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Ordnance, five hats and Constantinople: Benjamin, Gustafsson and Lubitsch

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ABSTRACT

This paper concentrates on identifying intellectual, cinematic and commercial representations of the efficiency movement as embodied in the emergent mechanical-*flâneuse* (the term is an obvious combination of the adjective ‘mechanical’, as a Taylorist/Fordist signifier, with the noun ‘*flâneuse*’, which is a gender inversion of the masculine *flâneur*: the metropolitan wanderer profiled in Benjamin’s re-examination of Baudelaire and 19th century Paris). To articulate these representations of the ‘new’ woman, under the influence of Americanism in post-1918 Europe, this paper focuses on two passages in Benjamin’s *One Way Street*. Benjamin’s passages are then read in juxtaposition to advertisements, the first for hats in the 1921 Paul U. Bergström Department Store Emporium (PUB) Spring Catalogue, Stockholm, Sweden, featuring a young Greta Gustafsson (Greta Garbo), and the second a 1923 advertisement for *Lancia* automobiles, in addition to early films directed by Ernst Lubitsch, such as *The Oyster Princess* (1919). The paper then sets out the trace of Taylorism in images of women from the inter-war period (1918-1939), before concluding on the proximity of these representations to the writings of Benjamin and the career and films of Lubitsch.

Coincidental Berliner: Walter Benjamin – and the efficient data index

Images depicting the topic of ‘scientific management’,¹ from its inception in 1911 (with the publication of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s *Principles of Scientific Management*) appeared regularly in the arts and other cultural product, intellectual publications and American popular media. Similarly, as early as 1913, representations of *Americanism*, the specifically European term referring to American efficiency and its industrial methods and cultural forms, began to manifest themselves on the Continent. Then in 1918, following America’s late involvement in 1917 and influential effect on the First World War’s outcome, interest in America rapidly

expanded. The America model held out promise for European reconstruction. This was particularly true in France, Germany and the new Soviet State, nations that faced a pressing requirement to rebuild after years of social, economic and physical damage. Consequently, the period of European peace between 1918 and 1939 was one in which the popular image of modern industrial America persisted, surviving the economic hardship of Great Depression, and, particularly with President Roosevelt's robust response to its challenges, offering a concrete example of what might be economically and socially possible. For most, Americanism was an articulation of hope, yet it must be recognised that for others Americanism was a bleak dystopic threat. However, taking into account the breadth of both positions, the issue of Americanism as dystopia must be set aside for a later treatment.

On both sides of the Atlantic, cultural manifestations of industrial efficiency took on a variety of forms of expression. Unexceptionally, retail-advertising claims on behalf of a commodity usually emphasised that its efficient manufacture would guarantee efficiency in the product's use. Outside advertising, other cultural references such as literature and cinema were more pointed in their incorporation of descriptions and illustrations of methods employed by efficiency experts. It is of no surprise that an example of the impact of efficiency systems upon the consciousness of a cultural theorist can be detected in Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street*. In one passage Benjamin juggles his eclectic approach to compiling information² with images that conjure up the notational regimes of archetypal systems-engineers of the time:

The card index marks the conquest of three-dimensional writing, and so presents an astonishing counterpoint to the three-dimensionality of script in its original form as rune or knot notation. (And today the book is already, as the present mode of scholarly production demonstrates, an outdated mediation between two different filing systems. For everything that matters is to be found in the card box of the researchers who wrote it, and the scholar studying it assimilates it into his own card index. ("Attested Auditor of Books" in *One-Way Street* 62).³

Benjamin completed the bulk of the manuscript for *One Way Street* several months prior to his visit to Moscow in December 1926 (*Moscow Diary* 85).⁴ Soviet Russia at the time of his visit was a country engrossed with adapting the efficiency movement to its own ends. The allusion to the scientific management systems clearly discernable in Benjamin's passage conforms to F.W. Taylor's, the Gilbreths' and Henry Laurence Gantt's techniques for measuring work efficiency and recording relevant efficiency data by employing collation tools such as cross-referenced index cards, productivity graphs and performance charts. Benjamin signified these methods with his observation on the new circumstance of writing, where 'everything that matters is to be found in the card box of the researchers who wrote it' ("Attested Auditor of Books" in *One-Way Street* 62). The permeation of Taylorism and the efficiency movement in general into the social and cultural form and mental set of the European also attained visibility as themes in the early silent films of the German (later American) director Ernst Lubitsch.

Coincidentally, Ernst Lubitsch and Walter Benjamin were both German and Jewish, both born in 1892 in Berlin. But here their backgrounds diverge and their commonality ends. However, the shadow of each passed across the other, not least in their shared interest and dependency upon cultural production viewed through familiar cosmopolitan origins. It could be argued that in cultural output and range, the interests of Benjamin and Lubitsch fit Georg Simmel's description of the blasé metropolitan intellect at work ("Metropolis and Mental Life" 65-79). The confluence and trace of this intellect is enigmatically exemplified in a short quotation from Benjamin when placed in proximity to a fragment of dialogue from Lubitsch's MGM feature film *Ninotchka* (1939).

Ninotchka, for those unfamiliar with the film's plot, begins with three ineffectual Soviet Trade Envoys (Iranoff, Bulanoff and Kopalski) in Paris to sell the confiscated Crown Jewels of former Grand-Duchess Swana, who happens to be living quite comfortably in the French capital. Aided

by exile White Russian émigrés and her sophisticated Parisian lover, Count Dolga (Leon), Swana stalls the proceedings in the French legal system while Leon distract the Envoys with the attractions of Paris.

Dispatched from Moscow to Paris to look into matters and expedite the sale of the jewels is a fourth and superior Envoy Extraordinary and model of Soviet efficiency, Nina Yakushova (Ninotchka). Shortly after arrival, she encounters the perplexing sight of a display window featuring a woman's hat. After booking into her hotel, she leaves to inspect Paris and by pure coincidence asks Leon for directions. He follows her to the Eiffel Tower and when he invites her to his apartment she accepts. In the apartment, an overheard telephone conversation enlightens Ninotchka to Leon's role in stalling the jewellery sale and their private encounter abruptly ends.

Legal proceedings continue to impede the Soviets while Leon persists in his attentions to Ninotchka, who eventually softens. Ninotchka now has Duchess Swana's jewels and her former lover (Crown Jewels and family jewels). However, in a moment of relaxation, Ninotchka inadvertently allows Swana to recover the Crown jewels and stipulate terms. Consequently, Ninotchka agrees to a quick legal and financial settlement, which necessitates her leaving Leon and returning to Moscow. Leon, no longer interested in Swana, tries in vain to gain permission to enter the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, back in Moscow, the Envoy Extraordinary maintains her friendship with comrades Iranoff, Bulanoff and Kopalski, while also diligently continuing her duty to the State. This leads to her being sent on another mission out of the USSR to save another trade envoy, this time in Constantinople and coincidentally involving the same three, Iranoff, Bulanoff and Kopalski. On arrival, Ninotchka discovers the cause of their indiscretions: Leon. Faced with the choice of allowing him perpetually to corrupt Soviet Foreign Missions or serving her country and ideals more effectively by staying with him, she chooses the latter.

Benjamin, in Moscow, visited his former lover Asja Lacis, taking with him *One-Way Street* and making a gift of the design for the book's dust jacket to her (*Moscow Diary* 12, 12n17, 15, 19, 46, 65, 94n139, 140, 141). The visit allowed him several occasions to read from *One-Way Street*, including its dedication: 'This street is named Asja Lacis Street after her who as an engineer cut it through the author.'⁵ In acknowledging Lacis' intellectual and emotional influence over his output, Benjamin attributes to her, as engineer, the identity of a metaphorical mechanical-*flâneuse*. However, of interest to discussion of *Ninotchka* is another section from the book that refers to Benjamin's earlier 1925 visit to Lacis in Riga:

ORDNANCE

I had arrived in Riga to visit a woman friend. Her house, the town, the language were unfamiliar to me. Nobody was expecting me, no one knew me. For two hours I walked the streets in solitude. Never again have I seen them so. From every gate a flame darted, each cornerstone sprayed sparks, and every street-car came toward me like a fire engine. For she might have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar. But of the two of us I had to be, at any price, the first to see the other. For had she touched me with the match of her eyes, I would have gone up like a magazine ("Ordnance" in *One Way Street* 68-69).

Benjamin was familiar with Surrealism.⁶ With an aptly Surrealist sense of the uncanny, a similarity exists between Benjamin's expectation that Asja Lacis 'might have stepped out of the gateway, around the corner, been sitting in the streetcar' ("Ordnance" 68-69), and the last lines the three Soviet Trade Envoys in Lubitsch's film speak to Ninotchka after her arrival in Constantinople:

1.42.00: KOPALSKI: (with a gleam in his eye): "There's something in Constantinople,
something irresistible"

IRANOFF: "it is in the air, it may come around the corner as you walk down the street"

BULJANOFF: “it may step out of a bazaar, it may wait for you in a corridor, it may hide in the shadow of a minaret”

KOPALSKI: (pointing to the balcony): “Right now it’s on the balcony.”

NINOTCHKA (looks toward the balcony and is dumbfounded as she sees Leon standing there smiling at her)⁷

As an intellectual and journalist, Benjamin addressed topics that covered the visual arts, literature and cinema, with a breadth that was anything but provincial. Lubitsch, as an internationally acclaimed German-American filmmaker, was dependent for his success upon the twentieth century’s defining form of popular or mass culture. Similarly, Benjamin’s interests included the mass media and film, the arcades and department stores of cosmopolitan European centres, their window displays and merchandise. Lubitsch knew this milieu intimately. His father owned a successful tailoring and clothing store in Berlin, and Lubitsch was initially schooled in retailing, his father’s intention being that Lubitsch make his career in the family business. A significant number of Lubitsch’s sophisticated European comedies (as they were labelled in the USA) placed their action in proximity to and often within the same ambient environment of cosmopolitan Europe explored by Benjamin. This was particularly true of Lubitsch’s early talkies, such as *Trouble in Paradise* (1932)⁸ with its predominantly Parisian setting, and *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), the film following *Ninotchka*.

Coincidental Berliner: Ernst Lubitsch and commodities

A further coincidence that brings Benjamin and Lubitsch close to one another was that when Lubitsch turned his back on his father’s business, he did so to join Max Reinhardt’s Berlin Deutsche Theater. Again like passing shadows, Benjamin came into contact with those exposed to the same theatrical influences as Lubitsch experienced under Reinhardt, when he orbited the circle of the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow. Lubitsch and Benjamin also shared a fascination

with advertising, and in their early adulthood addressed in overt terms their Jewish identities. For Benjamin this was realised through his association in 1913 with the Zionist movement (Sontag 8), and for Lubitsch from 1914 to 1917 through his first one reel flickers, based on bumbling provincial German-Jewish characters, played by Lubitsch (Hake 25-36). In these early films, Lubitsch not only represented his Jewishness as a comic foil but also first explored the legacy of his links to consumerism and the spectacle of the commodity. The films carried titles encapsulating their plots: *The Perfect Thirty Six*, 1914, a play on women's desired fitting size; *The Pride of the Firm*, 1914, addressing the theme of the marriage of the anti-hero into the family business-shop; others include *Miss Soapsuds*, 1915, and *Shoe Store Pinkus*, 1916 (25-35).

Greta Gustafsson – Five hats and a *Lancia* droptop

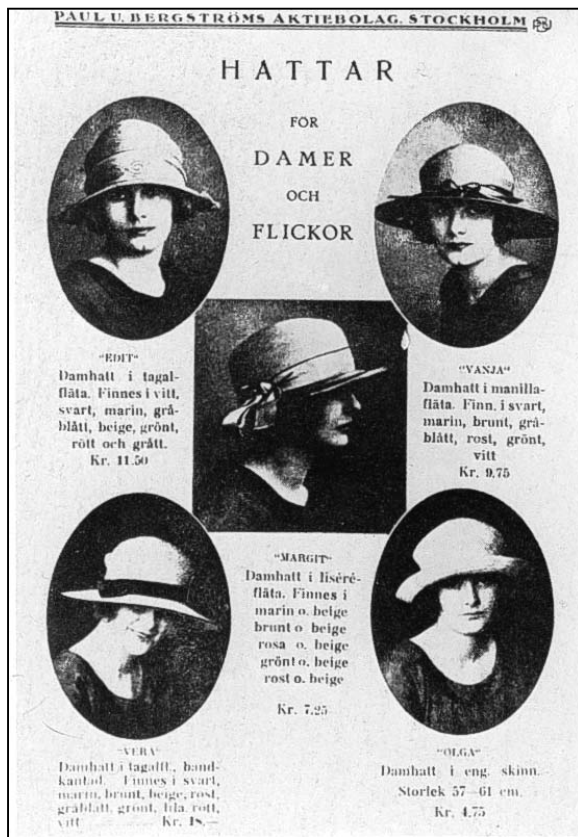
Shortly after Lubitsch began his career in film, a young Swedish department store sales assistant, Greta Gustafsson (Greta Garbo) was posing before both still and movie cameras. This early exposure of Gustafsson, between c.1920 and c.1923, was used to promote millinery and other merchandise, mainly for the Paul U. Bergström department store emporium (PUB) in Stockholm. On at least one occasion Gustafsson posed on behalf of the new four-door model open tourer from *Lancia*, the Italian automobile marque (rpt. in Walker 21).⁹ An analysis of Gustafsson's positioning across each of these two contexts, millinery and the automobile, is worth considering.

In the example that featured Gustafsson and women's millinery from the 1921 PUB Spring catalogue (fig. 1), the photographic spread depicted five different hats in a range of styles. Each was given a woman's first name: Edit, Vanja, Margit, Vera and Olga; and each one was Greta Gustafsson (rpt. in Walker 16).¹⁰ This strategy for promotion reinforces the concept of fluidity of identity, set out by Simmel as a key characteristic of immersion in cosmopolitan existence ("Metropolis and Mental Life" 69-79). The person under the hat was one and the same, Greta

Gustafsson as the consumer-in-general, but through her purchases, the consumer acquires a variety of identities. Following Simmel, the metropolitan consumer is free from the fixed constraints that dominate the life of the small-town person, who is informed by provincial trivialities and prejudices and whose identity in the community is subsequently fixed (69-79): despite, for that matter, available commodities.

These images from Gustafsson's early adult life in Sweden also parade her as *flâneuse*, in the context of the department store and commodities. For instance, when Gustafsson took on the multiple roles required in the PUB Spring catalogue, she also demonstrated the potential choice available to the canny shopper. She sampled the merchandise and trialled its possibilities, examined its qualities then returned it without cost. This publicity task also allowed Gustafsson to project her image with a distinctively purposeful presentness that did her future career path no disservice.¹¹

The second image, the publicity photograph for *Lancia*, was taken two years later in 1923 (fig. 2), after Gustafsson had made the move from shop assistant to drama student.¹² In this composition the manufacturer of the Italian marque and the young Swedish drama student collude to represent the image of the mechanical-*flâneuse* as automobile controller, reinforced by the way Gustafsson behind the steering wheel and her female companion (fellow drama student Vera Schmitterlow) were clothed. The vehicle was depicted as if about to negotiate a left turn, travelling at speed. Both Gustafsson and Schmitterlow wear aviator's leather flying coats; similarly their fashionable leather driver's caps mimic the aviator's cap of the 1920s.¹³ Gustafsson is also wearing driving gloves, evident as she sternly concentrates on (the appearance) of negotiating the turn. Schmitterlow has her left arm extended to give a hand signal. In doing so the passenger signifies her own authority as a co-controller of the machine in the manner of a rally driving team. However, it is Garbo who displays the concentrated stare of the



Greta Gustafsson (Greta Garbo) models 'Hats for Ladies and Girls'. PUB department store spring catalogue 1921. n.di, Swedish Film Institute. (Fig. 1)

Drama students Greta Gustafsson (driving) and Vera Schmitterlow (hand signal) in publicity photograph for Italian automobile manufacturer Lancia. 1923. Ahlén & Akerlunds Förlags. n.di, (Fig. 2)



one ultimately responsible as machine controller.

The *Lancia* photograph links diachronically to earlier images of the mechanical-*flâneuse* at the controls, such as ‘A Perfect Car for the Ladies’ from the 1910 *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Motor Buggy Catalogue* (rpt. in Schroeder Jr. and Sheldon 11-14, 16, 18-19), and the cover by Clarence F. Underwood for the 15 June 1912, *Saturday Evening Post* (rpt. in Cohn 62). The *Lancia* advertisement also resonates with what Simmel referred to as the social configuration of ‘Geist’ (“Metropolis and Mental Life” 77-78). Images depicting the mechanical-*flâneuse* as automobile controller were not uncommon during the 1920s and 1930s. Two of note appearing after the *Lancia* photograph are Tamara Lempicka’s (1898-1980) self-portrait from 1925, capturing the artist clothed in similar fashion, but her gaze is seductively focused on the viewer, a trope familiar to erotic painting (fig. 3); and Marcello Dudovich’s (1878-1962) poster from 1930 advertising G.B. Borsalino (fig. 4), the prestigious hat-making firm (McDowell 56),¹⁴ showing a similar situation to the one in the *Lancia* publicity. But in the latter case and in contrast to Lempicka’s self-representation, the driver of the auto and her companion (of ambiguous gender) stare resolutely ahead as they concentrate on progress forward and the task of controller. These images span several decades and cross the Atlantic, occupying spheres of commerce, popular culture and the fine arts. After 1923, Garbo’s own form of the purposeful stride crossed numerous movie screens and then two continents toward her characterisation of Ninotchka. However, for the moment what remains of fascination is the manner in which these images accumulated, gathering together, in Benjamin’s words, like ‘everything that matters’ and ‘is to be found in the card box of the researchers who wrote it’ (“Attested Auditor of Books” 62).

Ernst Lubitsch: typing pools, jazz, chewing gum, shimmy and May Day

By the mid-1920s Walter Benjamin had formed a professional friendship with the German intellectual Siegfried Kracauer, to whom he wrote from Moscow in anticipation of receiving a



Tamara Lempicka *Auto-portrait*
(*Tamara in the green Bugatti*).
1925. Oil on wood. 35 x 26 cm.
Private collection. (Fig. 3)



Detail: 1930 advertisement by
Marcello Dudovich for the exclusive
Italian hat makers G.B. Borsalino.
n.di. Treviso, Museo Civico
Collection. (Fig. 4)

copy of Kracauer's *Ornament der Masse* (*Moscow Diary* 128-129). Interestingly, Kracauer was one of the first scholars to critique Lubitsch's movie-making (Kracauer *From Caligari to Hitler* 23-24; 48-55; 57-58), and one of the earliest and most influential of German cultural theorists to discuss the impact of Taylorism on mass culture. This occurred in 1927, in the pages of *Ornament der Masse* (rpt. Levin 75-76), with what has become one of the best known of twentieth century metaphors used to illustrate a cultural form.¹⁵ Kracauer achieved this with his equation of the coordinated and rhythmic movements of the English dance troupe *The Tiller Girls* to the 'rational principles' of the Taylor system. In short, it was Kracauer's opinion that:

The hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the *Tiller Girls*. Psycho-technical aptitude tests seek to compute emotional dispositions above and beyond manual abilities. The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system ("The Mass Ornament" rpt. *Art in Theory* 464).

Kracauer's equation of the dancers' legs with the mass movement of men, women and machines ordered along a conveyer belt line of efficient production had a cinematic precursor in Lubitsch's film *The Oyster Princess* (1919). The film's plot revolves around a simple case of mistaken identity motivated in part by the intoxication of stumbling into lavish excess. William Paul describes the storyline as one in which:

The "Princess," daughter of the American millionaire "Oyster King," wants to marry European royalty. After a mix-up in which the princess seems to marry the servant of the impoverished Prince Nuki, a manic fox trot, and a bizarre women's boxing match, the princess finally beds down with the proper prince to the satisfaction of her Oyster King father (336).

Sabine Hake has also pointed out that as a 'story about impoverished Europeans and nouveau-riche Americans' (84) this film met with immediate success among German audiences, whose

current circumstance was one of ‘economic and political crisis’ (84). Lubitsch’s Americanisms and Taylorist asides, although hinted at throughout, were far more explicit in particular character and scenario treatments. For example, the Oyster King’s name is Mr Quaker, an obvious American reference. His ample deportment and assertiveness all sum up a popular contemporary European idea of the successful American industrialist, as does the manner in which in the opening scene of the movie he exercises his wealth and power when attended by a brigade of black manservants. Following this scene, he dictates the day’s business to a uniformly dressed, spaced and seated detachment of secretaries each taking down minutes (fig. 5), some behind typewriters, others using shorthand pads.¹⁶ If the initial appearance of the Oyster King allowed for some confusion of identity with wealthy German burghers of the day, then the appearance of the brigade of secretaries with typewriters clarified the situation. The equation explicitly points toward American management efficiency, just as when twenty years later Ninotchka’s first act on arrival at her Parisian Hotel is to set up her work desk, take out her portable typewriter and commence a report:

0.21.36: NINOTCHKA: (moves behind the desk, removes from her brief case and sets up a portable typewriter then sits behind it as if to start work) “I hope so for your sakes – let us examine the case – what does the lawyer say?”

BULJANOFF: “Which lawyer?”

NINOTCHKA: (incredulously) “You didn’t get legal advice?”

KOPALSKI: “We dealt directly with a representative of the Grand Duchess, I’m sure if you call him he will give you a very clear picture”

NINOTCHKA: (feeding and aligning a sheet of paper into the typewriter) “I will not repeat your mistake, I will have no dealings with the Grand Duchess nor her representative” (Ninotchka begins typing, the envoys strain forward over the desk as if trying to read her type, Ninotchka looks up) “Comrade Buljanoff?”

BULJANOFF: (sheepishly) “Yes comrade?”

NINOTCHKA: “Do you spell Buljanoff with one or two f’s?”

BULJANOFF: (still sheepish) “Two f’s if you please”

The theme of industrial wealth and power also appealed to Lubitsch’s German colleague, Fritz Lang, in his film *Metropolis* (1927), when he required the masses to operate efficiently, on cue, but in a far more pronounced and sinister fashion. Lang’s images of workers reduced to the most basic of mechanical movements warn against over-investment in dispassionate and autocratic Taylorist methods of control (Kracauer. *From Caligari to Hitler* 162-164).¹⁷ Returning to Lubitsch’s *œuvre*, following *The Oyster Princess*, images of efficiency operating on cue and *en masse* were used with irony on at least two later occasions. One of these is the opening shot for his three-minute contribution to *If I Had a Million* (1932), in which the fortunate clerk played by Charles Laughton is seen in the establishing shot, mid-distance, seated behind a desk (fig. 6). His desk is in a row among a number of identical rows of desks and similarly suited workers that fill an entire floor of a modern American office building. In *Ninotchka* Lubitsch similarly used the device of repetition ironically in the May Day Parade sequence (fig. 7). In this scene Ninotchka, having returned to Moscow, is dressed in identical fashion to the other women comrades taking part in the march (their costumes are not dissimilar from the uniforms worn by the secretaries in *The Oyster Princess*). Ninotchka is hardly distinguishable amongst the rhythmic movement of the mass, and hence is rendered but a small part, a cog and a screw of its efficient progress forward.

These scenarios are not alone amongst the witty asides made by Lubitsch at the expense of commerce and industry throughout his career. However, to audiences in 1919 the introduction of *The Oyster Princess* presented an obvious and pointed parody of the principles of scientific management and Henry Ford’s automobile assembly methods. In Sabine Hake’s estimation,

Lubitsch took the opportunity to allude to the ‘new developments in industrial production’ (87) in the scenes that follow the Princess’s preparation for the day at the hands of ‘specialised groups of workers (maids) – distinguished by their uniforms (aprons, frocks, caps)’ (87). These workers operate upon the body of the Princess as if operating in the systematic process of production on the conveyor belt (87). Hake also notes, ‘at one point, for instance, the Princess is carried from the cleaning section to the massage section’ as if just another item of mass production (87). The editing and shot organisation, with its moments of synchronised montage, particularly in the dance scenes featuring rhythmic mass movements of limbs, allude not only to Taylorist industrial practices (in advance of Kracauer), but also to that other emblem of Americanism, jazz. This analysis is reinforced by a 1922 report of Lubitsch at work prior to his embarkation for the New World, and although informed by sensitivities to post-war anti-German sentiment in the USA, the American journalist described the German director’s Americanisms as threefold: ‘And if you don’t think he’s a hundred percent American, just bring on the jazz, the chewing gum, and the shimmy’ (Howe rpt. in Weinberg 239). The journalist’s observation recognises Lubitsch’s early use of stereotypical Americanisms, also coincidentally noting the satirical ambiguity that marked Lubitsch’s work as a director of comedy. His approach to the impact of Taylor and Ford was playful and often subtle in comparison to the melodramatic Fritz Lang in 1927 or the slapstick Charlie Chaplin much later in 1936 with *Modern Times*.

Lubitsch’s indirect approach led to accusations of his being socially and politically unresponsive to the dire forces at work in Germany during the early Weimar years, and on emigrating, ignoring problems in the country of his birth and citizenship until unavoidable in the mid-1930s. The core to these criticisms was that Lubitsch let harsh reality slide past, unlike Georg Grosz and other members of Germany’s equivalent of cultural *engagé*.¹⁸ But this position seems hard to sustain, given the ironic and parodic observations made in *The Oyster Princess*, as well as the antimilitarism of his 1921 film *The Mountain Cat* (Hake 103). Lubitsch as a young director was

anything if not inquisitive when it came to modernist cultural ideas, most evident in his experiments in his early films with production techniques informed by Expressionist and Futurist film and Surrealist fantasy (41-42). However, the difference between Lubitsch and his more politically provocative German contemporaries lies in his personal approach to social critique and a certain central European cultural tradition, more in keeping with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque (91).¹⁹ In short, the less politically overt Lubitsch undermined conventional norms while not necessarily making pronounced statements of tendentious commitment as would, for example, the German Communist Party, the Dadaist Revolutionary Central Council, the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* or the moderate *Novembergruppe*.²⁰

Yet German Dadaists' works shared a sense of chaos comparable with early Lubitsch films such as *The Oyster Princess*. Correspondingly, and despite the German Dadaists' often contradictory and anarchic opinions, the Americanisms in Lubitsch's 1919 film and 1922 journalist's report on his likes are also present in Dadaist Richard Hülsenbeck's 1920 description of *bruitisme* as modern Europe's sound music, when he similarly alludes to automobile traffic and American jazz:

While we are speaking of music, Wagner had shown all the hypocrisy inherent in a pathetic faculty for abstraction – the screeching of a brake, on the other hand, could at least give you a toothache. In modern Europe, the same initiative which in America made ragtime a national music, led to the convulsion of bruitism (Hülsenbeck "En Avant Dada..." *Theories of Modern Art*. 379).

Hülsenbeck's appreciation of modern signifiers, screeching brakes and ragtime jazz complements his understanding of Wagner's musical appeal to German ultra-conservatism and now seems portentous, given Hitler's patronage of Wagner's music.²¹ Similarly, the journalist who noted Lubitsch's love of jazz, chewing gum and the shimmy also noted his dislike of



The Oyster Princess. 1919. Film still: Ernst Lubitsch's uniformly dressed, spaced and seated detachment of secretaries each taking down minutes, some using typewriters. (Fig. 5)



If I Had a Million. 1932. Film still: Ernst Lubitsch's segment in which the fortunate clerk played by Charles Laughton is seen in the establishing shot in mid-distance right seated behind a desk working. (Fig. 6)



Ninotchka. Film still: Ernst Lubitsch's ironic play on repetitive efficiency in the May Day Parade scene following Ninotchka's return to Moscow from Paris and her affair with Leon and the hat. (Fig. 7)

ex-Kaiser Wilhelm (Howe rpt. in Weinberg 238), although, as mentioned earlier, this observation may have been informed by a need to appease still active anti-German sentiment in America, on the eve of Lubitsch's embarkation. There is little doubt that, during the Berlin years, Lubitsch, as a relatively successful German Jew, and in an atmosphere of post-war hardship, would have been intuitively sensitive to ideological alliances that opposed him. Scott Eyman points out that politically motivated civil unrest forced Lubitsch to move neighbourhoods shortly after the release of *The Oyster Princess* (Eyman 67). This makes Lubitsch's covert manner of working with potentially politically charged material understandable. It should not, however, be inferred that Lubitsch's early films were constrained in their use of physical humour. They were not, and for this they can hardly be considered unique. The era of silent movies was bound to continually illustrate the truism that 'actions speak louder than words'. Paradoxically, after 1922, as Lubitsch's career developed in the United States, and later still as he successfully negotiated the transition from silent to sound movie directing in 1927, his methods became increasingly subtle and metaphorically silent. Lubitsch's subtleness when dealing with social and political issues contrasted with the political circumstances of his native Germany, where National Socialism and Hitler were brutal, blunt and increasingly more vocal and threatening. The impact on the mature Lubitsch of events unfolding in Germany during the late 1920s and 1930s, although observed from the distance of Hollywood, must await further investigation.

In 1919, *The Oyster Princess* shows that Lubitsch was a director sensitive to the impact of post-war Americanism on European culture. This sensitivity was complemented by his cosmopolitan sophistication as a Berliner schooled in the progressive theatre of Max Reinhard. The latter remained with Lubitsch while he embraced and profoundly contributed to the new popular medium of cinema during his German and later American career. Lubitsch had the credentials to witness and give filmic form to the mechanical-*flâneuse*, and she appeared early in his work, via the processing of the Princess and fleeting glimpses of women as Taylorised secretaries.

Benjamin's observation on the impact of Taylorism appears oblique, surfacing as it does in the passage on the card index in *One Way Street*. Yet two of his most profound contributions to contemporary thought, the essays entitled "The Author as Producer" (1934) and "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) bear witness to Benjamin working from within the impact of Taylorism so as to propose the shaping of its social dimensions. Unfortunately, Benjamin's tragic death in 1940 leaves only meaningless speculation on where his intellectual inquiries may have travelled had he survived Hitler. Similarly, Lubitsch at various points throughout his career represented in cinematic asides the direct impact of Taylorism on social, commercial and political behaviour. And Lubitsch, like Benjamin, did not survive the 1940s, as despite being far more materially secure in Hollywood, Lubitsch was severely weakened by a worsening heart condition that took his life at age 55 in 1947. Greta Garbo survived the 1940s, but her film career did not and the last film in which she performed was released in 1941.

NOTES

¹ Scientific management was also variously referred to as management efficiency, efficiency method, scientific system, Taylorism, Fordism, ‘best practice’ or simply efficiency.

² Illustrated by the extensive notes he left to his unfinished *Passagenarbeit*. For a study of this incomplete work see Susan Buck-Morss. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*.

³ In *One-Way Street*, Benjamin addressed topics ranging across film, modern warfare, technology, economics and the fragmenting effect of advertising on experience.

⁴ In his *Moscow Diary* (1926-27), Benjamin commented on several occasions upon the impact and preoccupation of the Soviets with the implementation of strategies of scientific management and ‘best method’; for instance: ‘Every week new organizational modifications are introduced and great efforts are made to come up with the best methods’ (85).

⁵ For Benjamin’s diary note of the gift to Asja Lacis of the *One-Way Street* dust jacket and showing her the book’s dedication see *Moscow Diary* (12). For the dedication itself go to *One Way Street* (45).

⁶ Benjamin wrote of Surrealism’s revolution in comparison to that of the communists. See “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia” (1929) in *One-Way Street* (225-239).

⁷ In this instance the stage directions and dialogue are quoted from the original 1939 MGM screenplay, reprinted in Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch. *Ninotchka* (113).

⁸ For an excellent discussion of the central themes of this film see Sabine Hake. “‘Chapter 9: The Object, the Image, the Cinema’ in *Trouble in Paradise*” in *Passion and Deception: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch* (174-199).

⁹ Reproductions of these advertisements featuring the young Greta Gustafsson (Greta Garbo) can be seen in Walker (16-21). The publicity photograph for *Lancia* is reproduced on page 21.

¹⁰ This singular example of early-1920s Swedish print media advertising could well be a candidate for scrutiny, drawing heavily on psychoanalytic film theories of the feminine ‘masquerade’. For example, see Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator” in *Film Theory and Criticism* (758-772); Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade” in *Formations of Fantasy* (35-44). However, to do so would be to lock argument into the limitations of psychoanalysis devolved from the legacy of Freud and Lacan’s talking cure with its subjectively focused idealisations. Central to Freud and Lacan is the subject and its ‘presumed’ motives and those of the subject’s idealised and often singular other social participant, the object (as in the common configuration – the ‘subject of the gaze’ and ‘the object of the gaze’). This leaves analysis totally absorbed in an abstraction that has been sociologically and politically de-contextualised. The sexual abstractions of psychoanalysis usually centre upon equally abstract demands that sexual power be interpreted within the idealised terrains of psychoanalysis. In these idealised sexual terrains, the other social participant is often presumed to balance the relationship with the subject-object under discussion, by virtue of gender opposition as if in an orthodox heterosexual encounter. For example, if the subject-object under discussion is feminine then it is invariably presumed that the gender considerations to be explored are loaded to en/counter the masculine. To a certain degree and more recently, gay and lesbian studies have addressed this limitation. However, psychoanalytic theory’s over-investment in unverifiable personal opinion when dealing with the complex and unknowable possibilities lodged in personal sexuality continue unaffected. On this basis, and while recognising that psychoanalytic theories have their followers and are no doubt valid methods of discussing the interpretations of certain forms of creative endeavour, their usefulness as method in the broader sociological and historic examination of the mechanical-*flâneuse* is considered too limited.

Another dimension to the PUB publicity sheet depicting five different hats and Greta Gustafsson is that it highlights a general quality of commodities well understood by both retailers and potential consumers. This quality is one that the anthropologists Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai (taking an important lead from Georg Simmel’s earlier 1907 sociological investigation of money – *The Philosophy of Money*) refer to as the ‘social life’ of the things – see Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Both Kopytoff and Appadurai point out that objects and goods are involved in transfers of meanings and identities, both in themselves and of others as they are taken up and put aside. Furthermore, Kopytoff and Appadurai, through analysis of the changes occurring as objects or goods move in

and out of the commodity phase (commoditisation), have pointed out that the commodity phase itself is relatively specific and limited compared to the totality of circumstances surrounding the commodity's production, commercial and social exchange and shifts in utility over time. The publicity sheet featuring five different hats, each in turn on the same head, Greta Gustafsson's, is an example of the Swedish retailer encouraging potential customers to see in the commodity an item already beyond their present commoditised status, that is, to imply through advertising that the hats have already entered the social life of the customers' possessions. In this sense, the hat advertisement featuring Greta Gustafsson is not so much an example of a masquerade of a singular individual's multiple identities dictated by an omnipresent, invisible and abstracted other (gender), as a parade of (her) cosmopolitan social potentiality and personal possibility, further facilitated by changing hats. The potential wearer remains not only the same person, but just as importantly, socially and personally in control of her potentialities and possibilities via canny consumer choice – abundantly available in the retailer's parade of merchandise multiplicity.

¹¹ Undoubtedly, photography and the moving pictures' facility to project engaging and powerful images fostered broad interest. Ability before the lens became one of the most potent personal skills to emerge in the age of the mechanical means of image reproduction. This skill was recognised by Adolf Hitler, who attempted to emulate it in 1926 as he imitated the gestures of silent movie screen dramatics in front of a still camera in the Munich studio of professional photographer Heinrich Hoffmann (Adam 90-91). Hitler used the gestures of the silent screen to aestheticize politics and cynically veil truth. The manipulative technique of Fascism that aestheticizes politics was, of course, the famous observation made by Walter Benjamin, who first drew attention to it in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) in *Illuminations* (211-244).

Earlier in the 1920s, Gustafsson acquired the techniques of photoplay as necessary professional knowledge that rapidly made her a leading cinema thespian, well before the advent of audio film. Yet there is a difference between Garbo's immersion in cinema of the 1920s and 1930s and the interest expressed by Fascism in utilising the same devices, and it is one that deserves comment. Conventional European and American politics was and is basically presumed sincere and truthful, the antithesis of Fascism and Hitler's use of film that was anything but sincere. The deceit worked by Fascism was distinct from that of popular narrative cinema: from its inception, cinema was understood as constituting fascinating forms of fabrication. Whatever truths it

contained would, audiences appreciated, require applied, discursive and interpretive excavation post-fact. Garbo was captured sincerely playing with the media; Hitler, on the other hand, cynically manipulated the media. The mechanical-*flâneuse* may parry with social and political circumstance, but not in the dishonest or cynically duplicitous manner of the female Fascist. In comparison, the female Fascist was defined and defined herself in strictly nationalist and racist terms, often metaphorically via notions of naturalness and fecundity, commonly pictured as maternalistic representations. For discussion and reproductions of images depicting the stereotypical female-Fascist see Peter Adam, *The Arts of the Third Reich*.

¹² Biographies that deal with this formative period in Garbo's career include Antoni Gronowicz, *Garbo: Her Story*; Barry Paris, *Garbo: a Biography*; Sven Broman, *Garbo on Garbo*; and Alexander Walker, *Garbo: A Portrait*.

¹³ The preference for this type of clothing when driving is sometimes claimed to have been a legacy of a general romantic fascination with 'ace' aviators of the First World War. But it could equally be the product of logistical requirements when taking a long journey at a time when automobiles were not noted for comfort in a variety of weather conditions.

¹⁴ The G.B. Borsalino hat-making firm was the winner of the Grand Prix at the Paris Exhibition 1900, Brussels 1910, Turin 1911 and Paris 1931 (McDowell 56).

¹⁵ Siegfried Kracauer's influential essay "The Mass Ornament" was first published in the *FrankfurterZeitung*, 9-10 June 1927, and was reprinted in English translation in the *New German Critique*, no. 5, Spring 1975. The translations referred to in this paper come from *The Mass Ornament – Weimar Essays*, (1926-1933). Ed. & trans. Thomas Y. Levin (75-86); and selected sections published in *Art in theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (462-465).

¹⁶ Sabine Hake describes the secretaries in this scene as sitting before Mr. Quaker 'in block formation', but expands on this observation in terms of Lubitsch's 'favourite rhetorical figures: multiplication, exaggeration, and hyperbole' (85).

¹⁷ However, as Kracauer points out, Lang's critique of Taylorism was tempered and even compromised by the plot resolution to the point that Adolf Hitler admired the film (162-164).

¹⁸ This common criticism of Lubitsch's approach to film-making and his early years as a silent film-maker has been repeated most recently by Scott Eyman in his biography on Lubitsch entitled *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (59-60).

¹⁹ Sabine Hake has commented upon the carnivalesque manner in which the plot, general scenario and characterisation of *The Oyster Princess* are constructed, and the point that Bakhtin's carnivalesque concept comfortably applies to 'the cinema and its rituals of passive participation' (91).

²⁰ For examples of these statements, see Richard Hüsenbeck, "First German Dada Manifesto 1919-20" (253-256); Richard Hüsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann, "What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany? 1919" (256); Richard Hüsenbeck, "from *En Avant Dada* 1920" (257-269); Max Pechstein et al., "Novembergruppe: 'Manifesto' 1918 and 'Guidlines' 1919" (262-264); Otto Dix et al., "Novembergruppe Opposition: 'Open Letter to the Novembergruppe' 1921" (264-266); George Grosz et al., "Red Group: 'Manifesto' 1924" (388-389); "ARBKD (Asso) 'Manifesto' and 'Statutes' 1928" (390-393) rpt. in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*.

²¹ This is particularly true when recalling the dark allusion to past events in a quip by film-maker Woody Allen in one of his sophisticated New York comedies (*Manhattan Murder Mystery* 1993) six decades later, when he remarked something to the effect: 'I can't listen to that much Wagner, you know. I start to get the urge to conquer Poland'.

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Film

Die Austernprinzessin (The Oyster Princess) 1919. B/W, silent, 1,144metres, released 25 June 1919. Projektions-AG Union directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Scenario by Hans Kräly. Starring Kurt Richter, Ossi Oswalda, Victor Janson and Harry Liedtke.

If I Had a Million. 1932. B/W, 88 minutes, released 2 December 1932. Paramount Publix, 'The Clerk' sequence written and directed by Ernst Lubitsch – featuring Charles Laughton.

Metropolis. 1926. B/W, silent, 120mins, released 10 January 1927. UFA production directed by Fritz Lang. Scenario by Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou. Starring Alfred Abel, Gustav Fröhlich, Brigitte Helm and Rudolf Klein-Rogge.

Ninotchka. 1939. B/W, 110 minutes, released 6 October 1939. MGM production. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Screenplay by Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder and Walter Reisch. Starring Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas.

Illustrations

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