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The Lubitsch Touch

A Meta-Critical Study, 1923–1947

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the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The idea of the auteur as the sole creator of a film has, from its inception, been of central importance to Film Studies. In this regard, we will resituate these debates in the context of a historically unique case study; that of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

Ernst Lubitsch (1892–1947) bears the distinction of having been a director central to two national cinemas – early German film and classical Hollywood. Yet as an auteur, Lubitsch is a paradox. Arguably, his ‘signature’ was written over his films with such distinction that they soon became associated with the so-called ‘Lubitsch touch.’ However, theoretical debates about authorship have never focused on Lubitsch. What is more, while the ‘Lubitsch touch’ has acquired a central position in the writing on Lubitsch, it has never been questioned, let alone investigated, in terms of how, as a concept, it came about or in what ways it has informed our understanding of this key director.

Here, we will therefore consider the author, rather than as an actual person, as a cultural and period specific construction in order to place the ‘Lubitsch touch’ at the centre of our research study. It is necessary to approach the term through para-textual rather than textual analysis. Thus, this project relies upon a large variety of material comprised of historical newspaper reviews, portraits and interviews, posters, press books and trailers. Focusing on the period 1923 – 1947, we will examine how the ‘touch’ was first introduced and defined, and explore the arguments that have emerged on the basis of critical and commercial negotiation. In taking a historiographical approach, we will place Lubitsch’s films in the context of multiple discourses, such as those of national cinema(s), genre, continental sophistication and self-censorship, collaboration and stardom and the workings of the studio system.

The ‘Lubitsch touch,’ precisely because it is contested territory, offers a site of negotiation for various key discourses and then as now foregrounds what is implicit in the construction of every author. The example of Lubitsch will therefore enable us to examine the extent to which criticism and historiography have contributed to our idea of a text as the work of a single creator, but the implications of this thesis on Lubitsch and his ‘touch’ will reach out not only beyond the Golden Age of Hollywood, but also beyond the field of Film Studies.

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I Introduction

Ernst Lubitsch is a curious case in film history. Born in Berlin in 1892, Lubitsch was an established director in the German film industry before he immigrated to America as early as 1922. He quickly became established in Hollywood despite a climate sceptical of German émigrés following the end of World War I. While it was large-scale historical dramas that had facilitated Lubitsch's move to the United States, he quickly moved towards sophisticated comedies as a genre that became intrinsically linked to his name.

Following the early Hollywood years spent at Warner Brothers, Lubitsch moved to Paramount, as a studio that suited him better in their desire to cultivate a European style. At Paramount, Lubitsch contributed significantly to the development of the musical, which had emerged with the coming of sound, and yet, despite his films found itself floundering within only a few years. In another exceptional event, Lubitsch became Paramount's head of production from 1935 to 1936, the only time a director of his standing and reputation had been given such a senior executive position.

Yet, as an auteur, Ernst Lubitsch is a paradox. An obvious candidate to join this illustrious group of directors, likened to artists of other arts and media, nonetheless Lubitsch has never been at the centre of theoretical debates about authorship. This omission is even more striking when we consider that his signature was written so distinctly over his films that they soon became associated with the so-called 'Lubitsch touch.'

This 'touch' has become established almost as a technical term and in popular film circles it is even more famous than the director behind it. Its emergence proved to be shorthand for Lubitsch's arguably individual and distinctive style. It

was viewed as a signature left on his films that would identify them unmistakably as his; yet, that this signature could indeed be more a burden than a blessing has at times been recognised in critical studies. Nonetheless, the curious nature of the ‘touch’ has never been investigated.

What then is the ‘Lubitsch touch?’ In fact, our research will resist providing an answer to this question. It will instead show that there is not a single ‘Lubitsch touch.’ Quite the opposite, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ has had many definitions depending on time, context and writer. The question I will then begin to answer is: ‘What has the ‘Lubitsch touch’ *been* for the critics, historians, marketing executives or anybody else who has come to employ the term in some way or other?’

The ‘Lubitsch touch’ emerged early in the career shift that had brought Lubitsch to the United States. It was used as least as early as the first film that Lubitsch made in America in 1923. Ever since then, the ‘touch’ has continued to raise questions of authorship in cinema. These debates have continued throughout film history, especially since Film Studies was instituted as a field of academic study. However, Lubitsch has always played, at best, a minor role in these debates. My project then, ultimately historiographical in nature and archaeological in method, looks at how authorship was negotiated in the particular case of Lubitsch from the 1920s through to the 1940s and will take into account how these debates have shaped film discourse ever since.

Rather than negating the existence of the ‘Lubitsch touch,’ I would instead question whether it can be located within Lubitsch’s films. I would then argue that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ can be found in all kinds of para-texts of Lubitsch and his films. Thus, in order to understand what the ‘Lubitsch touch’ has meant at different times and in different contexts we have to approach Lubitsch’s *œuvre* through para-texts rather than the texts themselves. In other words, rather than looking at

Lubitsch's films directly, I will follow the 'touch' through, most importantly, film reviews, interviews, press books, adverts, posters and trailers. While I will pay frequent attention to film-historical perspectives on Lubitsch, the public discourse during Lubitsch's career will be my principal area of study, so constituting this project of original research. My research will primarily be made up of critical discussions of Lubitsch's films which were often played out in the newspapers at the time and also the advertising campaigns that accompanied the films' initial release.

To demonstrate the progression of this discourse, I have concentrated on a selection of core publications to cover different kinds of readership, particularly trade papers aimed at a more specialist readership connected to the film industry, not least exhibitors in the *World's* case. These include *Variety* (*Weekly Variety*: New York, since 1905; *Daily Variety*: Los Angeles, 1933–2013), *Moving Picture World* (1907–1927; it merged with the *Exhibitor's Herald* in 1927 and in 1931 with *Motion Picture News* and was then known as *Motion Picture Herald*; the *Herald* was published until 1972) and *Photoplay* (1911–1980; during the period of examination it merged with another film magazine, *Movie Mirror*, in 1941). The latter represents fan magazines as the first and most famous of its kind. Finally, in order to obtain the sense of a wide and general readership, the *New York Times* (since 1851). What is more, online access to the ProQuest database of historical newspapers accessed at the Library of Congress enabled me to consult more regional newspapers across the United States via full-text search, as have clippings held at the Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles. Thus, while I focused on the four publications mentioned above, particularly poignant quotes from other sources may also appear.

Although these publications have formed the basis of my research, it is important to note that they may appear to be present to a very different extent in the thesis. This is particularly notable for fan magazine *Photoplay*, whose appearances

over the course of this study can at best be described as being similar to a cameo, quite possibly due to its focus on stars. On the other hand, the *New York Times*, particularly with its first regular film critic Mordaunt Hall, has featured at length in this thesis. This constitutes an interesting point of debate, given that Richard Koszarski, in one of the very few critical evaluations of historical film journalism, argues that the *New York Times* “was never very interested in motion pictures and gave them extremely low priority throughout the silent period.”¹

Both early film journalism and film advertising were still developing and gaining in sophistication over the course of Lubitsch’s career. Still, Koszarski notes the existence of press books “filled with suggestions for bizarre ‘exploitation tips’”² for as early as the 1920s. Radio also played a significant role but, given a lack of access, I have focused in my investigation on adverts printed in newspapers and trade papers, press books, posters and, for a short period in the second half of the 1930s, trailers.

Not unlike a biography, my thesis runs along fairly chronological lines. Following a prologue on Lubitsch in Germany, three chapters are spread out across the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. A section in the conclusion will hint at the afterlife of Lubitsch’s ‘touch’ following his death. The first chapter will follow Lubitsch’s move to the United States. Seeing him against the backdrop of the so-called ‘German invasion,’ the chapter will explore the nature of Lubitsch’s assimilation to American production methods which, at least as far as the public was concerned, passed fairly smoothly. From his second American film, *The Marriage Circle* (1924), onwards, Lubitsch became associated with the newly forming sophisticated

¹ Richard Koszarski. *An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994 p. 191 (= History of the American Cinema 3).

² Ibid. p. 39.

comedy. Hence, the ‘Lubitsch touch,’ can be dated back to 1923 at the latest and was parallel to his successful integration in Hollywood.

The chapter on the 1930s will open a grand panorama of contexts in which Lubitsch can be placed: technical innovation and the musical; the representation of sexuality and the issue of censorship; the negotiation of stardom; and studio dominance and individual style. Shortly after the inception of sound, Lubitsch turned to the musical as the only genre dependent on technological innovation, even if it flagged soon afterwards. Lubitsch’s previous association with ‘Continental sophistication’ also picked up pace just as Hollywood censorship was tightening in the hands of Joseph Breen of the Production Code Administration (PCA).

The 1930s then saw one of Lubitsch’s most significant collaborations with an actor – his musicals with Maurice Chevalier. Although Lubitsch always ran the risk of being overshadowed by his stars, closer inspection of the public discourse suggests that this partnership was actually more balanced. Indeed, once this cooperation came to an end, Chevalier soon returned to France, while Lubitsch investigated ways to market his films using his own image.

The last section of this chapter explores studio dominance of the period and how it was taken to impact on the style of directors. This became particularly interesting when Lubitsch, not least known for his ‘touch,’ was promoted to an executive role overseeing other directors.

My final chapter will chronicle the public negotiation of Lubitsch and his films in the 1940s. By splitting critical and promotional discourses, I will show how a marked shift in the ‘sentiment’ of Lubitsch’s early films of the decade may have changed the expectations of critics and directly impacted upon the reception of the films. By 1943 he had then returned to more typical ‘Lubitschian models.’ The concurrent promotional discourse amplified these typical elements to advertise

Lubitsch's productions regardless of the actual content of the film in question. Lubitsch figured increasingly and prominently in these discourses, suggesting the shift to critical disengagement from his style was matched by promotional disengagement from his films. As a result, the 'Lubitsch touch' appeared even less tangible while becoming even more closely associated with Lubitsch himself. Here, the conclusion will show how the Lubitsch brand was immediately rewritten at the moment of his death and has continued to be so ever since. Not intended to be exhaustive, it aims to acknowledge what is immediately beyond the investigation at the heart of this thesis.

Overall, the main period of research is limited to the years 1923 to 1947, exploring the making of Lubitsch's reputation through the American years of his career. In one way, this presents me with a dilemma; in terms of study, the films of Lubitsch's American period have always been in a privileged position in comparison to his German output. Nonetheless, there have been attempts to rectify such an imbalance and we will encounter them along the way. It should be noted that early German film criticism was not aware of a 'Lubitsch touch.' All the same, the early years have been important in my investigation into the American Lubitsch – hence I have supplied a prologue exploring his German period. It has been important, in particular, to address the question of whether the early German film critics had a concept of Lubitsch's authorship and how it would compare to that of the Americans critics in the decades to follow.

At the other end, 1947 marked the year of Lubitsch's death. This point of demarcation is equally problematic, given that I have not aimed to write a biography of the director. If anything, I have sought to produce a biography of his *style* and this style did not die with him. The question of style exists in the texts on a director's

films more than in his (or her) films themselves. A case in point, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is thriving more than ever.

Similarly, to focus merely on the ‘Lubitsch touch’ after 1947 would have been to neglect the formative years when the term was used all through Lubitsch’s American career. Indeed, this research into more than 3000 scans of newspaper material³ vouchsafes for the large variety of contexts in which Lubitsch and the ‘touch’ are discussed. Thus, focusing on the years between 1923 and 1947 has enabled me to trace not only the emergence of the ‘Lubitsch touch,’ but to address how it was during Lubitsch’s lifetime that this term went from a mere turn of phrase to an established term.

Hedda Hopper, alongside Louella Parsons the queen of Hollywood gossip columns and a writer on friendly terms with Lubitsch, writes on the topic of the ‘Lubitsch touch,’

It hasn’t hurt him, that phrase. Analyze it, it’s meaningless. Yet for all these years it’s had the effect of setting Ernst apart in a niche all his own. Other directors have basked briefly in the privileged sunlight of his fame when they, too, have pulled off some bright stroke. ‘Ah, the ‘Lubitsch touch’!’ a reviewer would crack. Presto – more glitter for Lubitsch!⁴

This thesis will show that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is actually not meaning-less. Instead, it is meaning-*full*, indeed full of a variety of meanings. For if the ‘touch’ was a burden for Lubitsch, my study will show that he also explored a myriad of ways of using it to his best advantage in promoting both his films and himself.

³ This count only includes digitised material and does not do justice to the rich resources of press material, as well as PCA files, held at Margaret Herrick Library. More newspapers were accessed in the Motion Picture Reading Room at the Library of Congress or newspapers to which the Media History Digital Library provides open access online, to name only the collections most extensively consulted for this project.

⁴ Hedda Hopper. “That ‘Lubitsch touch!’ Looking at Hollywood with Hedda Hopper.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (25 July 1943), p. C3.

II Review of Literature

The main aim of this thesis is not to investigate what the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is. Instead, its guiding objective is to determine how this director and his films have been contextualised, primarily over the years of Lubitsch’s American or Hollywood career. What is more, how has this resulted in the fact that his own signature style has acquired its own term?

This literature review seeks to place the original research into public material between 1923 and 1947 into a broader conceptual framework. In the first part, I will look at problems of history and the writing of history, posing questions of how the past can be shaped in the form of history. An examination of the auteur and the authorship debate will then take centre stage. This lasting if controversial approach followed the question whether the artistic signature of a director could be distilled from his or her works and thereby helped to pave the way to the perception of film as art. Moreover, this approach has also proved instrumental for the institutionalisation of Film Studies as an academic field of studies.

My project in the later stages of this research will also be concerned with questions of how the authorship of a work of art can be accounted for. Yet it is not least owing to the political impact that the debate has had (and still has) that makes it a point of interest for my case study of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ Before considering the history of references and looking into the origins and uses of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ I will provide an overview of the existing scholarship on Lubitsch.

It is around the concept of the ‘touch’ that all the threads of Lubitsch criticism converge, not least the discourse to which my own project will contribute. It has not been the main focus of my work to identify what the ‘Lubitsch touch’ actually consists of. My aim is rather to investigate the mechanisms that are at work

in the codification of a style as well as the canonisation of a director. Such a (meta-)critical exploration of how the 'touch' has been defined will render these processes of making history explicit, while simultaneously calling them into question.

1 Issues in Historiography

Issues in historiography and meta-criticism form the very basis of this project, entailing that I am less interested in analysing the Lubitsch films themselves. Instead, we will explore how others have analysed them or distilled meanings from them in order to promote them. I have limited this study to the years 1923 to 1947, especially journalistic and advertising discourses form the centrepiece of this study. Still, film historians make regular appearances and it is therefore necessary to look at a more general consideration of the past and the writing of the past and how what we call 'history' can and needs to be distinguished.

For some time, critical thinking about the relationship of the historian and his work has gone hand and hand with the writing of history. However, in the second half of the twentieth century interest in the nature of historical discourse has intensified with particular regard to its relationship to literature or to critical frameworks such as authorship and the role of the historian. Three points of reference stand out: the author, the narrative and the context. Needless to say, although these three references are all closely interrelated, but an attempt to untangle them and consider them separately will prove useful.

Early in his collection of lectures simply entitled *What is History?* E. H. Carr points out that "[t]he historian is necessarily selective."¹ The historian, as the author of the historical narrative that makes up his or her study, is more than a passive and detached mediator of objective facts. In denying him the uninvolved position of a

¹ E. H. Carr. *What is History?* Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1986. p. 6.

mere observer, Carr rejects “[t]he belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian,” going as far as to call this “a preposterous fallacy.”² At the hand of the historian, mere “facts of the past” become “facts of history,”³ as Carr’s memorable example of Caesar crossing the Rubicon shows. Said Italian river had (and has since) been crossed by “millions of other people,”⁴ but only one particular Roman called Julius Caesar is remembered for having done so. It is the significance that historians have ascribed to the event that makes us remember it in the history books. Therefore, what is decisive is not whether or not the event actually took place, but if historians have judged it important enough to be remembered. The event is a thing of the past, the judgement of its importance a matter of history.

Carr’s thesis sheds an interesting light on the issue of the ‘Lubitsch touch,’ if *ex negativo*. There is no such event as the ‘Lubitsch touch’ that took place at a specific place at a specific time. Lubitsch might very well have had a style that is discernible in his films, but it is up to the film historians concerned with his *œuvre* to identify it. The fact that there is not one single definition of the term makes particularly obvious this gap between the past – itself something like an “undiscover’d country,”⁵ or better, one that is constantly being re-discovered – and history as a realm governed by historians. While critics agree that there is a ‘Lubitsch touch,’ the latter is actually of a quite elusive nature; in fact, it is precisely this resistance to definition, in spite of critics’ persistent interest, that makes it so intriguing for a case study such as this one. At the same time, the question of (historical) definition only renders explicit what holds true for all events of history:

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See William Shakespeare. *Hamlet* III.i.77-79 for “the undiscover’d country from whose bourn / No traveller returns.”

how historians treat the ‘Lubitsch touch’ also holds implications for how they treat historical events more generally.

If E. H. Carr asked the question ‘What is History?’ as early as 1961, it was, however, Hayden White who can be credited with bringing the linguistic turn to historical discourse. Exploring the affinities between the writing of history and the telling of stories, White questions traditional historiography in which

the literary aspect of the historical narrative was supposed to inhere solely in certain embellishments that rendered the account vivid and interesting to the reader rather than in the kind of poetic inventiveness presumed to be characteristic of the writer of fictional narratives.⁶

Therefore, in the traditional conception of the writing of history, the nature of the narrative produced by the historian and its epistemic implications came to be accepted without further critical examination. White, on the other hand, reminds us that we must also interrogate the histories produced about the past on a meta-narrative level in order to interrogate their literary ramifications.

For White too there is a difference between the past and history. If Carr located the difference between the two in the necessary selection of facts by the historian, White chooses to focus on the act of storytelling, or of transforming past events into a narrative: “Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult.”⁷ Playing on the two constituents of texts – content and form – in the title of his seminal collection, White examines the content *of* the form. He emphasises that the form of the narrative, or how the narrative is presented stylistically, is an indispensable part of the text that should not be neglected, because it has repercussions for the narrative. It may appear a small

⁶ Hayden White. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. p. x.

⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

detail to consider the texts produced by historians as narratives, but consideration of this issue opens up wider questions of intended meanings and socio-historical context.

For my purposes, we might consider that White appears to put the metaphorical cart before the horse. However, by way of analysing non-narrative forms of historical writing – annals, chronicle and history proper – he shows that “events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence.”⁸ The acceptance that the histories produced by historians are, in essence, narratives is then closely related to the task of ‘producing meaning.’ Thus, in order to make sense of the meaning they are producing, historical texts and documents of any kind need to be inspected for their position within their socio-cultural context, their intended project and epistemic implications. This task is crucial because, as White points out elsewhere, “the narrative is a mode of representation [...] so *natural* to human consciousness.”⁹ The uncritical treatment of historical documents is based on my human acceptance of them as objective and true. Yet historical documents need to be examined for the design framing the manner in which they were written and then considered in their cultural and social context.

This now points my discussion in the direction of the critique of ideology. White is today only one voice amongst many others to insist that, “narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form.”¹⁰ Instead, its production has ideological implications and it is, crucially, no coincidence that White in the same paragraph

⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

⁹ Ibid. p. 26 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ Ibid. p. ix.

also mentions “the very stuff of a *mythical* view of reality,”¹¹ which in the Barthesian sense,¹² is always very close to the term ‘ideology.’

Carr too was concerned with the issue of the context in which the historian writes his history. Offering the intriguing example of religion in the Middle Ages, he questions whether the deeply rooted sense of religion is actually to be taken at face value. Alternatively, it could also be that it is merely presented to us nowadays as such, since the writing of history was then to an almost exclusive extent in the hands of monks who were deeply concerned with and “professionally occupied in the theory and practice of religion.”¹³ Again, it is the historian’s selection that is inextricably linked to the form that his (or her) narrative takes.

Nonetheless, what this example also emphasises is how both historian and his (or her) narrative depends on their position within society. As with Carr, White comments on the issue of selection, yet with a negative perspective. For “[e]very narrative, however seemingly ‘full,’ is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out.”¹⁴ This point, he goes on, “permits us to ask what kind of notion of reality authorizes construction of a narrative account of reality.”¹⁵ All the same, what seems to be a vast distance between the Middle Ages and the early days of filmmaking turns out to be only a small step for a project on the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ How the context in which medieval monks were writing influenced the narrative that they produced is, when adjusted to this context, precisely the question I will put to the documents, academic or otherwise, that reference and make use of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

¹¹ Ibid. (emphasis mine).

¹² See Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983. This connection is further emphasised by the fact that it is a Barthes quote that is placed in front of the whole collection.

¹³ Carr. *What is History?* p. 8.

¹⁴ White. *The Content of the Form*. p. 10.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

Keith Jenkins rejects the “distinction between ‘history as such’ and ‘ideological history,’” which implies that there can be certain histories (generally the dominant ones) that are not at ideological. In a similar vein to Carr and White, he argues in his short polemic *Re-thinking History*, that “meanings given to histories of all descriptions” are not “intrinsic to the past [...] but meanings given to the past from outside(rs)”¹⁶ – that is, outsiders born later. Jenkins concludes that “[t]he fact that history *per se* is an ideological construct means that it is constantly being re-worded and re-ordered by all those who are variously affected by power relationships.”¹⁷ The past and the history that are produced by the writing on the past are then not the same, even if the academic profession of the historian makes us believe in this shared identity without question. For us, then the ‘Lubitsch touch’ renders this issue explicit from almost a unique angle. While I am not negating the existence of the ‘touch,’ it is only the writing on it that has emphasised its significance. Therefore, it is the cultural circumstances of the writing on the ‘touch’ rather than the ‘touch’ itself that call for primary investigation.

What will also be significant to my project is the observation that the writing of history is basically but inextricably linked to the context in which it is produced. In this case, this means that the issue is at least as much about the present of the production of a text as it is about the period the text covers. Keith Jenkins’ comment here that “through hindsight, we in a way know *more* about the past than the people who lived in it”¹⁸ needs to be treated with caution, insofar as we can claim that we simply know *differently* about the past. Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that “the past that we ‘know’ is always contingent upon our own view, our own ‘present.’”¹⁹ To bear this point in mind is crucial when it comes to the writing of history and the

¹⁶ Keith Jenkins. *Re-thinking History*. London: Routledge, 2005. p. 21.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 15 (emphasis mine).

¹⁹ Ibid.

examination of historical, ‘primary’ documents such as censorship files or contemporary reviews. More importantly, in terms of the academic writing on Lubitsch and his ‘touch,’ such a consideration also applies to the other ‘primary’ documents considered over the course of this project and needs to be emphasised precisely because it is so easily forgotten.

Hence, for this research project, material indicative of what can be deemed promotional-industrial discourse as well as critical-journalistic and academic discourses are to be considered as primary documents. The same questions of intention and meaning, as well as scope and implication, lie at their door. These interrogations are, of course, different for each ‘type’ of these text bodies, but they can be considered from the same points of view. At the same time, we must not forget that if the questions we bring to the body of texts examined are different we remain nonetheless in a similar position to the film historians who have tried to make sense of their own projects.

3 *Film Authorship and the Auteur Debate*

Following these considerations of history writing, which in many cases have not been primarily nor specifically developed with Film Studies in mind, authorship will be central to the next part of this literature review. The issue of the author has accompanied Literary Studies for centuries, but in Film Studies the authorship debate has also acquired a particular, equivalent significance.

Its significance for this project is twofold. The very fact that my project is at its very heart concerned with one film director already calls for a conscious engagement with issues of authorship, as well as questions of how a specific signature style has been or can be accounted for. In the main body my thesis, I will

therefore look at other contexts in which Ernst Lubitsch has been or can be considered.

The authorship debate holds a particular place in the history not only of filmmaking, but in the history of Film Studies itself. The liveliness and, on occasion, obduracy with which the debate has been led has called for necessary consideration of a selection of issues. I will thus focus on how authorship in film has been negotiated, specifically with regard to the case of Alfred Hitchcock. The professed ‘master of suspense’ not only offers a prime example of writing about film but also for writing about authorship in film. What is more, in some significant ways, Hitchcock mirrors Lubitsch’s life, career and, most importantly, aftermath and therefore, unsurprisingly, remains a strong point of reference for studies on Lubitsch.

Auteurism, ironically, reached its peak when Roland Barthes with his memorable metaphor of the ‘Death of the Author’ – and shortly afterwards Michel Foucault’s re-conceptualisation of the author as “author-function”²⁰ – spearheaded the move away from the author within the Humanities. Nevertheless, authorship debates have proved pivotal for both the perception of film as art and Film Studies as an academic field of study. Given the influence and debates spawned by this approach in the field of Film Studies alone, a summary of the issue of authorship would ideally incorporate a number of texts and sub-debates, but the scope of this is beyond the current literature review. Therefore, I would like instead to concentrate on particular questions and issues within the field by focusing on the political aspect implicit in the theoretical texts of the debate – here, the early auteurs in particular wrote with a clear agenda – as well as the other aspects of filmmaking besides

²⁰ Michel Foucault. “What is an Author?” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Donald F. Bouchard, eds. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977. p. 125.

directing. It has indeed been suggested that other technical roles and responsibilities need to be taken into account when addressing the issue of authorship in cinema.

Initially, as Edward Buscombe writes in his article on the different “Ideas of Authorship,” auteurism was “polemical in intent [and] meant to define [...] a course of action”²¹ in order to establish cinema as an art, and an “art of personal expression.”²² As such, this approach has, despite having been “appropriated, attacked and reformulated,”²³ become vital for the codification of Film Studies, which is why it remains an approach to be taught as well as studied.

In the historical context in which cinema had still to fight for its appreciation as providing a serious contribution to culture, if not art, the auteurist approach proved a handy weapon. This accounts for the tone in which the debate was occasionally led and in which its early key texts were written, be they François Truffaut’s “Une certaine tendance du cinema français” (“A Certain Tendency in French Cinema”) or the translation from the French *politique des auteurs* to the Auteur Theory introduced to the United States by Andrew Sarris.

Sarris, particularly with his monograph on “Directors and Directions,” added yet another twist to the polemical undercurrent of this debate. Writing against those who regarded “Hollywood directors [...] as artisans rather than artists,”²⁴ his intention was not (only) to elevate film to the status of art, but to prove the superiority of American cinema over that of other countries. The issue of canonisation was more (possibly Truffaut) or less (certainly Sarris) covert and implicit in the writings of both. This angle, however, is intriguing with regards to Lubitsch, who made it into Sarris’ ‘pantheon’ in 1968, but, in more recent popular

²¹ Edward Buscombe. “Ideas of Authorship.” *Screen* 14.3 (Autumn 1973), p. 75.

²² Ibid.

²³ Pam Cook. “Authorship and Cinema.” *The Cinema Book*. Pam Cook, ed. London: BFI, 2007. p. 387.

²⁴ Andrew Sarris. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929–1968*. New York: Dutton & Co., 1968. p. 15.

perception and criticism, has since been quietly demoted from such a central position.

As early as 1957, none other than André Bazin offered a more qualified opinion on auteurism, pointing out differences between the positions of himself and “the regular contributors to *Cahiers*,”²⁵ amongst whom was also Truffaut. Bazin took issue with the problem of taste “for it assumes at the start of its analysis that the film is automatically good as it has been made by an auteur”²⁶ and such criticism runs the risk of “an aesthetic personality cult.”²⁷

Vigorously defending auteurism as exemplified in the journal *Movie*, Ian Cameron defined, as its governing assumption, “that the director is the author of a film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality it may have.”²⁸ He argued that “any merit [films] may have still comes from the director much more than from any other source.”²⁹ However, those dissenting from this concept of directorial hegemony soon came forward offering “Alternatives to Auteurs,” as the apt title of Graham Petrie’s article put it. “As books on cameramen and scriptwriters begin to pour off the presses,” Petrie writes, “[i]t is no longer going to be enough to assume that the director’s contribution is automatically of major significance.”³⁰ For Petrie, the major flaw of the auteur theory is “that it is *only* the director who matters and that even the most minor work by *auteur* X is automatically more interesting than the best film of non-*auteur* Y.”³¹ At the same time, Petrie was careful to stress that “it will be necessary to avoid the dangers of replacing one culture hero by

²⁵ André Bazin. “La Politique des Auteurs.” *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau, eds. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. p. 130.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 144.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 145.

²⁸ Ian Cameron. “Films, Directors and Critics.” *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*. Barry Keith Grant, ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. p. 31.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 33.

³⁰ Graham Petrie. “Alternatives to Auteurs.” *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*. Barry Keith Grant, ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. p. 111.

³¹ Ibid. p. 112 (*italics in the original*).

another.”³² Rather than introducing cameramen and scriptwriters into Sarris’ pantheon, it was Petrie’s project to recognise “cinema as a cooperative art.”³³

While Petrie followed “the ways in which [cinema] differs from fiction, poetry, painting, and even music and drama,”³⁴ others have taken this line of argument into the contexts of production and of Hollywood’s studio system. Thomas Schatz, in his monumental study of *The Genius of the System*, has been overtly critical of auteurism, instead advocating a “look at Hollywood’s relation of power and hierarchy of authority during the studio era, at its division of labor and assembly-line production process.”³⁵ Schatz concedes that there were Hollywood directors with “an unusual degree of authority and a certain style,” but their position was “privileged,”³⁶ and “came only with commercial success and was won by filmmakers who proved not just that they had talent but that they could work profitably within the system.”³⁷

Schatz reminds us that

these films were the product not simply of individual human expression, but of a melding of institutional forces. In each case the ‘style’ of a writer, director, star – or even a cinematographer, art director, or costume designer – fused with the studio’s production operations and management structure, its resources and talent pool, its narrative traditions and market strategy. And ultimately any individual’s style was no more than an inflection on an established studio style.³⁸

Instead of focusing on the director or indeed any other role in the filmmaking process, Schatz emphasises the collaborative nature of the Hollywood system, or indeed the film medium as a whole.

³² Ibid. p. 111.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Thomas Schatz. *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Film-making in the Studio Era*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996. p. 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 6.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

Timothy Corrigan has focused on a related aspect of the industrial discourse and mode of production, or what he calls “The Commerce of Auteurism.” He argues that “from its inception, auteurism has been bound up with changes in industrial desires, technological opportunities, and marketing strategies.”³⁹ While these changes also account for early strains in the debate, he goes on to note that,

Since the 1970s especially, the auteurist marketing of movies whose titles often proclaim the filmmaker’s name [...] aim[s] to guarantee a relationship between audience and movie whereby an intentional and authorial agency governs, as a kind of brand-name vision whose contextual meanings are already determined, the way a movie is seen and received.⁴⁰

Corrigan is certainly right to focus on more contemporary aspects of the debate in regard to commercial aspects of the auteur. The case of Lubitsch and his ‘touch’ does, however, suggest that the commercial mechanisms of the director as auteur date further back than Corrigan would appear to believe in his still insightful study.

In addition to theoretical works on the subject of authorship and auteurism, studies on specific directors and auteurs have proven insightful for my research. Although there could be numerous others such examples, some of the following are particularly important. Barbara Klinger’s work on Douglas Sirk, for instance, goes beyond a mere auteurist study. Rather than merely investigating Sirk’s authorship or even his biography in relation to his films, Klinger looks at the different contexts in which Douglas Sirk has been considered, “explor[ing] how historical analysis challenges our ideas about this director and his films.”⁴¹ Crucially, Klinger insists that “textual meanings are negotiated by external agencies, whether they be

³⁹ Timothy Corrigan. “The Commerce of Auteurism.” *Film and Authorship*. Virginia Wright Wexman, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003. p. 96.

⁴⁰ Schatz. *The Genius of the System*. p. 97.

⁴¹ Barbara Klinger. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. p. xii.

academic modes of interpretation, practices of the film industry, or film reviews set within a particular historical landscape.”⁴²

As with the meanings of a text, the reputation of a director is not fixed, but it is constantly re-negotiated by succeeding generations. Klinger’s intention is then not to uncover the “‘real’ meaning of the film” by way of “conventional textual analysis,” but rather to show how “film identity is always a matter of negotiation between textual features and contextual imperatives.”⁴³ For my study of Lubitsch’s style then, I will begin by assessing the framings and reframings of the ‘touch’ already existing during Lubitsch’s lifetime.

Before laying a final foundation to my study of the ‘touch’ in reviewing the literature dedicated to Ernst Lubitsch, I would like to take a closer look at the standing of Alfred Hitchcock in Film Studies and within the auteur debate in particular. Alfred Hitchcock has the reputation of being arguably the “classic auteur,” although, as Pam Cook notes, certainly not uniquely, but foremost for the *Cahier* critics.⁴⁴

Hitchcock indeed stands out of the group of “other Hollywood directors championed by the auteur critics,” in the sense that “the interest in Hitchcock not only survived the heyday of the *politique des auteurs* but flourished through the various paradigm shifts which have constituted the short history of this field.”⁴⁵ Faced with the enormous body of work produced on Hitchcock, Sidney Gottlieb does not shy away from making a comparison with, in Michael Bristol’s words,

⁴² Ibid. p. xvi.

⁴³ Ibid. p. xx.

⁴⁴ Cook. “Authorship and Cinema.” p. 390. See also, for a highly entertaining account of the Hitchcock – “Hitchcock fanatiques” (André Bazin) connection, James M. Vest. “To Catch a Liar: Bazin, Chabrol, and Truffaut Encounter Hitchcock.” *Hitchcock: Past and Future*. Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-González, eds. London: Routledge, 2004. p. 109-118.

⁴⁵ Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès. “Introduction.” *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzalès, eds. London: BFI, 1999. p. viii.

“‘Big-Time’ Shakespeare.”⁴⁶ In using this term, Bristol seeks to address “the long and enduring tradition of imperial and meretricious uses of Shakespeare’s cultural and commercial power,”⁴⁷ which is comparable, in many ways, to Hitchcock’s status within Film Studies.

In a similar vein, Robert E. Kapsis’ study on “the creation of reputation in the art world of film” shows “how the figure of an ‘artist’ or ‘auteur’ is socially constructed and of the forces which influence reassessments of reputation and cultural meaning.”⁴⁸ Kapsis’ attention to the ‘making of a reputation,’ and Hitchcock’s reputation in particular, points not only to the search for a signature style in the *œuvre* of a particular director, but, beyond such a search, to the creation of an almost ‘myth-like’ reputation, embodied in the phrase the ‘master of suspense.’ In Lubitsch’s case, the ‘touch’ was and remains a central aspect in the writing on Lubitsch, and is unique insofar as this supposed style is even identified with the director’s very name.

Closely related to this question is the issue of genre and popularity. Both Hitchcock and Lubitsch are closely associated with the respective genres of thriller and romantic drama (or perhaps better, the sophisticated comedy) and their commercial appeal. In what was the earliest serious study of Hitchcock in the English language, Robin Wood addressed precisely the issue of Hitchcock’s popularity as that which prevented many critics from taking him “seriously.”⁴⁹ In the same vein, it has been suggested that Lubitsch too has not been taken seriously, since the genre with which he is most closely associated is generally treated with

⁴⁶ Sidney Gottlieb. “Introduction.” *Framing Hitchcock: Selected Essays from the Hitchcock Annual*. Sidney Gottlieb and Christopher Brookhouse, eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002. p. 17. See also Michael Bristol. *Big-Time Shakespeare*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

⁴⁷ Gottlieb. “Introduction.” p. 17.

⁴⁸ Robert E. Kapsis. *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. p. 2.

⁴⁹ Robin Wood. *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. p. 57.

equal disdain.⁵⁰ In both cases, it can be considered one of the achievements of the auteurist critics that they challenge “the very division between the work of a ‘serious’ artist and the work of a popular figure such as Hitchcock (among other Hollywood contract film-makers).”⁵¹ In view of the issue of authorship in cinema that has proved so vital for Film Studies and so prolific thanks to its controversies, it is then surprising that Lubitsch and his legacy were never able to take the centre stage of the debate.

3 *The State of Lubitsch Studies*

These circles of specialists will be examined more closely in the final section of this literature review. It aims to provide a broad overview of the state of the general scholarship on Lubitsch. Over the course of this project, the focus will be on Lubitsch’s ‘touch’ as one specific and recurring detail in the promotional, critical as well as, on occasion, academic writing on Lubitsch. In order to do so, the scholarship on Ernst Lubitsch in general provides necessary background.

In the published criticism of his life and works Ernst Lubitsch oscillates between being revered and being half-forgotten. The sheer number and variety of approaches taken by the studies dedicated to Hitchcock is certainly without equal within Film Studies. ‘Lubitsch Studies,’ if you will, has been in a far less satisfying condition. However, at the very surface of film history in film dictionaries and encyclopaedias, Lubitsch is, if included, virtually always referred to in highly reverential terms. Critics do not economise on criticism where they see fit, as for instance, in David Thomson’s dry contention that “*Ninotchka* and *Heaven Can Wait*

⁵⁰ See William Paul. *Ernst Lubitsch’s American Comedy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. p. 7.

⁵¹ Allen and Ishii-Gonzalès. “Introduction.” p. viii.

are a good deal less funny than reputation would have us believe.”⁵² Generally, however, these short entries are full of praise, singling out *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), the transnationality of Lubitsch’s successful career(s) and the recognisability of a particular style, the latter being more often than not identified as the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

The majority of work done on Lubitsch has focused on his American period. Yet, the German-language equivalents to Anglo-American encyclopaedias and introductions to German cinema also mention Lubitsch, focusing on his significance for the early days of German cinema. Wolfgang Jacobson, in the chapter on early German film in Metzler’s *Geschichte des deutschen Films* (‘History of German Film’), has, for instance, credited Lubitsch with a singular position in the landscape of the early German cinema of the 1910s. He argues that Lubitsch had already formed his own style by that time, one opposed to all other developments in early filmmaking.⁵³

Lubitsch Studies was initiated by a study, first published in 1968, that, tellingly, bears the title *The Lubitsch Touch*. At best located at the margins of academic writing, Herman G. Weinberg’s book is a mixture of biographical account – critics might bitingly call it a ‘hagiography’ – and a career appraisal according to Weinberg’s own tastes. Weinberg takes a mainly biographical approach, with a chronological account of Lubitsch’s life and films covering the first half of the book, while the second half comprises a collage of excerpts of screenplays, interviews, ‘tributes’ and other documents. This study bears the distinction of the author’s

⁵² David Thomson. Entry on “Ernst Lubitsch.” *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*. London: Little, Brown, 2010. p. 596.

⁵³ Wolfgang Jacobson. “Frühgeschichte des deutschen Films.” *Geschichte des deutschen Films*. Wolfgang Jacobson, Anton Kaes and Hans Helmut Prinzler, eds. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004. p. 34. (“Lubitsch ist im deutschen Kino der zehner Jahre eine Ausnahmeerscheinung. Er findet einen eigenen Stil, der quer steht zu allen anderen Entwicklungen der frühen Kinematographie.”)

epistolary friendship with Lubitsch and was generally popular with book reviewers at the time of its initial publication.

Weinberg's collection has since been met with repeated criticism, however. Critical verdicts vary from a diplomatic statement that *The Lubitsch Touch* is "rather disappointing" and "unreliable"⁵⁴ as a biographical source (Hans Helmut Prinzler), to outright dismissals of his "much overrated [...] anecdotal ramblings"⁵⁵ (Andrew Sarris). Weinberg was not an academic⁵⁶ or indeed one aiming for academic standards, but the monograph challenges the boundaries between non-academic and academic writing. Still, Weinberg has become a significant point of reference for critical studies on Lubitsch. In fact, almost all the later academic studies on Lubitsch acknowledge, follow or more often set themselves apart explicitly from Weinberg's study. Choosing "The Lubitsch Touch: A Meta-Critical Study" as a title for my own research, this is because the approach I take is 'meta-critical' in that it is about the criticism by others rather than Lubitsch's films themselves. However, it also acknowledges the impact Weinberg's study has had as a starting point, if a negative one, for many studies on Lubitsch and his work.

Besides Scott Eyman's biography *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*, first published in 1993,⁵⁷ this strain of biographical criticism has continued, notably in the German writing on Lubitsch. In order to celebrate the centenary of Lubitsch's

⁵⁴ Hans Helmut Prinzler. "Berlin, 29.1.1892 – Hollywood, 30.11.1947: Bausteine zu einer Lubitsch-Biografie." *Lubitsch*. Hans Helmut Prinzler and Enno Patalas, eds. München: Bucher, 1984. p. 59. ("Das als 'Lubitsch-Biografie' vielgerühmte Buch von Herman G. Weinberg (The Lubitsch Touch) ist als biografische Quelle eher enttäuschend und in den Fakten unzuverlässig." Prinzler does acknowledge, however, that Weinberg is, by then, the only one to get Lubitsch's birth date right – 29 January rather than the 28th.)

⁵⁵ Andrew Sarris' foreword to Paul. *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy*. x.

⁵⁶ His 1983 obituary in the *New York Times* mainly identified him as a translator and writer. See Samuel G. Freedman. "Herman G. Weinberg, Writer and Foreign Film Translator." *New York Times* (8 November 1983), p. B5.

⁵⁷ For biographical background, I will rely greatly on Eyman. However, it should be acknowledged that he does not operate entirely within academic standards. His lack of references or extensive bibliography, for instance, makes it difficult to trace his evidence. This is why I would agree with Kristin Thompson, who calls Eyman's study "not the definite biography that Lubitsch deserves, [although] it provides a very useful overview." Kristin Thompson. Book Review of Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*. *Film History* 11.2 (1999), p. 233.

birth in 1992 two short monographs appeared in German: Herta-Elisabeth Renk's *Ernst Lubitsch* and Herbert Spaich's *Ernst Lubitsch und seine Filme* ('Ernst Lubitsch and his films'). Both are easy-to-read introductions to Lubitsch's life and work, but of limited use from a critical perspective.

The German collection *Lubitsch*, edited by Hans Helmut Prinzler and Enno Patalas, couples a biographical account with shorter accounts of the films and a section made up of "documents – memoirs – homages,"⁵⁸ also including several texts and articles authored by Lubitsch himself. Prinzler and Patalas' collage thereby gives a nuanced picture of the director, without appearing too highbrow and restricted to the academic discourse. This is mirrored by the context of its publication. The study accompanied a retrospective of Lubitsch's work during the 1984 Berlin Film Festival and is interesting not least because it comes from renowned historians of German film – the former heads of the film museums of Berlin and Munich respectively.

Auteurists have repeatedly used Lubitsch as their object of study. Their objective is to identify an artistic vision across the films of one director and Lubitsch's 'touch' may just constitute such an artistic expression of one individual. Andrew Sarris has such a project in *The American Cinema*, in which he classifies directors from the Hollywood studio era according to their merit. In his Pantheon section, Sarris not only reflects upon Lubitsch's style, but also makes explicit mention of the 'touch,' arguing that "[a] poignant sadness infiltrates the director's gayest moments, and it is this counterpoint between sadness and gaiety that represents the Lubitsch touch."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Hans Helmut Prinzler and Enno Patalas, eds. *Lubitsch*. München: Bucher, 1984. Table of contents. ("Dokumenten – Erinnerungen – Hommagen").

⁵⁹ Sarris. *The American Cinema*. p. 66.

Here, Sarris' characterisation of the 'touch' is interesting for two reasons. It differentiates Sarris's take from the other 'touches' that see Lubitsch's style in relation to stylistic and aesthetic devices or the production context. Indeed, for Sarris, the 'touch' has nothing to do primarily with the aesthetics of Lubitsch's films; it is precisely "not the leering humor of closed doors."⁶⁰ Instead, Sarris focuses on the most important thematic elements that he finds in Lubitsch's films and singles out *To Be or Not to Be* in particular. Certainly, a Nazi comedy, produced while World War II was still going on,⁶¹ would present a prime example of "bridg[ing] the abyss between laughter and horror."⁶² Moreover, the reference to sadness and gaiety emphasises the humanism in Sarris's take on the 'touch.' Sarris's project thereby has a close kinship to the public discourse of the 1940s and its perception of humanism in Lubitsch's work.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, two monographs also approached Lubitsch from an auteurist point of view. Leland A. Poague and William Paul followed the auteurist approach through in examining the Lubitschian *œuvre* in greater depth. Setting himself apart from the biographical criticism spearheaded by Weinberg, Poague stages close readings of Lubitsch's cinema. He focuses on five sets of films while discounting any appeal to chronology as long as the films were produced during Lubitsch's American period. He analyses them according to thematic similarities and dissimilarities, only on occasion referring to sources outside the film texts.

Leland Poague explicitly places himself in Sarris's tradition, praising "auteurist scholarship [for having] repeatedly and effectively demonstrated" how "a

⁶⁰ Sarris. *The American Cinema*. p. 66.

⁶¹ While released in early 1942, *To Be or Not to Be* had both been conceived and had gone into production before the attack on Pearl Harbour provoked the United States to enter the war officially. The changed domestic environment and the very existence of a home front certainly contributed to the problematic initial reception of the film.

⁶² Sarris. *The American Cinema*. p. 66.

certain personality or viewpoint may come to dominate production.”⁶³ Poague offers his own conception of the ‘touch,’ arguing that, as his career draws on, “Lubitsch became less concerned with asserting his own cinematic ingenuity than with exploring the humanity of his characters” and “relied less and less on visual razzle-dazzle.”⁶⁴ Both Sarris’s and Poague’s affinity with themes of humanity and ‘humanness’ are obviously at play in the auteurist project, which tends to seek consistency across a set of films in order to locate the moral or philosophical outlook of the director.

Poague’s study, which focuses on the later Hollywood films, sets out to prove precisely this point. It therefore focuses, unsurprisingly, on the exploration of specific themes, rather than performing a close textual analysis of the films’ aesthetics. He hence groups together films from different periods of Lubitsch’s career – for instance, *The Marriage Circle* and *The Shop Around the Corner* or *One Hour with You*, *Trouble in Paradise* and *To Be or Not to Be* – and at times these films are almost twenty years apart. However, this potential point of criticism of the approach is actually quite the opposite for an auteurist. If these seemingly disparate films can be proven to have a similar point of reference, or “share similar concerns,” in Poague’s words, this precisely corroborates the auteurist project, even more so if these concerns have been identified as the director’s style, or in Lubitsch’s case, his ‘touch.’ In a fashion true to the structuralist strain of auteurism, Poague looks for themes in Lubitsch’s films that transcend periods, but leaves out any consideration of the wider contexts of collaboration and production. Although Poague’s analyses are insightful and more critically informed than biographical criticism in the style of ‘Ernst Lubitsch and his films,’ the absence from his text of wider production and

⁶³ Leland A. Poague. *The Cinema of Ernst Lubitsch The Hollywood Films*. South Brunswick: A. S. Barnes & Co, 1978. p. 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

collaboration context outside the immediate films hints at the potential shortcomings of the authorship approach in Film Studies.

William Paul's study of Ernst Lubitsch's American comedies is equally auteurist, although in a slightly different way. Whilst both studies look for overarching themes in Lubitsch's *œuvre*, Paul is far more explicitly concerned with matters of reputation and style. In comparison to Poague, who focuses almost exclusively on the films chosen for close textual analysis and the unearthing of overarching themes in Lubitsch's American period, Paul's study proves to be more open. He references other directors, taking the studio context further into account and paying attention to how themes are complemented by the use of metaphor or visual representation. Nevertheless, close readings form the centrepiece of *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy* and Paul's study remains intrinsically concerned with the search for the director's "style,"⁶⁵ "vision" and eventually "touch."⁶⁶

The auteurs' general disdain for Weinberg's work may just lie in the proximity of their approaches to Lubitsch's films. Weinberg's lengthy and virtually all-encompassing elaboration of the 'Lubitsch touch,' for instance, covers several pages of his study,⁶⁷ appearing fairly early in the biographical summary and focusing upon *Die Austernprinzessin*. Here, the treatment of the 'touch' touches upon the significance of close ups, metaphors, subtle sense of humour, "personal statement[s]" of "his [Lubitsch's] own *Weltanschauung*."⁶⁸ Although Lubitsch did have "sentiment," Weinberg concludes that "Lubitsch laughed [about nothing] more than [...] the 'sex-game.'"⁶⁹ Weinberg covers so many different themes and conceptions that the notion of a 'Lubitsch touch' ultimately hinges on the persona of

⁶⁵ Paul. *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy*. p. 19.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 7.

⁶⁷ Herman G. Weinberg. *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study*. New York: Dover, 1977. p. 24-27.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 27.

the director. This approach also ties in with his biographical project, whereby he bases his narrative on a string of anecdotes from the director's life.

In contrast, the auteurist approach looks to the persona of the director, but as an embodiment of themes reaching across his (or her) films. Like the biographical approach, with which Weinberg can be associated, the auteurs place the director at the centre of their research. Crucially, however, rather than organising their argument in relation to the artist's biography, they base it on their search for an overall artistic vision conveyed by the director's work.

Significantly, both Poague and Paul follow the line that Sarris had laid out, with their focus on Lubitsch's American work, as can already be seen in the title of Paul's study, although this is also acknowledged by Poague. For the high number of "Lubitsch films (both German and American) [that] are lost" prevents a "complete history".⁷⁰ Instead, Poague also focuses on 'The Hollywood Films,' as the subtitle of his study indicates. Both critics, therefore, privilege Lubitsch's later work. This decision to focus on the later American period also gains a political edge, in considering that Sarris had not only 'imported' French auteurism to the United States, but also moreover adapted it to his own ends in using it as a means to showcase the superiority of American cinema.⁷¹

Revaluation is the political edge running beneath the auteurist project, not least in the American tradition of this approach, one which sought to valorise the

⁷⁰ Poague. *The Cinema of Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 7.

⁷¹ In view of Lubitsch's journey that brought him from Germany across the Atlantic to Hollywood, this bias towards his later American work also raises the issue of transnationality. Again, Lubitsch proves an interesting case because, as a German Jew working in the German film industry moving on to Hollywood and eventually being expatriated by the Nazis, his biography lends itself as an émigré example, rather than one of an exile and Nazi refugee, as was the case with so many of his peers. Lubitsch is mentioned in studies on the subject; see for instance Jean-Michel Palmier's massive study *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*. John Russell Taylor, in *Strangers in Paradise: The Hollywood Emigrés, 1933-1950* (1983), focuses more specifically on Hollywood, while Joseph Horowitz, more recently (2008), takes the arts more generally into account in *Artists in Exile: How Refugees from Twentieth-Century War and Revolution Transformed the American Performing Arts*.

commercial cinema that originated in Hollywood's studio system. This political edge of revaluation can be understood as the main difference that distinguishes biographical and auteurist projects. Indeed, the relative proximity of the two approaches in their primary point of reference – the person – can lead to particularly harsh distancing of the latter from the former. The early forays into Lubitsch criticism can then be taken as a particularly vivid example. For not every thematic approach to Lubitsch has to be deemed auteurist, while Weinberg's publication continues to be viewed critically.

In contrast, Sabine Hake has contributed to Lubitsch scholarship with a study of the significance of Lubitsch's early films. Offering a two part structure, *Passions and Deceptions* initially focuses on some of Lubitsch's early films and, in its second half, touches on their influence on a selection of films from Lubitsch's early American period. Hake explicitly "limits [her]self to the early films [in Lubitsch's filmography] in order to do justice to their actual contribution to the history of film."⁷² Although she chooses to focus on his early silent films in the first part of the text, her study still mirrors other auteurist projects in valorising, '(re-)canonising' if you will, a set of films that have formerly been neglected.

Of equal importance is Hake's accounting for "more overarching concerns, especially those relating to the problem of sexual and cultural difference" as well as "technological and cultural changes that accompanied the emergence of the classical narrative cinema to which Lubitsch contributed so significantly."⁷³ However, her project, which she explicitly defines as "based on and structured around the notion of authorship,"⁷⁴ ultimately uses precisely this concept as the common denominator.

⁷² Sabine Hake. *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. p. 17.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 16.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

There have been, however, also approaches to Lubitsch that focused on more technical aspects of his style. One of the first authors to approach this subject was, as we have seen above, Lewis Jacobs. Jacobs explores several meanings of the ‘touch,’⁷⁵ but most frequently relates it to the camera. Jacobs defines it in relation to the fact that “His swift, deft plotting is enhanced by the rapierlike [sic] ‘comments’ of his camera, which have been known as ‘the Lubitsch touch.’”⁷⁶ Beginning his study while Lubitsch was just halfway through his American career, Jacobs may well have been influenced by the public discourse as we have seen in the chapters on the 1930s. Initially, Jacobs is highly positive in his approach to Lubitsch. Bordering almost on hagiography of “the latest ‘film wizard,’”⁷⁷ Jacobs writes, for instance, that “The man who was finally to take the crown of leadership from DeMille,” who, in turn, had “exerted enormous influence”⁷⁸ between 1919 and 1924, was indeed none other than Lubitsch. However, in the same year of his penultimate musical, 1932, Lubitsch finds himself demoted by Jacobs. “Beginning with *Trouble in Paradise*,” Jacobs writes, “Lubitsch narrowed his range of expression to pantomime, *double entendres*, and suggestive continuity.”⁷⁹ He elaborates:

This has been apparent in all his succeeding films. [...] These films are compendiums of such subtleties as a look, a gesture, a tone. The acting and situations have become over-

⁷⁵ For instance also the plot element of the French soldier in *The Man I Killed* (1932), also known as *Broken Lullaby*, being “[p]raised for his deed by the priest”⁷⁵ constitutes “a sardonic Lubitsch touch”⁷⁵ for Jacobs. *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History*. New York: Teachers College, [1939] 1975. p. 359.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 355. Elsewhere (p. 358), he expands on this conception of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ in relation to the camera: “Structurally as well as technically, Lubitsch’s first sound films put their contemporaries in the shade. Faced with the problem of handling music, dialogue, and songs, he gave mobility to the, until then, static microphone, blending sound and image in a casual but extremely interesting fashion. The camera at that time was still imprisoned in a soundproof booth. But Lubitsch kept the camera moving freely and, with the same dexterity he had exhibited in making “silents,” gave the images, dialogue, and songs a fluidity which kept both the eye and the ear amused.”

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 356.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 335.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 360-361 (emphasis in the original).

refined, the cinematic treatment confined. Lubitsch's technique now has been reduced to a scheme of construction based upon elimination of intervals in the continuity.⁸⁰

This passage is notable for two reasons. It is not just that here is a comparably rare instance of a critic expressing bemusement with Lubitsch's style. More importantly, in this instance a critic admits that Lubitsch's style is indeed inconsistent across all of Lubitsch's films as director, even those in existence when Jacobs' history went into print. Implied in this passage is that, if one locates – or rather *chooses* to locate – the 'Lubitsch touch' in the mobile camera, then one will not find it beyond *Trouble in Paradise*.

The critical debates in the 1930s were influenced by concerns that camera mobility would be compromised by sound technology. However, more recent research has instead focused on what the camera shows. Others have picked up on Lubitsch's technique and have chosen to slightly refocus the essence of Lubitsch's style. In particular, Lubitsch's artistry is singled out in the context of his American sound comedies, while his earlier work is often considered in the context of revaluation. Therefore, it is curious that the camera is also at the heart of another set of peculiar arguments that relate the 'touch' to a narrative device taken from silent filmmaking.

Greg S. Faller reveals an intelligent strategy in putting forward his own take on the 'touch,' even in the brevity of an encyclopaedic article. He concedes that "[w]hat constitutes the 'Lubitsch touch' is open to continual debate, the majority of the definitions being couched in poetic terms of idolization."⁸¹ Without further ado, however, he then goes on to offer his own definition:

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 361.

⁸¹ Greg S. Faller. Entry on "Ernst Lubitsch." *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers: Directors*. Tom Pendergast and Sara Pendergast, eds. Detroit: St. James Press, 2000. p. 626.

Regardless of which romantic description one chooses, the Lubitsch touch can be most concretely seen as deriving from a standard narrative device of the silent film: interrupting the dramatic interchange by focusing on objects or small details that make a witty comment on or surprising revelation about the main action.

Faller's conception of the 'Lubitsch touch' "deriving from a standard narrative device of the silent film"⁸² clearly recalls Carringer's and Sabath's earlier comment: "The Lubitsch touch in its purest form ultimately derives from a standard narrative device of silent film."⁸³

Ephraim Katz, in his *International Film Encyclopedia* argues in a somewhat similar vein that "the subtle humor and the virtuoso visual wit that would in time become known as 'the Lubitsch Touch'"⁸⁴ can be spotted for the first time in connection with *Die Austernprinzessin*, made in 1919. For him, "[t]he style was characterized by a parsimonious compression of ideas and situations into single shots or brief scenes that provided an ironic key to the characters and to the meaning of the entire film."⁸⁵

Carringer and Sabath, Katz and Faller represent different forms of publications. The latter were written as short articles in encyclopaedias, while the former, *A Guide to References and Resources*, offers a comparably short overview of Lubitsch's biography and filmography before providing an extensive and annotated bibliography of critical publications on the subject in question. In all three works, the 'touch' constitutes something quite similar, insofar it is conceived as the focus on particular objects to convey meaning.

However, all three arrive at this view via very different roads. Carringer and Sabath quote a famous example of how a close-up is used as a denouement that "lets

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Robert Carringer and Barry Sabath. *Ernst Lubitsch: A Guide to References and Resources*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978. p. 23.

⁸⁴ Ephraim Katz. Entry on "Ernst Lubitsch." *The Macmillan International Film Encyclopedia*. London: Macmillan, 1998. p. 852.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the audience in on [a character's] joke" or trick. They conclude that "[t]he most characteristic Lubitsch touches usually involve a wittier or more complex use of this essentially functional narrative device."⁸⁶ The crux is that while Carringer and Sabath follow this up with examples from Lubitsch's films of both the American silent and sound periods, *The Marriage Circle*, *Forbidden Paradise* and *Trouble in Paradise*, the initial description is actually from a D. W. Griffith film.⁸⁷ In his article, Faller does not relate the 'touch' to any example, although the closest film in question is indeed *Trouble in Paradise*, while Katz relates it to a silent film made by Lubitsch himself.

Thus, in either case the emphasis is different. While Faller emphasises a generally praised American sound film of Lubitsch's, Katz manages to shed a light on one of the director's lesser known works. However, in this way, both favour a decidedly auteurist view, to which encyclopaedic articles might be prone. Carringer and Sabath, on the other hand, choose to contextualise their 'touch' differently. Their idea of it evolves from Griffith's use of the close-up through to its metaphorical usages in the silent *Marriage Circle* and *Forbidden Paradise* to, what they name as the virtually Eisensteinian "sound-image montage" in the sound film *Trouble in Paradise*.

Hence, what is identified as the 'touch' in *Trouble in Paradise* has come a long way from the initial example in the early Griffith film. Here it is not necessarily tone or sentiment that relate these examples, but technique. When Gerald Mast praises "Lubitsch's brilliance as a technician," it is only half of the story; it is precisely this, as he elaborates, that "tempts many to treat him as a pure

⁸⁶ Carringer and Sabath. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 23-24.

⁸⁷ They refer to the famous shot at the end of *The Lonedale Operator* (1911). Here, the telegraph's daughter fights off the two robbers with what appears to be a gun in a medium shot but is, in a later close-up, revealed actually to be just a wrench.

technician.”⁸⁸ Instead, “technique is no more than a way of looking at the material and can never be divorced from what the material is and why the artist has chosen to look at it as he does.”⁸⁹ It is the same with the critics who make sense of Lubitsch’s films and style. The ‘Lubitsch touch’ is regularly associated with the films’ ‘looks’ and Lubitsch’s visual technique.

All the same, Sabine Hake notes a peculiar dying down of large parts of critical engagement with Lubitsch around the “early eighties.”⁹⁰ This tendency has not been entirely reversed, as more recent scholarship produced on Lubitsch in the last decade confirms this trend. The majority of texts written on his work are shorter articles that centre on individual films, besides the aforementioned *Trouble in Paradise* especially *Ninotchka* (1939) and *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), often in the context of transnationality or émigré cinema such as Gerd Gemünden’s “Space Out of Joint.”⁹¹

As a regular in collections that also touch upon early German cinema, Lubitsch is often treated in shorter articles or chapters. Thomas Elsaesser, for instance, dedicates a chapter to a reading of *Madame Dubarry* (1919) in his *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary*, or Janet McCabe’s short piece on *Die Austernprinzessin* (1919) appears in a collection on German popular film. Elsaesser traces *Madame Dubarry*’s appeal for a meta-historical conception of history, which is precisely the reason why Lotte H. Eisner dismissed the film in her day.⁹² McCabe, on the other hand, uses *Die Austernprinzessin* as a case study for her

⁸⁸ Gerald Mast. *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979. p. 208.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 14.

⁹¹ See Gerd Gemünden. “Space Out of Joint: Ernst Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be*.” *New German Critique* 89 (Spring-Summer 2003), p. 59-80.

⁹² See Thomas Elsaesser. *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary*. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 219. and Lotte H. Eisner. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, [1952] 1977. p. 79. There she remarks rather dismissively, that “A typical Berliner, who began his career in the

project of illuminating popular Weimar cinema, in comparison to its more “celebrated,” “classical” “counterpart,”⁹³ and its female spectatorship.

In her study on ethics and social criticism, Nora Henry chooses to focus not on Lubitsch alone, but puts him along fellow émigrés von Stroheim and Wilder, with whom he arguably shared an affinity to Schnitzler and modern or Freudian psychology.⁹⁴ Initially, she adopts an interesting position in regard to the director, whom she calls “filmmaker” rather than auteur, as a kind of implied author set against an implied audience and well aware of “the strong and manipulative power of film.”⁹⁵ However, her chapter on Lubitsch turns out to be far more in line with the biographical-auteurist tradition, beginning with biographical notes followed by comments on Lubitsch’s style, specifically the ‘touch.’ Nevertheless, her analysis of the films and especially of Heinrich von Kleist’s influence on Lubitsch make an exciting contribution to the flagging contemporary interest in the director.

The latest publication on Lubitsch is a collection of essays called *Lubitsch Can’t Wait*. Curiously, as suggested in its subtitle, it is a collection of theoretical examinations of the director by researchers from all disciplines *except* film history.⁹⁶ This may prove an interesting venture in opening up an avenue of critical discussion away from the focus on Lubitsch and his persona. At the same time, for Lubitsch and his style, there is also a slight chance of a renaissance of sorts, when Wes Anderson has based the ‘look’ of his *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) on that of

cinema with rather coarse farces, Lubitsch saw the pseudo-historical tragedies as so many opportunities for pastiche.”

⁹³ Janet McCabe. “Regulating Hidden Pleasures and ‘Modern’ Identities: Imagined Female Spectators, Early German Popular Cinema, and *The Oyster Princess* (1919).” *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*. Eds. Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003. p. 25.

⁹⁴ See Nora Henry. *Ethics and Social Criticism in the Hollywood Films of Stroheim, Lubitsch and Wilder*. Westport: Praeger, 2001. p. 3.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

⁹⁶ See Ivana Novak, Jela Krečič and Mladen Dolar. “Preface.” *Lubitsch Can’t Wait: A Theoretical Examination*. Ivana Novak, Jela Krečič and Mladen Dolar, eds. Ljubljana: Slovesna Kinoteka, 2014. p. viii.

Lubitsch's Graustarkian romances. Indeed, Matt Zoller Seitz' splendid 'coffee table book' on Andersons's film repeatedly pays homage to the earlier director.⁹⁷

Another recent study on Lubitsch silent films concludes this string of recent Lubitsch scholarship – *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood* by Kristin Thompson. This is intended as a study on how, once Lubitsch arrived in America, he himself “rapidly absorbed the new style of Hollywood once he became exposed to it.”⁹⁸ Although Thompson addresses the ‘Lubitsch touch’ most explicitly in the epilogue of her study, her project actually intends to show that Lubitsch's genius lay less in his ‘touch’ and more in his quick adaptability to the American system of producing films.

It should probably not come as a surprise that the author-centred approach returns constantly in writings on a director whose ‘unmistakable filmic style’ is confirmed again and again and has even been given its own name. However, Sabine Hake is entirely correct to raise the question whether it is precisely this professed style that has “become more of a liability than a mark of distinction.”⁹⁹

For what is missing from Lubitsch scholarship, not entirely but certainly to a large extent, is not a biographical or an auteurist engagement with his works. It is rather a critical engagement with these very approaches to the director. The fact that the discourse of a Lubitschian style has become so established offers a site that renders the mechanisms of auteurism and its construction explicit. This calls, at least as importantly, for a critical engagement with precisely the mechanisms of such a

⁹⁷ See, for instance, how actor Ralph Fiennes cites Lubitsch and Wilder as inspiration for their “very particular, sort of rapid-fire delivery of dialogue” (p. 67) or composer Alexandre Desplat on the “mix[ing of] comedy and the big-*H* of history” in films like *To Be or Not to Be* and *Ninotchka* (p. 136). For influences on set design and cinematography see also pages 143 and 247. Matt Zoller Seitz. *The Wes Anderson Collection: The Grand Budapest Hotel*. New York: Abrams, 2015.

⁹⁸ Kristin Thompson. *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood: German and American Film after World War I*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008. p. 16.

⁹⁹ Hake. *Passions and Deceptions*. p. 13.

construction. To put it differently, what is missing from Lubitsch scholarship are more recent post-structural and deconstructivist approaches, those that would promise to compensate for the ‘dying down’ of large parts of critical engagement with Lubitsch in recent decades.

My research into the public discourse during Lubitsch’s career seeks to begin such a conversation. Focusing in particular on the years between 1923 and 1947, I will investigate how Lubitsch’s reputation was made and his style conceived being that it was indeed already being reconceived and re-reconceived in his day.

III A Prologue: Lubitsch in Germany, 1913-1923

Before exploring the American part of Lubitsch's career in greater detail, an examination of Lubitsch's German career will be useful, if not essential. Lubitsch's arrival in America marked him out as one of the most famous directors to come out of Europe. This is crucial from both a historical and historiographical perspective.

From the latter perspective, Lubitsch's standing may be surprising as he for a long time did not play a considerable role in the writing on early German filmmaking. Weimar cinema became identified predominantly with the look and themes of German Expressionism. Scores of filmmaking émigrés, who later arrived on American and Hollywood shores, would then, arguably, go on to exert a considerable influence on the look of American *film noir*.

Yet, German Expressionism constitutes only one strain of Weimar cinema and one that cannot be attributed to Lubitsch.¹ Lubitsch's German films were slapstick comedy and exotic spectacles; in short, examples of popular cinema, the lower forms of cultural and academic hierarchies. This problem still persists, although there has been a tendency to correct this perception thanks to shorter pieces.² Sabine Hake's monograph³ acknowledges Lubitsch's German period, when

¹ His *Bergkatze* may be considered an exception to this, capitalising on the use of Expressionist make up and grotesque physical exaggeration. The casting of his favourite tragedienne, Pola Negri, also plays to this tendency as well. However, *Die Bergkatze* is ultimately a satire and therefore, at best, 'inverse Expressionism.'

² In reference to Lubitsch see especially Christian Rogowski. "From Ernst Lubitsch to Joe May: Challenging Kracauer's Demonology with Weimar Popular Film." *Light Motives: German Popular Film in Perspective*. Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy, eds. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003. p. 1-23 and Thomas Elsaesser. "Weimar Cinema, Mobile Selves and Anxious Males: Kracauer and Eisner Revisited." *Expressionist Film – New Perspectives*. Dietrich Scheinemann, ed. Rochester: Camden House, 2003. p. 33-71. Elsaesser has been particularly responsible for widening the approaches to Weimar cinema beyond Expressionism and investigating the influence of Lotte Eisner, and especially Siegfried Kracauer, on the writing of early German film history. See for instance Thomas Elsaesser. *Weimar and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*. London: Routledge, 2000 or Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, eds. *A Second Life: German Cinema's First Decades*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996 (= Film Culture in Transition).

³ See Hake. *Passions and Deceptions*.

most book-length studies on Lubitsch's *œuvre* had concentrated on his Hollywood years.

My study will necessarily focus on the American years and beyond because there are simply no references to a 'Lubitsch touch' in the German material. The later German discourse – clipping collections still available roughly begin in the 1960s – enthusiastically adopts the phrase of the 'Lubitsch touch,' regardless of the language barrier.⁴ However, the phrase itself is not a German invention and would therefore not be part of this discourse.

This does not mean that early German critics did not engage with Lubitsch in the context of his work or had any conception of his authorship. A shorter investigation into the public response to Lubitsch during his German years is still valid and can help us, at least, to reflect back on the later debates. Although American journalists will not have read the musings of their German counterparts, the debates often centred on similar issues.

I will therefore analyse the public negotiation of Lubitsch's filmmaking in the German press of the 1910s. The basis for this overview form the relevant years of *Lichtbildbühne* (also *LBB*, Berlin, 1908-1940⁵), as the first German film magazine, *Film-Kurier* (Berlin, 1919-1945), one of the most influential early film publications, and in addition *Der Film* (Berlin, 1916-1943) and *Der Kinematograph* (Düsseldorf, 1915-1935). Lubitsch grew considerably in prominence after coming into the critics' radar as a comedian by 1915 at the very latest. Soon after this emergence, he commanded a certain standing as an actor and was eventually praised by the critics for his direction. However, while Lubitsch became a prominent comic

⁴ Grafe's article "Was Lubitsch berührt" (literally 'What touches Lubitsch,' meaning roughly 'As far as Lubitsch is concerned' is a pun on the term. However, such a translation is fairly rare; even in the German the English phrase is used. See Frieda Grafe. "Was Lubitsch berührt." *Lubitsch*. Hans Helmut Prinzler and Enno Patalas, eds. München: Bucher, 1984. p. 81-87.

⁵ These years indicate the years of the publication's existence. I focused on the years during which Lubitsch made films in Germany, if available as early as 1914 to 1922/1923.

actor and a celebrated director, he did not stand out from his contemporaries. Other directors were praised for their achievements in similarly emphatic terms, while the stars, especially those he directed later, could often overshadow him in the public discourse.

Moreover, despite Lubitsch's films becoming associated with him, no clear grip on his authorship emerged. Although lively early film critical debates took place and reviews highlighted that the critics had an eye for film aesthetics, cinematic authorship was mainly expressed in terms of crediting a filmmaker with 'direction' but without further elaboration. A sense of cinematic authorship was informed by knowledge of more established arts such as literature and theatre, but critics still lacked the vocabulary to both grasp and express what cinematic authorship entails. Thus, while some of the debates in the German discourse touched on Lubitsch as a director and with a good grip upon his films, the critics had no clear idea of what this surplus contribution was, let alone finding a metaphor for it.

Lubitsch arrived at film direction in two stages: first through acting on the theatrical stage of the theatre and then acting on the screen. His theatre career would routinely resurface in portraits throughout his long career and even in America. The latter would set the stage for the public negotiation of Lubitsch's emergence as a film director. Before turning to the early German response to his direction, I will therefore use this first section to give a brief overview of Lubitsch's rise to prominence as a film actor. Although Lubitsch achieved fame as an actor, the transition to directing was a subtle one as far as film papers were concerned. An early form of a star system had tied his films together in a 'series;' that is, they were grouped in terms of featuring a particular star in order to advertise the films more

successfully. There was at least one such series for the actor Lubitsch, yet this practice was not continued for the director Lubitsch.

Lubitsch's stage acting career was illustrious in terms of its association with Max Reinhardt and the Deutsches Theater, but it was less so for the roles that he played (as the perfect metaphor for his stage career, he once played the *second* gravedigger in *Hamlet*). When he turned to film acting, Lubitsch's slapstick comedian persona was the stepping-stone to something much greater, although it gradually brought him greater public prominence. Lubitsch moved from stage to screen around 1913, while he started to appear on the radar of early film journalists as one of 'Berlin's best comic actors'⁶ and as part of ensemble casts⁷ in *Die Firma heiratet* (1913) and its sequel-of-sorts *Der Stolz der Firma* (1914). Both films are today regarded as strong reference points for research into Lubitsch's acting style, which is seen as being based both in slapstick and in the milieu of Berlin and Jewish humour.

By mid-1915 and with the advertising campaign for *Zucker und Zimmt* (also *Zucker und Zimt*, 1915), Lubitsch and fellow comedian Ernst Mátray were featured as 'the two indestructible stage-comedians' who had written, directed and acted their leading roles.⁸ References to their coming from the Deutsche Theater implied artistry and the respectability of the more established art form about which early

⁶ Advert for *Bedingung – Kein Anhang!* *Lichtbild-Bühne* 7.7 (14 February 1914), p. 48. ("von den besten Komikern Berlins."). In the following, quotations in single quotation marks are to indicate that the translations from the German are my own.

⁷ *Lichtbild-Bühne* is rather bemused by the enormity of the cast, having a long list of actors follow the quip that Ufa is "boring us with all too much worshipping of names." Anon. Review of *Die Firma heiratet*. *Lichtbild-Bühne* 7.4 (24 January 1914), p. 32. ("Nur am Film-Anfang liebt es die Union, allzusehr [sic] durch Namenkultus zu langweilen. Eine ganze Leporello-Liste blitzt da vorüber: Walter Turszinsky, Jacques Burg, Carl Wilhelm, Rsel Orla, Victor Arnold, Albert Paulig, Franz Schönemann, Ernst Lubitsch, Glaser & Götz und – Edmund Edel.")

⁸ Advert for *Zucker und Zimmt*. *Lichtbild-Bühne* 8.18 (1 May 1915), p. 11.

film still felt self-conscious. The campaign for this film also uses his image (Figure 1).⁹



Figure 1: Lubitsch in an advert (detail) for *Zucker und Zimt* (1915).

Blindekuh (1915), released on the same day as *Zucker und Zimt* (sometimes also spelt *Zucker and Zimmt*), did not have an advertising campaign quite able to match that of *Zucker und Zimt*. Instead, *Blindekuh* was advertised as the first instalment of the Lubitsch series of 1915/16 (Figure 2).¹⁰

⁹ An advert for the same film a few weeks later was constructed in a similar manner, this time involving a picture of a somewhat daring scene set in a bar. The shot was even wider and the male actor in the picture this time was more likely to be Mátray. See Advert for *Zucker und Zimmt*. *Lichtbild-Bühne* 8.24 (12 June 1915), no page.

¹⁰ Advert for Lubitsch-Serie. *Lichtbild-Bühne* 8.21 (22 May 1915), p. 35.

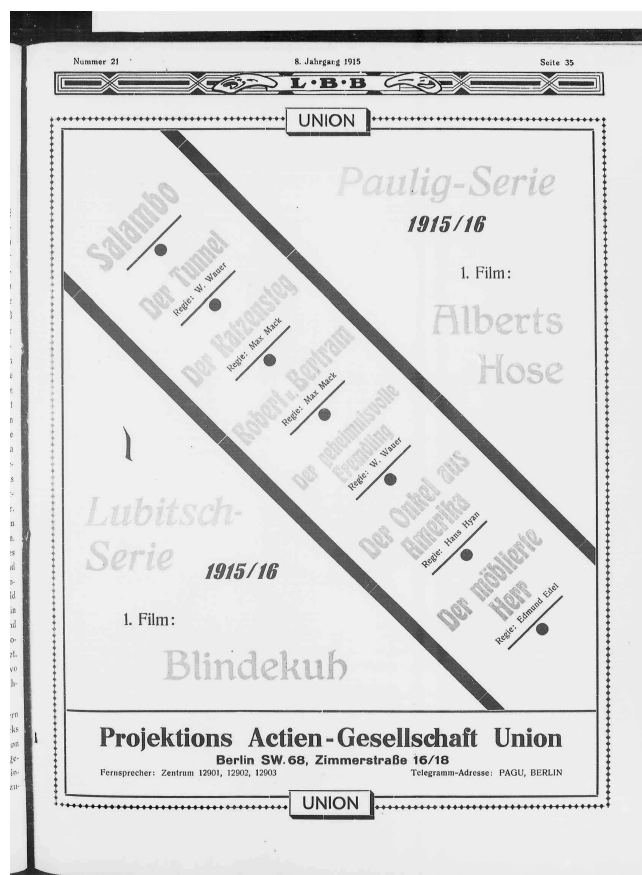


Figure 2: Advert for *Lubitsch-Serie* (1915)

Writing specifically about the case of Asta Nielsen, Martin Loiperdinger has connected the adoption of the film series to Nielsen's successful assertion of her own image. He explains that,

branding a series of exclusive long-feature films with the name of the actress who played the leading role was a ground-breaking innovation in the film trade. [...] Films which were made attractive for mass consumption not by subject, genre, plot or acting but by the actress whose appearances on screen characterised them as being *her* film¹¹

Such branding was done to “ensure that exhibitors booked the exclusive ‘Asta Nielsen series’ in advance, even before the films were produced.”¹² Accordingly, the establishment of such a series then indicated further Lubitsch's rising prominence as a performer. The importance of Lubitsch was echoed in a short review published in *Der Kinematograph*, which also mentions the series. While judging that the film has become too long to be a comedy, this review still credits Lubitsch's “art [*Kunst*]”

¹¹ Martin Loiperdinger. “Die Duse der Filmkunst: Asta Nielsen's Berlin Made Brand.” *Importing Asta Nielsen: The International Film Star in the Making 1910-1914*. Martin Loiperdinger and Uli Jung, eds. New Barnet: John Libbey, 2013. p. 110 (= KINtop: Studies in Early Cinema 2). See also Joseph Garncarz. “The Star System in Weimar Cinema.” *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy*. Christian Rogowski, ed. Rochester: Camden, 2010. p. 127-128.

¹² Ibid.

with making the film very funny.¹³ Hence, while the idea of a Lubitsch series was clearly contained in the marketing of the films, it also spilled over to into the practice of reviewing, not only by acknowledging the marketing tool employed, but also by singling out Lubitsch as the star performer.



Figure 3: Illustration of Lubitsch in advert for *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (1916)

Lubitsch's increasing fame as an actor raises the question of how the director Lubitsch was negotiated when he adopted this additional role. *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (1916) is a good example here and it remains a film that still stimulates discussion of his German period today. The film's production and release were closely

followed by the press of the day, but the reception mainly focused upon

Lubitsch as an actor. Adverts focus on Lubitsch as actor in image (Figure 3)¹⁴ and snippets printed from reviews.¹⁵

¹³ Anon. "Neuheiten auf dem Berliner Filmmarkte." *Der Kinematograph* 441 (9 June 1915), no page. ("Die blinde Kuh, der erste Film der Lubitsch-Serie bringt die alte Geschichte [...]. Durch Lubitschs Kunst ist der Film sehr lustig geworden, aber leider etwas in die Länge gezerrt.") In spite of the slight criticism of its length, the description of Lubitsch's work as 'art' is curious and may indicate an increasing sense of prestige usually not afforded to lower artistic registers such as comedy.

¹⁴ Advert for *Schuhpalast Pinkus*. *Der Kinematograph* 495 (21 June 1916), no page.

¹⁵ See for instance an advert for *Schuhpalast Pinkus*. *Der Kinematograph* 494 (14 June 1916), no page. A clipping printed in an advert quotes *B. Z. am Mittag* singling out Lubitsch, who 'has proven himself as one of the funniest film talents' ("Die B.Z. am Mittag schreibt: 'Ernst Lubitsch hat sich als eine der drolligsten Filmbegabungen erwiesen.'). A week later, another advert for *Schuhpalast Pinkus* took up the entire page. Split into three different parts, the advert focuses on Lubitsch in every one of them; underneath the title in the middle, Lubitsch is announced as the main actor in bold print and the film related back to *Die Firma heiratet*, which had also featured Lubitsch. Below it is another set of clippings from general newspapers, all of which pay tribute to Lubitsch again. *National-Zeitung* 'laughs heartily about Lubitsch as you do only rarely,' *Vossische Zeitung* emphasises how 'the film shows Lubitsch with his hilarious ideas in very funny images,' and thirdly *Berliner Morgenpost* praises the 'very famous comedian Ernst Lubitsch.' Finally, to top it all off, the page is headed by two illustrations, one depicting a now common still from the film, Sally succeeding at a lady and her purchase of shoes. Next to it, an illustrated close up of Sally, and Lubitsch recognisable in character, pictured looking over his shoulder. (Advert for *Schuhpalast Pinkus*. *Der Kinematograph*

As director of the film, Lubitsch did not figure in these adverts at all. Examining some of the reviews of the film, we observe that Lubitsch's achievement in directing receives at least an aside, but also not much more than that. *Der Film* writes that 'the director Ernst Lubitsch also deserves praise.'¹⁶ Yet, it was in fact Lubitsch the actor who was given stellar acting material by writers Hans Kräly and Ernst Schönfelder, which the reviews recognised in stating that Lubitsch 'does justice to all the scenes in the most hilarious way.'¹⁷ Similarly, when *Illustrierte Film-Woche* added the review to the photograph it had already printed of Lubitsch as protagonist of *Schuhpalast Pinkus*, it did note that the film was directed by Lubitsch. Nonetheless, the review as a whole was little more than an extended description of plot and individual scenes, in which naturally the director figures decidedly less.¹⁸

A review for another film, which Lubitsch only directed rather than starred in, acknowledges the tension between these two roles, that both were significant to the filmmaking process, but one as visible as the other one was invisible. *Meine Frau, die Filmschauspielerin* (1918/1919) has already clearly implied meta-cinematic implications in its title, 'My Wife, the Film Star.' Although Lubitsch did not appear in this film, the meta-cinematic implications were already clearly implied in the film's title, *My Wife, the Film Star*. The review itself praised the film as 'a

495 (21 June 1916), no page. *National-Zeitung*: "Man **lacht herzlich**, wie **selten** über **Ernst Lubitsch**, [...]." *Vossische Zeitung*: "schildert der Film in **überaus lustigen** Bildern **Ernst Lubitsch** mit seinen **drolligen Einfällen** usw." *Berliner Morgenpost*: "Der bekannte Komiker **Ernst Lubitsch** [...]." (bold print in *Der Kinematograph*). A variation of this advert is also reprinted for instance in *Lichtbild-Bühne* 9.32 (12 August 1916), p. 54.

¹⁶ Anon. Review of *Schuhpalast Pinkus*. *Der Film* 1.21 (17 June 1916), p. 36. ("Auch der Regisseur Ernst Lubitsch verdient Lob [...].")

¹⁷ Ibid. ("Hans Kräly und Ernst Schönfelder, die als Verfasser zeichnen, haben da für Ernst Lubitsch eine Bombenrolle geschrieben, der er in allen Szenen in drolligster Weise gerecht wird.")

¹⁸ Anon. Review of *Schuhpalast Pinkus*. *Illustrierte Kino-Woche* 4.25 (30 June 1916), p. 172.

triumph for the hardworking Meyer from Berl... Excuse me! I mean: for Lubitsch.’¹⁹

Werner Faulstich and others have described stardom from the perspective of ‘continuity.’ This continuity exists on both the diachronic and the synchronic axis. Diachronic continuity relates to the idea that a star persona is formed over time and over the series of roles that the actor takes on. Synchronic continuity, on the other hand, exists between the roles played in a film and an actor’s real existence.²⁰ While both could be at work here, it is most notably the synchronicity of role and actor that offers a particularly insightful view into Lubitsch’s on-screen and off-screen personae. The joke, of course, is that “Meyer from Berl...” refers to the German title of one of Lubitsch’s films, *Meyer aus Berlin* (1918) – a film that Lubitsch directed, but in which he more importantly also starred, as the protagonist, Sally Meyer from Berlin. What seems a clever joke, in fact, points at the complex relationship between actors, their roles and their real life personae. In Lubitsch’s case this cluster of roles was further complicated by both the fact that he was actually from Berlin²¹ and that he also worked behind the camera.

Notably, however, the roles that Lubitsch occupies were kept fairly separate. Lubitsch’s earlier fame as actor certainly helped him to achieve a recall value and prominence when he turned to directing. Nevertheless, this remains largely unacknowledged, particularly once Lubitsch turned to directing films very different to those of his earlier career as a comic actor.

¹⁹ Egon Jacobson. Review of *Meine Frau, die Filmschauspielerin*. *Der Kinematograph* 630 (29 January 1919), no page. (“So war Ossi Oswalds Ehrentag auch ein Triumph für den fleißig schaffenden Meyer aus Berl... Pardon! Ich meine: für Lubitsch.”)

²⁰ See Werner Faulstich, Helmut Korte, Stephen Lowry, Ricarda Strobel. “‘Kontinuität’: Zur Imagefundierung des Film- und Fernsehstars.” *Der Star: Geschichte, Rezeption, Bedeutung*. Werner Faulstich, Helmut Korte, eds. München: Wilhelm Fink, 1997. p. 12.

²¹ One could take this even one step further by connecting Meyer, generally considered a Jewish name, to Lubitsch’s Jewish heritage.

When Lubitsch was given the opportunity of full-time direction, the genre of his films changed markedly. Although he continued to make smaller films, with the gifted comedienne Ossi Oswalda at the centre, the slapstick largely disappeared. Almost in alternation with these comedies were historical spectacles which continued to grow in epic proportion and frequently featured Pola Negri. It was these epics that eventually paved the way to Hollywood for both their director and star.

The response to Lubitsch's gradual change in direction was very positive. *Der Kinematograph* even noted that Lubitsch had, following acting and writing, arrived at his true calling – directing.²² Nevertheless, the public negotiation of Lubitsch as a director is different and less visible than that of Lubitsch as the star comedian. As an actor, he never commanded promotional or advertising campaigns in the same way as, say, Asta Nielsen did. Yet the promotional material for those films both featured and even centred upon Lubitsch frequently, as did the ensuing reviews. However, Lubitsch's fame as an actor had no marked influence on the perception of him as a new director. Advertising tools employed to promote the films with Lubitsch as a star were not repurposed to do the same for the films directed by Lubitsch.

Nevertheless, the public discourse explored other ways to discuss the director who was now absent from the screen. Advertising campaigns featured Lubitsch's name prominently, but centred on the image of the attached stars. Two types of texts therefore, which emerged from the Lubitsch discourse after his turn to directing, stand out in particular, the set report and the premiere review. These

²² Egon Jacobsohn. Review of *Carmen*. *Der Kinematograph* 12.628 (15 January 1919), no page. (“Da ist der Spielleiter Ernst Lubitsch, der nun endlich seinen eigentlichen Beruf gefunden zu haben scheint. Daß er mit seinen früheren darstellerischen und schriftstellerischen Darbietungen auf einen Teil der Kinobesucher wegen seines vergrößerten Herrnfeldstils [sic] nicht gerade erfrischend gewirkt hat, habe ich ihm leider schon bei verschiedenen Gelegenheiten an einer anderen, mehr dem großen Publikum zugänglichen Stelle zurufen müssen.”)

allowed Lubitsch, having attained a certain degree of publicity as an actor, to remain at least visible within the public negotiations of the films, when he had left the frame of the camera.

The ‘set report’ is the first of these text types. It came early into the life cycle of a film and, even more, its public negotiation. Fritz Podehl, for instance, covers the visit of German President Friedrich Ebert to the set of *Anna Boleyn* (1920). Lubitsch emerges here as a director bringing order to the chaos of 4000 extras by passing on orders to his assistant directors.²³ Lubitsch comes across even more vividly in B. E. Lühge’s report from ‘The Lubitsch City’ (“*Die Lubitsch-Stadt*”), which is the set of *Madame Dubarry*: Lubitsch is ‘in four places at once’ and ‘fills the whole glass house with his personality.’ He directs ‘shouting the words’ for the actors, ‘teases,’ then encourages. Hence, Lühge paints a vivid portrait of Lubitsch directing star Pola Negri in his text.²⁴ While the film was still in production, these set reports created advance news, buzz and excitement. What is more, these texts also enabled the director to be brought into focus. Not only did they provide insight into the director’s organisation of the set and his direction of the actors, but they acknowledged the fact that Lubitsch was actually invisible from the finished film. Thus they ensured that the director emerged as a central player.

²³ Fritz Podehl. “*Anna Boleyn*: Mit Ebert in Tempelhof.” *Der Film* 40 (2 October 1920), p. 32. *Der Kinematograph* finds the event also worth reporting. There, Lubitsch stands out from the crowd as well. See Anon. “*Anna Boleyn*: Ein neuer Großfilm der Union.” *Der Kinematograph* 14.717 (10 October 1920), no page.

²⁴ B. E. Lühge. “Paris in Berlin: Die Lubitsch-Stadt.” *Film-Kurier* 15 (22 June 1919), no page [front page]. (“*Lubitsch ist an vier Orten gleichzeitig. Er rennt wie ein Wiesel umher. Er füllt das ganze Glashauss mit seinem Wesen, fein unerhörtes Temperament reißt alles hin und gibt ihm das Kolorit [...]. Lubitsch [...] schreit die Worte vor, die sie bei der Aufnahme sprechen. Er stichelt, er feuert an, es ist, als wenn Peitschenhiebe von ihm ausgingen. Er zwingt die Schauspieler, aus sich herauszugehen und zu ‘leben.’*”) For another set report by Lühge see also B. E. Lühge. “Pola Negri auf der Guillotine.” *Film-Kurier* (2 August 1919), no page [front page]. Here Lubitsch is presented as organising his set with almost military precision.

The ‘premiere review’ is a further type of review, which usually included the critic’s opinion (although sometimes it did not).²⁵ Reminiscent of reviews of opening nights at the theatre,²⁶ the critic’s write-up of the film is couched in the experience of the premiere in surprising detail. There is the ‘original,’²⁷ and ‘stylish and auspicious’²⁸ invitation to the screening of *Die Austernprinzessin* that the critics for both *Der Kinematograph* and *Der Film* received and made reference to.²⁹ There are descriptions of the flowers ‘cleverly arranged by Ufa’³⁰ behind which ‘the main participants’ took their seats, observing how full the cinema was³¹ and the strongly positive reception after the screening.³² In between, the reviewer gives his opinion on the film itself, but it is this framing device of anticipation and applause that backs up, confirms and substantiates the opinion of the critic.

The opening of the Ufa-Palast am Zoo is celebrated with the premiere of *Madame Dubarry*, which despite the generally grand occasion is deemed an ‘evening with Lubitsch and Negri.’³³ What is meant to honour the new Ufa cinema

²⁵ See M. M. “*Madame Dubarry* in Hamburg.” *Der Film* 5 (1920), p. 51. This is less of an actual review, printed in the sections on news and premiere dates. Interestingly, it followed a very similar narrative of impressions to that of a premiere, full to the last seat and eagerly anticipated by the audience – in this case, mainly the press. Only the critic’s ultimate opinion is missing in order to give the piece the status of an actual review.

²⁶ Sabine Hake confirms the strong influence of drama criticism of film criticism in Germany, focusing in her study on an even earlier period. See Sabine Hake. *Cinema’s Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993. p. 14-15.

²⁷ Egon Jacobsohn. Review of *Die Austernprinzessin*. *Der Kinematograph* 651 (25 June 1919), no page.

²⁸ Anon. Review of *Die Austernprinzessin*. *Der Film* 4.26 (28 June 1919), p. 39. (“Eine stilvolle, vielversprechende Einladung.”)

²⁹ Jacobson even prints in full what had been sent in the name of ‘Ernst Lubitsch, the manager.’ (“*Schon die Einladung eine originelle Idee. [...] Ernst Lubitsch, der Manager.*”)

³⁰ Anon. Review of *Die Austernprinzessin*. *Der Film* 4.26 (28 June 1919), p. 39. (“*Der Unionpalast [sic] zum Bersten voll – dank den geschickten Arrangements der Ufa und ihrer Verantwortlichen in gediegener Feststimmung – in der Mittelloge des ersten Rangs hinter Blumen und Pflanzen die bewunderten und gefeierten Hauptbeteiligten.*”)

³¹ Anon. “Ein Meisterwerk der Union: Lubitsch inszeniert *Carmen*.” *Lichtbild-Bühne* 11.51 (21 December 1918), p. 71. (“*Zu einem gewaltigen Erfolge wurde die Freitags-Vorführung des Monumental – Films der “Union” Carmen, die von einem dichtgefüllten Hause mit demonstrativen Beifall aufgenommen wurde.*”)

³² See Anon. Review of *Die Austernprinzessin*. *Der Film* 4.26 (28 June 1919), p. 39. (“*Endloser Beifall des glänzend unterhaltenen Publikums und ein wahrer Blumenregen waren die äußeren Zeichen des großen Erfolgs.*”)

³³ Hb. “Lubitsch-Negri-Abend: Zur Eröffnung des Ufa-Palastes am Zoo.” *Lichtbild-Bühne* 12.38 (20 September 1919), p. 13.

really is an evening to praise the director and his star.³⁴ The description of the evening is rich, with the ‘audience made up from circles of the arts, press and film industry so elegant one could think oneself at a Reinhardt premiere.’³⁵ This particular review underscores the critic’s opinion not only by providing corresponding impressions from the premiere and underlining the significance of the premiere, which coincides with the opening of the Ufa-Palast. The piece also enables the director to come into sharp focus in the public negotiation of his film in spite of his absence from the screen itself.

Hence, this clever subgenre of the review fulfils two tasks. Rather than just praising the credentials of the film, these reviews produced both the audience’s excitement and anticipation of the film, thereby further underlining the critic’s opinion. What is more and related to this, this approach allows for the director to be discussed beyond both the production context and the context of the product itself. The piece thus fosters the prominence of Lubitsch’s role as a substantial part of the finished product.

Interestingly, at first sight these texts appear significant in length, but they do not actually contain a substantial amount of criticism of the films themselves, beyond the usual opinions on acting, writing and the rest of the production. Instead, they can be understood as existing somewhere between advertisements and critical reviews. They are not explicitly adverts and yet suggest to the audience that they should consider seeing this film. At the same time they are written by a critic, but without much critical depth. Thus, the director, as an additional asset to the film itself, also figures in this aspect of the film’s discourse.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 14. (*“Ja, der Abend ist am besten gekennzeichnet als Ehrenabend Negri-Lubitsch.”*)

³⁵ Ibid. p. 13. (*“Wer sich am Donnerstag Abend vor dem neuen Ufa-Palast am Zoo einfand, hatte das Gefühl, eine Reinhardt-Première stehe bevor. Dasselbe aus Kunst-, Presse und ersten Industriekreisen gemischte elegante Publikum, dieselbe fiebernde Erwartungsstimmung vor dem Eingang, die Begrüßungsszenen derer ‘vom Bau.’”*)

Hence, Lubitsch's rise to prominence, at first as an actor and later as a director, ran along lines that had been fairly well established by this point in the early German film industry. His image was increasingly used, allowing his celebrity to accelerate. The use of his face too was often coupled with other comic actors of similar standing. Lubitsch's earlier prominence may have facilitated his crossing over into directing, but the discourse of the time kept these two roles separate with only very few exceptions and they did not necessarily build one upon the other. Instead, the critical discourse in particular explored ways in which the director could be brought out from behind the camera into the visibility of the para-textual discourse on Lubitsch's films. This was achieved by way of set reports that featured Lubitsch in a prominent role on set or in reviews that incorporated impressions from the premiere. As Lubitsch also attended these, they allowed for a discussion of the director more prominently.

As we have seen, Lubitsch still featured prominently in the discourse on his films even after he moved into direction. However, I have not yet touched on the role that he played in their reception and specifically the question of how his authorship figures in such a discussion. Although this overview can only hint at certain aspects, I will look at where Lubitsch's authorship tends to be located, how criticism of his films is phrased and how this compares to one of his contemporaries and collaborators, Paul Wegener. Ultimately, there is a sense of authorship and even, possibly, Lubitsch's individual authorship, but these concepts remain far too blurred and hidden behind the reviewers' purple prose.

Lubitsch's efforts at directing quickly found a friendly critical reception. Although Lubitsch's direction competed with and was, at times, almost overshadowed when a famous female star was involved in the project, critics still

paid Lubitsch considerable attention. *Wenn vier dasselbe tun* (1917) is directed ‘with taste,’³⁶ while the direction of *Romeo und Julia im Schnee* (1919/1920) ‘can only praised as the best (as always)’³⁷ and that of *Die Puppe* (1919) is also ‘tasteful’ and ‘deft.’³⁸ Where other films were, on occasion, less well received, the criticism was hardly ever laid at Lubitsch’s door. *Der Kinematograph* suggests that Lubitsch should dispute the ‘paternity’ of the burlesque *Käsekönig Holländer* (1917),³⁹ while *Der Film* compares *Das fidele Gefängnis* (1917) unfavourably to its stage origins, albeit without ever mentioning the film’s director,⁴⁰ and states that, in the following month, it expects far better from Lubitsch than his efforts for *Der Kraftmeyer* (1915).⁴¹

More frequently, criticism was aimed at the story, but Lubitsch’s treatment of it was praised. The motif of the foreign millionaire, which forms the basis of *Die Austernprinzessin*, may only be ‘harmless,’ but Lubitsch’s direction ‘stands at such great heights’⁴² and it is only thanks to Lubitsch that *Die Bergkatze* (1921) ‘picks up pace towards the end and generally becomes a success.’⁴³ A review for *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* (1918) pays a particular compliment to Lubitsch and fellow writer

³⁶ C. B. Review of *Wenn vier dasselbe tun*. *Der Film* 2.47 (24 November 1917), p. 34. (“*Im Unionspalast erfreut sich ein von Ernst Lubitsch sehr fein und geschmackvoll inszeniertes Union-Lustspiel.*”)

³⁷ Frank. Review of *Romeo und Julia im Schnee*. *Film-Kurier* 64 (28 March 1920), no page. (“*Der Regie Ernst Lubitschs ist auch diesmal (wie immer) nur das Beste nachzurühmen.*”)

³⁸ Oh. Review of *Die Puppe*. *Lichtbild-Bühne* 49 (6 December 1919), p. 29. (“*Lubitsch [...], stets geschmackvoll, hat hier eine Reihe alter, lustiger Ideen geschickt verwendet und aufgemacht, viel neue aus eigenem hinzugefügt.*”)

³⁹ Egon Jacobson. Review of *Käsekönig Holländer*. *Der Kinematograph* 639 (2 April 1919), no page. (“*Nein, Meister Lubitsch, nach Carmen oder auch nach Meine Frau, die Filmschauspielerin, darf man sich mit solchen Mummenschanz nicht mehr an die Öffentlichkeit [sic] wagen! Oder man leugnet diskret die Vaterschaft.*”)

⁴⁰ See Geka. Review of *Das fidele Gefängnis*. *Der Film* 46 (16 November 1919), p. 37.

⁴¹ E. Review of *Der Kraftmeyer*. *Der Film* 48 (30 November 1919), p. 37. (“*Wir sind von ihm weit besseres gewöhnt.*”)

⁴² Hb. Review of *Die Austernprinzessin*. *Lichtbild-Bühne* 25 (21 June 1919), p. 24. (“*Nicht, als ob der ‘Stoff’ über das mehr als harmlose Genre der bekannten Millionärmotive von jenseits des Ozeans im geringsten hinausginge. Aber die Regie Ernst Lubitschs steht hier auf so fabelhafter Höhe [...].*”)

⁴³ Fritz Podehl. Review of *Die Bergkatze*. *Der Film* 16 (16 April 1921), p. 60. (“*Der Inhalt rechtfertigt die Bezeichnung ‘Grottestke’ nur sehr bedingt [...]. Wenn trotzdem in den letzten Akten ein flottes Tempo erzielt wurde und der Film einen Erfolg machte, so dürfte doch fast alles auf das Konto Lubitschs, des Regisseurs [sic] zu setzen sein [...].*”)

Hans Kräly. If they have managed to make the audience laugh (the critic insists that he had even heard a woman ‘bray’ with laughter behind him), then that is an even greater achievement.⁴⁴ Thus, Lubitsch is hardly ever included in the criticism that his films may have encountered. What is more, the film criticism of the day commonly follows the line that the story may be bad, but Lubitsch’s treatment saves the film. Thus, this approach indirectly adds to praise of the director.

This approach to Lubitsch’s cinema is particularly interesting because during these early years Lubitsch still frequently continued to receive co-credit for writing.⁴⁵ When this was the case, it was the intertitles that received particular praise. Numerous critics credit the intertitles as the main achievement of several Lubitsch films. The intertitles in *Meyer aus Berlin* are, if numerous, ‘so short, so eye-catching and striking that they – always well integrated – appeared like a flash and only left behind their gag but not their impression as intertitles.’⁴⁶ Similarly, Argus contends, in his review of *Wenn vier dasselbe tun*, that “the intertitles reflect how much the authors [Ernst Lubitsch and Erich Schönfelder] enjoyed working on them.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Frank. Review of *Ich möchte kein Mann sein*. *Film-Kurier* 2.96 (8 May 1920), no page [front page]. (“Denn die Geschichte [...] ist schon tausendmal vorher in allen möglichen Variationen auf die Bühne gebracht worden. Wenn es trotzdem den Autoren gelungen ist, das Publikum zu stürmischer Heiterkeit hinzureißen, ja, es zeitweise direkt zum Wiehern zu bringen – ich weiß, daß das kein hübscher Ausdruck ist, aber die Damen hinter mir haben es tatsächlich getan –, so ist ihr Verdienst um so höher zu bewerten.”)

⁴⁵ Samson Raphaelson, who provided the script for *Trouble in Paradise*, *The Shop Around the Corner* and *Heaven Can Wait* many years later in the United States, suggests that Lubitsch did remain involved in the writing process for his films despite not receiving credit. Raphaelson, for instance, describes their collaboration, “Our work was based always on a play, always European, and usually unknown [in America]. Lubitsch would tell me briefly the general line of the plot. I never read the play, because he wanted me not to be hampered by someone else’s writing. He chose material for its possibilities, material that left us free for rampages of invention in what was known as his style” (24) and elsewhere even concedes that Lubitsch “wrote some of my best lines, and I supplied some typical Lubitsch touches” (22). (Samson Raphaelson. *Three Screen Comedies*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. p. 22, 24.)

⁴⁶ Anon. Review of *Meyer aus Berlin*. *Der Film* 5 (1 February 1919), p. 99. (“Freilich mögen dadurch viel [sic] Titel entstehen; aber sie sind so kurz, so plakathaft, schlagend daß sie – immer gut eingespielt – nur blitzartig aufzucken und nur ihren Witz, nicht aber den Eindruck des Zwischentitels hinterlassen.”)

⁴⁷ Argus. Review of *Wenn vier dasselbe tun*. *Der Kinematograph* 569 (21 November 1917), no page. (“Die Zwischentitel spiegeln das Vergnügen wieder [sic], das die Verfasser beim Arbeiten gehabt

The significance ascribed to the intertitles may well have stemmed from the fact that they were the most obvious instances of writing and authorship in film. The acting received praise not only because some of the actors were built up into stars, but because they were, quite simply, a particularly visible element of the films. Similarly, intertitles offered an obvious field for criticism as they were, as the written word, already familiar to the early critics from literature.

Beyond the discussion of individual films, the early trade papers displayed a remarkable interest in a larger debate on issues of film authorship. Certain articles, for instance, discuss how ‘visible’ the director should be⁴⁸ or the role of the director as the creator of a film.⁴⁹ German film discourse had already clearly established a certain grip on what distinguishes film as both medium and art from other cultural forms. Reviews of the later Lubitsch films discussed the ‘effective,’ ‘carefully planned’ images and even a ‘sharp eye for the purely scenic element of a film image.’⁵⁰ However, it may have been stated that Lubitsch worked with ‘brand-new tools and combinations,’ but what these were is not further addressed. Thus, while they clearly paid attention to the films’ aesthetics, or even ‘film poetry’

haben.”) For further references to the titlecards see Frank. Review of *Ich möchte kein Mann sein*. *Film-Kurier* 2.96 (8 May 1920), no page [front page]. or B. E. Luthge. Review of *Die Austernprinzessin*. *Film-Kurier* 15 (22 June 1919), no page.

⁴⁸ A. G. “Der ‘sichtbare’ Regisseur.” *Der Kinematograph* 569 (21 November 1917), no page. Considering the importance of the director for a film, this article discusses whether the director should be seen during the opening credits of a film.

⁴⁹ Julius Urgiss. “Die deutsche Film-Kunst.” *Der Kinematograph* 515 (8 November 1916), no page. Focusing largely on Max Mack, the article nevertheless argues more generally that the film director goes beyond the one in theatre in that he is the actual creator of a film more closely aligned to the writer or poet.

⁵⁰ See for instance F. Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *Der Film* 51 (18 December 1920), p. 27., S. Review of *Die Puppe*. *Der Film* 49 (7 December 1919), p. 48. (“Lubitsch arbeitet mit ganz neuen Mitteln und Kombinationen, hat Szene für Szene mit großer Sorgfalt durchdacht, und überraschend effektvolle Bilder geschaffen.”), C.B. Review of *Carmen*. *Der Film* 52 (28 December 1918), p. 52. (“Mit untrüglichem Blick für das rein Szenische des Filmbildes, für die Bewegung im kleinen wie im großen, für Ausdruck und Geste und dramatisch sprechendes wirkungsvolles Spiel hat er einen Film geschaffen, der – abgesehen von seinen herrlich schönen Bildern, imponierenden Massenszenen und technisch glänzenden Einfällen – vor allem ein dramatisches Erlebnis aus einem Guß darstellt.”).

(“*Filmdichtung*”),⁵¹ they hardly ever went into greater detail as to what Lubitsch’s direction actually did.

To summarise, Lubitsch was not only largely exempt from the criticism levelled at his films. What is more, he became distinguished for his cinematic technique and his treatment of a story; an image not least corroborated by the set reports that show the degree of his authority over his sets. More, there was already a sense of surplus value that Lubitsch specifically brought to a production. This surplus value had not yet become associated with a metaphor, let alone its own term, in regard to the ‘Lubitsch touch’ later. Two points complicate such a notion here. For one, the concept of authorship emerging from the reviews still remained too diffuse to describe the contribution that Lubitsch actually made to the cinematic product. Secondly, a side-ways glance at the director’s contemporaries suggest that this was not necessarily a singular occurrence.

The Lubitsch discourse also touched upon the discourses on other directors, most usually Richard Oswald or Paul Wegener. Oswald was related to Lubitsch in terms of shared subjects and genres of popular cinema, while Wegener was a repeated Lubitsch collaborator. Wegener directed him as an actor in the early years of Lubitsch’s career; later Lubitsch directed Wegener just before he left for America. Although Lubitsch is thus credited with having overtaken Oswald,⁵² a few years earlier Paul Wegener not only stood out in the reviews of his films, but also received even grander and more exalted praise.

⁵¹ F. Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *Der Film* 51 (18 December 1920), p. 27.

⁵² The reasons underlying such a statement remain unclear, although reviewer ‘S.’ writes that Lubitsch has understood, presumably in comparison to Oswald, that the director can be the soul of a film if he understands how to make use of all the possibilities the medium offers. See S. Review of *Die Puppe*. *Der Film* 49 (7 December 1919), p. 48. (“*Handlung und Darstellung sind durchhaucht von gesundem, wirksamen Humor; dem phantastischen Film mit seinem Anflug an unheimliche [sic] Geschichten hat Ernst Lubitsch eine brillante Lösung gegeben; zweifellos hat er zur Zeit Richard Oswald weit überholt. Lubitsch hat bewiesen, daß der Regisseur die Seele des Filmwerkes sein kann, wenn er es versteht, alle Möglichkeiten des Films auszunutzen.*”)

On *Hans Trutz im Schlaraffenland* (1917), one such Wegener-Lubitsch collaboration, *Der Film* writes of ‘Wegener’s purely artistic aspirations, which will find true and grateful reciprocation in the audience.’⁵³ For *Der Kinematograph*, Argus suggests that, in his new film, Wegener deals with ‘the desire to reap the fruits of life without having to sow them beforehand.’ Hence, Argus creates a persona of the arguably more philosophical director Wegener, notably distinct from the usual portrayal of Lubitsch the director, with his critical perspective even culminating in calling the film “the new Wegeneresche creation [*Schöpfung*].”⁵⁴ Here Argus clearly implies a reference to Richard Wagner, the monumental musician, and indirectly even his notion of the ‘*Gesamtkunstwerk*,’ and thereby associates Wegener with a much more established art form that ranks at least as highly as theatre.

From very early on in his film career, Lubitsch was principally praised for his directorial expertise; in fact, he was ultimately and distinctively admired for his filmmaking technique, although the reviewers failed to detail what those techniques actually were. The impression that Wegener’s more serious efforts left on the critics eluded him. Lubitsch was already a force to be reckoned with in early German cinema and in contrast, critics did not seem to reach the same levels of infatuation with Wegener. Lubitsch offered entertainment, often writing scripts that he then would later direct and star in; hence he was not necessarily considered a serious artist. Rather, Lubitsch eventually evolved into a gifted technician with a tight rein over the set. However, no clear concept of authorship emerged at this time.

⁵³ Anon. Review of *Hans Trutz im Schlaraffenland*. *Der Film* 2.47 (24 November 1917), p. 32.

⁵⁴ Argus. Review of *Hans Trutz im Schlaraffenland*. *Der Kinematograph* 569 (21 November 1917), no page. (“In seinem neuen Film behandelt [Wegener] die Sehnsucht, ohne Arbeit Früchte des Lebens zu genießen [...]. [D]ie neue Wegenerische Schöpfung [...].”)

This particular variety of early film reviews offered fewer, or less deep insights in terms of early close textual analysis than expected. However, they negotiated the early German existence of the star in peculiar ways. Although for the time, this was not an uncommon career development, Lubitsch, with his progression from theatre stage to film screen and eventually director's chair, offers an intriguing site of negotiations of the various powers and agendas that were already at work here, that of the artist and the star. These competing interests were likely to have become only more pronounced once he entered Hollywood's studio and star systems, but they were already clearly visible in the Germany of the 1910s.

Lubitsch's rise to comic fame proceeded, at least as far as public discourse was concerned, far more smoothly than his earlier efforts at acting. The change to direction did not see him out of the spotlight for long either. Although the tools for building up a Weimar star were not applied to his rise as a director, the public discourse began to rely upon other types of text to discuss Lubitsch; namely, the set report and the premiere.

In comparison to what was to follow, early German criticism discussed authorship differently from later critics in the United States. There was already then a notion of medium specificity, but the discourse still lacked the vocabulary to discuss it. Instead, it used ornate language to refer back to literary and theatrical models. It may then appear curious that the discourse did not then also rely upon metaphor to describe Lubitsch style. For all the lively debate that existed, it was lacking in substance and specific understanding of the new medium. What is more, Lubitsch did not stand out in a manner equivalent to the decades to follow. Specifically, Lubitsch's tendency to be considered apart from his émigré background and his resulting assimilation into American film culture would provide the background against which the 'Lubitsch touch' emerged in the 1920s. In the

Germany of the 1910s, however, blurry imagery and purple prose prevented a clear concept of Lubitsch's authorship from crystallising.

IV Lubitsch in Hollywood, 1923-1947

1 Between German Invasion and Sophistication: The 1920s

1.1 Introduction

In his portraits of the significant Hollywood directors of the 1920s, Richard Koszarski dryly notes: “Lubitsch had been trying to get himself to America for years.”¹ Who then was Lubitsch at the beginning of the 1920s? What was Hollywood too back then, and how would both of them evolve over the course of the decade?

To begin an answer: Ernst Lubitsch was the most popular director to come out of Europe at that moment. Generically, however, he was much harder to pin down, at least as far as his later association with the romantic comedy would appear to suggest. Lubitsch’s German filmography was interspersed with quirky smaller comedies à la *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* or *Die Austerprinzessin*. Yet, it was his exotic, historical spectacles that carried his reputation beyond Europe; at least, well before he himself had made the journey.

An invitation from Mary Pickford had brought him to Hollywood. Yet, it was rather uncharacteristic that the pair never made another film together, given Lubitsch’s long-standing work with other popular actors and actresses. Thus, he found himself a free agent after their one-time collaboration. Be that as it may, Lubitsch was before long scooped up by Warner Brothers, a rather curious match given his epics and their association with the hard-boiled, tough and low-budget, now as much as then. Indeed, historiographically speaking, Lubitsch has been largely written out of histories of the studio. The collaboration ended abruptly,

¹ Koszarski. *An Evening’s Entertainment*. p. 250.

irrespective of his initially joining Warner Brothers as a director of considerable prestige.

In genre terms, Lubitsch abandoned his exotic spectacles when he went to work for Warner. He made his return to earlier genre territories, such as the historical *Forbidden Paradise* (1924) or the nostalgic *Student Prince of Old Heidelberg* (1927), whilst on loan to other studios. Meanwhile, his time at Warner Brothers was defined by comedies of the sexes, set in urban centres, not always in the United States, but generally closer to the present time. These sophisticated comedies, as they have become known, can be seen as precursors of the romantic comedy, although studies of the latter genre generally start the decade after. Towards the end of the 1920s, Lubitsch was on the move again. By the time sound arrived, Lubitsch had settled at Paramount and, in directing musicals, embraced the talkies.

Lubitsch found on arrival a Hollywood that was one in transition. Lucy Fischer characterises this particular decade of American film history as one in which classical Hollywood cinema has its roots: “the studio and star systems, talking pictures, color photography, bona fide theaters, and the movies’ status as a major American industry. In fact, ever since, the fates of American society and the movies have been inextricably entwined.”² Hence, it can be said that Hollywood “continued to grow and prosper” over the course of the 1920s.³

Finally, this chapter will pinpoint one emerging characteristic of the 1920s: the rise of mass journalism. From the scandals that swept through Hollywood, tabloid journalism and jazz journalism forged grand narratives. A “manifestation

² Lucy Fischer. “Introduction: Movies and the 1920s.” *American Cinema of the 1920s: Themes and Variations*. Lucy Fischer, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009. p. 1.

³ Ibid. p. 15.

primarily of the Twenties, [...] the gaudiest decade in the nation's history,"⁴ as John Tebbel writes in his history of American journalism. For the most part, Lubitsch stayed away from the scandals, but the emergence of tabloid newspapers proved significant for the publishing landscape and the cultural climate. In their significance for the period they aligned with the formation of the star system and the rise of national magazines with mass circulations.⁵

In his history of American film criticism, Jerry Roberts writes that "[b]y the 1920s, when movies became a part of the national leisure fabric, newspapers' criticism amounted to journalistic coverage – getting essentials into the paper. Aesthetics were rarely considered or understood."⁶ These early critics "used their columns as literary sounding boards for pontificating, amusing, cajoling, or otherwise entertaining their growing readership."⁷ Koszarski concludes that, "[T]he ultimate goal was still more journalistic than critical."⁸ Nevertheless, this early criticism forms a significant part of the public discourse on the films of the period. Over the course of this thesis it will become clear that Koszarski, for all his useful insights into press culture, may be a little over-critical, most notably of the *New York Times*. Closely connected to this site of social negotiation is the discourse of advertising.

Advertising took off during this period, particularly in connection with forms of mass entertainment, such as cinema. In her treatment of the standardisation of Hollywood's practices in the seminal *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Janet Staiger

⁴ John Tebbel. *The Compact History of the American Newspaper*. New York: Hawthorn, 1963. p. 223

⁵ See David Robinson. *Hollywood in the Twenties*. London: A. Zwemmer, 1968. p. 22.

⁶ Jerry Roberts. *The Complete History of American Film Criticism*. Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2010. p. 26.

⁷ Koszarski. *An Evening's Entertainment*. p. 192.

⁸ Ibid.

even goes as far as to call the advertising discourse “[o]ne of the major mechanisms which established the standards for quality filmmaking.”⁹

From the grand German imports to smaller American silent comedies, this chapter examines Lubitsch’s 1920s films. I will map out the decade in three stages. The first two stages are vaguely chronological, while the third one is not. More importantly, all three operate from the general towards the particular. In film history terms, the first one, referred to generally as the ‘German invasion,’ will set the scene for understanding the other two stages.

This first section will look at public attitudes towards foreign filmmakers, Lubitsch in particular, as treated by what we could term the American public discourse of the 1920s. There was indeed a sense of threat manifest in such a discourse, one against which Lubitsch’s arrival in Hollywood must be viewed. This chapter will also explore the strategies employed to exempt Lubitsch from being included in this discourse, strategies that eventually facilitated his assimilation into American film culture. David Pratt’s work on the discourse surrounding the release of Lubitsch’s first exported film, *Madame Dubarry* (released in the United States as *Passion*), will serve as an illuminating springboard for my argument.

In the second section I will go beyond Pratt’s research, considering Lubitsch in the context of Continental sophistication. Lubitsch became increasingly associated with adjectives such as ‘Continental’ and ‘European,’ both of which helped clear him from any possible anti-German backlash. More, Lubitsch quickly became associated with the emerging sub-genre of the sophisticated comedy. This new development allowed not only for Lubitsch not to be identified by his German

⁹ Janet Staiger. “The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930.” *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960s*. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 97.

origins, a category of filmmaking that he never seemed to fit too well in the first place.

Finally, I will examine the phenomenon of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ and its emergence in the 1920s. With Lubitsch’s assimilation into the American film industry complete, a distinct flavour was perceived in Lubitsch’s films that distinguishes him from his peers. ‘Lubitsch touches’ are on occasion still found in the films of other directors, or other filmmakers find their own touch ascribed to them. As the ‘Lubitsch touch’ became established as the one ‘touch’ capable of sticking in the public discourse, Lubitsch was able to move beyond a narrative of simple assimilation to the American system. He hence prepared a prominent position that he could maintain and expand in the decade to follow.

These three stages therefore are intrinsically linked. A line leads from a discourse hostile towards what is perceived as German competition to Lubitsch’s lucky association with 1920s sophistication and even the sophisticated comedy. In view of the fact that Lubitsch became quickly established as a master of these films, it may be that the essence of a Lubitsch film has become identified with its own term, the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

All three terms constitute semiotic ‘symbols’ in Peirce’s sense of the word, where symbols “have become associated with their meanings by usage.”¹⁰ For Peirce, a “symbol, one in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows.”¹¹ The meanings of symbols are not inherent to them; instead, they are unstable, flexible and arbitrary and can therefore change with both time and convention. This is not to say that these terms are illusions and never existed, for it is important to examine how they have been used and what meaning

¹⁰ Charles Sanders Peirce. “What is a Sign?” *The Essential Peirce* Vol. 2, Peirce Edition Project, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 10.

they have carried at a given point in history – very much like the ‘Lubitsch touch’ itself.

1.2 Lubitsch and the German Invasion

This first section looks at the earliest period of a Lubitschian presence in the United States and situates Lubitsch publicly in the early years of his move from Europe to America. The second section of this chapter on sophistication will trace the wider semiotic implications of ‘German,’ but also more generally ‘European’ and ‘Continental.’ For now, I am interested in the connotations of ‘immigration,’ ‘foreignness’ and discourses of ‘menace,’ ‘threat’ and even a sense of ‘invasion.’ These key terms provide the necessary background to how the critics depict Lubitsch not only in terms of his individual ‘touch’ but as the director most central of the newly-emerging sophisticated comedy.

To approach this evolution of the American Lubitsch, I will first look at the waves of immigration of the period, before the economic background that put the particular kind of film Lubitsch made at the turn of the century at such an advantage. Later, I will explore how the critics reacted to Lubitsch’s appearance in Hollywood. I will trace the meaning of ‘invasion,’ both historically in contemporary criticism, and historiographically in the critical literature emerging subsequently. While the ‘German invasion’ is a critical construct that has become a handy shorthand to describe a sense of threat, such an anxiety can also be detected in the public discourse at the time. Critics therefore employed various strategies to exempt Lubitsch and his films from this discourse. This dissociation from the German background would eventually clear the way for other associations, which will be discussed in the remaining two sections of this chapter.

As with America as a whole, Hollywood witnessed several waves of immigrants arriving on its shores. Some of these waves have attracted more historiographical interest than others. The mass exodus from Europe to escape political persecution in the 1930s is certainly such an example, in view of the widespread popular and critical interest connected to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. From a film historical perspective, the émigré European influence on *film noir*, one of the foremost American film genres is another reason for this.

Other waves of immigration have received less critical attention, notably the artists who came to Hollywood in the 1920s. Consequently, the make-up of these waves is often more blurred. Tim Bergfelder for instance argues, in his ‘long view’ of German actors in Hollywood, that the émigrés who came over in the 1920s constituted what was already the third such wave from Germany.¹² On the other hand, Graham Petrie contends that it was only in the 1920s that a “pattern” for Hollywood immigration was established and that it was this pattern that would repeat itself in the following decades, if for different reasons.¹³ Be that as it may, Lubitsch is easily one of the most significant and most successful filmmakers to emerge from this wave.

To provide a very specific sketch of the 1920s in terms of Lubitsch’s reception as a filmmaker from abroad, it would be desirable to look briefly at the wave’s contextualisation as a whole. In her article “Dr. Caligari at the Folies-Bergère,” Kristin Thompson largely focuses on Robert Wiene’s experimental art film *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920). However, she also touches in passing

¹² See Tim Bergfelder. “German Actors in Hollywood: The Long View.” *Journeys of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood: A Critical Companion*. Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau, eds. London: BFI, 2006. p. 37-43.

¹³ Graham Petrie. *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922-1931*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002. p. x. If the 1920s had seen an attempt to lure European talent to Hollywood and the second wave for political persecution, the wave in the 1960s to the early 1970s was a mixture of the two. See Graham Petrie. *Hollywood Destinies: European Directors in America, 1922-1931*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. p. 1.

upon the economic rationale behind importing large-scale historical epics to the United States from Germany in the aftermath of World War I. Thompson shows how, defying all cultural, xeno-sceptic or transnational concerns, the historical epic was able to 'break' into the American market simply for economic motives:

Lavish sets and costumes, as well as crowds of extras, could be included in a film's budget in Germany for far less than in countries whose currencies were stronger. The films' low price tags abroad would make them all the more attractive to distributors who would have to pay more for comparably spectacular epics made domestically.¹⁴

As Thompson explains, these epic imports proved a clever move commercially and, following early success, American studios were eager to keep the films coming. This development is far more crucial for Lubitsch than any other German director, including Wiene. Indeed, of the first post-war films brought over from Germany, two were Lubitsch productions: *Madame Dubarry* and *Anna Boleyn* (*Deception* in the United States) were first and third, while Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* was the second. Petrie notes that, "[w]hile the Americans were encountering unexpected difficulties finding an outlet for their films in Germany, the tide began to run rapidly in the opposite direction, promoted by the huge popular and critical success"¹⁵ of Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*. Finding themselves suddenly on the defensive, the Americans may have felt the need to vilify further the German product and its main producer, but this importation wave eventually dissipated.

In studies that touch upon the topic of European and specifically German immigration to Hollywood in the 1920s there is a particular term that has gained currency: the so-called 'German invasion.' The term is clearly attractive in view of the many invasions that originated in Germany during World War II, most

¹⁴ Kristin Thompson. "Dr. Caligari at the Folies-Bergère, or, The Successes of an Early Avant-Garde Film." *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories*. Mike Budd, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990. p. 126.

¹⁵ Petrie. *Hollywood Destinies* (2002). p. 4.

notoriously the German invasion of Poland. What is more, as vividly described by Thompson in the quote above, the large scale on which these historical epics operated corroborates the notion of an invasion. Thomas J. Saunders notes that “[t]he coincidence of Hollywood’s rise to global dominance and Germany’s emergence as the leading European producer determined the pattern of international competition in the subsequent decade.”¹⁶ He goes on to summarise how this competition played out, specifically, that “Weimar’s reputation is not purely posthumous, [boasting not only] the largest and healthiest film industry in Europe at the end of the war, but [also winning] international recognition.”¹⁷ Hence, the American film industry and early film critics would have been right to consider Germany not only as a significant competition to their own position on the world market.

However, it is unclear where the notion of a ‘German invasion’ originated. Historical studies on the subject do not offer an origin. In their general survey of movie history, Douglas Gomery and Clara Pafort-Overduin use the term in connection to F. W. Murnau, whose film *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927) is credited as the “single film [if there is such one] which symbolized the German invasion of Hollywood.”¹⁸ Crucially, *Sunrise* is not an imported film, but a film made in America by a German émigré filmmaker.

Studies on various periods of German cinema also make reference to the term: see, for example, Sabine Hake’s *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*,¹⁹ *Cinema*

¹⁶ Thomas J. Saunders. *Hollywood in Berlin: American Cinema and Weimar Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. p. 4.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁸ Douglas Gomery and Clara Pafort-Overduin. *Movie History: A Survey*. New York: Routledge, 2011. p. 79.

¹⁹ Here it is *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* “which spark[ed] fears about a ‘German invasion.’” Sabine Hake. *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. p. 138. Made in Germany, the film was one of the earliest to be imported to the United States after the end of the War. Its legendarily alien aesthetic, but also its paranoid subject matter may well have contributed to the deep impression it had on America besides its financial potency.

in *Democratizing Germany*²⁰ by Heide Fehrenbach, or *When Heimat Meets Hollywood* on even more recent German-American film relations.²¹ In his study *Hollywood and Hitler*, Thomas Doherty captions one image “The German invasion.”²² Pointedly for this project, the corresponding photograph features Emil Jannings and his director for the film *The Patriot* (1928), who happened to be none other than Lubitsch himself. Graham Petrie’s *Hollywood Destinies* remains the seminal study on this wave of European directors to America. Yet, even when he mentions “the ‘invasion,’ as it was often characterized,”²³ it is unclear whether this is a historical description or more recent descriptor.

In regard to this phrase, none of these studies point towards a clear origin. David Pratt has surveyed the public discourse surrounding the release of Lubitsch’s *Madame Dubarry*, but not even he has unearthed anything specific in the matter. Thus, a ‘German invasion’ appears as a historiographical construct, a critical shorthand to summarise neatly the background against which these first German films were imported in the aftermath of World War I. In Lubitsch’s case, the phrase therefore provides a canvas for the historical “‘function’ [of his epics to] either break the ‘blockage’ against German titles and open the door for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or to bring Lubitsch to the attention of the American film industry so that he can come to Hollywood to make [some ten years later] *Trouble in Paradise*.”²⁴

²⁰ She writes that “by 1920, the Hollywood press was warning of a ‘German invasion,’ which, however, never materialized thanks to American protectionism.” Unfortunately for our investigation, the corresponding footnote only yields references to more secondary literature rather than primary sources that actually called the influx an ‘invasion.’ Heide Fehrenbach. *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing of National Identity After Hitler*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. p. 28.

²¹ Christine Haase. *When Heimat Meets Hollywood: German Filmmakers and America, 1985–2005*. Rochester: Camden House, 2007. p. 20 (= Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture). Haase does accompany her reference with a historical quote from the *New York Times*, which however does not contain the phrase either.

²² Thomas Doherty. *Hollywood and Hitler: 1933–1939*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. p. 16 (= Film and Culture).

²³ Petrie. *Hollywood Destinies* (2002). p. 3.

²⁴ David B. Pratt. “‘O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou?’ *Passion*, the German Invasion and the Emergence of the Name ‘Lubitsch.’” *Wide Angle* 13.1 (January 1991), p. 35.

Indeed, Pratt argues that the value of these Lubitsch films, which are lesser known today, is hardly ever raised at all. This provides Pratt with the premise for his own insightful article into the “far greater impact [of Lubitsch’s spectacles] on the American film industry than did the Expressionist titles.”²⁵ Nonetheless, beyond Lubitsch, the category of the ‘German invasion’ functions as a more dramatic narrative for the German influence on the American film industry and even aesthetics in a more general sense.

While the United States as a whole were subject to a wave of xenophobic sentiments of varying natures following the war,²⁶ Petrie notes that the “[h]ostility toward Germans died down with the ending of the war.”²⁷ Instead, there was “widespread enthusiasm with which even the trade papers and popular magazines had greeted the earliest imported films.”²⁸ Similarly, David Pratt goes to great length to highlight “First National’s fear of disclosing the German origins of *Passion*.”²⁹ Relying on a great array of newspaper material, he shows that this proved unsuccessful well before the film was even seen in New York. When it was, the public response, both from critics and audience, was substantial and overwhelmingly positive.³⁰ However, this positivity did not last the course of the decade. Thus, the portrait that forms of the decade is not a straightforward one. Nonetheless, while the source of the ‘invasion’ has proven, so far, impossible to trace, a survey of the critical negotiation of Lubitsch’s imported epics suggests that a sense of anxiety was indeed palpable. The following section will not only trace the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Graham Petrie for instance outlines these in the first chapter of his *Hollywood Destinies* (2002). See p. 1.

²⁷ Petrie. *Hollywood Destinies* (2002). p. 2.

²⁸ Petrie. *Hollywood Destinies* (2002). p. 11.

²⁹ Pratt. ““O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou?”” p. 48.

³⁰ See Ibid. p. 47.

progress of this sentiment but will also explore the strategies with which the critics have already then attempted to exempt Lubitsch from the general opinion.

In its feature on “German Picture News,” *Variety* reported on “[f]our new pictures [that] have appeared here [...] and which seem here superior to any American or Italian offerings.”³¹ This news was sufficiently concerning insofar as “[t]he German government, through its new laws, has also created an uncertain feeling in our entire industry. They threaten to monopolize the theatres, and we have incessantly to keep our eyes open, otherwise they will go so far as to ruin our industry here.”³² ‘Threat’ and ‘ruin,’ ‘monopolisation’ and the insistence to stay ‘incessantly’ watchful reinforce the concern and outright anxiety displayed here. *Moving Picture World* used equally anxious vocabulary, using the term ‘menace’ to describe the competition posed by German films; for instance, its editor, Arthur James, kept returning to the subject of the German invasion. In late spring of 1921, he wrote two articles, “Here Come the Germans!” and “The Menace Hysteria.” These were opinion pieces rather than actual reviews printed in the review section of the paper. Instead, they appeared in a prominent spot towards the opening pages; they were also signed by the editor-in-chief, to give them even more weight – then still an exception.

Other articles, in which both Lubitsch and the state of German imports were discussed, took on various forms and were written with different tones. For instance, *Photoplay* built less on the notion of ‘threat,’ but adopted an almost mocking tone when commenting on “the talk about the cheapness of feature-making in Europe,”

³¹ Anon. “German Picture News.” *Weekly Variety* 57.7 (9 January 1920), p. 57.

³² Ibid. Another example for the rhetoric of ‘threat’ in the discourse of German-American exchange of film goods is an article in *Moving Picture World* reporting that the “Municipalization [sic] of Cinema [felt] Threatened” as “Film production [was] Slow[ing] Up in Germany.” However, this article seems to describe the situation in Germany – another suggestion that the feeling of threat and invasion was by all means mutual, but also especially not far from the minds of American journalists (Anon. “Film Production Slows Up in Germany; Municipalization of Cinema Threatened.” *Moving Picture World* 49.9 (30 October 1920), p. 1209.).

wondering if “an ancient alchemist had stalked from his forgotten tomb to turn all metals into gold for some *kino-koenig* of *Deutschland*.”³³

In the following section, I will analyse how these three articles discuss Lubitsch in a much greater depth than first meets the eye. On the surface all three affirmed that public discourse was pervaded by anxiety and fear – including the ironic section in *Photoplay* – even if, in Lubitsch’s case, they aimed to dispel such concerns. The *Variety* article, for instance, tried to assure its readership that the Germans

actually stand in our line, with our new strict censor laws, in which each moving picture with the slightest immoral action is forbidden. They made it as difficult for the German makers to produce immoral pictures as it is in your country – in fact, pictures which have already passed through the censorship are now being seized by the police.³⁴

This passage, which closes the article, reassured the reader that, given the *actual* state of events, such worries are being addressed.

The title of James’s article for *Moving Picture World* may well cast the Germans as ‘invaders,’ but his intention was to assuage concerns rather than add to what he perceives as a ‘hysteria.’ Taking a highly positive view of the issue, he advocated a no-tariff approach, not least because, at the time, there were quite simply not enough good German films, while restrictions on film imports would not last long and would not prevent “German experts from coming here to make their big productions.”³⁵ This argument of “not enough good German pictures” is an interesting one; although ‘invasion’ may be defined more by the unwanted nature of foreign entry than its size, it still downplays the extent of the threat significantly.

³³ Anon. “Close-Ups: Editorial Expression and Timely Comment.” *Photoplay* 20.5 (October 1921), p. 34 (emphases in the original).

³⁴ Anon. “German Picture News.” *Weekly Variety* 57.7 (9 January 1920), p. 57.

³⁵ Arthur James. “The Menace Hysteria.” *Moving Picture World* 50.1 (7 May 1921), no page.

Moreover, James was bemused by the perceived panic and advocated a calmer and more balanced approach. Nonetheless, the editor confirmed the existence of anti-German sentiments in American society at the time. These articles mentioned Lubitsch's films – after all they were the majority of those brought over in these early years. However, they tried to untangle the association of Lubitsch with the German threat using three different strategies: firstly, to omit the inclusion of Lubitsch's name (James); to paint Lubitsch's films in a highly favourable light, either artistically (James again) or financially (*Variety*); or to depict him as an exception to the anti-German rule.

While the journalists forewent the suggestion of an 'invasion,' these articles appear to confirm that there had been a hysterical xenophobic reaction to European, and specifically German films within some sections of the industry. This is the context in which the very first American reaction to Lubitsch needs to be seen. Therefore, geography continues to be navigated in articles on Lubitsch and his imports. Pratt provides me with a handy list of cultural associations in the context of which Lubitsch is negotiated:

The connotations of "Germanness" included a propensity towards turgidness and "heavy handedness" over delicacy and "lightness of touch." It meant the pretentious over the frivolous, the tragic and the melodramatic over the comic, the mechanical over the natural, the premeditated over the spontaneous, the melancholic over the joyful, the vindictive over the merciful, the obvious over the subtle, the direct over the oblique, the exhaustive over the elliptical, the barbaric over the civilized. All these connotations were pointedly embodied in the term "Teutonic."³⁶

In response to this multiplicity of meanings and associations through which unfavourable aspects of what is perceived as 'German' were often emphasised, the early critics had to explore strategies to contextualise the phenomenon Lubitsch.

³⁶ Pratt. "'O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou?'" p. 36.

Arguably, the most interesting strategy would be to question the label ‘German’ itself, proving that such assumptions are based on cultural connotations rather than actual geography.

There were cases during this period where acknowledgement of the film’s German origins did not stand in the way of highly positive adjectives, such as a review of *Anna Boleyn* published in the *St. Louis Post*. The title of this review was already indicative of what is outlined below it: “*Deception: A Film of Superb Quality – German Picture a Fine Dramatization of Pivotal Point in English History.*”³⁷ The text was full of praise for the director, calling “this German film [...] a magnificent production” and one that “stamps Lubitsch [...] as one of the greatest producers in history.”³⁸ In fact, the review was very specific in its praise: “Where other producers like to have their pet scenes linger on the screen, Lubitsch cuts them off remorselessly when the effect has been achieved. There is no laborious parading of the fact that this scene or that was produced ‘at enormous expense.’”³⁹

Although the film and director were readily identified as German in this review, origin did not come at all into question. The term ‘laborious’ may clearly echo Pratt’s list of associations, but Lubitsch was distinguished from a group of ‘other’ directors and not specifically from German directors. Elsewhere, ‘remorselessly’ would suggest a negative judgement, but the review leaves no doubt of Lubitsch’s achievement.⁴⁰ Indeed, the two aspects of the director’s origins and his style were not linked in this review at all. Instead, it was the director’s genius that transcended what may be taken as an underlying contradiction: “The genius of

³⁷ Anon. “*Deception: A Film of Superb Quality*,” Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *St. Louis Post* (16 May 1921), p. 10.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The efficiency implied in this compliment may only have become stereotypically German in view of the cold efficiency with which the Nazis attempted to solve their self-imposed ‘Jewish question,’ i.e. the Holocaust, although it may be considered part of the ‘Prussian virtues’ of previous centuries.

Lubitsch shines out here.”⁴¹ We will see associations of Germanness eventually give away to the association of these films with such labels as European, Continental, sophistication and eventually that of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ itself.

There are critics for whom the adjective ‘German’ equated with inferiority and difficult working conditions. *Moving Picture World* went into some detail about the background of the “celebrated European director.”⁴² Lubitsch’s achievement here was seen as even greater in consideration of the fact that, “Although forced to work under the tremendous handicaps of meagre facilities abroad[,] Mr. Lubitsch succeeded in reaching a high pinnacle of success in Europe; in fact, becoming the greatest producer and director on the Continent.”⁴³ In *Moving Picture World*’s subsequent review of the film *Rosita* (1923), the trade paper returned to this theme, arguing “that it was inevitable [the director of “big German productions”] should finally land on this side of the Atlantic.”⁴⁴ Germany, with its hard working conditions and inferior production values, was thus undermined in implicit favour of the United States. However, what is curious about the *Moving Picture World* example is how a director emerging from such meagre filmmaking resources was nonetheless identified with the far more positive contexts of ‘European’ and ‘Continental’ cinema or culture. Not only was Lubitsch not representative of German cinema in his filmmaking but, more importantly, critics did not want to perceive him as such.

The theme of Lubitsch as a misfit in German film culture continues elsewhere. The *New York Times* reviews of both *Madame Dubarry* and *Anna Boleyn*, published three months apart in early 1921, expressed disbelief that

⁴¹ Anon. “*Deception: A Film of Superb Quality*,” Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *St. Louis Post* (16 May 1921), p. 10.

⁴² Anon. “Pickford Film for Release in the Fall.” *Moving Picture World* 62.9 (30 June 1923), p. 770.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ C. S. Sewell. Review of *Rosita*. *Moving Picture World* 64.3 (13 September 1923), p. 262.

Lubitsch could even be German. *Madame Dubarry*, the reviewer feels, was made “[u]nder the direction of the apparently Teutonic”⁴⁵ Ernst Lubitsch. The review thereby achieved the feat both of exaggerating Lubitsch’s Germanness by using the more derogatory synonym for ‘German,’ ‘Teutonic,’ and simultaneously putting into question whether all the connotations of such a term would even be true of Lubitsch. The *New York Times* elaborated that, “a heavy-handed German director, of the kind that seems indigenous to Germany, would have had a hard time making it anything else [other than “offensive to every refined person”].”⁴⁶ Hence, given that Lubitsch is, by admission of the review, only ‘apparently Teutonic,’ ‘offensive’ is precisely what the film is not.

The following April in the *New York Times*, an anonymous reviewer identified “that methodological ponderosity [sic] commonly attributed to the Germans,”⁴⁷ and located this attribute in some of the cast of *Anna Boleyn*. Yet this criticism was not focused on the film’s director, “There is nothing to suggest the quality of heaviness about Mr. Lubitsch,”⁴⁸ and so exempting the director from the style commonly associated with his country of origin. Both reviews then proceeded to ascribe different geographical origins to Lubitsch. The second review repeated the question posed by the preceding review, “has Mr. Lubitsch ever worked in Paris[,] under French influence”⁴⁹ or “in Vienna?”⁵⁰ This review then concluded this alternative search for origins with a prophetic statement: “He has a Continental touch.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ Anon. “Brought Into Focus.” *The New York Times* (30 January 1921), p. X2.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Anon. “The Screen,” Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *New York Times* (18 April 1921), p. 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁹ Anon. “Brought Into Focus.” *The New York Times* (30 January 1921), p. X2.

⁵⁰ Anon. “The Screen,” Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *New York Times* (18 April 1921), p. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

I will return to the connotations of 'French,' 'Viennese' and 'Continental' below in the following section on sophistication. For now, the additional but crucial point to be raised is that these geographical coordinates are culturally constructed. Of course, 'Germany' may signify a country in Europe, but it is explicit reference to an imagined community of heavy-handed directors rather than an actual community of the same. On this topic, Pratt makes the deliciously ironic point that, when *Madame Dubarry* was released, "the notion of what a specifically 'German' film looked like was already popularly set without benefit of even a single example."⁵² In other words, due to the War, Americans had not seen German films for years.

A notion of specifically 'German' filmmaking popular stereotypes had hence come to be relied upon. *Madame Dubarry* then, as the first film to come over from Germany since the First World War, was hailed as an exception to this particular rule. The case of *Madame Dubarry* is therefore a striking example of just how the conceptions of national styles are as much informed by other cultural associations as by experience of a particular, if indeed any, style.

The examples that I have cited fully support Pratt's earlier judgement that "the director's work was never considered representative of German cinema."⁵³ Instead, from very early on, critics explored other contexts in which Lubitsch's cinema could be placed and so interpreted. I have already hinted at some of these critical positions in the reviews quoted above and I will now continue to investigate these contexts in terms of an exploration of critical perceptions of the 'Continental-European' and then, closely related, critical positions on 'sophistication.' Nevertheless, this early reception of Lubitsch's work must be seen in the context of widespread prejudice and suspicion against Germany and Germans. It had already been suggested in these early years that Lubitsch's films were characterised by

⁵² Pratt. "'O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou?'" p. 55.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 36.

something else than the heavy-handedness so commonly associated with German filmmaking and which, by 1924, had already become known in critical descriptions as “such a pleasing lightness of touch.”⁵⁴ Thus, these critical considerations that came into play against stereotypes of a German style establish a set of meanings of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ that will remain dominant throughout the decade. The special concessions made to Lubitsch against the background of his origins and the subsequent dissociation from German stereotypes provided the foundation for his status as a filmmaker with his distinct style. Even beyond and possibly in contradiction to commonplace realities, these critical positions also prepared Lubitsch’s almost seamless assimilation into the American film industry, despite his possessing German roots in an anti-German environment.

1.3 Sophistication and the Rise of the Sophisticated Comedy

We have seen how the label ‘German’ was initially used to identify what Lubitsch was not or what he was different from. The film critics of the day then explored ways to describe what Lubitsch actually represented. One of these terms will be at the centre of the following section: sophistication. This term is of particular importance in the context of Lubitsch because not only was it used increasingly to describe Lubitsch’s films, but also served as a genre descriptor for the films that Lubitsch made in the 1920s for Warner Brothers. The term has its own history, pre-dating its use here by some distance. Hence, I will first contextualise it before investigating how it informs perceptions of Lubitsch’s style and how Lubitsch’s style moulds it in return.

⁵⁴ C. S. Sewell. Review of *Forbidden Paradise*. *Moving Picture World* 71.5 (29 November 1924), p. 448.

The semantic history of the term ‘sophistication’ has taken a long and winding road through the centuries. Faye Hammill has summarised neatly its early negative connotations to the more positive associations given to the term from the nineteenth century onwards, while noting that “‘sophistication’ was not generally used as a term of praise until the early 1920s.”⁵⁵ More modern understandings of ‘sophistication’ take it as “a fundamental attitude to life rather than simply a style of self-presentation”⁵⁶ and place it in the “realm of elegance, style, wit, detachment or cosmopolitanism, and [...] in relation to morality or politics.”⁵⁷

David Cort conceives of ‘sophistication’ as “one of the most embarrassing words [there is] because one can hardly tell whether it is being used in a complimentary or derogatory sense.”⁵⁸ He summarises the term’s various meanings in terms of “a person with lack of taboos, an experience of wines and women, mere unshockability, a fatigue of life, an affected manner, three university degrees, or true wisdom.” He finishes this definition with the stark “whatever that is”⁵⁹ and this feels appropriate for such a widespread field of possible applications.

Another semantic field close to that of sophistication is ‘glamour.’ Stephen Gundle describes this term as

a buzzword with a special resonance. *Vogue*, *Elle*, celebrity and women’s magazines, not to mention glossy newspaper supplements, all employ the term on a regular basis to underline the allure of an occasion, a dwelling, a product, a place, or a person.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See Faye Hammill. *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. p. 7.

⁵⁶ David Cort. “Sophistication in America.” *A View of the Nation: An Anthology, 1955-1959*. Henry M. Christman, ed. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.
https://archive.org/stream/viewofthenationa000970mbp/viewofthenationa000970mbp_djvu.txt
 (accessed 30 June 2014), p. 62.

⁵⁷ Faye Hammill. “Ethel Wilson and Sophistication.” *Studies in Canadian Literature/ Etudes en littérature canadienne* 36.2 (2011), p. 55.

⁵⁸ Cort. “Sophistication in America.” p. 62.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Stephen Gundle. *Glamour: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. p. 2.

Gundle concedes that this term also is “notoriously difficult to define.” Yet, the “talismanic qualities” that it does carry are those of ‘sparkle’ and ‘glow.’⁶¹

Mark Backman alludes to the fact that the concept of sophistication is always changing. Yet in writing that “the standards of sophistication can be fixed against the shifting background of social development,”⁶² he expresses exactly the opposite: what is considered to be sophisticated relates to the social context of a certain time and hence, these meanings are constantly changing, which is why “manners and attitudes considered sophisticated fifty years ago appear quaint and precious to us today.”⁶³

In focusing on Lubitsch’s films, notably those of the 1920s, it is not my intention to follow the development of the term ‘sophistication’ over time. Instead, the discussion will be limited to three main angles. Firstly, I will focus upon the Continental connotations of sophistication, which follows on directly from the previous section on the ‘German’ associations with Lubitsch. Here, I will argue there is a case to be made for a direct link between the falling out of favour of the term ‘German’ and the gain in popularity of the notion of ‘Continental sophistication’ to discuss Lubitsch enabling the director to be perceived as something other than ‘German.’

In terms of the thematic aspects of the term, it is in particular ‘subtlety’ that was established in the 1920s in close association with Lubitsch’s filmmaking, and the theme continued through the subsequent decades. The exclusionary connotations of ‘sophistication,’ also accompanied by an air of prestige, come through clearly in the negotiation of Lubitsch’s identity as a director. A historiographical side-glance at the sophisticated comedy as a genre will then close this discussion. This will

⁶¹ See Ibid.

⁶² Mark Backman. *Sophistication: Rhetoric and the Rise of Self-Consciousness*. Woodbridge: Ox Bow Press, 1991. p. 6.

⁶³ Ibid.

focus on how Lubitsch's association with these films helped him to be assimilated into the American film industry of the 1920s, but how in turn such the close association with one director may have been at the expense of this sub-genre. Serving as more than a mere adjective, 'sophisticated comedy' has come to describe many of Lubitsch's comedies of the 1920s and on occasion beyond this decade. However we will see that the sophisticated comedy has struggled for its place in the canons of both film history and film genre.

Following the completion of *Rosita*, a film not dissimilar to those that had brought him to America, Lubitsch found himself free from contractual obligations. United Artists would not or could not keep him and he was free to go where he pleased. Thus, Warner jumped at the opportunity and forged an improbable association that would last five films. Given Lubitsch's association with large-scale historical and exotic spectacles and in light of Warners' history as a low-budget studio, this collaboration may have appeared an odd match. However, over the course of this section it will become clear that the Lubitsch 'signing' proved, at least for a time, to be beneficial for both sides.

What is more, Lubitsch quickly changed gear in his Hollywood career. Arguably inspired by Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923),⁶⁴ considered as the starting point of this sub-genre, Lubitsch quickly became a master of this new kind of comedy.⁶⁵ In fact he became so crucial a figure that Lea Jacobs, in her study of 1920s American film, defines these 'sophisticated comedies' as "opposed to

⁶⁴ See for instance Herman G. Weinberg, *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study*. New York: Dover, 1977. p. 60.

⁶⁵ This is how this history tends to be written. As a rare exception David Thomson suggests that the line of influence was in fact the other way round: "In film history, some critics have praised [*A Woman of Paris*] for its stylistic ambitions, and it certainly shows Chaplin as a man who had noticed other directors (like Ernst Lubitsch) and wanted to learn from them." (David Thomson. *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood*. London: Little, Brown, 2005. p. 76.).

slapstick, akin to the high comedy of manners or to farce, and best epitomized by the silent films of Ernst Lubitsch.”⁶⁶

These Lubitsch comedies involved a smaller cast, usually centring upon one or two couples and their “domestic entanglements,” as the *Los Angeles Times* rather excitedly describes them.⁶⁷ The couples tend already to be already established, if not married, entailing that the films’ narratives are not driven by a romantic courtship. Unlike Lubitsch’s exotic spectacles, his films for Warner are set in the present, or much closer to the present day, and while continuing to be set in Europe, they adopt a decidedly urban setting.

Lubitsch’s earlier epics may have been called ‘sophisticated’ on occasion, but the term only gained wider currency over the course of the 1920s as Lubitsch changed genres. To emphasise how handy or catchy critics found the term, one can refer to the press review of *Kiss Me Again* (1925) in *Moving Picture World*. The clippings reprinted from ten publications mention the term at least five times: *Kiss Me Again* was “the witty, sophisticated film stuff that is so rare” for *Daily News*, while for the *Evening Journal* it was, “an exceptional comedy – sophisticated, brilliant, frothy, clever – absolutely delightful.” *Morning Telegraph* was convinced that, “Sophisticated audiences will eat [the film] up.” *Herald-Tribune* already knew that “Ernst Lubitsch [is] the master of the smart and sophisticated in film comedy,” while for *Evening Graphic* the film’s “situations were handled in the deftly sophisticated manner that has placed Mr. Lubitsch at the head of the list of very capable directors.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Lea Jacobs. *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. p. 79.

⁶⁷ Whitney Williams. “Lubitsch’s Latest is Gay, Sophisticated, Parisian Farce: Director’s Deft ‘Touches’ Makes *So This is Paris!* Humorous Take of Domestic Entanglements,” Review of *So This is Paris!*. *Los Angeles Times* (20 June 1926), p. D23.

⁶⁸ All in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

These reviews show just how popular the term ‘sophisticated comedy’ had become by the mid-1920s. Not only is the term used over and over again in a variety of papers, it is deemed so central that the snippets containing the phrase are the ones selected for reprint in the eminent trade paper of the period, *Moving Picture World*. Moreover, this collection of clippings covers the range of contexts on a miniature scale. The variety of adjectives – ‘witty,’ ‘brilliant,’ ‘frothy,’ ‘clever,’ ‘delightful,’ ‘smart,’ and ‘deftly’ – are all keywords that form the backbone of the Lubitsch discourse then and in decades to come. Common themes include the infidelities of married couples, a potentially exclusionary segmentation of the audience,⁶⁹ and the framing of sophistication as a specific achievement of Lubitsch as director. Needless to say, we will again encounter below this rich piece from *Moving Picture World*.

With his move to Warner, the next string of Lubitsch films changed in subject and genre to smaller comedies of manners. In early reviews of these films, comments made about locations and localities, origins and heritage were significantly present. Almost all of the films were set in the present and in urban centres, mainly but not exclusively in Europe. Locations were frequently mentioned in the reviews: “*The Marriage Circle* [for instance] has its locale in Vienna,” while acknowledging that the film was “made in California,”⁷⁰ or the “scene is laid out in Paris” (although reviewer ‘A.S.’ grants that the “story of the dull husband, the silly wife and the philandering musician might have been enacted in any suburb”⁷¹).

Just as importantly, para-textual associations with Europe and the continent are evoked, that is associations not immanent to the text itself. The fact that

⁶⁹ For the sake of completion, the full phrase reads “Sophisticated audiences will eat it up and every other kind of audience will enjoy it too, for Lubitsch has inspired his popular cast to put over somewhat racy humor in gay and innocent style.” Hence, the segmentation is evoked here, but, in the second half, immediately undone by the critics’ insistence that everyone will like it, sophisticated or not.

⁷⁰ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: Susceptible Men,” Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *New York Times* (4 February 1924), p. 23.

⁷¹ A. S. “The Shadow Stage,” Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *Photoplay* 28.2 (July 1925), p. 50.

Lubitsch's adaptation of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925) is set in London was hardly even newsworthy. Nonetheless, the mention of Oscar Wilde as the original author not only evoked London as the location, but also drew upon wider associations with both British culture and theatre as a respectable source for material. For Mordaunt Hall, reviewer of the *New York Times*, the fact that the film was "An Oscar Wilde Play"⁷² was enough to lend his review its title. More pointedly again, in the clippings article quoted above, the *Herald-Tribune* referred to Lubitsch as "the Oscar Wilde of pantomime, the Max Beerbohm of shadows,"⁷³ so calling upon not one but two British writers well versed in satire.

The Viennese setting functioned in a similar manner: *Moving Picture World* reported breathlessly that Lubitsch had, for the "anxiously await[ed]" follow-up to *Rosita*, selected "his story from a highly successful Viennese play which scored in leading cities on the Continent."⁷⁴ Later, for the same paper, *The Marriage Circle* was described as being "told with the deft, graceful touch." Crucially, the 'touch' here was not associated exclusively with Lubitsch, but is the touch "of a Viennese operetta."⁷⁵

Although the 'deft touch' just quoted now had not yet specifically become that of Lubitsch, the director figured prominently in such praise. This discourse had not forgotten Lubitsch's German roots, but the articles did not give the impression of either hiding or showcasing this aspect of his identity. References to the "German director"⁷⁶ often seemed to suggest that they are merely an alternative to repeating

⁷² Mordaunt Hall. "The Screen: An Oscar Wilde Play," Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *New York Times* (28 December 1923), p. 19.

⁷³ Anon. "Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*." *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

⁷⁴ Anon. "Lubitsch Selects Story from Viennese Play." *Moving Picture World* 64.4 (22 September 1923), p. 356.

⁷⁵ Anon. "Even the Fulton Sometimes Busts." *Moving Picture World* 68.3 (17 May 1924), p. 315.

⁷⁶ See for instance "*Lady Windermere's Fan* is picture in the style of the German director at his very best." Anon. "*Lady Windermere's Fan* Smashes Records At Its New York Premiere." *Moving Picture World* 78.2 (9 January 1926), p. 161. or "[*Kiss Me Again*] was written by Hans Kraely, who

Lubitsch's name. However, references to European culture as a whole tended to be more creative. The acknowledgement that "Lubitsch is a Continental and a diplomat"⁷⁷ evoked the significance of his travelling in-between the countries, while elsewhere Herbert Howe got carried away in *Photoplay* in likening Lubitsch to a "smiling little Michaelangelo of the art."⁷⁸

Time and again, Lubitsch's "distinctly continental flavour"⁷⁹ is referenced. By extension, the director was said to have a "continental touch"⁸⁰ in regard to the screen marriages. Soon, they were perceived as being typically his, to the extent that they were even characterised as "marriage[s] a la Lubitsch."⁸¹ All these descriptors relied on cultural associations with Europe, painting it here as the centre of refinement and culture.

Yet there is confirmation that they are indeed changeable cultural associations. For a late import of one of Lubitsch's German-made films received a decidedly colder reception. For instance, Sewell's main criticism of the Lubitsch-Negri vehicle *Die Flamme* (1922, released as *Montmartre* in the United States in 1924) was that it was made "apparently quite some time before either [Lubitsch or actress Pola Negri] came to this country."⁸² Indeed, Sewell went on to suggest that

has adapted other stories for the German director." Anon. "Likens Characters to Wines." *New York Times* (22 February 1925), p. X5.

⁷⁷ Jim Tully. "The Man Who Found Himself." *Photoplay* 27.3 (February 1925), p. 133.

⁷⁸ Herbert Howe. "Returning to Hollywood." *Photoplay* 27.6 (May 1925), p. 109. References to Italian culture are rare, surprisingly or otherwise. Furthermore, adjectives like 'little' may be used to describe Lubitsch physically. Yet when his art and style are discussed, Lubitsch is much more likely to be a 'master,' invoking greatness and towering achievement, or simply "the finest director continental Europe has ever sent us." (Anon. "Even the Fulton Sometimes Busts." *Moving Picture World* 68.3 (17 May 1924), p. 315.).

⁷⁹ C. S. Sewell. Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *Moving Picture World* 66.7 (16 February 1924), p. 581. See also C. S. Sewell. Review of *Three Women*. *Moving Picture World* 70.4 (27 September 1924), p. 334. See Howe's piece for the related phrase of "a continental sense of humor." His article and what he means by the phrase will be discussed below. Herbert Howe. "Returning to Hollywood." *Photoplay* 27.6 (May 1925), p. 109.

⁸⁰ C. S. Sewell, Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *Moving Picture World* 75.7 (15 August 1925), p. 736 and even as early as Anon. "The Screen," Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *New York Times* (18 April 1921), p. 17.

⁸¹ A. S. "The Shadow Stage," Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *Photoplay* 28.2 (July 1925), p. 50.

⁸² C. S. Sewell. Review of *Die Flamme*. *Moving Picture World* 70.6 (11 October 1924), p. 523.

“the settings and photography are not up to the best modern standards.”⁸³ Intriguingly, this criticism levelled at the film’s perceived datedness was repeatedly coupled with the film’s country, or rather continent, of origin insofar as it was “made in Europe,” and “the entire psychology of the picture follows European lines.”⁸⁴ The significant conclusion reached here is that this was “a production [...] with no modern or American angle whatever.”⁸⁵ It may therefore be argued that critics used the European label as a negative one when it suited them, suggesting that these associations were neither set in stone nor found on maps, but were rather present in the discourses that made up American culture. Indeed, Lubitsch and Negri were saved from such criticism insofar as the reviewer points out that they had since come to America and, by implication, settled in there.

To summarise, these film reviews principally configured Europe as a place of culture, refinement and novel experiences. Sophistication and glamour were hence to be located in wider fields of cultural luxuries and, according to Gundle, these indeed included travel and geographical distance.⁸⁶ Gundle also notes the emergence of Paris as “a Mecca of style and luxury not only in France but in Europe and beyond.”⁸⁷ In a similar vein, according to Faye Hammill, sophistication is closely tied to an “openness to other cultures (especially French culture).”⁸⁸ References to Continental Europe, then, were not only significant for their evocation of opera, theatre, literature and other established arts, but significantly for setting these references at a considerable distance from the United States. Either the reader is affluent enough to travel to these places or they are out of reach, not only geographically but financially, even if they may still be aspired to.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See Gundle. *Glamour*. p. 13-14.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 52.

⁸⁸ Hammill. “Ethel Wilson and Sophistication.” p. 55.

Such luxuries are indeed a staple in the Lubitsch discourse. Reviewers increasingly commented on the decorations, furnishings and costumes in his films. In a particularly dense description, Cecilia Ager would coin the phrase “Lubitschian luxury”⁸⁹ in the 1930s. She related the term to an “obvious richness of fabrics and exuberant detail,” the “lush expensiveness” of “[Lubitsch’s] satins, velvets, furs and laces” and “lavishly accoutred folk.”⁹⁰ Moreover, for this reviewer, the films “shimme[r] with jewels and aboun[d] with furs” in “costly abundance” and generally just “loo[k] deliriously expensive.”⁹¹ Ager’s descriptions were rich in references to materials in an extensive use of nouns, verbs and adjectives, supplying a vivid idea of just what these luxuries constitute. What is more, this refinement, education and luxury persisted on the linguistic level through the use of rarer words such as ‘accoutred,’ a term displaying its French etymology more clearly than other adjectives.

The articles and reviews on Lubitsch’s cinema did not generally reach the heights of delirium of Ager’s work; indeed, ‘sophistication’ was just as closely linked to ‘simplicity’ in this period as well. But critics had indeed started to pick up on the luxuries of Lubitsch’s films in the earlier decade. One particular metaphor was seized upon time and again in the collection of clippings mentioned at the beginning of this section. For the *Daily News*, the direction for this very same film was “champagne.”⁹² Indeed, in the same article for the *Sun*, Lubitsch’s *Kiss Me*

⁸⁹ Cecilia Ager. “Going Places: Insinuating Lubitsch.” *Weekly Variety* 106.3 (29 March 1932), p. 71.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Daily News* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843. The paper also promises us that we, as audience, will “purr with delight,” and in so doing arguably making another reference to French culture, ranging from the quiet elegance of cats to *Le Chat Noir*. – In an article for the *Times*, Lubitsch himself talked about the actors in *Kiss Me Again*, mentioning Marie Prevost and “her bubbling humor, her coquettish smile and vivaciousness” and finally comparing her to “champagne.” Similarly, other actors are referred to as “my chartreuse,” an otherwise expensive French liqueur, and reference is made to its “irresistible appeal to the romantic nature of many a woman,” or “Dark red

Again was “to the average photoplay around the age old [sic] triangle as champagne is to skimmed milk.”⁹³ This semantic field is completed by other subordinated terms that appear again and again, such as “brilliant” and especially “sparkling,”⁹⁴ which both can be used to describe luxuries ranging from diamonds to champagne. *Evening Graphic*’s use of the word field is interesting; not only did it use the word ‘bubble’ in a rich simile, but it is the film as a whole that “bubbles over with wit, charm and vivacity,” besides being “as Frenchy as the Champs Elysees.”⁹⁵ The language is autoreferential, using not only sophisticated vocabulary but also subtle figures of speech. What is more, this descriptive language seamlessly integrates Lubitsch’s film into a tapestry of European, particularly French, culture.

Subject matter and theme were also popularly linked to the notion of Europeaness when the films were described as ‘sophisticated’ in their mature representation of marital relations. As I have already alluded to, Sewell’s review of *The Marriage Circle* argued that it “possesses, in spite of being made in California, a distinct European flavour.”⁹⁶ The only indication of what was behind this adjective is that the reviewer “finds [him]self chuckling over the misfortunes of two married couples.”⁹⁷ *Moving Picture World* made a similar case for the film as the “second American-made picture” by “the famous European director,” where the film’s “distinctly continental flavour and atmosphere” was grouped together “with the code

burgundy.” Lubitsch in Anon. “Likens Characters to Wines.” *New York Times* (22 February 1925), p. X5.

⁹³ *Sun* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

⁹⁴ C. S. Sewell. Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *Moving Picture World* 66.7 (16 February 1924), p. 581. See also *Herald-Tribune* and *Evening Journal* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

⁹⁵ *Evening Graphic* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

⁹⁶ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: Susceptible Men,” Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *New York Times* (4 February 1924), p. 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

which surrounds married couples weighing lightly on the conscience of several of the characters, although there is no great moral transgression.”⁹⁸

Both reviews located the Continental quality of the film in its treatment of marital relations. Although there may be “no great moral transgression” being committed, the implication on the part of the reviews was that at least some has taken place. This gives us an idea of what that Continental flavour entails. Sewell’s review of *Kiss Me Again* (1925) did not connect the film’s ‘Continental’ nature to the fact that the protagonists are married, although he did summarise the film’s plot in terms of it concerning a “busy husband backslid[ing] in showing affection for his wife.”⁹⁹ Instead, the “continental touch is present and one or two situations border on the risqué but they have been handled discreetly so that they amuse and do not offend.”¹⁰⁰

These quotes are revealing in two ways. Firstly, they conceptualise the kind of comedy that Lubitsch offered in the 1920s but has since fallen out of cinematic fashion and is located at the margins of Film Studies. Secondly, Sewell’s reassurance that risqué scenes are handled discreetly hints at an important discourse of subtlety, one frequently negotiated in the context of Lubitsch. In the 1920s, subtlety was already a veritable buzzword in the Lubitsch discourse and there are several examples of film reviews linking subtlety to sex. Reviewing *The Marriage Circle*, C. S. Sewell likened the film to Chaplin’s *A Woman of Paris*, arguing that Lubitsch’s film “resembles [Chaplin’s] in its subtlety, [and Lubitsch] has handled a rather daring and sensational theme with simplicity and directness.”¹⁰¹ A few years later, Sewell reviewed *Forbidden Paradise*, touching on a “plot that is daring and

⁹⁸ C. S. Sewell. Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *Moving Picture World* 66.7 (16 February 1924), p. 581.

⁹⁹ C. S. Sewell. Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *Moving Picture World* 75.7 (15 August 1925), p. 736.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ C. S. Sewell. Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *Moving Picture World* 66.7 (16 February 1924), p. 581.

sophisticated and in which sex is always uppermost,” but handled with “such skill and deftness and with such a pleasing lightness of touch [...] that it should not offend anyone, but prove decidedly pleasing.”¹⁰² Indeed, Sewell may well have been thinking of a particular set of weaknesses when writing that it was “human frailties” that Lubitsch “handle[s] in the same masterful way.”¹⁰³ *Daily News* described Lubitsch as “a wonderful storyteller. He’s disarming and subtle, risqué [sic] and blandly innocent.”¹⁰⁴

However, the references to subtlety that did not appear to imply a sexual subtext far outweigh those that did. They appeared not only in connection to his actors¹⁰⁵ and the tone of the film,¹⁰⁶ but, most importantly, to Lubitsch himself. These reviews highlight that the direction that was “original and subtle”¹⁰⁷ and stories that only “the subtle Lubitsch can tell.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, Lubitsch and subtlety became so intertwined in the 1920s that there were several instances in which the director was used as a point of reference for the work of other filmmakers. Reviewing *Broadway After Dark* (1924), C. S. Sewell praised director Monta Bell, a “Lubitsch acolyt[e],”¹⁰⁹ writing that, “We understand that he has worked with Ernest [sic] Lubitsch and we can easily believe it, for he has shown [...] the same subtlety of touch.”¹¹⁰ Mordaunt Hall wrote about the same director in regard to a different

¹⁰² C. S. Sewell. Review of *Forbidden Paradise*. *Moving Picture World* 71.5 (29 November 1924), p. 448.

¹⁰³ Sewell, C. S. Review of *Three Women*. *Moving Picture World* 70.4 (27 September 1924), p. 334.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily News* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

¹⁰⁵ See Maximilian Vinder. “She Delivered the Goods.” *Photoplay* 21.6 (May 1922), p. 20-21, 109 or *Daily Mirror* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 843.

¹⁰⁶ *Sun* in anon. “Ernst Lubitsch and Warner Bros. Stars Win Praise of N. Y. Critics for *Kiss Me Again*.” *Moving Picture World* 75.8 (22 August 1925), p. 84 or Whitney Williams. “Lubitsch’s Latest is Gay, Sophisticated, Parisian Farce: Director’s Deft ‘Touches’ Make *So This is Paris!* Humours Tale of Domestic Entanglements.” *Los Angeles Times* (20 June 1926), p. D23.

¹⁰⁷ Anon. “Lubitsch’s New Comedy,” Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *New York Times* (10 February 1924), p. X5.

¹⁰⁸ Advert for *Three Women*. *Weekly Variety* 76.8 (8 October 1924), p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Scott Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. p. 127.

¹¹⁰ C. S. Sewell. Review of *Broadway After Dark*. *Moving Picture World* 68.5 (31 May 1924), p. 493.

film, noting that “Mr. Bell drums home his ideas, when it would have been well for him to remember that Ernest [sic] Lubitsch is content to give only a few feet to a masterly stroke.”¹¹¹

Writing for *Photoplay*, James R. Quirk addressed the achievements of a new director, Josef von Stroheim, quoting Douglas Fairbanks on some of the main ingredients of *The Salvation Hunters* (1925), namely, “Chaplin’s simplicity, [...] Griffith’s dramatic sweep” and crucially “Lubitsch’s subtlety.”¹¹² In turn, Howard Howe offered possibly the most explicit contribution to this debate in his regular column for *Photoplay* in 1925, discussing Lubitsch in some detail under the header “Sex and Sophistication.” In between extensive praise for both Lubitsch and Cecile B. DeMille, Howe offered his take on ‘sophistication:’ “The inclination of the public toward that which Hollywood terms ‘sophistication’ – in reality, merely an honest, intelligent interpretation of life – has left Hollywood gasping. They always thought sophistication meant something dirty.”¹¹³ Crucially, he went on to emphasise that “[t]hey are discovering that sex has nothing to do with it.”¹¹⁴ Although Howe was somewhat ambiguous in reference to ‘who’ “always thought that sophistication meant something dirty,” he was underlining that sex has already become part of the discourse on sophistication.

A slight reference to subtlety may indeed have been enough to convey the message of a sexy subtext to the readers of the day. However, it is striking that the most important marker of ‘subtlety’ is not its connection to language with connotations of being Continental, European or, indeed, related to sex. The vast majority of subtleties referenced in these texts are linked to and, indeed, in praise of, Lubitsch. Subtlety in Lubitsch may be related to a risqué subtext, but it should

¹¹¹ Mordaunt Hall. Review of *The Snob*. *New York Times* (15 December 1924), p. 12.

¹¹² James R. Quirk. “Speaking of Pictures.” *Photoplay* 27.3 (February 1925), p. 27.

¹¹³ Herbert Howe. “Returning to Hollywood.” *Photoplay* 27.6 (May 1925), p. 108.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

principally be taken to generally mean ‘more than meets the eye’ – whatever this ‘more’ may be. It is the flexible nature of the term sophistication that allows for such a wide range of inferences as to where Lubitsch’s subtlety can be located, as it becomes established as an element of his style.

Nonetheless, the complexities that come with the term ‘Continental sophistication’ do not prevent anyone from either exploring or exploiting the so-called ‘Continental’ flavour of Lubitsch’s American silent films. The discourse is less about actual geography here, and more concerned with the sentiments and semantics attached to these terms. More often than not, the term ‘Continental’ was associated with a set of meanings concerned for the most part with French culture and Paris in particular. Indeed, on most occasions these references did not go far beyond the mere mention of a ‘distinct Continental flavour.’

Faye Hammill links sophistication and the literary form of early twentieth-century modernism to account for the exclusive and exclusionary nature of sophistication and “the potential alignment of sophistication with modernism:”

Like sophistication, modernism operates by defining itself against its context: that is, against mainstream cultural production. Therefore, both modernism and sophistication are exclusionary discourses, constructing and addressing elite audiences.¹¹⁵

Hammill’s full-length study explores how sophistication works; a person considered sophisticated “would usually be imagined as educated, culturally aware, fashionable and self-conscious, and all of these things require deliberate effort”¹¹⁶ while, crucially, he or she would also be sophisticated enough to recognise somebody else to be sophisticated.

¹¹⁵ Hammill. “Ethel Wilson and Sophistication.” p. 55-56. She argues that both are “balanced by an apparently contrary affiliation with middlebrow strategies of imitation and appropriation,” which however seems less applicable to our case of Lubitsch.

¹¹⁶ Hammill. *Sophistication*. p. 3.

Richard Maltby dedicates a whole article to a three-and-a-half second duration in *Casablanca* (1942) with the aim of showing how every Hollywood movie contains “coincidences, inconsistencies, gaps, and delays.”¹¹⁷ He argues that these are deliberately left in the film to allow for as many interpretations as possible by as many kinds of audiences as possible, in other words to maximise the number of people who will pay for a ticket. In the course of this study, he also touches upon the “‘Sophisticated’ viewers, who ‘read into’ the sequence an element of off-screen sexual behavior, [and who] regard those who do not as ‘naïve’ and ‘innocent’ viewers.”¹¹⁸ Both Hammill’s and Maltby’s sophisticated consumers – Hammill focuses on readers, Maltby on viewers – form their own exclusive group, to which one can only belong if one is ‘in the know.’ However, Hammill adds another angle to many sophisticated texts¹¹⁹ suggesting that they embody a tension of “propos[ing] sophistication [as] the property of a distinguished elite, and yet covertly offer[ing] an education in sophistication.”¹²⁰ While Hammill’s argument proves interesting in relation to Lubitsch’s sophisticated comedies,¹²¹ I will show that this mechanism is indeed a complex one, as demonstrated by the bulk of reviews of Lubitsch’s films.

In his review of *The Marriage Circle*, for instance, Sewell ticked the boxes of referencing Chaplin’s *A Woman of Paris*, commending *The Marriage Circle* for “resembling [*Woman*] in its subtlety,” and praising Lubitsch for having “handled a

¹¹⁷ Richard Maltby. “‘A Brief Romantic Interlude: Dick and Jane Go to 3 ½ Seconds of the Classical Hollywood Cinema.” *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, eds. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996. p. 438.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ As stated above, Hammill generally focuses on written texts in her study. Here, she has “smart magazines” in mind.

¹²⁰ Hammill. *Sophistication*. p. 3.

¹²¹ Judging whether the films themselves do or do not is not aim of this study, but may well make for an interesting objective. Hammill, here and on the following page, runs through suggestions of how literary texts would do this; for instance, endowing the reader with a superior knowledge to the protagonist or through the themes of self-presentation, a determination to enjoy life and a refusal of stifling convention or moral codes.

rather daring and sensational theme with simplicity and directness.”¹²² Nevertheless, Sewell concluded that, for *The Marriage Circle*, “box office appeal is difficult to gauge.”¹²³ For one thing, “the conventionally minded” might find the film morally transgressive. More importantly and this was repeated, the film’s “subtlety and wit may also be over the head of certain classes of patrons.” It was “[t]o those who can appreciate its humor, cleverness and masterly direction [that] it will prove a delight.”¹²⁴ Here, Sewell invoked the notion that the film may be too sophisticated for certain audiences, so excluding those for whom the film will ‘go over their head.’ Interestingly, however, this did not necessarily deter audiences from buying tickets, as cinemagoers will only know if they like the film once they have seen it.

Writing on *Kiss Me Again*, Robert E. Welsh, editor of *Moving Picture World*, tried to dispel the notion of such a ‘reputation,’

Lubitsch is acknowledged as a master craftsman. Unfortunately, after giving a man such a label, there is a tendency in this industry to decide when he does an extra good job that he is “shooting over the heads” of the average audience. We stood through *Kiss Me Again* with an “average” audience. And if there is a “fine” point in Lubitsch’s work that this “average” audience missed we’d like to know where it is.¹²⁵

Lubitsch then already stood for a certain type of film, while also appealing to a certain type of audience. Welsh attempted to challenge such a notion, but it falls back on him. He thereby implied that he was so sophisticated that he did not even see how anybody else could have a problem with the film. In their reviews, both Sewell and Welsh provided highly positive evaluations and so implicitly confirmed their belonging to the ‘in-crowd’ of the ‘sophisticated.’

¹²² C. S. Sewell. Review of *The Marriage Circle*. *Moving Picture World* 66.7 (16 February 1924), p. 581.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Robert E. Welsh. “The Editor’s Views.” *Moving Picture World* 75.7 (15 August 1925), no page.

Nonetheless, another quote from Welsh's reviews complicated the argument. Welsh also noted that *Kiss Me Again* offers "[a]s simple a plot as was ever told in twenty words. But what Lubitsch has done with it!"¹²⁶ In other words, the film presented a simple story that flew right into the face of those who would accuse Lubitsch of elitism; the plot was so simple that it would struggle to go over anyone's head. However, for this reviewer it was Lubitsch's treatment that added to or even completed the film, suggesting that the treatment was indeed not as simple as the story suggests. Welsh therefore subtly subverted his own insistence that no-one in the 'average' audience in whose presence he saw the film disliked it for being too sophisticated.

Indeed, despite Welsh's efforts, Lubitsch's deft and clever sophisticated comedies gained a reputation for being directed at a certain intelligent, niche audience. The feature "What the Picture Did for Me" in *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* – *Moving Picture World*'s successor from 1927 onwards – offers a fascinating insight into how exhibitors and audiences responded to Lubitsch's reputation. The earliest mentions of a Lubitsch film were for *The Student Prince of Old Heidelberg*. This nostalgic period and costume piece, quite the opposite of his sophisticated comedies, was made for MGM in 1927. However, the reaction to even this inarguably 'unsophisticated' Lubitsch echoed what Hammill and Maltby argue about sophistication and exclusion.

These little snippets give a vivid impression of the grassroots nature of film exhibition, often featuring exhibitors bemused by the large price they have had to pay for the film while disliking it or being disappointed by the business it brought. One particularly straightforward opinion about the business and the rules that the studios imposed is as follows: "Not as big as Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer think it is, but

¹²⁶ Robert E. Welsh. "The Editor's Views." *Moving Picture World* 75.7 (15 August 1925), no page.

of course they spent a lot of money to make it and also spent lots of money telling us in advance how great it was going to be, so we all had to help pay for that advance cost when we bought it.”¹²⁷ There were curious cases in which an exhibitor would state the overall opinion of their customers while also including their own opinion, particularly if business was bad but they actually liked the film. A. E. Hancock of Columbia City offers such an example, although he adds that “the costume picture is a picture that the average show-goer won’t fall for any more,”¹²⁸ arguably because the sophisticated comedy has entered the scene. In the end, it is attendance alone that counts.

All the same, this lay evaluation of *The Student Prince* was generally clear, not least in terms of the film’s intended audience. As such it was noted that Lubitsch’s film “attracts a certain class and pleases. Those who stayed away were greater in numbers and would not have been pleased.”¹²⁹ In Colby, Wisconsin, this “good” picture “went over big with a few but for the majority, especially the roughnecks, it was the ‘blah.’”¹³⁰ Not only was this audience split, but, numerically, it was implicitly dominated by an uneducated crowd and an educated and happy few, replicating the exclusive class to which one only gains access when one has the education or culture to ‘get’ a Lubitsch film.

What is interesting about these snippets is that Lubitsch gets mentioned far less often or at least less prominently than, say, in reviews or even in advertising. Both reviews by the critics quoted above compliment Lubitsch extensively for what they perceive to be his contribution to the film’s success. The comments in the

¹²⁷ Anon. “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 92.1/34.4 (7 July 1928), p. 60.

¹²⁸ A. E. Hancock in “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 92.4/34.7 (28 July 1928), p. 54.

¹²⁹ O. A. Fosse in “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 91.2/34.2 (23 June 1928), p. 60.

¹³⁰ Anon. “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 92.1/34.4 (7 July 1928), p. 60.

“What the Picture Did for Me” section therefore may have been less damaging to Lubitsch. Nonetheless, they confirm that there was an exclusionary element to the sophistication of Lubitsch’s films.

The press discourse around Lubitsch’s Warner comedies was full of comments of a somewhat elitist, exclusionary nature. The mechanism is essentially always the same: sophistication is hardly ever rejected. At worst, the reviewer suggests that some audiences may find the film’s theme off-putting, but the sophisticated will appreciate it, including naturally the reviewer (or even an exhibitor). Hence, the ‘education’ that Hammill suggests is also implied: if you aspire to sophistication, all you have to do is enjoy this film. The exhibitors’ feedback in the *Exhibitors Herald* gives a fascinating glimpse into how this sophistication was received. On the one hand, it may have left some exhibitors uneasy and in fear for their business and yet, more widely, these snippets also contributed to perceptions of the Lubitsch brand as refined and exclusive, confirmed by its rejection by sections of the audience.

Following the completion of *Rosita*, Warner offered Lubitsch a lucrative contract and this unlikely pairing produced five films. With his reputation in America mainly based on large-scale historical and exotic spectacles, Lubitsch even now seems to not fit between “The Hard-Boiled, the Comic, and the Weepers” that made up the Warner Brothers profile. Accordingly, Lubitsch is not included in William R. Meyer’s compilation of *Warner Brothers Directors*.

Nonetheless, in view of the above, Warners’ move to sign Lubitsch does look less surprising. When writing about Warner Brothers’ ‘way to the top,’ Thomas Schatz notes that a “governing irony in Warner’s rise and the ‘talkie revolution’ generally was that Warner Bros. developed sound not to differentiate its products or

to revolutionize filmmaking, but to bring itself in line with the other majors.”¹³¹ Although Lubitsch never made a sound film for Warner, Schatz here also provides a motive for the studio to hire Lubitsch. The name Lubitsch meant ‘prestige’ more than ‘box office’ which, at least for a while, was more than enough for the studio.¹³²

As the principal motivation behind Warners’ signing of Lubitsch, this thirst for prestige became quite clear in terms of the waves that it made in the press. For instance, *Moving Picture World* follows Lubitsch’s establishment at Warner closely, while possibly exaggerating in its claim that “exhibitors everywhere are now anxiously awaiting the completion of the great foreign director’s first American photoplay produced in an entirely modern setting.”¹³³ As Harry Warner was later quoted, “[t]he recent news that the [obviously highly sought-after director] has been engaged by another producing company [...] will in no way affect his agreement with the Warner organization.”¹³⁴ Lubitsch’s film adaptation of the Viennese play was eventually deemed “the most important” amongst the Warner films recently completed¹³⁵ and large adverts were ordered to announce Warner’s acquisition of “Genius of the Screen”¹³⁶ publicising with some verve the fact that the “World’s Greatest Moving Picture Director directs for Warner Brothers.”¹³⁷

More than any other available director, Lubitsch embodied Europeanness of the refined, prestigious kind. Indeed, he capitalised on this reputation when he exchanged European histories for European urbanity, allowing him to showcase his examples of 1920s stylishness and sophistication. For Warner, Lubitsch was initially

¹³¹ Schatz. *The Genius of the System*. p. 58.

¹³² See Thompson. *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood*. p. 26.

¹³³ Anon. “Lubitsch Selects Story from Viennese Play.” *Moving Picture World* 64.4 (22 September 1923), p. 356.

¹³⁴ Anon. “Director Lubitsch Also Has an Eye for Business.” *Moving Picture World* 64.3 (15 September 1923), p. 276.

¹³⁵ Anon. “With Throttle Opened Warners Deaf to Industrial Rumbings.” *Moving Picture World* 65.3 (17 November 1923), p. 321.

¹³⁶ Advert for Warner Brothers, “Forty for 1925-6.” *Moving Picture World* 75.2 (11 July 1925), p. 116-117.

¹³⁷ Advert for Warner Brothers. *New York Times* (3 August 1925), p. 32.

meant to bring prestige, not (only) box office rewards, although the lack of the latter may well have played a substantial role in his departure from the studio in 1926. Even Warner needed to survive economically irrespective of the many facets of quality and prestige that terms such as ‘Continental European,’ ‘sophistication’ or ‘subtlety’ brought to the studio. However, such contradictions inherent in his signing were smoothed over by the establishment of Lubitsch in the United States as a director with considerable recognition value. This association with films generally beloved by critics if not always by audiences enabled the Lubitsch name to acquire further prestige and allowed the director to take a significant step towards becoming an ‘artist.’

This may be one of the central reasons why the sophisticated comedy hardly figures in Film Studies. Its subject matter is quite clearly outlined, but is still a little too different from the romantic comedy to be considered part of this genre or to offer fruitful comparison. Accordingly, genre studies of the romantic comedy tend to begin with 1930s screwball comedy and if they refer to Lubitsch, they tend to discuss *Trouble in Paradise*. This 1932 film fits into the time period without one having to acknowledge that there may have been precursors.

In terms of historical approaches, the sophisticated comedy is quite closely linked to the 1920s and with it a generally under-researched decade. In her cultural history of the term sophistication, Hammill concentrates on ‘reading’ sophistication rather than ‘watching’ it, although she too dedicates a chapter to the 1920s and 1930s. Steve Vineberg begins his study *High Comedy in American Movies*¹³⁸ in the 1920s; although he is aware of Lubitsch’s American silent films and refers to them in passing, he still discusses the later works more extensively. Lea Jacobs’ discussion of the sophisticated comedy is a notable exception, but, as a case in point,

¹³⁸ See Steve Vineberg. *High Comedy in American Movies: Class and Humor from the 1920s to the Present*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005 (= Genre and Beyond: A Film Studies Series).

this discussion is staged in the context of a chronologically delimited study of “American Film in the 1920s,” the revealing subtitle of *The Decline of Sentiment*.

Jacobs also edited a special edition of *Film History* in search of comic traditions that were not slapstick comedies but came “Before Screwball.”¹³⁹ However, two out of the six contributions are dedicated to Lubitsch, thereby implicitly confirming the director’s strong association with this group of films.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Lubitsch’s close association with these films may have prevented closer critical study in the past.

However, from a 1920s perspective, the association with sophistication was a highly advantageous one for Lubitsch, allowing for the more problematic associations with Germany to be replaced by those of Continental-European sophistication. With this association with ‘sophistication’ came a set of meanings, centred on both luxury and subtlety, which Lubitsch’s films display in spades. The sophisticated comedy may have had its roots in European operetta and Continental attitudes towards sex, but it emerged in Hollywood as a new genre. Therefore, as the enthusiastic critics of the day demonstrate, the integration of a new director into the American film industry could occur relatively smoothly. Audience reaction may have been more divisive but Warners’ signing of Lubitsch was proven to be the correct decision in their quest for prestige.

1.4 The Emergence of the Lubitsch Touch

Any overview of the 1920s and Lubitsch’s arrival in Hollywood would not be complete without acknowledging the negotiation of Lubitsch’s style in public

¹³⁹ Lea Jacobs. “Introduction: Before Screwball.” *Film History* 13.4 (2001), p. 335.

¹⁴⁰ See Ben Brewster. “The Circle: Ernst Lubitsch and the Theatrical Farce Tradition.” *Film History* 13.4 (2001), p. 372-389 and Kristin Thompson. “Lubitsch, Acting and the Silent Romantic Comedy.” *Film History* 13.4 (2001), p. 390-408.

discourse. In this final section, I will introduce a third term alongside ‘German’ and ‘sophistication’ – that of the ‘touch,’ or in fact *the* ‘Lubitsch touch.’¹⁴¹

The preceding sections of this chapter on the 1920s illustrated how Lubitsch arrived in an America deeply sceptic of émigrés, especially from Germany. The close association of the sophisticated comedy with Continental and European attributes allowed Lubitsch to be discussed in contexts other than his origins, given that what critics expected from German filmmakers did not fit with what they found in Lubitsch. The label ‘European’ hence comes with more positive associations, although it can be just as unstable, as the review of *Die Flamme* above suggests. While the previous sections of this chapter explained how Lubitsch could integrate seamlessly into American film culture, the final section of this chapter explores the emergence of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ as a narrative of distinction that would come into full force in the 1930s and 1940s, even if its roots were already in the 1920s.

Building up Lubitsch as a brand allowed the critics and advertisers of the day to come to terms with contravening or oppositional discourses, especially those around German émigré filmmaking, even if the emerging discourse of Continental sophistication could not entirely do away with the latter. One singular addition to this brand was the emergence of a term that has since become established in both popular and critical discourses on Lubitsch. To show how this discursive phenomenon was prepared throughout the 1920s, I will look at how specifically Lubitsch is represented and discussed in the public discourse, with a particular focus on both his persona and profile as a director. I will thus approach this negotiation in several stages, first looking at how Lubitsch as a private individual is discussed in

¹⁴¹ Modes of orthography vary in terms of presenting the Lubitsch touch, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ or the Lubitsch Touch. However, the point of this term is that it is indeed a term, one not unlike a technical term, or a term with a capital ‘T’ so to speak. We will continue using what we have found to be the most common way of spelling the term, the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

news stories relating to him, before moving on to a professional focus on Lubitsch as a director. Lubitsch had always been interested in matters relating to his industry and his art, participating from early days in spirited discussions about the German and American film industries and his own work methods, as well as those of others. These discursive texts helped to create the persona of an engaged director – even an emerging film artist or auteur positioned between two film worlds – but one who was in the process of assimilating successfully to his new home in Hollywood. In a final stage I trace the very term of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ in the early 1920s and how it eventually became a fixture of Lubitsch-related texts over the course of the decade.

In the 1920s, Lubitsch had already found himself discussed not only in reviews of his films, but in news items or gossip, interviews and portraits. Longer portraits and interviews often included the set-up of meeting for the interview with a description of the director’s appearance, being “a small man physically, slightly given to promising plumpness,” but whose “dark eyes are keen and smiling.”¹⁴² Mention of his “restricted and hesitating”¹⁴³ English or phonetic transcriptions of his accent recurred again and again. However, at other times, Lubitsch was praised for having “met the test [of answering rapid-fire questions shot at him, through an interpreter] with rapid-fire replies, delivered without hesitation and with authority.”¹⁴⁴ Although these asides may occur in connection with other directors, they remain crucial in laying the groundwork for establishing Lubitsch as a distinctive brand. This is a crucial inclusion as it brings the director from behind the camera into the focus of the portrait. The figure in the blind spot of the camera is therefore made visible and so recognisable to both reader and audience.

¹⁴² Anon. “Lubitsch on Directing.” *New York Times* (16 December 1923), p. X5.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Sumner Smith. “Ernst Lubitsch Describes Novel Method of Preparing a Picture for Production.” *Moving Picture World* 54.1 (7 January 1922), p. 53.

The reports and news items vary depending on the focus of the publication. *Variety* or *Moving Picture World* may stick to reporting on Lubitsch as the director in context of work-related events, while more personal anecdotes may find their way into fan magazines like *Photoplay*. In October 1925, for instance, *Variety* reported on a Lubitsch luncheon in honour of the director. It was noted that the guest list unsurprisingly included Lubitsch's wife, but otherwise kept strictly to a guest list of Lubitsch's work colleagues and peers from the "infant industry," some of whom gave speeches.¹⁴⁵ In *Photoplay*, Lubitsch's family life, or at least his marriage and Mrs. Lubitsch featured quite frequently in anecdotes about the director. This article included a tale about how Lubitsch ran off from the set of *The Marriage Circle*, which he was currently "busily directing," in order to replace the "sickly looking rose bush" to be used in the next scene with a "very beautiful"¹⁴⁶ specimen taken out of his own garden. It is easy to see how disparate the nature of these events is and how differently they are reported. Nevertheless, they are all parts making up the mosaic of the Lubitsch persona.

However, the impact of these stories extends to adding another layer to the films with which Lubitsch is associated; indeed, the films form a subtext to such articles. I have selected a news item from *Photoplay* as these are easily the most colourful and amusing pieces. Drier news stories from other publications would work just as well, but *Photoplay* will convey my point most clearly. This time, the "great foreign director [with his] charming home and one of the prettiest wives in Hollywood" threw a party. A friendly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Brown, were

¹⁴⁵ See Anon. "Lubitsch Luncheon Noted for Absence of All 'I's'" *Variety* 80.10 (21 October 1925), p. 30.

¹⁴⁶ Cal York. "Gossip: East and West." *Photoplay* 15.2 (January 1924), p. 131. The payoff of the story is that "an hour or so later, when Mrs. Ernst strolled forth to work in her garden, she found a dark and empty spot where her favorite bush had been wont to bloom" and *Photoplay* asks its readers to "take it from Mrs. Ernst!" just what "a worker and a seeker after realism" Ernst Lubitsch actually is.

in attendance. After a while Lubitsch remarked to Mrs. Brown that he did not see his wife and Mrs. Brown's husband. Mrs. Brown replied "brightly, 'Oh, they've gone outside to look at the dogs.'" The author noted that upon recognition that Mr. Brown and Mrs. Lubitsch were late in returning, "when there was one of those silences in the room." It was for Lubitsch, certainly to rather great effect, then to remark: "But, Mrs. Brown, we haven't any dogs."¹⁴⁷

This anecdote is entirely located in the personal discourse surrounding Lubitsch and does not at all introduce him as a director. The reader's interest in and knowledge of Lubitsch's films would certainly add to the anecdote's punch and in helping to produce a more fleshed-out persona of the director. The clear implication is that Mrs. Ernst Lubitsch has gone off with Mr. Clarence Brown for a private rendezvous. Lubitsch's dry reply, exposing the cover story for what it is, fits the humour displayed in his films. The story could have well be a scene from the cinema of Lubitsch, who is after all the master of "humorous tale[s] of domestic entanglements"¹⁴⁸ and even "daring dramas of domestic dissention"¹⁴⁹ or, to make use of a different term, the sophisticated comedy as the genre of films with which he becomes so closely associated.

Amidst all the ambiguities marking the discourse of sophistication, discussed in the previous section, the subject matter of Lubitsch's films is fairly clear-cut and straightforward. Yet, the close association of Lubitsch with these films adds another layer to these anecdotes. If life does not imitate art or art life, the two still appear closely intertwined, thereby strengthening once more the perception of the bond between the director and his work. These stories, seemingly immaterial, hence

¹⁴⁷ Cal York. "Studio News and Gossip: East and West." *Photoplay* 29.4 (September 1924), p. 46.

¹⁴⁸ Whitney Williams. "Lubitsch's Latest is Gay, Sophisticated, Parisian Farce: Director's Deft 'Touches' Make *So This is Paris!* Humours Tale of Domestic Entanglements." *Los Angeles Times* (20 June 1926), p. D23.

¹⁴⁹ Advert for *The Marriage Circle*. *Moving Picture World* 66.6 (9 February 1924), no page.

reflect back upon and so contribute to Lubitsch's persona, and Lubitsch's portrait in the media would not be complete without them.

However, other reports focused more on the director's work, methods and common themes and techniques employed in his films. These can be found mainly but not exclusively in the more 'serious' publications such as *Variety*, *Moving Picture World* or the *New York Times*. One mechanism deployed to underline the significance of the director in the filmmaking process is particularly characteristic for the film discourse created in the *Times*. Richard Koszarski has been critical of the paper's engagement with early film criticism.¹⁵⁰ Yet, this approach did not apply to the film director, or at least not to this particular film director.

Although the *Times* never gave an exclusive treatment of Lubitsch, its reviews of Lubitsch films tended to be followed up with another article devoted to the film in question a few days later. At times, both these texts were strikingly similar in terms of their line of argument, the examples cited and even the phrasing. Although the review would be published first and would already focus on Lubitsch and his contribution to a film, the second text tended to be specifically about the director, his work methods or the stylistic devices displayed in the film at hand.

Take for instance the case of *Three Women* (1924). The review that was published in the *Times* of 6 October 1924 already focused substantially on the director. His "third pictorial effort," *Three Women* was perceived to have shortcomings. Still, the film "reveals Lubitsch as a talented stylist in direction, a producer who makes the most of every detail and whose work scintillates with original ideas." This was due to "Mr. Lubitsch's able direction [which] has caused the actions and expressions of the players to be readily understood, thus rendering subtitles unnecessary for long stretches." Indeed, it was "the sparing manner in

¹⁵⁰ See Koszarski. *An Evening's Entertainment*. p. 191.

which subtitles are employed” that was particularly highlighted, as was the use of close-ups, notably how the detailed display of diamonds and pearls cleverly show how the villain of the piece calculates the riches of their female owners.¹⁵¹

The following week, the *Times* returned with a fairly long article on Lubitsch’s latest offering. The writer, Hall, was now unrestricted by his usual review column “The Screen” and could give the article a header of his own preference. This title then referenced Lubitsch rather than a detail from the film: “Mr. Lubitsch’s Direction Outshines his Narrative.” Therefore, this article again focused on Lubitsch’s successful, in fact, “brilliant,” direction. The argument of the second article ran along similar lines: the use of subtitles – indeed, “Lubitsch us[ing] 42 subtitles” – was commented upon extensively, along with the simplicity “in which Mr. Lubitsch opens up this latest effort,” and detailed descriptions of certain scenes. This review culminated in a final evaluation that “[a]pparently Mr. Lubitsch does not favour lengthy court scenes, as he disposes of this murder trial with more speed than Jersey justice. The jury comes in with the verdict and the foreman, when addressing the Judge, shakes his head, thus saving Mr. Lubitsch a subtitle.”¹⁵²

The second article did not add new material or insights; in fact, Lubitsch was not necessarily mentioned any more frequently. What sets the two pieces apart, however, is that Hall decides to cut the extensive description of the story which, according to the initial review, is “weak in comparison” to the “direction” that makes the film “a work of art.”¹⁵³ Hence, no longer restrained by his “Screen” column, Hall can focus on the aspects of the film in which he is interested; pointedly, these are predominately related to Lubitsch. Although the *Times*’ earlier

¹⁵¹ See Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: A Calculating Villain,” Review of *Three Women*. *New York Times* (6 October 1925), p. 25.

¹⁵² Mordaunt Hall. “Mr. Lubitsch’s Direction Outshines His Narrative.” *New York Times* (12 October 1924), p. X5.

¹⁵³ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: A Calculating Villain,” Review of *Three Women*. *New York Times* (6 October 1925), p. 25.

review had focused on praising Lubitsch, the space of the second text gives the *Times*' Mordaunt Hall the opportunity to put the director at the very centre of the argument. The *Times* therefore presents a strategy of how to add to the discourse of the director otherwise principally composed by portraits or interviews.

Beyond the actual film reviews, the papers' interest in Lubitsch's work methods remained just as detailed. In the conversations recorded in these portraits, the journalists found Lubitsch's approach to the screenplay, his direction of his actors and his (non-)use of intertitles particularly intriguing. Lubitsch's relationship to his actors was an aspect of his work to which the public discourse returns in virtually every decade of Lubitsch's career; it was even emphasised prominently in the obituaries which followed his death in 1947. Hence, I will examine the negotiation of acting in Lubitsch below in a section on perceptions of Lubitsch's work with Maurice Chevalier. Here, I will focus on the discussion of intertitles. This negotiation is significant on several levels: firstly, they are essential to the silent film as one way of conveying dialogue and meaning; secondly, they also mark out the silent film for its lack of a sound track; and finally, intertitles are a prime site for negotiating Lubitsch's transition from being a German filmmaker to a Hollywood director.

Before his move to America, German reviewers had already commented on the extensive use of intertitles in Lubitsch's films: in fact, the early German critics frequently credited them as the main achievement of several Lubitsch films, as we saw in the prologue. This emphasis could be explained by critics wishing to present a clear example of a writer at work for eyes not quite accustomed to screenwriting, as we had seen in the prologue. However, American critics were fascinated precisely with Lubitsch's increasingly minimal use of intertitles. As early as April 1921, the *Times* exclaimed "Thank heaven, [Lubitsch's films] have not been overloaded with

subtitles, and they do not [even] need as many as they have.”¹⁵⁴ The Hall review of *Three Women* quoted above also took a similar line.

The views of critics on both sides of the Atlantic differed so significantly as to imply a difference in national cinemas. In the American reviews, Lubitsch’s style was not linked to his German background. Instead, the critics praised Lubitsch for adhering to certain standards with which they were already familiar in the American system. David Bordwell has put forward the notion of an “invisible”¹⁵⁵ Hollywood style in his seminal study on Hollywood cinema, written together with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. In the later parts of their book, Thompson suggests that “the formulation of the classical mode began quite early, in the period around 1909–11, and by 1917, the system was complete in its basic narrative and stylistic premises.”¹⁵⁶ The reduction of intertitles to a minimum in each film then at the least supports such a style of narration. The reduction of intertitles to a minimum would at least support such a style of narration and Hall’s interestingly detailed explanation of how the shot of a head-shaking judge saves Lubitsch an intertitle could easily be taken for an example of what Bordwell calls Lubitsch’s “concealed artistry.”¹⁵⁷

In her monograph *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood*, Kristin Thompson argues that Lubitsch’s genius lies precisely in his quick assimilation to American modes of filmmaking. Lubitsch was eager to settle in America and critics welcomed his addition, enquiring enthusiastically of his work methods and evaluating them accordingly: “Once in America, [Lubitsch] rapidly honed his application of classical [Hollywood] principles, and soon he was in turn influencing the filmmakers there

¹⁵⁴ Anon. “The Screen,” Review of *Anna Boleyn*. *New York Times* (18 April 1921), p. 17.

¹⁵⁵ David Bordwell. “The Classical Hollywood Style, 1917–60.” David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 23.

¹⁵⁶ Kristin Thompson. “The Formulation of the Classical Style, 1909–28.” David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 246.

¹⁵⁷ Bordwell. “The Classical Hollywood Style, 1917–60.” p. 23.

with a string of masterpieces.”¹⁵⁸ In fact, the reason why Lubitsch adapted to the American system so quickly and successfully was that he had been imitating American work methods while still working in Germany.¹⁵⁹ Along similar lines David Pratt suggests that

it is precisely because [Lubitsch's films] failed to stand out as sharply from American films that they ultimately failed to stand for either “German” films or European “art” films. This lack of distinctiveness relative to the norms of American production would be one of the reasons Lubitsch so easily became not just a Hollywood filmmaker, but for a time the most honored of Hollywood filmmakers.¹⁶⁰

As previous sections of this study have demonstrated, such a process of assimilation was indeed supported not only by Lubitsch's lack of fit with the traditional ‘Germans’ of the film critics, but his association with a genre newly emerged from the American studio system. Critics were excited about Lubitsch and his use of intertitles, but Lubitsch quickly went beyond mere assimilation. Thompson's hypothesis is impressively argued, but it cannot account for developments later in the decade. Within a few years of his arrival, Lubitsch was not only assimilated into the American system but was becoming a distinguished filmmaker. Having arrived as a foreign filmmaker on a single assignment to director Mary Pickford, his move to Warner on a long-standing contract swiftly anchored him in Hollywood and Warners' aspirations for rise and prestige fit the stylish and sophisticated films that Lubitsch turned to make.

Hence, any depiction of a one-way transfer in favour of Hollywood and at the expense of Lubitsch's Europeanness is misplaced because it ignores the surplus value that Lubitsch brought to Hollywood. Although such a value only became fully apparent over the course of the following decade, it was already present *in nuce*

¹⁵⁸ Thompson. *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood*. p. 14.

¹⁵⁹ See Ibid. p. 22-23.

¹⁶⁰ Pratt. ““O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou?”” p. 64.

through the 1920s. In her epilogue Thompson concedes that what could be the clearest mark of distinction, a style named after oneself, already emerges in the 1920s. Nonetheless, she does not find the phrase of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ to be “very helpful.”¹⁶¹ While I agree on the limited appeal of such a vague phrase, it was already gaining popularity in the writing about Lubitsch in the 1920s and so its continued use has proven useful to many.

Among the definitions that the *Oxford Dictionary of English* gives for ‘touch’ are “an act of touching someone or something,” that is “coming in contact with,” “a small amount” or trace,” “a distinct manner or method of dealing with something.”¹⁶² However, metaphors of touching, touches or even a touch had been present in the Lubitsch discourse before the ‘touch’ itself. As early as 1923, the *New York Times* quoted Lubitsch as saying that he and the players he mentions in this passage “want to touch the emotions of the people who see this picture.”¹⁶³ Similarly, Hall conveyed his impression that *The Dressmaker from Paris* (1925), by the German-born Paul Bern, displayed “touches which remind one of Chaplin’s production *A Woman of Paris*,”¹⁶⁴ or put forward the curious assertion in *Photoplay* that it was, in fact, Adolph Menjou who “gives more than his usual artistic touch to [*Forbidden Paradise*].”¹⁶⁵ The above are only two examples suggesting that touches were not singular to Lubitsch, even in the context of a Lubitsch film.

Over the course of the decade, other touches kept cropping up, ranging from ‘subtlety’ – *So This is Paris!* (1926) is described as a “sophisticated comedy with

¹⁶¹ Thompson. *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood*. p. 127.

¹⁶² Anon. Definition of “touch.” *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Angus Stevenson, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. http://0-www.oxfordreference.com pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199571123.001.0001/m_en_gb0873290?rskey=pwzuxf&result=1 (current online version 2013, accessed 1 August 2014).

¹⁶³ Anon. “Lubitsch on Directing.” *New York Times* (16 December 1923), p. X5.

¹⁶⁴ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen,” Review of *The Dressmaker from Paris*. *New York Times* (18 March 1925), p. 19.

¹⁶⁵ Anon. Review of *Forbidden Paradise*. *Photoplay* 27.2 (January 1925), p. 60.

subtle touches”¹⁶⁶ for instance – to “the continental touch” which, for *Moving Picture World*, is present in *Kiss Me Again*¹⁶⁷ even if, for the *Times* the same film has “deft”¹⁶⁸ touches. To the definition found in the *Oxford Dictionary*, one could also add a definition provided by Cambridge Dictionaries Online where ‘to touch’ means “to put your hand or another part of your body *lightly* onto and off something or someone.”¹⁶⁹ Hence, the adjectives to describe this special element in Lubitsch’s

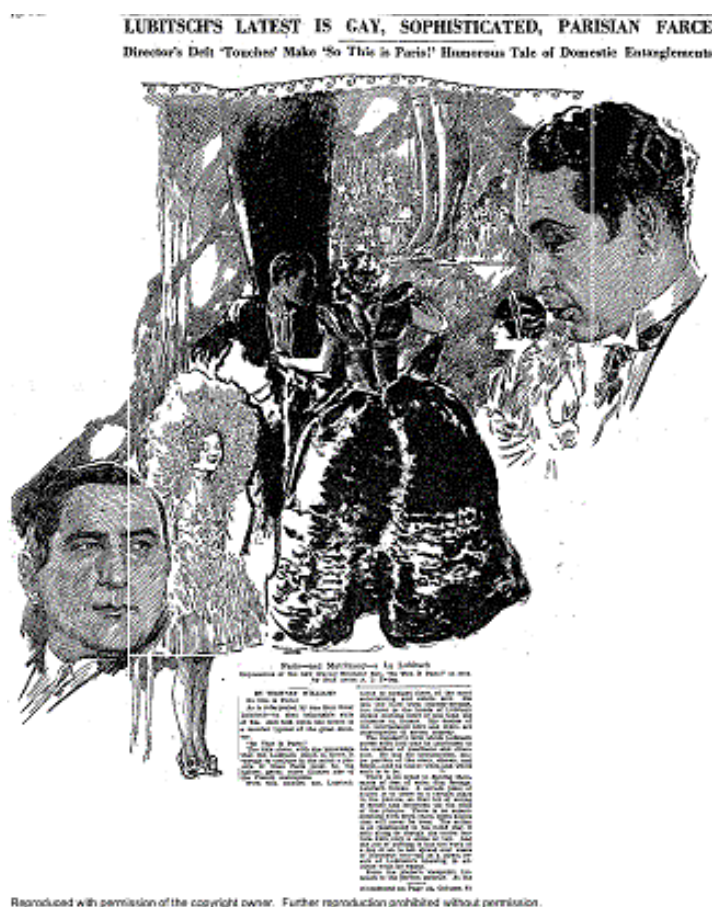


Figure 4: Illustration accompanying review of *So This is Paris!* (1926)

films were close to the field associated with ‘touch.’ C. S. Sewell, reviewing for *Moving Picture World*, found not only “skill and deftness” as well as “one of the cleverest comedy touches,” but also “a pleasing lightness of touch.”¹⁷⁰ The sense of ‘lightness’ may also be a clear

¹⁶⁶ J. P. McEvoy. “How to Write a Revue.” *New York Times* (15 August 1926), p. X3.

¹⁶⁷ C. S. Sewell. Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *Moving Picture World* 75.7 (15 August 1925), p. 736.

¹⁶⁸ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: Music and Wine,” Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *New York Times* (3 August 1925), p. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Anon. Definition of “to touch.” Cambridge Dictionaries Online. http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/touch_1?q=touch (accessed 1 August 2015, emphasis mine).

¹⁷⁰ C. S. Sewell. Review of *Forbidden Paradise*. *Moving Picture World* 71.5 (29 November 1924), p. 448.

reason for the common labelling of Lubitsch's films as "delightful"¹⁷¹ or "a delight."¹⁷²

The aforementioned Menjou touch is one of the few rare examples for the touches noted in the context of Lubitsch films were not predominately associated with the director himself. Interestingly, quite a few 'touches' also found their way into the headlines of articles written about Lubitsch films. While "Audiences Quickly Grasp Dramatic Touches"¹⁷³ did not explicitly indicate that a Lubitsch film was its subject – possibly because *Kiss Me Again* is not the only film reviewed here – others certainly do. One such is "Appealing Touches in Film directed by Mr. Lubitsch" or, two years later, an article in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled: "Lubitsch's Latest is Gay, Sophisticated, Parisian Farce: Director's Deft 'Touches' Make *So This is Paris!* Humorous Tale of Domestic Entanglement." The latter review is particularly interesting in that it accompanies by an illustration featuring the main actors' faces as well as a famous set with pillars looking like women's legs (Figure 4).¹⁷⁴ Not only the headlines but also the illustration here suggest that the phrase had been growing into a buzzword and, indeed, a slogan. While the connection to the 'product' is important, it maintains an even more significant quality of catching the reader's eye.

Still, how does a 'touch,' or many 'touches,' become the singular 'Lubitsch touch?' Language changes gradually and it would therefore be impossible to name a specific moment when the 'Lubitsch touch' became accepted linguistic and semantic convention. However, the beginnings of the 'touch' have been most frequently

¹⁷¹ See for instance Mordaunt Hall. "The Screen: Music and Wine," Review of *Kiss Me Again*. *New York Times* (3 August 1925), p. 10.

¹⁷² See for instance C. S. Sewell. Review of *Forbidden Paradise*. *Moving Picture World* 71.5 (29 November 1924), p. 448.

¹⁷³ Mordaunt Hall. "Audiences Quickly Grasp Dramatic Touches." *New York Times* (23 November 1924), p. X5.

¹⁷⁴ Whitney Williams. "Lubitsch's Latest is Gay, Sophisticated, Parisian Farce: Director's Deft 'Touches' Makes *So This is Paris!* Humorous Take of Domestic Entanglements," Review of *So This is Paris!*. *Los Angeles Times* (20 June 1926), p. D23.

associated with Hal B. Wallis, part of the publicity department at Warner Brothers when Lubitsch joined the studio. In the catalogue that accompanied the Wallis retrospective held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970, it is noted that Wallis is “said to have coined the famous phrase,”¹⁷⁵ when he was Head of Studio Publicity at Warner Brothers. Others do not mention him in this context; for instance, Lubitsch biographer Scott Eyman refers to Wallis only once and in passing, but he does not propose other names as possible fathers (or mothers) of the ‘touch.’ *Variety* also attributes the invention of the ‘touch’ to Wallis in its 1986 obituary for the producer. Wallis joined Warner in 1923 and “three months later he was moved up to [Charley] Kurtzman’s job [Kurtzman until then had been head of publicity]. At that time, one of the new directors on the lot was Ernst Lubitsch, about whom publicist Wallis coined the phrase ‘the Lubitsch touch.’”¹⁷⁶

Interestingly, Hal B. Wallis himself painted a far more understated picture in his autobiography when touching upon Lubitsch’s time at Warner in passing. Naming him as their “leading director” and “an authentic genius,”¹⁷⁷ Wallis devoted about a page to anecdotes on the director’s way of working. Lubitsch would break for tea on set, telling his crews to enjoy their evenings, so that “they would be more relaxed the next day” or, elsewhere, he made the horses in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* run in the ‘wrong’ direction owing to the fact that the film was set in England. Crucially, the pleasure that Wallis derived from working with Lubitsch also apparently stemmed from the latter’s availability for the promotion of his films. He wrote, “Cooperative with the press, [Lubitsch] loved to talk, and his stories were always funny. He gave many radio interviews and appeared at premieres often.”

¹⁷⁵ Adrienne Mancina, ed. *Hal B. Wallis: Film Producer*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970. p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Anon. “Hal Wallis, 88, Dies At Home in His Sleep,” Obituary for Hal B. Wallis. *Variety* 213.23 (8 October 1986), p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ Hal Wallis and Charles Higham. *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis*. New York: Macmillan, 1980. 15.

Yet, if Wallis is the inventor of the ‘Lubitsch touch,’ he does not take credit for the full extent of his share in it, or at least does so in a considerably understated way in his autobiography: “Lubitsch became a celebrity in his own right, and I [Wallis] made sure he got lots of publicity.”¹⁷⁸

One might think that Wallis would have taken slightly greater credit for a term that, by the time of the publication of his autobiography in 1980, had gained considerable currency. Repeated attribution in journalistic and increasingly academic discourses may well have served to perpetuate the myth of his inventing the ‘touch,’ not unlike the ‘touch’ itself. If so, it should be noted that Idwal Jones began to weave this myth as early as 1945, for at the very end of a longer portrait of Wallis, Jones wrote that

When a new German director, famed for his cheroot-smoking and deftness, came to the Warner studio some years ago, Wallis, then a publicity man, gave his style the trademark of “the Lubitsch touch.” It is a trademark that endures, and hangs in the air even when there is no Lubitsch film around – like the smile of the Cheshire cat.

“I lifted it from the ‘Nelson touch,’” Wallis admits. “Nelson said that of himself just before Trafalgar. That fellow knew he was good, I guess.”¹⁷⁹

If this story is true, it is of course rather ironic that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is now far more famous than Nelson’s. The earliest reference to the term that I have so far located has found its way into Anthony Slide’s anthologies of film reviews through the decades between 1896 and 1940. In October/November 1923, *Exceptional Photoplays* writes of *Rosita*: “As for direction, nowhere is the picture stamped with the Lubitsch touch as prominently as usual.”¹⁸⁰ The chronology of events – Wallis’s

¹⁷⁸ Hal Wallis and Charles Higham. *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis*. New York: Macmillan, 1980. 15.

¹⁷⁹ Idwal Jones. “Just in Time for Breakfast: Observations on a Visit to the Set of *The Affairs of Susan*.” *New York Times* (11 March 1945), p. X3.

¹⁸⁰ Anon. Review of *Rosita*. *Exceptional Photoplays* 4.1-2 (October-November 1923), p. 5 reprinted in Anthony Slide, ed. *Selected Film Criticism, 1921-1930*. Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1982. p. 243.

move to Warner in 1923, Lubitsch's signing with Warner on 7 August of that year¹⁸¹ and the publication of the review in autumn – does not necessarily contradict this version of the genesis of the 'Lubitsch touch.' According to Eyman, Lubitsch's first film for Warner, *The Marriage Circle*, went into production between September and October,¹⁸² which would still have given Wallis time to come up with the moniker.

All the same, what is remarkable about the review, its timing and its subject is that the term is used in connection with a film not produced by Warner but by United Artists. Despite the term's novelty, a style is fundamentally based in tradition, convention and even myth. Disguising the term's novelty by 'selling' it as a 'familiar' concept, as the *Rosita* review does, would not therefore compromise the intentions of a marketing executive to establish it as an already well-known concept. Nonetheless, it is notable how, according to this version of events, publicity travels in the early 1920s from a marketing executive of one studio – which will only release the first Lubitsch film in February of the next year – to a journalist reviewing another film made previously at another studio.

We are unlikely to trace the person responsible for having first invented the 'Lubitsch touch.' Wallis may well have been the inventor of the phrase, which would also be consistent with the motives for Warners' signing of Lubitsch. While no one has emerged as a serious alternative candidate, it is striking that the use of the phrase was largely confined to critical material rather than advertisements throughout the 1920s. This raises the possibility that Wallis lifted it not from Horatio Nelson but from a review, perhaps even the one for *Rosita*. Alternatively, he may not have been involved in its invention at all, but merely rested in agreement when someone later associated him with the phrase.

¹⁸¹ See Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 98.

¹⁸² See Ibid. p. 102.

However, the notion that a phrase which has since become established as a critical term, was actually invented as an advertising tool is a tempting one. What is almost, although not quite as tempting is that Wallis accepted authorship of the term and that this is yet to be questioned. Be that as it may, it would be much later in the 1930s, and particularly in the 1940s, when the phrase actually came to be of significant use of advertisers, as we shall see in the chapters to follow.

Yet, the question remains: why and how did the ‘Lubitsch touch’ stick? The metaphor of a cultural product being ‘touched’ by a certain air, flavour or hand is common, but what transformed this flavour within Lubitsch’s films into a ‘touch?’ Writing on the period slightly before the advent of Lubitsch and his ‘touch,’ Janet Staiger notes that reporting upon and promotion of particular Hollywood personalities had started around 1910, and that

Brand name advertising and slogans were common US economic practices by 1900. For filmmakers, the purpose of brands was to spread the value of each film to all the films, hoping to entice repeated consumption of the manufacturer’s offerings. If the manufacturer could succeed in this, the firm would gain the advantage of an apparent monopoly.¹⁸³

Staiger goes on to state that “[i]n general, however, the use of brand names as a primary advertising tactic declined in subsequent years when multiple-reel films supplanted the less differentiated one-reelers.”¹⁸⁴ If Wallis with the advertising use of the term in the background, is indeed behind the invention of the ‘touch,’ this would prove an exception to Staiger’s rule. Nevertheless, it would still confirm industry practices in whose context the ‘Lubitsch touch’ would have been invented.

The problem remains of an explanation as to why it was mainly critics and reviewers who took up the metaphor in this period, rather than studio publicists and

¹⁸³ Janet Staiger. “The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930.” *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960s*. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. London: Routledge, 1988. p. 99 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 100.

marketing men. One exception that otherwise proved the rule is a large, advert for *Three Women* printed in *Variety* and presenting Lubitsch as the main asset of the film, calling the film an “individual Lubitsch production,” “personally directed by Ernst Lubitsch” and “[a]nother dramatic gem from the master hand of LUBITSCH.” However, while all snippets but one from other critics mentioned Lubitsch, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ only found its way into the advert through the quotes taken from New York critics. Hence, the *Morning Telegraph* opined that “[a]gain [Lubitsch’s] masterful direction and subtle touches are evident.”¹⁸⁵

Several components had come together in the emergence of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ First, in the 1920s, was a perceived need to downplay and disavow Lubitsch’s German heritage against the background of anti-German sentiments in the American society of the time. Secondly, there was the rise of the sophisticated comedy, which allowed for associations with a set of meanings that were far more positive, yet equally elusive. Finally, there was Warners’ ambition to catch up with the majors and the desire for prestige. As we have seen, Warners’ thirst for prestige, which they found in the signing of Lubitsch, turned out to be a vital breeding ground for the establishment of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

In the context of this approach, Wallis’s association with the ‘Lubitsch touch’ can be viewed as part of an attempt to close the gap with other studios. While the nature of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ has remained just as difficult to pin down, the association with and the distinction for the director is clear. The label could be used for advertising. Yet, the ‘Lubitsch touch,’ in the 1920s, mainly proved a useful mechanism for reviewers and critics to emphasise the prestige and artistry of this director, even proclaiming a whole “Lubitsch school of expression.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Advert for *Three Women*. *Variety* 76.8 (8 October 1924), p. 31. (emphasis in the original).

¹⁸⁶ In an editorial from *Film Daily* attached to an advert for *The Girl Who Wouldn’t Work*. *Moving Picture World* 76.1 (5 September 1925), p. 18.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to trace the meanings of words that are all familiar and yet difficult to pin down. Lubitsch's arrival in early 1920s Hollywood was met with curiosity and as one of the earliest and most significant European émigré directors coming to the United States, the 'buzz' he generated was complex. Lubitsch was mainly kept clear of the more belligerent and anti-German talk in post-War America, not least because he seemed ill-suited to represent what was understood as 'German.' If the reference to Germany remained attached to him, it was generally used by journalists to distinguish Lubitsch or present him as an exception. Still, this discourse forms the background against which Lubitsch's arrival in and assimilation into Hollywood must be seen.

An alternative to the 'German' label that came to be highly favoured alternative was the comparison to a more 'Continental' feel, which was evoked in connection with Lubitsch's films as he moved into the sophisticated comedy. Associating Lubitsch's films with this more neutral term and identifying them as the centrepiece of a genre newly emerging in America further facilitated his crossing over as an American filmmaker.

Finally, considerable interest in Lubitsch as a director and his methods of working facilitated not only his move to Hollywood but also prepared the perception of him, and the director more generally, as an artist. Critics found a filmmaker agile and open to both discussion and adoption of German and American techniques. Kristin Thompson has made an eloquent argument for how easily Lubitsch could be absorbed into Hollywood. While he was indeed assimilated rather seamlessly and Thompson's case is supported by the public discourse, it still cannot account for the distinguished position that Lubitsch assumed over the course of the 1920s. His

position as a leading American filmmaker would of course become further established in the decades to follow.

Over the course of the 1920s then, Lubitsch became associated with the 'Lubitsch touch' – a term no easier to define than 'German' or 'sophistication' and yet remaining intrinsically Lubitsch's. In fact, both this strong association of a 'touch' with Lubitsch and the term's flexibility to accommodate a wider range of meanings may well be its greatest asset and the secret of its longevity. How the term evolves will be the subject of the following chapters on the 1930s and 1940s.

2. *A Historical Panorama: The 1930s*

2.1 *Introduction*

The following chapter on Lubitsch in the 1930s not only neatly fits into the very centre of this thesis, it also rehearses *in nuce* the argument that this thesis will make as a whole. My previous exploration of the 1920s demonstrated how Lubitsch was set at the centre of an assimilation narrative, one in which he was transformed from a German émigré filmmaker to a director of American sophisticated comedies with a Continental flavour. The ‘Lubitsch touch,’ while not at the end of such a chronological development, fitted into this process of assimilation: it offered a term for the style specific to Lubitsch even beyond his close association with the newly emerging genre of the sophisticated comedy.

The chapter to follow this one will show how Lubitsch and the ‘Lubitsch touch’ had become so established by the 1940s that his style was considered no longer to warrant an explanation or justification. Instead, the mention of this famous ‘touch’ was placed increasingly prominently in the advertising discourse around his films, serving as a veritable label. Different ‘touches’ then emerged from this discourse; those that were not necessarily mutually exclusive and yet, as we will see, decidedly distinct.

The decade at the centre of this chapter actually witnessed the culmination of a number of aspects important to both Lubitsch’s and Hollywood’s histories. This chapter will therefore break away from the fairly linear narratives of the other chapters around it. Instead, I will structure this chapter in line with several contexts where Lubitsch and the ‘Lubitsch touch’ were present in the public discourse of the decade and have since been analysed by researchers: the musical, sexuality, stardom and the studio. None of these Hollywood elements or contexts necessarily originated in the 1930s nor do they conclude by the end of that period. It is rather that they

became crucially important to Lubitsch's work in this decade and may be said to be key to American film history of the period.

The musical is the only context named above that relied upon the technological innovation that had become widely, and profitably, available towards the end of the 1920s. When Lubitsch adopted sound, he did so by making musicals at a crucial time for a genre that was still very young. When the genre reached crisis point, public discourse needed to negotiate the issue that Lubitsch was continuing to make successful musicals; critics did so by then turning to a very specific new meaning of the 'touch.'

The section on the negotiation of sexuality in the Lubitsch discourse will be staged against a backdrop of tightening censorship. There have been various critical discussions about the significance of this particular period of censorship, although censorship has existed as long as cinema itself. However, in its combination of an arguably oppressive censorship system with an industry that had a vested interest in tight control within the studios, the Production Code Administration has gained notoriety, both critically and in popular terms. Against this backdrop, Lubitsch's tendency to dabble in more suggestive subjects would make him a prime target for the censors. Nonetheless, an examination of the public discourse will reveal that both critics and advertisers welcomed his adventurous approach and did not view his artistry as a director to be compromised by censorship.

Lubitsch's collaborations with stars, most notably his five films starring Maurice Chevalier, sheds a light on the negotiation of stardom in the period. We can look at this partnership in the context of the narratives that have sprung up in regard to other collaborations. Nevertheless, in the context of both their careers, I will discuss this particular narrative for reason of its essentially symbiotic nature. For it is not only this partnership that turned Chevalier into a star, but was also responsible

for further realisation of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ This particular discussion will then end with an examination of Lubitsch’s explorations into his own star image as director. For following the conclusion of his Chevalier collaboration, Lubitsch explored ways in which he himself could promote his films, including by making cameo appearances in trailers.

The final section of this chapter will look at the studio system of the 1930s, particularly the role of Paramount as the studio with which Lubitsch was associated most prominently. The 1930s has often been taken as synonymous with the ‘studio system.’ In such a system, power was organised in tight structures within the major studios, often through the oversight of powerful managing executives. It is worth exploring how a prominent director such as Lubitsch navigated such a system and yet preserved his artistic independence. What is more, however, Lubitsch also held the position of Head of Production for roughly twelve months halfway through the 1930s. This position of power complicates academic notions of artistic authorship. Yet, Lubitsch’s example will show that the public conception of authorship of the time is very different to those that have since developed in Film Studies. As such, Lubitsch maintains his distinguished position irrespective of the role he occupies in the filmmaking process but on the grounds of his established reputation.

This chapter will demonstrate how, over the course of one decade, Lubitsch and his style are conceptualised differently according to the contexts in which they are placed. The ‘Lubitsch touch’ can figure in these disparate contexts precisely owing to its ambiguous and flexible nature. Across this thesis as a whole I trace, over the course of Lubitsch’s career, the sets of meanings that the ‘touch’ took. In this chapter dedicated to the 1930s, however, these conceptualisations develop side by side. What is more, the contexts discussed in the later stages of this chapter will

reveal ways in which the significance, reach and appeal of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ was tested.

2.2 *Lubitsch the Re-invigorator or: The Musical*

The BFI survey of *100 Film Musicals* opens with the statement that “[f]or thirty years from the coming of sound in the late 1920s, the musical was at the heart of the Hollywood studio system. One of the most popular of all the film genres on which Hollywood production was based,” Jim Hillier and Douglas Pye go on to explain that, “for many people its combination of music, sophisticated production values, song and dance epitomised the glamour and appeal of Hollywood.”¹⁸⁷ There may well be truth in these authors’ reference to sophistication, for Lubitsch is represented several times in their collection of musicals, with *The Love Parade* (1929), *The Merry Widow* (1935) and *One Hour with You* (1932). The ‘coming’ of sound to Hollywood constituted an early craze that then surrounded the only genre that had been made possible only by this technological advancement.¹⁸⁸

Experiments with sound and music, not least deliciously depicted in *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), quickly gave way to more confident uses of the new technical possibilities. However, the novelty soon wore off and the genre was besieged with crisis only a few years into its existence, particularly during the years in which Lubitsch made his contributions. Indeed, Lubitsch was a crucial force behind the musical; he convinced Warner Brothers to buy the story that eventually became the basis for the first talkie, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), even making use of a clause in his

¹⁸⁷ Jim Hillier and Douglas Pye. *100 Film Musicals*. London: BFI, 2011. p. 1 (= BFI Screen Guides).

¹⁸⁸ Tino Balio. “Production Trends.” *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939*. Tino Balio, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. p. 211.

contract to this end.¹⁸⁹ His innovative techniques were then clearly recognised in the 1930s and beyond in film history.

In the context of Lubitsch's work overall, his five 1930s musicals¹⁹⁰ constitute only a fairly small fraction of his output. At the same time they make up more than half of the films that he directed in this decade. Although not necessarily amongst the favourite Lubitsch films of today, they played a crucial role in the formation of Lubitsch's style, as the discourse of the 1930s indeed locates one of the decade's key 'Lubitsch touches' in this context.

The governing methodology of this section is less concerned with a close, direct analysis of Lubitsch's films nor identifying his particular contributions to the genre. This analysis has taken place elsewhere and I will indeed revisit some of these critical evaluations towards the end of this section. Nonetheless, the question of what ingredients successfully made a 'Lubitsch musical' – especially the curious case of *Love Me Tonight* (1932), which may be considered a Lubitsch musical although it was not directed by Lubitsch – is an interesting one, but the meta-critical approach that I take is not particularly suited to answer it. Instead, I am interested in how the musical figures in the discourses on Lubitsch's films and his persona. I want therefore to explore how a genre could be used to forge the notion of the director as an artist in general and of Lubitsch having a particular kind of 'touch.'

This section approaches the public discourse on the musicals of the 1930s by focusing on two aspects: innovation, predictably, while, less predictably, re-invigoration. It is an irony, or even a paradox that Lubitsch mastered the musical form just as the genre was beginning to wane. This is scarcely remarked upon in

¹⁸⁹ See Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 119-120. Although Lubitsch did not get to direct the film version of the play, its author Samson Raphaelson became a longstanding writer for Lubitsch, writing the screenplays for *Trouble in Paradise*, *The Shop Around the Corner* and *Heaven Can Wait*.

¹⁹⁰ *One Hour with You* and *The Merry Widow* also had foreign language versions. Paramount's revue film, *Paramount on Parade* (1930), to which Lubitsch and Chevalier contributed three episodes could also be counted among these.

critical studies. However, as a contradiction it was one resolved by Lubitsch's particular persona as a director and his strength as a now established brand – the 'Lubitsch touch.'

My initial discussion will be concerned with how to negotiate the coming of sound and the popularity of the musical in the texts relating to Lubitsch's films of the 1930s, focusing on how Lubitsch is associated with innovation and technique and how this is used to distinguish him in relation to the young genre. The musical was the one genre that made direct use of the innovation of sound. Critics, then, explored Lubitsch's original and innovative contributions to this technical novelty, not least in recurring references to Lubitsch's work with the camera. This combination ultimately leads to a position of distinction that also will emerge from the next sections of my discussion. I have established that Lubitsch was distinguished from what was perceived as a German kind of filmmaking in the 1920s, which eventually facilitated his assimilation into the American film industry. However, it is crucial to recognise that, by the 1930s, Lubitsch had become so well established in Hollywood that he was able to hold a distinguished position in a major studio as well as being sought for high profile productions.

Monte Carlo (1930) is something of an anomaly in the Lubitsch canon. As one of Lubitsch's Paramount musicals, it is set in Europe and features Jeanette MacDonald, although Maurice Chevalier is missing from the line-up. Chevalier's omission may partly explain why *Monte Carlo* had a slightly cooler, mixed reception than other films in Lubitsch's musical canon. Still, *Monte Carlo* is notable for one musical sequence that stands out even more in this 'lesser' Lubitsch. "Beyond the Blue Horizon" is sung by Jeannette MacDonald as her character, Countess Helene Mara, travels on a train watching the peasant girls who provide the

chorus, working in the fields. This sequence was frequently discussed in virtually every review of the film. Indeed, praise for this particular scene stood in notable contrast to critical evaluation of the rest of the film.

For instance, *The New York Times* described the scene extensively and how the “noise of the train,” “the song of the wheels and the spasmodic shriek of the whistle” are heard; eventually, “the sound of the jogging and the rush of the train as it speeds along become blended into a musical accompaniment for a song.” Summing up, Hall praised the sequence as “a fascinating thought, filmed and recorded with all the artistry now possible.” Crucially, it was “all so admirably suited to the screen.” Framing his praise in terms of originality, Hall wrote that “Lubitsch’s pictures usually sparkle with original twists and this new offering is no exception”¹⁹¹ in reference to the “Beyond the Blue Horizon” sequence. A subsequent rewriting of the first *Times* review went as far as to call Lubitsch a “wizard with sound effects”¹⁹² in reference to the same song. In the absence of Chevalier and with no star comparable to Lubitsch’s standing featured in the film, critical praise was focused almost entirely on the director.

Even exhibitors contributed positive feedback to the Lubitsch musicals. In relation to *The Love Parade*, A. J. Gibbons from Illinois wrote that “[i]f there is any doubt as to the improvement of the talking picture of the silent one let him view this work. It was everything worthwhile that distinguished the stage before the advent of the screen, grand opera, comic opera, vaudeville, speciality stunts and stage acting, all so appropriately blended as in no part to seem to be lugged in.” What is most important is that a Lubitsch musical is again brought into the context of furthering the new medium and its technological development. In fact, Gibbons’ opening

¹⁹¹ Mordaunt Hall. “Director Blends Camera and Microphone in Forthcoming Film,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (20 July 1930), p. X3.

¹⁹² Mordaunt Hall. “Lubitsch’s *Monte Carlo*: Brilliant Direction and Keen Wit in Screen Musical Comedy.” *New York Times* (7 September 1930), p. X5.

statement suggests both Lubitsch's achievement and his own education, not to say sophistication (if not of those coming to view them) when he praises *The Love Parade* "the acme of entertainment of the talking picture."¹⁹³

In regard to Lubitsch's 1932 musical, *One Hour with You*, a sound remake of his own *The Marriage Circle* starring Maurice Chevalier, Hall touched upon regular sources of praise for Lubitsch. He cited references to Lubitsch's "unflinching direction," a "capital cast" and that the film is beautifully done and "with meticulous attention to every detail." Acoustic experiments, such as having characters speaking in rhyme, were generally less popular with the reviewer, who qualified that it is, after all, a "comedy with melody." Yet, again he singled out one particular scene when "M. Chevalier as Dr. André Bertier take[s] the audience into his confidence and ask[s] 'What would you do?'" Hall is not only convinced of Lubitsch's use of sound, but goes further in his praise: "Mr. Lubitsch, as he has done in other pictorial works, employs his musical accompaniment most effectively" and "[s]ometimes so that it enhances the comedy in a situation."¹⁹⁴

This breaking of the 'fourth wall' would not have been entirely impossible in the silent days. However, the rapport that Lubitsch establishes with the audience only makes sense when his musicals do not have to overcome the barrier of silence. It is notable that, in her study of the musical, Jane Feuer does not distinguish Lubitsch for his contribution to the genre. Instead, what she finds noteworthy about his musicals are precisely the moments where lead actors address the camera directly. She writes that "Chevalier was even permitted to break a Hollywood taboo by looking directly into the lens to address the cinema audience. In *One Hour with*

¹⁹³ Anon. "What the Picture did for me." *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 99.12 (21 June 1930), p. 94.

¹⁹⁴ Mordaunt Hall. "Two Sparkling Pictorial Comedies," Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (3 April 1932), p. X4.

You, Chevalier winked and leered into the lens as if letting the spectator in on a dirty joke.”¹⁹⁵

Here, Feuer makes a particularly conspicuous point in an initial discussion of Lubitsch’s musicals in the 1930s. Essentially, she links the use of sound and use of visuals in this observation upon a visual twist of musical cinema. In the contemporary debate, Hall, in turn, praised Lubitsch for his originality and innovation in the context of the new genre. The linking of Lubitsch’s use of sound and of the camera, either exemplified in the reviewed film established earlier, was already part of the discourse in the 1930s.

These arguments not only centre on the idea of innovation in regard to Lubitsch, but return to the notion of technique employed by the director and therefore warrant their own investigation. One area in which Lubitsch receives particular praise is interestingly his use of camera when putting together the musicals – somewhat surprisingly, as the musical is defined by its reliance on sound rather than visuals. However, the early years of sound film were marked by the fear that the camera would lose its mobility and dynamism with the coming of sound. Indeed awkward experiments characterised the era. Richard Barrios explains that “[m]ore often than not, a discussion of 1929 films fast turns to the issue of camera mobility – specifically, the lack thereof, and the intransigent mike’s unconquerable stranglehold on film.”¹⁹⁶

This connection is made especially in reviews by the astutely observing *New York Times*. Andre Sennwald, for instance, included camerawork in a catalogue of typical Lubitsch elements which, according to Lubitsch himself, came about only through diligent preparation: “Several years ago Lubitsch informed me that the

¹⁹⁵ Jane Feuer. *The Hollywood Musical*. London: Macmillan, 1993. p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Barrios. *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. p. 113.

subtle qualities of irony, pathos, bitterness and laughter with which he invests his pictures, the delicate emotions which he suggests with his camera, are worked out on paper to the last detail before he ever reaches the set.”¹⁹⁷

References to the camera in the context of sound constituted a theme that ran through Mordaunt Hall’s reviews of virtually all of Lubitsch’s musicals. In relation to Lubitsch’s first musical, *The Love Parade*, he praised “this Teutonic genius [for not being] dismayed by the linking of the microphone with the camera.”¹⁹⁸ Elsewhere, Hall wrote on *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) that “When a character walks up a long flight of stairs, his steps are accompanied by musical strains that afford laughter” or, picking up on both the film’s title and star, he appeared convinced it is both Chevalier’s “smiling and singing[, which] are bound to appeal to all those who see this offering.”¹⁹⁹ Hall thus brought the visual and the acoustic together. Most frequently, Hall linked directly to Lubitsch particular techniques that combine the camera and the use of sound. He continued this theme in his second write-up of the film,

He virtually writes his picture with the camera, and now that he has the microphone at his disposal he blends sound and shadows in a fashion that reaches a peak of undeniable cinematic art. He has an uncanny way of juggling dialogue, dispensing with it when he wills and calling for plenty of spoken words when he decides that it is the proper moment.²⁰⁰

Another of his reviews was fittingly titled “Director Blends Camera and Microphone”²⁰¹ and in the ‘sequel’ to this review he argued that “[t]his production is

¹⁹⁷ Andre Sennwald. “Hollywood vs. *The Good Fairy*: Regretfully Suggesting That Molnar’s Winged Fancies Have Been Daubed with the Slapstick Brush in the Film City,” Review of *The Good Fairy*. *New York Times* (10 February 1935), p. X5.

¹⁹⁸ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: Maurice Chevalier Again,” Review of *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (20 November 1929), p. 38.

¹⁹⁹ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: A Gay Parisian,” Review of *A Smiling Lieutenant*. *New York Times* (23 May 1931), p. 13.

²⁰⁰ Mordaunt Hall. “Chevalier’s New Film: *Smiling Lieutenant* Rich in Mirth and Melody,” Review of *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *The New York Times* (31 May 1931), p. X5.

²⁰¹ See Mordaunt Hall. “Director Blends Camera and Microphone in Forthcoming Film,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (20 July 1930), p. X3.

Mr. Lubitsch at his best after he has had experience with the microphone and now learned to manipulate it as he has done a camera for several.”²⁰² In what was even a third review of the film, Hall observed that even in his second musical, Lubitsch “reveals an understanding of the microphone which is almost equal to his sparkling guidance of the camera.”²⁰³

Hall’s judgement that Lubitsch ‘Is now famed,’ ‘has now learned to manipulate,’ and is ‘almost equal’ in his use of sound goes beyond resolving fears in regard to how Hollywood awkwardly incorporates sound. Instead, Hall praises Lubitsch’s musicals by linking them to areas in which Lubitsch’s achievements are already considered established. Indeed, early writers on Lubitsch were no strangers to his use of the camera and Hall’s repeated acknowledgment of Lubitsch’s use is curious on the levels of both the context of the use of the camera in a Hollywood with sound and amongst émigré filmmakers from Europe.

Notably, Hall is rather generous with the adjectives describing Lubitsch’s background in Germany, or rather German filmmaking – ‘Teutonic,’ ‘the German’ while elsewhere he uses the German word for Mr., ‘*Herr*.’²⁰⁴ There was already then a clear connection between European émigrés and technically highly skilled filmmaking. The *New York Times*, for instance, noted that, “More recently the best German and American brains have combined to make new films which were a distinct and sincere effort to create a work of art.” The newspaper went on to note that “There is apparently little anxiety about the crudities of the mechanism” so echoing the confidence of these filmmakers that, “The technical difficulties may soon be done away with.” However, when referring to ‘the best German and

²⁰² Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: A Sparkling Comedy,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (28 August 1930), p. 26.

²⁰³ Mordaunt Hall. “Brilliant Direction and Keen Wit in Screen Musical Comedy,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (7 September 1930), p. X5.

²⁰⁴ See Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: A Gay Parisian,” Review of *A Smiling Lieutenant*. *New York Times* (23 May 1931), p. 13.

American brains,’ the paper may be overly complimentary to those with American citizenship, as the filmmakers referenced by name all have their roots in Europe and, one excepted, in Germany, “Lubitsch, Jannings, Chaplin, Murnau, Conrad, [sic] Veidt and Pabst.”²⁰⁵ Summarising the problems that the musical had been facing in previous years, Alexander Bakshy wrote for the *New York Times* in 1935,

Some continental producers, notably René Clair and some Germans, and occasionally Lubitsch, among the Americans, have taken advantage of this escape from the limitations of realistic plausibility to give their musical films a freedom of treatment that did no violence to the natural behavior of their characters.

Bakshy’s convoluted listing of the main players involved in such innovation is telling. In Bakshy’s thinking, Lubitsch was firmly stuck in transnationality, distinct from the Germans and more a part of an American collectivity at this point. Be that as it may, although he qualifies the success of these as “this solution, clearly, has a limited scope”²⁰⁶ for American producers, the association technical innovation with continental filmmakers is reinforced.

For reasons further elaborated in the previous chapter, Lubitsch was not necessarily part of such a discussion; he was not taken as representative of German film, his German films and how ‘German’ they are is still a less prominent area within the study of Weimar cinema. Hence, when the camera was discussed the criticism of the 1930s and later, such discussions were hardly ever linked to Lubitsch’s status as an émigré. Similarly, Hall’s use of these descriptors may well ‘dip’ into such a background, but Hall did not explore this line of argument further. As he was firmly integrated into the American film industry by this point, there was no danger of critics alienating Lubitsch. Instead, film criticism put him in a context

²⁰⁵ Anon. “Still Talking ‘Talkies.’” *New York Times* (19 June 1929), p. 30 (names capitalised in the original).

²⁰⁶ Alexander Bakshy. “New Paths for the Musical Film: In Which a Critic Suggests the Split Screen as the Way Out of the Wilderness for the Producer.” *New York Times* (9 June 1935), p. X4.

of distinction, as émigré cinema was then famed for its artistic use of the camera. Accordingly, Hall continued to ‘marry’ Lubitsch’s German roots with his perceived artistic excellence in calling him “the brilliant German director.”²⁰⁷ It was to exemplify his eminent artistry and, as such, link the discourse on his use on sound to that on his use of the camera, that critics contributed to the ‘marking’ out of his achievements in this new musical genre. This phenomenon is even more significant when considering that in its very early years, the new genre was plagued with a lack of camera mobility due to issues with the microphone and the use of sound as a whole problems that some even took to be the end of cinema as they knew it.

The argument can therefore be said to return to Lubitsch as an artist with a style. However, there has been a longer tradition of locating Lubitsch’s style in his use of the camera, one that eventually spilled over from the journalistic to the academic discourse. One of the first critical studies to single out the cinematography of Lubitsch films is Lewis Jacobs’ early history.²⁰⁸ Jacobs completed a study, film-historical but not necessarily academic, of monumental dimensions. *The Rise of American Film* first went into publication before the end of the 1930s and therefore still during Lubitsch’s lifetime. Jacobs was not entirely consistent in his definition of the ‘touch,’ in terms of his offering numerous different kinds of touches from various Lubitsch films. More often than not Jacobs’ reference to the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is evoked in relation to the use of cinematography. The ‘Lubitsch touch’ is most succinctly defined in a passage in which Jacobs argues that

²⁰⁷ Mordaunt Hall. “The Screen: Maurice Chevalier Again,” Review of *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (20 November 1929), p. 38.

²⁰⁸ Called a notable exception in work done on film history until 1970s in Francis G. Couvares. “Introduction: Hollywood, Censorship, and American Culture.” *American Quarterly* 44.4 (December 1992), p. 511.

All the American-made Lubitsch films have been distinguished by a personal style and craftsmanship. His flair for witty imagery gives his pictures a laconic and yet scintillating quality. His swift, deft plotting is enhanced by the rapierlike [sic] 'comments' of his camera, which have been known as "the Lubitsch touch."²⁰⁹

Ever since, film critics and historians have commented upon Lubitsch's use of the camera: Ethan Mordden had Lubitsch "rid[e] his camera up and down halls, out onto terraces, into the opera house, showing only essentials,"²¹⁰ when he discusses his musicals. For Gerald Mast, Lubitsch's "camera positions [showed] either much more or much less than any character could perceive,"²¹¹ while Richard Barrios interpreted "the camera in *The Love Parade* [as alluding] to things too naughty for dialogue, [...] Lubitsch's governing aesthetic."²¹² All these observations are taken from studies on musicals and are thus attuned to another 'cinematic channel,' that of sound. This only underlines the acknowledgement of the initial technical glitches that the new technology came with. Richard Barrios sums it all up beautifully in a section of his *A Song in the Dark* tellingly titled "Paramount: The Director as Muse." In focusing on a reading of the first one film of the perceived cycle, *The Love Parade*, Barrios observes rather vividly that "Most [film] operettas were assigned to faceless hirelings or ill-suited technicians; Paramount had Ernst Lubitsch."²¹³

Hall's singularly insistent discussion of Lubitsch's use of the camera across his reviews of his musicals may say as much about Lubitsch's style as it does about the critic's interest when it comes to Lubitsch's films. Critics of any kind never write objectively, or work in an ideological vacuum. Interestingly, the rigid consistency of Hall's approach may have sparked, or at the very least contributed, to

²⁰⁹ Lewis Jacobs. *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History*. New York: Teachers College, [1939] 1975. p. 355.

²¹⁰ Ethan Mordden. *The Hollywood Musical*. Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1982. p. 38.

²¹¹ Gerald Mast. *Can't Help Singin': The American Musical on Stage and Screen*. Woodstock: Overlook, 1987. p. 109.

²¹² Barrios. *A Song in the Dark*. p. 280.

²¹³ *Ibid.* p. 278.

a line of argument about Lubitsch's style. In this regard, Jacobs' hefty volume may have provided the bridge, thereby establishing a line of argument that goes beyond not only time but also discourse when it was later taken up by academic scholars. Finally, Lubitsch's involvement in the musical sparked a discussion of his use of sound, which in turn made Mordaunt Hall pay more attention to Lubitsch's use of the camera.

It would be going too far to suggest Hall's authorship of this particular tradition of Lubitsch studies. However, it is worth noting how, on the one hand, Lubitsch's use of sound in the musical shed light on his use of the camera again and how this usage is, years later, reflected in the emerging academic treatment of Lubitsch's films. Both the critics of the 1930s and later film historians would suggest that the relationship between the coming of sound and the emergence of the musical genre was a complex one at the turn of the 1920s. However, it is the discussion of the musical in the context of Lubitsch's *œuvre* that allows for insights into the emerging perception of him as a film artist.

Discussions of Lubitsch's contribution to sound are often framed in terms of discussions of how he uses the camera, taking the latter as an established area of his expertise. Hall's repeated reference to Lubitsch's German roots can then easily be taken as a link to his fellow European émigrés, who were particularly noted for their use of the camera. I will return to such an open treatment of Lubitsch's origins when setting them in the context of the heritage of the biggest star with whom he worked in the 1930s, Maurice Chevalier. There, Chevalier's French citizenship seems to reinforce the 'Frenchness' of Lubitsch's films, specifically his Chevalier comedies. Here, a connection with Lubitsch's use of the camera was already noted, while references to Germany do not need to connote a threat or infiltration for they convey an air of cinematographic technique. That Lubitsch masters the musical and its

needs from its earliest moment on is beyond doubt for the critics, who happily linked his expertise to that of his émigré peers.

Technique and innovation alone were not sufficient even in the early years of the musical. In fact, the genre hit a slump only a few years after its inception. I will therefore be concerned in the next section with how critics dealt with early problems in accordance with Lubitsch as a master of the musical. Besides crediting Lubitsch with technical innovation, the public discourse of the time creates a narrative of the 'old' musical and its renewal uniquely through the intervention of Lubitsch. From a 1930s perspective this is surprising, considering the technical innovations that had made the musical possible had only been rolled out a few years earlier.

From a historiographical perspective, this is also interesting as this crisis of the early years and Lubitsch's celebrated contribution around the same time are often equally acknowledged but hardly ever placed in contrast. Such neglect is grave because public discourse located one of the 'Lubitsch touches' in its negotiation of this contradiction in the first half of the 1930s. To contextualise this argument I will begin and conclude with an examination of how Lubitsch's contributions to the musical have been evaluated by film historians and critics with regard to the genre's history. My aim will be to prepare a discussion of their negotiation in the public discourse that is closer to the genre's beginnings. Interestingly, it is there where this contradiction, so often brought about but hardly ever acknowledged in critical studies, is resolved by taking the 'Lubitsch touch' as a force of innovation that both created and re-invigorated the new musical genre.

Specific studies of Lubitsch hardly differentiate between musicals and non-musicals when locating the former within his wider *oeuvre*. Leland Poague discusses Lubitsch's 'Hollywood Films' in terms of themes rather than genres. In

Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy, William Paul follows a similar selection process. Those chronicling Lubitsch's life and work as a whole acknowledge his contribution more explicitly and Hans Helmut Prinzler, for instance, credits Lubitsch with developing his own form of the film musical.²¹⁴ For his biographer, Scott Eyman, Lubitsch also "invented a new kind of movie altogether: the musical."²¹⁵

Critical studies and histories of the musical genre generally²¹⁶ place Lubitsch in an equally prominent position. Richard Barrios argues that history keeps *The Love Parade* on its books for "the director's decision to preserve the conventions of operetta without taking any of them too seriously, refracting it all through his chronic inability to see the battle of the sexes as anything other than a cause for mockery."²¹⁷ Some go into great technical detail to summarise the innovative aspect of Lubitsch's technique from his first musical, *The Love Parade*, onwards. "[W]ith songs that flow directly from the action, it has claims to be the first fully 'integrated' musical,"²¹⁸ as Douglas Pye notes. Rick Altman goes into further detail in summarising Lubitsch's two-camera technique, which was "successful, though [...] cumbersome and expensive [...] and provided complete freedom in the editing room

²¹⁴ See Prinzler. "Berlin, 29.1.1892–Hollywood, 30.11.1947: Bausteine zu einer Lubitsch-Biografie." p. 44. "Der Tonfilm erreicht Lubitsch Mitte 1929 bei Paramount. Die Herausforderung wird von ihm sofort angenommen und als Genre produktiv gemacht: Lubitsch entwickelt eine eigene Form des Filmmusicals, bei der die Songs als emotionale Höhepunkte in die Handlung integriert sind und nicht als eigenständige 'Nummern' mit Musik und Tanz quasi in einer Rahmenhandlung stattfinden."

²¹⁵ Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 149.

²¹⁶ Some studies on the musical focus less on Lubitsch: Rick Altman does not include him in the historical chapter of *The American Film Musical*, which is conceived along genre lines rather than personalities. However, he discusses Lubitsch extensively elsewhere in the section on the 'fairy tale musical' for instance (Rick Altman. *The American Film Musical*. London: BFI Publishing, 1989.). Jane Feuer does not mention Lubitsch in the historical summary of the genre and instead mentions Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* as the prime example for musicals that "satirized a run of operettas that had preceded [them], all the while being [themselves] MacDonald-Chevalier operettas." (Feuer. *The Hollywood Musical*. p. 93.). Hugh Fordin, while calling his study *The Movies' Greatest Musicals*, focuses on Arthur Freed and therefore has no need to discuss Lubitsch. Finally, Michael Dunne decides to focus on musicals that deal with the economic situation realistically in his chapter on the Great Depression (Michael Dunne. *American Film Musical: Themes and Forms*. Jefferson: MacFarland, 2004.).

²¹⁷ Barrios. *A Song in the Dark*. p. 279.

²¹⁸ Douglas Pye. "The Love Parade." in *100 Film Musicals*. Jim Hillier and Douglas Pye, eds. London: BFI, 2011. p. 133 (= BFI Screen Guides).

to intercut the two scenes in any way desired.”²¹⁹ George Mast echoes the gain for the director who then

enjoyed considerable freedom to play with visual imagery, divorcing its strict synchronization to vocalized lyrics, which could carry on without visual aid. A film could juxtapose any arresting, ironic, evocative, or clever visual image with the continuity of prerecorded [sic] music.²²⁰

These technical innovations certainly gave the films the ‘look’ and freedom to explore themes in a more independent way that others comment on: the ancestry “from European operetta, with its sexual and romantic intrigues of upper-class characters in grand European settings.”²²¹ These, Rick Altman has identified as a subgroup of the American musical – ‘the fairy-tale musical,’²²² whose first instalment was Lubitsch’s debut musical picture. Babington and Evans praise these musicals for their

brilliance of the ironical, quasi-satirical operettas [in which b]oth seized on the patterns of unreality, excess, uncomplicated heroism and spotless beauty, as inspiration for their own remarkably similar and unique blend of wit, elegance, shimmering beauty and what the movie trailers used to call ‘Romance.’²²³

In his history of the decade, Tino Balio also singles out the musicals made by Lubitsch and Mamoulian, for whose *Love Me Tonight* Lubitsch “clearly [figured] as [the] spiritual father,”²²⁴ at Paramount: “Of all the early experiments to enliven the musical, none were as innovative as Paramount’s continental fairy tales.”²²⁵ As the

²¹⁹ Altman. *The American Film Musical*. p. 151.

²²⁰ Mast. *Can’t Help Singin’*. p. 92.

²²¹ Pye. “*The Love Parade*.” p. 133

²²² See Altman. *The American Film Musical*. p. 129-199.

²²³ Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans. *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985. p. 73.

²²⁴ Mast. *Can’t Help Singin’*. p. 100. The film bizarrely ticks all the boxes of a Lubitsch musical except for the involvement of the director himself and has been called a “Lubitsch pastiche” of sorts (Douglas Pye. “*Love Me Tonight*. 100 Film Musicals. Jim Hillier and Douglas Pye, eds. London: BFI, 2011. p. 130 (= BFI Screen Guides).).

²²⁵ Tino Balio. “Production Trends.” p. 212.

main reason for their stylistic success, he cites their innovative and flexible integration of story, locale and scoring through editing, which resulted in the elimination of much of the staginess that had still marked many early offerings of the genre. Gerald Mast echoes this judgement in writing that “The most inventive early thinking about marrying a musical to film took place at Paramount.”²²⁶

When Lubitsch turned to sound, he responded to the new medium of talkies in an inventive and successful way. Building on technical innovations in terms of separating sound and image, Lubitsch was able to explore with the freedom he wanted the themes of his operetta source material. As we have seen, these techniques were widely recognised by contemporary critics for instance, in the manner in which they discuss the camera as a counterpart to the use of sound or align the two as indicators of Lubitsch’s artistry. Historical studies of the genre have then echoed the centrality of Lubitsch’s position in the musical genre’s early years. He has been described specifically not only as exceptionally successful in the early years of often awkward experimentation. Later writers frame him as an innovator at the beginning of the genre’s history, while the contemporary discourse sees him at the end of a development.

Several histories of the genre have also acknowledged a temporary crisis of the musical just a few years after the coming of sound. Rick Altman, for instance, mentions “the end of 1930, when the bottom fell out of the musical market, [...] the slack years of 1931-2.”²²⁷ According to Balio’s history of the decade, the introduction of sound was followed by experiments with the musical genre and eventually a period of consolidation. However, as Balio notes, the novelty soon

²²⁶ Mast. *Can’t Help Singin’*. p. 100.

²²⁷ Altman. *The American Film Musical*. p.119.

wore off and, by the summer of 1930, the new genre had already become “box-office poison.”²²⁸ Richard Barrios is entertainingly poetic when he opines that

This triumphant first march found the musical quashing all competitors, including radio, live theatre, and especially vaudeville; then, suddenly, the sensation was halted nearly overnight. After less than two years, it had virtually expired, a victim of changing times, an impending Depression, oversaturation, and various other factors.²²⁹

This slump would ultimately be followed by a period of consolidation when “suddenly, it returned stronger than ever, a national and international morale rouser nearly as potent and loved as the new president, Franklin Roosevelt.”²³⁰ Musicals have been part of the movies ever since and in hindsight Lubitsch was central to the very beginnings of the genre. However, the curious overlap between the years of crisis and those in which most of Lubitsch’s musicals of the 1930s were made is never recognised (1929 to 1932, plus one in 1934). All these studies state the centrality of Lubitsch’s role in the early years of the genre and, indeed, in precisely the same years when the genre was seen to experience these difficulties. However, few of these histories place these two elements side by side, probably in order to avoid confusion.

William Paul is one of the exceptions in placing these disparate components into direct conjunction. Writing that “musicals went somewhat out of fashion in 1931–1932,”²³¹ Paul acknowledges that “Lubitsch’s one musical of 1932, *One Hour with You*, had been one of his greatest commercial successes.”²³² The musical’s downturn in popularity may be an explanation for the absence of a Lubitsch musical all through 1933, but Paul implies that this would not account for the existence of the musical remake of *The Marriage Circle*, *One Hour with You*.

²²⁸ Balio. “Production Trends.” p. 211.

²²⁹ Barrios. *A Song in the Dark*. p. 4.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Paul. *Ernst Lubitsch’s American Comedy*. p. 94.

²³² Ibid. p. 95.

We need instead to look at the material contemporary to Lubitsch in the 1920s and 30s and how early critics resolved this contradiction between the genre's years of crisis and Lubitsch's years of innovation. When Lubitsch embarked upon his 'musical journey' in 1929, the writing was already on the wall for the musical, for the public discourse had already framed the genre as a weakened one, painting it somewhat curiously as 'old hat.'

Paramount's advertising campaign, for instance, made reference to this. The first page of a longer promotional spread paired *The Love Parade* with *The Vagabond King* (1930), quoting *Variety*'s handy little snippet that it is "No. 1 among the \$2 talkers," but also that the Lubitsch film was "[t]he industry's biggest hit to date!" On subsequent pages the campaign followed the theme of 'old' and 'new,' or in the words of 1930 Paramount: "It's 1930, Brother! You can't run your car with 1929 license plates or your theatre with 1929-style pictures!" Accordingly, "[o]ld-time stars are out," as "new stars like Chevalier, Oakie, Helen Kane and others [are in] scal[ing] b. o. heights."²³³

Similarly, *The Love Parade* was declared in another advert "king," while "[o]ld-fashioned musicals are "passé."²³⁴ Never mind that only three or so years earlier these kinds of films did not and could not even yet exist. In film-historical hindsight, *The Love Parade* was indeed one of several 'firsts' for both Lubitsch and the musical genre. However, when Paramount announce the genre's reinvention in this advert of 1930, the genre was only a few years old.

Thus, in another delicious slice of irony, not only does this advertisement paint a fairly new innovation as 'old,' but the desired effect is to sell more of the same by branding previous instalments as old and the object to be advertised as new.

²³³ Advert for Paramount. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 98.2 (11 January 1930), no page.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Such marketing principally occurred via the Lubitsch brand. The *Times* wrote of “dozens of clever comedy touches”²³⁵ in the aforementioned review, which turn into the ‘Lubitsch touch’ in the *Herald*’s review of *Monte Carlo*.

Indeed, the *New York Times* capitalised on the impact and recognition value of Lubitsch, publishing not only one but two reviews of the film²³⁶ as well as a photo of the director, headed “Hero of the Week.” The first of these two reviews kept with the theme of ‘something different.’ Reviewer Shreck noted that there had been “much conversation of late on the rapid decline in popularity of the screen musical and its eventual death unless ‘something different’ were produced.”²³⁷ The review credited Paramount and Lubitsch precisely with this quality of ‘difference.’ In fact, it is as a result of this quality, along with the “Beyond the Blue Horizon” sequence opening of the film, that “one realizes he is to see a screen musical that is ‘different.’ Here again is a Lubitsch touch.”²³⁸

Thus, the *Herald*’s critic was, as was the case of so many before him, happy to concede that this Lubitsch film too has a “simple story.” In fact he cheerfully admitted that the story of a count who poses as a hairdresser is “[n]ot in itself an elaborate theme.”²³⁹ However, there was a surplus value that still permitted *Monte Carlo* to be waved through by this critic. What the ‘Lubitsch touch’ actually constitutes is not discussed; instead Shreck refers to the notion of ‘something different’ being visible in the musical sequence “Beyond the Blue Horizon.” This

²³⁵ Mordaunt Hall. “Director Blends Camera and Microphone in Forthcoming Film,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (20 July 1930), p. X3.

²³⁶ In a not unique and yet unconventional move the paper prints the two reviews side by side, Shreck’s positive one is paired with a more muted one by Douglas Hodges, possibly to account for disparate opinions among the paper’s critics. Hodges’ write-up too focuses on Lubitsch and even though *Monte Carlo* is said to constitute an “under the average Paramount picture,” it still “is filled with Lubitsch comedy and Lubitsch style.” Douglas Hodges. Review of *Monte Carlo*. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 100.10 (6 September 1930), p. 38.

²³⁷ Jay M. Shreck. “Different and Fine!” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 100.10 (6 September 1930), p. 38.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

element promises to save and re-invigorate the already waning genre of the musical comedy. It is this added value that, as implied by these critics, only Lubitsch can bring to a picture and is therefore appropriately identified with his name, the 'Lubitsch touch.'

This is not all that different from casting Lubitsch as a pioneer and innovator. However, the 'Lubitsch touch' crucially remains in this discourse, not just being located in Lubitsch's ability to innovate and master a genre, but even to re-invigorate a waning genre such as the musical in the early 1930s. Therefore, contemporary discourse locates Lubitsch's surplus value precisely in this implied contradiction and indeed capitalises on it.

Bruce Babington and Peter Evans offer the interesting argument that "[t]he kind of musical that [Lubitsch] was central in developing owed its difference largely to the fact that it is closer to his own non-musical comedies than to most other kinds of film prevalent in the developing genre around 1930."²⁴⁰ Here they refer to the backstage, the revue, the exotic operetta or the short-lived campus musical. They go on to explain that

It is possible to imagine his non-musical comedies of the period, say *Trouble in Paradise* (1932), working with only a slight transformation as musicals, because the distinguishing feature of Lubitsch's development of the genre is his insistence that musical elements follow and delineate the complex narrative and psychological values of his comedies.²⁴¹

The difference between Lubitsch's musicals and his non-musicals of the decade, in Babington and Evans' argument, is not as great as to allows us to see them as wholly different films. The analysis in this section is not meant to support or dismiss

²⁴⁰ Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans. *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985. p. 77.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

such a notion, as I have limited the discussion largely to the negotiation of Lubitsch's musicals. Yet, it is interesting how the focus on Lubitsch has remained strong in the historical material. This section investigated how Lubitsch's contributions to the genre are framed in terms of innovation and also, more surprisingly, the re-invigoration of a genre in crisis within only a few years of its very inception. Although the suggestion here has been that of a discourse specific to the genre, the strong association with Lubitsch has contextualised them within his work and as stand-outs and even exceptions to their genre.

As for the 'Lubitsch touch,' it was framed within the context of the musical as a special ingredient to spice up what had already gone bland and so to expand the sets of meanings the musical can convey layer by layer. While Lubitsch's use of the camera may have been noted during the silent days, his approach to the microphone only found expression within his sound films. The following sections in this chapter focus on the negotiation of sexual content in his films, the possibly competing discourses of Lubitsch as director and his stars and the discussion of his authorship in view of a seemingly oppressive studio system. All of these points of discussion will uncover surplus values that are not mutually exclusive, but can only be accommodated by the 'Lubitsch touch' precisely for reason of its unfixed nature.

2.3 Artistic Independence between Permissiveness and Production

Code or: Lubitsch and Sexuality

The censorship of films in the United States has existed almost as long as cinema itself there. Numerous scholars have argued that censorship has existed in every age of film: Gregory Black writes that "[i]n America the movies were censored from

their inception,”²⁴² while Tom Pollard, in his study of the “censorship wars” in Hollywood, notes that “[m]ovie censorship exists in every age, and major censorship cases have occurred throughout history.”²⁴³ Yet there is a period in Hollywood history that has become particularly associated with censorship: the 1930s through to when the so-called studio system began to disintegrate in the 1950s and 1960s. The notion of a Production Code, which after 1934 in particular exerted considerable influence on the decisions and style of individual filmmakers fits the narrative of the studios maintaining a tight control over production in the so-called ‘studio era.’

This concept is of particular interest in regard to Lubitsch as a filmmaker whose style was arguably more visible than that of most others. What is more, there was a longstanding tradition of connecting the ‘Lubitsch touch’ to sly innuendos that conveyed much more explicit events happening off-screen. If, in the 1920s, such a connotation of Lubitschian sophistication was less pronounced or acknowledged, this layer was added in the 1930s, so allowing me to maintain that Lubitsch is doubly interesting for a study into the effects of censorship on a single director.

The particular Code in question came about “to ease the passage of films into states which maintained their own idiosyncratic censorship boards,”²⁴⁴ writes Shindler. In order to reduce costs, films gained the seal of approval as ‘proposals’ or projects instead of going through production only to be rejected by one federal state or another. Implemented in 1930, it has been argued for some time that the

²⁴² Gregory D. Black. “Censorship: A Historical Interpretation.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 6.1 (Fall 1991), p. 168. Historiographically, even the early period has been well researched and has generated numerous studies, see for instance Lee Grieveson. *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. See also chapter 1 “Progressivism and the New Medium of Film” in Gerald R. Butters, Jr. *Banned in Kansas: Motion Picture Censorship, 1915-1966*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. 1-23.

²⁴³ Tom Pollard. *Sex and Violence: The Hollywood Censorship Wars*. Boulder: Paradigm, 2009. p. 5.

²⁴⁴ Colin Shindler. *Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema and American Society, 1929-1939*. London: Routledge, 1996. p. 98.

Production Code only gained control after 1934, leaving the years between 1930 and 1934 the 'pre-Code' era. This pre-Code label has been in popular use in both popular and academic film cultures. Pollard, for instance, argues that between 1930 and 1934, "[i]n fact, the Production Code enforcement became so lax that today the period is known as the official pre-code era."²⁴⁵

However, the pre-Code label has also been challenged. Most notably, Richard Maltby has taken a firm stance against such a division, arguing it to be myth that in the years 1930 to 1934 "the Code existed on paper but not in practice." One of the reasons he suggests for the persistent popularity of this label is that it "suit[s] present entertainment needs."²⁴⁶ The label proves both catchy and lucrative in commercial contexts ranging from Turner Classic Movies to, by implication, the selling of film-historical studies.

While 1934 is often seen as a watershed in Production Code history, Lea Jacobs notes that changes in censorship after 1934 are actually "rather subtle;"²⁴⁷ here, she echoes some of Maltby's doubts, but follows a different methodological path. One change that she emphasises is in recognition that "After 1934, censors devote relatively more attention to set design, performance, and what Breen calls 'tone.'" While certain topics were not 'forbidden,' "it became much more difficult to call attention to such ideas even through the nonverbal aspects of the scene."²⁴⁸ This, indeed, may have left Lubitsch a more central figure for the censors' attention, as he was widely noted for his pictorial style.

²⁴⁵ Pollard. *Sex and Violence*. p. 31.

²⁴⁶ Richard Maltby. "More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of 'Pre-Code Cinema.'" *Senses of Cinema* 29 (December 2003), no page. http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/pre_code_cinema/ (accessed 20 August 2015).

²⁴⁷ Lea Jacobs. "Industry Self-Regulation and the Problem of Textual Determination." *The Velvet Light Trap* 23 (Spring 1989), p. 12.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 12-13.

Lubitsch is represented in a number of studies of the Production Code Administration. Colin Shindler names Lubitsch as one of the “major talents [who] exploited the new sexuality and demonstrated the woefully inadequate nature of the Hays Code as a bulwark of traditional bourgeois morality.”²⁴⁹ Gregory Black uses *The Merry Widow* as one of his case studies,²⁵⁰ as does Mark Vieira in *Sin in Soft Focus*.²⁵¹ Indeed, the latter film would “encounte[r] Lubitsch’s most panic-stricken sessions with the censors of the Production Code and the newly energized [Catholic] Legion of Decency.”²⁵² Interestingly, the public discourse of the day glossed over such problems with considerable ease, as we shall see below.

The Production Code Administration only forms the background to this section, though a crucial one. It provides a central point of interest for an analysis of how a sexual subtext implied in Lubitsch’s films was negotiated during this period. My focus will not be on determining precisely who was responsible for which change or alteration to Lubitsch’s films, even if it would certainly be interesting to see if a censor was responsible for one of the famed ‘Lubitsch touches’ rather than Lubitsch himself. Instead, I want to explore how public discourse made sense of the notion of a director with a particular style and how Lubitsch then faced and braved the practices of censorship and the resulting ‘compromises.’

Maureen Furniss has analysed the production files of Lubitsch’s films, tracing the question of whether Lubitsch was compromised by the censors. Complementing her work, I will explore how public discourse negotiated the

²⁴⁹ Shindler. *Hollywood in Crisis*. p. 101.

²⁵⁰ Black. “Censorship: A Historical Interpretation.” p. 167-185. A later version was also printed in Gregory D. Black. *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

²⁵¹ See Mark A. Vieira. *Sin in Soft Focus: Pre-Code Hollywood*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

²⁵² Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 221.

Lubitsch brand, with a particular view to outward influences such as the self-censorship practiced by Hollywood with the Production Code Administration.²⁵³

According to the public discourse of the day, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ was allowed to become outwardly ‘sexy’ over the course of the 1930s. In light of the Production Code background outlined above, this section will be closed with a further analysis starting from the question of whether Lubitsch’s authorship and the authority of his films were perceived to be compromised. The ‘Lubitsch touch’ was indeed increasingly associated with subject matter that would have been problematic under the Code. However, Lubitsch’s standing as a distinguished Hollywood filmmaker – and the ‘Lubitsch touch’ itself – remained undamaged, at least publicly. Again it will turn out that it was the flexible nature of the ‘touch,’ even if it was only defined in blurred lines, that allows it accommodate such apparent contradictions.

However, before engaging with Furniss’ argumentation and evidence, the scene needs to be set for such a discussion: why would Lubitsch have had problems with the censors in the first place? In the previous chapter I examined how Lubitsch’s association with sophistication eventually facilitated his integration into American film industry and culture. Given the history of the term, ‘sophistication’ can take on many meanings, not least those of liberal sexual mores or sexual frankness. However, my analysis of the public discourse around Lubitsch and perceived ‘Lubitschian sophistication’ indicated that, in the 1920s, it was more often linked to a subtle representation of a certain theme than the theme itself. Critics applauded Lubitsch for suggesting more than met the eye, at least the eye of the

²⁵³ See Lea Jacobs on the crucial difference between state censorship and civil censorship: “State censors, who are more or less independent of the film companies with which they deal, are in a position to prevent exhibition [...]. In contrast, the censors for the MPPDA were rarely in a position to block exhibition. Further, they exercised most power while films were in the planning stages rather than in the review of completed features.” (Lea Jacobs. “Industry Self-Regulation and the Problem of Textual Determination.” p. 6.).

unsophisticated viewer as a group to which the critics scarcely ever belonged. In the majority of cases, then, Lubitsch was the ‘critics’ darling.’

In examining the more open discussions of the content of Lubitsch’s 1930s pictures, the following analysis will confirm that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ was expanded into more overtly sexual subject matter within his *œuvre*. It will be interesting to observe that the critics remained largely in favour of Lubitsch, no matter how difficult the work became behind the scenes, while their promotional campaigns became, crucially, more cheeky and adventurous.

On the surface, many of the reviews of Lubitsch’s 1930s films rehearsed tropes established in the previous decade. In his review of musical *Monte Carlo*, Mordaunt Hall wrote, for instance,

This screen work is filled with the subtleties and satire in which Lubitsch delights. He is never for a moment at a loss for something different enough to call forth admiration, and he sustains the tone of his composition throughout, with a gentle dig at stage operetta in the culminating episode.²⁵⁴

Elsewhere, Hall opined that *One Hour with You*, “is a frivolous affair, light and foamy.”²⁵⁵ For *Motion Picture Herald* the latter film initially operated similarly to previous Lubitsch offerings: “All the adjectives ever applied to a Lubitsch-made picture – gay, sparkling, scintillating, smart, etc. – can be again used to describe Maurice Chevalier’s latest vehicle.”²⁵⁶

Other reviews deploy a strategy of dividing the audience – a ploy which we have already identified as an integral part of the discourse of ‘sophistication’ in the 1920s. *Variety*, in its review of *The Merry Widow*, covered all the points then

²⁵⁴ Mordaunt Hall. “*Monte Carlo*: Brilliant Direction and Keen Wit in Screen Musical Comedy,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (7 September 1930), p. X5.

²⁵⁵ Mordaunt Hall. “Two Sparkling Pictorial Comedies: M. Chevalier in a New Version of *The Marriage Circle* and a German Film Based on the Theft of the Mona Lisa,” Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (3 April 1932), p. X4.

²⁵⁶ Anon. Review of *One Hour with You*. *Motion Picture Herald* 107.1 (2 April 1932), p. 34.

anticipated of a Lubitsch film, let alone a Lubitsch musical. Lubitsch's take on the original Lehár score was "a more earthy, knowing and sophisticate [sic] version" of the text, all "exquisitely expressed in movement, melody, rhythm and humor." The film was still pervaded by "the haunting charm of the earlier and more simple [sic] sentimental" versions, and as is so often written of Lubitsch films, it was "Lubitsch's direction which gives this *Metro Widow* its distinctive flavor."²⁵⁷ *Moving Picture Herald* echoed the sentiment that *One Hour with You* may just not be for everyone, for the film "may be a bit risqué [sic] for some of the smaller towns where live certain men and women whose calling in life appears to lie in keeping some of the less conventional truths from mankind."²⁵⁸

'Subtleties,' '(de)light,' 'gay,' and the binary between 'sophisticated' and 'simple,' which is suggested to be strict and yet so often undone immediately afterwards:²⁵⁹ all these attributes frame the 1930s comedies in a very similar light to that which the public discourse negotiated for the American films that Lubitsch made in the 1920s. However, 'sophistication' in the previous decade had often been connected to Lubitsch's style of 'suggesting more than meets the eye' rather than being definitively narrowed down to only a sexual connotation.

Now, the critics were willing to suggest more, and indeed often go further than mere suggestion. 'Risqué' became a particularly common way to describe the Lubitsch films of this decade. Indeed, even some of the reviews quoted above went on to discuss the films more explicitly than if they had watched and discussed them in the 1920s. For instance, in suggesting a division between the educated and the uneducated, the review in *Moving Picture Herald* mentioned above does not only

²⁵⁷ Anon. Review of *The Merry Widow*. *Daily Variety* 4.75 (1 September 1934), p. 3.

²⁵⁸ Anon. Review of *One Hour with You*. *Motion Picture Herald* 107.1 (2 April 1932), p. 34.

²⁵⁹ The *Motion Picture Herald*, too, follows its seemingly exclusionary statement anticipating that "Even these will revel in this fast moving farce, though it will be out of the question for them to admit enjoyment. But the big towns will fall for it like several tons of bricks." Anon. Review of *One Hour with You*. *Motion Picture Herald* 107.1 (2 April 1932), p. 34.

warn that *One Hour with You* may be too risqué for small town folk. It also suggests, using a more sexual connotation, that it is “not a picture for kids.”²⁶⁰

Mordaunt Hall also acknowledged that, while “set forth with gleaming charm,” *Monte Carlo* “has its risqué periods.”²⁶¹ His review of *One Hour with You* was framed along similar lines, calling the film “a most enjoyable offering” and emphasising that “the imaginative German director indulges his characteristic flair for risqué incidents and smart patter.”²⁶² Hall then returned to the question of the film being ‘risqué,’ arguing that “no matter how daring [the film] is at times in its lines and situations, it cannot be denied its wealth of wit.”²⁶³ He added another qualification to this risqué element – that which some members of the audience might find objectionable: “Furthermore, no matter what happens here, it is always done with pleasing sophistication.”²⁶⁴ Ironically, Hall’s seemingly equivocal turn of phrase ‘whatever happens here’ is actually unequivocal as to what happens here, alluding as it does in its inconspicuous looking phrase to some kind of sexual content. What is more, Hall remains wholly positive about the sophistication that is operating here, calling it ‘always’ ‘pleasing.’

This unambiguous praise held true for the majority of reviews that allude more explicitly to sexual content. In these examples, Lubitsch’s sophistication was framed in terms of the older tropes established in connection to his films of the 1920s. Although these conceptions still applied, they were now expanded to encompass the overt and acknowledged sexual subtext of his films. It is notable that

²⁶⁰ Ibid. That said, the *Herald* compromises this statement immediately afterwards again – maybe surprisingly so for its connection to Martin Quigley. It reassures potentially worried parents that the film “would [not] do [the kids] any harm, but just because they wouldn’t know what it’s all about.”

²⁶¹ Mordaunt Hall. “*Monte Carlo*: Brilliant Direction and Keen Wit in Screen Musical Comedy,” Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (7 September 1930), p. X5.

²⁶² Mordaunt Hall. “Two Sparkling Pictorial Comedies: M. Chevalier in a New Version of *The Marriage Circle* and a German Film Based on the Theft of the Mona Lisa,” Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (3 April 1932), p. X4.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

all these critics welcomed the addition and critiqued the films in good spirit, even the *Motion Picture Herald*. In such discussions, the contributions of the *Herald* may often be taken with a grain of salt, given that its editor Martin J. Quigley wrote a draft of the Production Code.²⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the conception of Lubitsch's style had been expanded by the notion of a sexual subtext in his films that is, rather surprisingly, addressed quite openly.

In addition to the critical discourse, the promotion seemed to explore similar avenues at least for a time. Here, French culture continued to be a strong point of reference. Faye Hammill makes an interesting point about 'sophistication,' here concerning French loanwords. She notes that the very word 'sophistication' cannot be adequately translated into English and is therefore frequently circumscribed with French loan words,²⁶⁶ which may well strengthen this connection further.

This linguistic reality finds an interesting mirror image in the 1930s advertising discourse around Lubitsch's films; notably the use of the word and idea of the 'boudoir' or lady's bedroom. These adverts were mainly printed in *The New York Times*, although on at least one occasion *Motion Picture Herald* also mentioned boudoirs in connection to 1934's *One Hour with You* and the association continued to be evoked occasionally in the 1940s.²⁶⁷ What is more, the studio's endorsement of the boudoir was documented in Paramount's press sheet for *One Hour with You*. A note at the bottom of the front page declared Jeannette MacDonald "The Lady of the Boudoir" on the grounds of her not having "missed a single picture without being photographed either retiring or arising from her

²⁶⁵ See Shindler. *Hollywood in Crisis*. p. 98.

²⁶⁶ See Hammill. *Sophistication*. p. 3.

²⁶⁷ The text most closely associating Lubitsch with boudoirs in the following decade is a review for *That Uncertain Feeling*, although the mention here is rather ironic as the *Baltimore Sun* is not too impressed with the film: "Perhaps the old master of modified boudoir mirth couldn't get steamed up over a remake job." (Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Baltimore Sun* (26 April 1941), p. 10.).

slumbers.”²⁶⁸ To the delight of the press officer, MacDonald’s record remained intact in her latest film and is indeed shared by Chevalier and his “boudoir songs.”²⁶⁹

Many a Lubitsch film features the lady protagonist’s bedroom or dressing room as a setting but in *Monte Carlo* the male protagonist poses as a hairdresser and thereby reaches the Countess’s most private apartments. The film therefore seemed predestined for an advertising campaign featuring the boudoir. One of the earliest of these adverts praised *Monte Carlo* as “Paramount’s gay adventure with boudoirs, beauties and barons!”²⁷⁰ It would not be too far-fetched here to assume that the use of ‘boudoir’ is to be attributed to its alliteration with ‘beauties and barons.’ However, the tagline above the top billed director read even more explicitly-implicitly, “As intimate as a boudoir!” while Lubitsch’s film was praised as a whole as being “exciting, intriguing romance.”²⁷¹

Another advert proclaimed the film “Paramount’s intriguing Riviera romance, bold barons and seductive boudoirs!”²⁷² Preceded by the alliterations of ‘Riviera romance’ and ‘bold barons,’ the ‘seductive boudoirs’ stood out rather starkly as the non-alliterative couple. ‘Boudoirs’ again suggested the most private parts of a lady, or at least of her private apartment. On its own, ‘seductive’ already has its fair share of suggestive meanings, but if built up as it is in this tagline, one would expect yet another alliteration, this time with the letter ‘s.’ Coupling ‘seductive’ with the word ‘sex’ may be a natural thought by more than one reader of this advert. If Lubitsch’s films and style were referred to time and again as subtle and clever, the advertising for them did not necessarily lag far behind. Indeed,

²⁶⁸ Press Sheet for *One Hour with You* (1932), p. 5. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed on 14 July 2013).

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Advert for *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (31 August 1930), p. X4.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Advert for *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (2 September 1930), p. 19.

Paramount in its boudoir adverts dared to call a spade a spade, or a boudoir a boudoir for that matter. In light of the previous example which also relied on alliteration, the use of the figure of speech works both ways. In this example, the alliteration was set up clearly, but the word expected to begin with the letter 's' was replaced by a less explicit, but no less loaded word.

Over the course of the decade such subtlety gave way to a more liberal and explicit discourse addressing this additional layer of Lubitsch's films. It did so directly and without any subtleties of phrase; for instance, in a review held at Margaret Herrick Library and otherwise without reference, Lubitsch was described as "that expert at sex, satire and scene-building."²⁷³ The bluntness of such a statement may surprise, referencing sex as it does both directly and nonchalantly.

What is more, Lubitsch's expertise at depicting sex stands side by side with his talent for satire and scene-building. If satire can be taken as his way of setting the tone of his films and scene-building is generally indicative of filmmaking craftsmanship, sex is subject matter itself and, as such, it is just as integral as the two other qualities. Indeed, the examples shed light on what had come to be expected of Lubitsch and were expressed as such. Risqué and daring content were perceived to be a crucial, integral part of Lubitsch's work and in no way constituted the objects of criticism.

The *Herald's* opinion of *Desire* (1936) may sound grating, with its recommendations that viewers will find "torrid" and "super-heated sex" along with plenty of comedy and "sentimental romance drama." Indeed, *Desire* is "All right for the sophisticated, probably, but a feature that official and unofficial guardians of public morals are quite likely to leap on, requiring the application of much pretty

²⁷³ Anon. Review of *The Smiling Lieutenant*. Ms. Collection Chamberlin Scrapbooks no. 30. p. 10. Production file held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 12 July 2013).

astute showmanship and no little diplomacy.”²⁷⁴ However, even in this Catholic-backed trade paper, the damnation was not quite complete. Serious attempts at dissuading its readership from attending screenings would look quite differently, especially given that the audience in attendance at the premiere appeared to have been greatly entertained, as the *Herald* did not fail to mention, if in the small or rather italic print towards the end of the piece: “The audience roared at its comedy and did quite a bit of ooh-ing and ah-ing at its sex.”²⁷⁵ They seemed to have enjoyed themselves.

Surely, as McCarthy suggested rather bluntly, *Desire* contained objectionable content that some parts of the audience may have found off-putting. Even here, however, open enjoyment by other parts of the audience still finds its way into the review. The *Herald*, too, somewhat surprisingly fails to condemn the film outright. While the explicit inclusion of sex may be surprising to the trade paper, it seems to rehearse the already established notion of a ‘touch’ being versatile and flexible enough to accommodate various responses. In this way the *Herald* only confirms that the explicit inclusion of sex has now found its way into the Lubitsch discourse.

If, for Maureen Furniss, the “subject of sex is foregrounded in *The Merry Widow* perhaps more than in other Lubitsch films,”²⁷⁶ *Daily Variety* had felt itself free to express just as much when writing that the film “is strictly adult entertainment, but as such rates high and should acquit itself handsomely at the box office.”²⁷⁷ Again, real moral concern was easily discarded by the paper and instead outweighed by enjoyment and even the assurance that the film would do well

²⁷⁴ McCarthy. Review of *Desire*. *Motion Picture Herald* 122.6 (8 February 1935), p. 55.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Maureen Furniss. “Handslapping in Hollywood: The Production Code’s Influence on the Lubitsch Touch.” *Spectator: The University of Southern California Journal of Film & Television* 11.1 (Fall 1990), p. 56.

²⁷⁷ Anon. Review of *The Merry Widow*. *Daily Variety* 4.75 (1 September 1934), p. 3.

financially. As with the majority of the other reviews, *Daily Variety* here was full of praise for Lubitsch's musical, beyond the slight warnings of adult content. This review was particularly complimentary towards the film's director: "It is Lubitsch's direction which gives this *Metro Widow* its distinctive flavor, however, and he is more nearly the old Lubitsch of sly innuendo and finessed sex implications than in any picture he has done for years."²⁷⁸

The *Variety* review sums up what the other examples have been suggesting. In the debates of the 1930s, discussion of the 'Lubitsch touch' was extended to refer more explicitly to sexual matters than the critics were willing to allude to in the discussions of sophistication of the previous decade. However, even though the 1930s critics feel more comfortable discussing the nature of such content, the Lubitsch style is still framed within older tropes of deftness, allusion and subtlety. Hence, it did not make a great difference whether the *Herald* would condemn or criticise such subject matter, as its approval or rejection are two sides of the same coin.

What unites approval and rejection, is the degree of openness with which the critics allow such a subject to be addressed, particularly in view of the fact that censorship was arguably closing in on Lubitsch. Being a professed 'expert at sex' would not have helped his reputation or may, as a result, have threatened his the obtaining the PCA seals for future projects. Hence, the flexible, almost slippery nature of the 'Lubitsch touch' did not function uniquely as a euphemism for sex for those who chose to read it this way. In allowing for such a wide range of conceptions and responses, it also enabled Lubitsch's reputation to remain largely intact. What all these examples of various kinds show is the discourse that associates the common Lubitsch films more openly with risqué content. The sexiness of

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

Lubitsch's films is not hidden but is in fact acknowledged and even foregrounded in the discourse of the 1930s.

Maureen Furniss has focused on the relationship between Lubitsch and the Board in her article "Handslapping in Hollywood." Analysing the production code files held at Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles, she argues that Lubitsch was increasingly compromised by the Bureau in his artistic independence. If Lubitsch did not face much interference in the early 1930s, the tide had arguably turned by the time of the release of *Design for Living* (1933) and, especially, *The Merry Widow*. She argues that "[a]lthough many sources have suggested that Lubitsch and the 'Lubitsch touch' were unscathed by industry censors, PCA files indicate that both the filmmaker and his style were definitely affected by censorship, especially after 1934."²⁷⁹

The 'Lubitsch touch' is one of the foundations of Furniss' argument and she conceptualises it in terms of Lubitsch's "double entendres and 'risque' [sic] plot situations [which] suggested – in most cases, unmistakably so – a dalliance that was associated with things European."²⁸⁰ While many would certainly agree with such a definition, my argument has so far shown that the 'Lubitsch touch' is far more complex and can take on far more meanings than the one Furniss suggests. These meanings are hardly ever mutually exclusive; instead, they focus on different aspects and often provide very different arguments. Take for instance the previous section on the musical, in which sexual connotations do not form an element of the 'Lubitsch touch' at all. Although, as we will see in the next section, the films starring Maurice Chevalier, all of which were musicals, may very well have been amongst the most obviously sexual that Lubitsch ever made, not least owing to their

²⁷⁹ Furniss. "Handslapping in Hollywood." p. 53.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

main star. As such, it also fits Furniss's argument when she writes, referring to the early 1930s, that "This was, of course, the period in which the 'Lubitsch touch' was developed."²⁸¹ However, the 'Lubitsch touch' had already been around for at least a decade.

Indeed, Furniss leaves an essential gap in her narrative. In terms of films from the early 1930s she refers, in a particularly rich passage, to extensive evidence that the involvement of Lubitsch, Chevalier and indeed the 'Lubitsch touch' were not a disadvantage to a production.²⁸² In particular, a letter of 17 November 1931 written by Jason Joy, a member of the Studio Relations Committee, contains an insightful passage. It informed B. P. Schulberg that "were there any combination involved other than the particular director and cast of this picture we would be inclined to believe the story could not be handled on the screen."²⁸³ Furniss quotes Joy's continued concerns about the depiction of adultery between Mitzi (Genevieve Tobin) and the Chevalier character, although Joy ultimately reaffirmed that "Because the director and cast can handle risqué scenes with tact and good taste, we feel that, with this warning of possible danger [...], we should reserve opinion until we have had an opportunity to see the finished product."²⁸⁴ In other words, it was *because* of Lubitsch's involvement in the production that the scenes were considered more permissible. If Lubitsch had had a reputation for dubious subtexts, the opposite would surely have been true. The participation of Lubitsch alone would then have suggested an inappropriate subtext, no matter how innocent the picture looked on the surface.

²⁸¹ Ibid. p. 53.

²⁸² Ibid. p. 54.

²⁸³ Jason S. Joy. Letter to B. P. Schulberg, 17 November 1931. *One Hour with You*. Production file, held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 2 July 2013) and quoted in Furniss. "Handslapping in Hollywood." p. 54.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

James Fisher, another official, adopted a more global approach when assessing *The Love Parade*, suggesting it would be rather unpopular in “some countries” and also that it featured a few lines with a “rather explosively sophisticated meaning.”²⁸⁵ Yet, the film was “light, sophisticated, frivolous [sic], [and] never vulgar.”²⁸⁶ ‘McKenzie,’ Will Hays’ assistant,²⁸⁷ in the attached note to ‘Jason,’ expresses a slightly qualified opinion, but still agrees.²⁸⁸ However, by November, F. L. Herron, foreign manager at the Office, had become concerned about this first musical in the context of a story full of risqué situations, language and costumes as well as numerous bedroom scenes, concluding with the question “How they expect this film to get by the censors with such material, I don’t understand.”²⁸⁹ In summary, the reception of Lubitsch within Production Code Administration could be said to be then more than marginally divided.

For 1934, two years later after this correspondence, Furniss comes to such an opposite conclusion in the negotiations of *The Merry Widow*. She writes: “Precisely because the film starred Chevalier – who, like West, had a sexual persona that was unacceptable under the PCA Code – and because it had the ‘Lubitsch Touch’ all over it, *The Merry Widow* was a natural target for controversy.”²⁹⁰ Furniss notes that *Design for Living* was met with stiff opposition when Paramount attempted to re-release the film three times over the next decade. While this may explain what was, ultimately, the averse reception of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ arguably found in *The Merry Widow*, it cannot account for a reversal in the perception of Chevalier; he is not a

²⁸⁵ James B. M. Fisher. Note, 19 October 1929. *The Love Parade*. Production file, held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 2 July 2013).

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ See Thomas Doherty. *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. p. 206.

²⁸⁸ McKenzie. Note addressed to Jason (Joy?), 19 October 1929. *The Love Parade*. Production file, held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 2 July 2013).

²⁸⁹ F. L. Herron. Letter to JSJ (Jason S. Joy), 20 November 1929. *The Love Parade*. Production file, held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 2 July 2013).

²⁹⁰ Furniss. “Handslapping in Hollywood.” p. 55-56.

part of the star trio in *Design for Living*. Considering that the reputations of Lubitsch and Chevalier are continuously tied together in Furniss's argument, this raises doubts about her critical line with regards to Lubitsch.

The only explanation Furniss gives for the difficulty faced by MGM's *Merry Widow* is that, "While the film contains the subtextual richness for which Lubitsch is famous, the subject matter is – for its time – overtly sexual."²⁹¹ Her only evidence is a dramatic telegram sent by Irving Thalberg, stating that there is "a war waged" against *The Merry Widow* and confirming his willingness to cooperate with the Production Code Administration²⁹² and a letter authored by one Kathleen Greeley of the Catholic Lending Library. There Greeley first quotes an unreferenced film review

Paramount this week unveiled *Desire* – it reintroduces sex and the 'Lubitsch touch' both absent for some time – As to sex and the 'Lubitsch touch' the studios have been so concerned for almost two years in avoiding anything at which a finger might be levelled that they have not dared the nuances that delight some of the mature and are generally missed by those of the audience whose morals and lives the censoring gentlemen have been so eager to protect.

Greeley then gave her opinion directly: "All decent people, in particular we Catholic people, are looking to you to continue to eliminate the 'nuances' and the Lubitsch touch."²⁹³ Greeley's take on the 'Lubitsch touch' is interesting because it suggests that the 'Lubitsch touch' stood more for a certain subject or its presentation than being directly related to Lubitsch himself. It is rather likely that Greeley would have expressed similar feelings back in 1932, when the Studios Relations Committee

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Irving G. Thalberg. Telegram to Will Hays (26 October 1934) quoted in Furniss. "Handslapping in Hollywood." p. 58.

²⁹³ Kathleen Greeley. Letter to Joseph Breen (February 1936). *Desire*. Production file, held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles. Quoted in Furniss. "Handslapping in Hollywood." p. 59. It is unclear which review Greeley refers to. She may be quoting the review printed in the *Motion Picture Herald*, edited by Quigley. Yet, while that review borders on sniding, it is not as outright dismissive as Greeley suggests. See McCarthy. Review of *Desire*. *Motion Picture Herald* 122.6 (8 February 1935), p. 55. as well as below.

(SRC) was still impressed by and in favour of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ Lea Jacobs argues that while the “MPPDA [Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America] was particularly moved to respond to the legion [...], regulation did not entail the simple assimilation of the demands of this or any other pressure group.”²⁹⁴

One aspect of Furniss’ argument is particularly intriguing because it points towards the uncharacteristic move of appointing Lubitsch to Head of Production at Paramount in February 1935: if Lubitsch was apparently not directly involved in the production of films, then the needed seals could be obtained more easily. Behind the scenes, however, he could still exert influence, according to Furniss’ hypothesis.²⁹⁵ Here, Furniss highlights the issue of Lubitsch’s “marketability”²⁹⁶ in relation to the fact that Paramount found it increasingly difficult to gain the approval of the Production Code Administration for Lubitsch’s projects. It is thus tempting to believe that censorship-related issues were an important factor in Lubitsch’s decision to take on the role of head of production the year after completing *The Merry Widow*.

Following Lubitsch’s return to the director’s chair, the material held at the Margaret Herrick Library suggests that Lubitsch projects struggled to obtain the favour of the censors. Yet, they ultimately obtained approval. In late 1936, for instance, Joseph Breen still found a lot of problems with the proposed *Angel* (1937). However, he also noted that “We feel that, with careful handling, the use of objectionable material may be avoided.”²⁹⁷ In other words, while there was less assurance of approval with Lubitsch at helm of the project, the Bureau remained cautiously optimistic. By way of confirmation, Breen wrote several weeks later in

²⁹⁴ Jacobs. “Industry Self-Regulation and the Problem of Textual Determination.” p. 8.

²⁹⁵ Furniss. “Handslapping in Hollywood.” p. 61.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 59.

²⁹⁷ Joseph I. Breen. Letter to John Hammel regarding *Angel* (28 December 1936). Production file held at Margaret Herrick Library (accessed 10 July 2013), no page.

regard to the production code that “We note the changes which have been made and are pleased to say it is our opinion that the story is basically satisfactory from the point of view of” the Production Code.²⁹⁸ Although the censors may not have marked out Lubitsch as an asset in handling a film tactfully, his involvement in projects was not an issue for the censors. In the PCA material, there is hence some evidence to indicate a shift in favour of Lubitsch’s films over the course of the decade. However, neither Furniss’ line of argument nor my tracing of her examination of the material held at Margaret Herrick Library appear yet to provide a conclusion as to how Lubitsch felt compromised by the censors.

Lubitsch is an obvious example in terms of examining the effect that the Production Code Administration may have had on the style of an individual filmmaker working at a major studio during the studio era. . Not only has it come to be accepted that Lubitsch had an individual style thanks to the notion of the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ What is more, said ‘touch’ has often, though not exclusively, been associated with representation of affairs and sexual relationships,²⁹⁹ which would have been at least problematic under the Code.

Furniss’ evidence suggests that there was a shift from the pre-Code era to the years after 1934; however, the quotes that we have just examined show her argument standing on shaky ground. The first, possibly surprising quote from the SRC files indicates that Lubitsch and Chevalier could get away with certain subjects *because* of their reputations of handling such material with tact. As for the second, the author of the letter was shown to be a far from unbiased observer, thanks to her

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ See for instance Sumiko Higashi, who makes such an argument in a chapter on Cecil B. DeMille and Erich von Stroheim, alongside Lubitsch, stating that for the 1920s: “In the late teens and early twenties, [they] began to portray romance after rather than as a prologue to the wedding. Critics and moviegoers alike responded to this focus upon marital life, undoubtedly because these directors made films that dealt with the sexual aspect of marriage.” (Sumiko Higashi. *Virgins, Vamps, and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine*. Montreal: Eden, 1978. p. 132 (= Monographs in Women’s Studies)). Although the public discourse negotiates these subjects in more complex ways, as we have seen in the previous chapter, such content has been part of the critical discourse on Lubitsch.

background as a member of the Catholic Lending Library. In the light of extensive research into the influence of the League of Decency, Lea Jacobs reminds us to be wary of the influence of a single pressure group on the Production Code Administration. By extension, an exaggerated demonisation of the League of Decency, the Production Code Administration and the Code era itself may result in a dramatization of the historical narrative, which, not least, furthers labels such as ‘pre-Code’ in popular culture.

Furniss’s study is a highly useful and illuminating one, making these files more widely known and available. She succeeds in showing that the censors’ tastes both evolved and narrowed over the course of the 1930s, even if the effects of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ remained implied rather than explicit. Furniss offers the thought-provoking suggestion that Lubitsch took a break from directing to forego further skirmishes with the censors. It is easy to see that such a break would have had an effect on his productions internally. Yet the material available on the films he made after his return may suggest a cooler attitude but it does not constitute a concrete rejection. What is more, the investigation into the public discourse of this period of the 1930s will have to show whether Lubitsch’s marketability was genuinely affected after he returned to directing.

The main focus of my project is not well suited to an enquiry into whether Lubitsch was hampered by the Production Code Administration behind the scenes. Instead, it looks at the public discourse during Lubitsch’s years as a Hollywood filmmaker and addresses the question of how authorship and style were created and negotiated there. In contrast, Furniss’ approach relies more extensively on the production files material, but even here, her evidence is inconclusive, for any consideration of the public discourse would complicate her argument still further. We have already seen that the writers and reviewers considered quite openly and

still favourably Lubitsch's shift in subject matter, keeping with "the premise that Lubitsch could handle such things in a way that maximized humor and minimized offense."³⁰⁰ Hence, to follow this background that I have supplied on Lubitsch's encounters with the Production Code Administration, the following section will investigate further whether Lubitsch's artistic independence was compromised.

The open discussion on the existence of sexual content in Lubitsch's 1930s cinema in the light of tightening censorship raises the question of how his artistic independence was negotiated. I have already suggested that, for the most part, the critics did not object to the subject matter; quite the contrary, they often took delight in it. Therefore, it is still worth investigating how Lubitsch was perceived: was he still considered the director of his own films or was he perceived as having his authority compromised by the censors? This analysis will complement the previous investigation into how openly the public discourse negotiated the risqué subject matter of Lubitsch's films. The approach of the following section will thus be necessary for the question whether the 'Lubitsch touch' was still an expression of individual artistry.

Lubitsch himself made the strongest suggestion that his films and his style were compromised by the censors in an interview with the *New York Times* on the occasion of the world premiere of *The Merry Widow*. As was so often the case when Lubitsch visited the east coast of the United States, the conversation was framed in terms of the cultural hierarchy between theatre and film. However, it was the issue of censorship that took up the bulk of the conversation. Interviewer Andre Sennwald proposed various buzzwords related to charges frequently laid at Lubitsch's door: "the recent drive for clean pictures," "the charge that certain types of films are bad

³⁰⁰Furniss. "Handslapping in Hollywood." p. 54.

for children” or generally the “decency campaign” and whether, as Sennwald asked Lubitsch, it influenced his work. Lubitsch complained bitterly about the current situation: “I am on the side of everybody who fights vulgarity in the cinema,”³⁰¹ he answered about the first. However, his worry was that this campaign, which might be taken to fight “cheap hokum,” would also “force the higher cinema expression into hokum of a different, but equally lamentable nature.”³⁰² He remarked in relation to the second charge that, “it is not the function of the film producer to educate the child. [...] To ask that films be produced for the amusement of children is to work a terrible injustice upon adults.”³⁰³ Finally, in answer to the third charge, he addressed the issue of censorship: “If I, at the present time, should be asked to make a great and sincere picture on a serious subject, I should be forced to reply that it would be impossible for me to do so.” And when setting films in by-gone eras to exploit a popular loophole to the Code, Lubitsch admitted that “Even the greatest of biblical characters would fall under the scissors of the censors.”³⁰⁴

In the light of censorship history and how Lubitsch and *The Merry Widow* were caught up in it, such a statement seems unsurprising. However, Lubitsch continued that, “As matters stand, I can work with almost complete freedom on light, flimsy stories like *The Merry Widow*, but it would be impossible for me to produce a film which pretended at any profundity in story and character.”³⁰⁵ In fact, the only other film of his that Lubitsch mentioned and that he said he would not be able to make as “true to life as I see it” is “my old picture, *The Patriot*” of 1928, a historical drama set in 18th-century Russia starring Emil Jannings.

³⁰¹ Andre Sennwald. “A Word with Ernst Lubitsch: Under Cross-Examination, the Director of *The Merry Widow* Discusses Some of the Cinema Topics of the Day.” *New York Times* (14 October 1934), p. X5.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

Lubitsch's stance against censorship is easy to understand, both in light of the back and forth surrounding *The Merry Widow* and of his status as a director with an active interest in the implications of his medium and his art. Here, the issue of censorship is separated from the suggestiveness with which Lubitsch would present the implicitly sexual charge of many of his comedies of the time. Instead, he frames the debate as one between the artist and the compromises he has to make for his art due to outward influences such as 'the censors.'

With this film possibly more than with others, Lubitsch had made considerable compromises to get it past the censors. However, in the Sennwald interview he chose to portray the production of these light, gay and delightful comedies as relatively problem-free – or at least in comparison to others. Certainly, he may have pretended that *The Merry Widow*, just about to take the plunge into the box office, had gone through a carefree production process. Ruth Vasey makes an intriguing point about the marketability of the censorship board, arguing that the declaration of the Production Code was "Part of the MPPDA's public relations strategy." She elaborates on this point in stating that, "While the movies were still marketed as 'sensational,' they had to reassure their critics that they would not use their position of cultural centrality to undermine existing social structures."³⁰⁶ Hence, the seal of approval did not only serve to ensure that state censorship boards would eventually allow a film to be shown in a certain state, it also sent a signal of considerable publicity. In this light, Lubitsch's downplaying of the internal problems of *The Merry Widow* may have been similar for his other works facing censorship.

It is easy to see how quarrels with the censors would have made for bad press. What is more, the interview reads like a performance in print. Interviews with

³⁰⁶ Ruth Vasey. *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. p. 101 (= Wisconsin Studies in Film).

Lubitsch were often prefaced by the set-up of the conversation, but Sennwald was particularly hagiographic, not only in describing the circumstances of the meeting and Lubitsch's appearance, but also claiming that there is "no evidence to support a theory that he had contracted egomania since his last visit to New York."³⁰⁷ Sennwald let Lubitsch off rather lightly, letting him answer according to his *façon* without pressing him too hard on any one point. Even though, to some extent, it is Lubitsch portraying himself as the artist that he wishes to be portrayed as, it is also the reporter of the *New York Times* who offers him the canvas to do so. Be that as it may, Lubitsch himself portrayed himself as largely unhampered by censorship compromises, even citing at one point his 'almost complete freedom.' It was in regard to the heavier subjects that he expected to encounter problems; fortunately, these were hardly ever associated with him.³⁰⁸ Lubitsch managed to make out that the issue of censorship was about something else entirely; a discussion about art more generally quite separate from themes usually associated with him.

Critics, on the other hand, did not hide Lubitsch's connection to the films. As we have already seen in the previous section, tropes had already been firmly established to connote the Lubitschian style. An enthusiastic McCarthy wrote that *Trouble in Paradise* "has drama, romance, comedy, suspense, surprise – all expertly welded by Lubitsch's touches" and that his direction "just about tops anything that Ernst Lubitsch ever has done before." After commenting on the plot of this particular love-triangle, in which one of a couple of thieves falls in love with his

³⁰⁷ Andre Sennwald. "A Word with Ernst Lubitsch: Under Cross-Examination, the Director of *The Merry Widow* Discusses Some of the Cinema Topics of the Day." *New York Times* (14 October 1934), p. X5.

³⁰⁸ Films like *The Man I Killed/Broken Lullaby* (1932) may be taken as an attempt at similarly heavy and more dramatic subjects. *The Man I Killed* was not popular with critics and audiences. On the other hand Lubitsch's *The Patriot* found itself well received and even nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. Its diminished impact on the Lubitsch brand today may be explained by the fact that it is considered lost. What we do know about it does not fit with what we expect from Lubitsch today and we cannot incorporate it into our notion of a Lubitsch film as it is not available for viewing.

latest victim, McCarthy reaffirmed that, “it’s the Lubitsch finesse that really makes the picture so good.”³⁰⁹ In regard to the same film, Mordaunt Hall claimed that the film “points no moral,” and yet “In virtually every scene the lively imagination of the German producer shines forth and it seems as though he were the only person in Hollywood who could have turned out such an effective entertainment from such a feathery story.”³¹⁰

Furthermore, Thronton Delehanty of the *Evening Post* argued that “Nothing but the touch of Lubitsch could transmute the love pulsations of Count Danilo and the beauteous Sonia into the wickedly irreverent spasms which pour forth. It is a *Merry Widow* continuously stimulating.”³¹¹ Finally, Andre Sennwald even allowed himself a little dig at the censors. Basing much of his review of *The Merry Widow* on the concept of the “excellent Lubitsch manner,” he wrote that, the “new Ernst Lubitsch confection” is “heady as the foam on champagne, fragile as mist and as delicately gay as a good-natured censor will permit.”³¹² For McCarthy of the *Herald*, “the Ernst Lubitsch reputation for class and smartness should not be overlooked,” while the only little criticism he finds of the film is “several slow spots in the picture, but these will be eliminated.”³¹³

Besides *The Merry Widow*, Lubitsch’s adaptation of *Design for Living* is a prime point of interest when it comes to the crossroads between censorship and authorship. As a story about a woman caught between two men, not only does it fall into Lubitsch territory, but it would fall foul of the Production Code Administration

³⁰⁹ McCarthy. Review of *Trouble in Paradise*. *Motion Picture Herald* 109.5 (29 October 1932), p. 31.

³¹⁰ Mordaunt Hall. “Ernst Lubitsch’s Shimmering Picture About Well-Dressed Thieves and Pickpockets,” Review of *Trouble in Paradise*. *New York Times* (9 November 1932), p. 28.

³¹¹ Thronton Delehanty quoted in Advert for *The Merry Widow*. *New York Times* (15 October 1934), p. 20.

³¹² Andre Sennwald. “A Lubitsch Production of *The Merry Widow*, with Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier,” Review of *The Merry Widow*. *New York Times* (12 October 1934), p. 33.

³¹³ McCarthy. Review of *The Merry Widow*. *Motion Picture Herald* 116.11 (8 September 1934), p. 34.

time and again. What is more, it was originally a stage play written by British writer Noel Coward and Lubitsch's take upon it again raised the issue of authorship in its own way. In his review of the Lubitsch film, Mordaunt Hall offered a very balanced and, for Lubitsch, generous opinion. With the screenplay, adapted by Ben Hecht, famously retaining only one rather negligible line from the play, the original writer led a mainly furious to lukewarm reception of the film. However, Hall compared Coward and Lubitsch, arguing that both "have much in common, both possessing very nimble minds."³¹⁴ Appreciating them both in their respective media, he went on to state that those who know the play will "undoubtedly conclude that it is better than the picture."³¹⁵ He then argued somewhat paradoxically that, "at the same time, they [too] may agree[,] that Mr. Lubitsch did wisely in his drastic action in producing the shadow version."³¹⁶ Even more, for Hall, "The narrative is unimportant," as usual, "but the various incidents are set forth most engagingly" and what was crucial, "they are often more appealing than in the play."³¹⁷ However, in light of censorship, Hall assumed that

After witnessing the play Mr. Lubitsch was eager to make the picture, but he was naturally well aware of the screen censorship aspects, and it also occurred to him that the scintillating dialogue might be a trifle too effervescent to win popular favour. Therefore he called Mr. Hecht, and it was decided to rewrite the play while preserving as far as possible the gayety and general tone of the stage production.³¹⁸

Hall's write-up published in the *Times* review section two days earlier contained a similar line of argument, but the phrasing is subtly different. Here, the sense of Lubitsch's authorship and agency in adapting the Coward material was even more pronounced in the light of possible censorship concerns. The film

³¹⁴ Mordaunt Hall. "Mr. Lubitsch's *Design for Living*: Pictorial Edition of Coward Play is Alert and Imaginative," Review of *Design for Living*. *New York Times* (3 December 1933), p. X9.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

may only be a skeleton of the parent work, but it has the same familiar rattle. In attacking the problem of translating the play to the screen Mr. Lubitsch was aware of the probability of censorial scowls and the chance that the English author's brilliant dialogue might be a little too lofty for some cinema audiences. Therefore he decided that something unusually drastic would have to be done in making the film. Thus all which remains of Mr. Coward's manuscript are the title and the theme.³¹⁹

We may read into the above the implication that censorship forced Lubitsch to change his source material. However, this is hardly the story that Hall was telling in these reviews for, by being in charge of the changes, 'his' Lubitsch retains his agency and authorship of the film. What transpires from both reviews is how Lubitsch has managed to claim authorship of his film on not only one but two levels. Hall dismisses the notion that Lubitsch's film and his artistry may be compromised by censorship on the one hand and adaptation on the other, being that a film adaptation could easily be taken as an inferior work of art. It is obvious that censorship through the Production Code Administration would compromise a director's artistic independence. However, by putting censorship on the same level as adaptation, Hall manages to qualify and reframe the severity of such a compromise, while strengthening the portrait of Lubitsch as a director-artist.

Finally, Maureen Furniss has intriguingly suggested that Lubitsch may have been promoted to head of production in order to take him out of the censors' line of fire. After he was restored behind the camera, even the *Herald* reviews *Angel* in a guarded, but not a damning way, focusing closely on the film's director: "It goes without saying the return of Ernst Lubitsch to active production after two years is a circumstance to be mentioned by showmen who elect to proffer this picture to their patrons, for the Lubitsch name has definite and widely comprehended connotations",³²⁰ and that

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ W.R.W. Review of *Angel*. *Motion Picture World* 128.13 (25 September 1937), p. 44.

Herr Lubitsch has produced this picture in his accustomed ornate manner and equipped it with his usual incidental whimsies, some of them very laughable, concentrating his consummate artistry upon the sly insinuation, the cunning suggestion, the unfinished utterance, the off-center emphasis and the adroitly timed joining of dialogue with contradictory action, which are his stock in trade.³²¹

The tone of the review is quite pointed and ironic for the film is “angelic in title only.”³²² At the same time, reviewer ‘W.R.W.’ foregoes any clear rejection of the film and instead focuses on the general ingredients of a Lubitsch film. Hence, compromising on censorship or serving a stint as a studio official at least did not hamper the critics’ excitement for Lubitsch’s return, as muted as it may have been occasionally.

One tradition of defining the ‘Lubitsch touch’ has been to associate it with innuendo, insinuation and omission. After the Production Code gained influence, these double-entendres are not only understood as reading between the lines but as indeed reading them as references to sexuality. The general idea would obviously be that Lubitsch shot ‘around’ the Code, in order to sneak sexual content past the censors. Indeed, the critical emphasis on his visual wit was strong for the entirety of his career. In fact, some of the most curious examples called up are not from the Code area at all: the reversing of the ink glasses in *Madame Dubarry*, the eggs on the morning tables in *The Marriage Circle* or the passing of time in *Trouble in Paradise*. Made in 1932, two years before the enforcement of the Code, *Trouble in Paradise* also contains highly charged images, such as superimposition of ‘*Trouble in*’ over a bed with the delayed addition of ‘*Paradise*’ or the silhouettes of George Monescu (Herbert Marshall) and Mariette Colet (Kay Francis) kissing projected onto the bed.

³²¹ Ibid. p. 49.

³²² Ibid. p. 44.

Lubitsch and the Code is then an intriguing pairing worth investigating. Lubitsch's affinity for visual wit and seductive plots should make him a prime example of how the Code affected one of the geniuses of the system to an even greater degree than others. However, I have been less interested in how the Code may have affected Lubitsch's style than how, if it all, the Code was *perceived* to have an influence on the formation of Lubitsch's style.

Maureen Furniss' valuable investigation into Lubitsch's treatment by the Production Code Administration suggests that Lubitsch was, initially, particularly favoured by the censors as an expert in the tactful treatment of problematic material. While Lubitsch's films generated scores of suggestions on the part of the censors, Lubitsch also quickly gained a reputation for handling even delicate subjects matters with tact and taste. Furniss argues that this opinion later shifts in the watershed between pre-Code and Code, which occurred in the same year as Lubitsch's arguably most difficult case with the censors, *The Merry Widow*. Nonetheless, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that censorship either affected or especially hampered the perception of Lubitsch as an artist as well as his style. The risqué tone of his films is openly acknowledged, if slightly more in the early years of the 1930s. Hence, we should conclude that the material held at Margaret Herrick Library is rich and yet not substantial enough to make such a case either way.

In the end, what the material does suggest is that, by the 1930s, Lubitsch had obtained a distinguished position. His reputation had reached the censors who, at least early on, emphasised more his ability to treat problematic material with taste and tact, even if they later cooled towards him. This may well have changed, as suggested by Maureen Furniss in her article. The line of argument that Lubitsch, in response to his difficulties with censorship, was given a more inward-facing position

as Head of Production is an inviting one and one with which I am inclined to agree. However, neither the PCA files, nor the public material offer a conclusive answer to this. While, after 1934, the *Motion Picture Herald* may have been more explicit in its criticism of Lubitsch, other reviews of films made after his stint as Head of Production suggests that he was welcomed back.

My investigation into the public discourse surrounding a ‘sexier’ ‘Lubitsch touch’ has shown that this became a definite ingredient of the Lubitsch brand in the 1930s. Throughout the decade, public discourse on Lubitsch and his films picked up and acknowledged the playful tone of his films, while references to censors often remained tongue-in-cheek. The following section will then look at how this shift may be located in the most significant director-actor collaboration Lubitsch fostered while in America – his films with Maurice Chevalier.

2.4 One More Star than there is in Heaven or: Lubitsch and Stardom

In 1932, *Variety* published a remarkable piece called “Lubitsch’s Analysis of Pictures Minimizes Director’s Importance.” The article did not resemble a clearly framed portrait or interview – its tone tended more to echo an opinion piece or even op-ed – for it expressed the views of a named individual, Lubitsch, who is not affiliated with the publication, and indeed the text consistently uses the pronoun ‘he’ rather than ‘I’ when referring to Lubitsch. All the same, the article was striking in centring on two principal facets of the industry: the business-side, where “Mr. Lubitsch approves” the payment of directors on percentage, as well as recent stylistic fashions – ironically, in view of the section on the musical here the article noted that “Lubitsch abhors the current overdoing of the moving camera.”

However, in the early sections of the article, Lubitsch expresses his frustration about the paucity of methods for engaging with the public. Therefore, he welcomes interviews with the press as “the only means a director has for identifying himself to the public.”³²³ He continued with the question, “Since a director does not appear in person in his pictures, how can the audience be aware of his existence” and then elaborated on the argument that he “is sure that his name as the director of a picture means nothing in itself at the gate,” for when audiences have enjoyed his picture, “they don’t remember his name.”³²⁴

With the director seated behind the camera such statements are easily comprehensible, but for a director who has already established his own style, they are remarkable and come across as even more so in the section to come. Here, I will look at one of the most visible facets of the film industry, the negotiation with stars. After analysing one of most significant collaborations of all of Lubitsch’s career, I will show how Lubitsch went beyond interviews in exploring ways of making himself visible to the public and to promote his films.

This interview is a small glimpse into both Lubitsch’s and the studio’s frustration in having to make the director useable in the public discourse. Interestingly, Lubitsch went well beyond ‘identifying himself’ to the public in looking for ways to make the director’s image profitable in its own right; just as stars were established to guarantee returns in the studio era, the institution of Lubitsch’s style as the ‘Lubitsch touch’ was viewed to work in similar and equally profitable ways. The ‘touch’ with its increased value of recognition therefore provides a necessary and valuable asset, one whose vague nature allows it to appeal to as many people as possible.

³²³ Anon. “Lubitsch’s Analysis of Pictures Minimizes Director’s Importance.” *Weekly Variety* (1 March 1932), p. 2.

³²⁴ Ibid.

In his seminal study on stars, Richard Dyer may hint at the same issue when he states that “it is assumed that we are dealing with the stars in terms of their signification, not with them as real people. The fact that they are also real people is an important aspect of how they signify, but we never know them directly as real people, only as they are to be found in media texts.”³²⁵ Accordingly Dyer limits himself to stars of cinema “rather than television (or sport, theatre, fashion, etc.),” while he still emphasises that “at the level of theorisation and methodology [...] what is elaborated here in relation to Hollywood film stars is broadly applicable to these other kinds of star”³²⁶ as well. In fact, Lubitsch himself did work as an actor in his very early years in Germany, but had long given up acting by the 1930s, at least in front of a rolling camera.³²⁷ Instead, I will examine how Lubitsch’s prominence as a director and producer figures in the public discourses on his films and how they are marketed or critically reviewed on the basis of their connection to him as the man behind the camera.

For Barry King, it is important to define stardom alongside “economies – systems of control that mobilise discursive resources in order to achieve specifiable effects. These are: the cultural economy of the human body as a sign; the economy of signification in film; and the economy of the labour market for actors.”³²⁸ Cathy Klaprat notes that “[p]ublicity campaigns revolved almost exclusively around stars.”³²⁹ Writing on the star system, Richard Maltby explains that, “As well as being the visible part of the industry, the star system was central to the standardization of movie product, and to its interrelations with other consumption

³²⁵ Richard Dyer. *Stars*. London: British Film Institute, 2009. p. 2.

³²⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

³²⁷ There are many accounts of Lubitsch acting out roles for his actors on the set of his films.

³²⁸ Barry King. “Articulating Stardom.” *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. Jeremy G. Butler, ed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. p. 127.

³²⁹ Cathy Klaprat. “The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in another Light.” *The American Film Industry*. Tino Balio, ed. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. p. 355. See also Richard Caves. *American Industry: Structure, Conduct, Performance*. Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1964. p. 19-21.

industries and advertising.”³³⁰ Strong positioning in the star system hence constituted a considerable asset for a film’s success or failure, because actors, effectively employees contracted with a studio, “could exert some influence over their characterization, and hence over the whole structure of the movies in which they appeared.”³³¹ However, the considerable power of stars to execute their parts and particularly to attract audiences did not extend to the sphere of production.³³² Crucially, their real power, Maltby elaborates, lies with the paying public rather than the producing studio. It is the stars, in his analysis, who “were the commodities that more consistently drew audiences to the movies.”³³³ As a result, films were produced as so-called ‘star vehicles.’ As Maltby puts it, movies “constructed around the appeal of one or more particular stars and sold on that basis, are bound to have a set of conventional ingredients.”³³⁴ For Maltby, such ‘vehicles’ are “much like a genre,”³³⁵ by which he means that the “repetition of these standard ingredients has created audience expectation of these elements.”³³⁶ Although he observes that a certain difference may be made between the films themselves and the “deliberate manufacture of stars as a mechanism for selling movie tickets”³³⁷ a similar argument can be made for the director and his role in such productions.

With the advent of auteurism that transformed certain directors into artists and also “a commodified version” of their status as such, directors were used for the same promotional purposes as stars. Barbara Klinger argues that it is crucially “[d]irectors and stars [who] present one of the most visible examples of the relation

³³⁰ Richard Maltby. *Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. p. 141.

³³¹ Ibid. p. 142.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

between commodity fetishism and promotion.”³³⁸ Timothy Corrigan notes a similar “Commerce of Auteurism” in his study on American cinema after Vietnam.³³⁹ Crucially, both authors note that such a shift only occurred from the New Hollywood era onwards. However, auteurism and its later commercialisation do not appear out of nowhere and while the commodification of stars dominates the public discourse in earlier decades, Lubitsch seems to explore how he as a director can capitalise on his prominence.

Lubitsch, throughout his long career, forged many long-standing collaborations, especially with writers and actors. Some collaborations were formed in the United States, while many other colleagues had already been brought across the ocean following Lubitsch or even slightly preceding him. Lubitsch had made a number of films with Pola Negri, that were significant both in their number and in the importance to their careers. As discussed in Chapter One their collaborations paved the way to Hollywood for each even more than Lubitsch’s other German films; notable here were the ones he still starred in himself or centring on the youthful *Backfisch* character so often enthusiastically portrayed by Ossi Oswalda.

While still in Germany, Lubitsch had already demanded considerable prominence as the director of his films, although this had to be negotiated with the star power of the respective leads of his films. Notably, in terms of advertising and critical reception, the films that did not feature major, and specifically female stars such as Negri or Oswalda would emphasise their connection with Lubitsch as the film’s director and advertising and criticism a bit more. *Das Weib des Pharaos* (1921) offers a good example. It features actors of considerable prominence such as

³³⁸ Barbara Klinger. “Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture.” *Cinema Journal* 28.4 (Summer 1989), p. 12.

³³⁹ See Timothy Corrigan. *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991. p. 101-136, also reprinted in *Film and Authorship*. Virginia Wright Wexman, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003. p. 96-111.

Emil Jannings and Paul Wegener, actor, director and writer in his own right; and even the German cinema-goers' public darling, Harry Liedtke. However, the film featured no star of the Lubitsch ladies' standing to compete with Lubitsch's star power. Considering the enormous stardom that Chevalier commanded in the early 1930s, a similar hierarchy or 'priority' could be expected. However, as it turned out, this collaboration evolved along more symbiotic lines.

In terms of Lubitsch's American years, the most significant collaboration is undoubtedly that with French actor Maurice Chevalier. Lubitsch and Chevalier made five films together. Their collaboration began with Lubitsch's first sound film proper, musical comedy *The Love Parade*, which in turn earned Chevalier a nomination for Best Actor at the Academy Awards of 1930. Generally, their work comprised films of similar pattern: musical comedies set in 'real' Europe or a fantasy version of it, as well as the revue film *Paramount on Parade*, to which the duo contributed three episodes including the grand finale. Royalty or fun poked at royalty tended to be included, except for *One Hour with You*, which was a remake of Lubitsch's urban-set sophisticated comedy, *The Marriage Circle*.

During this period, Chevalier also starred in *Love Me Tonight*, which strongly resembles the Lubitsch musicals, but crucially was not directed by Lubitsch "[f]or reasons which no one was able to explain either at the time or since."³⁴⁰ Similarly, Lubitsch directed *Monte Carlo*, again a musical comedy, but featuring James Buchanan in the role of the male lead. All these films were made for Paramount, except for the ultimate collaboration, *The Merry Widow* of 1934.

³⁴⁰ Michael Freedland. *Maurice Chevalier*. New York: William Morrow, 1981. p. 120. Lubitsch's biographer Eyman mentions the matter in passing as well. While not directly raising the question of *Love Me Tonight*, Eyman suggests that Lubitsch's involvement in *The Man I Killed* and *One Hour with You*, which was first to be directed by Lubitsch, then given to George Cukor and later reclaimed by Lubitsch again, prevented him from making *Love Me Tonight* himself, but it was to be based "on the Lubitsch model." Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 185 and 203.

Jeanette MacDonald completed the trio in all non-revue films, excepting *The Smiling Lieutenant*, which placed Chevalier between Claudette Colbert and Miriam Hopkins in the role of the fair princess, which was usually played by MacDonald. As confusing as are the exceptions that prove the rule, Lubitsch and Chevalier hit success with *The Love Parade* and stuck to the formula until the mid-1930s, when they parted ways for good and Chevalier left America soon afterwards.



Figure 5: Advert using Chevalier's image, *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931).

The public negotiation of their collaboration is complex. As an up-and-coming star, Chevalier unsurprisingly overshadowed his director as well as his co-star to some degree, especially in the advertising discourse. On closer inspection, however, Chevalier's star power and the 'Lubitsch touch' formed a symbiotic relationship cross-fertilising their respective discourses, in their aspects of French sophistication and the

negotiation of sex.

Fresh from his success with *Innocents of Paris* (1929), Chevalier was built up to become a major star in America over the course of the collaboration with Lubitsch. Unsurprisingly, the Frenchman dominated the public discourse on Lubitsch musicals and, amusingly, several critics bemoaned Chevalier's absence from *Monte Carlo*, for which he had been replaced by Jack Buchanan, who was

widely considered inadequate.³⁴¹ It was however the visual aspects of the discourse and the promotional campaigns that Chevalier dominated in particular. There is an endless number of examples available; one instance is a relatively tame advert, printed in *Variety*, which has Chevalier's head at least twice as big as everybody else's and Chevalier positioned as the only actor to acknowledge the spectator (Figure 5).³⁴²

³⁴¹ See, for instance, Douglas Hodges' review, in which he framed Buchanan's shortcomings in comparison to Chevalier: "His voice is well suited to the talking screen and to the character. But his personality and pantomime fall short. He bears no resemblance to Chevalier; and carries neither love interest nor comedy." Douglas Hodges. Review of *Monte Carlo*. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 100.10 (6 September 1930), p. 38 or this clipping held at Margaret Herrick Library: *Monte Carlo* is "almost as good as *The Love Parade*, but not quite because *The Love Parade* had Chevalier." Anon. Review of *Monte Carlo*. Clippings in *Ms. Collection #123, Adurey Chamberlin Scrapbooks #13*, held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 11 July 2013). p. ?132.

³⁴² Advert for *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *Weekly Variety* 102.11 (27 May 1931), p. 64. The critical snippets on the next page at least allow for three mentions of Lubitsch.



Figure 6: Advert for *The Love Parade* (1930).

There was also a four-page advert for *The Love Parade*, which balanced a shot of Lubitsch on a double-page with Chevalier, but otherwise predominately

focuses on the Frenchman in various uniforms and his usual suit with boater hat (Figure 6).³⁴³

In addition, the exploitation angles presented in the Paramount press books, exploring Chevalier's star image more than that of any of his co-stars or indeed his director. These are ads in which Chevalier is always the focal point, paired with the heads of four ladies, in between two women who both claim him for themselves. If Jeanette MacDonald was distinguishable in these, her image did little more than

show her worried or draped on a sofa in a full shot paired with a photographically more detailed and realistic close up of Chevalier's face (Figure 7).³⁴⁴

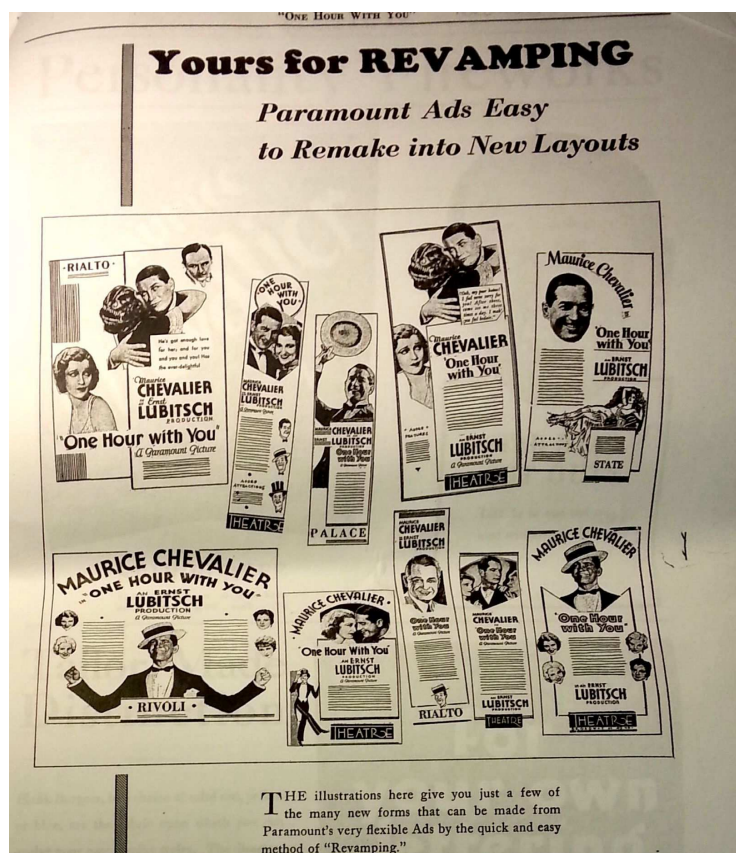


Figure 7: Suggestions for ad campaign for *One Hour with You* (1932).

Another promotional idea included a cut out in which “girls

[can] imagine [themselves] in her place with Maurice Chevalier”³⁴⁵ (Figure 8). The visual ideas for how to use Chevalier appear endless while his image widely

³⁴³ Advert for *The Love Parade*. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 98.1 (4 January 1930), no page.

³⁴⁴ Paramount Press Book for *One Hour with You*. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 15 July 2013), p. 13.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 4.

overshadows that of his co-star, newcomers like Jeanette MacDonald or established stars such as Claudette Colbert.



Figure 8: Exploitation angles for *One Hour with You* (1932)

Chevalier was undeniably and indisputedly the star of Lubitsch's films and the material produced in connection with his Lubitsch films centres to a large extent on him. None of the other stars, not even his four-times screen partner, Jeanette MacDonald, could compete with Chevalier's prominence. Interestingly, Jeanette MacDonald did not assume a position of comparable prominence to that of Chevalier in the material for the Lubitsch film, *Monte Carlo*, nor could the Chevalier replacement, Jack Buchanan.

It is hardly surprising that the star power of a star, one eventually as significant as that of Chevalier, was exploited for maximum impact. However, there

are instances where the collaboration of Lubitsch and Chevalier became one of a symbiosis of two considerable star powers benefiting both. The following section will explore how the two discourses on Chevalier and Lubitsch both feed into and feed off each other. Most notably, the established association of Lubitsch with Continental sophistication, which was discussed in the previous chapter, boosted the collaboration as much as the construction of Chevalier as a star. How this construction of Lubitsch and Chevalier was achieved will be the focus of the following section of my analysis, which looks at two aspects of the collaboration: firstly, how sex was negotiated in the public discourse using Chevalier and his Frenchness specifically, which comprised his actual nationality but, more importantly, also included his culturally heightened Frenchness.

The Chevalier biographies remain vague on how the pairing with Lubitsch came about.³⁴⁶ Lubitsch biographer Scott Eyman also does not attach any particular significance to the match, although he does relay an anecdote that might hint at it having really been Lubitsch's choice, rather than that of another more highly ranked studio official, producer or mogul. Sometime after the success of *Innocents of Paris* had become apparent, Chevalier met Lubitsch in a hallway. The latter noted cryptically, "I am walking around with a film musical in my head, Maurice. Now I will put it on paper. I have found my hero."³⁴⁷ Be that as it may, the collaboration found them so well matched that the origins of the match-up appear to be more than mere coincidence. For the two brands of Chevalier and Lubitsch seemed to share two particular discourses in their reliance on a sexual subtext and upon French culture.

³⁴⁶ See Freedland, *Maurice Chevalier*, p. 111 or Edward Behr, *The Good Frenchman: The True Story of the Life and Times of Maurice Chevalier*. New York: Village Books, 1993. p. 150.

³⁴⁷ See Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch*, p. 154.

The first of these discourses was closely related to the discussion of the sexual subtext that occurred more widely in the 1930s – a point that already touched upon earlier in this chapter. Not insignificantly, Lubitsch had frequently placed



Figure 9: Advert for *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931)

female characters at the centre of his films. Chevalier gladly accepted such a challenge with his mischievous, only partially concealed Continental sexuality, whose wink with the eye no woman, it seemed, could long resist or in the face of which no woman could remain angry. Chevalier therefore offered a site for more explicit projections than had been possible in the 1920s.

As such, the suggestive subtext was often related to Chevalier himself, even more so in the related advertising. Here the risqué subtext of the reviews was often related to the story and therefore to writer and director. One advert calls *The Love Parade* a “charmingly

roughish romance”³⁴⁸ flanked by not one, but two heads of Chevalier. Another announced, rather breathlessly, capitalising the first letter of every word: “She Was A Nice Quiet Girl – Until He Winked At Her!”³⁴⁹ (Figure 9). Linguistically, the focus may be on her as ‘she’ is the subject of the main clause. However, the accompanying image here focused on Chevalier looking arguably puzzled and surprised by the enthusiastic reaction from ‘her,’ who can be identified as Miriam Hopkins only by her blonde locks.

³⁴⁸ Advert for *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (6 April 1930), p. 125.

³⁴⁹ Advert for *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *New York Times* (2 June 1931), p. 39.

Chevalier biographer, Edward Behr, looks more closely at the effect that Lubitsch's films had on the Chevalier star persona, arguing that "One of the surprises of early Lubitsch musical films is their potent if oblique sexual content and their constant 'double entendres' – contributing to no small extent to Chevalier's extraordinary reputation as a sex symbol, but attracting mature women, and men as well as teenagers."³⁵⁰ As much as Lubitsch's films provided a platform for the 'entertainer' Chevalier, the Lubitsch brand rubbed off on him with its wide appeal, producing a number of flexible responses. At the same time, Chevalier appeared the embodiment of what had been covered up in earlier Lubitsch films. Although the Production Code material suggests that Lubitsch and Chevalier were regarded in the same way – particularly at an earlier moment when they were both considered to have addressed suggestive material with tact – Chevalier may well have helped to deflate some of the criticism otherwise addressed to Lubitsch directly.

The second context in which these discourses on Lubitsch and Chevalier converge, may be deemed 'the French connection.' Edward Behr introduces Lubitsch as "a tough, aggressively European individualist and quintessential Berliner, who has remained nostalgically attached to his pre-Nazi German cultural past."³⁵¹ Here, Behr may be going overboard with his adjectives. Although Lubitsch's films continued to be set in Europe or rather a mythical and at times even a nostalgic Europe, Lubitsch's negotiation in the 1920s demonstrated how neatly, seamlessly and comparatively easily he was integrated into his new country of residence. In the 1920s, Lubitsch's association with Continental sophistication allowed him to be dissociated from the terms that, only a few years before, had identified him more problematically with German culture and the enemy. This facilitated his integration into the American film industry and was strengthened

³⁵⁰ Behr. *The Good Frenchman*. 152.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

when he began to specialise in, and indeed champion, a new genre of the sophisticated comedy. Hence, although Lubitsch was not French, it was possible for critics to perceive him as such and to take him increasingly, if you will, as culturally French.

In the following analysis, I will look at how French associations continue to crop up in the discussion of Lubitsch films that had indeed taken an actual Frenchman for their star. Not only did Chevalier's Frenchness prove a spectacular success with audiences, but, the associations with being 'Continental,' and specifically 'French,' that already existed with Lubitsch's work provided the ideal context for Chevalier's heightened Frenchness. In fact, both Lubitsch and Chevalier benefited tremendously from this mutual association.

In terms of Chevalier's star persona, Babington and Evans write that he

was enormously popular in the early '30s, representing in the popular consciousness a kind of quintessence of Frenchness. Though the expression of this in advertising, interviews and reviews was often rather banal, with an almost obligatory imitation of his accent seeming necessary [...], such shorthand should not [...] be mistaken for mere emptiness, since it was crucially related to the complex image of the European.³⁵²

³⁵² Babington and Evans. *Blue Skies and Silver Linings*.p. 80-81.

Hence, by 'heightened Frenchness,' I am referring to Chevalier's performance of Frenchness and the look that Chevalier sports beyond the frequent evocation of France for instance, in film titles such as *Innocents of Paris*, or his pronounced

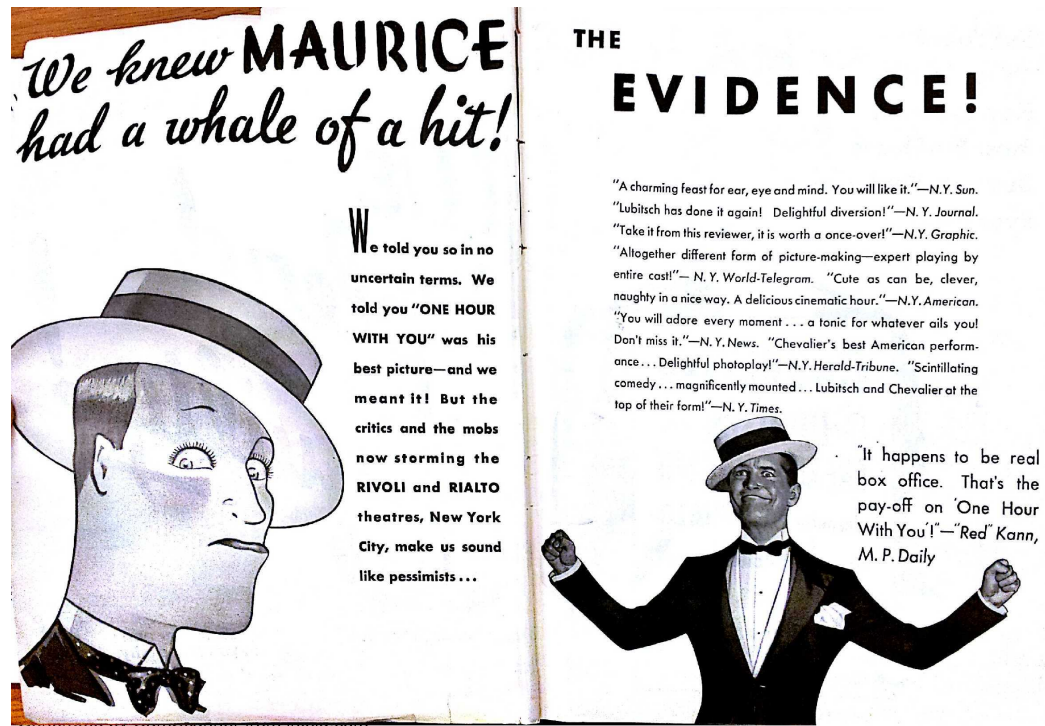


Figure 10: Chevalier's 'performed' Frenchness, advert for *One Hour with You* (1932)

French accent heard in films and often singled out in reviews.³⁵³ If Chevalier did not wear military uniforms, he was most frequently seen in suits, complete with bow-tie and necktie and a boater hat or at times a beret – a look not only used in films but also frequently exploited in advertising. The advert in figure 10³⁵⁴ not only included photographs of Chevalier, but also an illustration which reduces the Chevalier brand to its essential ingredients focusing on the hat, adding sparkle to the bowtie and emphasising his facial features, lips, high cheeks, eye lashes and a strong chin. This evoked both a stylish and stylised French sophistication, but also played out the

³⁵³ For instance by Mordaunt Hall who notes "M. Chevalier's pleasing way of pronouncing English words." Mordaunt Hall. "Chevalier's New Film: *Smiling Lieutenant* Rich in Mirth and Melody," Review of *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *The New York Times* (31 May 1931), p. X5.

³⁵⁴ Advert for *One Hour with You*, "We plead guilty." *Motion Picture Herald* 107.1 (2 April 1932), 21-24 (detail).

Continental sophistication with which Lubitsch has long since come to be associated.

Unlike Chevalier's co-stars, Lubitsch achieved a certain equality with his star which was frequently framed in geographic terms. For instance, Hall first has "the German, Lubitsch, vi[e] with the Frenchman, Chevalier, in the matter of honors"³⁵⁵ but elsewhere, the relationship is often described as symbiotic. In his review of *The Love Parade*, Hall indeed wrote that "Ernst Lubitsch, the brilliant German director, has served well Maurice Chevalier the French entertainer, in his talking and singing picture *The Love Parade*."³⁵⁶ Elsewhere Hall noted that the relationship was reversed when "[t]his latest Lubitsch production, aided by M. Chevalier and his supporting cast, is filled with scintillating wit of the Parisian variety."³⁵⁷ In 1931, he congratulated "that Franco-German team, Maurice Chevalier and Ernst Lubitsch, [...] on delivering another exceptionally clever contribution to the screen."³⁵⁸ A snippet in an advert, which included a New York press review, hailed the same film as "another triumph for Lubitsch and Chevalier: Fresh, vibrant, sparkling,"³⁵⁹ terms commonly found in the Lubitsch discourse.

However, these reviews tended to go further than they had previously done, in terms of ascribing authorship and authorial agency to Lubitsch. Lubitsch

keeps control of his picture throughout, and although Ernst Vajda and Guy Bolton are credited with the book – an adaptation of a play called "The Prince Consort" – in hands

³⁵⁵ Mordaunt Hall. "M. Chevalier's Brilliant Work: Parisian Entertainer's Current Film, *The Love Parade*, is Deftly Directed by Ernst Lubitsch," Review of *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (24 November 1929), p. X6.

³⁵⁶ Mordaunt Hall, "The Screen," Review of *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (20 November 1929), p. 38.

³⁵⁷ Mordaunt Hall, "M. Chevalier Again," Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (24 March 1932), p. 17.

³⁵⁸ Mordaunt Hall. "Chevalier's New Film: *Smiling Lieutenant* Rich in Mirth and Melody," Review of *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *The New York Times* (31 May 1931), p. X5.

³⁵⁹ Advert for *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *Motion Picture Herald* 103.9 (30 May 1931), no page. Quote from the *N.Y. American*.

other than those of Mr. Lubitsch it might easily have been a tame affair. Mr. Lubitsch and the adapters have given to this production a Parisian flair [...].³⁶⁰

Elsewhere, with reference to *One Hour with You*, Hall noted, “[i]t is quite obvious throughout this film that Mr. Lubitsch’s nimble mind has been busy not only in the direction of the subject but also in the handling of the script,”³⁶¹ before describing such a handling in greater detail. In regard to *The Smiling Lieutenant*, set in Vienna and the fictitious Flausenthurm, Hall wrote that “Herr Lubitsch’s flair for the Parisian type of comedy is constantly in evidence.”³⁶²

What stands out from these quotes is the numerous references to the nationalities of the two figures. Unlike in the previous decade (and chapter), there is little doubt about whether Lubitsch and Chevalier are drawn as foreigners. Instead, it is the deliberate invocation of Continental, and now even more specifically French, culture to describe a certain flavour of these films, which is established both through Lubitsch and “the French entertainer.”³⁶³ Although Lubitsch’s previous association with French culture showed that a real passport was unnecessary to ascribe him a ‘virtual’ passport, Chevalier’s background made such a connection even easier. Not only was Chevalier actually French, but he emphasised and heightened his Frenchness with his appearance, from the hat to the audible accent, as well as the settings of his films and their subject matter.

³⁶⁰ Mordaunt Hall. “M. Chevalier’s Brilliant Work: Parisian Entertainer’s Current Film, *The Love Parade*, is Deftly Directed by Ernst Lubitsch,” Review of *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (24 November 1929), p. X6.

³⁶¹ Mordaunt Hall, “M. Chevalier Again,” Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (24 March 1932), p. 17.

³⁶² Mordaunt Hall. “Chevalier’s New Film: *Smiling Lieutenant* Rich in Mirth and Melody,” Review of *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *The New York Times* (31 May 1931), p. X5.

³⁶³ Mordaunt Hall, “M. Chevalier Again,” Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (24 March 1932), p. 17.

In the 1930s, Lubitsch's association with a 'real' Frenchman, or one emphasising his Frenchness, relied on Lubitsch's previous connotations of Continental Frenchness. In turn, it also reinforced such a set of connotations of the Lubitsch brand. A review by Edwin Schallert, presumably for the *Los Angeles Times*, of *One Hour with You*, put the matter into a nutshell: "Vive la France! Also... vive M. le Chevalier, and Ernst Lubitsch! Anyway, the Lubitsch 'touch,' which has become more than a legend, is omnipresent in this production which is showing at the Paramount Theater."³⁶⁴ Schallert also expressed "no doubt that collaboration was not altogether amiss."³⁶⁵ Collaboration is the key, and while Chevalier's stronger visibility tends to overshadow Lubitsch in terms of publicity, the relationship between the two discourses was ultimately symbiotic and therefore marks a difference in how the Lubitsch's collaborations with other actresses were perceived.

Chevalier therefore provided a face and site for the associations that had already become established for the Lubitsch brand. Hence, the extension of the 'Lubitsch touch' to more risqué topics was made possible by the casting of Chevalier. In return, the flexible nature of the 'Lubitsch touch' accommodated the layer of meaning added to Chevalier's performance and allowed him to get away with it. This may have initially imbalanced the collaboration in terms of being an exploration of the public discourse, but in this way it actually benefited both participants in strengthening their respective brands. Hence, while Chevalier was the greatest selling point for advertisers, his level of recognition was also a sign of the impact and elevated status that Lubitsch commanded as the director of these films.

³⁶⁴ Edwin Schallert. Review of *One Hour with You*. Chamberlin Scrapbooks #33, no page. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 11 July 2013).

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

Lubitsch held his own as a star director even when placed in a collaboration with a rising star such as Chevalier. Although public discourse suggested a fairly balanced and especially symbiotic relationship between the two, it can be argued that this was a collaboration on Lubitsch's terms. Chevalier fitted the established Lubitsch brand perfectly with his heightened Frenchness and roughish sexuality. His American career faded once his collaboration with Lubitsch came to an end, while his only noteworthy non-Lubitsch film, *Love Me Tonight*, is clearly in the Lubitsch line. While Chevalier had had an American hit before the collaboration with Lubitsch, their partnership outweighed even the success of *Innocents of Paris*. Behr judges the press reception of *Innocents of Paris* to be wholly negative. Crucially, only *Variety* extended its criticism to Chevalier as well: "Neither Maurice Chevalier nor his songs will last very long over here."³⁶⁶ Other reviewers praised Chevalier as the one asset of a film whose "other virtues were hard to find."³⁶⁷ Chevalier's career did not begin with Lubitsch, not even its American chapter, but their collaboration cemented his career with the "success of *The Love Parade* turn[ing] Chevalier into a star phenomenon surpassed only by Gary Cooper, Clark Gable and a handful of others."³⁶⁸

Interestingly, both contemporary and later sources confirm the worth and importance of this erstwhile partnership. Gerald Mast, for one, writes that "Paramount had scored a terrific casting *coup* when they imported the exuberant Maurice Chevalier from the Paris music hall to sing alongside the lovely but spunky Philadelphia soprano, Jeanette MacDonald."³⁶⁹ Similarly, Hedda Hopper captions a picture accompanying a large article on Lubitsch that "It was Lubitsch who brought

³⁶⁶ Quoted in Behr. *The Good Frenchman*. p. 149.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 161.

³⁶⁹ Mast. *Can't Help Singin'*. 104.

Maurice Chevalier to America.”³⁷⁰ As a gossip columnist her attitude towards facts and truth may well be lenient. However, as one of the most influential gossip columnists, Hopper’s voice should not be underestimated because she reflected the significance that the collaboration had for both Chevalier and Lubitsch and, not least, its public perception.

It is therefore not unreasonable to reflect upon how the public negotiation focused on Lubitsch himself and his style. Having established the complex influence that a star’s discourse may have had on a film’s negotiation and perception I will now take a closer look at the ways in which Lubitsch’s prominence was mediated in the public discourses on him and his films. I will then focus in this section on the new methods advertisers debated and then deployed in their use of Lubitsch. These approaches barely occurred in the 1920s, when an ad here or there would use Lubitsch’s headshot, although they did resurface in the 1940s. However, the 1930s were special because advertisers began to make greater use of Lubitsch in print media; they also employed him in their use of audio-visual material, such as trailers. All these para-texts provided Lubitsch with a platform to transform his absence from the film into a presence central to the discourse on his films. However, such uses also vouchsafed for Lubitsch’s distinguished standing at this moment in time – if the ‘Lubitsch touch’ had not already become a brand, then there would not have been a need or incentive to project it as these adverts did.

³⁷⁰ Hedda Hopper. “That Lubitsch Touch! Looking at Hollywood With Hedda Hopper.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (25 July 1943), p. C3.



Figure 11: Detail from press book for *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938)

Even for the films of such a prominent director such as Lubitsch, the advertising context was still dominated by the negotiation of the attached actors. However, there are notable differences in emphasis. The ill-fated Jack Buchanan could never command the discourse on *Monte*

Carlo the way that Chevalier managed for his films. A case in point were the poster suggestions offered by Paramount in the press sheets, some of which did not even feature Buchanan.³⁷¹

Over the course of the 1930s, the advertisers began to experiment with Lubitsch as a source of advertising; *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938) is a good example of this. The press book featured a page made up of four photographs showing Cooper in character spanking “his wife” (Figure 11).³⁷²

Arguably unsatisfied with the attempt in the first photograph, the couple then looks up, only for Lubitsch to give directions in the third picture. The final picture then

³⁷¹ One features a photograph only of Jeanette MacDonald, another a flattering and racy illustration of her full body. Most of the others show the couple in various embraces, often with Buchanan's face only in profile or even more fully obscured. See Press Sheets for *Monte Carlo*. Paramount Pictures Press Sheets. p. 7-8. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 8 July 2013).

³⁷² Press Book for *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. no page. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 14 July 2013).

shows Cooper spanking his on-screen wife again in a pose not dissimilar to the first and yet with more deliberation and energy – a tiny yet essential difference. Underscoring this presentation is the four-picture flip-book “How to spank your wife... In four lessons... Given by Professor Lubitsch... With Gary and Claudette as pupils.”³⁷³

Lubitsch is then cast as the teacher of his stars, both in the text and in visual terms. When he comes into the third picture, we only see the back of his head. However, the three heads are arranged on a diagonal line with Lubitsch’s at the highest and most senior, point. His gesturing hand almost entirely obscures Cooper’s head, reinforcing the essential impact that Lubitsch’s scene direction will have. Although the text-based explanation does not make it any more explicit, that special something Lubitsch brings to the production to make the difference may be called, of course, the ‘Lubitsch touch.’

This page is part of the press book, in which the director always features prominently in his own section. This may well have been the precursor for using Lubitsch’s image more publicly in actual advertisements for his films. One such example printed in *Variety*, covers two pages (Figure 12).

³⁷³ Press Book for *Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife*. no page. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 14 July 2013).



Figure 12: Advert for *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938)

The first page is almost entirely covered by a close up of Claudette Colbert looking rather weary as she rests her head on Cooper's shoulder, who has turned his back to us. The advert asks "What's wrong with this situation?" and answers its own rhetorical question: "Claudette in Gary's arms and yet so sad...that'll ever do... Hey! Mr. Lubitsch."³⁷⁴ The next page shows two photographs of the couple embracing, similar to their pose in the first picture (although flipped here). In the first photo, we see Lubitsch standing in the set for the scene, possibly giving directions and smiling at Colbert, whose face is now only visible in profile. In the second, shown below, the couple has turned around so we can see her face again, now with a broad and enchanted smile. The ad completes its answer to its initial question: "That's the idea... never a dull moment...a million laughs... in this comedy hit of 1938."³⁷⁵

³⁷⁴ Advert for *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. *Daily Variety* 19.15 (23 March 1938), p. 5.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 6.

The idea of this advert is similar to the one displayed in the press book ad in which Lubitsch is the master, the instructor and the supervisor heading the whole production. Again, the idea of the master director, here called “The Old Maestro,” is summoned up and it is crucially this old master who comes “to the rescue” bringing along “that Lubitsch touch.”³⁷⁶ He creates smiles and happiness, in Claudette Colbert, women in the audience and exhibitors with full auditoriums. Whatever it is, it only requires a short appearance, a small gesture or a gentle touch from the master to make a difference. Surely, Colbert and Cooper remain the stars leads and have an greater visibility in this advert, even if it is only really Colbert who is the star. However, it only requires one short instance or appearance of Lubitsch to leave a lasting and decisive impact. Whatever the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is, within the context of this advert it is understood to encompass this ‘special something.’

Hence, the advertising campaign, suggested in the press book and later printed for instance in *Variety*, makes a ‘master director’ of Lubitsch’s persona, here called the “Old Maestro.”³⁷⁷ Calling Lubitsch a master of his art and putting this moniker in the context of older, more prestigious and established arts is a key strategy at the very centre of the Lubitsch persona; it is also one that, crucially, makes use of Lubitsch visually. This approach arguably provides the necessary step to what will follow in the second half of the 1930s; that is, a string of Lubitsch cameos in the trailers for his own films.

By the 1930s, trailers had become an established way of advertising coming attractions. Film trailers date back to the early 1910s – 1913 to be exact – and by the 1930s the National Screen Service was largely responsible for the creation and distribution of film trailers, and it was for a great part independent from the studios.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 6.

³⁷⁷ Press Book for *Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife*. no page. Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 14 July 2013).

These trailers consisted of a collection of central scenes from the film in question. However, Lubitsch seemed to have had other ideas, as a number of trailers for his films proved.

Trailers stand out alongside the advertising that I have previously analysed because as they are, thanks to their audio-visual nature, more closely aligned to the actual film product, as Vinzenz Hediger observes in his study of trailers.³⁷⁸ Nevertheless, this close kinship could also lead to problems; the trailer can offer the most accurate information about the quality of the product, but it must not give too much away.³⁷⁹ Thus stars, locations or tone are particularly handy sales angles since, technically, they are only parts of the product but not the entire product.³⁸⁰ Brand names, even studio labels, arguably help little, unless it is the Disney logo.³⁸¹

With his 'touch' Lubitsch may form an exception to this rule and his work on trailers offers yet another example. As the director, Lubitsch added himself to Hediger's list of possible sales angles for the classical film trailer, made possible by his established position as, crucially, both a distinguished and, by this point, distinguishable film director. Through his 'touch,' Lubitsch had been able to build up a brand identity, one that he cleverly used to promote his films.

³⁷⁸ Vinzenz Hediger. *Verführung zum Film: Der amerikanische Kinotrailer seit 1912*. Marburg: Schüren, 2001. p. 17.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 23-24.

³⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 24.

³⁸¹ Ibid. p. 23.

As unconventional as Lubitsch's inclusion in print advertising may seem, the director's appearance in front of the camera will always produce a greater impact as it consistently breaks the line into the narrated world (although it took at least three trailers until Lubitsch actually accomplished this). The following section then will



Figure 13: Form trailer for *The Merry Widow* (1934)

look at how Lubitsch used his own image and brand in three trailers from the mid-1930s onwards – for *The Merry Widow* and *Ninotchka*, the trailer of which included Lubitsch in a rollcall. To these, I will add finally the trailer for *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), a promotion that in itself set up an intriguing narrative, even before Lubitsch as himself visits Matuschek & Co.

The trailer for *The Merry Widow* (stills Figure 13)³⁸² has the romantic couple dance on a globe before the various sales assets that the film has to offer, thus implying global success. This approach is clear in the lines, “A

widow smiled, the world surrendered!” and “the captivating melodies of Franz

³⁸² *The Merry Widow*. Trailer. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), USA, 1934. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL8BRH2N0Mc> (accessed 26 January 2015).

Lehár's," while the stars complete this promotional approach with a sample of "You'll Find Me at Maxim's" sung with a decidedly French accent. Key scenes and sound bites are then rounded off with taglines to convince the viewer: "Majestic in production magnificence," "Dazzling in its spectacle," "A romantic gem of musical delight." Halfway through the trailer, a slide then announces *The Merry Widow* as "The Ernst Lubitsch Production."

This lettering is complemented by a short scene showing Lubitsch leaning on his chair attentively as he closely observes something in the distance, before raising one of his ubiquitous cigars to his mouth. The implication is clear: Lubitsch keeps a close eye on the filmmaking process and, more generally, maintains tight control over his production. Indeed, the scene is immediately followed by close up of an ostentatious crown before the title appears – *honi soit qui 'coincidence' y pense*.

A trailer for *Ninotchka*³⁸³ towards the end of the decade uses a similar trick if with slightly less subtlety. The advertising campaign accompanying *Ninotchka* was largely based on Greta Garbo's star power. Indeed, it may be more appropriate to say it was based especially on her star persona, emphasising that the film constituted her first comedy and that "Garbo laughs!" as discussed above. She had done so before, but this was of little importance. The scene, in which the title character laughs hysterically after having kept her cool all this time, is memorable and, needless to say, it introduces the trailer. A collection of short vignettes and a short sequence of dialogue follow as usual. Towards the end then the image track over a scene from the film announces, "ONLY *Garbo* COULD HAVE PLAYED IT!" while, after the edit, "ONLY *Lubitsch* COULD HAVE MADE IT!"³⁸⁴ (Figure 14).

³⁸³ *Ninotchka*. Trailer. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1939. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mP3GmdopSiM> (accessed 26 January 2015).

³⁸⁴ The setting imitates the setting in the trailer, although said trailer uses different fonts from Times New Roman, in which this thesis has been printed.

Again Lubitsch leans on his chair looking at something in the distance rather than directly into the camera. The phrases quite explicitly hint at the film's assets.



Figure 14: From the trailer for *Ninotchka* (1939)

Still, this trailer cleverly blurs the distinction between director and star. If the cigar from *The Merry Widow* trailer had been a Lubitsch trademark, it is missing from this trailer. Indeed, nothing here suggests that Lubitsch is Lubitsch or, in fact, a director at all. He can be seen wearing a slightly dishevelled shirt and tie. Again, he is sitting down and observing something in the distance, but without the cigar this time, or any other item that would designate him as a director. In fact, the background too does not belie the busy set of a production unit. Instead, he is shown in front of the much quieter background of a curtain.

This backdrop is crucial. Instead of a busy set framing Lubitsch as a director, a member of production *behind* the scenes, the curtain associates Lubitsch with what is going on *in front of* the same. In comparison to the trailer for *The Merry Widow*, the one for *Ninotchka* may not too subtly emphasise Lubitsch's originality and artistry, announcing, 'Only Lubitsch could have done it!' The visual representation of Lubitsch behind the written overlay, putting him in the context of the stage, rather than a busy behind-the-camera background subtly places him closer to acting stars than behind-the-scenes production crew such as, not least, the director. The trailer,

then, hints cleverly at Lubitsch's marketability and his status as publicity asset to the production in his own right.

From this premise, it is only a small step to the trailer to *The Shop Around the Corner*.³⁸⁵ At just over four minutes, this trailer is considerably longer than the two discussed above. After the initial title announces, with a dramatic bang on the soundtrack, "COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS," the trailer immediately parts ways with the narrative that is usually anticipated. For, Frank Morgan, who plays the *pater familias* of the small community in the eponymous shop, steps out and directly addresses the audience in character. After advertising some of the products in his shopping window, "Mr. Matuschek of Matuschek & Co" introduces his employees, played by the likes of James Stewart, Margaret Sullavan, Felix Bressart, Joseph Schildkraut and William Tracy. This sequence thus serves to give glimpse of the characters and plot hints that do not spoil the film, at least too much, and even fill gaps cleverly left in the narrative.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ *The Shop Around the Corner*. Trailer. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1940. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr3nsHRKZJA> (accessed 26 January 2015).

³⁸⁶ When Mr. Matuschek introduces Vadas, the character played by Joseph Schildkraut, he says "Everybody wonders where he gets the money to dress so elegantly. He certainly can't do it on the salary he gets from me." While these lines are being spoken, we watch a short excerpt from the film showing an exquisitely but ostentatiously dressed Vadas paying the taxi driver who had brought him to work that morning, probably also leaving him with a generous tip. Vadas is actually never visibly given any money in the film. The reason why he can dress so expensively is only ever implied as the answer to this mystery lies within the diegesis, the narrated world, but is crucially kept entirely off-screen. When Mrs. Matuschek, a character who never appears on-screen, continues to ask her husband for large sums of money, Mr. Matuschek is right to suspect her of an affair. He is also right to assume it is with one of his employees, but mistakes the James Stewart character for the culprit. Instead, Mrs. Matuschek cheats on her husband with Vadas and this is how Vadas is assumed to pay for his expensive tastes. Ironically, while Vadas does not finance his spending using (only) the salary he gets from Mr. Matuschek, it is Mr. Matuschek who ends up paying for it all. However, the audience can only draw such a conclusion by inferring this fact as Samson Raphaelson's script and Lubitsch's direction cleverly leave this gap in how the story is told. Interestingly, the biggest clue as to this connection lies in the trailer, which is the only time that this is hinted at so explicitly. To some extent, watching the trailer, albeit after the film, enhances the audience's understanding of the narrative. Thus, the trailer not only works as an advertising tool, but also serves as interpretation of the product it exists to promote. Vinzenz Hediger suggests that trailers in the classical period withhold information concerning the plot. However, his argument does not seem to apply to this particular trailer. At the same time, it may be noted that Hediger sets these earlier trailers in contrast to more recent ones, which are constructed around plot summaries (16). While the trailer for *The Shop Around the Corner* capitalises on stars and scenes and may even be taken as loosely presenting a mystery plot (36), it does in fact do something quite different altogether; suggesting a gap in the

The trailer is allowed to run on quite extensively until an extract from the romantic climax between the two leads, following which the camera cuts back to Mr. Matuschek in the meta-narrative. A man in a suit and with cigar enters the frame from the right, tapping Mr. Matuschek on the left (Figure 15).



Figure 15: From the trailer for *The Shop Around the Corner* (1939-40)

The man points to his watch, indicating that Mr. Matuschek should hurry. The power relations are clear; Mr. Matuschek states that he “had thought [the man was] a customer,” but it is the man who is in control reminding Mr. Matuschek of the time. Instead, Mr. Matuschek introduces the man as

“Ernst Lubitsch, our director. The man who gave a Garbo, in *Ninotchka*, who made you laugh, and now gives you a Morgan, who makes you laugh...” He trails off as Lubitsch interrupts him “I hope!” before finishing of “yes, I hope so too... in *The*

film’s narrative more strongly than the film itself ever does (Hediger. *Verführung zum Film*. p. 16, 22, 36.).

Shop Around the Corner.” Only then do the usual clips of the stars’ faces and names resume for the finale of the trailer. The final title confirms once again that *The Shop Around the Corner* is “another romantic hit from the director of *Ninotchka*, Ernst Lubitsch” finishing with the familiar method of setting apart Lubitsch’s name with a more cursive typeface not unlike a signature.

Lubitsch’s appearance in the meta-narrative within the trailer completes the shrewd use of his own star persona in the trailers for his film.³⁸⁷ Two aspects of the trailer then heighten the impact of his sudden³⁸⁸ appearance. The meta-level is established early on thanks to Frank Morgan’s constant reappearances and his direct address to the audience. Crucially, Lubitsch is not set against the romantic lead and the bigger star of the film, James Stewart. Frank Morgan can be assumed to be familiar to the audience not least for his appearance as the eponymous *Wizard of Oz* (1939) only a few months earlier. In both cases, Morgan plays a crucial supporting character and in both films, especially *The Shop Around the Corner* within the context of a genre arguably focused on the romantic couple. Lubitsch then manages to integrate an array of supporting characters into the main narrative.

As we have seen above, Lubitsch’s prominence could be compromised in advertising discourses in relation to a big star such as Chevalier. Set against Frank Morgan, however, he remains easily distinguishable. Second, when it comes to

³⁸⁷ The series of trailers seems to include at least one more trailer for *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941) which however could not be viewed for this project. Judging from *Variety*’s comment, it may well have been on par with its predecessors: “A BIG, broad wink illustrates the ‘Lubitsch touch’ in a trailer for *That Uncertain Feeling*. The trailer ends with a dolly shot showing Ernst Lubitsch directing his crew in a scene from the picture. The camera comes up over the director’s shoulder. He turns, smiles and gives the big wink, indicating by the gesture the saucy and provocative content of the film.” Anon. “Hollywood Inside.” *Daily Variety* 20.60 (3 March 1941), p. 2 (emphasis in the original). See also *Weekly Variety* observing a “Somewhat double-entendre motif” in the same context in Anon. “Lubitsch, Have You Got *That Uncertain Feeling*?” *Weekly Variety* 141.12 (26 February 1941), p. 8.

³⁸⁸ *Variety* reported on the production of this trailer. Interestingly, it reported only that Lubitsch “has written and will produce and direct a special reel for exploitation” of the film. With Lubitsch “turning trailer maker,” the trade paper notes only that “Frank Morgan will ‘star’ in the single-spooler.” It is likely that *Variety* was unaware of Lubitsch’s cameo. Still, it is interesting to note that Lubitsch’s appearance remains unspoilt and its impact therefore intact (Anon. “Ernst Lubitsch Does Trailer for *Shop*.” *Daily Variety* 26.13 (20 December 1939), p. 1.).

Morgan there is a tension between his on-screen character, “Mr. Matuschek,” and his off-screen persona, “Frank Morgan,” that does not exist when Lubitsch appears on screen. Mr. Matuschek (or indeed Frank Morgan) may initially have confused the intruder for a customer but clarifies this misunderstanding quickly; for it is Ernst Lubitsch, the director and, indeed, star, if the star behind the camera.

Trailers in which the director appears are not uncommon, although arguably the most memorable one of these, Alfred Hitchcock – who famously led a tour of the crime scene and the diegesis of *Psycho* (1960) and gave a lecture on birds to promote *The Birds* (1963) – only materialised two decades later. Hitchcock can certainly be credited with taking this concept to higher levels in ultimately creating “Alfred Hitchcock presents...,” the title of an anthology series that Hitchcock hosted and produced. Nonetheless, it is also a fitting shorthand for how Hitchcock managed to mould his persona into an advertising asset.



Figure 16: Lubitsch in the prologue of *Die Puppe* (1919)

It should be noted that in the context of Lubitsch, this promotional approach is not without precedent. In fact, looking at Lubitsch’s filmography, this use of the director and his persona stepping in front of the camera is almost a natural

progression. All these examples formed a red thread in Lubitsch’s career from his early years of acting in Germany, when he not only appeared in films, but also appeared as ‘himself’ or ‘metteur-en-scène’ in the prologue to *Die Puppe* (Figure 16). Lubitsch, of course, started out as an actor. In fact, he never seemed to have

fully abandoned acting, reportedly acting out every role for his actors on set. Crucially, no actor ever won an Academy Award for a Lubitsch film.³⁸⁹ While, earlier in the 1930s, Lubitsch had bemoaned the scant significance which the audience accorded to the director, by the end of the decade he had found a way not only to identify himself to the audience, but also to capitalise on his public image to promote his films. One could even say that the audience had become not only the audience of his films, but also the audience of his performance.

Lubitsch was not only significantly aware of the significance of the director's role to the process of making a film. He also explored the possibilities of using the director's artistic persona in the promotional context of his films. To this end, he blurred the lines between the director behind the camera and star in front of it. Crucially, by the 1930s the term 'star' had no longer come necessarily to mean 'actor,' at least in Lubitsch's specific case. Lubitsch had recognised the implications of his prominence and the persona he had managed to forge and shape over the years through interviews, portraits and debates he conducted via newspaper articles.

This third section on the faring of both Lubitsch and his 'touch' in the 1930s has explored how the director and his emerging brand are negotiated in the context of the star discourse. Actors and actresses are among the most visible aspect of the film product, thus lending themselves greatly to promotional exploitation in the corresponding advertising campaigns. To maximise their promotional effect, some of these actors were built up as stars with their own star identity across films and crossing the line between public and private. Having been present in America for

³⁸⁹ Interestingly, Hitchcock holds the same dubious distinction, with the sole exception of Joan Fontaine winning the Academy Award for Best Actress for *Suspicion* (1941) at the ceremony held in 1942. A case could be made for these two 'directors' directors' having been perceived to be in such tight control of production that the individual achievement of an actor could not convince by the voting body of the Academy, which consisted of members of the industry.

more than a decade, Lubitsch also commanded the persona of an established director with its own recognition value. This raises the question of how the competing discourses of the star and the director are brought together and into harmony in the public discourse on their films.

Lubitsch paired with several stars over the years; his arguably most central collaboration in the United States was with French entertainer Maurice Chevalier, running its course over five films. This partnership proved interesting, as the two discourses on Chevalier and Lubitsch fed off each other and furthered each other symbiotically. Lubitsch's previous association with Continental sophistication found a site in Chevalier's Frenchman persona. In fact, the more overtly sexual connotations that the 'Lubitsch touch' assumed over the course of the 1930s may well have become possible but also acceptable in the Chevalier persona. Chevalier's waning American career following the collaboration suggests that the actor relied on the director's discourse just as much as Lubitsch needed Chevalier's star appeal, although the status of the star tends to overwhelm the presentation of their film, particularly in advertising discourse.

Following the split from Chevalier, Lubitsch explored more fully how his own image could help to promote his films. As a case in point, the first trailer in which Lubitsch himself appears behind a title card happened to be the final film he made with Chevalier. Lubitsch and the Lubitsch brand were now established, distinguished and recognisable enough to support the promotion of his films in both critical and advertising contexts – even at a time when brand names were considered of little help to this end. Rather than adding yet another layer to the 'Lubitsch touch,' the star discourse and Lubitsch's pairing with stars show just how powerful and effective the Lubitsch brand had become.

2.5 *The Lubitsch Touch and Studio Style or: Lubitsch and Paramount*

An overview of 1930s Hollywood history would not be complete without a word or two on Paramount in the context of the studio system and an exploration of Lubitsch's career in the same period. The main Hollywood studios were founded in the 1910s and grew over the subsequent decades before the system became porous over the 1940s and 1950s. Still, the association of this particular decade with the notion of a system is not accidental or random. In the 1930s, Hollywood was a "mature oligopoly" with "five companies dominat[ing] the screen in the United States."³⁹⁰ Vertically integrated, they controlled "stables of stars, writers, directors, producers, cameramen, and other artists and technicians"³⁹¹ as well as the rest of the life cycles of a film down to its exhibition in their own theatre chains.³⁹²

Richard Maltby describes the role of the director in the studio system as "more circumscribed [...] than critical concepts of directorial authorship would imply." Instead, the

justification for claims of directorial authorship in Hollywood stem from the director's supervisory control of the movie's visual appearance and its performances. Many of Hollywood's industrial practices qualified the extent to which this control was exercised, however: producer-director and even producer-director-writer teams were quite common features of Hollywood's collaborative processes.³⁹³

Balio echoes such an analysis, singling out "the growing domination of producers over the production process" and the related "diminished status of the director and

³⁹⁰ Tino Balio. "Part III: A Mature Oligopoly, 1930–1948." *The American Film Industry*. Tino Balio, ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. p. 253.

³⁹¹ Ibid..

³⁹² See Ibid. p. 254–255. Balio acknowledges that this extraordinarily powerful position had already been challenged in the late 1930s. However, the case did not reach the Supreme Court before 1948 and only then brought this era to an end. See Tino Balio. "Part III: A Mature Oligopoly, 1930–1948." *The American Film Industry*. Tino Balio, ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. p. 255.

³⁹³ Maltby. *Hollywood Cinema*. p. 139.

the screenwriter in the system”³⁹⁴ in the context of film authorship during this period. While “Working conditions for [directors, actors and screenwriters] somewhat improved as a result [of them forming unions], the control of production remained firmly in the grip of producers.”³⁹⁵

The studio system has therefore also been called the ‘era of the moguls.’ The term moguls has been used variously to identify studio founders, production executives and studio producers, categories that were not distinct in the system’s early years.³⁹⁶ For my purposes this somewhat blurred differentiation will suffice, not least because these categories not only varied from studio to studio but even from personality to personality.³⁹⁷ What is important is that the director, who arguably has since been given a status resembling the author in literature, was integrated into a system of production and that this system, at least potentially, if not actually, put him below others in the studio hierarchy.

It could be argued that film history has also complicated the issue. Although the studio system did not originate in the 1930s, its tight organisation of rosters of personnel, who had to be ‘loaned out’ rather than just freely accept work at the next studio, as well as tightening self-censorship, emphasised the perception of it being an almost ironclad system by this decade. The movement towards auteurism has suggested in particular that if individual authorship, located in the director, could flourish within such a tightly organised system, then this would indeed be a

³⁹⁴ Tino Balio. “Feeding the Maw of Exhibition.” *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939*. Tino Balio, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. p. 73. (= History of the American Cinema 5).

³⁹⁵ Balio. “Feeding the Maw of Exhibition.” p. 77.

³⁹⁶ See Matthew Bernstein. “Era of the Moguls: The Studio System.” *American Film History: Selected Readings, Origins to 1960*. Cynthia Lucia et al., eds. Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2015. p. 154.

³⁹⁷ For an entertaining illustration of this see Ethan Mordden sketching out of the personalities of Paramount’s Adolph Zukor and MGM’s Louis B. Mayer: “Zukor was the deal maker, out of reach in the Eastern boardrooms. He didn’t produce: he presented in name only. Zukor hired junior executives to turn out the films while he conceived the mergers, the bond issues, the certificates with the bank. Mayer, on the contrary, was the honcho in situ.” Ethan Mordden. *The Hollywood Studios: House Style in the Golden Age of the Movies*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988. p. 89.

considerable achievement. Andrew Sarris, for instance argues that “Ideally the strongest personality should be the director, and it is when the director dominates the film that the cinema comes closest to reflecting the personality of a single artist. A film history could reasonably limit itself to a history of film directors.”³⁹⁸ The auteurists found authorship in a system that arguably did not allow for creativity to flourish and which “connotes conformity rather than diversity, repetition rather than variation.”³⁹⁹ In this way, the auteurists provided Film Studies with artists and a worthy object of study, but at the expense of others being involved in what is necessarily a collaborative medium.⁴⁰⁰

More recently, Thomas Schatz, Douglas Gomery, Ethan Mordden and others have reframed the discussion of the Hollywood system to place the focus on industrial practice. In a rather emotional response to the popularity of the auteurist approach, Schatz expresses his “strong conviction” that producers and studio executives are “the most misunderstood and undervalued figures in American film history.”⁴⁰¹ Such an approach is intended to focus not only upon industry and trade practices, but also on executive personnel and crucially the studios as collaborative organisations. In fact, many of these studies are structured according to the studios. Hence, the impression that emerges is two-fold. First, these studies attempt to correct the picture of Hollywood film production organised in the studios by focusing on personnel who have otherwise been side-lined. Second, this approach reinforces the notion of a studio style.

³⁹⁸ Sarris. *The American Cinema*. p. 24.

³⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 20.

⁴⁰⁰ For all its shortcomings the auteurist approach must be seen in its historical context. This was when there was not yet such an established discipline. Sarris seems to perceive this point clearly, suggesting that a history of film directors “would certainly be a good start toward a comprehensive film history, but it would hardly explain everything to be found in thousands of movies.” (Sarris. *The American Cinema*. p. 24). Yet the approach proved too influential in both negative and positive terms for this qualification to be more widely acknowledged.

⁴⁰¹ Schatz. *The Genius of the System*. p. 8.

Indeed, Balio notes a veritable “‘authorship’ of distinctive house styles”⁴⁰² in this period. Production was so standardised – the same stars, sets, and subjects – that studios became associated with a certain look. However, while the same faces and the same stories could account for a certain consistency, it was the set designer in particular who was identified with the ‘look’ of the films. Balio argues that “Studio art departments potentially had the greatest impact on the look of a picture”⁴⁰³ and mentions the most powerful supervising art directors by name: Cedric Gibbons at MGM, Van Nest Polglase at RKO and Hans Dreier at Paramount. Similarly, Ethan Mordden counts the set designers amongst the most significant of Hollywood’s technicians, since they are “charged with creating the ‘look’ of each film, and, by synecdoche, the visual style of a studio’s entire output.”⁴⁰⁴

Where does this leave Lubitsch and his style, both having been established in this thesis as highly distinctive? For several reasons Lubitsch is an intriguing figure in this context. Firstly, Lubitsch is an accepted auteur; in fact so accepted that this is often stated nonchalantly or indeed not at all. With a style named after him, such a classification almost seems superfluous – of course, he was an auteur! Lubitsch spent the majority of his career in the studio system, but his career differs from that of some of his fellow auteurs. Unlike a significant number of others, Lubitsch never managed to go independent. He tried several times, but spent the vast majority of his career under the roof of some of the grandest and most established studios. All of these are today included in the so-called ‘Big Five:’ Warner before it was upgraded to a major studio in the 1920s; MGM intermittently between the late 1920s and early 1940s Fox; towards the end of his career; and most crucially, Paramount in the 1930s.

⁴⁰² Balio. “Feeding the Maw of Exhibition.” p. 73.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. p. 85.

⁴⁰⁴ Mordden. *The Hollywood Studios*. p. 12.

Lubitsch's time at Paramount will provide the main focus of this section. It comprised ten years, twelve films and his singular appointment as Head of Production between 1935 and 1936. Paramount had a long string of production heads in what was a rather tumultuous decade for them and Lubitsch's appointment ended abruptly after only twelve months. Still, Gomery is correct in writing that "This was certainly the only time in Hollywood studio history that such a noted director was given full creative control of a major studio's product."⁴⁰⁵

After leaving Warner Brothers, whose studio history has largely forgotten about his contributions,⁴⁰⁶ Lubitsch signed with Paramount, where he seems to have found an artistic home. Paramount's history is far more complex than those of the other studios. The studio went through many mergers, shifts and personnel reshuffles, with the archives being dispersed. As a result, no authoritative critical history has yet emerged. Instead, more popular chronicles in addition to chapters in critical studies of the individual studios and the system as a whole provide the historical background for this section.

To capture the essence of Paramount, Leslie Halliwell thus summarises the famed Paramount glow as a "penchant for smartness," a world "generally slightly naughty," "not at home with gangsters" or horror. Paramount "seemed to enjoy an element of harmless suggestiveness" and a clear "preference for night scenes

⁴⁰⁵ Douglas Gomery. *The Hollywood Studio System*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986. p. 39.

⁴⁰⁶ Charles Higham's summary of the Warner profile, that it "rejected schmaltz so beloved of other studios, particularly M-G-M [and that its films were] cynical, alert, committed, sharp-witted," may well be taken as an appropriate summary of the sophisticated comedies that Lubitsch made for Warner. However, when he writes that "Most Hollywood studios ha[d] been content simply to entertain, [while] Warner Brothers also sought to instruct," this could hardly be further from the notion of a Lubitsch film (Charles Higham. *Warner Brothers*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975. p. 1.). Generally, Lubitsch is hardly ever more than a footnote in Warner histories. Indeed, their studio style may be best summarised in the subtitle of in William Meyer's study of *The Warner Brothers Directors: The Hard-Boiled, the Comic, and the Weepers* (See Meyer. *The Warner Brothers Directors*). This may be a more fitting characterisation of the films that the studio produced after Lubitsch had already moved on. However, even in this, it is indicative in that a noteworthy studio identity of Warner Brothers focuses on their 1930s output rather than the decade before.

wherever possible.”⁴⁰⁷ With specific regard to Lubitsch, another history, *Paramount Pictures and the People Who Made Them*, is only mildly impressed with his contributions to the studio. Most of his films of the early 1930s only feature in passing and, if at all, as a mere foil to Mae West, as “The public was ready for something a little rougher than Lubitsch’s sophisticated digs at sex,” no matter “the sexy naughtiness that Lubitsch touched [the audience] with.”⁴⁰⁸

By contrast, it comes as little surprise that Lubitsch’s biographer Scott Eyman takes a more positive view, suggesting that, by the time Hollywood entered 1934, “Lubitsch’s influence was pandemic in Hollywood, and especially at Paramount, where his elegant, allusive manner had become the house style.”⁴⁰⁹ Similarly, Ethan Mordden, in his portraits of the studios, names Lubitsch’s *Trouble in Paradise* as “what may be the definitive Paramount movie,” for it contains, among others, Lubitsch “who, like his contemporary Josef von Sternberg typified the Paramount director as maximum leader of unique cinema,” the European setting and what was “Most Paramount of all in *Trouble in Paradise*[,] the droll nature of its sexuality.”⁴¹⁰

From the previous discussions of Lubitsch’s style it should be easy to recognise how Lubitsch’s ‘touch’ fitted Paramount’s style. Thus, while Lubitsch easily qualifies for auteur status with his ‘touch,’ he complicates the categories through which the studio system was organised. How was Lubitsch’s style perceived to be influenced or even compromised by the studio he was working for and its executives and producers? How was Lubitsch’s stint as head of production reported

⁴⁰⁷ Leslie Halliwell. *Mountain of Dreams: Golden Years of Paramount Pictures*. New York: Stonehill, 1976. p. X. Interestingly, he also notes that “fewer Paramount movies have become classics than can be counted from other Hollywood majors, but the studio’s product admirably maintains its aura,” an “unmistakable impression of the Hollywood dream of life.”

⁴⁰⁸ I. G. Edmonds and Reiko Mimura. *Paramount Pictures and the People Who Made Them*. San Diego: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1980. p. 191.

⁴⁰⁹ Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 202.

⁴¹⁰ Mordden. *The Hollywood Studios*. p. 20-21.

in the press, when he took a break from directing and essentially crossed over to the supervisory side at Paramount? How is personal expression negotiated when film is a necessarily collaborative medium and how is such a personal style negotiated in view of that of a major studio such as Paramount?

The following section approaches these questions from two angles. It looks at how Paramount functioned as a studio, but also examines how the role of others in the filmmaking process, such as studio officials at a more senior executive level or set designer Hans Dreier, is discussed in the public debates on Lubitsch and his films. Second, I will move on to how Lubitsch's influence on the studio was considered at that time, most crucially but not only when he was head of production. I will then seek to show that the studio hardly figures in the critical debates on Lubitsch's films, although there is a slight suggestion of a uniform style at the level of advertising. However, I will conclude that no distinctive brand identity emerges and none that would compromise that of the 'Lubitsch touch.'

In the 1930s then, house style was not a critically recognised category. Instead, it is a category more likely to have emerged retrospectively when similarities began to stand out from the output of a studio. The second part of this section will therefore centre on Lubitsch's attempt to resolve worries that his work as executive would influence the style of the directors working under him. While Douglas Gomery suggests that this may well have been the reality of Lubitsch's tenure, it can be taken as an attempt to restore authorship at directorial level. Ultimately, however, Lubitsch's tenure is itself the strongest indicator of the authorship that was manifested at an executive level, if executed by someone from the creative arm of film production. In terms of both the studio's influence on Lubitsch's work – considered only minimal by the early critics – and Lubitsch's

overriding influence on projects he was attached to in ‘only’ a supervisory or producing capacity, both of these were due to Lubitsch’s established prominence.

In being independent from the actual influence that a major studio like Paramount will have executed on one of its most prominent directors, the public discourse may well have perceived and negotiated Lubitsch’s influence in a different way. This difference is crucial for the reputation of the brand Lubitsch and Lubitsch’s individual style. Hence, what follows is less of an investigation into what was going on behind the scenes of Paramount production, but how such influence was perceived beyond the studio. Did the public discourse already perceive the studios as limiting individual creativity and if so, how did it negotiate the artistic expressions of individual artists, if that is what they were still perceived as? How did studio executives and others, such as set designers, figure in the discourse on Lubitsch’s films and in relation to the director?

By looking at examples from both the critical and the promotional discourse, it will emerge that a studio influence is noticeable in reports on production and in the promotion aimed at those involved in the trade, for instance exhibitors. However, this material was aimed less at the general public where the Lubitsch brand remained unchallenged and intact. Paramount’s and Lubitsch’s styles may have overlapped greatly, but even from this angle the style continued to be attributed to the director rather than the studio.

Interestingly, the notion of Hollywood as a tightly organised system and an environment potentially detrimental to artistic expression did not just enter the discourse with the emergence of film history, but in some decades before. Andre Sennwald, for instance, raised the issue as early as 1935. In an article entitled “Hollywood vs. *The Good Fairy*,” describing “the best screen comedy of the infant

year [but only due to] the low estate of humor in the 1935 cinema,” Sennwald strongly criticised “commercial cinema” and “Hollywood, [which,] with its vast production schedules and its time-clock system of manufacture, has little time for the invention of difficult visual devices.”⁴¹¹ He summarised the effects of such a system

We will never produce great directors so long as we force them to rush pictures through production without adequate preparation, requiring them to shoot from uncompleted scripts while the writers feverishly prepare the next scene, so that production schedules can be met and pictures delivered to the exhibitor like soap, automobiles and dated coffee.⁴¹²

The *New York Times* writer mercilessly attacks the studio system with its tight schedules set from above, claiming that this system will never produce great directors or films. It is notable that the system in which studio officials and managers were given considerable influence on the creative aspects of film production is thus negotiated and criticised in the public discourse of the time. In fact, Lubitsch was among the exceptions to Sennwald’s attack on the studio system, although he mainly focuses on René Clair, whose *A nous la liberté* (1931) had been only recently been revived. More generally, however, it is notable how aware journalists and critics already were of the tight studio organisation existing at this time.

There were also indicators, albeit rather on the side-lines of the discourse, that even a director as prominent as Lubitsch was still tied to a contract and studio obligations. These hints appeared most frequently in the industry paper *Variety*, which was closest to industry matters, rather than the exhibitors’ interests, as in

⁴¹¹ Andre Sennwald. “Hollywood vs. *The Good Fairy*: Regretfully Suggesting That Molnar’s Winged Fancies Have Been Daubed with the Slapstick Brush in the Film City,” Review of *The Good Fairy*. *New York Times* (10 February 1935), p. X5.

⁴¹² Ibid.

Moving Picture World and later *Motion Picture Herald*, the fans in fan magazines such as *Photoplay* and the general readership of the *New York Times*. Closer to the industry-side of film production and distribution, *Variety* arguably offered a more practical and less exalted view of the relationship between a studio and a director, no matter how prominent they were.

The trade paper reported in 1933 that “Lubitsch May Direct *Merry Widow* for MG.”⁴¹³ At this time, Lubitsch was still firmly contracted to Paramount and the note, comparably short and towards the bottom of page 3, touched upon Paramount’s consent: “Paramount has told Lubitsch it’s okay for one film, if made right away.” This is significant as “Par,” in notorious *Variety* speak, still had “two more films from Lubitsch, but would just as soon wait.”⁴¹⁴ The note did not give any details about these future projects, in terms of how source material was to be selected or actors cast and the extent to which Lubitsch would have freedom in these questions. However, the phrasing of the note as a whole emphasised Lubitsch’s contractual obligation to his main studio rather than his autonomy in choosing his own projects, at least without intervention from more senior studio executives. For as long as he was still under contract with Paramount, the studio had to give its permission to Lubitsch to make *The Merry Widow* for MGM.

Variety’s offshoot based in Hollywood reported similarly on a new Lubitsch project. The headline in *Daily Variety* read “*Carmen* Is Listed As Next For Lubitsch.” However, the text itself was slightly more ambiguous on the question of who had the last word in the selection process. While “It is understood that the director has okayed the assignment,” it is “Paramount [which] has selected *Carmen* as next production which Ernst Lubitsch will direct upon his return from Metro

⁴¹³ Anon. “Lubitsch May Direct *Merry Widow* for MG.” *Weekly Variety* 112.11 (21 November 1933), p. 3.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

where he finishes *Merry Widow* shortly.”⁴¹⁵ While the first example emphasised the contractual obligation that Lubitsch still had to fulfil to the studio, the second seemed to imply that it is the studio that has selected a project for the director, to which the director in turn has to agree. Evidently, this does not quite paint a portrait of the artist who selects projects according to his own vision.

Thus, in being independent from the directorial freedom that Lubitsch *actually* enjoyed as one of the prestigious and seasoned directors of the studio, his directorial authority, as represented in the two *Varieties*, still rests considerably on Paramount’s approval. *Variety* made this point rather playfully in a report on the “Doghouse for Baddies,” “wherein picture names are wont to rest during periods in which their particular studios feel they need chastisement [sic].”⁴¹⁶ “Gary Cooper,” for instance, as *Variety* noted, “has been in and out of Paramount’s doghouse so often he needs a new collar.” Hence, Cooper’s two-time director found himself in both doghouse and disgrace: “Ernst Lubitsch, when he first turned down *Design for Living*, received the silent treatment for [sic?] the studio.” The paper explained the issue further: “Everybody thought he was a bad boy for turning down the nice Noël Coward story.” Finally, “Lubitsch didn’t come out of the doghouse until he decided to do the picture, but he had it changed considerably from the play before he started.”⁴¹⁷ The headline of the article ‘Doghouse for Baddies’ was written in enormous letters, while its subtitle ‘But the Studios Always Relent’ was written in considerably smaller print. However, the conflict between Paramount and Lubitsch was only resolved when Lubitsch relented and agreed to make the film stipulated by the studio. Biographer Scott Eyman, for instance, does not mention any extraordinary events leading to the project of Lubitsch’s adaptation of Coward,

⁴¹⁵ Anon. “*Carmen* is Listed as Next for Lubitsch.” *Daily Variety* 4.28 (9 July 1934), p. 2.

⁴¹⁶ Anon. “Doghouse for Baddies: But Studios Always Relent.” *Weekly Variety* 3.13 (5 September 1933), p. 3.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

while the trade paper is more concerned with the issue. In these *Variety* examples, the power relationship between studio and director leant towards the former. As funny and playful as the metaphor of the doghouse may seem, Lubitsch's artistic freedom in selecting material appeared compromised by studio authority. Hence, there was the suggestion in a trade paper such as *Variety* that even a prominent director like Lubitsch had to negotiate with his studio for artistic freedom. This reality subtly qualifies the great authority he is usually afforded elsewhere in the critical discourse.

This level of interference was limited to the discussion of Lubitsch's films while they were being prepared or were in production. By the time it got to the review stage of the finished product, studio and studio officials played a subordinated, almost non-existent role. There, moguls hardly ever made an appearance and if they did (Adolph Zukor, for instance), their names were dropped right at the beginning of a review. Mordaunt Hall opened a review with the statement "Through the connivance of Adolphe [sic] Zukor and Ernst Lubitsch, Maurice Chevalier's prepossessing shadow was presented last night in a picture,"⁴¹⁸ the picture being *One Hour with You*. However, the remainder of the review centred on Lubitsch, his actors, and other personnel most prominently the writers and, of course, the plot.

Another example was the considerable buzz surrounding the production of *The Merry Widow*. The film had been in one of the circles of development hell for most of the 1930s before it was finally made in 1934. At one stage, *Variety* reported that Irving Thalberg was trying to win Lubitsch to direct the film on loan from

⁴¹⁸ Mordaunt Hall. "M. Chevalier Again," Review of *One Hour with You*. *New York Times* (24 March 1932), p. 17.

Paramount.⁴¹⁹ Although iconic then as now, MGM's *wunderkind* Production Head was later, credits aside, absent from the reviews of the film.⁴²⁰ Indeed, the focus was wholly on Lubitsch whose direction was singled out to have "give[n] the Metro *Widow* its distinctive flavor."⁴²¹

On *The Love Parade*, Hall wrote that Lubitsch "keeps control of his picture throughout, and although Ernst Vajda and Guy Bolton were credited with the book [...] in hands other than those of Mr. Lubitsch it might easily have been a tame affair."⁴²² Hall here acknowledges the writers' input, but still invests all authorial responsibility and the corresponding praise in the director. Writers were commonly mentioned in reviews of Lubitsch's films and so it proved an equally popular narrative to acknowledge them while still giving the main praise to Lubitsch's direction. It was then then only a small step to taking cinematic authorship away from the authors of the screenplay and handing it to the directors.

Critical Hollywood histories have considered other technicians, most crucially the set designer, to be responsible for the look of a film. Film reviews of the time often acknowledged the involvement of actors, writers and other personnel, particularly as Lubitsch had created a tight circle with a trusted crew around him. Yet, such musings beyond the mere mention of the sets were nonetheless rare.

Mordaunt Hall, so often sourced for more in-depth discussion of Lubitsch's films, went out of his way in his review of *Trouble in Paradise* to discuss the stylish look of the film. He pointed out that "Mr. Lubitsch has drawn heavily upon

⁴¹⁹ See, for instance, Anon. "Paramount Plans 65 Films for Year." *New York Times* (1 July 1933), p. 16 or anon. "Activities in Hollywood's Studios." *New York Times* (17 December 1933), p. X7, in which *The Merry Widow* is referred to as "Thalberg's production."

⁴²⁰ See, for instance, Anon. Review of *The Merry Widow*. *Daily Variety* 4.75 (1 September 1934), p. 3 or Andre Sennwald. "A Lubitsch Production of *The Merry Widow*, with Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier," Review of *The Merry Widow*. *New York Times* (12 October 1934), p. 33.

⁴²¹ McCarthy. Review of *The Merry Widow*. *Motion Picture Herald* 116.11 (8 September), p. 34.

⁴²² Mordaunt Hall. "M. Chevalier's Brilliant Work: Parisian Entertainer's Current Film, *The Love Parade* is Deftly Directed by Ernst Lubitsch," Review of *The Love Parade*. *New York Times* (24 November 1929), p. X6.

Paramount's resources for his scenic designs, which are an important adjunct to this flippant film."⁴²³ One such resource may certainly be set designer Hans Dreier who, although mostly uncredited, was listed in numerous Lubitsch films.⁴²⁴ Dreier had been another European import of Paramount⁴²⁵ and remained there as chief art director even after Lubitsch's departure.

In historical appraisals of Paramount, Dreier is a clear candidate for a leading position in shaping the studio's 'look.' Baxter argues that under Dreier, Paramount's films "achieved an opulence of surface never equalled by others, while its directors and stars brought to the American film sophistication and fantasy, which it would not have achieved alone."⁴²⁶ Eames agrees: Hans Dreier "was mainly responsible for the celebrated 'Paramount look' of elegance."⁴²⁷

However, for Hall it was the director who deserved all the praise for his use of design:

Here the director has a flair for beautiful clocks of various types and in one sequence, while the voices of two players are heard carrying on their bantering, all one sees is a clock on the table. When the characters pass into another room, there is still another clock. Upstairs there is a modernistic grandfather clock and outside a window there is the tower from which chimes tell the hour. The settings are lovely and spacious with meticulous attention to furnishings. No more inviting example of 1932 decorations has been offered on the screen.⁴²⁸

In fact, "In virtually every scene [it is] the lively imagination of the German producer [that] shines through and it seems as though he were the only person in

⁴²³ Mordaunt Hall. "Ernst Lubitsch's Shimmering Picture About Well-Dressed Thieves and Pickpockets," Review of *Trouble in Paradise*. *New York Times* (9 November 1932), p. 28.

⁴²⁴ See Anon. Entry on Hans Dreier. *Internet Movie Database* http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0237417/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1 (accessed 14 September 2015).

⁴²⁵ For research on set design with a European focus see Lucy Fischer. *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris, Sarah Street. *Film Architecture and the Transitional Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007 (= Film Culture in Transition) and Alastair Phillips. *City of Darkness, City of Lights: Emigré Filmmakers in Paris 1929-1939*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004 (= Film Culture in Transition).

⁴²⁶ John Baxter. *Hollywood in the Thirties*. London: A. Zwemmer, 1968. p. 33.

⁴²⁷ John Douglas Eames. *The Paramount Story*. London: Octopus, 1985. p. 31.

⁴²⁸ Mordaunt Hall. "Ernst Lubitsch's Shimmering Picture About Well-Dressed Thieves and Pickpockets," Review of *Trouble in Paradise*. *New York Times* (9 November 1932), p. 28.

Hollywood who could have turned out such a feathery story.”⁴²⁹ As usual, the review discussed plot, mentioning the source material as well as those who adapted it. However, Dreier and his team remained wholly anonymous and while their assistance is acknowledged in a nod to “Paramount’s resources,” the praise and vision as an entirety were invested in the director. As a result, the set design could indeed be taken as a part of the Paramount look. Crucially, Lubitsch’s authorship of the film dominates all other possible influences.⁴³⁰

Although the strong focus on Lubitsch as a central figure of the critical discourse will be familiar, it was crucial that he emerged as such in view of his collaboration with other members of the studio, executives or technicians. Studios and executive managers did not figure greatly at the critical level of reviews, even if their roles were slightly more acknowledged in the notes on pre-production and production. In fact, the notion of a studio style did not enter the Lubitsch discourse at all, for which there are two possible reasons, each equally possible and not mutually exclusive. First, studio style was a category developed only by later critics when they had access to studio output as a whole which could be analysed for common patterns. In other words, studio style was historically mainly implied in the industry practice of using and re-using the same props, sets and actors. Only in hindsight and in film history has it emerged as a stylistic category. Second, the notion of a Lubitsch style was overriding in the Lubitsch discourse that judged studio style simply not to figure at all, and even if it had existed in the critical

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Cecilia Ager, briefly referred to in the previous chapter, writes extensively about the look of *One Hour with You* in what is a general piece rather than a review of the film itself. In fact, she focuses more on the costumes of the characters, the “satins, velvets, furs and laces [which] must not be decried.” Ultimately, this “obvious richness of fabrics and exuberant detail” is deemed “Lubitsch luxury.” This particular look is thus related back to the director rather than any of the design departments. (Cecilia Ager. “Going Places: Insinuating Lubitsch.” *Weekly Variety* 106.3 (29 March 1932), p. 71.).

discourse of the 1930s, the Lubitsch and Paramount styles overlapped so greatly that it was not necessary, let alone possible, to distinguish between the two.

To test this hypothesis, I will turn in the rest of this section to promotional discourse, in which large advertising spreads displayed a strong sense of uniform studio style. The previous section on stardom showed how Lubitsch emerged only slowly in the advertising context of his films, and with particular force in the trailers employed of the second half of the 1930s. Hence, his lack of prominence in this context may compromise the notion of his authorship and the following analysis will show that, here, studio brand identity was not strong and that, in some instances, even served to showcase subtly the Lubitsch brand.

The studios were frequently mentioned in smaller adverts for individual films⁴³¹ or a small number of films.⁴³² These may or may not have included the mountain-top logo for Paramount or, as a point of comparison, the lion for MGM. Much more spectacular, however, were the longer advertising spreads in which the studios presented their entire catalogue for the current or forthcoming seasons. Paramount's spreads were particularly colourful and focused upon the studios' assets in terms of film titles, and rosters of stars, but also directors and writers. These also included the studios' logo or other trademarks such as various illustrations of the MGM lion with corresponding taglines such as "THAT LION IS ON THE LOOSE AGAIN!"⁴³³ Brand identity could then be detected in the logos, although the pages promoting the individual films in the Paramount spread did not feature any label reiterating the studio's involvement.

⁴³¹ Advert for *The Smiling Lieutenant*. *Motion Picture Herald* 103.9 (30 May 1931), no page. for a Paramount film or Advert for *The Merry Widow*. *New York Times* (15 October 1934), p. 20 for a film Lubitsch made for MGM.

⁴³² Advert for *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (31 August 1930), p. X4 or Advert for Paramount, "Hits before they leave the Studio." *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 100.13 (27 September 1930), p. 3-4.

⁴³³ Advert for MGM. *Daily Variety* 4.40 (23 July 1934), no page. (capitalisation in the original).

Aside from the studio logo, Paramount tried to differentiate itself from other studio with notes signed by Adolph Zukor⁴³⁴ or accompanied by his photograph.⁴³⁵ In addition to the rosters of stars, directors and writers, Paramount also included producers and tried to carve a studio identity out of texts on the studio's history and photographs or illustrations of the studio grounds. The overarching design of these adverts was strong and gave the spreads as a whole a sense of consistency that tied the films together as being produced by the same studio, although what particular flavour the studio actually stood for remained largely unaddressed. In pages dedicated to the individual Paramount films, the focus was on stars or illustrations.

In line with this approach, an advance announcement for what would later be released as *Design for Living* (then still titled "Morals and Marriage")⁴³⁶ featured Lubitsch's name in large lettering, but only a small still from already-attached star Fredric March. On the other hand, an advance announcement of the first Lubitsch-Chevalier collaboration, then still untitled but later to be *The Love Parade*,⁴³⁷ presented the smiling heads of both Chevalier and Lubitsch holding up respective title cards (Figure 17). What is more, a caption characterises the film as "Produced with all the lavish glamour, clever touches and expert polish for which Lubitsch is famous."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Advert for Paramount. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 95.11 (15 June 1929), no page.

⁴³⁵ Advert for Paramount 1931-2 Season. *Motion Picture Herald* 103.5 (2 May 1931), no page.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Advert for Paramount. *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 99.9 (31 May 1930), no page.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

The inclusion of Lubitsch, outside the director's roster and inside one of the film adverts, was not particularly emphasised and yet it was still an out-of-the-

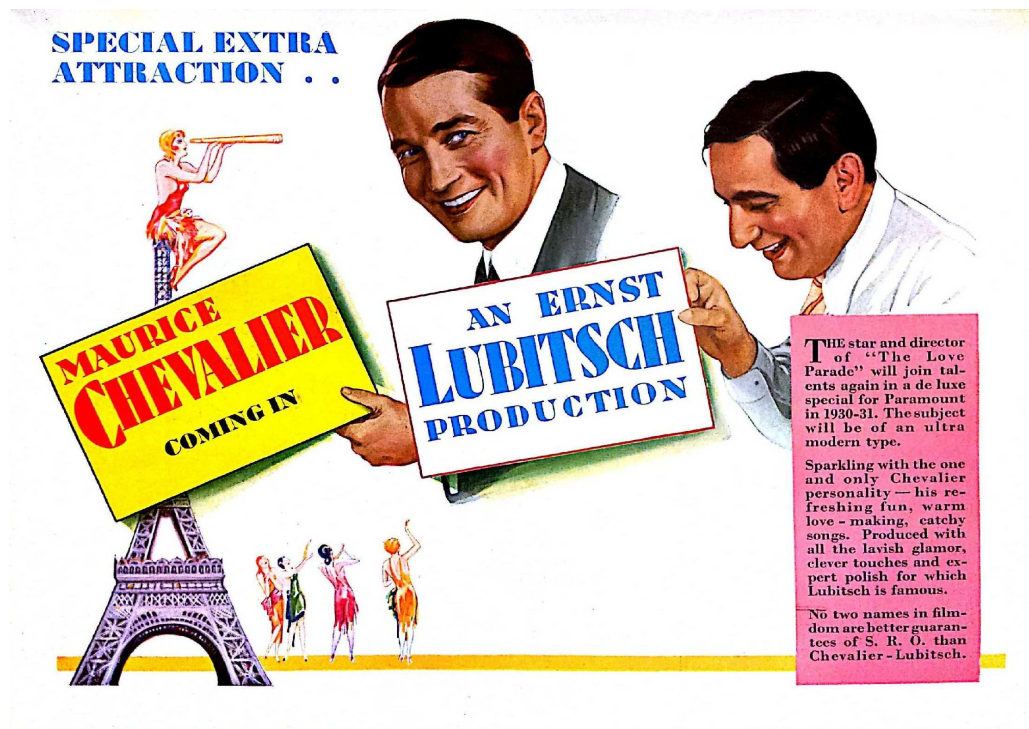


Figure 17: Lubitsch appears in the Paramount spread (1930).

ordinary occurrence in these spreads. The duo is applauded by illustrations of much smaller ladies in cocktail dresses. Otherwise, though crucially, the scene includes only an illustration of *le tour Eiffel*. The advert therefore subtly plays into the brand that Lubitsch had already established over the course of the 1920s and that was to be developed even further during the Chevalier co-operations to come. This fairly sparse advert therefore managed to retain the distinct flavour so often mentioned in the context of the Lubitsch brand. However, it does not compete with the homogenous look that the spread aims for overall. Lubitsch's authority is subtly preserved, while the consistent brand of the studio is also kept intact.

These large spreads predominantly appeared in trade papers focusing on industry matters and not least targeting exhibitors in particular; the effect on the general readership is therefore debatable. What is more, while these adverts displayed a considerable uniformity in design across the whole spread, no clear brand identity emerged. If anything, the Paramount spreads made the films in question appear colourful. Various illustrations of lions marched through the spreads for MGM while, in the following decade, the slogan “More stars than there are in heaven” would become famous. However, Paramount showcased its roosters just as prominently. Clear brand identities cannot be detected, which is in line with what Vinzenz Hediger has observed.⁴³⁹

The example of large advertising spreads is then the one instance in which the studios figure more prominently in the discourse on Lubitsch’s films, although this was not emphasised to the extent it could have been. One of the reasons for this is that these spreads may well have been associated with the practice of block booking. Through this practice, exhibitors had to accept the bulk of a studio’s output in order to secure its premier quality material. Not surprisingly, this deal often left exhibitors increasingly frustrated and dissatisfied.⁴⁴⁰ Thus, although these spreads sought to present the whole output in the best light possible, the sheer length of these spreads, especially Paramount’s, may just have backfired and produced the opposite effect.

In summary, studio and executives did not feature prominently in the public discourse on Lubitsch, be it critical or promotional. Indeed, the large advertising

⁴³⁹ See Hediger. *Verführung zum Film*. p. 23.

⁴⁴⁰ See for instance Yannis Tzioumakis. *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. p. 26. Tzioumakis connects these oppressive trading practices, especially on Paramount’s part, to the rise of resistance and movement towards independence. See also Balio. “Part III: A Mature Oligopoly, 1930–1948.” p. 258. He calls the practice “without a doubt the most contested [...] in the business.” The problem was not the quantity of pictures as theatre owners needed a large number of films to fill their playing time, but the range of quality the films came in.

spread announcing the catalogue for the next season bore the strongest marker of studio dominance in negotiation with the director. It is interesting to note that in the critical discourse the studio hardly figured at all and that this was a promotional category, although its significance should not be overstated. Instead the Lubitsch brand and the corresponding presentation of Lubitsch as a director with an individual style remained intact and were mainly unhampered by studio obligations.

While the trade papers suggest that the studio influences Lubitsch's decisions early into the production, this influence disappears when they report on a project at later stages. Other areas of the film process – namely, writing but also set design, the latter of which today is often credited for a studio's distinctive 'look' – figured little or barely at all in critical response to the films. If anything, they were subordinated to the direction and was seen as assisting the director in the expression of his vision. It should be reiterated that this is not necessarily a realistic depiction of how the production actually played out. Instead, it sought to address how Lubitsch's authorship is represented in the public discourse in the light of the dominance of the studio for which he worked. The following section will turn this perspective around and investigate how a director may have placed his individual stamp on Paramount.

The previous section examined how the studio, senior executives and studio technicians exerted influence on Lubitsch's films. My analysis of examples as varied as reviews and large promotional spreads has suggested that the influence they held was not very strong, at least not upon the finished product. Large promotional spreads displayed the larger unity of the whole seasonal product of the studio, but a strong brand identity or differentiation from other studios was not discernible. Ultimately, the influence that the studios were seen to have on Lubitsch can be considered negligible.

In the reverse sense, Lubitsch was always a prominent asset to his studios. Previous discussion has already established just how prominently Lubitsch figured as a director not only in the reviews of his films, but also in his interviews or portraits. Surprisingly, halfway through his time at Paramount, the studio appointed Lubitsch to Head of Production, the most prominent director to have ever held such a position. In hindsight the move was not wholly unexpected. Lubitsch had always shown interest in wider industry matters beyond the creative input of his own films. Moreover, he had always been a director interested in going beyond the creative side of his profession. The division between artistic direction and the practical management of film as an industry poses the question how of Lubitsch trod this fine line and how the press negotiated his crossing over to a managerial post, particularly given that his status as a creative had been cemented by the existence of his 'touch.'

Lubitsch's move, then, raises the question of whether authorship could then also be considered at the executive level of a major studio, although it had been previously located in the role of the director. After following Lubitsch's road to his post and the reception of his appointment, this section will chart how the 'touch,' as the expression of his artistry, figured within the context of Lubitsch's managerial post. We will see that while this experiment of appointing of a creative director to the post of a studio executive was welcomed, the 'touch' made an unexpected appearance in discussions of its relation to the works of other Paramount directors. Ultimately, Lubitsch's stint as Head of Production complicates our notion of directorial film authorship and suggests that, in the 1930s, it could also be located at more senior managerial levels. The tension between these public assurances and what can be assumed was the reality behind the scenes suggests that film authorship was not only much more flexible, but it was also crucially tied to the Lubitsch brand rather than the position he occupied at a given time.

The portraits mentioned in earlier sections of my discussion provide ample proof of Lubitsch's interest in the wider aspects of film beyond his own filmmaking. With Andre Sennwald, Lubitsch had chatted widely about issues of censorship and the status of cinema in relation to more established arts such as theatre.⁴⁴¹ We should also not overlook the remarkable article discussed early into the stardom section, in which Lubitsch himself made the distinction between "directors [who] are supposed to be the artistic chaps [and are] not supposed to have a head for business."⁴⁴² Lubitsch had always been interested in his art as well as the wider context of its industry, and he had been happy to discuss these questions with journalists.⁴⁴³ Hence, Lubitsch had proven for some time that he was one of the directors who were deeply invested in their art, as well as having 'an eye for business.'⁴⁴⁴

Moreover, Lubitsch had been assigned production duties as early as 1929.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, in autumn 1930, he was appointed to head Paramount's Astoria studios in New York. In spite of a relatively positive response to the personnel matter – Mordaunt Hall, for instance, wrote that "one may anticipate that [Lubitsch's] fine handiwork will not only shine in special productions which he is to direct himself but also in others of twenty films to be made in the East"⁴⁴⁶ –, the papers hardly

⁴⁴¹ Andre Sennwald. "A Word with Ernst Lubitsch: Under Cross-Examination, the Director of *The Merry Widow* Discusses Some of the Cinema Topics of the Day." *New York Times* (14 October 1934), p. X5.

⁴⁴² Anon. "Lubitsch's Analysis of Pictures Minimizes Director's Importance." *Weekly Variety* (1 March 1932), p. 2.

⁴⁴³ See, for instance, Anon. "Lubitsch on Directing." *New York Times* (16 December 1923), p. X5, Sumner Smith. "Ernst Lubitsch Describes Novel Method of Preparing a Picture for Production." *Moving Picture World* 54.1 (7 January 1922), p. 53-54 or Anon. "Director Lubitsch Also Has an Eye for Business." *Moving Picture World* 64.3 (15 September 1923), p. 276.

⁴⁴⁴ It should be noted, however, that Lubitsch was appointed to supervise the creative aspects of production, while Henry Herzbrun was to deal with financial matters.

⁴⁴⁵ See Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 225-226.

⁴⁴⁶ Mordaunt Hall. "Brilliant Direction and Keen Wit in Screen Musical Comedy," Review of *Monte Carlo*. *New York Times* (7 September 1930), p. X5.

went overboard in reporting on his Eastern activities.⁴⁴⁷ In hindsight, however, the move may have commended Lubitsch for greater tasks to come in spring 1935. When Paramount re-emerged from bankruptcy in 1935, Lubitsch was among the studio executives,⁴⁴⁸ having been appointed on 4 February 1935.⁴⁴⁹ Lubitsch had been Paramount's most acclaimed director since 1928, as John Douglas Eames points out in his *Paramount Story*. So while the move was unprecedented, in retrospect it does not come entirely out of the blue. His dismissal in February 1936 was met with much less of a media response than his appointment a mere twelve months earlier.

Lubitsch's profile did not change significantly when he turned studio official. During his time 'at the helm,' he made appearances as production head in the *Herald's* "The Camera Reports." This feature tended to focus on studio officials and others involved with production, but hardly ever featured Lubitsch as 'mere' director.⁴⁵⁰ On occasion, the papers went into detail on a particular issue that fell under Lubitsch's responsibility as production head, for instance, Lubitsch's bickering with Josef von Sternberg over *The Devil is a Woman* (1935).⁴⁵¹ Douglas Churchill, in his write-up of the situation, acknowledged that Lubitsch himself is "a

⁴⁴⁷ The appointment is reported on for instance in Anon. "Fun in Various Forms: Firm of Past Week Range from Slapstick to Retrained Comedy-German Operetta." *New York Times* (19 October 1930), p. 117 or Anon. "Lubitsch Now Heads Eastern Production of Paramount Film." *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture World* 100.10 (6 September 1930), p. 41. Several months later, positive and complimentary reports appear on the Eastern plant "cruising under full steam for the first time" Anon. "Eastern Producing." *New York Times* (8 March 1931), p. 112. See also Anon. "What Lubitsch Told Zukor About Coast Studio's Pomp Makes East Fair-Haired." *Weekly Variety* 102.3 (1 April 1931), p. 7. The former mentions Lubitsch among other personnel shifted East, while the latter assigns Lubitsch some agency with the "Paramount Publix head [Zukor] cit[ing] Lubitsch's highly complimentary opinions on eastern team-work as against w.e.[?] fol-de-rol and pomp." Yet, this hardly places him centre stage.

⁴⁴⁸ Eames. *The Paramount Story*. p. 37.

⁴⁴⁹ Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 225.

⁴⁵⁰ See for instance Photograph in "The Camera Reports." *Motion Picture Herald* 118.7 (23 February 1935), p. 46, Photograph in "The Camera Reports." *Motion Picture Herald* 119.4 (27 April 1935), p. 15, whose captions however reads that Lubitsch will "edit" a certain piece of film, or Photograph in "The Camera Reports." *Motion Picture Herald* 119.12 (29 June 1935), p. 10, which explicitly refers to Lubitsch "heading Paramount production."

⁴⁵¹ Douglas W. Churchill. "Intimations of Spring in the West." *New York Times* (10 March 1935), p. X3.

product of the megaphone [and as such] believes that the director is the most important person on a studio lot.” However, when Churchill wrote that “Mr. Lubitsch is not having an easy time with Josef von Sternber[g],”⁴⁵² Lubitsch was clearly cast as a studio executive who has to resolve creative differences with a director rather than as a director bickering with a fellow director (which those two however also certainly did).⁴⁵³

Lubitsch’s appointment is not only noteworthy in terms of his previous occupation as a director and film creative. Even amongst this group of professionals, Lubitsch stood out not only as having a creative mind, but even more as having an identifiable style – the ‘touch.’ My discussion of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ can therefore reveal the most interesting negotiation of Lubitsch and his authorship in the light of his promotion to Head of Production. One issue picked up by at least two of Lubitsch’s biographers is the concern of the time that, following Lubitsch’s appointment, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ would wash over the whole Paramount output and, crucially, over the work of other directors.

Hans Helmut Prinzler characterises Lubitsch’s work as production head as flexible, arguing that he did not impose his style on the films in production and co-operated well with the directors under his supervision.⁴⁵⁴ Scott Eyman echoes this depiction of Lubitsch, although he words his analysis more strongly: “As far as the

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ See Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 228. After von Sternberg had called Lubitsch’s *The Patriot* ‘scheiße’ (shit) to Emil Jannings’ face, the relationship between the directors had been “quietly antagonistic.” *Variety*, a few years after this incident must have taken place, reports that Lubitsch and von Sternberg were friends “again” after a feud surrounding von Sternberg’s *Blonde Venus* (1932). Anon. “Von Sternberg and Lubitsch Again Pals After *Venus* Feud.” *Weekly Variety* 111.4 (4 July 1933), p. 2.

⁴⁵⁴ See Hans Helmut Prinzler. “Berlin, 29.1.1892–Hollywood, 30.11.1947: Bausteine zu einer Lubitsch-Biografie.” p. 50. (“[Lubitsch] verhält sich flexibel, zwingt dem Produktionsprogramm nicht seinen Stil auf und kooperiert gut mit den ihm anvertrauten Regisseuren”) Prinzler’s evaluation of Lubitsch’s stint is ultimately positive, although he singles out Mae West as his one big opponent, a conflict that does not figure in the public discourse at all.

other directors on the Paramount lot were concerned, their biggest immediate problem was their fear that Lubitsch would attempt to impose his style on them.”⁴⁵⁵

It is important then to consider that this concern indeed spread to the public discourse responding to the appointment at the time. *Motion Picture Herald*’s Hollywood correspondent Victor Shapiro considered the appointment as a moment of great opportunity. He quoted Lubitsch in a speech directed at Paramount’s directors, “‘This is the first time [...] that a studio head has been appointed who knows your problems and is sympathetic to them.’”⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, if anything, as Lubitsch continued, he himself “want[s] to learn from you boys what I don’t know.”⁴⁵⁷ This promise of a “freer rein” was significant, as Lubitsch himself, as Shapiro points out, was known for “his own inclination toward subtlety and sophistication in pictures.”⁴⁵⁸ In this speech then, Lubitsch passed beyond simply hailing the ‘great opportunity’ of a creative director reaching executive level, in order to respond better and more accurately to the needs of his fellow directors. Therefore, Lubitsch did his best to underplay the issue and dissipate any concerns of this kind. This approach on his part is also echoed by Idwal Jones, who reported that Paramount “intends to make sixty-four films in the coming year [but that] doesn’t mean they will all be ‘Lubitsch films.’”⁴⁵⁹

However, the *New York Times* had already addressed this issue in a lengthy article published within weeks of Lubitsch’s appointment. For this piece, Lubitsch confirmed that “each [type of director, be it the genius-directors, which Lubitsch calls ‘phonies’ possibly in a dig aimed at von Sternberg, and the ‘script-shooters’

⁴⁵⁵ Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 226.

⁴⁵⁶ Lubitsch quoted in Victor M. Shapiro. “The Hollywood Scene.” *Motion Picture Herald* 118.6 (16 February 1935), p. 53.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Victor M. Shapiro. “The Hollywood Scene.” *Motion Picture Herald* 118.6 (16 February 1935), p. 53.

⁴⁵⁹ Idwal Jones. “And an Incidental Excursion Through the Paramount Film Factory.” *New York Times* (22 September 1935), p. X4.

“who must follow the written word literally,” but despite the apparently derogatory term are “of great value”] has his place and will be allowed to work in it.” What is more, Lubitsch promised that “There will be no imposition of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ formula on any one [sic?].”⁴⁶⁰

This reference to the famous phrase may be just shorthand as, by this point, the ‘touch’ had been firmly established. Still, this point is interesting, as it implies that the multiplication of ‘Lubitsch touches’ across Paramount films is not something that was desired once Lubitsch had been appointed into this general supervisory position. In fact, Lubitsch worked hard at allaying any concerns of this kind. If the ‘Lubitsch touch’ had become established as a mark of distinction and has been considered as such ever since, then this was a rare occasion when Lubitsch used the term against itself to address concerns that he might abuse his new power. Even in this disowning of his style in having attained such a supervisory position, the suggestion is that Lubitsch could have, and even may have, executed his authorship at the executive level of Head of Production.

Such reassurances may well have been made under a certain pretence to calm both the directors and the general public. This would fit with Maureen Furniss’s suggestion that Lubitsch was promoted away from frontline director’s duties in order not to run into any more problems with the censors.⁴⁶¹ Yet, this raises the question of why Paramount opted for such an idiosyncratic high-profile appointment, one that was always bound to make waves. Although Paramount was not blessed with continuity at executive level in these stormy years of the 1930s, “all of Hollywood thought it was a weird choice.”⁴⁶² All of Lubitsch’s attributes spoke for him – a firm and longstanding position in Hollywood, his interest in industry

⁴⁶⁰ D.W.C. “Lubitsch at the Helm: As Paramount head, He is the Hub of an Interesting Experiment.” *New York Times* (31 March 1935), p. X4.

⁴⁶¹ See Furniss. “Handslapping in Hollywood.” p. 61.

⁴⁶² Gottfried Reinhardt, Max Reinhardt’s son, quoted in Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 225.

matters beyond his own filmmaking and his ability to keep to budget – yet his fortune at the box office proved fickle in many stretches of his career.

What is more, the events surrounding the production of *One Hour with You* through 1931–1932 do in fact suggest that Paramount intended to maximise the potential of Lubitsch and his style. Eyman observes that, “Since Lubitsch was heavily involved with *The Man I Killed*, Paramount decided that Lubitsch should only ‘supervise’ the production of *One Hour with You*,”⁴⁶³ instead of directing it as had initially been intended. One knock-on effect of Lubitsch’s workload, *Love Me Tonight* was also affected and eventually handled by Rouben Mamoulian, but clearly “made on the Lubitsch model.”⁴⁶⁴ Aside from the skirmishes that went on between the directors the suggestion here is that Paramount was at least trying to spread the ‘Lubitsch touch’ across as many projects as possible. If this was not the main incentive behind Paramount’s decision, it may well have added to it. Douglas Gomery follows a similar line of reasoning when he summarises Lubitsch’s approach to supervising production:

Lubitsch adopted a ‘retake and remake’ procedure whereby a feature could be put back into production after principal photography had been completed if Lubitsch deemed there were ways to improve it. He centralized story purchases in his office, and took a very tough line *vis-à-vis* fellow directors.⁴⁶⁵

The observation here is that Lubitsch did in fact exert considerable authorial influence on other directors’ work. Hence, the public promise that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ would not wash over non-Lubitsch films may have been well intended, but it did not seem to have been a practical reality in daily routine. Tino Balio is right in

⁴⁶³ Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 185. Lubitsch eventually went beyond merely a supervisory involvement on *One Hour with You* and demanded that his name was restored to the picture’s discourse and that the name of the make-shift director, one George Cukor, then still closer to the beginning of his career, be taken off. Cukor, to say the least, was not happy and took the matter to court, but Paramount eventually bowed to Lubitsch’s greater seniority.

⁴⁶⁴ Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 203.

⁴⁶⁵ Gomery. *The Hollywood Studio System*. 1986. p. 39.

noting that “The concept of authorial freedom as it is understood today did not exist in Hollywood during the thirties.”⁴⁶⁶

Curiously, Balio then writes that this is the case “Not even when Paramount made Ernst Lubitsch head of production in 1935.”⁴⁶⁷ Lubitsch’s appointment was, in fact, not an exception, but the prime example of the case that he makes. Such a reaffirmation was aimed at keeping intact the authorship of those acting as directors on these films. In fact, the public discourse managed to anticipate later concepts of film authorship, when arguably this was not the case during Lubitsch’s tenure. Film authorship, as conceived in the 1930s, was considerably different from the notion that has since emerged in Film Studies. Despite the assurances in the public discourse that directorial authority would remain on a directorial level and not be invested in the director who had moved up to head of production, this seems precisely to have been the case.

The need for such public statements hence underlines the attempts to locate cinematic authorship with the director. In reality, however such statements were attached to certain prominent filmmakers, whether they were directing or heading production. Lubitsch’s appointment therefore represents, ironically, the most curious example standing against later auteurist arguments of vesting authorship with the director. For Lubitsch was *not* a director between 1935 and 1936, when he was “given full creative control of a major studio’s product.”⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, this creative control was not that of a film director, even if this particular Head of Production also happened to have a head for directing. Although this head of production also happened to have a head for directing, authorship and authority in this case were to be located on executive level.

⁴⁶⁶ Balio. “Feeding the Maw of Exhibition.” p. 79.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Gomery. *The Hollywood Studio System* (1986). p. 39.

Such a claim seems to be confirmed by the discourse on the films for which Lubitsch is only credited with production rather than direction. *Desire*, starring Marlene Dietrich, was produced by Lubitsch but directed by Frank Borzage, which may have proven a challenging constellation for reviewers.

The *New York Times* had no such qualms. Frank Nugent went all out in highlighting Lubitsch as the film's producer, while Frank Borzage also received mention. In fact, Nugent insisted that "One should not overlook the skill of its director, Frank Borzage"⁴⁶⁹ – yet did not practice what he preaches. It was "Ernst Lubitsch, the Gay Emancipator, [who] ha[d] freed Marlene Dietrich from Josef von Sternberg's artistic bondage" and the film proved "the genius of its producer."⁴⁷⁰ Lubitsch may not have taken his seat in the director's chair during production. Still, the fact that it was a Lubitsch production was "constantly highlighted by those indefinable touches of his."⁴⁷¹ 'Indefinable' as they were deemed, these 'Lubitsch touches' were taken to prove the firm grip that Lubitsch held over production acting 'only' as the film's producer. Here, as little as studio producers figure in the negotiation of Lubitsch-directed films, Lubitsch still managed to exude great prominence in a film that was actually directed by somebody else.⁴⁷²

Whether Lubitsch's authority and influence on the production process largely relied on his position of producer rather than director, as Thomas Schatz has

⁴⁶⁹ Frank Nugent. "A Delightful Comedy Romance is *Desire*, at the Paramount," Review of *Desire*. *New York Times* (13 April 1936), p. 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² As an example of how to approach the film differently, Scott Eyman, in his discussion of *Desire*, emphasises the collaborative nature of the film's production. He argues that *Desire* "Cross-pollinat[es] Lubitsch's taste in plot and characters with director Frank Borzage's ability to articulate emotional resonance." Eyman also makes a side comment, one not least suggesting Borzage's influence on the finished product: "The actors get more close-ups than Lubitsch might have given them if he'd directed the film himself, but Borzage's gentle eroticism matches up nicely with the usual Lubitsch playfulness, and the dialogue by Edwin Justus Mayer, Waldemar Young, and Samuel Hoffenstein sparkles with an elegant melancholy." (Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 240-241.).

argued,⁴⁷³ is of lesser importance – audiences may well have been hard pressed to know the difference. More crucially, Schatz goes on, “[s]uch authority came only with commercial success and was won by filmmakers who proved not just that they had talent but that they could work profitably within the system.”⁴⁷⁴ While Lubitsch’s financial track record was not exactly spotless,⁴⁷⁵ the case of Ernst Lubitsch suggests that, in the 1930s, authorship was often to be found in the more prominent or at least established and authoritative personnel.

In the context of their discussion of *The Merry Widow* and focused on the musical, Bruce Babington and Peter Evans offer an intriguing argument for how Lubitsch’s authorship in the 1930s is to be understood. Dismissing a “naïve auteurist approach of attributing every aspect and meaning to a single authorial source,”⁴⁷⁶ they recognise that, “Like other directors, Lubitsch worked within severe economic, mass audience, and ideological constraints, and he worked, especially in the musical, in an intensely collaborative form.” At the same time, as they continue,

Lubitsch was exceptional in the Hollywood system. A figure both eccentric and central, at once an artist and an executive, he projected himself, before the age of the ‘director as superstar,’ as a public presence, one of the few directors whose name was blazoned on publicity and constantly mentioned by reviewers.⁴⁷⁷

The following section then takes its lead from Babington and Evans by comparing Lubitsch to Hitchcock, exploring how both directors “cultivated a look” and contrasting Lubitsch to Busby Berkeley insofar that Lubitsch was a “conscious Hollywood artist.” Although disowning an auteurist approach, Babington and Evans

⁴⁷³ Schatz. *The Genius of the System*. p. 5-6.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 6.

⁴⁷⁵ See, for instance, Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 212.

⁴⁷⁶ Babington and Evans. *Blue Skies and Silver Linings*. p. 76.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

acknowledge Lubitsch's distinguished position as both a creative artist and, although not explicitly, with regard to this position, as a studio executive.

Lubitsch complicates the categories of both a studio style and that of film authorship located in the director. Lubitsch's style epitomised Paramount's style in this decade to the extent that the two were indistinguishable for critics of the 1930s. In terms of the projects to which Lubitsch's name is attached, the director found his brand intact though not necessarily showcased. As the two were so closely related, the studio style that was later observed did not compromise that of the director. What is more the role of the studio hardly figured in the discussions of Lubitsch, which further allowed the discourse to represent him as an artist unhampered by obligations that the studio system may have imposed upon him or other directors.

Lubitsch's time heading production at Paramount suggests that authorship then was considered possible at an executive level. This proved to be the case no matter how much Lubitsch tried to tone such worries down publicly, or indeed how film culture and Film Studies alike have since allowed for contexts that privilege the director above everyone else, stars possibly excepted. Film authorship in the 1930s was still not fixed in critical categories such as that of the director, but was instead fluid enough to take on various forms. In addition, the notion of a studio style has appears to have been developed retrospectively when the output of a studio as a whole could be viewed and scanned for similarities.

With regard to Lubitsch, his case would seem singular rather than more widely applicable, with his authorship being far less tied to the role he occupied – as director, producer, head of production – and instead to the name itself. The 'Lubitsch touch' is a logical extension of this, or rather having preceded this conception of Lubitsch's authorship, it is an encapsulation of what it meant to have Lubitsch attached to a project in whatever capacity. In this way, the term figures as

one way of framing authorial expression in the midst of many competing voices; that is, many competing locations in which authorship could be located and where such concepts were not yet fixed.

Lubitsch's exceptional stint as Production Head, as short-lived and mixed as its success may have been, provides an opportunity to test the authorship of a director later deemed to be an auteur. Lubitsch was naturally taken to be an auteur not least for his pronounced and identified style, and for his attempts to go independent, though these proved futile towards the end of the decade. Instead, he continued to make the vast majority of his films under the roofs of some of the largest studios in Hollywood.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter on the 1930s has provided a panoramic overview of certain aspects of film history relevant to this study. The resulting discussion has been governed, on the one side, by an exploration of elements of 1930s Hollywood history, and on the other by an analysis of the public negotiation of Lubitsch's authorship and style. We have explored the technical innovation following the introduction of sound; the negotiation of sexuality against the background of tightening censorship from 1930 onwards; stardom, as one of the most visible aspects of the creation and promotion of films in the era; and finally studio production in the context of individual film authorship. Sound aside, none of these issues originated in the 1930s, but they arguably reached a peak in this decade and, more importantly, were central to Lubitsch's filmmaking in this era of Hollywood cinema.

When Lubitsch turned to sound filmmaking, he did so by dabbling in the genre which had only recently been made possible thanks to technical innovation in sound. Lubitsch's contributions to the musical have been recognised in film-

historical studies of the genre, while his musical comedies were popular both with their initial critics and audiences. Intriguingly, the genre experienced difficulties within years of its inception, and just at the moment when Lubitsch was entering the musical scene. This apparent contradiction managed to be resolved by 1930s critics and promoters painting the previous instalments of the genre as old-fashioned, while the 'Lubitsch touch' was framed as invigorating a waning genre.

The second section of this chapter then looked at the negotiation of sexual content in Lubitsch in relation to increased power of the Production Code Administration. Lubitsch is an obvious candidate to run into problems with the Office, as the subject matter of many of his films could easily have been considered problematic. Maureen Furniss's analysis of the Production Code files relating to Lubitsch films has suggested that Lubitsch was facing an increasingly stiff wind from this direction. Yet, evidence remains ultimately sketchy as to how Lubitsch's artistry and the 'touch' in particular were hampered by the censors from 1930 onwards. Surprisingly, in the early years of the decade in particular, Lubitsch seems to have enjoyed a strikingly favourable reputation with the Production Code Administration. In other words, he was known to dabble routinely in problematic material, but rather as someone who would treat such problematic material appropriately and tactfully.

What is more, an investigation into the public discourse of the decade suggests that, on the one hand, both critics and promoters recognised a more overtly sexual subtext lurking just under the surface of his films. On the other hand, however, both of the above seemed for the most part to enjoy such a development thoroughly. Whether or not Lubitsch was actually compromised in his artistic independence behind the scenes, the public discourse continued to have confidence that the 'touch' was intact.

The third section on Lubitsch's collaboration with stars and, most importantly Maurice Chevalier, was then closely related to this analysis of the public evaluation of Lubitsch's treatment of sex. Here we looked at how this co-operation is particularly interesting for its symbiotic nature, which then allowed Chevalier to become a big star. At the same time, Chevalier's 'performed' Frenchness, even more than his actual Frenchness, provided a site to play out and develop the connotations with which Lubitsch had already become associated in the previous decade. The nature of this partnership shows that the director too had, by then, established a brand strong enough to match that of a star performer such as Chevalier.

Accordingly, Lubitsch began to explore his own, if you will, star image following the end of the collaboration with Chevalier. While Lubitsch had always been extremely prominently placed in the critical discourse, both through reviews and additional texts such as portraits, interviews and even set reports, he tentatively began to cooperate with his inclusion in print advertising. The promotional media then received a considerable boost when Lubitsch additionally explored the use of his image in trailers for his films. Initially, these cameo appearances were limited to title cards, but Lubitsch was eventually written into a trailer narrative that broke the fourth wall and had him cross the line into the diegesis. Such a move proved particularly effective, because the mixing of narrated and real worlds can never be resolved; it therefore maximised the impact of Lubitsch's recognition as 'the director.'

This chapter then concluded with a consideration of the role of the studio in the context of Lubitsch and the 'Lubitsch touch.' Hollywood as a whole was tightly organised into studios in this period, at least, or especially in the contexts where Lubitsch was located as an industry professional. Lubitsch spent the vast majority of

his career at major studios, and his time at Paramount proved fruitful for both. Their styles overlapped so strongly that they became interchangeable. Lubitsch's appointment to Head of Production in 1935 vouchsafes this. At the same time it also complicates the conception of film authorship at directorial level.

Lubitsch seems to have been able to execute authorship while in his managerial post. This fact has pointed us in two directions. First, it allows us to recognise that film authorship in the studio system can be located at executive level, although Lubitsch tried to tone this down in the public discourse. Secondly, it was his distinct prominence that allowed him to function as an auteur irrespective of the role he occupied.

The 1930s constituted the central decade of Lubitsch's career. His rise in the 1910s made him an interesting prospect for the American industry and when he left for Hollywood in the 1920s he found himself quickly assimilated. The 1940s, after some fruitful years early on, witnessed Lubitsch's physical and artistic struggles, even while his image and his 'touch' were more amplified than in the 1930s. In this 'middle' decade, we have seen how Lubitsch became established as a leading director at Paramount Studios, arguably at the heart of the studio system. His phase of integration in the 1920s was therefore followed by a period of increased distinction in the 1930s.

This decade was also a period of recognition as the Lubitsch brand evolved. The first two sections of this chapter therefore showed that even within the same decade, the 'Lubitsch touch' was essentially polysemous and could take on different meanings depending on the context. Never negating each other completely, their emphasis in meaning is still clearly different. In the final three sections, I then demonstrated not only how the 'touch' evolved in terms of meanings, but also how it grew in significance.

3 *Swansong for Lubitsch: The 1940s*

3.1 *Introduction*

The 1930s were the central decade in Lubitsch's career and accordingly, they have figured significantly in this thesis. The subsequent decade was the final one of Lubitsch's career before he died in 1947 and will figure more manageably in the overall narrative. In the previous chapter we located the points where the historiography of 1930s Hollywood and the 1930s in Lubitsch's career overlapped, and how they compared with, contributed to or complicated each other. However, the 1940s are markedly different as Lubitsch figures much less in the dominant themes of 1940s Hollywood history.

The Hollywood of the 1940s is characterised by difficulties and contradictions, possibly best captured in the title of Thomas Schatz's study of the decade, "Boom and Bust." Thomas Schatz indeed provides the most substantial and expansive chronicle of the decade, following Hollywood through a difficult period in which economic decline, hinted at around the turn of the decade, was delayed by the nation's entry into World War II.¹ He identifies several issues and themes that extend beyond the decade as a whole. These include the effects of World War II reaching the United States and its industries; similarly, the influence of the emerging Cold War on Hollywood in particular, and more specific struggles over labour force and labour regulations. Schatz also touches upon the attempts (and successes) of individual members of the industry – especially directors – to turn independent alongside continuing conflicts with censors over content. He observes, finally, the general declining trend of an industry that had begun around the turn of the decade

¹ Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, however, note that "By mid-1941," several months before Pearl Harbour and the United States' resulting entry into World War II, "box-office receipts had begun to mount. And it was a brilliant year for creative achievement." This implies that the war may have been only a contributing and enhancing factor in the industry's precarious situation. (Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg. *Hollywood in the Forties*. London: Zwemmer, 1968. p. 7-8 (= International Film Guide Series).)

and was only delayed when war struck. After the end of World War II, however, the decline would continue.²

Only some of these issues relate to or are significant for Lubitsch's career. This is one of the main reasons for the relative length of the previous chapter and why the one that follows will be considerably shorter. Some themes significant to the 1930s, and discussed in the previous chapter, continue into the following decade, but prove to be of lesser significance in relation to Lubitsch. While for instance, anti-trust legislation, culminating in 1948, or labour struggles themselves were significant developments throughout this decade, Lubitsch hardly figures in them, if at all. In fact, Lubitsch represents a link to only a couple of the issues raised by Schatz and even there his contribution is no longer necessarily perceived as central in historiographical terms.

Lubitsch's career continued for several years following his breakaway from Paramount in the late 1930s. He died in November 1947 during the production of *That Lady in Ermine* (1948). There was hardly a period in his career when Lubitsch stuck to one kind of film in order to enjoy unanimous critical and public response. However, in these final years he oscillated predominantly between two poles. Firstly, there was a group of films from the early years of the decade that critics perceived and praised highly for their 'humanism.' The discussion below will suggest that critics assumed that this would be a permanent change in direction for him. Secondly, for the remaining years of his career, Lubitsch defied these predictions in returning his focus to the models and genres in which he had worked in previous decades: the sophisticated comedy, the musical, and Graustarkian romance.

² Schatz, Thomas. *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. p. 1 (= History of American Cinema 6).

Over the course of the 1940s, Lubitsch's output slowed down noticeably to seven films compared to the twelve films he made in the 1930s.³ This decreased output may well have been due to health problems and personal issues. He underwent a second divorce and several heart attacks, while other minor cardiac episodes required Lubitsch to take extended periods of rests and breaks from working. More generally, Lubitsch's career took less straightforward turns in the 1940s. While Paramount had provided Lubitsch with a professional home throughout the 1930s,⁴ he was navigating murkier waters as he entered the following decade. For instance, his first attempts to go independent eventually resulted in his accepting a two-picture deal with MGM as he struggled to get *The Shop Around the Corner* off the ground and finished to the standard he expected.⁵

This is a particularly interesting example of how Lubitsch fits less and less into the times; breaking away from the major studios proved a popular move for many artists especially after the war. Moreover, Lubitsch's attempts at going independent did not go unnoticed in the public discourse, especially by trade papers with a close focus on the industry. From a film-historical perspective, however, the pioneering Lubitsch came to this point a few years before directors who proved to do so more successfully after him. Yet his eventual signing with Fox put an end to these efforts. Despite this, as a high-profile director, Lubitsch never again became as closely associated with a studio style as he had with 1930s Paramount.

The home that Fox provided in the 1940s could be understood in terms of the "black-and-white films of the period, [which] also had a polish, a suave and

³ This count does not include *Dragonwyck* (1946). For this film Lubitsch received only producer credit, which is why it is not always included in filmographies, which tend to focus on his directorial work.

⁴ He directed *The Merry Widow* (1934) for MGM on loan.

⁵ *Ninotchka* and *The Shop Around the Corner* were made for a major studio, MGM. However, Lubitsch only accepted this situation after it became evident that *The Shop Around the Corner* might not be made otherwise. See Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 265, 270.

accomplished air of elegance which [however crucially] reflected the showman's flair of Darryl F. Zanuck."⁶ The studio as a whole had, as Schatz summarises, successfully moved to a "resurgent position in the 1940s"⁷ after having barely survived the Great Depression. Characterising the studio further, Schatz continues with the assertion that Fox "developed an efficient and unabashedly commercial strategy that emphasized formulaic A-class star vehicles and a heavy output of B pictures. That approach proved enormously successful in the late 1930" and would do "quite well" with its high-end output in the years just before the war.⁸

In fact, Fox was developing a veritable "split personality"⁹ of 'serious' films on the one hand – prestige pictures based on literature or life and done in black and white – and "commercially successful if critically suspect pictures [among which Schatz counts] period musicals, quasi-historical action-adventure films, and the like, often done in Technicolor."¹⁰ This split constitutes an interesting differentiation, as Lubitsch had always been associated with prestige, during his career as well as afterwards. In other words, he made films for a smaller group of sophisticated viewers which potentially went 'over the heads' of the mainstream masses. At the same time, he had interspersed these films with more popular films and musicals; not least in the 1940s, shooting in Technicolor.

It is easy to assume that Fox indeed signed Lubitsch for reasons of his still significant prestige. As we will see below, some of the films that he made in the 1940s just around the time of joining Fox remain amongst his most esteemed. What is more, Lubitsch arrived at Fox with the now firmly established 'Lubitsch touch' and the promotional campaigns for his Fox films would capitalise on this asset. At

⁶ Higham and Greenberg. *Hollywood in the Forties*. p. 10.

⁷ Schatz. *Boom and Bust*. p. 51.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Joel W. Finler. *The Hollywood Story*. New York: Crown, 1988. p. 94-95. Also quoted in Schatz. *Boom and Bust*. p. 52.

¹⁰ Schatz. *Boom and Bust*. p. 52.

the same time, the public discourse was well aware of the difficulties that Lubitsch had been facing; if Warner Brothers had signed Lubitsch as the greatest director to come out of Europe two decades previously, the same could not quite be said for Fox.

Film historians have made mixed evaluations of Lubitsch's work in the 1940s. Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, in their appraisal of the decade for the 'International Film Guide Series,' are fairly explicit in their account of how Lubitsch fared in the 1940s. In their words: "Alas, Lubitsch – once the doyen of Paramount comedy director, creator of the dazzling *Trouble in Paradise*, most enchanting of Thirties amusements – was very much in decline in the Forties."¹¹ As in Higham and Greenberg and other studies of the decade, Lubitsch does not play a central role for any aspects discussed in the context of 1940s Hollywood history. Higham and Greenberg most frequently discuss him only in the context of Paramount and comedy, but Lubitsch most frequently figures as a point of reference.¹² Schatz makes a similar implicit evaluation in the sense that he mentions Lubitsch only in passing.¹³

In general, film historians have found less and less to discuss in the context of the 1940s Lubitsch, or regards Lubitsch in fewer contexts. There was contemporary coverage and critical engagement with his films in the same period and in a somewhat similar vein, although it was more concerned with how the 1940s films fitted with the old, established flavour of Lubitsch than how they brought new

¹¹ Higham and Greenberg. *Hollywood in the Forties*. p. 160. The previous instalments of the series, provided by David Robinson on the 1920s and John Baxter on the 1930s, had been equally critical of Lubitsch's work.

¹² As such, they write "At Paramount the influence of Lubitsch remained strong," but it is now "the high-key comedies like *Going My Way*[, which] were popular, and in Preston Sturges," who, in light of the mention to Lubitsch, rather tellingly is referred to as "sophisticated master of film repartee and the double-take." (9) Elsewhere, they contend that Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949) had "a tough, Lubitsch-like sophistication and wit, with an extra edge in the handling" of its actors (170). Higham and Greenberg. *Hollywood in the Forties*. p. 9, 170.

¹³ See Schatz. *Boom and Bust*.

issues to the fore. As a consequence, Lubitsch's status was problematic already before his death.

This chapter will take a slightly different approach from the two preceding ones: if the chapter on the 1920s looked at the chronological development from Lubitsch's earliest years in America and his discussion as a German immigrant, to association with the term sophistication, the second chapter examined set aspects of 1930s Hollywood history in relation to aspects of 1930s Lubitsch history.

As this brief summary of 1940s Hollywood history suggests, there were increasingly fewer overlaps between the two and the decade could be taken to be the swansong of Lubitsch's career. Initially, a new direction in Lubitsch's films was welcomed and praised by critics. Yet Lubitsch followed these films by returning to older genres and subjects that had been successful previously, but were now met with increased indifference. In the promotional context, those elements previously associated with Lubitsch were blown up or amplified, with the result that Lubitsch's famed subtlety turned into its opposite. In the course of reducing the 'Lubitsch touch' to a few eye-catching elements, Lubitsch himself was increasingly used as a promotional tool, consistent with the successful practice of his appearances in trailers made in the decade before. The promotional discourse subsequently used the 'Lubitsch touch' to deliver a simplified, reductive message using a few well-established elements. These elements did not necessarily then correspond to the advertised film, but with the established Lubitsch style. While flattened in this way, the complex response to Lubitsch and his films in the critical discourse could only be accommodated by the malleable quality of the 'touch.' Although the reception of the films varied markedly, the invariance of the recourse to the 'touch' was hardly ever acknowledged.

To address this multiplicity of responses, negotiation and uses of Lubitsch and his 'touch' in the 1940s, I will be looking at the critical and the promotional discourses separately. In regard to the state of film criticism in this decade, Jerry Roberts notes that "the general opinion of film critics up until the 1960s [is] that they were, by and large, composers of plot précis with an opinion tacked on, and all with the depth of a loved-her, hated-him quip."¹⁴ In contrast, my research into the previous two decades shows that this is too great a generalisation.

The critical engagement with Lubitsch flattened in the 1940s, as older models and largely tired tropes were rehearsed. On the other hand, new directions in his style were enthusiastically received, particularly in his early films of the decade. Lubitsch generally continued to be a favourite with the critics, aside from the occasional neutral, lukewarm or outright disappointed voice. Still, in spite of the emerging humanism in his films from the early years of the decade, Lubitsch the director became firmly established as an 'old hand' and this may be the reason why critical discussion of his work lost depth in this period. Whatever the reason, historical studies of journalism and specifically film journalism are very rare and often focus anecdotally, as Roberts does, on individual critics or all too abstract themes.¹⁵ More critical evaluations, of the kind that Richard Koszarski included in his study of Hollywood in the 1920s are beneficial and insightful but even rarer.

Similarly, research into film marketing has been set between critical approaches and those studies that inform and advise upon how to market films rather than examine their subject critically. It is therefore rare to encounter studies detailing one particular period. Robert Marich, writing in a more familiar tone, argues that until the 1960s the creation of movie advertisements was an

¹⁴ Roberts. *The Complete History of American Film Criticism*. p. 95-96.

¹⁵ See Raymond Haberski. *It's Only a Movie! Films and Critics in American Culture*. Lexington, The University of Kentucky Press, 2001.

“uncomplicated business” with the major studios operating their own poster departments that “churned out”¹⁶ hand-drawn adverts. Thomas Schatz also notes that newspapers continued to be the primary means of advertising, although radio was also gaining ground over the war years.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Jerry Roberts comments on the significance of publicity material created and sent by the studios which “mid-century” eventually evolved into ‘press kits.’¹⁸

Critical and promotional discourses were therefore difficult to keep apart in this period. The circulation of newspapers to most American cities throughout the 1940s facilitated widespread coverage and publicity.¹⁹ The emergence of increasingly neat and sophisticated ‘press kits’ also helped the studios to convey the message to the critics that they had in mind for promotional campaigns. In the material discussed below the lineages and crossovers of certain ideas prove to be easily identified. Discussing the power balance between critical and promotional discourses, Jerry Roberts recognises that “Film criticism could not keep up with the PR machines, and the general assumption from half a century later is that, even if it could, it still wouldn’t have made much difference. The audience wasn’t educated to the state of films as an art form.”²⁰

Hence, film criticism did not provide an appropriate balance for the increasingly sophisticated studio promotion. This fact becomes particularly obvious when I compare the two discourses in relation to Lubitsch and is one of the main reasons why I will discuss them separately. Ultimately, they reflected upon each other closely, but their subtle differences in weighing aspects of the Lubitsch brand warrant separate analysis.

¹⁶ Robert Marich. *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies Used by Major Studios and Independents*. Amsterdam: Focal, 2005. p. 23.

¹⁷ Schatz. *Boom and Bust*.p. 191

¹⁸ See Roberts. *The Complete History of American Film Criticism*. p. 95.

¹⁹ See Marich. *Marketing to Moviegoers*.p. 156.

²⁰ Roberts. *The Complete History of American Film Criticism*. p. 95.

3.2 *Lubitsch Critiqued*

The most interesting development to emerge from the critical discourse of the 1940s on the director was an emerging discussion of what was perceived to be a ‘humanist’ Lubitsch. Beginning with his first film after Paramount, *Ninotchka*, critics noticed a new sentiment emerging from Lubitsch’s films, one that was particularly emphasised in the discussions of *Ninotchka*, *The Shop Around the Corner* and *Heaven Can Wait* (1943) – three films that all neatly fitted into the years 1939 to 1943. Interestingly, this period is today regarded as the “richest period” of Lubitsch’s work covering these three films and *To Be or Not to Be*.²¹

The critical reception of these films was markedly different from that of Lubitsch’s earlier ‘wars of the sexes,’ which were more cynical than romantic, and more stylised than marked by genuine authenticity. Instead, Lubitsch’s style is associated with a new set of terms, with a focus on character and theme dominating the critical discussion. This development becomes particularly obvious in the use of the term ‘Continental,’ which had figured so prominently in the Lubitsch discourse during the preceding decades. If the sophisticated comedies of the 1920s had been perceived as exclusionary, the same cannot be said about the films of the early 1940s. Indeed, this fairly short period in Lubitsch’s career may well have shaped markedly the perception of the films that follow after *Heaven Can Wait*. The enthusiasm for these films could be taken to have modified the critics’ expectations and this would account for the more superficial discussion of Lubitsch’s films after 1943.

²¹ Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch*, p. 274. Eyman’s reasoning for this statement is that it was then that Lubitsch “would examine with a remarkable, tender humor the ways in which the life of the mind yields to the life of the heart; communism yields, not to capitalism, but to copulation.” The end of this statement is obviously coined with Lubitsch’s Soviet satire in mind. However, Eyman does not explicitly state which other films he would include in this. The first three film in particular still enjoy great favour; the first two as romantic comedies, while *To Be or Not to Be* is now hailed one of the great political film satires. Only *Heaven Can Wait* has ever so slightly faded from memory.

In the early years of the decade, the *Jewish Advocate* praised, for instance, the “delightfully human narrative” in *The Shop Around the Corner* and the “gentle theme of the story [which] present[s] many opportunities for the famed Lubitsch touch.”²² For the *Washington Post*, Nelson Bell described the same film as “an amusing, gracious and warming study of a small group of simple folk in Budapest,”²³ while for the *New York Times* the film was “a pretty kettle of bubbling brew [...] under Mr. Lubitsch’s deft and tender management and with a genial company to play it gently, well this side of farce and well that side of utter seriousness.”²⁴ The *Reporter* in turn anticipated that *Ninotchka* would feature a “Garbo every audience will like and rave over, for she is human in this role”²⁵ and of *Heaven Can Wait*, reviewer ‘Mori.’ wrote that, “Lubitsch has endowed [the film] with light, amusing sophistication and heart-warming nostalgia,”²⁶ while *Variety* called the same film

A picture of commanding charm, richly emotional, creating much laughter and compensating pathos, alive with tolerant humanness, avoiding any technical trickery to gloss over its shrewd Lubitschian observations and those of the writers who provided the story and prepared the screenplay.²⁷

The adjectives ‘gracious,’ ‘tender,’ ‘richly emotion,’ ‘tolerant,’ along with the sweet metaphor of the ‘bubbling kettle’ mark, amongst other such descriptions, a

²² Anon. Review of *The Shop Around the Corner*, “*Shop Around the Corner* at Franklin Park.” *Jewish Advocate* (22 March 1940), p. 14.

²³ [Nelson B.?] Bell. “The ‘Lubitsch Touch’ Again Evident in *Shop Around the Corner*,” Review of *The Shop Around the Corner*. *The Washington Post* (3 February 1940), p. 6.

²⁴ Frank S. Nugent. “The Screen in Review: Ernst Lubitsch Offers James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan in a Genial and Tender Romance in *The Shop Around the Corner* at the Music Hall.” *New York Times* (26 January 1940), p. 20.

²⁵ Anon. “Garbo-Lubitsch Hit Combination,” Review of *Ninotchka*. (*Hollywood?*) *Reporter* (7 October 1939), no page. *Ninotchka* Clippings. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 10 July 2013). Lubitsch’s success with actors especially in eliciting great performance and even ‘re-inventing’ famous actresses, such as Negri, Pickford or Garbo, is a common narrative in Lubitsch’s collaborations with these actresses. It is little surprise then that this review too heavily focuses on Lubitsch, whom it refers to as “the master.”

²⁶ Mori. Review of *Heaven Can Wait*. *Weekly Variety* 151.6 (21 July 1943), p. 22.

²⁷ Anon. Review of *Heaven Can Wait*. *Daily Variety* 40.32 (21 July 1943), p. 3.

considerable shift in the tone of the critical discussion of Lubitsch's films. They may well be accompanied by older tropes and critical lines into Lubitsch's work, namely sophistication. Yet the frequency with which the critics employed these words at this time presents a new quality of the discourse at the time.

The final quote from *Variety* also hints at a substantial shift away from technique in referring to Lubitsch's 'technical trickery.' Instead, critics turned their attention to subject, theme and characters. This is also spelt out in two particular reference points; namely, social standing and the absence of war. William Weaver, for instance, portrayed *Heaven Can Wait* in broad strokes, writing that

The Van Cleves happen to be wealthy and New Yorkers, but they could be poor and live anywhere so far as the essence of the story is concerned, for the story is no more nor less than a recital of the domestic events in the life of the family, the romances, weddings, births, deaths, the vital statistics, so to speak, with the emphasis on the characters of the members of the succeeding generations and with the making of the point that the passage of time [...] changes only the individuals, never the family unit.²⁸

Although not princes and princesses, the Van Cleves can play their part as the wealthy New York set and thereby fit in with the characters who, more often than not, gained access to wealthier or, at the very least, affluent and stylish circles. However, Weaver emphasises the egalitarian notion that people are all just the same and these wealthier characters no different from anybody else. In addition he points out, seemingly with relief, that

There is no war in the picture, although the period of it spans three of them. Neither is the treatment of or reference, to anything going on in the world outside the family circle of the Van Cleves. They are shown as what they are, neither all bad nor all good, and as doing what they do for reasons they consider sufficient [...].²⁹

²⁸ William R. Weaver. Review of *Heaven Can Wait*. *Motion Picture Herald* 152.4 (24 July 1943), p. 107.

²⁹ Ibid.

The absence of war was noted several times in connection with these films and can be related to a sense of nostalgia for a pre-war idyll that the American people still felt well over a year after their official entry into World War II, when exhibitors were lobbying constantly for more “escapist fare.”³⁰ This tendency was indeed echoed in feedback from one of the exhibitors who describes the same film as “Very fine. Liked by all that attended [...] and definitely did not include anything about war, which was the best part of it. Received many requests to bring this one back.”³¹

War had never been at the centre of Lubitsch’s work. Several of his German films would use conflicts and national politics as a canvas against which romantic affairs would play out. Lubitsch mainly used war either as the backdrop against which a (love) story is set or to satirise militarism by featuring extravagant uniforms – sometimes both.³² Although war had never been a part of the Lubitsch brand, relief about the absence of war was pointed out more than once in regard to his films of the period.

In terms of their character constellations, it is noticeable how these films often began by centring upon a romantic couple, but then opened up to become ensemble pieces also incorporating characters that had no interest in the romantic couple at all; indeed these extraneous characters were normal people, without title or any notable wealth.

Such a discussion is particularly notable in view of the association of Lubitsch’s films with sophistication. Chapter One outlined Faye Hamill’s argument on the exclusionary side of sophistication. We have seen that this

³⁰ Schatz. *Boom and Bust*. p. 3.

³¹ Anon. in “What the Picture Did for Me.” *Motion Picture Herald* 152.8 (11 September 1943), p. 38.

³² By the time he made *Heaven Can Wait* there have only been two exceptions: the ill-fated *The Man I Killed*, quickly retitled *Broken Lullaby* (1932), and *To Be or Not to Be*, whose reception was also not entirely smooth. The Cold War theme of *Ninotchka* was for most of its duration, more about political stalemate than open conflict. Moreover, in its representation in the film too, the protagonists are never in actual physical danger.

tendency was also echoed in the discourse on Lubitsch's sophisticated comedies, where some critics warned that such film might go over the heads of the audience while others tried to dispel such worries, not to mention the exhibitors who provided feedback on how a film had done at their cinema. However, the shift that had taken place in Lubitsch's selection of his characters' social strata was recognised and indeed well received.

Frank Nugent's afore-mentioned review of *The Shop Around the Corner* illustrated this in a curious way. He wrote that Lubitsch

has employed [his "inexhaustible" sense of humour] to brighten the shelves where his tidy Continental romance is stored and, among the bric-à-brac, there are several fragile scenes which he is handling with his usual delicacy and charm, assisted by a friendly staff of salespeople who are going under resoundingly Hungarian names, but remind us strangely of Margaret Sullavan, James Stewart, Frank Morgan and Joseph Schildkraut.³³

Here, the term 'Continental' is not used in, if you will, a cultural sense; that is, as a the set of meanings that relate the term closely to European sophistication. More than anything, Nugent speaks in geographical terms when referring to the fact that *The Shop Around the Corner* is set in the Hungarian capital of Budapest. Indeed, hardly anything appears to remain of the common features of Lubitsch's earlier films in terms of his genuinely sophisticated comedies or even the relatively recent *Ninotchka* with its still "hearty comedy."³⁴ Instead, Nugent uses the term "romantic-comedy"³⁵ for *The Shop Around the Corner*, a term not conventionally used for Lubitsch's cinema.³⁶ Given the tone that the critics find in Lubitsch's films of this period, the category seems appropriate because these are not sophisticated comedies

³³ Frank S. Nugent. "The Screen in Review: Ernst Lubitsch Offers James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan in a Genial and Tender Romance in *The Shop Around the Corner* at the Music Hall." *New York Times* (26 January 1940), p. 20.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ James Harvey bookends his study, monumental in its dimensions, on the romantic comedy with Lubitsch on one end, but it is more an, if insightful and entertaining, collection of portraits of individual films and careers. See James Harvey. *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood, from Lubitsch to Sturges*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

classically à la Lubitsch. Nugent's review of Lubitsch's 1940 release is interesting insofar as it shows the fluidity of meanings in the film and how terms have been repurposed and shifted in their meaning. While this new quality or tendency in Lubitsch is discussed at length, the older category terms appear to lose part of their meaning when 'Continental' suddenly comes to mean 'set on the continent' and little else than this geographical sense.

I have arguably allowed some of these quotations to run on longer than they needed to in order to display two details. For one, as we will further encounter below, this sense of a new quality in Lubitsch's films stands in marked contrast to the discussion once this humanist period comes to an end. Secondly, these longer passages may not necessarily be of profound academic depth, but they are rich in detail and bear witness to the impression that the films' mood leaves on these early critics. Moreover, the richness of metaphor and style is striking and is testament to the continuing enjoyment of Lubitsch's cinema on the part of the critics.

The new direction Lubitsch took in the late 1930s, continuing through the early years of the following decade, was one that critics received enthusiastically. Exhibitors and their feedback on audience reactions seemed also to mirror this. What the critics noted and approved of in these films was generally different from what had been typical of Lubitsch in the years before, that is his interest in a wider circle of characters and in representatives of wider social strata. What is more, the discussions of these films were dominated by a focus on emotion, characters and a more inward-looking concern with the (social) family, away from larger planes of world history and conflict. Accordingly, Lubitsch's style was reconceptualised and, in emphasising theme, subject and characters, critics no longer located its essence in his technique.

With hindsight it seems clear that this would remain a phase in Lubitsch's work. This may in part explain why the more 'typical' Lubitsch after 1943 was discussed in less expansive terms. Although most critics did not state their disappointment explicitly, Lubitsch's more 'romantic' films made between 1939 and 1943 may well have influenced his critics' expectations. When Lubitsch changed direction sharply to return to earlier patterns of sophisticated comedy and musical for *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941), *A Royal Scandal* (1945) *That Lady in Ermine*, these films were well received, but nowhere near as enthusiastically as before.

Along with the enthusiasm for a 'new,' more human Lubitsch, the director continued to be described in more established terms through the 1940s. *That Uncertain Feeling* is based on the theme of a bored housewife caught between neglect by her husband and the attentions of a charming pianist.³⁷ *A Royal Scandal* is a remake of Lubitsch's very own *Forbidden Paradise*, while the posthumously released *That Lady in Ermine* is a musical. In contrast to the earlier films' inclusionary focus on an ensemble of characters, the focus was now again on couples or love triangles and, crucially, those again from more affluent parts of society. Yet, the lines between the humanist romances and the more conventionally Lubitschian films that concluded his career are fluid in their differentiation and negotiation of these two groups of films, as we will also later see in the promotional discourse. Indeed, Lubitsch himself oscillated between these two poles and it was the difference in emphasis and enthusiasm that became the more notable feature.

I will now focus on the critical discussion of these three films with a particular focus on *That Uncertain Feeling*, a film which Lubitsch made while arguably in the middle of his humanist period. Here, the focus will be on earlier tropes like sophistication, subtlety and a risqué tone. While critical reception of

³⁷ The film is also considered a version of Lubitsch's lost silent *Kiss Me Again* and, the pianist aside, the basic plot line reads not unlike that of Lubitsch's *Angel*.

Lubitsch's late films was largely positive, a certain tendency towards saturation or fatigue became noticeable in the revival of older and arguably self-explanatory phrases such as 'inimitable.' This tepid critique stands in contrast not only to the discussion of Lubitsch's 'emotionally richer' films from the early 1940s, but also to the vigour with which critics had discussed Lubitsch in the previous two decades. Thus, in the 1940s, references to the 'Lubitsch touch' became a cipher for the earlier Lubitsch *œuvre* rather than a marker of his present material. We will reencounter this issue later on in this chapter in which I deal with Lubitsch's promotional treatment in this decade.

As curious as the shift may have appeared to a more romantic and humanist Lubitsch in some of the early films of Lubitsch's post-Paramount years, others amongst his later films were discussed in older terms reminiscent of previous years and decades. For instance, *That Uncertain Feeling*, made between *The Shop Around the Corner* and *To Be or Not to Be*, was termed a "bedroom farce,"³⁸ a "comedy of marriage"³⁹ or a "marriage estate"⁴⁰ while continuing to be described as "entirely gay, frothy."⁴¹ For *Daily Variety*, in fact, *That Uncertain Feeling* was based on the "frothiest" structure that Lubitsch had ever worked with, since "every phase of this emotional escapade is stated in terms of deft humor, in situation, in speech in the occasional editorial title inserted to emphasize some crucial moment."⁴² For the first critics of these films, Lubitsch's direction was full of "his sly humor [that] brought fresh life to the slightly shopworn plot."⁴³ Elsewhere it was described as "crisp and

³⁸ Char. Review for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Weekly Variety* 142.2 (19 March 1941), p. 16.

³⁹ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling* in *The Shadow Stage. Photoplay* 19.1 (June 1941), p. 115.

⁴⁰ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Daily Variety* 31.16 (27 March 1941), p. 3.

⁴¹ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling* in *The Shadow Stage. Photoplay* 19.1 (June 1941), p. 115.

⁴² Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Daily Variety* 31.16 (27 March 1941), p. 3.

⁴³ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling* in *The Shadow Stage. Photoplay* 19.1 (June 1941), p. 115.

characteristic,”⁴⁴ for Lubitsch had not lost “his probing sense of high comedy”⁴⁵ and “tackles the [film’s] problem in a light and singularly satirical vein.”⁴⁶

Hence, risqué sophistication continued to be an important point of reference in the discussion of these films. As such, despite only earning one of the maximum two ticks available in their critical rating system, *That Uncertain Feeling* was still deemed a “‘must see’ for adults,”⁴⁷ – another turn of phrase traditionally implying that the film in question could be risqué. Joseph Coughlin’s review of the film ran on similar lines by touching upon several typical staples of the Lubitsch discourse, naming the film as “Another link in the cycle of comedies of marital manners,” a “provocative” Lubitsch production that is “often risqué [sic].”⁴⁸ Again, Coughlin hints at the exclusionary nature of Lubitsch’s films: “Whether the treatment will be considered nice depends on the level of sophistication to which an audience has educated itself.”⁴⁹ In other words, the audience will require a certain level of education to ‘appreciate’ the latest Lubitsch production. Coughlin revived once again the argument that this Lubitsch film might go over the heads of some parts of the audience.

Paul Jones, in turn, added some more common staples in his review of *A Royal Scandal*, a film that made its appearance halfway through the 1940s. Admitting that he does not know “Whether the ‘Ernst Lubitsch touch’ was ever what it was cracked up to be,” Jones argued that “Otto Preminger has learned enough tricks from the French master of subtlety to mix up a rather tasty pudding.”⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Daily Variety* 31.16 (27 March 1941), p. 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴⁶ Char. Review for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Weekly Variety* 142.2 (19 March 1941), p. 16.

⁴⁷ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling* in *The Shadow Stage*. *Photoplay* 19.1 (June 1941), p. 115.

⁴⁸ Joseph F. Coughlin. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Motion Picture Herald* 142.12 (22 March 1941), p. 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Paul Jones. “Backstage: Better than *Laura*,” Review of *A Royal Scandal*. *The Atlanta Constitution* (6 July 1945), p. 14.

He also called the film “giddy, naughty but nice” and concluded that, “It’s good entertainment, but a wee bit too sophisticated for the average taste.”⁵¹ Continental Frenchness again became a cultural association for this reviewer, unlike in the Nugent example discussed above. It thus continued to evoke sophistication and sexiness if, crucially, in a safe or ‘nice’ context.

Subtlety, too, continued to figure in the reviewers’ lexicon as central to the Lubitsch style. Harry Brand, Director of Publicity at Fox, noted in the press material for *A Royal Scandal* that the film was an example of Lubitsch’s “subtle insight into human nature”⁵² or, for *Variety*, underlined the “characteristic subtlety” with which Lubitsch suggests a cause for the wife’s hiccups in *That Uncertain Feeling*.⁵³

In his aforementioned review of *That Uncertain Feeling*, Coughlin also touched on this theme but his verdict was now rather damning. Although “The famed and almost allegorical ‘Lubitsch touch’ is quite evident in the staging of the triangular theme of a husband, his wife and the other man,” Coughlin emphasised that, “In fact, this directorial signature at times becomes too evident and unsubtle, particularly in the sequence devoted to the psychoanalysing of the wife.”⁵⁴ Admittedly singular in this particular criticism, Coughlin denied Lubitsch what legions of critics had identified as one of his specialities for years.

In this particular criticism, Coughlin is quite explicit in locating authorship in the director, even referring to his ‘signature.’ Simultaneously, he is quite critical of it, finding it too ‘unsubtle.’ Thus, he attributes the film even more clearly to Lubitsch, but at the same time criticises his contribution to the film, when the majority of critics had, through the years, largely exempted Lubitsch from criticism.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Harry Brand. “Vital Statistics on *A Royal Scandal*.” No date. Production Notes on *A Royal Scandal* on microfilm. Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles. Accessed 15 July 2013.

⁵³ Char. Review for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Weekly Variety* 142.2 (19 March 1941), p. 16.

⁵⁴ Joseph F. Coughlin. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Motion Picture Herald* 142.12 (22 March 1941), p. 36.

As examples for other reviews,⁵⁵ both Jones and Coughlin revive tropes that had been established over the course of the previous two decades as ingredients making up Lubitsch's distinct flavour. What was important about them at this point in time is how they were paraded with little excitement or thorough critical engagement.⁵⁶ Compared to the rich discussions of Lubitsch's heightened humanism that had preceded them, these examples of critical discourse appear stale in their reliance upon tropes found in previous films.

As a whole, these references served merely to call up meanings that had become closely associated with Lubitsch's films over the years. In the previous passage, for instance, I included extensive quotes which may be considered longer than they could have been. However, the extensive references are here intended to emphasise the indifference with which common denominators of Lubitsch's style were produced by critics to describe the new releases. James Harvey, in *his* chapter on, "Lubitsch in the Forties" is of the opinion that *That Uncertain Feeling* is "deft and proficient and often quite funny [...]. But the whole thing has a kind of sit-com tepidity: Lubitsch has done all this before – all too often, it seems."⁵⁷ This disappointment and even fatigue, so palpable in Harvey's judgment, may well echo the unwillingness of contemporary critics' to engage with the material.

In an effort to afford Lubitsch the praise he was still owed by critics, a new quality of praise emerged in the 1940s. Donald Ogden Stewart, one of the screenwriters of *That Uncertain Feeling*, may have been singular in describing the

⁵⁵ See for instance also Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Daily Variety* 31.16 (27 March 1941), p. 3., Anon. Review of *Cluny Brown*. *Daily Variety* 51.41 (1 May 1941), p. 3.

⁵⁶ In case of *That Uncertain Feeling*, there is only one exception to this: the dinner scene with the Hungarians was universally loved by critics and is mentioned over and over again, in Coughlin's review for instance "The taste and tone of the humor, however, are somewhat alleviated by the inclusion of scenes more wholesomely comic as, for instance, in a sequence showing a dinner for a prospective Hungarian insurance client." (Joseph F. Coughlin. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Motion Picture Herald* 142.12 (22 March 1941), p. 36.).

⁵⁷ James Harvey. *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood, from Lubitsch to Sturges*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. p. 477.

‘Lubitsch touch’ as “magic.”⁵⁸ More commonly, the films became associated with terms such as ‘inimitable’ and also ‘unmistakeable.’ In the press material for *A Royal Scandal* Harry Brand, Fox’s Director of Publicity, argued that “For his second production for 20th Century-Fox, [Lubitsch] has lent his nimble imagination, his mischievous wit, his subtle insight into human nature and [crucially] the *inimitable* ‘Lubitsch touch’ to a story of a fascinating woman.”⁵⁹

Such branding often begins with or is fostered by the marketing department of the studios for, as I discussed in Chapter One, studio marketing may have even been the origin of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ itself. However, references to the ‘inimitable’ touch were also present elsewhere in the discourse of the 1940s; for instance, in the *Daily Variety*’s review of *That Uncertain Feeling*⁶⁰ and *To Be or Not to Be*, the latter write-up referencing “The mind and hand of Ernst Lubitsch, artist and craftsman, [which run through every foot of the production with unmistakable labeling [sic].”⁶¹ Lloyd L. Sloan circumscribed Lubitsch’s style as “that intangible something now generally referred to as the ‘Lubitsch touch,’” one that aided “some top-flight satire and carefully developed and well-handled (for the most part) comedy.”⁶² In reviewing *That Uncertain Feeling*, it was the view of *Daily Variety* that Lubitsch had lost nothing of his “his resourcefulness, his probing sense of high comedy,” but most crucially of his touch, which was described as “inimitable.”⁶³

This special quality of the ‘touch’ was not only acknowledged at times but was even distinguished, so becoming a means in itself to compensate for the absence of any further discussion or definition of the term. In other words, if Lubitsch’s style

⁵⁸ Donald Ogden Stewart. “Watch Out for a Trend.” *New York Times* (4 May 1941), p. X4.

⁵⁹ Harry Brand. “Vital Statistics on *A Royal Scandal*.” No date. Production Notes on *A Royal Scandal* on microfilm. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 15 July 2013).

⁶⁰ See Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Daily Variety* 31.16 (27 March 1941), p. 3.

⁶¹ See Anon. Review of *To Be or Not to Be*. *Daily Variety* 34.51 (18 February 1942), p. 3.

⁶² Lloyd L. Sloan. “Cluny Brown Amusing Satirical Production,” Review of *Cluny Brown*. *Citizen News* (13 June 1946), no page. Clippings for *Cluny Brown* on microfilm. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 15 July 2013).

⁶³ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Daily Variety* 31.16 (27 March 1941), p. 3.

was characterised as inimitable or unmistakable, then no further elaboration of ‘Lubitsch touch’ was required because it had been established as obvious. This obsolescence of discussion of the term was also echoed in suggestions that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is “evident,”⁶⁴ or even “again evident,”⁶⁵ then seemingly sufficient by way of analysis. The inclusion of a single adjective, be it ‘inimitable,’ ‘indefinable’ or ‘unmistakable,’ supposedly demonstrated Lubitsch’s singularity while insufficiently concealing the fact that such distinction still did not entail further elaboration of the meaning of the famous term.

In its own way, this strategy on the part of the critical discourse ties in with the very nature of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ observed previously; that is, the flexible nature of the term in its capacity to accommodate a myriad of conceptions. In the response to the final films of Lubitsch’s career, this inability or unwillingness to elaborate on the exact nature of the ‘touch’ becomes an end in itself. The description of Lubitsch’s style as ‘inimitable’ and ‘indefinable’ is therefore a praise in itself that in no way damaged the Lubitsch brand.

From his first post-Paramount film onwards, Lubitsch’s change of direction was met with warm praise and enthusiasm. As I have noted, the lengthy discussion of the humanism perceived in Lubitsch’s work stood in stark contrast to the more rehearsed critical appraisals of the films he made afterwards. Ironically, it was the richness of the reviews in the early 1940s that produced an indirect emphasis on the hollowing out of what Lubitsch’s style constituted for the critics of his other, final films. Reviews of the films that followed *Heaven Can Wait* generally stayed positive, but there is a noticeable change in enthusiasm. One cannot help but wonder

⁶⁴ Anon. Review of *That Uncertain Feeling* in *The Shadow Stage*. *Photoplay* 19.1 (June 1941), p. 115.

⁶⁵ [Nelson B.?] Bell. “The ‘Lubitsch Touch’ Again Evident in *Shop Around the Corner*,” Review of *The Shop Around the Corner*. *The Washington Post* (3 February 1940), p. 6.

if this more humanist period in Lubitsch's work had an impact on the critical expectation of what the 'Lubitsch touch' now meant.

Lubitsch still remained a great asset to Fox as a studio which, like Warner, had hired the director for his continued and still considerable prestige. Damning criticism of his films or his direction was very rare. Yet the novelty that the critics had found in the Lubitsch of previous decades gave away to a calm, established acknowledgement of his talent. Thus, over the course of the 1940s, the critics' inability to describe the 'Lubitsch touch' or their refusal to shed light upon the nature of Lubitsch's style became a writing strategy in itself that relied on variations of terms such as 'inimitable.' Even though the 'touch' was very frequently described as 'unmistakable,' often without further elaboration, the fact that the nature or essence of the 'Lubitsch touch' could and would not be explained is the very essence of the argument.

3.3 *Lubitsch Promoted*

A 1945 advert for *A Royal Scandal* hails "The LUBITSCH Touch That Means So Much!"⁶⁶ However, in the critical discourse of the 1940s, the poly-semantic nature of the touch had not been without problems. Critics relished the heightened sense of humanism that they detected in Lubitsch's early work in the 1940s, while continuing to make reference to more established terms, but without much explanation or elaboration. The nature of such discourse suggests an over-reliance on elements associated with the Lubitsch brand rather than an active engagement with the films themselves by the 1940s.

In response to this problem, the following section will first analyse the negotiation of Lubitschian sophistication as it appeared in advertising. Here we will

⁶⁶ Advert for *A Royal Scandal*. *The Hartford Courant* (3 May 1945), p. 7 (emphasis in the original).

see that the concept of ‘sophistication’ not only recurs in a set of meanings associated with previous Lubitsch films, but it is amplified in promotional material. Curiously, such a tendency is not limited to the ‘sophisticated’ films that Lubitsch made in the 1940s, but it also extends to the films that critics had deemed humanist and romantic.

If earlier Lubitsch films could have been described as ‘history through the keyhole,’⁶⁷ the keyholes now appeared in the adverts. An ironic side-effect, the ‘delightful subtlety’ so highly praised by reviewers is somewhat lost in the promotional discourse and even called out as such in the Coughlin review of *That Uncertain Feeling*, quoted above.

I will also explore how adverts, rather than looking at looking to actual elements of the films, often relied on both the ‘touch’ and Lubitsch himself to provide meaningful bait to draw audiences to the cinemas. This is why I will then discuss how Lubitsch’s persona is directly used in the promotional discourse in the second half of this section. Towards the end of the previous decade, Lubitsch had started to appear in trailers for his own film. While this practice appeared to come to an end around 1941 with *That Uncertain Feeling*, Lubitsch himself was used more and more frequently throughout the decade for promotional purposes in print media. This trend would culminate in a particularly striking visual use of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ in the promotional campaign for *Ninotchka*.

The advertising discourse of the 1940s hence exploited risqué sophistication as well as Lubitsch himself in the promotion of his films. Amplifying the sophistication made the adverts seem rather flat and unsubtle, although they could be very clever. Yet, we will see once again that advertising the films through their

⁶⁷ See Ulrich Gregor and Enno Patalas. *Geschichte des Films I*. Gütersloh: S. Mohn, 1962. p. 56.

connection with Lubitsch caused them to be associated even more closely with the Lubitsch brand and so dissociated them from their individual look or content.

In one piece of promotional material, Twentieth Century-Fox had stars Charles Boyer and Jennifer Jones “making Lubitsch love”⁶⁸ in *Cluny Brown* (1946). The Lubitsch name lends itself to a handy alliteration with ‘love.’ Here of course ‘love’ is not to be taken to mean romance between two people, with ‘making love’ a not too veiled euphemism for having sex. The directness of the phrase was symptomatic of how the promotional discourses rehearsed more explicit messages in order to advertise Lubitsch’s films.

The critical discourse did not then engaged in any in-depth discussion of what Lubitsch’s style actually meant, because a few firmly established characteristics seemed to suffice. In some ways, the same holds true for the promotional discourse; here the ‘Lubitsch touch’ was reduced to a small number of firmly established markers, which were then amplified to maximise impact. In doing so, the promotional discourse used both suggestive language and insinuating visuals to capitalise on the key elements of the Lubitsch brand. Hence, the promotional discourse relied upon those elements that had come to be associated with the Lubitschian style or manner, then amplifying them to maximum effect at the expense of relying upon the actual content of the advertised film.

The *Ninotchka* press book came up with several so-called catchlines, some more explicit than others. There is the line “SPARKLING SATIRE! CINEMATIC CHAMPAGNE! ROLLICKING ROMANCE! BUBBLING BURLESQUE!” which easily rolls off the tongue not least for its alliterations.⁶⁹ Here, the association with

⁶⁸ Advert for 20th Century-Fox. *Motion Picture Herald* 163.10 (8 June 1946), p. 6.

⁶⁹ MGM Press Book and Exhibitor Aids for *Ninotchka*. On Microfilm. no page. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 15 July 2013, capitalisation in the original).

luxury and sophistication, of the culinary kind, fits well with the Lubitsch brand that was established in the 1920s.

Two other taglines proved crasser, not least in the all-capital lettering: “IN MOSCOW THEY PLANTED MEDALS ON HER BOSOM... IN PARIS THEY PLANTED KISSES ON HER CHEEK!” and “IT KIDS THE PANTS OFF THE RUSSIAN COMMISSARS!”⁷⁰ It was permissible under the production code to show a couple cheek-to-cheek. Moreover, the first part of this first line is at least figuratively true; while we never see her being given an order directly, comrade Nina Ivanovna Yakushova (Greta Garbo), as she is known in Russia, is considered the Soviet Union’s ‘special envoy’ for particularly difficult cases. *Ninotchka* was based upon the dichotomy between functionality and the negation of all physical human contact on the Soviet side, in contrast to Western hedonism and the celebration of life embodied by the Parisian setting. Thus, the taglines did not relate to any scene in the film, nor the film’s meaning as a whole, while both catchlines seem deliberately crass and explicit at the expense of any commitment to the narrative. A third line confirms this exaggeration in dubbing *Ninotchka* “THE SAUCIEST COMEDY THE SCREEN EVER DARED TO TELL!”⁷¹ Given that the film in question is a romantic comedy, and tame by Lubitsch’s standards, the insistence on the risqué tone of the film seems ill-advised on the part of the promotional campaign.

Interestingly, over the course of Lubitsch’s career in 1940s this particular adjective, ‘saucy,’ became a core element of what the Lubitsch brand constitutes in the promotional discourse around his films. In several adverts for *That Uncertain Feeling* a series of adjectives accompanied various constellations of leading actors Merle Oberon, Melvyn Douglas and Burgess Meredith: “original, witty and

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

sophisticated,” “amusing, modern” and “light-hearted,”⁷² “clever,” “sparkling” and “gay.”⁷³ “Saucy”⁷⁴ was then added to the list for the final advert of this series of several over as many days. If all of these had been commonly associated with Lubitsch, this latter word had not. The more suggestive ‘risqué’ had usually hinted at a potentially sexual subtext before. Now, the more direct ‘saucy’ comes to replace it increasingly. As such, the advert announced that “That gay Lubitsch touch which produced the indefinable sparkle of past successes sets a new pace...,”⁷⁵ and thus the first of these ‘pacemakers’ constituted this new characteristic. The point is not that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ could also refer to something ‘saucy.’ Instead, what has changed is that advertisers have called this particular spade a spade, which in case of the love triangle in *That Uncertain Feeling* is doubtlessly the ‘saucy’ spade in question.

Another slightly different advert, also published in the *Washington Post*, forewent ‘telling’ that the film will be ‘saucy,’ for its tagline rhymes “She’s crazy ‘bout Burgess / He loves her so much – / But she’s mad about Melvyn / With that Lubitsch touch!”⁷⁶ If the captions in the *Times* adverts had ‘told’ us that the film would be saucy, then this advert is far more about ‘showing’ and we can read the ‘Lubitsch touch’ here to mean just as much.

This ad then coupled the text with a picture of Merle Oberon holding a top hat next to Burgess Meredith and a fedora next to Melvyn Douglas. This is clearly a love triangle that uses the not so subtle metaphor of the choice between an old hat and a slightly newer one. The use of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ here does not seem very different from previous usages, but what is striking is how explicitly the advert

⁷² Advert for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *New York Times* (1 May 1941), p. 26.

⁷³ Advert for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *New York Times* (29 April 1941), p. 17.

⁷⁴ Advert for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *New York Times* (1 May 1941), p. 26.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Advert for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Washington Post* (14 May 1941), p. 18.

negotiates the wife's transgressive interest in a man to whom she is not married. Lubitsch's films had always concerned matters of the heart and the little transgressions of husbands and wives that made up married life. However, what was new in the 1940s was how explicitly the promotional discourse could address these issues, even more so than in the previous decade. This advert left no doubt about what kind of triangle *That Uncertain Feeling* features and although this advertising campaign as a whole is suggestive rather than unsubtle, a fairly explicit 'saucy' was now added as an ingredient added to the 'Lubitsch touch.' Along with the previous example from the *Ninotchka* press book, this suggests that the studios were already testing the limits of how far they could go in terms of being explicit about sex.



Figure 18: "G A R B O," advert for *Ninotchka* (1939)

The adverts of this period also combine verbal and visual imagery to achieve a certain effect and send off a particular message in regard to Lubitsch. One particular advert for *Ninotchka* (Figure 18) proved interesting for several reasons. I will discuss

perhaps the most striking illustration of advertising a little later below; for now I will first explore how the visual and the verbal connect to make *Ninotchka* appear virtually scandalous by conveying the supposed ‘sauciness’ of the film. The caption of the advert, set in comparably small print, captures the sophistication usually associated with Lubitsch: *Ninotchka* is described as a “wonderful picture” featuring a “new and glamorous Garbo” with “nothing on her mind but love and laughter as she gets the Lubitsch touch!”⁷⁷ Even the final exclamation “It’s a scream!”⁷⁸ is comparably constraint. The caption then suggests the usual Lubitsch offering: a polished, sophisticated and entertaining picture, re-defining its actress through a narrative that runs through virtually all of Lubitsch’s pairing with a female star who was extremely famous in her own right.

Yet, what made a much bigger impact was a spacious illustration that had Garbo’s surname on a film strip, creating from her name as an acronym the words “Gay,” “Amorous,” “Racy,” “Bold” and “Oh, boy” out of it.⁷⁹ If ‘gay’ may be taken as a stock adjective to describe the atmosphere in a Lubitsch film, the following three words ascend in their explicit nature to culminate in a quasi-orgasmic exclamation. The most realistic illustration, a photo-like image of a faintly smiling Greta Garbo stands in stark contrast to the other sketches of a girl with a bottle presumably of champagne, two pairs of legs interlocking cheekily underneath a table and the backs of scandalised onlookers who look through a window and curtain. Excepting the girl who has supposedly had too much champagne, none of these images refer to the story of the film. In terms of the onlookers, surveillance too is only a very minor theme, while the dinner scene is played out wholly above the tablecloth. Instead, the advert presents predominantly exaggerated situations the

⁷⁷ Advert for *Ninotchka*. *Hartford Courant* (21 November 1939), p. 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. (capitalisation in the original).

advert would have us believe are at least *possible* in a Lubitsch film, if such a Lubitsch film were to taken to be ‘gay,’ ‘amorous,’ ‘racy,’ ‘bold’ and even, finally, ‘oh, boy.’

In their size and signification the large lettering and the illustrations together overshadow the modest caption presented towards the bottom left of the advert. Furthermore, they undercut both the tone of the film and the themes that Lubitsch used to represent. For *Ninotchka* is at its heart romantic. Lubitsch, together with writers Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, was known for finding many subjects to satirise, and here he did so, not least Soviet communism and the declining Old World mores. Yet the romance between Ninotchka and Léon (Melvyn Douglas) is largely played straight in the depiction of Ninotchka’s innocent and naïve discovery of a whole new world in old Paris and Léon’s charming self-deprecation.

Adverts such as these hence served to change the meaning of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ and the Lubitsch brand. Although the caption does not refer to it specifically, Lubitsch was formerly hailed for his subtlety. Here, however, ‘subtlety’ ebbs away slightly and it is easy to see why this would be the case in the light of such ‘loud’ adverts.

Keyholes were another striking feature associated with Lubitsch which gained momentum in the advertising discourse of the 1940s. Lubitsch had a long-standing history with doors. One of the earliest surviving examples of Lubitsch using a keyhole is not only as a vignette but his looking through an actual, or if you will, a ‘diegetic,’ keyhole at the very end of his German feature *Die Austernprinzessin*. This moment occurred years before Mary Pickford famously proclaimed Lubitsch a “director of doors [because] Nothing interests him but

doors!”⁸⁰ Shame on whoever thought that Lubitsch might have been more interested in doors than his star.

Be that as it may, to this day critics have been interested in this matter and routinely return to it as a prime example of how Lubitsch “handles the sexual innuendo of dialogue and action,” to summarise but one argument, “and the characteristic inventiveness with which the developing relationship is followed by servants and courtiers watching through windows and peering through keyholes.”⁸¹ More recent critical attention paid to Lubitsch’s interest in doors and keyholes is mainly confined to close textual analysis of his films.⁸²

Yet in the critical discussion of Lubitsch and his films during his lifetime, keyholes were hardly negotiated at all. Instead, rather curiously, they began to sneak into the publicity campaign for several Lubitsch films of the 1940s. The reasons may be that they convey a meaning that is fairly easy to apprehend, while at the same time they remain symbols of semantic ambiguity. They tended to appear in one of two ways: either a sketch of a keyhole accompanied by a scandalised onlooker, or a still of the embracing starring couple projected into a larger keyhole. At times these two approaches were combined. The following three adverts present three different uses of the keyhole for three Lubitsch films.

⁸⁰ See for instance Weinberg, *The Lubitsch Touch*. p. 52. Scott Eyman’s research suggests that if this annoyed outburst was not apocryphal, it may at least have been a retrospective opinion on her part: analysing Pickford’s correspondence in the 1920s, he finds that she was actually “quite enamored [sic?] of Lubitsch and their collaboration.” She tried to secure him a deal with United Artists, which unfortunately fell through as Lubitsch would have been too expensive (Eyman. *Ernst Lubitsch*. p. 92).

⁸¹ Doug Pye. “*The Love Parade*.” 100 Film Musicals. Jim Hillier, Doug Pye eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. p. 133-134.

⁸² Other critical discussions or at least references to keyholes in Lubitsch include, also on *The Love Parade*, Barbara Bowman. *Master Space: Film Images of Capra, Lubitsch, Sternberg and Wyler*. Westport: Greenwood, 1992. p. 77. In connection to *Die Austernprinzessin*, Douglas Gomery and Clara Pafor-Overduin. “Noted German Directors.” *Movie History: A Survey*. New York: Routledge, 2011. p. 102. See also Sabine Hake’s particularly thought-provoking reading of how both “Lubitsch’s obsession with closed doors,” but also the availability of “open keyholes and faulty curtains” may relate to his social marginalisation as a Jew in German culture of the 1910s in *Passions and Deceptions*. p. 49-50.

Yet another advert for *Ninotchka* (Figure 19) announced that “Garbo gets the Lubitsch Touch.”⁸³ This tagline is flanked by two illustrations. On one side, there are two men whispering to each other behind their hands; on the other, a bewildered maid looks through a keyhole. In this advert, the keyhole is very small and only a minor part of the illustrations as a whole. The reader is left in the dark about what the maid actually sees, for the keyhole here operates as a symbol for something hidden, if not forbidden, happening behind a closed door.



Figure 19: Keyholes I: Advert for *Ninotchka* (1939)

Notably, the scandalised look on the maid's face is counterbalanced by the scene involving the men. These two talk in a very hush-hush manner behind one man's hand and do not appear at all shocked or scandalised. It could therefore be claimed that even the shock displayed on the maid's face does not, for once, contradict the gayness of Lubitsch's picture, as it is hailed in the caption. The scenes suggest scandal and gossip and will hopefully arouse interest

and even intrigue in the readership of the paper as the film's potential audience of the film. The reality of the ad in relation to the film is that neither scene has much

⁸³ Advert for *Ninotchka*. *Daily Boston Globe* (11 January 1940), p. 8.

significance in the actual film itself, but the unspoilt entertainment that the advert promises *Ninotchka* will offer remains intact.

The remaining two adverts that I will discuss here actually blow up the keyholes to disproportionate sizes and place them at the very centre of the advert. Keyholes were used regularly in the promotional campaign for *Heaven Can Wait*; for instance in a four-page long advert printed in *Variety* (Figure 20).⁸⁴ The first page shows a smiling couple gazing at each other and framed inside a keyhole, again with the silhouette of a man and woman looking on so deeply engaged in what they see that they lean against the wall of the keyhole. However, when the intrigued reader opens the next double-page, the imagery is far more complex than that of the preceding page.

Here, the couple in question are framed by illustrations of shocked, even jumpy men on the left. There are more observers on the right of the frame, whose figures are somewhat emphasised in their looking on from above with a lilac frame



Figure 20: Keyholes II: *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)

that matches the colour of the film's title. This time their expressions are those of shock, a faint sense of anger and even worry, while the source of all these emotions

⁸⁴ Advert for *Heaven Can Wait*. *Daily Variety* 40.43 (5 August 1943), p. 5-8. The final page of the spread is unremarkable, being that it only features general text and the Fox logo, and is not included here.

is sketched out in the middle. It is an illustration of an unidentified couple embracing. All these are sketches involving exaggerated human actions and reactions.

The only more realistic illustrations in this advert are, for one, the devil's face, indicated by his intimidating bearded face with a sharply shaped hairline. The devil is looking down with his tail and trident also sketched, making him a hybrid between the two worlds of realism and fantasy, sincerity and humour. However, the devil is not interested in the couple and has his eyes firmly on the box-office, proclaiming "I will play the devil with your records!"

The other more realistic illustration is that of stars Ameche and Tierney. It suggests a truer, more life-like and even genuine presentation in *Heaven Can Wait*, one that may tie in effectively with the critical readings of the film's gentle humanism I have discussed above. Nonetheless, here the film still of the happy couple is balanced on a double-page with an enormous, black⁸⁵ keyhole. The keyhole not only balances out the couple on the facing page, but it is placed roughly where the previous keyhole was located. Thus, the turned page could be taken as a door that the reader has miraculously managed to pass through and so gained access to what is going on behind the keyhole when turning the page in *Variety*. Hence, here the keyhole is effectively employed to pique the audience's interest as to how exciting it would be if the keyhole could be made to disappear. The levels of realism and sketch in this ad for *Heaven Can Wait* suggest a degree of sincerity on the part of the central couple and exaggerated emotions in the figures reacting to it. Yet the transformation of the page into a virtual door is a clever turn in advertising terms, even if it reduces the Lubitsch film to one suggestively set in the more private parlours of the Van Cleve's house.

⁸⁵ From the scan it is unclear whether it was coloured-in later or if the 'unfinished' look was intended (see the bottom-right corner of the keyhole).

The final advert to be discussed in this section also suggests a keyhole, but differs on several counts. Interestingly, given the film's title, this advert for *A Royal Scandal* (Figure 21) does not employ 'scandalised' observers, merely relying upon the tongue-and-cheek tagline that calls the film "scandalous like a look thru [sic] the keyhole!"⁸⁶ Inside the keyhole, the romantic couple, played by Tallulah Bankhead and William Eythe (the latter, given his status, only billed fourth above the film title), are depicted locking lips in a kiss.

Another difference is that here the keyhole is merely a circular hole, thereby markedly differing from the more abstract and schematic keyholes featured in the earlier adverts. Instead, it may be taken to be closer to its metaphorical meanings –



Figure 21: Keyholes III: advert for *A Royal Scandal* (1945)

hinting at a woman's private parts – which would then tie in with the flesh-like colour and so the advert, rather than hints, hammers the point home even more. This keyhole does not rely on the iconic representation of a keyhole – round on top, with

⁸⁶ Advert for *A Royal Scandal*. *Motion Picture Herald* 159.5 (5 May 1945), p. 37.

an a-shape as the bottom half – but it is instead presented as one ‘thing’ that keyholes are often taken to stand in for. The rest of the advert makes the implicit as explicit as possible, with the full tagline proclaiming, rather than suggesting, “All embracing records in spot after spot.”⁸⁷ On the surface this may refer to the locations where the film is shown, but it may also further allude to sexual foreplay or intercourse. As a further case in point, another tagline does not only use the metaphor of touch, but *the* ‘touch’ instead, describing “That Lubitsch Touch [as] a wonderful box-office sensation!”⁸⁸ There are twenty-five dots between ‘That Lubitsch Touch’ and ‘is a wonderful box-office sensation,’ leading straight into the keyhole and so neatly tying together the various ends of this additional layer of meaning. The advert has to remain tongue-and-cheek in its lines precisely because it is rather obvious and literal in its visual representation.

Ninotchka, *Heaven Can Wait* and *A Royal Scandal* were made for different studios and this gradual change in discourse cannot be attributed to the variation in studio styles. Interestingly, the three films are in chronological order, which then may account for a growing degree of exploitation of the visual aspects of this particular ‘Lubitsch touch.’ Taking these three adverts together, there is also a growing degree of deftness – another popular word in the Lubitsch discourse – in the use of the keyhole. However, this loss of virtually all abstraction is similar to the loss of all subtlety in the verbal messages attached to the adverts. As a result, the promotional discourse loses what Lubitsch had arguably stood for: the clever subtlety of showing without actually showing.

Yet another element is exploited explicitly in the promotion of Lubitsch’s films, besides the use of risqué sophistication as established elements of the Lubitsch brand. This is Lubitsch himself, who nonetheless did not become an asset

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

to his films over night. In previous decades, Lubitsch himself was greatly aware of his contribution but also his prominence as a director. Even during his long-standing collaborations with established stars Lubitsch managed to keep a tight control of his image.

The previous chapter suggested, in this regard, that Lubitsch had only accepted the collaboration with Maurice Chevalier on his own terms. This still held for the 1940s, when he teamed up with leading actors who had at least some star power, such as Margaret Sullavan, the young James Stewart, Gene Tierney and Don Ameche and the up-and-coming Jennifer Jones.⁸⁹ The only two stars of considerable standing in Lubitsch's final period were Greta Garbo in *Ninotchka* and the arguably rather un-Lubitschian star, *That Lady in Ermine*'s Betty Grable. The star power of both of the above tended to compete with and overshadow that of Lubitsch, just as that of, say, Pola Negri, Asta Nielsen or Greta Garbo had done over his directorial career. Nevertheless, the promotional discourse for the 1940s films undoubtedly made use of the connection to the director more directly and openly.

By the 1940s, relying on the director when promoting his films was not a new idea, not even in the context of Lubitsch films. It is useful to recall Lubitsch's repeated insistence on a sign above New York's Rialto cinema to show his name "in sufficiently large size" relative to that of Emil Jannings, the star of *The Patriot*.⁹⁰ Then there was the the advertising campaign of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*,⁹¹ where Lubitsch was shown instructing Gary Cooper how to correctly slap his on-screen

⁸⁹ Jack Benny was a radio star of some standing, but as an actor he was taken so seriously and thus eager to work with Lubitsch. Carole Lombard was a well-known and established comedienne, but her death just before the release of *To Be or Not to Be* left problematic the matter of her negotiation: While advertisers tended to ignore the fact or glorified Lombard and the film as her last, the papers would acknowledge the event more, or less, in the case of the fan magazines, or less, with most reviews making at least a passing reference.

⁹⁰ Anon. "Inside Stuff – Pictures." *Weekly Variety* 92.11 (26 September 1928), p. 48. The first sign had not featured Lubitsch's name at all and the second as only in smaller letters. The paper put it rather laconically: "Painters are doing plenty of climbing."

⁹¹ Press Book for *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. no page. Held at Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles (accessed 14 July 2013).

wife Claudette Colbert in a film that was probably closest in character to the then fashionable screwball comedy. Before the 1940s, Lubitsch's face had appeared sporadically in the advertising campaigns for earlier films, for instance, in isolated adverts for *Three Women*, *Kiss Me Again* or *Lady Windermere's Fan*.⁹² Warner, who had hired Lubitsch to further the studio's own ascent to a status as one of the majors, capitalised on the director's considerable degree of prestige in adverts that centred on him alone.⁹³

However, these were all still isolated occurrences. The curious prologue to the German *Die Puppe*, in which Lubitsch appeared as literal 'metteur-en-scène' – without any of the negative connotations the term may have received subsequently in the context of auteurism – may not have been of promotional nature *per se*, but in its nature it was at least as close to Lubitsch's later cameos in the trailers to some of his films in the late 1930s as it was to his own budding acting career in the 1910s. Lubitsch's most intensive promotional streak indeed seemed to have finished with the trailer for *That Uncertain Feeling*. Whatever the reason why Lubitsch decided not to appear in his trailers after 1941 – health might well have been one – he had always displayed great awareness of his own contribution to the film discourse and how it could be used not only to promote the film, but also himself. Thus, in the name of promoting his films the marketing executives became more and more creative at using Lubitsch, his image and his style more visibly.

⁹² See Advert for *Three Women*. *Moving Picture World* 69.3 (19 July 1924), no page., advert for *Kiss Me Again*. *Moving Picture World* 75.6 (8 August 1925), p. 593 and advert for *Lady Windermere's Fan*. *Weekly Variety* 81.6 (23 December 1925), p. 36-37.

⁹³ See advert for Warner Bros, "Forty for 1925-6." *Moving Picture World* 75.2 (11 July 1925), p. 116-117 and advert for Warner Bros. *New York Times* (3 August 1925), p. 32 discussed in chapter 1.

There are conventional ways to imply the continuity of a certain brand, for



Figure 22: “A towering Lubitsch,”
advert for *A Royal Scandal* (1945)

instance, referencing earlier titles in an advert, in the hope that the audience will have seen them and liked what they saw in the name of coming back for more.⁹⁴ Another strategy is to use a font that looks somewhat similar to a signature. In an advert for *Cluny Brown*,⁹⁵ Lubitsch’s name was thus set in exactly such a font, suggesting easily, if not all too obviously, an author or a painter’s signature upon their work. What is more, in this particular advert, the ‘handwritten’

font of Lubitsch’s name echoes a line in a similar-looking font exclaiming “Oh, Mr. Lubitsch! What you’ve started!” By implication, what he has started is the romance between the film’s two protagonists, whose embracing sketches are featured four times on this particular page alone. In this way, the ‘handwritten’ font not only suggests the director’s signature, it also gives us a glimpse of what this signature entails. The ecstatic exclamation here plays on the romantic, possibly naughty, element attached to the name Lubitsch who functions here much like a cinematic, narrative or stylistic signature. Such an approach turned the director’s actual absence

⁹⁴ See for instance the MGM advert for *The Shop Around the Corner*, which proclaims that “Ernst Lubitsch fresh from *Ninotchka* triumph clicks again in heart-warming entertainment with tenderest [sic] romance the screen has ever seen,” but otherwise does not make use of the director or indeed any actors at all. Advert for MGM, “Can MGM Keep Up That Sizzling Pace?” *Weekly Variety* 137.3 (27 December 1939), p. 21.

⁹⁵ Advert for *Cluny Brown*, “Oh, Mr. Lubitsch! What You’ve Started!” *Motion Picture Herald* 163. 8 (25 May 1945), no page.

from the advert into a virtual presence, not unlike the film experience itself. In other words, the director was nowhere to be seen and yet, arguably, present in every frame, anticipating the suggestion that a director can author a film. The meanings of the 'Lubitsch touch' were amplified while being simultaneously flattened. This was achieved not only by using a signature-like font to hint at Lubitsch's mark on the film, but also by suggesting what this mark would be.

When a director had grown to the prominence of Lubitsch, he offered additional possibilities for a proactive use of his professional persona in an

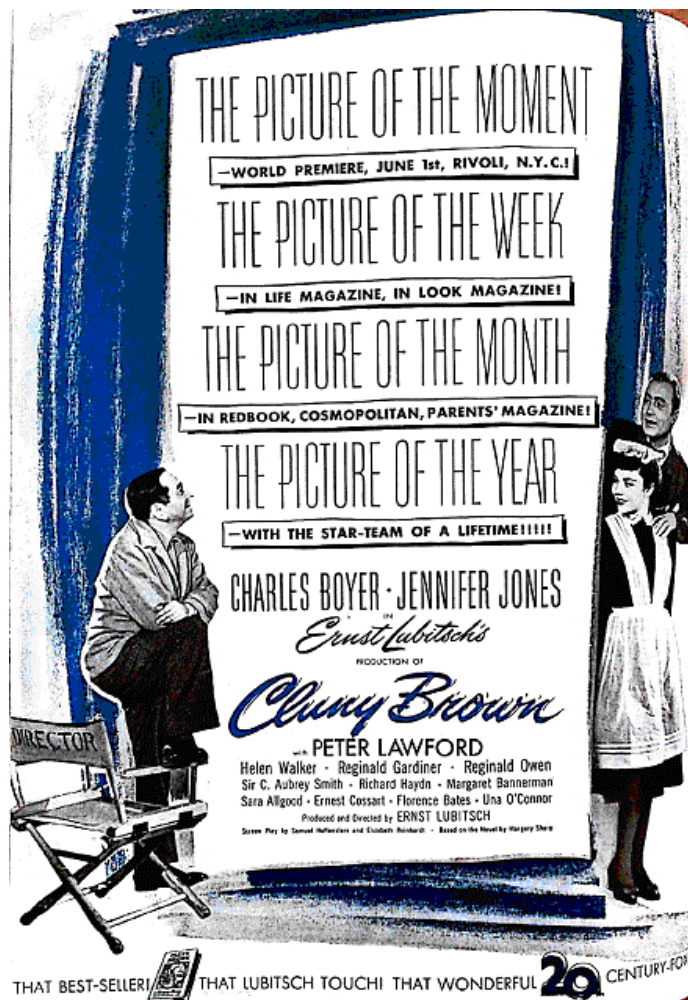


Figure 23: Advert for *Cluny Brown* (1946)

advertising context.

The following section will look at examples of where Lubitsch was used in print media, not unlike in the trailers of the 1930s. During the 1940s, the number of adverts either referring to Lubitsch by name or in explicit if indirect ways continued to grow considerably, as we have seen in adverts explored in the

pervious section. A number of additional examples also introduced Lubitsch directly. These included promotional portraits over super-imposed letters, posed stills and snapshots from the production posed or otherwise.

As different as this small collection of adverts initially appears, several striking similarities stand out. First, they present Lubitsch directly and negotiate his role in the production as director. The advert for *A Royal Scandal* (Figure 22) has Lubitsch towering over the romantic couple,⁹⁶ while in the one for *Cluny Brown* (Figure 23), director and actors were more equally matched on either side of a large canvas proclaiming the film “The picture of the moment,” “week,” “month” and “year.”⁹⁷ It appears in the advert that the actors may be acknowledging Lubitsch’s

presence, but Lubitsch’s eyeline seems to suggest that he is looking at the canvas.

Lubitsch’s importance is further emphasised by his confident pose. While the actors peek from behind the canvas, Lubitsch is firmly placed in front of it and with one foot placed on



Figure 24: Advert for *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940)

⁹⁶ First page of advert for *A Royal Scandal*. *Motion Picture Herald* 158.13 (31 March 1945), p. 41-44.

⁹⁷ Advert for *Cluny Brown*, “That Bestseller! That Lubitsch Touch! That Wonderful 20th Century-Fox!” *Motion Picture Herald* 163.9 (1 June 1946), p. 6.

the arm rest of a chair which identifies Lubitsch as ‘director.’ The impression is then of a confident artist looking at his work, which may be the canvas for a painting or indeed the canvas on which the film is to be screened. In their costumes, peeking from behind the canvas onto which their likenesses will be projected, the actors are clearly part of this artwork. Therefore, at least according to the power relations projected in this advert, the actors are subordinate to the predominance of the director.⁹⁸

Such an emphasis on Lubitsch’s central importance to his films was echoed in the adverts promoting *The Shop Around the Corner*. One takes a still from the production (Figure 24) and places Lubitsch between the two leads. On the set of the restaurant scene, Lubitsch is shown putting his head together with James Stewart, as he points possibly at Margaret Sullavan who in turn poses for the camera while sorting out her hair. The caption reads that “Famed Ernst Lubitsch directs a scene from his newest triumph.”⁹⁹

In reality, here Lubitsch is not presented as the director; instead, he looks more like a winking uncle cheekily poking young Jimmy and encouraging him to approach Sullavan. Lubitsch is hence the centre of the advert, and spatially he is closer to the centre than anyone else. While he leans to the side, he still commands the space. His demeanour is jovial, confident and knowing, whereas Stewart seems pensive and unsure, while Sullavan appears absorbed in her looks. This snapshot, probably captured or posed during the rehearsal of the scene, thus allows the advert to bring Lubitsch out from behind the camera, just as the previous advert did for *Cluny Brown*. Although here Lubitsch would not be readily identifiable by a

⁹⁸ One of the most famous self-portraits, at least of sorts, in the history of art comes to mind: *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velázquez. There, Velázquez depicts himself standing next to the canvas and in the moment of examining the object of his painting. In comparison, Lubitsch seems much more confident and satisfied with his work than the probing gaze of the artist in the painting.

⁹⁹ Advert for *The Shop Around the Corner*. *Daily Boston Globe* (2 February 1940), p. 22. See also the advert in *Weekly Variety* 137.5 (10 January), p. 15 for a similar strategy.

stranger as the director of the scene; he relies instead on his air of status as well as brand identification in helping his potential audience to recognise him.



Figure 25: Advert for *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941)

Meanwhile, a, frankly, hilarious advert (Figure 25) for *That Uncertain Feeling* seems, at first glance, to undercut the power relation invoked by placing Lubitsch at the centre. The image here is of Lubitsch being tickled by his stars, rolling on the floor laughing.¹⁰⁰ In

contrast to the director, presented as being firmly in charge in the adverts discussed above, Lubitsch has arguably lost all control in this tickle attack. However, it is the tagline underneath the scene that puts the intended spin on the advert's narrative: "Lubitsch made the *critics* roll on the floor and now they've bowled *him* over with raves."¹⁰¹

In fairness, the tagline makes only limited sense. The small print that follows includes rave reviews, yet it is not critics but Lubitsch's stars, the trio of Merle Oberon, Burgess Meredith and Melvyn Douglas, who hover over him. Thus, it is

¹⁰⁰ Advert for *That Uncertain Feeling*. *Weekly Variety* 142.9 (7 May 1941), p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. (emphases in the original).

precisely the seeming *loss* of control that makes the point. The suggested message or implication is that the film is so good that the critics' feedback has proven quite overwhelming and that even someone as tightly in control of his work as Lubitsch may lose their balance. Again, Lubitsch is placed at the centre of the advert, the female star is not placed in the most prominent light and the male stars hardly recognisable (Douglas) or half-obscured (Meredith). Thus it is the director's control that is reaffirmed ironically in its 'apparent' loss.

To close this section, I will return to two of the adverts discussed above in related contexts (Figure 26, details of figures 18 and 19).



Figure 26: The 'Lubitsch touch' illustrations (detail of figures 18 and 19)

In the campaign for *Ninotchka*, an eye-catching sketch made a striking appearance in terms of a small illustration that combines a top hat with a pair of naked female legs and the lettering "The Lubitsch Touch." This illustration was not used subsequently; not even, most interestingly, for the Lubitsch film featuring a star particularly famous for her legs: *That Lady in Ermine* with Betty Grable.¹⁰² Still,

¹⁰² This is ever more surprising as the naked legs seem strangely inappropriate for the film's protagonist. *Ninotchka* does transform from a stern Bolshevik in functional attire into a Parisian girl in love, but even then changes only into a floor-length ballgown.

this sketch encapsulates the evolution that Lubitsch's image and touch had undergone during the 1940s. The phrase is used in these adverts not in captions or taglines, but in the illustration of a top hat on two legs. It thus reduces the 'phrasing' of the Lubitsch touch to its essential elements; in other words, aside from the label, it takes away any verbal explanation of what the image means. Instead, it relies upon the symbols of top hat and legs to suggest what, by that time, the Lubitsch brand had come to stand for.

Importantly, how the hat and the legs relate to each other holds the meaning of the 'Lubitsch touch' in this moment in time. The running legs signify movement and energy; they fail to touch the ground and are therefore hard to pin down. They play into the notion of airiness and lightness. The unrealistic presentation of a huge hat directly placed on a pair of female legs and lacking head, arms or torso, relates to the conscious self-presentation and stylisation so evident in Lubitsch's films. In addition, as we have seen above, it plays a role in the branding of Ernst Lubitsch himself, being that both are fashionable and polished. In spite of the humanism that critics observed to have emerged in Lubitsch's films of this period, the illustration seems to revert to the notion that nothing in a Lubitsch film is ordinary or authentic. Instead, Lubitsch's cinema is characterised in terms of stylisation and light-footed theatricality where, similar to this illustration, nothing happens by accident and everything is carefully planned and chosen. This reduces the relationships between men and women at the centre of Lubitsch's to that of a hat and a pair of legs.¹⁰³

Both the adverts analysed above contain a more complex subtext, relying on the usual Lubitsch adverts in the small print or balancing the maid's shock with the

¹⁰³ In gender terms, one could even go as far as to suggest the man on top – which was not uniform in Lubitsch's universe, for at times there are also triangles with the woman at the centre, see *Design For Living* (1933), *Angel*, *To Be or Not to Be* or *That Uncertain Feeling* for instance, let alone Lubitsch's early historical dramas, which tended to centre on a strong, charismatic or quirky female protagonist. However, in *Ninotchka* the political drama over the return of the jewels to the Duchess Swana increasingly develops into a fight between two women over one man indeed.

men's amusement. The hat and legs illustration hence ties in with the 'louder,' more obvious message of the adverts – both in terms of their way of conveying meaning through visuals and their supposed messages. Sut Jhally suggests that

Control over demand and symbolism, rather than contradictions in production, becomes the vital focus of advanced capitalism. This is achieved through control of the symbolic code such that commodities can be given any meaning (totally divorced from what they are used for) by the manipulation of their relationship to other signs.¹⁰⁴

This is precisely what happened in the 1940s with the 'Lubitsch touch.' At the expense of other possible meanings, the phrase and the significance of Lubitsch is reduced to a smaller number of symbols which, in turn, are amplified to maximise success. Crucially, by the 1940s a brand identity for both Lubitsch and the 'Lubitsch touch' had become established and throughout the decade, these signifiers were reduced to their very essential elements, before being blatantly amplified and exaggerated. This tendency reaffirms Sut Jhally's argument that "advertising is the most influential institution of socialisation in modern society"¹⁰⁵ and Robert Goldman's cautionary remark that "We do not ordinarily recognize advertising as a sphere of ideology."¹⁰⁶ What is subtle in the 1940s discourse is not the 'Lubitsch touch,' but how it was used to promote Lubitsch's films. The use of a flesh-coloured circle that may signify both keyhole and vagina may be a clever way to advertise a film appropriately titled *A Royal Scandal*, but lacks the subtlety for which Lubitsch may have been famous both before and afterwards.

By the 1940s the brand Lubitsch and the 'Lubitsch touch' had become established. The logical next step would be to rely solely on the 'touch' and not to mention the man behind it at all. Indeed, this advertising campaign is indicative of

¹⁰⁴ Sut Jhally. *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*. New York: Routledge, 1990. p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Goldman. *Reading Ads Socially*. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 1.

initial attempts – for instance, in an advert that includes a full shot of and taglines related to Greta Garbo (“Garbo’s Gay! Garbo Flirts! Garbo Laughs!”¹⁰⁷). But it never directly acknowledges Lubitsch’s contribution, not even in the small credits that mention studio, cast, screenwriters and author of the source material. Instead, the references to Lubitsch are solely contained in the by now familiar catchline “It’s got the Lubitsch touch!”¹⁰⁸ This advert was, however, a relatively rare occurrence which, in itself, may vouchsafe for Lubitsch’s prominence.

The adverts that I examined in other parts of this study functioned by amplifying one aspect of Lubitsch’s comedy to pique the interest of the potential audience, while also reducing the meanings of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ significantly. They actually succeeded ironically in turning conceptions of the ‘touch’ away from something for which Lubitsch’s style had become known before – his subtlety. The adverts that I have explored above also reduced the Lubitsch brand, but they did so by reducing the brand to the director himself, to his style, or metonymically certain attributes of this style or persona, such as his cigar, a stylish top hat or a pair of long legs. Even if they identify Lubitsch with the role that he plays in an individual production context, they rely on previous knowledge of who Lubitsch is on the part of the audience.

These adverts thereby prove two points: that Lubitsch was established and continued to be used as a significant asset of his films. Even if he was hidden outside the camera’s frame, the adverts did their best to make Lubitsch visible. On the other hand, they also demonstrated less and less active engagement with what the Lubitsch brand meant or how it was evolving. In the critical discourse then, these elements more conventionally attributed to Lubitsch were discussed without

¹⁰⁷ Advert for *Ninotchka*. *The Washington Post* (15 December 1939), p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

much elaboration. Ironically, it was precisely these elements that were amplified in the promotional discourse.

However, the result was the same: the ‘Lubitsch touch’ had become firmly established, but investigation into what the ‘touch’ meant had diminished significantly. In both critical and commercial discourse, the ‘Lubitsch touch’ merely became a marker of what Lubitsch stood for rather than what the films reviewed or advertised actually offered. In his study, Goldman may focus on more recent history from the 1970s onwards, but his point is highly valid and may offer insight in his recognition that, “Modern advertising thus teaches us to consume, not the product, but its sign. What the product stands for is more important than what it is. A commodity-sign is complete when we take the sign for what it signifies.”¹⁰⁹ As a closer critical engagement with the more typical Lubitsch films subsided and the advertising context exaggerated what the ‘Lubitsch touch’ stood for, the discourse on Lubitsch became less about the films themselves and more about their relation to the director.

3.4 Conclusion

The final decade of Lubitsch’s career was less straightforward than the others had appeared. Having arrived in cinema in the Germany of the 1910s, first as an actor then soon afterwards as a director, Lubitsch’s career took off quickly. When he left Europe, he was one of its most famous directors and coming to Hollywood in the 1920s, his integration took place more smoothly than that for many of the other émigrés before or after him. The 1930s then saw Lubitsch and Paramount collaborate in what may well have been Lubitsch’s most fruitful period of his entire

¹⁰⁹ Goldman. *Reading Ads Socially*. p. 2.

career. Yet, when he left Paramount towards the end of that decade, his career path became more convoluted.

The critical reception of his films reflects a similar oscillation between enthusiasm for his warmer films and somewhat muted applause for films more typical of him as a director. Early in the 1940s, critics praised Lubitsch for the new direction he appeared to have taken, one demonstrating a greater interest in characters than situations. However, even in these films, Lubitsch peeked through the keyhole to find out what is going on behind closed doors – an image or even a metaphor that was directly used and exploited in the promotional discourse. The sexual subtext commonly implicit in the ‘Lubitsch touch’ was then directly alluded to. The ‘Lubitsch touch’ had been able to accommodate a wide range of meanings; although they were not mutually exclusive, they were still decidedly different thanks precisely to the subtleties and ambiguities that allowed promoters, critics, exhibitors and audience to read the style as they wished.¹¹⁰ However, in view of personal health struggles and less coherent output, the Lubitsch brand began in the 1940s to amplify meanings that hailed back to earlier successes, as well as capitalising on the connection with the director himself.

The less engaged response to Lubitsch’s more ‘typical’ films of the final decade of his career and the amplification of these conventional elements in the promotional discourse stood side by side with the more humanist readings of his films of the early 1940s. Thus, despite a somewhat deflated set of meanings associated with the ‘touch’ in these areas, Lubitsch’s style still evaded concrete definition. This singularity of his work as a director became particularly striking the

¹¹⁰ Compare Richard Maltby who applies such an argument to the reading of a short snippet of *Casablanca* (1942). There he argues that “In every Hollywood movie there are coincidences, inconsistencies, gaps, delays,” that allow for the widest audience appeal possible, and crucially, this is done deliberately. Maltby. “‘A Brief Romantic Interlude.’” p. 436.

obituaries that follow in November 1947. There, Lubitsch was immediately rewritten in the event of his death.

V *Conclusion*

Lubitsch died in November 1947. Although my study has been concerned with the reception of Lubitsch during his lifetime, this event marks a milestone rather than the end for the ‘Lubitsch touch.’ Indeed, Lubitsch’s work, persona and style were immediately rewritten and reconceptualised in the event of his death, illustrating the conjecture of this thesis that none of these are facts set in stone but depend on their discursive context.

The following overview of the reports following Lubitsch’s death is not conceived to be exhaustive or as in-depth as my earlier discussions. Instead, this section shall serve as both a summary of and reflection on my prior discussion of the contemporary public discourse on Lubitsch and as an outlook into how the following generations of critics, journalists, academics, cinephiles and indeed eventually bloggers reframe Lubitsch’s legacy in the decades to follow. In the obituaries and funeral reports in late 1947, most of the contemporary debates are reframed in terms of Lubitsch as a transnational figure, Lubitsch and sophistication, Lubitsch and the camera to name but a few.

Mervyn LeRoy, in his speech honouring Lubitsch at the Academy Awards in spring of 1947, singled out Lubitsch’s “master[y] of innuendo,” elaborating that “He had an adult mind and a hatred of saying things the obvious way.”¹¹¹ Thanks to this and Lubitsch’s “God-given genius he advanced the technique of screen comedy as no one else has ever done.”¹¹² The previous section on the 1940s offered a large range of material to support at least the former claim. During this decade Lubitsch had indeed been drawn as the master of innuendo and subtlety, if with a certain

¹¹¹ Mervyn LeRoy quoted in Philip K. Scheuer. “Lubitsch Looks At His ‘Oscar:’ Noted Producer Reviews Career That Received Academy Award.” *Los Angeles Times* (6 April 1947), p. C1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

degree of irony and in rather unsubtle terms. Although no one could know then that Lubitsch's career would come to a relatively early end, the ceremony offered the timely opportunity to summarise Lubitsch's achievements and describe the essence of his filmmaking. Mervyn LeRoy then chose to emphasise this detail about Lubitsch's work in the *Los Angeles Times*, although we have seen that the term is in fact far more complicated and layered.

Like such laudatory speeches, obituaries do not merely constitute written or spoken tributes, they are speech acts and performances.¹¹³ Speech acts go beyond merely informing; instead, they 'act' and we act by performing them. In the case of obituaries, they do not merely inform a readership of a person's death, they inscribe what was important about them to be preserved in memory, at least at the point in time in which they were published.

A survey of the material in *Variety*, *Motion Picture Herald*, the *New York Times*, the *Daily Boston Globe* and the *Christian Science Monitor* shows that the majority of publications detail Lubitsch's background in Germany. The *Herald* focuses on Lubitsch's American career, which began with *Rosita* and lasted twenty-five years.¹¹⁴ All the others include Lubitsch's German career and emphasise in particular his training on the Berlin stage, indeed, under Max Reinhardt at the prestigious Deutsches Theater.¹¹⁵ Frank Daugherty, writing a particularly personal

¹¹³ For critical discussions of obituaries see for instance Glennys Howarth, *Death and Dying: A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007 and Riitta Jallinoja, "Obituaries as Family Assemblages." *Families and Kinship in Contemporary Europe: Rules and Practices of Relatedness*. Riitta Jallinoja and Eric Widmer, eds. p. 78-91.

¹¹⁴ See Anon. "Ernst Lubitsch, Director, Dies." *Motion Picture Herald* 169.19 (6 December 1947), p. 50. Twenty-five years covers exactly the time that Lubitsch had spent making films in America, beginning with *Rosita* in 1923. The anniversary of this year may well have been behind the Academy's decision to honour Lubitsch that year. However, its focus on exactly twenty-five years also implicitly excludes his achievements in Germany.

¹¹⁵ See for instance Anon. "Lubitsch Drops Dead." *Daily Variety* 57.6 (1 December 1947), p. 9, Anon. "Deaths and Funerals: Ernst Lubitsch Veteran Film Producer and Director was 55." *Daily Boston Globe* (1 December 1947), p. 15 or Anon. "E. Lubitsch Dead, Film Producer, 55: Director and Actor Introduced Negri, Jannings on Screen – Was Noted For Touch." *New York Times* (1 December 1947), p. 21. The *Times* acknowledges Lubitsch's background in a respectable art form such as theatre while in Germany, but at the same time frames his move to Hollywood as "want[ing]"

text for the *Christian Science Monitor* providing particular detail on the German films, calls Lubitsch's humour of "genuine German theatrical heritage."¹¹⁶ These associations locate Lubitsch's roots in the more established art of the theatre, thereby adding prestige to his professional persona.

However, references to Continental Europe, sophistication and any kind of risqué subject matter are virtually non-existent here in stark contrast to the discourses analysed in both chapters on the 1920s and the 1940s. When Lubitsch first arrived in Hollywood early in the 1920s, World War I had just come to an end. References to Lubitsch's German background were then quickly replaced by associations with Continental Europe, sophistication and even French culture. These links or connotations not only allowed the dissociation of Lubitsch from his potentially problematic national background, but also facilitated the association with more positive connotations and even a newly emerging genre, hence further facilitating Lubitsch's integration into American culture and Hollywood film industry.

What is more, over the course of the three decades analysed, we observed that there was a trend for the increased acknowledgement and deployment of sexual subtexts and subject matter in the discourses on Lubitsch. In the 1920s, such intimations often remained unacknowledged or were only subtly referred to. Yet in the 1930s, not even the danger of film censorship could foreclose the discussion of more risqué material in Lubitsch's films, while in the following decade the promotional discourse capitalised on just these associations, no matter how 'warmly' the critics described a film like *Heaven Can Wait*.

to 'study' American motion pictures from all angles." Thereby it simultaneously valorises his country of destination. After all, there must then have been something worth studying in American cinema.

¹¹⁶ Frank Daugherty. "He Added to the Gaiety of Nations a Memory of Movie Making." *The Christian Science Monitor*. (30 March 1948), p. 16.

Yet, following Lubitsch's death, the 'touch' became associated with less risqué contexts. While Lubitsch was "famed for the 'Lubitsch touch,'" ¹¹⁷ the *Herald* includes the moniker without any further explanation. *Variety* foregoes the term altogether, but quotes screenwriter and Lubitsch's eulogist Charles Brackett on his style: "Every picture he made bore his own special imprint – male, deft and unsentimental and joyous. He [was] blessedly incapable of meeting a standard of taste which wasn't his own." ¹¹⁸ Brackett's notion of 'unsentimental' may well be the most, if only, suggestive allusion to this particular layer of the 'touch.' Meanwhile, the *New York Times* permits Lubitsch to be "a master of subtle humor." However, "combined with fanciful situations," the 'Lubitsch touch' had "a zany quality, implausible, Cinderella-like but thoroughly satisfying." ¹¹⁹ The reference to 'implausible' 'Cinderella' stories may refer to Lubitsch's lavish costume dramas set in fictional European kingdoms, but they ultimately suggest fairy tale and romance rather than the sexy subtleties with which Lubitsch had been associated at other times.

For the *Globe*, the 'Lubitsch touch' is associated with "light comedy," ¹²⁰ while the *Los Angeles Times* also paid homage to the 'Lubitsch touch' during the funeral. In his eulogy to Lubitsch, Charles Brackett "turned from the serious to lightly picture Lubitsch approaching the pearly gates, pausing reluctantly to discard his big black cigar before entering." ¹²¹

It may have been a case of '*De mortuis nihil nisi bonum*,' '[say or write] nothing but good about the dead.' However, the public discourse, in its main part,

¹¹⁷ Anon. Obituary for Ernst Lubitsch. *Motion Picture Herald* 169.19 (6 December 1947), p. 50.

¹¹⁸ Anon. "H'd Pays Tribute to Lubitsch at Final Rites." *Daily Variety* 57.54 (5 December 1947), p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Anon. "E. Lubitsch Dead, Film Producer, 55: Director and Actor Introduced Negri, Jannings on Screen – Was Noted For Touch." *New York Times* (1 December 1947), p. 21.

¹²⁰ Anon. "Deaths and Funerals: Ernst Lubitsch Veteran Film Producer and Director was 55." *Daily Boston Globe* (1 December 1947), p. 15.

¹²¹ Anon. "Ernst Lubitsch Buried as Friends Openly Weep." *Los Angeles Times* (5 December 1947), p. A1.

had never appeared to judge Lubitsch's foamy frivolities negatively, not even in the early heyday of the Production Code. In terms of all of these conceptions of the 'touch' it is indeed easy to find points of reference in Lubitsch's work. The meanings of Continental sophistication may have evolved through the decades of Lubitsch's association with the term, but they had still remained a strong reference point throughout his Lubitsch career. Yet, the narrowing down of the semantic fields in the obituaries to merely romance and light comedy is notable.

The *Christian Science Monitor* seems to suggest a particular direction for the 'Lubitsch touch' when writing that Lubitsch's

later work lost none of the sparkle which made his talent known throughout the film world as the 'Lubitsch touch.' I have never ceased to marvel at the manner in which he could literally mold the faces of actors – although it was more than that, for he seemed actually to change their character.¹²²

If often overshadowed by his actors throughout his career, Lubitsch was associated with the exertion of a strong influence on the acting in his films. Thus the obituaries credit Lubitsch for "introducing Pola Negri and Emil Jannings to America,"¹²³ as well as "Maurice Chevalier and Jeannette MacDonald as stars in *The Love Parade* and *The Smiling Lieutenant*"¹²⁴ and, finally, discovering the comedy talents of Gary Cooper and Greta Garbo.¹²⁵

Even more to the point, however, is that the *Monitor* links the 'touch' to technique more than the other obituaries do. Acting played a particular role in the Lubitsch discourse over the course of the decade, when Lubitsch had to reduce his directorial duties due to his heart problems. When Otto Preminger took over the

¹²² Frank Daugherty. "He Added to the Gaiety of Nations a Memory of Movie Making." *The Christian Science Monitor*. (30 March 1948), p. 16.

¹²³ Anon. "Ernst Lubitsch, Director, Dies." *Motion Picture Herald* 169.19 (6 December 1947), p. 50.

¹²⁴ Anon. "Lubitsch Drops Dead." *Daily Variety* 57.6 (1 December 1947), p. 9.

¹²⁵ See Anon. "E. Lubitsch Dead, Film Producer, 55: Director and Actor Introduced Negri, Jannings on Screen – Was Noted For Touch." *New York Times* (1 December 1947), p. 21 and Anon. "Ernst Lubitsch, Director, Dies." *Motion Picture Herald* 169.19 (6 December 1947), p. 50.

direction of *A Royal Scandal*, Edwin Schallert of *Los Angeles Times* writes of the “Unique method to preserve the Ernst Lubitsch touch.”¹²⁶ The *New York Times* later echoes this quip in that the film is getting “the famed Lubitsch touch by remote control.”¹²⁷ Both papers then noted that the actual direction was handled by Otto Preminger, while as official producer on the project, Lubitsch led or indeed “directed”¹²⁸ the rehearsals with the actors. This emphasis on directing actors presented a fitting coda to the many collaborations with notable actors, which Lubitsch had frequently developed across several films. In later discourse, cinematic technique would come to feature more alongside subject matter as the essence of Lubitsch’s filmmaking. However, the techniques of directing his actors would play only a very marginal role.

Hence, what the obituaries take from Lubitsch’s life in 1947 is an association mainly with ‘light’ comedy and his accomplished direction of actors. The association with innuendo is only touched on in passing in Mervyn LeRoy’s laudation at the Academy Awards and even there tactfully reduced to suggesting rather than showing.

This narrowing down of the meanings of the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is also reflected in the films that these texts single out as noteworthy. The *Daily Boston Globe* and *Christian Science Monitor* focus on a random selection of films from *The Marriage Circle* and *Ninotchka*, while the *Herald* concentrates on more recent ones from the sound period onwards. Both *To Be or Not to Be* and *Heaven Can Wait* appear only once, while *Trouble in Paradise* features not at all. Films such as *The Student Prince*, or others that today are even more rarely seen, made an appearance

¹²⁶ Edwin Schallert. “Preminger Will Aid Lubitsch as Director.” *Los Angeles Times* (19 April 1944), p. A9.

¹²⁷ Fred Stanley. “Hollywood Takes Heed: Notes from a Hollywood Journal.” *New York Times* (8 October 1944), p. 47.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

– especially the musicals with Chevalier. While these films still constitute an early staple of the genre, they seem to be credited more for the collaboration with the French actor, and to a lesser extent his American co-star Jeanette MacDonald. As biting political satire and what today would be called ‘pre-Code comedy,’ *To Be or Not to Be* and *Trouble in Paradise* may both have been regarded as problematic titles in 1947. *The Student Prince* can be read as capitalising on sadness and nostalgia, at least on the surface. *Heaven Can Wait* featured equivalent nostalgia, but differed in presenting a playboy as its protagonist who, even towards the end of life, makes a pass at his son’s girlfriend.

In summary then, somewhat like LeRoy’s speech, the obituaries presented a glimpse of the discourse at a particular point in time. Given their performative function, which was not only to inform about Lubitsch’s demise but also to celebrate his work, their specific narrowing down of the terms of debate to particularly tasteful elements within the wider discourse is notable and decidedly different both from previous decades as well as those to follow. Crucially, however, if LeRoy’s speech somewhat echoed the conceptions of Lubitsch in the later 1940s, the obituaries chose to shift away from these in the moment of Lubitsch’s death.

Returning to Hedda Hopper and her exclamation, quoted in the introduction, that the ‘Lubitsch touch’ is meaning-less, this study has shown that there is not one ‘Lubitsch touch.’ There are instead many ‘Lubitsch touches.’ They may not be mutually exclusive in their conceptions and meanings, but they are decidedly distinct. How these notions of a ‘touch’ were emphasised and applied depended on the context in which they were placed and the arguments that were made in relation to them.

Nor, as Hopper argues, did the phrase hurt Lubitsch. Instead, it is precisely the ambiguity and confusion over the exact nature of the ‘touch’ that made it both

universally applicable and long lasting. It enabled critics, advertisers and Lubitsch himself to reframe what the 'touch' meant. Indeed, the flexible nature of the 'touch' proved beneficial to the perception of Lubitsch as a filmmaker, be it on arrival as a German émigré to the United States in the 1920s or in his production of musicals just when the genre was on the (temporary) wane in the early 1930s. Against the backdrop of a certain level of anti-German or at least 'German-sceptic' feelings amongst the American public only a few years after the end of World War I, Lubitsch's entry into American film culture was partly facilitated not only by what was perceived as his 'un-German' style of making films.

By swiftly associating Lubitsch with 'Continental sophistication' and eventually the 'Lubitsch touch' it became possible to discuss the émigré filmmaker in less complicated contexts. In reality, Lubitsch's liberation of the camera against a background of bulky early sound technology may precisely have resulted in his characterisation as a European émigré, brought over to Hollywood for his technical skills. However, by the time of the coming of sound Lubitsch was already so well integrated into the studio system that thanks to his supposed mastery – or 'touch' – he was able to re-invigorate the waning genre of the musical.

In the 1940s, Lubitsch's position became even more complex. When Lubitsch laced several of his films with more romantic and 'humanist' sentiment, the shift was warmly welcomed by the press early in the decade. When he returned to more characteristic types of films, there were no calls to make another *Shop Around the Corner*, but critical interest waned markedly. Instead, the older tropes were called up and rehearsed but without the enthusiasm critics had shown in the early 1940s.

To complicate and contrast with this critical engagement, the promotional discourse capitalised on the conventional 'Lubitsch touches,' even when this seemed

inappropriate for the film in question. Thus, the advertising discourse tied the product to the abstract Lubitsch brand rather than the actual content of the films themselves. As a result of this combination of critical engagement and promotional amplification, the meanings of the 'touch' were reduced to a few exaggerated elements without critical debate shedding a light on its complexities.

Hence, Lubitsch and his contribution to the filmmaking process as director were reconfigured and reconceptualised depending on the context. Here, the treatment of sexuality and its discussion in the public discourse also played a considerable role. The debate therefore developed from Lubitsch being associated in the 1920s with sophisticated comedies and a general sense of suggesting more than met the eye to a more confident discussion of sexual subtexts in the 1930s, just when censorship was closing in. A short glance at the internal production files suggests that Lubitsch initially occupied a comfortable reputation with the censors, while this may have worsened over the years. His style of direction and his film productions also remained in general favour in terms of public reception.

In the following decade, these elements were blown out of proportion, especially in terms of their promotional use. We have indeed seen how Lubitsch's characteristic subtlety was rendered uncharacteristically obvious. Remarkably, the films that did not necessarily fit with such a representation were nevertheless treated just the same. Thus, the 'Lubitsch touch' became less associated with the films themselves and more with the discursive meanings that had become understood as Lubitschian. As a case in point, Lubitsch himself features increasingly prominently in the advertising of his films, a practice that he had started exploring during his early years in Germany continuing all the way through to his appearances in trailers for several of his 1930s films. Lubitsch thus prefigures later concepts of auteurism,

centring on eminent directors of the studio era, and even the commercialisation of authorship that has been applied to directors ever since New Hollywood.

The sections on the 'touch' in the context of the early musical film or the changing negotiation of sophistication have shown the radically differing meanings that the term was given. Other contexts, such as his partnership with Chevalier and general issues of stardom or his work with Paramount, demonstrated where Hollywood historically located authorship and how the 'touch' was figured in these terms. Thus, the public negotiation of his collaboration with Maurice Chevalier or of his tenure as Head of Production tested the projections of the 'Lubitsch touch.' Public discourse suggested that, on the one hand, stardom could be explored beyond the actor, much as Lubitsch did following the split with Chevalier. On the other hand, the public discourse of the 1930s also suggested that cinematic authorship was still flexible enough to be located not only in the director's chair. It could also be located at a more senior executive level as well, as long as the artistry of the executive in question was as firmly established as that of Paramount's Head of Production between February 1935 and February 1936.

I have figured the years 1923 and 1947 as demarcations of this project mainly for reasons of feasibility. However, they do present natural milestones in the development of the 'Lubitsch touch.' The 'Lubitsch touch' seems to have appeared around 1923, if we take the review of Lubitsch's American silent *Rosita* in *Exceptional Photoplays* as the first place in which it is mentioned. Before 1923, German critics and promoters had contributed to Lubitsch's rise as actor and director in Germany. In the 1910s, too, early German film critics displayed a keen interest in the new medium, to which lively debates in the film magazines of the time can attest. Yet, ornate language, not least often borrowed from other arts such as literature and theatre, concealed a lack of vocabulary to describe adequately what

differentiated film from these other media. What is interesting is that this use of empurpled language and this lack of substance did not lead to the formation of a metaphor for Lubitsch's style, as it did later.

Moreover, after considering the German context, we see that no clearer or consistent notion of Lubitsch's authorship arose in the American discourse on Lubitsch's films. Once the 'Lubitsch touch' was established, the shape-shifting nature of this ambiguous term was turned again and again into an advantage. Indeed, in the earliest review that uses the phrase, the 'touch' is not discussed at all, for the reviewer suggests that it has already been established. This combination of implied general acceptance of the term and the absence of a definition of it is a key aspect of the formidable ambiguity that has ensured its longevity. Curiously, it is precisely the silent, unchallenged acceptance that different definitions of the 'touch' can exist side by side that has ensured its popularity – during Lubitsch's lifetime and beyond.

In 1947, Lubitsch's death put an end to his filmmaking and the first stage of the reception and negotiation of his style. In the obituaries, Lubitsch was, for the first time, 'frozen' in history; yet, critical and popular studies of his work have since gone on to conceptualise and reconceptualise his work in retrospect.¹²⁹ Crucially, the obituaries immediately rewrote Lubitsch in a different light to that in which he had been painted for most of the 1940s.

In film-historical terms, the obituaries are a sketch of how Lubitsch's style has been reframed since his death. Investigating the historiographical practices of film history writing with Lubitsch as a case study proves to be both fascinating and rewarding. In showing how Lubitsch's work was initially received and how Lubitsch's style emerged as a concept called the 'Lubitsch touch,' my thesis has

¹²⁹ Arguably, they can now also view it as a whole as Lubitsch does not produce any more new material. A small qualification to this is the discovery of films, especially from the early period, that had been considered lost before. Such discoveries could then have an impact on the conceptions of Lubitsch's style and arguments made about his work.

thus provided the necessary foundations for a research project into how Lubitsch's legacy has been considered and framed ever since. Of course, the years that have passed since 1947 have not seen the appearance of any new Lubitsch films. However, both popular discourses and the academic sphere have engaged with the medium of film ever more widely. In all these, the 'Lubitsch touch' has continued to be reframed, even if its director has occupied an increasingly precarious position in terms of fame. These debates and the reasons for such a development invite ample investigation and such research would directly follow on that laid out in this thesis.

A central question for this further research would be the question whether the 'touch' was more of a burden than a blessing for Lubitsch. Lubitsch's cinema can be seen as particularly tied to the time and fashions when the films were made – the sophisticated comedies that after the 1920s would be a prime example for this, having only seen isolated revivals ever since. Expressive film techniques and a yearning for the style of bygone eras have ensured Lubitsch the continued attention of both film scholars and cinephiles. But among more popular film discourses, this task has been, if anything, taken over by nothing else than the 'Lubitsch touch.' As a preliminary answer, both a blessing and a burden, the blessings do seem to outweigh the burdens.

During the four decades of the director's career, his authorship and the 'Lubitsch touch' were not a clearly defined entity. Yet, critics and promoters somehow conspired to agree at every turn that there was such an entity on which to hinge their critical arguments and promotional campaigns. Subsequently, spilling over into the academic discourse on Lubitsch and his films, the problematic nature of the 'touch' has been grasped more clearly. But critical endorsement has also given further credence to the term. Thus, it weighs even heavier that the

repercussions for Lubitsch's authorship and authorship in general had until now remained unexamined. It has been this lack in the body of Lubitsch research that this study has endeavoured to address.

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Filmography

- A nous la liberté.* Dir. René Clair. Prod. Films Sonores Tobis, F, 1931. Main Cast: Henri Marchand (Emile), Raymond Cordy (Louis), Rolla France (Jeanne).
- Angel.* Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1937. Main Cast: Marlene Dietrich (Maria 'Angel' Barker/Mrs. Brown), Herbert Marshall (Sir Frederick Barker), Melvyn Douglas (Anthony 'Tony' Halton).
- Anna Boleyn/Deception.* Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Messter-Film GmbH, Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1920. Main Cast: Henny Porten (Anna Boleyn), Emil Jannings (König Heinrich VIII.).
- Die Austernprinzessin/The Oyster Princess.* Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1919. Main Cast: Ossi Oswalda (Ossi Quaker), Victor Janson ("Austernkönig" Mister Quaker), Harry Liedtke (Prinz Nuki), Julius Falkenstein (Josef).
- Bedingung – Kein Anhang!.* Dir. Stellan Rye. Prod. Deutsche Bioscop, GER, 1914. Main Cast: Hans Waßmann, Albert Paulig, Ernst Lubitsch.
- Die Bergkatze/The Wildcat.* Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1921. Main Cast: Pola Negri (Rischka, die Bergkatze), Paul Heidemann (Leutnant Alexis), Victor Janson (Festungskommandant).
- The Birds.* Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. Alfred Hitchcock Productions, USA, 1963. Main Cast: Tippi Hedren (Melanie Daniels), Rod Taylor (Mitch Brenner).
- Blindekuh.* Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1915. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch.
- Bluebeard's Eighth Wife.* Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1938. Main Cast: Claudette Colbert (Nicole De Loisselle), Gary Cooper (Michael Brandon), Edward Everett Horton (The Marquis De Loisselle).
- Broadway After Dark.* Dir. Monta Bell. Prod. Harry Rapf Productions, Warner Bros., USA, 1924. Main Cast: Adolphe Menjou (Ralph Norton), Norma Shearer (Rose Dulane).
- Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.* Dir. Robert Wiene. Prod. Decla Bioscop AG, 1920. Main Cast: Werner Kraus (Dr. Caligari), Conrad Veidt (Cesare).

Carmen/Gypsy Blood. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1921. Main Cast: Pola Negri (Zigeunerin Carmen), Harry Liedtke (Don José Navarro).

Casablanca. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1942. Main Cast: Humphrey Bogart (Rick Blaine), Ingrid Bergman (Ilsa Lund), Paul Henreid (Victor Laszlo).

Cluny Brown. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1946. Main Cast: Charles Boyer (Adam Belinski), Jennifer Jones (Cluny Brown), Andrew Carmel (Peter Lawford).

Design for Living. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1933. Main Cast: Fredric March (Thomas B. 'Tom' Chambers), Gary Cooper (George Curtis), Miriam Hopkins (Gilda Farrell).

Desire. Dir. Frank Borzage. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1936. Main Cast: Marlene Dietrich (Madeleine de Beaupre), Gary Cooper (Tom Bradley).

The Dressmaker of Paris. Dir. Paul Bern. Prod. Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, USA, 1925. Main Cast: Leatrice Joy (Fifi), Ernest Torrence (Angus McGregor), Mildred Harris (Joan McGregor).

Eternal Love. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Joseph M. Schenck Productions, USA, 1929. Main Cast: John Barrymore (Marcus Paltran), Camilla Horn (Ciglia).

Das fidele Gefängnis/The Merry Jail. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1917. Main Cast: Harry Liedtke (Alex von Reizenstein), Kitty Dewal (Alice von Reizenstein), Ernst Lubitsch.

Die Firma heiratet. Dir. Carl Wilhelm. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1914. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch (Moritz Abramowski), Victor Arnold (Hoflieferant Manfred Mayer), Albert Paulig (Reisender Siegmund Philippsohn).

Die Flamme/Montmartre. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Ernst Lubitsch-Film GmbH, USA, 1922. Main Cast: Pola Negri (Kokotte Yvette), Alfred Abel (Adolphes Freund Gaston), Hermann Thimig (Komponist Adolphe).

Forbidden Paradise. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, USA, 1924. Main Cast: Pola Negri (Catherine, the Czarina), Rod La Rocque (Capt. Alexei Czerny), Adolphe Menjou (Chancellor).

The Girl Who Wouldn't Work. Dir. Marcel De Sano. Prod. B.P. Schulberg Productions, USA, 1925. Main Cast: Lionel Barrymore (Gordon Kent), Marguerite De La Motte (Mary Hale).

Going My Way. Dir. Leo McCarey. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1944. Main Cast: Bing Cosby (Father Chuck O'Malley), Barry Fitzgerald (Father Fitzgibbon), Gene Lockhart (Ted Haines Sr.).

The Good Fairy. Dir. William Wyler. Prod. Universal Pictures, USA, 1935. Main Cast: Margaret Sullavan (Luisa 'Lulu' Ginglebuscher), Herbert Marshall (Dr. Max Sporum), Frank Morgan (Konrad).

The Grand Budapest Hotel. Dir. Wes Anderson. Prod. Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA, 2014. Main Cast: Ralph Fiennes (Monsieur Gustave H.), Tony Revolori (Young Zero Moustafa), Adrien Brody (Dmitri Desgoffe und Taxis).

Hans Trutz im Schlaraffenland. Dir. Paul Wegener. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1917. Main Cast: Paul Wegener (Hans Trutz), Ernst Lubitsch (Satan).

Heaven Can Wait. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1943. Main Cast: Gene Tierney (Martha Strabel Van Cleve), Don Ameche (Henry Van Cleve), Charles Coburn (Hugo Van Cleve).

Ich möchte kein Mann sein/I Don't Want to Be a Man. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1918. Main Cast: Ossi Oswalda (Ossi), Curt Goetz (Ossis Hauslehrer Dr. Kersten).

If I Had a Million (episode "The Clerk"). Dir. Ernst Lubitsch et al. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1932. Main Cast: Charles Laughton (Phineas V. Lambert) et al.

Innocents of Paris. Dir. Richard Wallace. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1929. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Maurice Marney), Sylvia Beecher (Lousie Leval).

Käsekönig Holländer. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1917. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch.

Kiss Me Again. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1925. Main Cast: Marie Prevost (LouLou Fleury), Monte Blue (Gaston Fleury), John Roche (Maurice), Clara Bow (Grizette).

Der Kraftmeyer. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1915. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch (Stubenhocker).

Lady Windermere's Fan. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1925. Main Cast: Ronald Colman (Lord Darlington), May McAvoy (Lady Windermere), Bert Lytell (Lord Windermere), Irene Rich (Mrs. Erlynne).

A Letter to Three Wives. Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Prod. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1949. Main Cast: Jeanne Crain (Deborah Bishop), Linda Darnell (Lora Mae Hollingsway), Ann Sothorn (Rita Phipps).

The Lonedale Operator. Dir. D.W. Griffith. Prod. Biograph Company, USA, 1911. Main Cast: Blanche Sweet (Daughter of the Lonedale Operator).

Love Me Tonight. Dir. Rouben Mamoulian. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1932. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Maurice), Jeanette MacDonald (Princess Jeannette).

The Love Parade. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1929. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Count Alfred Renard), Jeanette MacDonald (Queen Louise).

Madame Dubarry/Passion. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1919. Main Cast: Pola Negri (Jeanne Vaubernier, later Madame Dubarry), Emil Jannings (König Louis XV.), Harry Liedtke (Medizinstudent Armand de Foix).

The Man I Killed/Broken Lullaby. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1932. Main Cast: Lionel Barrymore (Dr. H. Holderlin), Nancy Carroll (Fräulein Elsa, Walter's fiancée).

The Marriage Circle. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1924. Main Cast: Florence Vidor (Charlotte Braun), Monte Blue (Dr. Franz Braun), Marie Prevost (Mizzi Stock), Adolphe Menjou (Professor Josef Stock).

Meine Frau, die Filmschauspielerin/My Wife, the Movie Star. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1918/1919. Main Cast: Ossi Oswalda (Filmstar Ossi), Victor Janson (Generaldirektor der Filmgesellschaft), Hans Kräly (1. Dramaturg der Firma).

The Merry Widow. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), USA, 1934. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Danilo), Jeanette MacDonald (Sonia), Edward Everett Horton (Ambassador).

Meyer aus Berlin/Meyer from Berlin. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1918. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch (Sally Meyer), Ethel Orff (Paula Meyer), Heinz Landsmann (Harry), Trude Troll (Harrys Braut Kitty).

Monte Carlo. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1930. Main Cast: Jeanette MacDonald (Queen Louise), Jack Buchanan (Count Rudolph Falliere/Rudy the Hairdresser).

Ninotchka. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), USA, 1939. Main Cast: Greta Garbo (Nina Ivanovna Yakushova, called Ninotchka), Melvyn Douglas (Count Leon d'Algot), Duchess Swana (Ina Claire).

One Hour with You. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1932. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Dr. André Bertier), Jeanette MacDonald (Colette Bertier), Genevieve Tobin (Mitzi Oliver).

Paramount on Parade (sequences "Origin of the Apache Dance," "Park in Paris" and "Rainbow Revels"). Dir. Ernst Lubitsch et al. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1930. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier et al.

The Patriot. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Studios, USA, 1928. Main Cast: Emil Jannings (Czar Paul I), Florence Vidor (Countess Ostermann).

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. Shamley Productions, USA, 1960. Main Cast: Anthony Perkins (Norman Bates), Janet Leigh (Marion Crane).

Die Puppe/The Doll. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1919. Main Cast: Ossi Oswalda (Ossi Hilarius), Hermann Thimig (Lancelot), Victor Janson (Puppenmacher Hilarius), Ernst Lubitsch (set designer; himself).

Rausch/Intoxication. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Argus-Film GmbH, GER, 1919. Main Cast: Asta Nielsen (Henriette), Alred Abel (Schriftsteller Gaston).

Romeo und Julia im Schnee/Romeo and Juliet in the Snow. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Maxim Film Ges. Ebner & Co., GER, 1919/1920. Main Cast: Lotte Neumann (Julia), Gustav von Wagenheim (Romeo).

A Royal Scandal. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1945. Main Cast: Tallulah Bankhead (Catherine the Great), Charles Coburn (Chancellor Nicolai Iiyitch), William Eythe (Lt. Alexei Chernoff).

Rosita. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Mary Pickford Company, USA, 1923. Main Cast: Mary Pickford (Rosita), Holbrook Blinn (The King), Irene Rich (The Queen).

The Salvation Hunters. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Prod. Academy Photoplays, USA, 1925. Main Cast: George K. Arthur (The Boy), Georgia Hale (The Girl).

Schuhpalast Pinkus/Shoe Salon Pinkus. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1916. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch (Sally Pinkus), Else Kentner (Melitta Herve).

Singin' in the Rain. Dir. Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly. Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), USA, 1952. Main Cast: Gene Kelly (Don Lockwood), Debbie Reynolds (Kathy Sheldon), Jean Hagen (Lina Lamont).

The Shop Around the Corner. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), USA, 1940. Main Cast: Margaret Sullavan (Klara Novak), James Stewart (Alfred Kralik), Frank Morgan (Mr. Matuschek).

The Smiling Lieutenant. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1931. Main Cast: Maurice Chevalier (Lt. Nikolaus 'Niki' von Preyn), Claudette Colbert (Franzi), Jeanette MacDonald (Princess Anna).

So This is Paris!. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1926. Main Cast: Monte Blue (Dr. Paul Giraud), Patsy Ruth Miller (Suzanne Giraud), Lilyan Tashman (Georgette Lalle, a dancer), George Beranger (Maurice Lalle).

Der Stolz der Firma. Dir. Carl Wilhelm. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1914. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch (Siegmund Lachmann), Victor Arnold (J.C.Berg), Albert Paulig (Charly Frost), Martha Kriwitz (Lilly Maass).

The Student Prince of Old Heidelberg. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Metro-Goldwyn Mayer (MGM), USA, 1927. Main Cast: Ramon Novarro (Prince Karl Heinrich), Norma Shearer (Kathi), Jean Hersholt (Dr. Jüttner).

Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans. Dir. F.W. Murnau. Prod. Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1927. Main Cast: George O'Brien (The Man), Janet Gaynor (The Wife), Margaret Livingston (The Woman From the City).

Suspicion. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. RKO Radio Pictures, USA, 1941. Main Cast: Joan Fontaine (Lina), Cary Grant (Johnnie).

That Lady in Ermine. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch, Otto Preminger (uncredited). Prod. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, USA, 1948. Main Cast: Betty

- Grable (Francesca/Angelina), Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (Colonel Ladislav Karolyi Teglas/The Duke).
- That Uncertain Feeling*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Ernst Lubitsch Productions, Sol Lesser Productions, USA, 1941. Main Cast: Merle Oberon (Jill), Melvyn Douglas (Larry), Burgess Meredith (Sebastian).
- Three Women*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Warner Bros., USA, 1924. Main Cast: May McAvoy (Jeannie Wilton), Pauline Frederick (Mrs. Mable Wilton), Marie Prevost (Harriet).
- To Be or Not to Be*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Romaine Film Corporation, USA, 1942. Main Cast: Carole Lombard (Maria Tura), Jack Benny (Joseph Tura), Robert Stack (Liet. Stanislaw Sobinski), Felix Bressart (Greenberg).
- Trouble in Paradise*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1932. Main Cast: Miriam Hopkins (Lily), Kay Francis (Madame Mariette Colet), Herbert Marshall (Gaston Monescu).
- Das Weib des Pharao/The Loves of Pharaoh*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Ernst Lubitsch-Film GmbH, GER, 1921. Main Cast: Emil Jannings (Amenes, Pharaoh von Ägypten), Harry Liedtke (Ramphis), Dagny Servaes (Teonis), Paul Wegener (Samlak, König der Aethiopier).
- Wenn vier dasselbe tun/When Four Do the Same*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Prod. Projektions-AG Union (PAGU), GER, 1917. Main Cast: Emil Jannings (Witwer Seegstoff), Margarete Kupfer (Buchhändlerin Lange), Ossi Oswalda (Tochter Seegstoff).
- The Wizard of Oz*. Dir. Victor Fleming. Prod. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), USA, 1939. Main Cast: Judy Garland (Dorothy), Frank Morgan (Professor Marvel/The Wizard of Oz/The Gatekeeper/The Carriage Driver/The Guard).
- A Woman of Paris: A Drama of Fate*. Dir. Charles Chaplin. Prod. Charles Chaplin Productions, Regent, USA, 1923. Main Cast: Edna Purviance (Marie St. Clair), Clarence Geldart (Her Step-Father), Carl Miller (Jean Millet).
- Zucker und Zimt*. Dir. Ernst Lubitsch, Ernst Mátray. Prod. Malu-Film (Mátray Lubitsch), GER, 1915. Main Cast: Ernst Lubitsch, Ernst Mátray.