

CHAPTER 9

Women in Cities

Comparative Modernities and Cinematic Space in the 1930s

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The role of montage in cinema is in many ways inseparable from the role of the archive. The assembly of shots in a film—or in any audio-visual work—is the result of a selection of shots, rushes, found footage, photography, and sounds by the filmmaker who works from their own collection of “rushes” or digital files, and also from the vast history of cinema that digital media is rendering more and more accessible and available for reproduction. My work in film history is cued by Walter Benjamin’s invitation to “carry over the principle of montage into history” (1999: 461) by bringing together disparate images and films from the archive into what he would call a “constellation.”

The utopian thrust of montage was most prevalent in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the surrealists, the Soviet filmmakers, and directors in Hollywood and Japan embraced the exciting potential of new technologies and newfound energies of juxtaposition, contradiction, and dynamic shifts in perspective. At the same time, these techniques of montage enabled new means of depicting the increasing visual presence of women in cities, but they did so in culturally specific ways. Through a critical juxtaposition of examples from the Soviet, American, and Japanese cinemas of the period, it should become clear how “montage” was couched in the terms of everyday life and urban experience. Its utopian potential was predicated on its coextensive role in the consolidation of mass culture, the implementation of social controls, and the gendered forms of visual culture.

Benjamin developed his most extensive thinking on montage in his terminally incomplete *Arcades Project*, assembled as a montage of quotations, fragments, and thoughts culled from the labyrinthine archive of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. His ostensible subject, Paris of the nineteenth century, became the template for his own cross-referenced, multilayered, multilingual methodology. Indeed, it is the city itself that arguably inspired Benjamin, along with his modernist contemporaries in literature, art photography, and film, to realize the potential of montage to unsettle conventions of realist representation, historiography, and anthropology. In James Clifford’s critical analysis of the “art-culture system” of collecting, collections, and collectors, his discussion turns to New York as experienced by Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1941. Lévi-Strauss found the collage-like mix of cultural forms and histories to be at once provocative and inspiring, but also symptomatic of the increasing cultural homogeneity of urban modernity. Clifford argues that “the chronotope of New York supports a global allegory of fragmentation and ruin” (1988: 244).

The city is thus the primal site of montage, the assembly of views in which the old and the new coexist. If Levi-Strauss was preoccupied with the losses and ruins of modernity exemplified by the metropolis and its museological entombment of the past, Benjamin embraced the spark of the new alongside the transience of decay on display in the modern city. For feminist film scholars, the woman in the city in the first decades of the twentieth century was a global novelty. The phantasmagoria of fashion and visual style produced a culture of mobility and shifting identities in which the New Woman was integrated, implemented, and even produced within the montage of views that was (and is) the urban environment. Film and photography, along with magazines and display windows, framed and objectified women within the visual language of modernity, but also addressed women as consumers.

This chapter is an investigation into the cinematic archive, a retrieval and juxtaposition of several different views of modernity. New Women appeared in a variety of modernities in international cinema. Film traveled around the world as part of the creation of cosmopolitan global modernities, even while it was configured very differently in Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union. New Women were media constructions, and endemic to the rise of mass media. The fashions, behaviors, moralities, and lifestyles associated with them are part of the phantasmagoria of modernity, constructed from the anxieties and desires of both men and women in these different locales.

The global circulation of cinema entailed a shared discourse on gender across cultural divides; at the same time, different film languages were developed out of different social formations. In the Soviet Union, theories and practices of montage were developed in the 1920s in conjunction with the Utopian aspirations of the revolution. In the United States, the late 1920s and early 1930s saw the consolidation of a film industry built around a restricted use of montage designed to make itself invisible. In Japan, however, filmmakers during this period drew from both the Hollywood and Soviet models, as well as indigenous cultural forms. Avant-gardist elements were integrated into genre-based stories drawn from popular culture and appealing to local urban audiences. The modernist oppositions between narrative realism and Brechtian reflexivity did not have the same significance in Japan, due to the different construction of modernity in Japan. The example of montage in Japan is therefore important because it challenges the cultural and aesthetic values attributed to the film technique that can be too easily taken for granted.

Vertov, Gender, and the Modern Phantasmagoria

By now I think we can agree that the woman in the city figured within a global spectrum of film practice in the early 1930s, and she was intimately linked to a new way of perceiving space as the cinema became implanted in cities over the first three decades of the twentieth century (Friedberg 1993; Russell 2002). Miriam Hansen's introduction of the concept of "vernacular modernism" to film studies has provided an important discursive frame for the rethinking of the role of cinema in the construction of global modernity. By recognizing popular narrative cinema as a medium of sensual, novel experiences and aesthetic vocabularies, she points to the way that "new subjectivities" emerged in interwar cinema. Hansen discusses the heroines of Shanghai cinema of the 1930s (2000: 16), and several other scholars have elaborated on the construction of the New Woman in Asian cinemas of the

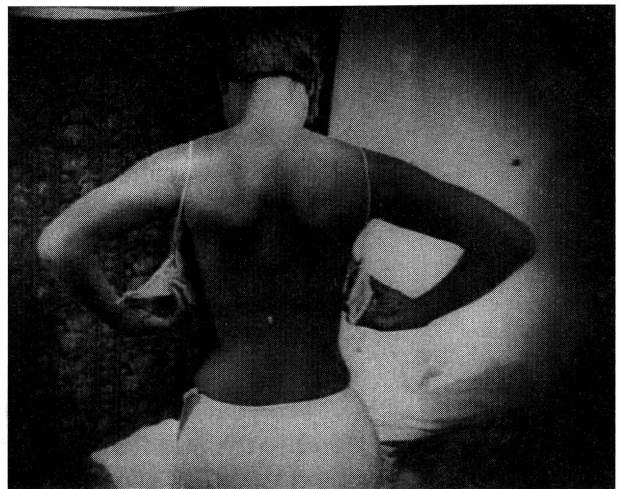
1930s (Bao 2005; Kinoshita 2005; Wada Marciano 2008; Zhang 2005). In my own recent work, I argue that the modernity of the Japanese director Naruse Mikio is not only a question of formal innovation, but also pertains to the novelty of his female protagonists and their stories, which are consistently tied to urban space, commodity culture and the phantasmagoria of fashion and visual style (Russell 2008).

The comparative method of this chapter is part of a larger project of theorizing twentieth-century narrative cinema as a mode of cultural anthropology. The role of montage in this exploration is threefold. First of all, the shifting perspectives afforded by urban transportation and architecture were appropriated by cinema styl-ists in many ways in the early 1930s. As a cinematic technique, montage enabled documentarians, Hollywood productions, and the avant-garde to reconfigure relations of time and space. Secondly, montage can also refer to the techniques and practices of censorship through the addition and removal of visual imagery. The period in question, the early 1930s, was a time when institutional authorities, alongside artists and filmmakers, mastered the art of montage as a mode of social control. Thirdly, the techniques of cutting and pasting, or visual editing, enable critical juxtapositions of coeval modernities. Such techniques played a key role in the 1930s, and they are readily available to us now in the form of digital media. Montage in this sense becomes a function of the archive and its ongoing reconfiguration of the phantasmagoria of modernity.

Perhaps the best-known utopian version of the interwar city film is Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which was made under the sign of a new and improved technological form of perception. Vertov insisted that the kino-eye could see better than the human eye, and by that he meant his entire apparatus of shooting and editing. Montage in *Man with a Movie Camera* is a means of seeing what Vertov describes in one of his manifestos as "a new world unknown to you" (1984: 18).

The city in this case is a collage of three different Soviet cities collapsed into one vertiginous urban metropolis. Despite his utopian manifestos, Vertov's mechanical eye in the film itself remains attached to some familiar cultural patterns of representation. The opening sequence of the film, for example, features a woman waking and dressing. Shots of her body—her arm, finger, neckline, top of her head, arms, back, and eye—are intercut with various other, unrelated images (see figures 9.1 and 9.2).

Figures 9.1–2. Screenshots from *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929).



As she wakes up and dresses, Michael Kauffman, the cameraman, risks his life for a stunning shot of a railway train passing over his head. Meanwhile, the woman's body serves as an allegory for the rising city. The fastening of bra and stockings are synecdochically linked to the machine of the new city. Her blinking eye is cut with the opening and closing of shutters, and finally, with the camera shutter itself.

As Patrice Petro has argued about representations of Berlin during the Weimar period, the female figure serves as a metaphor for the seductive thrill of the modern city for many male writers and artists (1989: 41). Thus, even in his revolutionary modality, Vertov underscores a fundamental trope of the late silent city film. Other sequences throughout the film feature women exercising, showering, and bathing in various stages of undress, providing a titillating image for the heroic cameraman who collects a dizzying assortment of views of the city. However, my point is not to take Vertov to task for sexual exploitation, but simply to recognize this canonical sequence in this canonical film as emblematic of the role of the female body in the new structures of perception at work in the city film of the late silent cinema. The woman who is voyeuristically viewed waking and dressing is clearly a working woman in keeping with the gender politics of Vertov's social utopianism. Vertov's wife Svilova appears in the film later on working at her viewing machine, cutting, freezing, and speeding up the strips of film that compose the film she herself is in. And yet the role of the waking woman within the industrialized city and the film's celebration of cinematic technology is as image and spectacle, a symbolic image of the waking city, before she is subject of vision.

Vertov's method has become a model of sorts for the theorization of experimental ethnography. David Tomas, for example, says that "Vertov's unusual model of collective observation and cinematic manufacture remain, to this day, one of the few coordinated attempts to design a 'social technology of observation' that could account for an expanding media culture while retaining a tactical political and social 'situational reflexivity'" (1994: 272).

Vertov's theory and practice draws attention to film as a mode of production. Not only were they reflexive challenges to the norms of continuity editing, Vertov's techniques were designed to find a truth value in the cinematic interval between shots. Trinh T. Minh-ha has recognized Vertov's theory of the interval as a valuable tool of visual anthropology, noting that "such a mode of filmmaking" relies "for its meaning and emotional impact, on each distinct image—not in itself in isolation, but in its full interaction with all the other images selected" (1999: xii). Trinh herself develops the Vertovian principle of montage into a theory of the interval, drawing on music theory to explore the potential for a poststructural, postcolonial, mode of ethnographic representation.

Man with a Movie Camera combines documentary and experimental techniques for a feature designed to jettison all the trappings of theater—without scenario, sets, or actors. But Vertov was not able to overcome an element that Walter Benjamin recognized as key to the cinematic effect: that of performance (2008: 30). Kauffman, the cameraman, no less than the woman waking and dressing, may not be an actor, but that doesn't mean he is not performing. For Benjamin, film performance constituted an emblematic ongoing encounter between man and machine, the assertion of humanity against the apparatus. Like Vertov, he understood montage as the best technique to allow the rags, the refuse, the material of the everyday, to "come into their own" (1999: 460). In film performance, montage denotes the fragmentation of gesture by which the actor triumphs over the machine (2008: 31).

From our perspective, Vertov's distinction between fictional and observational cinemas cannot be sustained, and it is equally true that the fiction films of the period lend themselves to documentary analysis. The global cycle of women-in-the-city films, including Hollywood alongside Japanese genre films, constructed a visible space through which "new women" emerged in the late silent / early sound years of the early 1930s. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the analysis of this cycle of films points to the construction of a shared terrain of modernity. The cinematic phantasmagoria constituted an international dreamscape that was at once liberating and threatening, inspiring censorship along with imitation. In my view, an anthropology of mass media must acknowledge the role of cinema in the dream life of modernity, or as Benjamin put it, in the potential for awakening from the long sleep of capitalist ideology. It is Benjamin's surrealist methodology that I want to invoke in the following comparative study of American and Japanese modernities.

Vertov's experimental use of montage was deemed by the Soviet authorities to be inaccessible to the general public, and so his revolutionary practice remained outside the domain of popular culture and was screened only to the cinephiliac elite—in the USSR and internationally. We need to turn to the more commercially viable forms of cinema for a better understanding of the role of montage for the production of the New Woman. The revolutionary and Utopian potential that Vertov and his Soviet contemporaries saw in cinematic montage was played out rather differently in the United States and Japan, but in all three national cinemas we find the woman inscribed in urban space through various narrative and technical means. The interval becomes a space for the emergence of female subjectivity when montage effects are used in melodramatic and popular-cultural texts. Narrative cinema of this period was often also a language of the city, set within its architectures, social networks, and intersections. The woman in Tokyo and the woman in New York are both cinematic, mediated women, productions of film culture even while—following Vertov's methodology—they are also actors who are "bits of real energy . . . joined through intervals into a techtonic whole by the great craft of montage" (1984: 20).

Drawing on Benjamin's methodology of dialectical optics, in which the present constitutes the foreground for a reconfigured historical perspective on modernity, I want to compare the different modernities that coexisted in 1933 pre-code Hollywood cinema and the late silent cinema of early 1930s Japan. I take my cue from a scene in Naruse Mikio's 1934 film, *Street Without End*, in which the characters go to the movies and see *The Smiling Lieutenant* by Ernst Lubitsch, from 1931, starring Maurice Chevalier and Miriam Hopkins.¹ The inclusion of an American sound film within a Japanese silent film is indicative of the unevenness of modernity. Lubitsch was a very popular director in Japan and many directors were arguably influenced by his light romantic comedies. The clip that Naruse appropriates from *The Smiling Lieutenant* is a severely cut up version of the original, in which he retains the gestures of romantic game playing but leaves out any and all suggestions of sexuality. In 1933 Japan, some but not all theaters were equipped for sound, and even fewer studios, so the talkie was by and large still associated with foreign films, the vehicles of a host of new behaviors, styles, and activities.

It is important to recognize that Naruse's own film practice, and the material culture and more immaterial negotiation of values and desires that it portrays, is itself a production of Japanese modernity. This cultural formation—Japanese Modernity—is a hybrid of local and global forms (Sakai 1997; Miyoshi 1991; Wada-

Marciano 2008), and I am interested in setting it side by side with a canonical American film from the period to see whether the latter can be illuminated by the former. Through montage, can we disrupt the dominant cultural flow of modernity from West to East and think about it as a more cosmopolitan, coeval, global phantasmagoria?

The early 1930s in Hollywood is a period known as “pre-code.” The American studios between 1930 and 1934 exploited the sensational and titillating effects of sex and violence with little to no regulation. The wildly eccentric films of the era constitute an anomaly in the history of Hollywood morality and for many years were pulled from distribution. Their “rediscovery” was stimulated with the 1999 publication of Thomas Doherty’s book *Precode Hollywood* and with the growing body of work available on DVD.

Baby Face (Alfred E. Green) is a 1933 pre-code potboiler in which Barbara Stanwyck sleeps her way up the corporate ladder. It may seem an odd choice to compare with Japanese cinema of this era, which was still more than twenty years from its first kiss. The parameters of the New Woman in the United States and Japan certainly differed greatly, but despite the unevenness of modernity, I would like to compare the use of visual style in the construction of these New Women to show how new modes of the feminine, or “new subjectivities,” are produced within cinematic space. In both Tokyo and Hollywood, the female figure moves through a complex pattern of urban space, architectural kitsch, and cinematic technique. It is a “familiar” cinematic construct, even if it is a fantastic and otherworldly space, a transformative version of the everyday. It is precisely in its status as phantasmagoria that I want to explore this space and its relation to narrative.

The *phantasmagoria* was Benjamin’s term for the dreamworld of commodity capitalism as he saw it manifest in the display culture of the Paris Arcades. The term is drawn from a proto-cinematic entertainment device of projected images, but Benjamin used it to refer more broadly to the production of illusion that contained its own key to demystification. The phantasmagoria is at once a utopian dreamworld and the recognition of its impossibility and even its danger. While there is certainly some critical debate around this concept, I find the term to be a particularly useful way of referring to narrative cinema that tends toward self-critique.²

If we look at the cinema of the early 1930s as a mode of phantasmagoria, we can begin to see its kitschiness and triviality as a mode of instability and potential critique. In both Japan and Hollywood, the economic depression spawned a nascent form of social criticism and class consciousness. Miriam Hansen has argued that we need to rethink film classicism as a mode of modernity (2000: 335), and nowhere is this more true than in the convergence of the modern and the classical that is found on both sides of the Pacific during this period. If on the Hollywood side this takes Baroque forms of excess, sensationalism, and critique, in Japan it takes the form of an uneasy embrace of American forms. Thomas Doherty describes pre-code Hollywood as being “on the cusp” of the classical (1999: 1), and I would say much the same thing about the Japanese cinema of this period, as it was in the process of being consolidated into a coherent industrial style. My comparison of Japanese and Hollywood films will necessarily confirm the unevenness of modernity; but in their points of contact, the comparison should also suggest how modernity theory can help us rethink film history as a synchronic and global practice.

In film studies, the Japanese cinema of the early 1930s has been positioned as a radical alternative to the institutional style of seamless narrativity that had been

consolidated in Hollywood by this time. In addition to some use of continuity editing, Japanese directors such as Ozu and Naruse used montage as a more dynamic visual device, punctuating narrative with discontinuous inserts and editing dialogue with surprising angles and camera movements. And yet, while their stylistic use of film technique is reminiscent of the European avant-garde, their films adhered in many ways to the genre and narrative conventions of the American cinema, as these directors developed a popular national cinema. As I have argued elsewhere, their radicalism was not in countering Hollywood, but in adapting its modern values, aesthetic vocabulary, and technical proficiency to the depiction of everyday life in Japan (Russell 2008). They borrowed from both the avant-garde and from Hollywood to create texts that are often evocative of surrealist aesthetics precisely in their embrace of kitsch alongside art cinema.

In a groundbreaking study of Japanese cinema published in 1979, Noel Burch analyzed the idiosyncratic editing patterns of pre-war Japanese cinema in terms of a “refusal of certain norms of Western cinema, [and] a budding sense of formalization based in the *Western manner*, on a transgression of norms” (1979: 191). He demonstrated how the “presentational” style of Japanese cinema related to traditional arts and theatre practices. He also admitted, “what was a mass cultural attitude in Japan was a deeply subversive vanguard practice in the Occident” (1979: 115), but he nevertheless insisted on the Brechtian, anti-bourgeois reading of Japanese montage as a critique of the normative transparency (“representational” style) of the dominant American editing patterns.

Subsequent film historians have pointed out that the cinema in question was not produced or consumed as transgressive or revolutionary in Japan. Its modernity encompassed a conservative ideology that, over the course of the 1930s, entailed the exclusion of traces of “Western” culture in the service of a pan-Asian imperialism—with of course devastating results for Japan and its colonial enterprise. Burch relied on abstract cultural oppositions between West and East, and overlooked actual historical relations of production and reception. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, for example, writes: “Even though the subject of his study is Japanese cinema, Burch does not show any specific interest in the ideological effect of Japanese and other cinemas in the context of Japanese society. . . . Burch’s study never considers the specificity of the institutional site of discourse” (2000: 21).

The unusual use of montage and editing techniques in films by directors such as Ozu and Naruse needs to be positioned more closely to the construction of Japanese modernity. As Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano argues, Japanese cinema “needs to be articulated as a coherent aesthetic mode with practices of its own” (2008: 3). And it is not only in formal terms, but in terms of “the performative and experiential aspects of modernity’s transformations” (2008: 6). Montage in this sense is not only a technique of representation, but a sensual and experiential expression of the shocks and fragmentation of urban modernity. The critical shift from formalist modernist aesthetics to cultural modernity is most explicitly articulated—in both theory and practice—around the intersection of gender and the city.

Street without End: The Tokyo Café Waitress

It is difficult to ascertain just how typical Naruse’s 1934 film *Street without End* is, given the paucity of surviving films from this period of Japanese cinema. I believe it shares certain features with many other Japanese and Chinese films of the early

1930s, at least in terms of its use of public space as a key narrative locale and in its use of women's melodrama. Sugiko, played by Setsuko Shinobu, is a café waitress in Ginza, which was at this time already a cosmopolitan high-fashion shopping and entertainment district in Tokyo (figure 9.3). In the film's main storyline, Sugiko is hit by a car, and the rich man driving it marries her and takes her home to live with his wife and sister. While the story of the suffering daughter-in-law is a familiar Japanese narrative, in this film Sugiko takes the very unlikely and surprising turn of leaving the rich man and his family. She accuses her husband of being weak and refuses to stay by his side when he dies in hospital (from injuries sustained in another car accident). She finally walks out of her marriage and returns to the café.

The multi-character narrative of *Street without End* is based on a popular newspaper serial by Kitamura Komatsu. What Naruse's adaptation lacks in terms of character development and literary depth, it more than makes up for in its ethnographic depiction of the Ginza district. Naruse's pacing is quick and vigorously punctuated with rapid camera movements and surprising cutaways, and includes a kind of documentary depiction of the street life of the city. After a montage of shots of different neighborhoods, the opening sequence moves through the Ginza streets, leading up to the café where Sugiko works. The camera appears to be mounted at first on a streetcar, filming the passing storefronts and buildings. The sequence continues with a montage of images of pedestrians and shop windows displaying jewelry, pastries, and other foreign goods for sale. The people include young and old, rich and poor, dressed in Japanese and Western clothing, most of whom are "extras" or non-characters who are never seen again in the film (figure 9.4). The sequence concludes with the street artist and his display of caricatures of people on the street in a grid-like pattern on an easel.

One of the remarkable things about this opening sequence is how it evokes the intellectual project of Japanese modernity contemporaneous with the film. Miriam Silverberg describes this project as an "ongoing construction of a new culture shared by all but at the same time differentiated by gender and class" (1992:

Figure 9.3.
Screenshot from
Street without End
(Naruse Mikio,
1934).





Figure 9.4.
Screenshot from
Street without End
(Naruse Mikio,
1934).

31). She notes the influence of the Soviet avant-garde on Japanese graphics, and stresses the aspect of “construction” in the Japanese meaning of modernity. One of the principle ethnographic projects of the period was Kon Wajiro’s phenomenology of everyday life, in which he attempted to identify the elements that went into the construction of Japanese modernity, including the gender codes associated with modern Japanese men and women. In elaborately illustrated essays published in magazines such as *Fujin koron* and *Modernologio*, Kon detailed the items of dress, food, work, and play favored by people in different social sites, including the street, the home, and the workplace.³ Kon’s practice was devoted to “recording and composing continuously the manifestation of Tokyo as it is being made anew.” His method was to draw collage-like compositions of fragmentary details of everyday life.

One of the emblematic figures of the period was the *moga* or “modern girl.” She was a complex figure, as much a media creation as anything else, who served as a kind of emblem of the transformative, feminizing effects of imported American culture. As H. D. Harootunian notes, the *moga* was an “overdetermined” figure: “The new roles assumed by women signaled, as nothing else, the changes beginning to take place in the world of modern experience... Overdetermination, which dominated the discourse on everydayness, was the sign of its historicity.” (2000: 117).⁴ However, the uniformed waitress of *Street without End* is neither a *moga* nor an old-fashioned homebound woman. As Silverberg has argued, the café waitress belonged to the new economy of the spectacle, and had a potential mobility within it (1991).

As the opening montage of *Street without End* indicates with its shots of pastries and English signs, the film is set within a transformation of the everyday. Urban space is depicted laterally with camera movements aligned with the motion of streetcars, but also through the fragmentation of space according to the

logic of shop windows and street portraiture. The intrinsic linking of the cinema and the city is thematized in the film through the narrative of a retiring movie star who needs to be replaced. The scene in which Sugiko and her rich fiancé go to the movies makes the link between the *moga*, the movies, and American culture, explicit.

The scene opens with a blonde woman in a sequined evening gown (Miriam Hopkins) arguing with a man in an officer's suit (Maurice Chevalier) (figure 9.5). They flirtatiously argue over a chessboard, and then the camera pulls back to show the film (*The Smiling Lieutenant*) being screened in a movie theater. A pan over the Japanese audience is followed by a quick exterior shot of the theater. Its modernist design is echoed in the subsequent shots in the lobby where Sugiko (dressed in kimono) and her husband Hiroshi meet a young woman in western dress who snobbishly accuses Hiroshi of marrying beneath his class (figure 9.6).

This woman, accompanied by a friend in similar fashionable attire, is the film's emblematic *moga* figure, Hiroshi's former fiancé. She is clearly Sugiko's nemesis, rendering her a traditional passive Japanese wife in comparison. By the end of the film, Sugiko demonstrates that modern attitudes of independence and self-willed agency are not necessarily tied to modern fashions.

The Lubitsch film that Naruse quotes in this sequence has been severely edited, and has also been muted, with Japanese subtitles inscribed on the (sound) film within the (silent) film. In the original, the woman played by Miriam Hopkins kisses the man rather forwardly on the lips, saying "That's me!" and "That's me again!" In the Japanese version, the kissing is redacted entirely. Lubitsch's scene ends with the chessboard being thrown onto a bed, with the couple following behind it. Naruse's self-censorship omits the bed entirely, in keeping with Japanese moral codes of proper on-screen behavior. Techniques of montage enable a cultural juxtaposition that, in 1930s Japan, would have been astonishingly modern.

Figure 9.5.
Screenshot from
*The Smiling
Lieutenant* (Ernst
Lubitsch, 1931)
quoted in *Street
without End* (Naruse
Mikio, 1934).





Figure 9.6.
Screenshot from
Street without End
(Naruse Mikio,
1934).

And yet this “modernity” is also constructed through montage as the coextensive technique of cutting out.

The New Woman invented within the phantasmagoria of the cinematic city in Japan and Hollywood—and indeed the Soviet Union—was a production of the contradictions and social tensions of the era. The multiple perspectives afforded by cinematic montage become a key vehicle for this production. Woman as spectacle confronted herself over and over again as agent and active subject. Narrative thematics of marriage and romance provide the framework for containment; and yet the dialectical optics of historical montage enable a historical awakening from such genre conventions. We can recognize them for what they are. In some cases, we can even see the mechanisms of censorship at work and re-view the films of the past within their larger institutional contexts of repression and recutting.

Baby Face: The New York Gold Digger

The politics of containment are exemplified by the production history and censorship of *Baby Face*. The film is notorious for its depiction of a hardnosed gold digger who manages to seduce the entire male hierarchy of a New York trust company, one floor at a time. She finally ends up with the handsome young owner of the whole company. In the original version, the film ends with Stanwyck and her banker husband kissing in an ambulance (figure 9.7).

He has just attempted suicide after the bank’s collapse, and she has rushed home to save him, choosing love, finally, over money in a somewhat abrupt change of heart. In the coda added by the Hays office before the film was released in 1933, the couple is banished to Erie, Pennsylvania, as they have given all their money to save the bank from collapse. This coda, however, includes no image of

Figure 9.7.

Screenshot from
Baby Face (Alfred E.
Green, 1933).

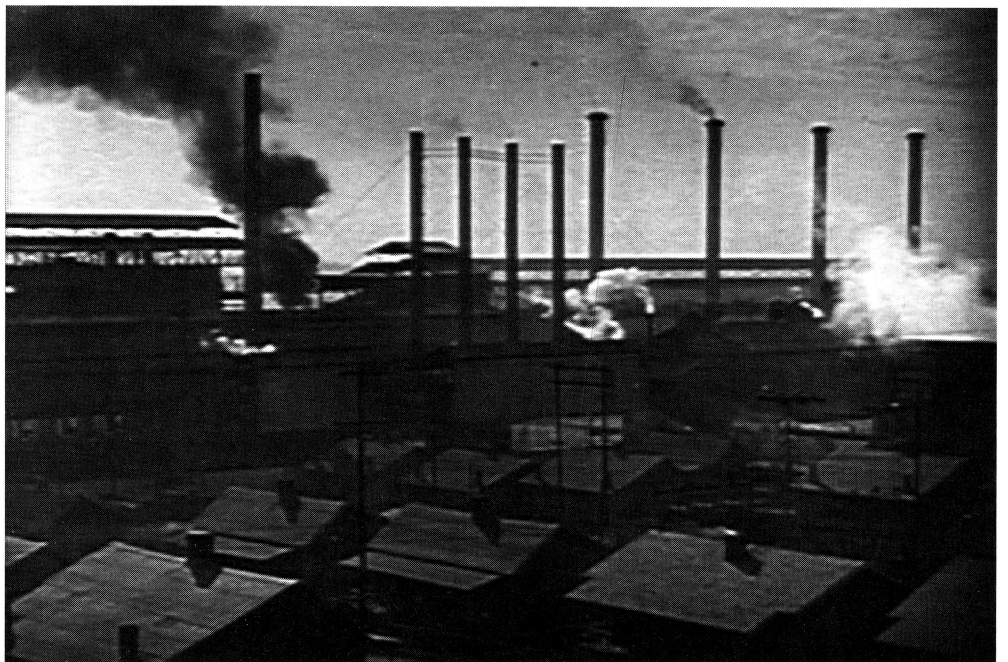


Stanwyck, who was unavailable for retakes, and thus escapes the added-on punishment (figure 9.8).

Despite the changes made by the Hays office, *Baby Face* was pulled from distribution quite quickly, and did not resurface until the 1990s when the Hollywood vaults began to circulate on video. The uncut version was found in the Library of Congress in 2004 and Turner Classic Movies has repackaged the film in its two versions for contemporary viewers on DVD. We now have the opportunity to see the Stanwyck character motivated by a Nietzsche-quoting mentor urging her to use all her seductive charms to achieve power over men. We can also see her *sans* Nietzsche, simply doing it in a crafty manipulative way. The threat posed by

Figure 9.8.

Screenshot from
Baby Face (Alfred E.
Green, 1933).



a woman infiltrating the corporate world through sex appeal is of course highly contradictory—and symptomatic of depression-era America. As Richard Maltby argues, *Baby Face* blames the permissiveness of the jazz age for the collapse of the economy (1998: 169); at the same time, the Hollywood industry of the period exploited the image of fetishized sexuality to the fullest extent, and so we see in the two versions the woman both being punished and getting away with it. The arbitrary tacked-on punishment becomes a transparent and ineffective narrative solution to a deeply contradictory text.

The story of *Baby Face* is on one level a kind of parody of the upward mobility narrative that so many Hollywood films engage with. The film was shot entirely in studio sets that construct a fantasy version of New York dominated by art-deco skyscrapers. The Gotham Trust Co. is depicted as an ersatz Rockefeller Center with signs in the windows tracking Lily's (Stanwyck) vertical movement through the business, from personnel department, to filing, to mortgages (figure 9.9). The camera movements up the building's facade culminate toward the end of the film in an elegant crane shot from street level to the penthouse apartment where Lily is comfortably ensconced within the art-deco glamour of fashion, architecture, and interior design.

The seamlessness of Hollywood continuity editing enables a penetration of the window, not unlike Vertov's kino-eye transcending the limits of human vision. Among other things, *Baby Face* illustrates the playfulness of cinematic style in Hollywood that is often overlooked by theorists of its heterogeneity. The vertical camera movements incorporate the montage-like structure of urban architecture, in which each window opens onto another level of class hierarchy commensurate with an idealized corporate structure. The sequence of men that Lily seduces represents, in turn, a movement from working-class accents and style to the aris-



Figure 9.9.
Screenshot from
Baby Face (Alfred E.
Green, 1933).

tocratic summit of the penthouse. The parody of the gold digger is thus a parody of capitalism as an erotic pyramid scheme (figure 9.10).

Barbara Stanwyck's performance is key to the film's production of the New Woman. *Baby Face* was inspired by the success of MGM's *Red-Headed Woman* of 1932, which made comedy out of the melodramatic kept-woman cycle (Maltby 1998: 172; Doherty 1999: 134). Jean Harlow sleeps her way to the top in that film, and ends up living in luxury in Paris. Her performance, however, is brash and exaggerated, and her character is a hard-hearted home wrecker. Stanwyck's character, on the other hand, is more hard working and subtle in her conniving manipulation of men. She not only sleeps her way to the top, she also works her way up, learning how to read mortgages and speak French as she moves up from one office to another. The "problem" the film created for the Hays office was not completely solved by the cutting-out and cutting-in of shots by the censors. Techniques of continuity editing enabled audiences to identify with the dynamic heroine through reverse-field cutting, among other devices. No tacked-on punishment could completely erase the vision of Stanwyck's seductive performance.

In its multiple versions, *Baby Face* seems to finally resist ideological readings, and provides more of an illustration of the construction of female subjectivity in the language of early 1930s cinematic technique. It is really as an archival film, viewed from our own present, that *Baby Face* can be compared to its contemporary Japanese films, as I am not making any claims about it having a direct influence on Japanese cinema. I very much doubt that it would have been released there, given its dubious morality.

The American pre-code films of the 1930s clearly influenced each other, producing cycles of films with repeated motifs, themes, and settings that cannot quite be accounted for by genre theory. Moreover, these cycles seem to belong specifically to a certain period in modern history when the market collapse, the rapid expansion of mass media, and the emergence of new forms of government converged into an uneven and unpredictable social formation on both sides of the Pacific. The big city–small town division, along with the pervasive imagery of the

Figure 9.10.
Screenshot from
Baby Face (Alfred E.
Green, 1933).



corporate boardroom, the boxcar, and the fur fashions are all familiar motifs of the era, along with the narrative situations of shopgirls, kept women, and fallen women. These are as familiar in Japanese as in American cinema of the early 1930s. The pervasive misogyny and racism that informs both the Japanese and the American cinemas of the era cannot be redeemed, but these ideologies can always be better understood as elements of a dynamic and contradictory phantasmagoria.

Conclusion

The comparison of Japanese and Hollywood cinemas of the 1930s is not meant to determine any scope of influence, which undoubtedly flowed in only one direction. Naruse's 1935 film *Wife! Be Like a Rose!* was one of only two Japanese features to be screened in the United States before *Rashomon* in 1951 (Smith 2002). On the other hand, Japanese audiences saw many American movies during the interwar period, until they were banned in 1937. Naruse was arguably influenced on many levels by American cinema, which is one of the reasons why film scholars looking for more pure forms of Japanese-ness neglected his cinema for so long. And yet, as part of a global cycle of women-in-the-city films, *Baby Face* is indicative of the American vernacular modernity that remained in the United States, strictly American.

If a Japanese film such as *Street without End* is seen as part of a global cycle of films featuring women in cities in the early 1930s, it enables a productive reading of comparative modernities. This cycle includes films made elsewhere as well, as similar patterns are found in Chinese and European films of the period. Following from Benjamin's remarks on film as a form of kitsch, I would specifically include the most neglected films in this cycle, hitherto excluded from the canon, and only recently resurfacing in the digital archive. For Benjamin, kitsch has sensory, sensual properties with explosive potential because of its proximity to the masses; film is necessarily dialectical as a form of phantasmagoria (1999: 395).

For Benjamin, the abstractions of art cinema are dangerous, whereas the cinematic kitsch of the 1930s, precisely when he is writing the *Arcades Project*, is utopian, if also somewhat illegible to him. In the Convolute labeled "Dream City and Dream House" he poses a curious question about film: "what manner of nature" is produced by technology?—which is another way of interrogating the phantasmagoria of modernity (1999: 396). The dreamworld of commodity capitalism must, eventually, yield an awakening. While the twenty-first century is so far as lost in its dreamworld as were the last two, I think we can use Benjamin's perspective for a critical methodology appropriate to certain periods and styles of film practice that tend to construct "new forms of nature."

In the cycle of women-in-the-city films, we can see how the instability of the phantasmagoria provides a stage for the performativity of the New Woman. For example, in both *The Smiling Lieutenant* and *Baby Face*, the female protagonists study and learn the codes and behaviors of the New Woman. In the Lubitsch film, the princess effectively lowers herself from aristocratic privilege to become a jazzy flapper; in *Baby Face*, Barbara Stanwyck moves up the corporate ladder by learning to perm her hair. The urge to copy the latest fashion is demonized, however, in *Street without End*. The virtuous heroine refuses the luxurious excesses of Western-influenced modernity, finding a middle road by donning the uniform of the café waitress. Public space in these films is an extension of the film screen, a venue for

women to seek new identities within the montage-like construction and perspectives of urban space.

The public space of streets, stores, offices, and transportation is frequently linked to effects of camera movement and montage that inscribe technology into the visual field in the cycle of women-in-the-city films. Narratives of social climbing and falling, usually through romance, constitute a mythic fairytale fabric for the phantasmagorias of fashion, architecture, and cinematic space. The real world of everyday life is indeed eclipsed, and while we can perhaps imagine the experience of the films' original spectators, of which we have only the most fragmentary traces, we cannot know it. We can, however, think about our own experience of these films as a dialectical awakening.

In film-critical debates about this period, the recurring question is whether narrative closure is subverted by stylistic and aesthetic excess. I find this question ultimately fruitless, and more about critical desire and priorities than about the films themselves.⁵ If we approach them in terms of the phantasmagoria, we can ask what is really modern about them? What is really new? And the answer has to be, over and over again, New Women. These New Women are personified, to be sure, in the personas of actresses such as Barbara Stanwyck, and in her Japanese contemporaries such as Chiba Sachiko, Isuzu Yamada, Irie Takako, and Tanaka Kinuyo. The star of *Street without End*, Setsuko Shinobu, did not have a stellar career in sound film, and even here, the camera work and cutting is much more expressive than she is. Nevertheless, it is precisely this inscription within cinematic space that is important, pointing to a tendency that is arguably pervasive during the period, but frequently overshadowed by performance style (figures 9.11 and 9.12).

The New Woman was a construction of the larger media and fashion industries in which magazines played as important a role as cinema in the United States, Japan, and globally. The New Woman was at once demonized as a personification of everything dangerous about modernity, and the new erotic manifestation of its utopian promise. The New Women who emerge from these studio films are in

Figure 9.11. Barbara Stanwyck in *Night Nurse* (William Wellman, 1931).





Figure 9.12.
Screenshot from
Street without End
(Naruse Mikio,
1934).

fact extremely diverse characters, and I am interested above all in their emergence within the more routine and industrial production of phantasmagorias. They seem to be produced not only by the cinema, but by the city itself, and above all, by the intersection of the city and the cinema.

The reflexive identities of the actress as New Woman, who is always doubling herself in a performative modality, provides an intertextual inscription of the historical real, even if it often remains within the cloak of celebrity. In the coevalness of different modernities, available as an archival phantasmagoria, we can furthermore begin to understand how the cinema constructed a cosmopolitan, metropolitan community of women in the city. Through the operations of dialectical optics we can turn the doubleness of Japanese modernity into a renewed perspective on the Hollywood phantasmagoria as a site where Benjamin's "new nature" is produced (1999: 396).

The spaces traversed by these women are very specifically constituted through the dynamics of modern architecture. As Beatriz Colomina describes the emergent built culture of this period, spaces were produced that systematically blurred the realms of public and private; spaces were created and predicated on unfixed points of view, as mobile as the camera and the train; and spaces, she says, were constructed from images rather than walls (1994: 6). It is precisely in this fusion of filmic and architectural space that the New Women of the twentieth century began to speak. And in the films I am interested in here, embedded in popular culture rather than the arts, the women are not simply emoting; they are working through and across the many networks of the social formation that was in a state of constant flux, becoming increasingly limitless and multilayered.

Women in both the Japanese and American cinemas of the 1930s learned to trade in on their value as a commodity in the phantasmagoria. The New Women are working women, appearing in melodramas of social climbing and social collapse. In Japan, the everyday was much closer and the spectacle of wealth was more transparent, as the virtues of the old world were still very much in play. But

maybe we can learn something about American modernity from the example of Japan, where the new is always in dialogue with the old. In a film like *Baby Face*, the melodramatic recognition of virtue implicit in Lily's self-redemption points to a reality unseen, outside the phantasmagoria, beyond the image-sphere. In the censored version of the film, Lily's trajectory begins and ends in a small town that is not rural, but the industrial wasteland of Erie, Pennsylvania—suggesting that there is no "otherness" to American modernity. The "old world" is very specifically located in France with its "old-world plumbing," as Lily so caustically describes it. In the feminization of the city, these films present us with a privileged view of how the doubleness of modernity produces new subjects.

As a formal principle of film practice, montage is a principle of connection as well as juxtaposition. Its invisibility in the codes of continuity editing is as powerful discursively as its effect as a technique of collision, comparison, and association. In the women-in-the-city films of the late silent and early sound cinemas, montage is one of several techniques that inscribe the female figure into the aesthetics and politics of modernity. In both Japan and Hollywood, the woman is a threat that has to be contained ideologically and narratively. The example of Vertov indicates just how deeply the codes of gender are inscribed into the technologies of "mechanical reproduction," or simply "seeing," in the metropolis. New digital technologies enable us to see films side by side and, reassembled, they reveal the techniques of containment alongside techniques of utopian expressivity.

Both Dziga Vertov and Walter Benjamin understood montage to have a dynamic, utopian, potential to blast apart received wisdom and conventions of bourgeois representation. Both men saw this potential horribly lost to the industrial and authoritarian modes of representation that came to dominate the cinema in America, Europe, and Japan by the late 1930s. The digital archive, however, enables a recovery of the dialectical impulse of montage for new ways of thinking about film history. Archival montage as I have used it here includes techniques of juxtaposition, shifting perspectives, and the ability to access the multiple versions of censored texts. Archival montage offers historians and cultural anthropologists—and ethnographers as well—valuable tools of analysis. The recovery of lost texts and their recirculation in newly accessible forms provides insight into what we might call the optical unconscious of the twentieth century. The comparative method of this chapter illustrates the dream images through which women entered the public sphere during the interwar period on three different continents. While women's bodies were fundamental to the global spectacle of cinema, women were also inscribed within the montage of shifting views that linked the cinema so closely to urban space.

The methodology I have employed here is inspired not only by Walter Benjamin's surrealist critical cultural theory, but equally by the work of "found-footage" filmmakers and the great variety of archival film practices. George Marcus uses the example of cinematic montage as a model for ethnographic writing that can articulate "an effect of simultaneity" (1994: 40). Filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Craig Baldwin, Su Friedrich, and many, many others, have mined the film archive to create dynamic and instructive effects of cultural spacio-temporal juxtapositions. Visual anthropology can and should include the representation of mediated culture, such as transnational film cultures, among its objects of study in order to better apprehend the ways that cinematic montage is more than a formal device, more than a metaphor, but an unstable cultural form in itself. The art and practice of finding and assembling images in montage-based constructions dates

back precisely to the period under discussion here, the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the avant-garde and popular culture collided on the screens and streets of the world.

Notes

1. In my book *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio*, I incorrectly identified this film as *The White Woman* (1933), starring Carole Lombard, which is featured on a poster in this scene of *Street without End* (Russell 2008: 78). In fact, it is unquestionably *The Smiling Lieutenant*.
2. Margaret Cohen has argued that the phantasmagoria can take on the liberating potential of the dream-image while at the same time serve as a critique of the false consciousness which it also reproduces (1993: 256). However, we need to add that such an auto-critique is not necessarily or systematically available, but is a subjective, critical effect.
3. Silverberg's article includes reproductions of some of Kon's illustrations (1992: 40, 41, 43).
4. One of the arguments of my book on Naruse is that his cinema constitutes a remarkable depiction of the transformation of everyday life, through the thorough penetration of experience with technologies of modernity.
5. Historical work such as Mary Beth Haralovich's on the proletarian women's film of the 1930s that can account for a film's address, its production of meaning, its conditions of studio production, and the terms of censorship, will inevitably find a given film to be "complex and contradictory" (1998: 83).

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