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Lubitsch

LOLA, Issue 1, 2011.

Innuendo 1.5

William D. Routt

'Lo Adrian,

Not too long ago you asked me about maybe illustrating the 'Innuendo' essay for LOLA. (1)

As you might expect this idea has morphed somewhat. I now think that maybe what I would like would be called 'Innuendo 1.5'. I think it will be pretty good actually. It would consist of

1. stills collected from the web with some captions - put into the (slightly rewritten) original text at certain places;

    1. Portrait with cigar
    2. *Shoe Palace Pinkus*
    3. Negri deterritorialising
    4. Negri controlling the gaze
    5. Negri portrait with mirror

2. a clip from *Madame du Barry/Passion* currently on YouTube, embedded in the text with a rather long explanatory paragraph about what is going on in the terms set up in 'Innuendo' as a caption;

    Clip from *Madame du Barry*

3. an appended section titled 'But that may not be enough' consisting of stills and clips from *Broken Lullaby* with some fairly short text/captions suggesting a fairly radical interpretation of that wonderful film partly based on the ideas in 'Innuendo'.

    1. Stills of amputation
    2. Stills of Paul's first visit
    3. ? Circular shot
    4. Stills of Walter's room
    5. Still of the musical offering
    6. Post-coital sequence

4. rewrites of main text

1. "In
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> *An oblique hint, indirect suggestion; an allusive remark concerning a person or a thing, esp. one of a depreciatory kind.* (Oxford English Dictionary)

The way to do this is to tell you the story, the life, even though I cannot and will not do that. She taught me that the story of the life, the story that is always changing with the years, was all the hope that anyone really had. And too, the elements of Lubitsch's story and his films are like swatches of fabric that each of us is given to piece something together and to stitch over with a thread of sense. And I guess he would like me to be making him a bed covering, not a portrait, a textile after all.

Ernst Lubitsch was a Jew from Berlin. No, it was worse than that: he was a first-generation Jew from Berlin. His father had migrated from Russia, and if there is anything less presentable than a Jew from Berlin it is an East European Jew. This is what upset Lotte Eisner so much about him. Not that he was Jewish, because Lotte Eisner was Jewish, but that he was a Berlin Jew, a Russian Jew, a crude Jew who might have served as a stereotype for Hitler. He was short and fat and ugly. He was a tailor's son. He smoked cigars *all* the time. When he smiled, it was with 'the dark, mocking leer of a creditor', according to Ben Hecht (qtd. in Eyman 27), and the pictures show that Hecht was right. I imagine that when he ate, he ate prodigiously, smacking his lips and belching. He ate sauerkraut and sausage, *gulyas* and steak tartare. The stories of his humour indicate that he was particularly fond of embarrassing practical jokes.

This is the Lubitsch of the first films, 1913 to 1917, the period when he 'became the outstanding German screen comedian, as popular as Max Linder in France, and Harold Lloyd, perhaps even Chaplin, in America during the same period' (Theodore Huff qtd. in Weinberg 13). What he put on the screen then made people squirm later. 'Too Jewish slapstick' noted Eisner (a couple of times) in 1967 (qtd. in Weinberg 252), and in 1993 Scott Eyman warns that if we ignore the context of World War I Berlin, 'all we can see is a grinning comic gargoyle of negative comic character traits' (47).

But is that the case? Was it not rather that Lubitsch put 'himself' on the screen, the self

she taught me that was the only true self, the self in the mirror, the self in the photograph? (Which is to say, what he knew others saw when they looked at him: the migrant Berliner Jew). Both Eyman and Weinberg seem ready to blame Lubitsch at least a little for what the Nazis did with this image some years later, as though the culture that fostered the image had nothing to answer for and as though it was not the Nazis' use of it, but somehow the image itself, that was corrupted – Lubitsch as a mini-skirt.

Lubitsch's offensive characters - named Moritz or Sally or Meyer - were not unlike the characters performed by some rappers today. They were composed of all the stereotypical traits that made Germans, even German Jews, uneasy. Sally Pinkus and his kind were in-your-face Jews, a combination of *shmendrik* and *schlemihl* (Hake 30): lecherous, stupid, greedy, vulgar, sneaky, cunning, ill-mannered, klutzy, flamboyant. In Lubitsch's films these awful characters triumphed: they got the girls and the money - just what anti-Semites, then and now, are afraid of. That was the joke.

'Never again in Germany would anyone make such plebeian films' writes Enno Patalas, in much the best article available in English on Lubitsch's German films (641). Patalas understands the *petit bourgeois* aggression, the assertion and *the politics* of all Lubitsch's work before his move to Hollywood.

> Lubitsch's German films are doubly tied up with the inflation period. On the one hand, they could not have been made at any other time ... Lubitsch's films are 'inflation films' in another sense, in that they reflect the destruction of conventional values. In ever new variations, these films show how something is used up, worn out, wasted. Something is consumed, something else appears in its stead, is consumed too, and so on. Often the films are themselves built on this principle. (640)

The title, *Schuhpalast Pinkus* (*Shoe Palace Pinkus*, 1916) describes Lubitsch's migrant caricature in terms of his place of business and his place of business in terms of kitsch ambition. Rapacious modern desire changes and 'inflates' everything: human into business, store into castle, salesman into aristocrat. This is wartime inflation, to be sure, but an inflation that was not seriously checked from 1915 to 1924. Patalas is not just being fanciful or metaphoric when he links inflation to a fluid social and moral atmosphere: changing prices and incomes mean changing status, changing power, and, in consequence, if you will, changing ideas of what is good and what is bad.

Lubitsch ostentatiously gave up stardom in the credits for his first feature, *The Eyes of the Mummy* (1918), 'to realise his artistic dreams' (qtd. in Hake 38). Although there is as much irony as naiveté in this phrase, and he was to act again in two films (*Meyer from Berlin*, 1919, and *Sumurun/One Arabian Night*, 1920), it would not do to assume that Lubitsch's irony ever wipes out a sincere desire to make art. Irony cannot efface what it infuses, and part of the significance of Lubitsch's work to the times in which we live lies in the ways in which that work simultaneously asserts and denies its aesthetic ambition. This too may be part of the scandal of Lubitsch: the overweening pretense of someone with neither the innate breeding nor the education to warrant it - and of someone who was surely never serious - to be taken seriously.

The mix of ethnicity, class and economics recurs in Lubitsch's 'second period' of often more serious, and certainly more 'refined' work, from about 1917 (*When Four Do the Same*) to 1923 (*Die Flamme/Montmarte*). In most of these films, however, ethnicity tends to lose the kind of bite that makes 'too Jewish slapstick' so uncomfortable for certain viewers. Only in the case of the gypsies in *Carmen/Gypsy Blood* (1918) and *Sumurun* does a specific ethnic identity tend to translate into anarchic inflation of values, as it does in the earlier films; and the same deliberate destructiveness seems to be characteristic of the robbers of *Die Bergkatze/The Wildcat* (1921), who are identified only in a general way as ethnically 'other' by names that end in 'a' or 'o' (personally, I think they are gypsies too). Ethnic identity, in the form of the 'national character' of the United States, Spain, *ancien régime* France, Tudor England, 'Arabia', the Balkans, ancient Egypt and *fin-de-siècle* France, plays some part in *The Oyster Princess* (1919), *Carmen*, *Madame du Barry/Passion* (1919), *Anne Boleyn/Deception* (1920), *Sumurun*, *The Wildcat*, *The Loves of Pharaoh* (1922) and *Die Flamme*, but the part it plays is something to look at: spectacular, exotic and occasionally ridiculous. Some people may have thought *Madame du Barry* and *Anne Boleyn* were withering propaganda attacks on France and England, as Herman G. Weinberg claims Alfred Hugenberg did (37), but most people even back then were less ideologically blinkered than Hugenberg.

From Weinberg to Sabine Hake, there is agreement among film historians and critics that what Lubitsch's films of this period were about, mostly, was empowered women. Hake says that after Lubitsch got himself out from in front of the camera, his films 'reveal the identification of the Jewish male with the marginal position of women' (39), but one does not have to accept the dubious idea of a director's 'identification' with a character, much less Hake's inflection of that premise, to recognise that these films put women in the centre, make them (sexual) aggressors, and regard the punishments they incur for the freedom of their actions as tragically unmerited.

What Lubitsch did most assuredly do was to use Pola Negri, especially, in the kinds of outsider roles that he himself had been playing. In the Lubitsch films Negri incarnates women who are not aware of and not bound by the rules that govern others, that is, women who behave as though they had the right to act as they please. Like the protagonist of *Carmen*, their independence often gives them almost absolute power over certain marginal areas of life, but it also makes them vulnerable to traditional sites of masculine privilege, like soldiering and politics, which they ignore at their peril. Negri often shows this freedom by the way she scurries at will all through the set, bending, twisting, flitting - the only character permitted such a range of territorialising activity. By contrast, the men whose territory this 'really' is, those with the power that will ultimately destroy her and her allies, are the most hampered in their movements, the most uncomfortable and rigid. They are also the characters least aware that what they do is a performance, the ones who mistake what they are doing for life itself. Negri turns to face the spectators, she grimaces, laughs, performs, displays, exhibits herself. She understands that her territory is *the screen,* and that the territory of others is whatever they imagine the screen reflects.

Negri, playing Jeanne in *Madame du Barry*, intrudes gauchely into the lives of the men who will advance her: hurling a hatbox into the path of a horse, tumbling over a screen on top of her future pimp/brother-in-law. As La Carmencita, Negri enters behind the hapless Don José just as he inhales his cigarette, grabs him by the hair, pulls him backwards and kisses him. She has begun these films as a cameo, a still object, an emblem - territory itself for the territorialising gaze; but always she veers away from such passivity, marking her own territory by her actions, dragging all eyes with her, reterritorialising herself in the process, creating the screen as a surface, the screen she faces, on which her face opens in close-up, screen of that face.

Beyond the surface of the screen, in the imagined world, it is a game, and more than that, of predestined glances. Even Jeanne cannot propel herself unwitting and unaided into the presence of Louis XV. Instead, the bored monarch will peer out of frame to some place not clearly contiguous (that is, to noplace), and coincidentally he will see her there, far away, and will be entranced. The windows of Versailles only look out on scenes that foretell doom. From them Jeanne, now the King's mistress, spies her true love, Armand, again. Later the same windows show a mob at the gates, Armand again, and the slaughter of the mob. Later yet, a delegation of radicals looks out through palace windows and catches Louis at play when they suppose he should be heeding their demands. He dies as he plays, the du Barry falls, and the revolution follows, somewhat anachronously, but with impeccable narrative logic.

Yet the fate in these images of looking and seeing is more than a matter of simple chrono-logic. Each of them evokes a network of *relations*. In Jeanne, Louis sees an object of his desire, but Jeanne appears in his field of vision because du Barry has beaten her into prostituting herself in order to get the King to pay off a debt. When Jeanne sees Armand, she sees the man she saved from execution, who believes himself to have been saved by the King, and who will condemn, then attempt to rescue, her. The unsuspecting mob outside the window has been secretly goaded into action by Jeanne's enemies; just as oblivious, it is destroyed because it is spoiling the ceremony that in some sense legitimises Jeanne's position. What a delegation of the people sees through the window is a blindfolded King; what it fails to recognise when it turns from the window to look behind, is Choiseul, the motive power behind both the throne and the impending revolution. Each pair of looker and seen implies a third through which the first two are related.

Madame du Barry – Production still

Over and over again these films present the viewer with striking *mental images*. (2) Some, like the repeated image of a group of women in a building looking down as men look up from below, with each side displaying itself as it enjoys the other's display, are crystal images depending on the viewer's store of cultural knowledge, layering everyday behaviour in one class onto the fantasies of another and flipping the advertising of red light districts onto the refined voyeurism of the ballet. In *Madame du Barry* there is a trilogy of such images in which Jeanne each time sees herself in a mirror reflected through du Barry.

Jeanne, a lower class country girl sequestered behind the screen by the ambassador Don Diego who intends to seduce her, discovers herself to the Marquise du Barry who is in need of money.

Other mental images crystallise less culturally specific gender, social and economic relations. Du Barry captures Jeanne's body for his use by displaying to her a fabulous necklace. She puts it on and delightedly looks at the two of them - herself and it - in a mirror. In this film of frames, we should not let such a moment pass by unreflected. The

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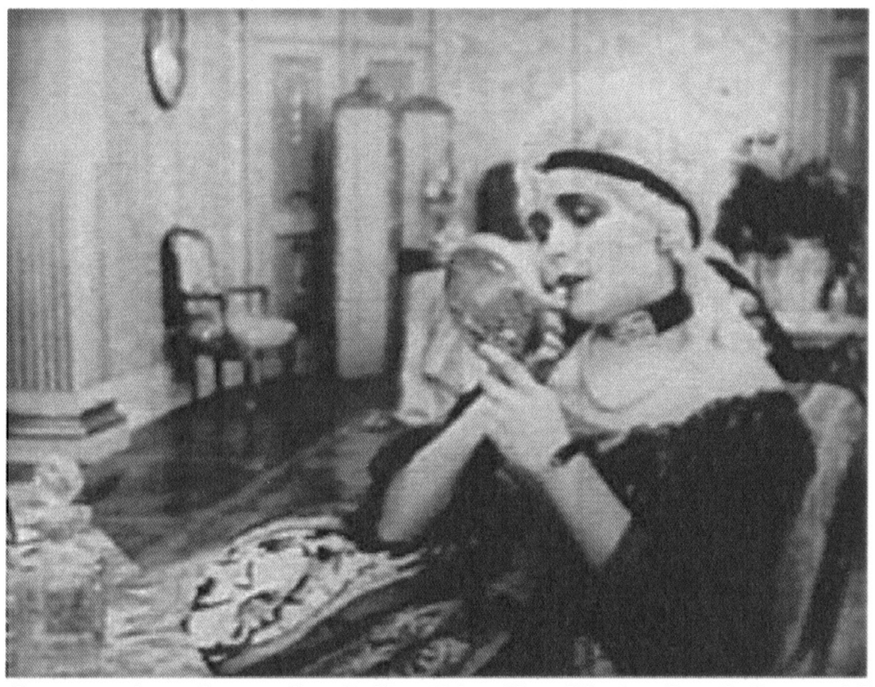
necklace turns Jeanne into a portrait, it marks her as an object of exchange. Yet at the same time, *her body and the necklace become one in the cinema-mirror*. In looking at the reflection, she sees herself and sees herself reflected through du Barry. Jeanne is not unaware: she knows precisely what we know. Indeed, this is the moment in the film in which there is the most hope for her and she enjoys the greatest control over her destiny. She can still turn her back on the reflection.

Other mental images in Lubitsch films crystallise relations set in play by narrative, like the melodramatic shot of Don José with his head thrust through curtains apparently witnessing his betrayal by Carmen, which he cannot possibly actually see. The unshaven visage, the rolling eyes, the clutch of hands beneath the curtains, the field of darkness around the head, all underscore his panicked recognition that compulsions he cannot comprehend but which, we sense better than he, have brought him to this pass. Meanwhile in *Madame du Barry*, Jeanne gazes again into the mirror of du Barry.



Jeanne has been brutalised by the Marquise into making herself up to take the next step to catch the attention of the King. There is no way back from this moment, the last in which Jeanne sees herself in a mirror.

Jeanne is formally presented at court. (3)

Story

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Jeanne has risen from milliner to the mistress of Louis XV. She is now the Comtesse du Barry and is to be presented at court, signifying formal recognition of her status as first lady of France. The Duc de Choiseul, the King's Minister of State, has been plotting with his sister, the Duchesse de Gramont to undermine Jeanne's position by circulating satiric ballads about her and by linking her prodigality to a rise in taxes. In this way he has caused a great deal of popular unrest. Meanwhile Jeanne has contrived to get her true love, Armand, freed from prison, inducted into the King's Guard, and promoted to Lieutenant. Armand is not aware of her role in these events and believes the King is responsible. The lovers have not met since Armand's arrest; indeed, Jeanne has only seen Armand once – through a window and from a distance - in that time.

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The clip of the presentation is from a/the European version. There are intertitles in French and German, but not English. Basically what happens in the sequence is that Jeanne's formal presentation is interrupted when Choiseul opens a window, letting in the sound of the mob's protest. Jeanne is upset, but Louis is infuriated and orders the mob dispersed. Jeanne spots Armand directing the troops. She is thrilled, but her mood changes as the action becomes violent. Choiseul and de Gramont take the opportunity to chide her, but the King's retaliation has established Jeanne's importance to him and, in a coda not included in this clip, the rest of the court shuns Choiseul and de Gramont.

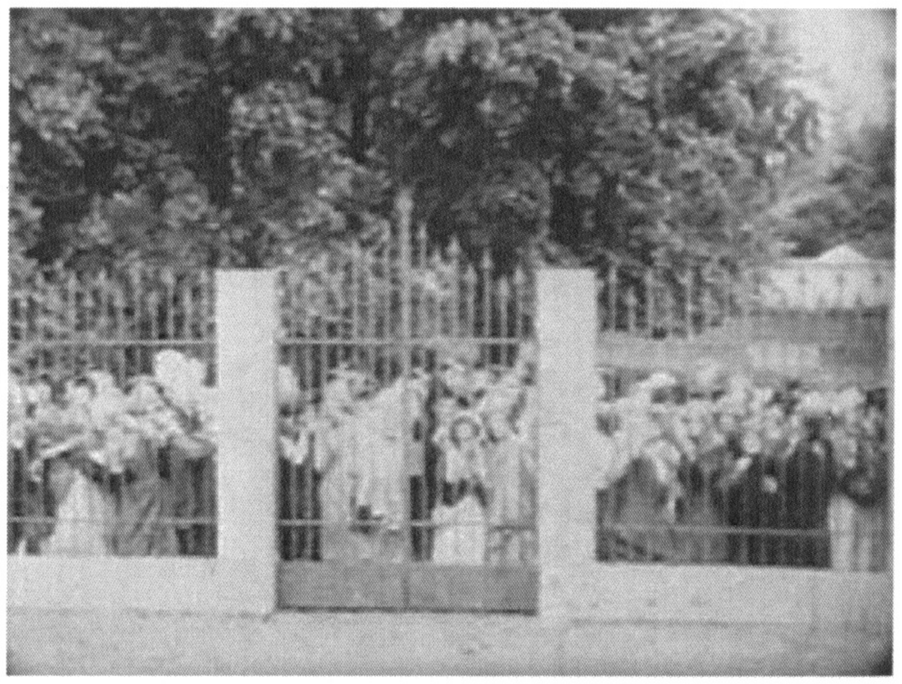
Analysis

A prelude sets the scene for the spectacle of the presentation and the drama that ensues. (The four prelude shots below are from the US version of the film.)

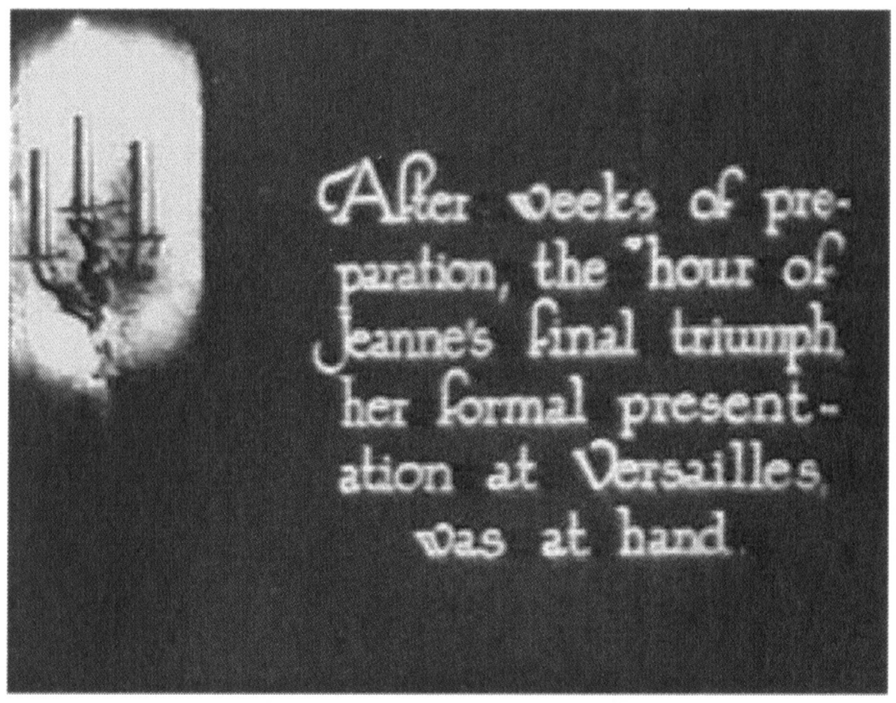
Spectacle of the court 1 (Jeanne in the carriage)

Spectacle of the court 2 (de Gramont and friend, links with preceding – the look points to succeeding image)

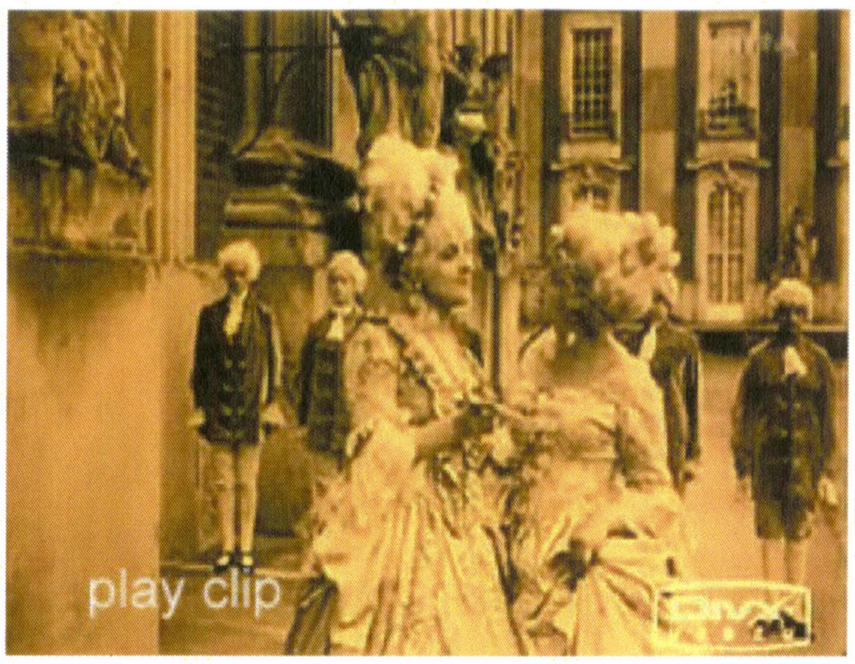
Spectacle of the mob/the people (links with preceding two images)



Spectacle of impending conflict (de Gramont speaks, explicating all linkages more fully by explicating the previous look and anticipating the drama to come)



Clip: The presentation and its results. Note that the beginning of the clip is similar set up of same characters as image 2 above. (Clip is from European version).



The first complete shot of the clip picks up the costume motif introduced in image 2 (crudely, costume=court) and firmly places us as the spectators of the court spectacle by granting privileged access to Jeanne's preparation (Jeanne is thus made briefly a counterpart of de Gramont). A complex – but not uncommon - transference of point of view in some measure equates the inside knowledge we have just gained from de Gramont with the inside knowledge we get (and are used to get) from observing Jeanne. This image is replaced by a spectacular shot of Jeanne's train smoothed by Zamor, a figure of colonial power and enslavement, which opens a new line of narration (the actual presentation at court), but it is also the case that the new shot puts Jeanne where the caged mob has been (image 3), replacing them as de Gramont (image 2) replaced Jeanne, the virtually unseen passenger in the carriage (image 1). In this image in this position we can 'foresee' both the achievement (and decadence) of the spectacle and its dramatic disruption to come.

Each frame of the clip is a site of simultaneous looks, perceived and interpreted differently by different characters in the episode (Jeanne, de Gramont, Louis, Choiseul, the court, the people). There are no 'innocent', unprocessed images here. All are fully-fledged mental images. What Louis sees when Jeanne enters is different from what de Gramont and Choiseul see, and so on – and the spectator knows this and takes account of it in understanding the film. The clip is all about those differences in perception/interpretation – but by the same token, it is also about what the spectator perceives/interprets, and implicitly then, what has been authorised for spectatorial perception and interpretation ('Lubitsch' for my purposes here). That is, the interpretation of the clip is by no means unlimited. It is as confined by the web of its gazes within and without as the mob is confined by the gate behind which it has gathered.

What makes this clip special is not merely that it seems to be a key moment in the narration (that is, in the way this film tells this story), but the deliberate way in which seeing itself is made a part of the structure and of the thematics of the episode.

When Choiseul goes to open the window to disrupt the presentation, it is not to look at the people outside, nor to allow the people to look inside the court. Instead it is to allow *the sound the mob is making* ('Down with Du Barry!') to penetrate a room hushed for the formal presentation. Jeanne and Louis have until now been in control of what is seen and what is heard within the palace/court. However, for some time Choiseul and de Gramont's

chosen instrument for Jeanne's destruction has been *the popular ballad*, written and distributed by their agents, and sung by nearly everyone outside the court. Now they take control over what is heard within the palace. De Gramont says, 'The people are applauding the new favourite', and Choiseul protests, 'It is impossible that Your Majesty holds me responsible for the anger of the people' - but Louis responds, 'I must see if the people have the audacity to oppose my will', changing the terms of the discourse (what 'the people' refers to) and the nature of the plot. Choiseul has chosen to attack Jeanne but not the King, now Louis chooses to attack the mob but not Choiseul.

It is not clear whether either Choiseul or the King have thought carefully about what will be seen from the open window and from the gate. Indeed, it could be said that Choiseul has never seen the mob at all. Certainly one of the points of the scene is that Choiseul and de Gramont are effectively invisible to the people, while Louis and Jeanne are highly visible. Nonetheless Choiseul responds to Louis' equation of Jeanne and his will by remarking to Jeanne after she has witnessed the bloody destruction of the mob, 'I hope that Madame la Comtesse is pleased with the satisfaction that has been given her,' suggesting that he has indeed seen what has happened outside the window, but quite differently from the way Jeanne has seen it – nevermind the King.

When Louis goes to the window it is specifically to see, to confront, and eventually to destroy the mob, which – seeing him – recoils. What he fails to see, of course, is what the people are protesting besides Jeanne – the rise in taxes. He perceives instead only an insult to his consort instigated by Choiseul to defy his will, and he defends Jeanne by destroying the people outside the gate. The people, of course, see a fearful tyrant at the window, refusing to listen to their radical demands for justice, and they experience the brutality of a tyrant's retaliation for any opposition to his will.

Jeanne goes/is taken to the window to see the disruptive drama of the people which Choiseul and de Gramant have engineered. She appears in the window with Louis, however, and this seems to be something more than the mob was expecting to see.

At first Jeanne is taken aback by the mob, but then she spies Armand, who is rushing, as she supposes, to her rescue. In the window her expression changes; she smiles. The troops rush after Armand. Shots are fired. In the window her expression changes again - to one of consternation. At Louis' orders Armand's troops massacre the people and, seeing this, Jeanne staggers back from the window, overcome and now invisible from the outside. As in a dream, she has seen her wishes fulfilled. She has seen her enemy. She has seen her love. She has seen vengeance mediated through the will and the action of men who love her.

And we, the viewers, have seen all of this complex play of visible and invisible; our looking filtered into mental images assigned to each of the actants, to a multi-faceted author/narrator, to the story and to film, and to several different viewers (more and less knowledgeable, sophisticated or cynical).

I have abducted the idea of the mental image of relations from Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, where the invention of such images is attributed to Alfred Hitchcock (197-205). Yet they do not originate with Hitchcock, and if my analysis is right, Lubitsch was deploying them before Hitchcock began directing. There are other parallels between the two filmmakers - their lumpish appearances, their association with lightweight genres, their obsession with pre-production - but I think one of the most intriguing parallels is that both of these outsiders found a home in Hollywood, the most central and most marginal location in America.

Patalas says that Lubitsch 'was an American even before he went to Hollywood' (643), essentially because he understood and celebrated modernity. But Lubitsch was also an American because he was a migrant Berliner Jew: an urban outsider touched by the popular German culture that pervaded the United States. The two observations are not so very different, after all. For these reasons, then - and doubtless other too - Lubitsch found himself particularly at ease in Hollywood. And I should add to these the charm I have not mentioned until now: the kindness, the generosity of spirit, the effusiveness. I think it was his charm that kept him working in Hollywood through the early twenties even after he had failed to produce another blockbuster like *Madame du Barry*.

Broadly speaking, 'Hollywood' describes the 'third' Lubitsch period from 1923 to 1947, with perhaps, an interval of four years (1928-1932) during which some 'more sombre, more pretentious' (Sarris 644) films were made. In the Hollywood period all the books talk about the influence of Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923), and some mention DeMille's series of 'sophisticated' sex comedies (1919-1923), but I tend to agree with Andrew Sarris that Chaplin's film plods in comparison with Lubitsch's more elegant work, and I think there are some fundamental stylistic differences between Lubitsch and De Mille that hinge on the issue of Vulgarity, which the latter celebrates rather more ostentatiously than the former.

On the other hand, the importance of Mauritz Stiller's work to the direction Lubitsch took in Hollywood and, for that matter, to his direction, period, ought to be clear. It was Stiller who, with *Love and Journalism* (1916), the two *Thomas Graal* films (1917, 1918) and *Erotikon* (1920), actually defined the *style,* rather than merely the subject matter, which became identified with Lubitsch's name until the latter's death in 1947. In the early twenties Lubitsch and Stiller were working along parallel lines really, and possibly 'influence' is too strong a word for their creative affinity. Stiller's extraordinarily prescient montage, built around looking and (mis)seeing, and his deft direction of actors are concentrated, refined and eventually surpassed by Lubitsch in Hollywood. It really was no accident that, in *Ninotchka* (1939), Lubitsch was able to provide Greta Garbo, Stiller's protégée, with the film many think was her best.

The position outside, which had been Sally Pinkus' and Pola Negri's, was taken now by the *persona* of the narrator of Lubitsch's films. I have said that in the earlier films, Negri made the screen her territory. This is basically a process of enlargement. One way or another, she *fills* the screen, as stars tend to do. In other words, what is going on is conceptually related to the close-up. But another strategy of the close-up is to *miniaturise*, to make us conscious of minutia. This is the strategy adopted by Stiller and deployed so often in Lubitsch's Hollywood films. As an outsider, he receded from what he showed - as, for example, Hitchcock did not. The close-ups one remembers from Lubitsch's earlier Hollywood films are rarely of faces or of 'striking compositions'. Instead the screen isolates an object or a gesture - something mundane - and the sense imparted by the close-up is not one of revelation, but reflection. The narrator has made a space, an emptiness, for these images: a virtual blank screen. Slowly they position themselves upon its surface, and slowly the point of view recedes. The screen is reterritorialised in recession, from outside.

One might take 'miniaturisation' as the root metaphor of Lubitsch's Hollywood style. In a 1923 interview he talks of *The Marriage Circle*, often claimed as the first 'Hollywood Lubitsch' movie, as a retreat from the big productions he had been identified with before coming to America:

> In my last picture I experienced a great change in my career, as it is the first time I have made an important modern drama. I have gotten away from spectacles, as there are only 5 characters in this, which is called *The Marriage Circle*. It is a very intimate drama. Even the script of the story was different, and I never got so close to real life as I have in this picture. (Ernst Lubitsch, 1923, qtd. in Leyda 285)

At the same time, the director retained his close attention to detail. He fashioned

exquisite miniatures of what there was to look at, moving in so as to diminish rather than to aggrandise his subjectivity. This process makes what it shows at once singular and plural, finite and absolute, and in so doing, of course appears trivial, not to say frivolous – precisely to the extent that *The Marriage Circle* now appears to be a dated 'comedy of manners' rather than 'an important modern drama'. And so those of us who love Lubitsch best love his comedies best, because in their tender, knowing grasp they cloak their Promethean reaching from the eyes of those who reflect only the pretence of the real.

The 'Lubitsch touch', his innuendo, is not achieved, as something similar is in Hitchcock, by anything the narrator knows in which you and I are complicit. For these films of the surface never *know* anything beyond what they show. If we think we know something, the responsibility is ours. The point of what happens behind the door is that nothing happens behind the door: it is cinema - which is to say in another way, it is real without pretention. Each character is *inexplicably* both wise and foolish, good and bad, ugly and beautiful. We understand them by what they see and do, not by what they think and feel but by the nod the cinema makes: 'there it is'.

There is forgiveness in this.

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But that may not be enough.

> It is my idea to work with the scenario writer from the very beginning and as I do so, I build up in my own mind exactly how I am going to direct the picture. When the scenario is finished I know just what I want. It is important that a scenario should be a good manuscript, as it is essential in the directing of a picture. You have to know before you start 'shooting' what to do in every scene. Some scenes are taken according to necessity and not according to their continuity. You may begin work on the last scene and then skip to the middle of the production. Therefore, how can one start at the end without having mapped out carefully beforehand every detail of direction of the production? (Ernst Lubitsch, 1923, qtd. in Leyda 284).
>
> I practically lock myself away from the rest of the world, with my script writer and technical staff. For two or three months we will pore over the work. Every detail is worked out. Perhaps for days I think round a particular scene. Nothing is decided hastily. . .
> Gradually the whole production is built up. In my mind's eye I can see exactly how that film will appear on the screen. . . How vital it is, then, for every scene, every action, to be detailed down to the very last raising of an eyelid. (Ernst Lubitsch, 1933, rpt. In Richard Koszarski, ed,, pp. 271-273).
>
> [Samson] Raphaelson was particularly enchanted one day during the writing of *The Man I Killed* as Lubitsch was acting out a scene in a graveyard. The scene called for a person on either side of a grave, and Lubitsch created the mood, even

> imitated the sound of a bird singing. When the time came to switch characters, he was living the moment so intensely that he began jumping over the grave, back and forth, hopping over a mound of fresh earth that existed only in his imagination. (Eyman 178)
>
> So immersed did Lubitsch become in the *morbidezza* of the piece that Ernst Vajda, co-scenarist with Samson Raphaelson on the film, described a late afternoon in a cemetery, dead leaves swirling in the wind, with Lubitsch actually imitating the leaves blowing about the gravestones in the wind. (Weinberg 119-120)

Broken Lullaby is a film in which the protagonist longs for forgiveness but finds only love. Rather than attempt anything approaching a full exegesis I want to expose certain sets of images that seem to me to warrant some explication and also seem to be related to one another. Much of the richness of the film is thereby lost, but perhaps some of its complexity and its art will thereby be displayed.

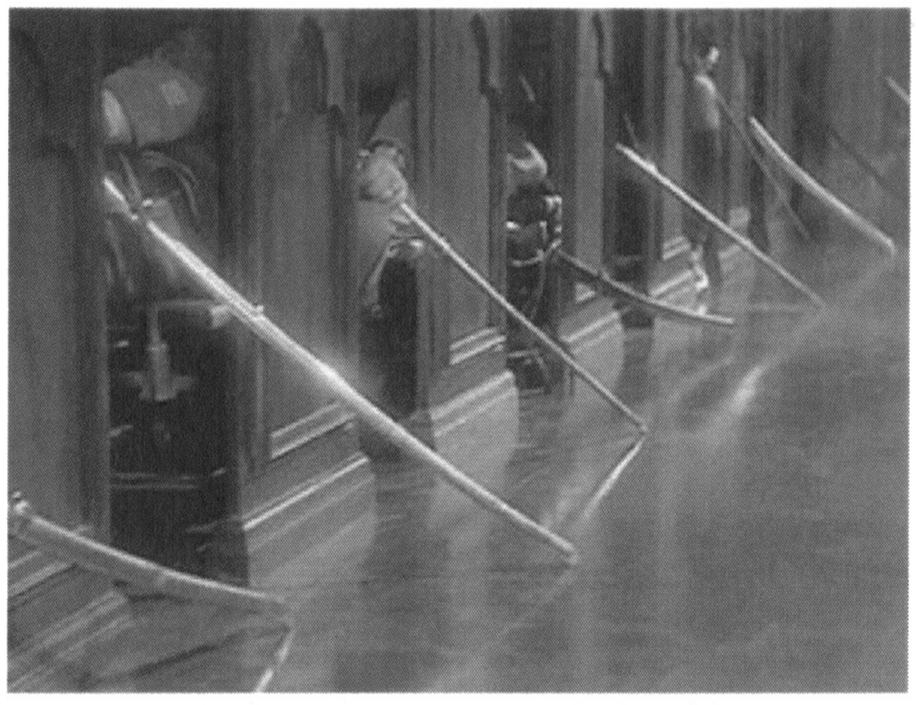
Like *Madame du Barry*, and unlike the bulk of Lubitsch's best-known work, *Broken Lullaby* is a melodrama acted in a dated melodramatic style. That is, it is a highly stylised and controlled work that demands much from viewers. Andrew Sarris, Scott Eyman and Josef von Sternberg clearly detest the film, and that is so because they are certain that they know what Lubitsch was good at.

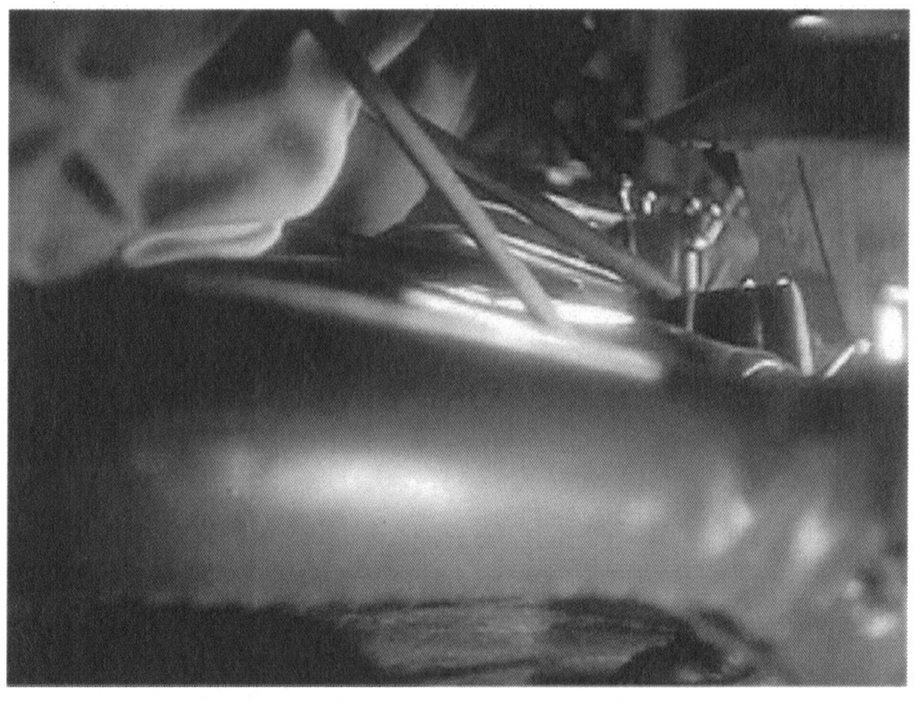
The title, *Broken Lullaby*, might give one pause. It bears more sense than meaning, and it transmutes the deliberate morbidity of the original title, *The Man I Killed*, into a different, more soothing, register. The lullaby of the title is, in the film, Robert Schumann's '*Traumerei*', which translates as 'dreaming, musing, fantasy' or the like. I do not think that the *Traumerei* of the film is any more broken than the lullaby of it.

Amputation/extension.

Explication. The film opens with music, then sounds and images of bells ringing. The music turns dark. Armistice Day, Paris, 1919. Celebrations. Guns firing, bells ringing, cheering, parades. Then this shot, the film's iconic image, as the celebratory sounds and music continue.

Cathedral interior. Solemn music. Officers. Then two shots in clear counterpart to the frame above.



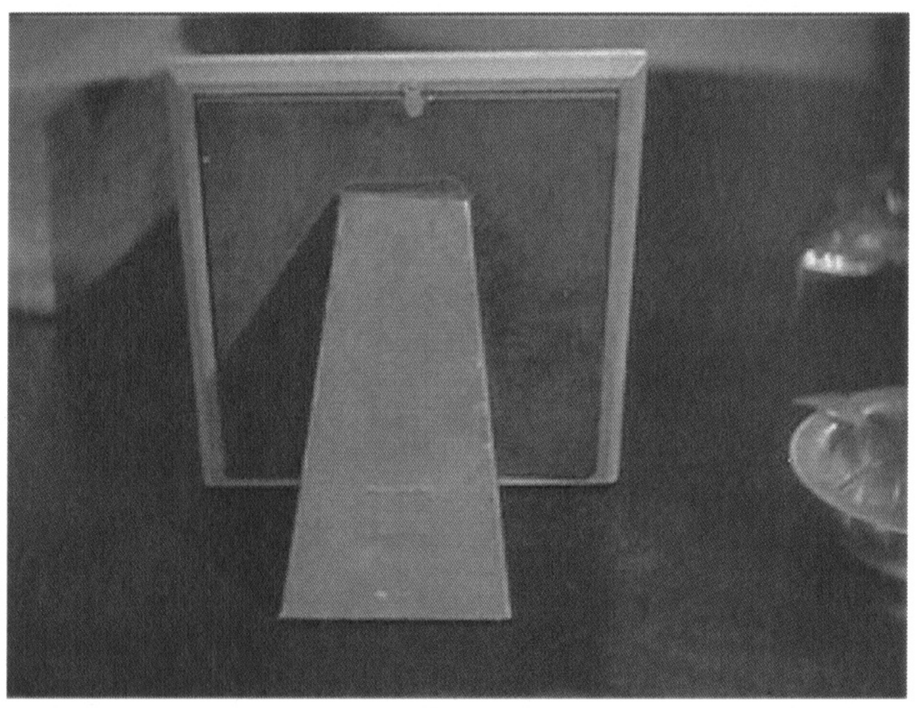


Much later. Dr Holderin (Lionel Barrymore) walks out on his cronies after a tirade against their rabid anti-French prejudices. He finds an ally in a German veteran (Rodney McLennan).

Identification/substitution.

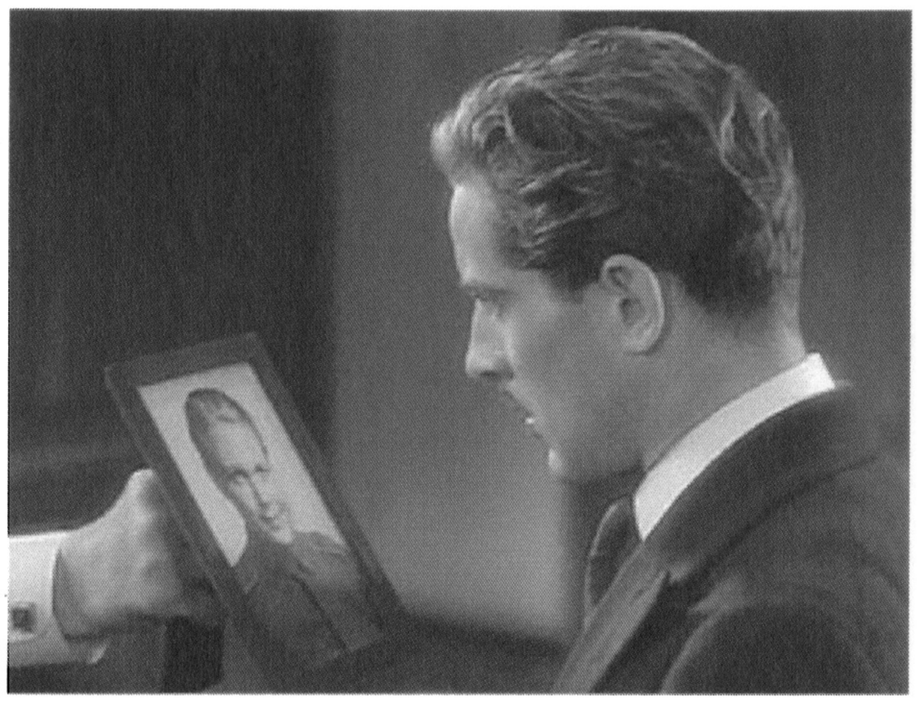
Explication. A door opens. Paul Renard (Phillips Holmes) visits Dr. Holderin intending to confess that he is the French soldier who killed his son, Walter. Remember that by this time everyone knew that a closed door was the quintessential 'Lubitsch touch'.

The picture before Paul on Dr. Holderin's desk.

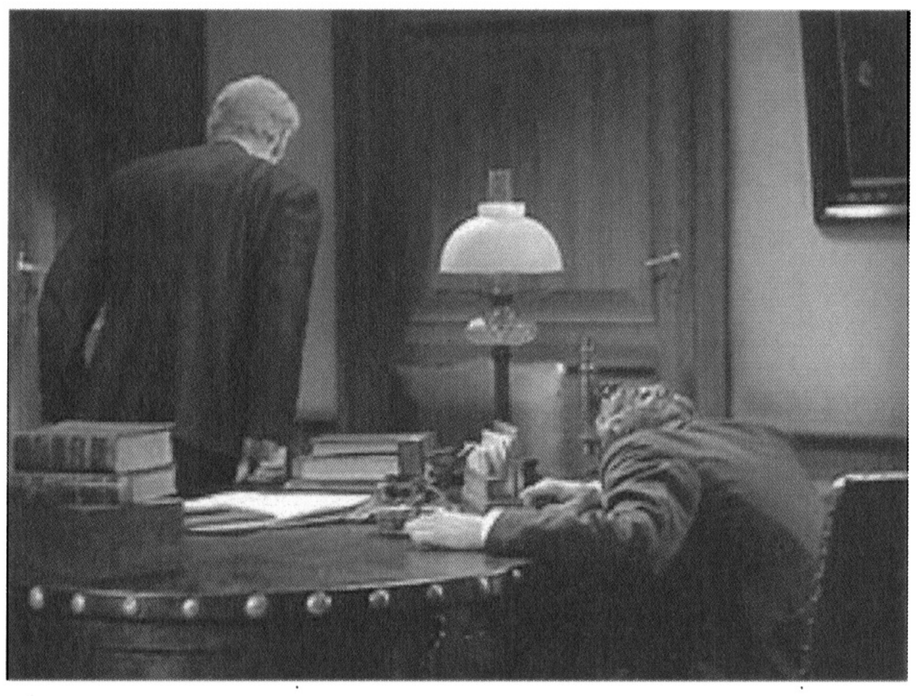


We recognise Walter Holderin in the picture and remember how similar the two young men are.

Angrily, Dr Holderin shows Paul the picture to explain why he has refused to treat a Frenchman.



The result of this confrontation. In effect Dr Holderin has responded to Paul's unvoiced confession. There are no faces at all in this shot.



Dr Holderin begins to offer to treat Paul. A door opens. Elsa, Walter's fiancée (Nancy Carroll), has come to tell Dr Holderin that, in the graveyard, she has met a Frenchman who knew Walter – Paul, of course. Elsa takes care of the Holderins. It is easy to mistake her for the sister Walter did not have.

Face to face. Paul and Elsa look at each other while Dr Holderin looks (again) at Paul.

Face to face through the open door. Reverse angle from that of Elsa's entrance. Elsa has brought Frau Holderin (Louise Carter) to see Paul. The women and men look at each other. Elsa'a arms have been in that position for a long time now.

Face to face. Similar to the shot of Paul and Elsa above. Paul and Frau Holderin look at each other while Dr Holderin looks (again) at Paul. The difference between Frau Holderin's and Elsa's expressions is as important as the similarity in the way this shot and its

predecessor are blocked.

Sudden insert. Big close up, but not of a face. Holderin's and Paul's hands. Touching replaces seeing.

Face to face. Dr Holderin looking at Paul.

Face to face. Elsa looking at Paul.

Face to face. Frau Holderin looking at Paul. The sequence is important here.

Last shot of the scene. A postcard. All of Walter's family looks at Paul. He is surrounded, but relieved and for the first time in the film, happy as he lies to them.

Reprise: the encircling shot. The three faces and their differing looks are all accomplished in one moving shot, then Paul flees the frame.

The end of the first evening. In my notes I have called this 'the post-coital sequence', and no one who knows Lubitsch's work would think otherwise. The entire scene may be taken as an uneasy *double entendre* that in some ways prefigures Pasolini's *Teorema* (1968). Alive/a lie, a matter of deictics, of hearing, of morbid innuendo.

The empty room.

Explication. A central part of the Holderin family's unwillingness to let Walter go is that his room has remained untouched. Dr Holderin regularly visits, and this distresses Elsa. As you can see, much is made of the closed door behind which we are allowed to see that nothing is happening except what might be expected.

Act 1

Act 2

The room and its closed door become important to Paul. It is, after all, what remains of Walter (and what must be dealt with if Paul is to replace him).

Elsa retrieves the key to the door.

She unlocks the door.

She opens the door.

She guides Paul in the room.

Big close up. She uses a key to unlock the desk drawer which contains Walter's last letter (which Paul read first, after he had killed Walter). As she reads aloud, Paul reveals what he knows of the letter and how he knows it.

Paul leaves the room with the door closed behind him, sensing that what he has revealed will place him outside the family forever.

Act 3

Dr Holderin returns to the room and for the first time we see what happens from the inside as the door is opened.

Should I leave you the pleasure of discovering the lock for yourself?

The overflowing moment/the corrupted offering.

Explication. What happens for me in this climactic scene is complex and depends on reading some of its imagery against the grain and in line with the overtones of the second sequence ('The end of the first evening') above.

What is being offered here? Surely both Walter's violin and Elsa. And surely the sexual/exchange imagery is both vulgar and explicit. Initially Elsa seems uncomfortable.

But she overcomes her discomfort and urges the violin on Paul herself. Now she is anxious for him to accept Dr Holderin's gift; and Paul turns his attention from the symbol to the thing itself. She is telling him that she forgives him, but also that the price of her love is that he takes Walter's place. The happiness of the family must take precedence over the need to assuage his guilt.

As Paul plays the music Walter loved Elsa continues to look at him. Her face changes from closed to open.

Frau and Dr Holderin are struck by the music and the memories it brings. Although this shot unfailingly reminds me of Grant Wood's famous 'American Gothic', I don't think I believe that any such allusion was Lubitsch's intent.

Elsa uses a key again, this time to unlock her part of Walter's music.

The happy couple (perhaps not the one we were expecting) expire from the effects of their passion.

Diminnuendo

In [*The Marriage Circle*] and other works this famous director contrived a kind of

innuendo that became known as the 'Lubitsch touch'. The basic theory behind this often amusing contrivance was that no matter what happened, one would always have a twinkle in the eye and never lose his *sang-froid* ... *Most of the films he made failed to appeal to me*. (Josef von Sternberg 38, my emphasis)

'Vell, you know he vorks different dan de vay I vork, Sam – you see, he goes for other kinds of qvalities dan I go for.' (Lubitsch to Samson Raphaelson, qtd. in Weinberg 212)

Well, now, an [essay] on Lubitsch, like a Lubitsch picture, should end with a comedy tag line.
Sir Cedric Hardwicke, at a dinner party given by Alfred Hitchcock, was defending the merits of English provincial cooking, which Lubitsch thought terrible. 'Well, I don't know', said Sir Cedric, who was playing a humorless English general in a Hitchcock picture at that time (4): 'It all depends on one's taste – for instance, in women, there are women who are perfumed and made up and their clothes designed expensively for them – and there are other women, wholesome and artless and healthy and simple ...' Whereupon Lubitsch broke in: 'Who vants dat?' (Weinberg 214, my emphasis)

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Director, *Broken Lullaby* (1932). Paramount. Dr. H. Holderin (Lionel Barrymore). Elsa, Walter's fiancée (Nancy Carroll). Paul Renard (Phillips Holmes). Frau Holderin (Louise Carter). War Veteran (Rodney McLennan).

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