

Girls, Girls, Girls! Vernacular Flappers and Cinematic Discourses on Modernity

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Images of the female body, widely circulated for the first time to women as well as men, became as uprooted from their reality as the modernist cityscape was from its industrial and commercial functions.¹

In a striking parallel the three main characters of three very successful films made between 1927 and 1936, *It*, *Pandora's Box*, and *Osaka Elegy*, are young, female, and the environment they are set up against does not make life easy for them; eventually, not all of them succeed. This plot together with their outer characteristics—bobbed hair and modern dress—defines them immediately as ‘new women’. These similarities are so remarkable because the three films were produced under very different circumstances. The silent films *It* (1927, Clarence C. Badger and Joseph von Sternberg) and *Pandora's Box* (*Die Büchse der Pandora*, 1929, W. G. Pabst) were shot in Hollywood and Weimar Germany respectively; *Osaka Elegy* (*Naniwa erejī*, Mizoguchi Kenji) was produced as a talkie in Japan in 1936. The American ‘flapper’, the German *neue Frau* (‘new woman’) and the Japanese *moga* (‘modern *gāru*’, ‘modern girl’) were played by actresses that counted among the ultimate ‘new women’ of their times: Clara Bow (1905-1965), Louise Brooks (1906-1985), and Yamada Isuzu (1917-2012). The figure of the new woman calls into mind the increasing urbanisation and economic boom of the 1920s, both developments providing women with opportunities for new and different lifestyles.

However, if the flapper—with her iconographic haircut and style of dress—came from Hollywood and began gracing the streets and screens of Germany and Japan, was she the same as in America? Despite her underlying modern American flavour, Lulu in *Pandora's Box* did not mean the same as *It's* Betty, and Ayako in *Osaka* was faced with—or sprung from—yet another environment. The three modern women signified different things; they stood in dialogues with different social discourses. To explore the interplay between the representation of flapper-like girls on international silver screens and social changes, opportunities and anxieties, it is first necessary to think about how the three women in these films can ‘mean’ something in the first place, the ‘way in which the raw material of women’s bodies and experiences can be variously shaped by the film industry.’² After exploring the positioning of woman and her body as signifiers of cultural meaning, I will look at the role of cinema, as a visual medium, in dealing with this signifier, and, therefore, at the relationships

1 Myra Macdonald, *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*, London, New York: Edward Arnold, 1999, p. 200.

2 Sue Harper, *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*, London, New York: Continuum, 2000, p. 1.

between the signifier, cinema, and social discourse.

I will then relate my findings to the flapper's iconographic image. In the particular timeframe of the 1920s and 1930s, the new woman's body was a site of discourse on which problems of modernisation were staged and discussed. Although the figure of the flapper originated in America and, through various cultural and technological means, came to Germany and Japan, the new women signified 'modernity' in different ways. Merely equalling the flapper to the Japanese *moga* or the Weimar modern woman would do them injustice: we have to decontextualise the concept of female modernity from Hollywood to consider the modern girl's signification in her individual cultural and national context.

The three new women exemplify the manner in which in cinema, as a form of cultural representation, the female body stands for something different than just itself. The same icon standing for different concepts depending on cultural and social context, underlines woman's role of a signifier in cinematic conventions. As the new woman was a concept, not an actual person, she could be nationalised in the course of adapting to modernisation. Vernacular modernism clearly meant different things to different people in different places and cannot just be equalled with 'Westernisation'. Dissanayake provides the connection between the nation, modernity, and film in that, 'the discourses of nationhood and history and the representational space opened up by films are all vitally connected with modernity and interpenetrate each other in complex ways.'³

'Woman' reflected on the silver screen

We are not purely redeeming spirits, not pure flesh, not a veil for the wisdom of the world, not mere mothers, not mere devils... All these predicates speak to something of us, often of us as we are seen by men and as men need us to be.⁴

In *Monuments and Maidens* (1987), Warner points out the myriad ways in which women bear meanings beyond themselves in Western traditions of cultural representation. Standing for symbolic qualities such as 'peace', 'justice', or 'warfare', images of women have become fields of cultural signification. 'Men often appear as themselves, as individuals, but women attest the identity and value of someone or something else ... Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, and they often do not include who she herself is'.⁵ Warner, among others, locates the actual mechanism behind this positioning of the female body as a cultural signifier in woman's place in Western philosophical tradition. The emphasis placed by the logocentric patriarchal discourse on rationality and logic has served to separate woman from her body, so that she might be able to acquire a subject's position in the Symbolic.⁶

3 Wimal Dissanayake, 'Introduction: Nationhood, History, and Cinema: Reflections on the Asian Scene,' in *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. x.

4 Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *French Feminists in Religion: A Reader*, ed. Joy et al., London, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 44.

5 Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1987, p. 331.

6 Hélène Cixous, 'Feminine Writing and Women's Difference: The Laugh of the Medusa', in *French Feminism Reader*, ed. Kelly Oliver, Lanham, MA, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield 2000, p. 265.



Figure 1: 'Mannequins' (Schaufensterpuppen) Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-11948 / CC-BY-SA 3.0.

Woman's body has been taken away and 'colonised' by the Symbolic in order to attach meaning to it. Due to woman's position as the margin, these meanings can shift in the extreme, from the whore to the virgin. Furthermore, "woman" springs to life only when culture decides the apparel through which she is to be seen.⁷ In most cases, this apparel will serve to reinforce the patterns of domination and subordination in the hegemonic, patriarchal discourse. The meaning of woman in cultural representation, therefore, is constructed in accordance with social and power relations, rather than given.

Haskell argues that, 'the conception of woman as idol, art object, icon, and visual entity is, after all, the first principle of the aesthetic of film as a visual medium.'⁸ Since cinema is both constituted by and constituent of social discourse, and 'discourse, whether verbal or visual, fictive or historical or speculative, is never unmediated, never free of interpretation, never innocent,'⁹ the constructed signification of woman lies in the reality of the times the films were made. Although the codes, used by film in the process of mediating external discourses, are 'presented as *natural*, as denotative, because the layering of cultural connotation is masked,'¹⁰ the layers can be decoded in order to understand the series of discourses, both internal and external to the text.

Cinema has, from the beginning, been a defining art form of modernity. Macdonald's statement that 'modernism began the process of detaching image from reality,'¹¹ points to cinema's potential of taking up exactly this abstract feature of modernism. Cinema abstracted life; it 're-presented'. Moreover, in its function as public sphere and democratic mass medium, cinema made available a forum for the debate of discourses concerning social, political, and cultural questions. In this respect, Hake stresses the importance of cinema in the discussion of questions of national culture

7 Macdonald, p. 32.

8 Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, p. 7.

9 Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Introduction', in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman, p. 2.

10 Ann E. Kaplan, *Women and Film*, London, New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 18.

11 Macdonald, pp. 199-200.

and identity.¹²

Kracauer's emphasis on films reflecting a nation's 'mentality', together with the notion of woman and her body as a cultural signifier that takes on connotations that are 'culture-specific, fitting a certain *ideology*, a certain set of values, beliefs, *ways of seeing* [my emphasis]¹³ leads to the final aspect of the (mainstream) cinematic representation of the female body: the functioning of woman as an object for the male gaze. As a consequence of Western cultural convention to express abstract meaning through the female body, woman has traditionally been there 'to look at': she has been objectified for consumption by the gaze of the onlooker. Mulvey has pioneered in explaining how, particularly in cinema, 'voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms'¹⁴ work in order to circumvent the threat posed by the representation of woman. We will see, how in *Pandora's Box* and *Osaka Elegy* prostitution, the commodification of the female body, becomes a central issue. The interplay of those three points—the otherness of woman, cinema as a stage for discussing contemporary questions, and the objectification of the female body for the male gaze—explains the function of the female body to signify, embody, and calm social fears. The objectification of the female protagonists ties all three films together and also becomes obvious in the titles, which do not refer to human beings but to inanimate 'essences' of modernity: the 'American Dream', liberated female sexual energy, and estrangement in the wake of urbanisation and capitalism. These essences were discussed on international silver screens through the body of slender, short-haired modern women.

International new women

The 'It' girl

When the flapper raised her skirts above the knee and rolled her hose below it, the naked flesh of the lower limbs of respectable women was revealed for the first time since the fall of Rome; the connection of the two events was not seen as coincidental.¹⁵



Figure 2: Clara Bow as Betty Lou (*It*, 1927) .

12 Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema*, London, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 5.

13 Kaplan, p. 17.

14 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality, Screen*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 32.

15 Kenneth A. Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper,' *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969) p. 46.

The 'It' girl, Clara Bow, provides us with a springboard in order to investigate how her characteristics were transferred and transformed in Weimar Germany and Japan. In *It*, Bow, one, or probably *the* quintessential flappers of the 'Roaring Twenties', plays Betty, a shop assistant in a modern warehouse. In spite of her modest background, she is determined to marry her boss, who does not even notice her. Due to her clever little plots, he eventually leaves his rich fiancée and marries Betty. This falling of class boundaries is explained by the concept of 'It', 'a quality that throws down all other... it can be physical or of the mind', as explained in the film. Inspired by notorious English author Elinor Glyn's novel *It* (1927), this film made Clara Bow into the 'It girl'.

The image of the flapper, born out of drastic changes in society, was very much in line with modernity. These changes were part of a long-term economic trend, intensified after the First World War, for women to penetrate the workforce outside the family home.¹⁶ Their growing economic independence together with the emergence of women's rights movements led to a sense of unease in patriarchal society. According to Pumphrey, 'the New Freedom was identified from the beginning as a product of modern city life and perceived as a threat to the traditional, patriarchal concept of the family, to the nineteenth century's (middle-class) ideal of the chaste, passive young woman and the self denying wife and mother.'¹⁷ The flapper's supposedly liberal sexuality deeply troubled conservative circles who feared a decline in manners and morals and, eventually, a collapse of Western civilisation; even more so since woman had served to embody the keeping up of morals in the decades before.

However, it was easier to meet the flapper on the cinema screen than in everyday life. She was a symbol that represented and, at the same time, held a promise for change in woman's place. These promises were encapsulated in the specific flapper-look that completely contradicted traditional ideals of femininity. The youthful flapper 'bobbed her hair, concealed her forehead, flattened her chest, hid her waist, dieted away her hips and kept her legs in plain sight.'¹⁸ Her style of dress expressed the dream of liberation: it allowed the type of movement necessary for work, sports, and Charleston dancing. Moreover, this kind of clothing was much cheaper than the established women's wear, and so most women could now afford to be stylish. The flapper's look promised liberation and classlessness. Clara Bow as Betty corresponds to those characteristics: She is a modern working girl, whose physique fits in with the urban modernity of the warehouse. Her past is irrelevant; she lives in the present, and her humble milieu cannot prevent her from reaching for her goal. The classlessness of the flapper-style becomes obvious when she creates a short, attractive evening-outfit out of an old dress because she cannot afford to buy a new one.

It utilises these properties of the flapper-discourse to reflect on modernity and the changes in gender roles in America of the late 1920s. In fact, the very existence of cinema and its popularity and economic viability as media of mass entertainment made 'possible' the emergence of Clara Bow, the actress from a more than humble background. However, contrary to expectations, far from

16 Yellis, p. 51.

17 Martin Pumphrey, 'The Flapper, the Housewife and the Making of Modernity,' *Cultural Studies* 2 (1987) p. 184.

18 Yellis, p. 44.

offering any type of radically alternative lifestyle to women, the film *It* reinstalls the dominant order by confining the flapper in the traditionally rightful place for women: Betty appears to be daring and unconventional but is redeemable by the traditional value of marriage. Although she does cause some upheaval by transgressing class boundaries, this turbulence is justified by her having ‘It’. This quality is defined in the film several times, once through a cameo by Elinor Glyn herself: it is ‘self-confidence and indifference as to whether you are pleasing or not – and something in you that gives the impression that you are not at all cold’. Betty, of course, through her outrageous and hilarious behaviour corresponds to this idea, she has It, and is indifferent to whether her actions conform to social norms. However, even as she throws all class barriers over board by marrying her boss, the very ending shows that she is not as rebellious as expected. It is clear from the outset that, once she has achieved her (respectable) goal of becoming a married woman, she will not cause any irritation again. For Haskell, ‘as the flaming incarnation of the flapper spirit, Clara Bow suggests sensuality and wildness but doesn’t stray any farther from the straight and narrow than the distance of a long cigarette holder or a midnight joy ride.’¹⁹ This re-settlement of the rebellious flapper into a socially acceptable place makes her not so unruly at all and brings a reassuring end to the discourse surrounding the troubling changes in woman’s place that accompanied modernity.

In the following two sections we will see how the iconographic qualities of the flapper came to Germany and Japan to be taken up by social discourse.

Pandora’s Box

...the gods also gave her a container in which they enclosed all the world’s evil. The heedless woman opened the box and all kinds of evil were showered upon mankind.²⁰



Figure 3: Louise Brooks as Lulu (*Pandora’s Box*, 1929) .

19 Haskell, p. 79.

20 Prosecutor’s speech at the Court of Justice where Lulu is tried for the murder of Dr. Schön

Louise Brooks is a case in point for the experience of cinematic border crossings. When she came to Germany in 1929, her American nationality was an issue. In his long search for Lulu, G.W. Pabst found no German actress that embodied the qualities that should be expressed by this role. According to Brooks, ‘Pabst determined that I was his unaffected Lulu with the childish simpleness of vice.’²¹ Pabst’s decision ‘outraged a whole generation of German actresses.’²² Moreover, for the audience, her nationality actively contributed to a discourse on Americanisation and loss of identity,

Leaving the Gloria Palast, as [Pabst] hurried me through a crowd of hostile fans, I heard a girl saying something loud and nasty. In the cab I began pounding his knee, insisting, ‘What did she say? What did she say?’ until he translated: ‘That is the American girl who is playing our German Lulu.’²³

With Brooks as Lulu in *Pandora’s Box (Lulu)*, it was not only the flapper’s characteristics—Lulu’s shining black bob and slender, mobile figure—but the flapper herself who was physically ‘imported’ from America to Germany. However, whereas *It’s* Betty vivaciously follows the American Dream, Lulu stands for more sombre questions in a nation that had lost any sense of the dawning of a new era. *Pandora’s Box* conveys a vast feeling of dislocation and alienation in the face of an overwhelming modernity. Pabst is representative of a style that turned away from the fantastic trend of the postwar years. Against Kracauer’s definition of ‘new objectivity’ (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) as marking ‘a state of paralysis ... The main feature of the new realism is its reluctance to ask questions, to take sides,’²⁴ Sloterdijk counters that ‘Weimar was the ‘most wide-awake epoch of (German) history, a highly reflexive, thoughtful period, full of imagination and extremely articulate, ploughed through with self-irony and self-analysis.’²⁵ This description certainly applies to *Pandora’s Box*. Pabst thoroughly analyses and ironically highlights the effects of unchecked capitalism and decadence on society. The characters are clearly all ‘products of their time:’ ‘In the role of Dr. Schön, ‘the great Fritz Kortner, bulky but urbane ... gives one of the cinema’s most accurate and objective portraits of a capitalist potentate.’²⁶ His son Alwa, standing for the next generation, find neither hope nor hold in society; the cash-nexus destroys him. Schigolch—in the original script Lulu’s first lover, after censorship he *seems to be* her father—represents the *Lumpenproletariat*, prevailing at the cost of everybody else. Jack the Ripper, finally, signifies the effects of capitalism; he is controlled entirely by objects. The knife eventually ‘commands’ him to kill Lulu. As a consequence of capitalism, the ties between the characters are dissolved within ‘a complex succession of camera movements, glance–glance shots and glance–object shots, whose function it is to give a fluid movement to the scene. It

21 Louise Brooks, ‘Pabst and Lulu,’ in *Pandora’s Box (Lulu) : A Film by G.W. Pabst*, ed. Sandra Wake, *Classic Film Scripts*, London: Lorrimer, 1971, p. 7.

22 Kenneth Tynan, ‘The Girl in the Black Helmet,’ *New Yorker*, 1979, p. 45.

23 Tynan., p. 6

24 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton, Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004 [1947], p. 167.

25 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred, London: Verso, 1988, p. 708; quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginings*, London, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 9.

26 Tynan, p. 53.

establishes hierarchies and relations between the characters, only to undo them again.²⁷

Lulu signifies this troubled and shaky modernity. Condensing Wedekind's plays *Erdgeist* (1895) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1904) into a single work, Pabst made his film and his Lulu entirely a product of Weimar Germany at the end of a stabilised period and on the move towards the dissolution of the middle class and the short-lived Weimar democracy. The most important issue played out on the body of Lulu is the class struggle in the declining Republic. After the Revolution of 1918, the Social Democrats, ironically, had liquidated the revolutionary forces but failed to take power from the former moneyed elite that went on ruling. The economic world crisis of 1929 fuelled the discontent with unequal social structures: it 'dissolved the mirage of stabilization, destroyed what was still left of middle-class background and democracy, and completed the general despair by adding mass unemployment.'²⁸ Clearly, the system no longer provided a sense of stability. Liberalism was associated with *laissez-faire* capitalism and, in terms of culture, with Americanism.

Although the film does not openly mention Berlin, we can safely assume the capital as the setting. Petro describes the Berlin of the time as serving 'as the decisive metaphor for modernity, and modernity was almost invariably represented as a woman.'²⁹ Berlin of the late 1920s calls into mind a mixture of decadence and decay, the intermingling worlds of the cabaret and of the Lumpenproletariat. Lulu has connections to both. She is a cabaret dancer, kept by a rich publicist. Her background, as Betty's, is obscure, but even more so as we will never know whether the shady character Schigolch is her father or lover. Mirroring the nation's sense of confusion, Lulu freely transgresses class boundaries. The bewildering modern mobility is also expressed through the flexibility of Lulu's body and the travelling scenes to Paris and London. However, Lulu, unlike Betty, leaves destruction in her wake. Still, there is no taking sides: Is she active or passive? Is she the perpetrator or the victim? Is Pandora the root of all evil or is it the box? Even the film's title leaves us in the dark: Is it about Pandora's box, or is it about Lulu? It very clearly is about the threat of female sexual energy. In this respect, the film takes up *It's* topic of changes in traditional gender roles as a metaphor for modernity.

Lulu is entirely a spectacle for the male gaze, 'her embodiment has recourse only to prescribed roles of male sexual fantasy such as the seductress, the prostitute, the house wife, the revue dancer, or the clown Pierrot.'³⁰ She has no motherly qualities, and the attempt to control her fluidity and sexual energy through marriage ends with the death—or perhaps murder—of her husband, Dr Schön. Although, as Wilke shows, Lulu is also an 'embodied agent who acts precisely through these (mimetically adopted and/or prescribed) roles'³¹ that she takes on as a sexed spectacle, the men who exploit Lulu for money or for sexual pleasure are in fact responsible for the tragedies. When, in an ironic turn of patriarchy, Schön tells Lulu to shoot herself for all the trouble she has caused, it is

27 Tynan, p. 270.

28 Kracauer, p. 10.

29 Patrice Petro, 'Modernity and Mass Culture in Weimar: Contours of a Discourse on Sexuality in Early Theories of Perception and Representation,' *New German Critique*, 40 (1987) p. 115.

30 Sabine Wilke, *Ambiguous Embodiment: Construction and Destruction of Bodies in Modern German Literature and Culture*, Heidelberg: Synchron, 2000, p. 94.

31 Wilke, p. 64.

finally him who dies. However, Lulu is no vamp, as her own sexuality ultimately destroys her once it is articulated in the final scene. This is also the first time where her normally unfocused, not looking, gaze returns the gaze of a man. Before, it had been patriarchy's gaze that fetishised her:

The camera dives and scrutinizes Lulu's impassive features, lingering over the perfect sweep of her face, the pearl-like quality of her skin, the fringe of her lacquered hair, the sharp arch of her eyebrows, and the trembling shadow of her lashes. Or again Pabst just shows, at the edge of the screen, the chin and a fragment of cheek belonging to the man next to her, with whom the audience automatically identifies.³²

This gaze has foremost been Dr Schön's, the embodiment of the patriarch, intensified through his monocle. His death transfers the gaze to other men, as signified by Rodrigo's scowl, by Castipiani seeing her in a newspaper, or the Egyptian scrutinising Lulu's photographs. The first time that Lulu returns the gaze—of Jack the Ripper—and expresses her own sexual desire outside the nexus of money will be her doom. Her final 'liberation' brings on her death. In a much more drastic way than in *It*, the new woman's threatening liberalism is checked.

In addition to this discourse on the new woman with its seemingly standardised ending that reassures traditional, patriarchal structures, the film—and Lulu's body—stand in dialogue with a second discourse on modernity that is very much in line with the destabilised national character of late Weimar Germany. The film seems to reflect on modernity's anonymous power structures, which people can neither influence nor identify. Urbanisation and industrialisation created a mass-society, and the declining middle-class failed in its struggle to identify the motives behind the masses. The subject's dissolution within the masses, where its actions seem to be controlled by external, anonymous structures is also discussed through Lulu's body, or rather through her destruction. When Jack sees the knife lying on the table he 'gasps in horror; no matter what he does, he cannot escape his fate.'³³ The object becomes more powerful than the human will, and Jack kills Lulu. The weakness of man in the face of these power structures is obvious in the weak male characters exploiting Lulu. In London neither Schigolch nor Alwa prevent her from prostituting herself; on the gambling ship she breaks down, crying, 'Everyone...everyone wants my blood...my life...they're sucking it away... horrible! Money, money, money! That's what they're after! Nothing but money!' Materialism destroys human relations.

The two interlocking discourses of Weimar Germany on the sexually 'liberated' new woman and of an increasing sense of alienation and dislocation are projected onto Lulu's strangely active/passive body. The projection of discourses on modernisation onto the body of an American actress does not seem like a coincidence, given the fact that modernisation and 'Americanisation' were perceived as going hand in hand.³⁴ The press sharply criticised the film, also because it was perceived

32 Lotte H. Eisner, 'Pabst and the Miracle of Louise Brooks' in *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 [1952], 295-, p. 308.

33 'Pandora's Box (Lulu)', in *Pandora's Box (Lulu): A Film by G.W. Pabst*, ed. Sandra Wake, Classic Film Scripts, London: Lorrimer, 1971, p. 134.

34 Kracauer maintains that 'allegedly "Americanized" films were in fact true expression of contemporaneous German life' (Kracauer, p. 5).

as scandalous that Pabst gave the most coveted role of the decade to an American Broadway-girl.³⁵ The scope of discussion, although mostly condemning, that emerged around the premiere of *Pandora's Box*³⁶ shows that the film spoke to the audience; it participated in an important discourse.

The problems of an alienating, 'foreign' modernity also provide the frame for *Osaka Elegy*. Again, the female main character serves as an object for projection, rather than signifying herself.

Osaka Elegy: 'an elegy of a place, not a person'³⁷

...few films ask to be examined as products of their time more than does *Naniwa Elegy*.³⁸



Figure 4: Yamada Isuzu as Murai Ayako (*Osaka Elegy*, 1936) .

Working as a switchboard operator in Osaka—itself a metaphor for modernity, capitalism, and urbanisation—the protagonist Ayako is thoroughly modern. Her bobbed hair and Western dress immediately mark her out as a *moga*, a modern girl. The liberated sexuality of a new woman is evident in her being kept as her boss's mistress and later working as a geisha. With these characteristics, the Japanese *moga* was, like her American and German sisters, 'both a fictional and historical emblem of women's liberation in the 1920s and 1930s.'³⁹ Women broke out of the private sphere and increasingly were visible in society, whether in the workplace or in culture. Cinema is emblematic for women's rising presence in public, since it broke with the traditional banning of women from the stage.

The genre of social realist film in the late 1920s and early 1930s gave expression to pressing

35 Ilona Brennicke and Joe Hembus, *Klassiker Des Deutschen Stummfilms: 1910-1930*, Munich: Goldmann Verlag, 1983, p. 154.

36 Gero Gandert, *Der Film der Weimarer Republik: Ein Handbuch der zeitgenössischen Kritik*, Berlin, New York: de Gruyter 1993.

37 Donald Kirihaara, *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, p. 104.

38 Kirihaara., p. 35.

39 Darrell William Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 53.

themes of social discourse. Labelled ‘tendency films’ (*keikō eiga*) for their left-wing outlook towards social issues, their contemporary subgroup focussed on the urban social scene. They scrutinized effects of modernisation on the individual and on society.⁴⁰ *Osaka Elegy*’s social-critical stance is reminiscent of the genre that was all but suppressed in the increasingly authoritarian atmosphere of the mid-1930s. The film depicts the bleakness of modern city life, ‘absence of the patriarch; an elder sister driven to prostitution to educate a male sibling; and male impotence in the face of modern competitive corporate society.’⁴¹ *Osaka Elegy*—like *Pandora’s Box*—expresses feelings of alienation and dissolution on the modern girl’s body. With her physical signifiers of modernity and, in extension, Westernisation—long legs, Western dress, and short bobbed hair—Ayako also signifies the loss of national identity.

In 1928, left-wing intellectuals concluded that, as America was the world’s largest capitalist country, ‘the source of modan (modern) was America and that “Americanization” was taking place in Europe and in Japan... they agreed that the absence of a national tradition in the United States made the superficial, ephemeral quality of modern life possible.’⁴² The fear of foreign influences was central to social discourse in Japan, too, as she moved towards the end of an era of liberalism. Again, this discourse is staged in cinema on the screen of the female body and, again, American Louise Brooks acted as a ‘border crossing’ agent. The *moga* signified the social changes accompanying modernity, and the iconographic ‘black helmet’ became her symbol. According to Iwamoto Kenji, this hairstyle became fashionable throughout the world after Louise Brooks appeared in her first film, *The Street of Forgotten Men* in 1925. Introduced to Japan by Mei Ushida in 1926, it ‘was en vogue in Japan all through early Showa (1926-1945) .’⁴³

The American flapper, the Japanese *moga*, and the German *neue Frau* (new woman) were all iconographic media-constructs⁴⁴ and therefore projection spaces for social discourse. Yet, each carries her specific flavours and connotations; she is mediated through culturally specific discourses. Although the modern girl’s ‘border crossing’ is facilitated by similar cultural and historical developments, she also, importantly, entered Japan through the technical device of the cinema. Cinema, however, as a Western technological invention brought with it a particular—Western—way of seeing and representing the world. In the Japanese context it developed in a dialectic relationship between technical devices and native influences. Standish points out that, ‘[i]n Japan at the turn of the century, discourses of “modernism”, “imperialism” and “nationalism” were introduced through the

40 In terms of Japanese cinema’s two ‘mega-genres’, *jidaigeki* (period dramas) falling under the *keikō eiga* genre utilised a pre-modern setting to discuss contemporary issues.

41 Isolde Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, London: Continuum, 2005, pp. 76-77.

42 ‘Modan seikatsu mandankai’, *Shinchō*, 1 no. 28, 1929, pp.123-47,, 1928; quoted in Silverberg, ‘Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 51, no.1, 1992, p.33.

43 Kenji Iwamoto, *Nihon eiga to modanizumu: 1920-1930*, Tokyo: Riburu Poto, 1991, pp. 96-97.

44 For in-depth discussions of the *modan gāru* as a media-construct see Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness*, 1996, Barbara Hamill Sato, ‘The *Moga* Sensation: Perceptions of the *Modan Gāru* in Japanese Intellectual Circles During the 1920s’, *Gender & History*, 5, no 3, 1993, pp. 363-381; Miriam Silverberg, ‘The Cafe Waitress Serving Modern Japan’, in Stephen Vlastos (ed.) , *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, 1998, pp. 208-225; Miriam Silverberg, ‘The Modern Girl as Militant,’ in Gail Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1991, pp. 239-266.

burgeoning mass media and cinema.⁴⁵ Furthermore, cinema itself became a metaphor for modernity. Its moving pictures, generated by modern technology, conveyed a certain structure of feeling, a sense of what it is to be modern. These experiences, although incorporated into local experiences and thus attaining a ‘local vernacular,’⁴⁶ cannot be separated from the notion of Western influence and the ensuing feeling of a threat to national identity.

Japan in the 1930s was characterised by a struggle between internationalisation and conservative nativist reaction. This struggle, was projected onto the body of the *moga*, who, for Davis, plainly signified ‘the “advances” of Westernization into old Japan.’⁴⁷ The notion of ‘Westernisation’ encompasses many of the problems we already have associated with modernity in America and Germany. Yet, in Japan, modernity could not be divorced from Westernisation; it was something that—whether desirable or not—was associated with having been brought into Japan from the outside. It is not surprising that the otherness of the individualistic, extravagant and *exotically foreign* cultural construct of the *moga* came to signify Japanese modernity. Originating in the relatively liberal periods of Taishō and early Shōwa, by the mid 1930s the *moga* was firmly associated with modern city life. However, as in late Weimar Germany, ‘grimier times settled over the country... Japan had already begun to occupy Manchuria, and the brutal suppression of liberal elements among the Japanese was well under way.’⁴⁸

Osaka Elegy makes obvious that Japanese filmmakers and audience found the *moga*—who features iconographic characteristics of the flapper—suitable to discuss contemporary questions. As with *It* and *Pandora’s Box*, the film’s title tells us that the focus is not on Ayako herself. She becomes the object of the gaze and, as such, communicates meaning beyond her own signification. Controlled by the gaze that reflects the patriarchal system, in the film’s narration her ‘finer characteristics are flattened out into tendencies and types, as she acts out hopeless and exploitive predicaments.’⁴⁹ Just like Betty and Lulu, Ayako has no past; she just tries to cope with the present, acting out of unknown reasons. The camerawork further corroborates the film’s impersonality. The lack of close-up shots of Ayako downplays her character psychology and prevents identification, the audience remains mere observers. The objectification of characters and the importance of the material—money is the catalyst of action and tragedy—tunes in with the period’s discourse about capitalism—mostly considered to be a Western concept transplanted into Japan during the Meiji Restoration—and its social consequences. This dissolution of human relations by modern capitalism and the inadequacy of the patriarchal family system are perceived as results of modernisation/Westernisation. The collapse of the patriarchal family system accounts for feelings of alienation and emasculation. The glamorised actress stood for the eroticised fears of the loss of traditional family life; it is because of Ayako’s ‘illness of delinquency’

45 Standish, p.25.

46 Miriam Bratu Hansen, ‘Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism,’ *Film Quarterly*, 54, no. 1, 2000.

47 Davis, p. 54.

48 Birnbaum, p. 189.

49 Kirihara, p. 38.

that she is repudiated by family and society.

That Mizoguchi's film takes up a social discourse of highly topical interest is emphasised by the fact that it was voted the third best film of 1936.⁵⁰ It is not a criticism of the modern girl or 'a moral tale, warning women that transgression is fatal and can only lead to unhappiness, suffering and loss.'⁵¹ Its use of the *moga* as a signifier for a troubled alienating modernity becomes obvious in the sheer paradox of Ayako's fate. The *moga* as a cultural construct signifies a threat to social structures; she breaks out of the family, the stabilising centre of which she (woman) traditionally is supposed to be. Ayako, however, is forced by her family to transgress social and gender boundaries. The father is too weak to provide for them. Ayako has to prostitute herself in order to return the funds he embezzled and to pay for her brother's graduation. The men around Ayako exploit her for their gratification, but the modern girl bears the brunt. She is denied the chance to marry for love, she is unable to support herself legally, and is eventually rejected by her family. Ironically, her 'delinquency' stems from the traditionally respectable notion of a woman sacrificing herself for the family.

The media construct of the *moga* inverted the ideal of the 'good wife and wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) promoted by the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 in the process of basing the family as the smallest unit of the state on a patriarchal family system. Within this discourse, revived in the process of ideologically underpinning militarist expansionism, woman's role is that of sustaining the nation by bearing and raising children. The *moga*'s lack of maternal qualities corroborates fears of losing the national essence. Yuval-Davis explains the idea of woman's role to carry 'the "essence" of cultures as ways of life to be passed from generation to generation. The construction of "home" is of particular importance here.'⁵² In Osaka Elegy, the home is threatened by the power of money and the dissolution of human relationships. In an ironic turn, it is Ayako—the *moga* as an eroticised threat to family life—who loses her home.

Breaking out of the private sphere of the household, assigned for women, in the increasingly authoritarian atmosphere of the late 1930s she could find no place to go. The film's open ending—Ayako walks out of her home, into the cityscape of nightly Osaka—once more signifies the instability of modern life where the individual vanishes in the masses of the city.

Conclusion

Betty, Lulu, and Ayako signify meaning beyond their actual denotations. The international new girl's iconographic properties can, indeed, be traced back to the Hollywood flapper; yet, we only understand their full significance in their specific temporal and national contexts. Although she always kept an exotic flavour, the new girls as icons transgressed cultural, social, and national boundaries of and in three continents in order to take part in—and to embody—specific national discourses on modernity. In all three films, she stands as a metaphor for associated problems and fears. However, the films reassure rather than disturb. Patriarchy prevails by denying the transgressive woman/other a

50 Kirihara, p. 96.

51 Freda Freiberg, *Women in Mizoguchi Films*, Melbourne: Japanese Studies Centre, 1981, p. 15.

52 Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Gender and Nation,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 4, 1993, p. 43

place of her own, either by pulling her back into the system through marriage, or by eliminating her.

The solutions presented in the German and Japanese productions are more drastic and sombre, resulting in the modern girl's death or expulsion. Despite the vernacularisation of the modern girl as a cultural construct, her inherent 'otherness' and the association of modernity with Americanisation can account for this variance. Social problems in the wake of modernisation in Germany and Japan led to conservative backlashes. These fears and 'solutions' are played out in *Pandora's Box* and *Osaka Elegy* on the modern girls' bodies as reflection spaces for social anxieties.

The problematic modernity is 'invariably represented as a woman.'⁵³ Consequently, the modern girl is destroyed; the threatening otherness is eliminated. Ironically, however, the dissolution of social structures ultimately cannot be attributed to either Lulu or Ayako. It is not the modern girls' sexuality that threatens the system, but this very system's capitalist decadence. Both suffer because of the social situation, and because they are thoroughly exploited by men. Lulu is nothing more than an object of desire and exchange. Her sexuality, making her desirable and threatening at the same time, is not her own, but the projection of patriarchy's desire. Ayako's 'sexual deviance' that makes her a prostitute, is not her own wish. She puts her body in the service of the patriarchal system, which is upheld by her rescuing her father from being imprisoned for embezzlement and enabling her brother to pursue his studies. The men in those stories encourage and enjoy what they prohibit; the ensuing problems are presumably solved by eliminating the modern girls. The moment of their destruction at the hands of patriarchy is when they first articulate their own desire. Lulu looks for love in Jack the Ripper; Ayako steals money in order to marry for love and, consequently, is expelled from society. When Brooks described Lulu as coming to life so that she may die,⁵⁴ she alluded to Lulu's *raison d'être* as an object supposed to solve patriarchy's dilemma through an almost exorcism-like act.

This exorcism of threatening otherness seems to provide an outlook into ensuing socio-political developments, underlining cinema's significance as a cultural node and reflection space of, what in lieu of a better term could be described as *zeitgeist*.⁵⁵ The identification of American cultural influence and capitalism as sources of contemporary problems seems familiar in both the Japanese and the German context: Late Weimar was felt to be passive and penetrated by a foreign—American—culture. The same applies to Japan, where modernity and lingering traces of 'Taishō democracy' came to be associated with the influx of Westernisation. The second step for the hegemonic discourse in Japan and Germany to re-assert its authority, then, will be to get rid of this problematic 'other' femininity—associated with a problematic liberalism—altogether. The antidote here would appear to be the turn towards masculine values and a masculine national project. And, indeed, both countries

53 Petro, p.115.

54 Louise Brooks, 'Pabst and Lulu', in Sandra Wake (ed.), *Pandora's Box (Lulu): A Film by G.W. Pabst*, London: Lorrimer, 1971, 118-119.

55 Kracauer and Eisner's seemingly similar views on Weimar cinema have rightfully been criticised for being 'haunted by the history that came after the films' (Elsaesser, p.4). Nevertheless, rather than a deterministic reconfirmation of knowledge of the past, historic hindsight paired with curiosity about and a sensitive approach towards the context of production and reception, furthers our understanding of the interplay of society and culture and underlines cinema's place in the study of global cultural history.

were well on the way, or already down the road, towards militarist totalitarianism when *Pandora's Box* and *Osaka Elegy* were produced and released.

ガールズ、ガールズ、ガールズ！ どこにでもいるフラッパーと近代についての映画言説

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【キーワード】映画、モダニティ、ジェンダー、社会

1927年から1936年にかけてつくられてヒットした三本の映画——『IT』『パンドラの匣』『浪華悲歌』——において、対照的な3人の主人公たちは若い女性たちで、彼女たちをとりまく世の中は楽なものではなく、実際にことごとくうまくいかない。ポブカットのモダンガールという装いのもとにつくられたプロットが示すように、彼女たちは「新しい女」である。3本の作品がまったく異なる状況において製作されたがゆえに、こうした共通性はきわめて重要となる。サイレント映画『IT』（クラレンス・C・バジェールとジョゼフ・フォン・スタンバーグ、1927年）と『パンドラの匣』（W・G・パーブスト、1929年）はハリウッドとワイマール期のドイツで製作され、『浪華悲歌』（溝口健二、1936年）はトーキー映画として日本で製作された。それぞれの映画でアメリカの「フラッパー」、ドイツの「ノイエ・フラウ（新しい女）」、日本の「モガ」を演じた女優たちはこの当時、極めつけに「新しい女」たちであった。クララ・ボウ（1905-1965）、ルイズ・ブルックス（1906-1985）、そして山田五十鈴（1917-2012）である。新しい女の形象は、1920年代の急速な都市化と経済的な活況とともに記憶され、それらの発展は新しくそれまでとはまったく異なったライフスタイルを女性たちに提供した。三人の女性たちが例示しているのは、文化的表象の形式としての映画において、女性たちの身体はそれ自体が何か異なるものを表現しているということである。西洋の伝統がそうであるように、3本の映画の表象の現象は、それぞれ異なる文化的文脈にもとづいている。その一方で、そこに反映されている固有の主題は、生産と受容にかかわるローカルな文脈を参照して評価されるべきであり、また理解されるべきである。