to play any role other than a young girl forced the studio’s hand because, after all, “Miss Murray is not 16.”\(^{1015}\) The mysterious sequestering of her son was described by the press in June 1928 as if it was an episode from a gothic novel, most notably in accounts that stated the son’s only contact without the

\(^{1015}\) My description of press accounts of what was perceived to be Murray’s bizarre, narcissistic behavior comes from newspaper clippings in the Mae Murray clipping file, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California. Many of these clippings are dated, but unsourced.
outside world was either from behind a “walled garden” or from behind a shuttered, upstairs window of the actress’s house.

The press accounts of Murray’s “comeback” attempts in stage revues and nightclubs in the forties and early fifties, while praising her dancing ability and effect on audiences, continued to associate her and her performance contexts with the “gaudiest” episodes in Hollywood history. And the praise is always accompanied by, and therefore complicated by, images of a now fifty–something Murray in a platinum blonde wig, heavy pancake make–up, thick, false eyelashes, and dark lipstick. Hedda Hopper was kinder, not mentioning in her July 24, 1947 *Los Angeles Times* account of Murray’s hopes for a comeback in pictures that the star wished to play Mary Magdalene, only reporting that the actress was in town briefly before returning to Europe to “fill film commitments” and that she “looked as cool as a summer breeze” in her all white outfit (unfortunately, the newspaper did not illustrate the piece with a photo of the actress). Perhaps there was little surprise when Murray’s authorized biography, which came out in 1959, was entitled *The Self–Enchanted*, as press accounts had been suggesting for years that she lived a self–enclosed world of fantasy.

Around the time Murray’s biography was published, a number of female film stars associated with both the silent and sound era of the studio system—including, not only Swanson, but also Mary Astor, Ida Lupino, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis—acted in film or television roles as “has–been” stars who teeter on the edge of sanity. This narrative theme and iconic motif continued through the 1960s and 1970s, fueled by the continuing legacy of *Sunset Blvd*, as well as by the success of the 1962 film *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and by the bizarre, well–publicized 1965 divorce trial of silent film star Corinne Griffith, once known as the “Orchid Lady.”

Griffith, who had retired from film shortly after the coming of sound, had become a wealthy woman based on her shrewd investments, especially in Beverly Hills real estate. Refusing to either divulge her real age or pay alimony to her husband of a few months, she declared on the witness stand of the alimony trial that she was not the real Corinne Griffith, but, rather her younger sister and former stand–in who had been posing as the famed star to hide the fact of Griffith’s death in Mexico thirty years prior. The ex–husband’s lawyer brought in two other former silent stars, Betty Blythe and Claire Windsor, who testified that the woman in court was, in fact, the “real” Griffith. This strange incident, which no press accounts seem to have tied to the plot of one of Griffith’s most famous films, the 1924 production *Black Oxen* (in which the character played by Griffith takes “gland” supplements to keep herself youthful looking and tries to pass herself off to old friends as her younger niece), supposedly inspired Thomas Tryon to write *Fedora*, a

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story in his book *Crowned Heads*, which was adapted into a 1978 film written and directed by Billy Wilder, the writer–director of *Sunset Blvd*.  

Corinne Griffith’s attempt to pass herself off in divorce court as her own stand–in, while as narcissistic in its own way as any of Murray’s self–dramatizations—Griffith literally doubles herself or creates a self in her likeness to do her bidding—was seen by newspapers as a masquerade of a woman trying to hide her age and hold on to her money, rather than that of a woman, like Murray, who believed in her own manufactured image so completely that she was perhaps incapable making a distinction between it and a “real” self. While apparently Griffith had lied about her age before (as did many female stars) and continued to do so after the infamous trial, she had also provided generally honest accounts of her career and life to historians and in her own books on such topics as cooking, antiques, income tax, real estate, her experiences of being married at one time to the owner of the Washington Redskins. Her family memoir, which was adapted into the film *Papa’s Delicate Condition*, was already well known at the time of the trial. 

Probably for those reasons, the press accounts of the trial depict her as eccentric, but do not really question her sanity. Her husband, however, is described in more than one report as breaking down on the stand in “hysterics,” a displacement of “femininized craziness” onto the man, who assumes either the role of “gold digger”/gigolo or of romantic—opposite types, perhaps, but both, nonetheless, feminized positions. The press unwittingly affirms the psychoanalytic notion that the masquerader is a female neurotic who creates a double to protect the self. Perhaps somewhat comparable to the professional woman who masquerades as overly feminine to deflect reprisals for usurpation of the masculine position, Griffith authors a double whose role as “stand–in for glamorous star Corinne Griffith” allows “legal–subject Griffith” to escape the punishment of paying alimony, usually the “burden” of masculine subjects.  

If Clara Bow struggled to wedge a distance between herself as laborer and the persona of the “IT Girl,” Griffith creates, out of her knowledge of industrial film practices around the star (i.e., the use of “stand–ins” to allow stars to escape the time and drudgery of lighting set–ups in shot preparation), her own double to muck up legal rituals and proceedings that rely on the self–sameness of name and subject, and that now threaten to take her earnings away. (We could perhaps add to the “case study” of Griffith the diagnosis of a neurotic whose obsession with accumulating wealth suggests a person fixated at the “anal” stage of development). 

If the personas and values represented by some stars from the silent era were incorporated into “golden age” myths where they could be protected as

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1017 Anthony Slide, in *Silent Players* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), is the only writer of which I am aware to make the connection between *Fedora* and the divorce case of the “doubled” Corinne Griffith. 

cultural ideals, the personas of Bow, Murray, and Griffith became vulnerable in eras or to forces that ambivalently exposed or constructed their psychological instabilities. Murray, who failed to secure long-term stardom's success myth because her narcissism and delusions of grandeur ruined employment offers and fan adulation, is not allowed in the utopian fantasy space. When she is found in the 1960s wandering in St Louis not knowing who she is, and then after being taken back to Los Angeles walks every day up and down Hollywood Blvd in her 1920s fashions, she becomes a figure who time has past by, rather than one out of time. Her 1965 obituaries in the newspapers, unlike the fond obituaries of the same year for Clara Bow, either barely suppress derision or are written in a sensationalist, purple prose reminiscent of the press accounts that describe the madness of Norma Desmond at the end of Sunset Blvd. Corinne Griffith, on the other hand, died in 1979, real estate intact, as one of the wealthiest women in America.
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