

the popular series *The World Exhibition in Paris 1889* was presented.

¹⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999): 138.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992): 243.

¹⁷ "Panorama International", *Dagens Nyheter* 8 October 1889.

¹⁸ Crary: 134, 136.

¹⁹ "Svenska Turistföreningens upprop till Sveriges herrar fotografer", *Svenska turistföreningens styrelse, Fotografisk tidskrift* 59 (1893).

²⁰ Mark Sandberg *Living Pictures, Missing Persons: Mannequins, Museums, and Modernity* (forthcoming): manuscript, 194.

²¹ Moving images had been shown in Malmö in 1896 and a number of early film projectionists – for example, the Skladanowsky brothers – had visited Stockholm before 1897.

²² Michelle Aubert and Jean-Claude Sequin (eds), *La Production cinématographique des Frères Lumière* (Paris: BiFi, 1996): 382-384.

²³ For an in-depth discussion on early postcards, see Karin Walter, *Postkarte und Fotografie: Studien zur Massenbild-Produktion* (Würzburg: VVK, 1995).

²⁴ See Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Miniature and the Giant: the Perceptual Spectacular of Postcards and Early Cinema", in Quaresima and Vichi (eds): 43-53.

²⁵ Ulla Ehrensward, *Gamla vykort* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1972): 37.

²⁶ "Der Kinematograph der Zukunft! Lokalaufnahmen als Kassenmagnet", *Kinematographische Rundschau* 18 (1907).

²⁷ Oliver, "Observations by Our Man About Town – Local Pictures", *Moving Picture World* 28 August 1909. For a discussion on local and regional film production – albeit in a German context – see *KINtop* 9 (2001) "Lokale Kinogeschichten".

²⁸ Axel Nilsson et al (eds), *Gamla svenska städer: gator och gränder, hus och gårdar. Samlingsverk i bilder jämte förklarande text utgivet af Svenska Teknologföreningens afdelning för husbyggnadskonst* (Stockholm: Svenska Teknologföreningen, 1908).

²⁹ Torsten Lenk, "Kulturhistorisk film: Dokument av första ordningen", *Svensk skolfilm och bildningsfilm* 18 (1926).

Catherine Russell and Louis Pelletier

"Ladies, Please Remove Your Hats": Fashion, Moving Pictures and Gender Politics of the Public Sphere. 1907-11



Catherine Russell is Associate Professor of Film Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, and Director of the PhD in Humanities Program. Louis Pelletier is a student in the MA Program in Film Studies at Concordia University in Montreal.

Figure 1: Exhibitor's slide. (Courtesy Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive.)

Autumn leaves are seen on many spring hats in flat layers encircling the high crown, while at one side there are placed some picturesquely incongruous ornaments, such as an owl's head and two long quills, or a bunch of small oranges and a tall water-spout effect in russet marabout.¹

Fashion always places its fig leaf on the spot where the revolutionary nakedness of society may be found. A slight adjustment and... But why is this adjustment fruitful only when it is carried out on the body of the recent past?²

□ On Tuesday 5 November 1907, a scuffle in one of the boxes briefly disrupted the film screening at the Ouimetoscope in Montreal. Miss Albertine Barry was requested by a special constable employed by the theatre to please remove her hat, as it was blocking the view of those seated behind her. Miss Barry refused, claiming that she did not believe that the rules regarding hat removal applied to patrons in box seats. Constable Lefebvre proceeded forcibly to remove her from the theatre, bruising her arm and "disarranging" her outfit. Miss Barry charged Lefebvre with assault and won her case in court, the judge noting that there was no legal requirement in Montreal for ladies to remove their hats; thus, the theatre employee was not protected by law. The constable was found guilty of assaulting Miss Barry and fined \$10 "and costs of one month".³ The *Montreal Daily Star* headline announcing the verdict read: "Patrons may wear their hats at the theatres".⁴ The opinion of the press was that the case would encourage those women who had been courteously and voluntarily removing their hats to return to their former habits of keeping them on. A front-page cartoon on 22 November 1907 illustrated "What we may logically expect": a bespectacled man in tailcoat seated behind a row of huge hats sprouting flowing plumes and stiff ribbons completely blocking his view of the stage. As the judge's decision applied to both moving-picture houses and legitimate theatres, the case aroused some deep-seated anxieties concerning women in the public sphere. (Figure 2.)

The "hat nuisance" had been a serious problem in American and European theatres

since at least 1895. A law banning theatre hats was narrowly defeated in the New York State legislature in that year, although the attempt to legislate against fashion was thought by many to be a ridiculous attempt at state intervention.⁵ In France, discussion of the issue in the 1890s tended to favour legislation against hat-wearing at theatres, which was actually passed by the Mayor of Marseilles in 1897.⁶ As moving pictures began to attract the clientele of legitimate theatres after 1907, the hat nuisance inevitably came along with the new "gentrified" audiences. In fact, it appears that, with moving pictures, the hats became more of a nuisance, or at least they generated a more vigorous debate, partly due to the coincidence of the excessive "Belle Époque" millinery fashions with the movement for uplift in the nascent film industry. As a *Montreal Daily Star* columnist noted in 1908: "[o]ur city is becoming infested with moving picture shows, and this fact draws attention to the hat nuisance".⁷ Exhibitors projected lantern-slides between films requesting ladies to remove their hats, contributing yet another visual element to a voluminous discourse on headgear that included an ongoing series of derogatory comments disseminated by cartoonists and newspaper humorists. (Figure 1.) Chaplin, Griffith and Émile Cohl all made comic films featuring ladies wearing huge hats blocking the view of male spectators.

However, what if we were to think of these hats as part of the visual culture of the period, and not as an interruption or negation of it? The hat nuisance constitutes an intersection of fashion and film history, a site where discourses on class, gender, consumption, spectatorship and theatre architecture coincide. The period is one in which social practices and morals were undergoing rapid revision, and the cinema itself was in the process of becoming a new, autonomous form of entertainment. The hat nuisance became an ongoing topic of discussion in the American and European trade papers up until the First World War, as the industry tried to come to



Figure 2: Front-page cartoon accompanying the verdict of Miss Barry's suit, *Montreal Daily Star* 22 November 1907.

terms with the fashion intervention. Tracing the hat nuisance through the pages of the *Montreal Daily Star* indicates how fashion and film-going intersected on a local level. As the English community in Montreal also kept a close eye on fashion and entertainment news from the metropolitan centres of New York, London and Paris, this resource also enables us to get a sense of the international scope of the phenomenon.

The intersection of film and fashion reaches a high point in the 1930s when elaborate tie-ins between the two industries were established around the star system. While this intimate relationship can be traced back to the 1910s, the "big-hat nuisance" immediately precedes this direct appeal to the female consumer, and might be considered a counter-example insofar as millinery fashions were perceived as a disruptive interruption of

the nascent moving picture show. In examining the controversy more closely, we can perhaps see how the "fashion system" emerged as a discourse of mass culture. As Sarah Berry has argued, "[f]ashion brought the symbolic power of dress into the mass marketplace, an event that epitomized capitalism's shift towards a symbolic economy".⁸ The identities available to women through fashion may be limited by the structures of consumer society, and yet, especially in the early decades of the 20th century, fashion was an important means by which women used "the performative aspects of modern life...in their struggle for greater social mobility and autonomy".⁹

The prevalence of monstrous millinery at moving picture houses constitutes an extraordinary instance of female spectators appropriating public space. Once it is recognised as an essential element of the "phantasmagoria" of urban modernity of the period, we can perhaps situate the gender politics of early spectatorship within a dialectical history of modernity. As Ulrich Lehmann has argued, "evaluating fashion within a historical construct can be attempted only in conjunction with modernity...Like fashion, modernity dies every night".¹⁰ The transitory nature of fashion made it a central element of the theories of modernity developed by Charles Baudelaire, Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin. The "relative beauty" of fashion and its constant transformation of novelty, of the "latest" and of the "new", made it emblematic of modernity for these theorists, and for many artists and poets of the early decades of the century. Fashion feeds off the past in the endless recycling of forms and motifs even while it constantly produces the outdated and the outmoded in its wake; for many early modernists, fashion became the model for a new historiography.

Women's millinery fashions of the Edwardian period were largely based on shapes and forms of male headwear, decorated with feminine trimmings that included

plumes, furs and buckles familiar from 18th- and 19th-century male fashions, as well as Asian accessories such as fans, pins and fabrics borrowed from colonial sites. They were not only large but also expensive, and excessive in their display of materials. In Benjamin's writing on the Paris Arcades, *modernité* and *la mode* are intimately related in the quest for utopian ideals within the framework of everyday life and the visual landscape of urban modernity. In his preliminary notes to *The Arcades Project*, he writes: "Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped".¹¹ As Lehmann argues: "Without the sublime in fashion's dialectical aesthetics, the ephemeral as its opposite and predecessor cannot exist; without the connotation of antiquity, modernity loses its *raison d'être*".¹² Thus, the excessive styles of ladies' headgear, situated within the screening space of "the cinema", extends the cinema's own dialects of ephemerality and techno-utopian (auratic) spectacle into the audience. The women under the hats, as spectators and consumers, need to be recognised as a constitutive feature of the redefinition and reinvention of aesthetics brought about by cinema's modernity.

Big hat fashion and the female spectator

Shelley Stamp has pointed out how the big hat issue was symptomatic of a highly contradictory attitude towards women on the part of film exhibitors and the trade press during the 1910s. On the one hand, a concerted effort was being made to attract women to the cinema in the interest of the moral "uplift" they supposedly brought with them. The presence of middle-class women, or "ladies", was closely tied to the transformation of the "dirty" and dangerous Nickelodeon into a clean, safe and decorous environment. However, as Stamp points out, women "were frequently accused of being unable to adopt the viewing position demanded of classical

cinema, because they were too distracted by friends or too consumed with their own appearance".¹³ Thus, a great deal of effort was put into condescendingly "training" women to be good spectators, including the lantern-slides requesting them to remove their hats. A glance at the trade papers c.1909 reveals a wide variety of advertisements for such slides. The rhetoric used in some of these images often betrayed the desperate character of the situation. For example, a pair of slides tries to shame the hat-wearer by singling her out: "Why have all the ladies taken off their hats", she is asked, "but you?". The point is reinforced by a stern-looking man pointing his finger at the viewer in the second slide. Another specimen tries to create a sense of supreme obligation by the adoption of a biblical tone. Under an image of a woman removing her hat is the caption: "Go, thou, and do likewise".¹⁴

Part of the problem was that the fashion for big hats coincided with the development of narrative continuity in the cinema, and a film language that entailed a more contemplative form of spectatorship. Whereas the Nickelodeon era tolerated an interactive and rowdy audience, the "classical" cinema that emerged between 1907 and 1914 featured longer and more complex films. As Stamp notes:

[T]he hat controversy...points to a more serious struggle over the nature of exhibition space. Like images that lampooned women's obsession with their appearance, caricatures of hat-wearing film goers suggest that a delight in self-adornment which women were encouraged to bring to the cinema was actually at odds with evolving viewing practices that de-emphasized theatre space, the viewer's body, and interaction among patrons.¹⁵

The hat nuisance suggests that women were "added attractions" to the movie programmes.

As women began to socialise at the cinema, fashion came into conflict with the ostensible spectacle of the movies.

Stories about the multiple disturbances created by the extravagant ladies' hats in all spheres of public life haunted the pages of local newspapers during this period, side-by-side with department store advertisements and extensive feature articles on the latest fashions just in from Paris or New York. While the exhibitor's slides in film theatres requesting ladies to remove their hats became a staple of the film exhibitor's intermission repertoire, the ladies still refused. They not only refused at the movies, they also refused at the theatre, at horse shows, in church, at lectures, at symphony concerts, and at baseball games. And the hats continued to get bigger and more extravagant with every season, with one style eclipsing the next, and reaching a maximum size in 1911.¹⁶ A prototypical fad was the one surrounding the Merry Widow hat. Featured in the operetta of the same name that opened in Vienna in 1904, it became one of the leading styles in 1908, popularised by a London production of the play. To commemorate the operetta's 275th performance at New York's New Amsterdam Theatre, Merry Widow hats were distributed to all the women in the audience.¹⁷

The Merry Widows were eclipsed the following year by the Peachbasket hats, themselves to be reduced to oblivion by the Chantecler craze in 1910. With this latest trend, the leading millinery style was linked, for the second time in three years, to a theatrical success: the eponymous Edmond Rostand play set in a farmyard (chantecler being a breed of rooster). While theatrical productions of *The Merry Widow* and of *Chantecler* proved highly successful, in most localities outside Paris and New York motion picture versions of the plays arrived first.¹⁸ In fact, an injunction was brought against the Kalem Company's version of *The Merry Widow* in 1908 for unrightfully reproducing the theatrical production, one of the first such

cases to challenge the motion picture industry's rampant "borrowing" of copyrighted material.¹⁹

With some specimens up to 3' in diameter, the Merry Widow hat represented the apex of the Edwardian taste for big hats, a phenomenon that, as a whole, could be seen as emblematic of Benjamin's cryptic observation that "fashion is the predecessor – no, the last eternal deputy – of surrealism".²⁰ The already imposing straw or felt base was loaded down with an array of "trimmings" that could include any combination of feathers, fur, dried flowers, fake fruits and vegetables, foliage, lace, ribbons, beadwork, embroidery, satin, velvet, silk flowers, stuffed birds, wings, hatpins of various shapes and sizes, and a variety of gems and pearls. Buckles, scarves and veils were also likely to be dropped from these towering sculptures that could tilt towards the back or the front, or be perched at an angle on top of a carefully stacked coiffure. (Figure 3.) A typical description of an item in a millinery show in 1908 is as follows:

A large toque-shaped hat of soft white beaver showed one of the few instances of a draped crown. The brim of this becoming shape was formed of satin and net in one of the new leather shades, the trimming consisting of an owl in the same tones, placed at the side.²¹

Or this one which, instead of taxidermy, is finished with metal:

There is a Gainsborough in fine dark blue straw, trimmed at the side with upstanding fans of blue faille ribbon and finished with a half wreath of poppies in the geranium tints, the only other ornament being a large steel buckle.²²

In 1909 we find:

A very handsome hat of large shape is of black velvet with a crown of Irish crochet over pale yellow satin, trimmed in front with a large bunch of white ospreys caught with a pair of baby wings.²³

The Merry Widow hat itself is described as a sailor hat

[O]f extraordinary generous proportions, and which is a New York idea, measures 25 inches across from one side of the brim to the other, but is narrower from back to front. It is carried out in black braid and has for trimming a huge bow of the black spotted net that is so popular. This is edged with mohair braid. The whole effect while of course, exaggerated, is very becoming to some tall women.²⁴

One of the main reasons why women did not take off their hats in public was that the whole arrangement had to be so carefully attached to their coiffure that it was no easy task to replace it once it was off. Thus, one of the solutions attempted by theatre owners to solve the hat nuisance was to instal mirrors in theatres to facilitate the remounting of the headpiece after the show. Mirrors could be found in the large and comfortable rest rooms, and also in lobbies, and even, in one instance, on the back of the seats.²⁵ Indeed, there seems little doubt that the women wearing these hats were going to the movies, at least in part, as an opportunity to be seen in their triumphant headgear.

As a number of historians have indicated, the female presence at the early cinemas was closely tied into a culture of display and consumption.²⁶ The *Montreal Daily Star* commented regularly on the millinery fashions seen in stage productions from the metropolitan centres.²⁷ An article in *Moving Picture World* in 1910 suggests that more careful attention to fashion in moving pictures

Your Money Refunded if We Fail to Please You.



4136—A charming Hat designed for dress wear, the light weight of which makes it especially adapted for the Summer months. It is strictly hand-made and formed of an exquisite lacy braid of silky texture interwoven with Tuscan. The graceful drooping brim is smartly dented, as pictured. It is trimmed with four handsome ostrich plumes and soft algerette effect of cut ostrich. The soft crown is adorned with a taffeta ribbon. The hat is both stylish and dressy, and we offer it at a remarkably low price. It can be furnished in black or natural straw color only, with the trimming, in each case, of white. \$9.98
4137—An exquisitely dainty Hat, made of a fine chip straw with a mushroom brim. The crown is adorned with Marabout, a form of trimming which has met with marked approval in the realm of Fashion. At the left side a Marabout fancy, combined with a pretty rosette of satin ribbon, contributes greatly to the dressy appearance. Satin ribbon is used in a fold around crown. Furnished in black with black trimming; natural straw color with tan Marabout trimming; or in white with white trimming. \$9.98
4138—A bewitching model which bears the indefinable stamp of Paris. It is made of very fine quality Milan straw in a most becoming shape. Velvet ribbon trims the crown, and terminates at side-back in loops and ends. The floral adornment is ideal in its color harmony and wonderful in its naturalness. It consists of two large chrysanthemums combined with silk and velvet panicles, intermingled with foliage. The model can be had in either black or natural straw, with trimming as described. \$11.98
4139—A small modish Hat, admirably adapted for wear on dress occasions is pictured here. It is a hand-made model, formed entirely of shirred chiffon with a twist of satin ribbon around the crown, caught in front with a handsome jet buckle. Two grace-

ful ostrich plumes provide a handsome completion. The hat can be had in black with one black and one white plume, or, if preferred, in all black; also in gray with gray plumes. \$11.98
4140—A truly artistic Hat, beautiful in its shaping, which is an admirable example of the prevailing style. It is a chip straw with a wide brim, gracefully lifted up on one side and finished on the under edge of brim with a velvet fold. The crown is covered with soft shirred satin Messaline of a splendid quality, with an attractive jet buckle in front. Two handsome ostrich plumes of generous length trim the model. The hat may be had in black straw only, with one white and one black plume. If preferred, it may be had in all black. \$11.98
4141—This fascinating dress Hat is of finest quality Milan straw with the brim stylishly shaped, as pictured, and trimmed beneath with a fold of black velvet. Fine velvet ribbon in black extends around the crown with a large Alsatian bow in back. The flowers used to adorn the model are two very large silk and velvet roses in beautiful contrasting shades, with clusters of forget-me-nots and foliage in a very natural effect. The model can be had in natural straw color or black straw with trimming as described. \$11.98
4142—This handsome Hat is distinctly up to date in its graceful contour. The entire hat is made of a fine quality imported braid, fancifully applied on the crown, intermingled with Maline, producing a truly charming effect. A soft twist of Maline and braid fastening with a jet ornament provides a Frenchy touch in front. Model is finished with two full, long ostrich plumes, which add greatly to its charming appearance. Can be had in black with two white plumes, or in black with black plumes, as preferred. \$12.98

Figure 3: "New York Fashions, 1909", National Cloak & Suit Co.

PANDORA RANGE

"We Take off Our Hats to 'Pandora' Range!"

BECAUSE—

It's a uniform baker and cooker.
Is the only Range with a burnished top surface.
Has a reliable thermometer.
Durable, sure-working grates.
Emery rod for knife sharpening or towel drying.
Is solid, strong, handsome and easily regulated.

"In 'Pandora' We Trust."

McClary's

LONDON, TORONTO, MONTREAL, WINNIPEG, VANCOUVER, ST. JOHN, N.B., HAMILTON, CALGARY.
FOR SALE BY

Figure 4: Advertisement, *Montreal Daily Star* 3 October 1908.

will attract a more refined class of audience. The "well-dressed" picture, which would acknowledge "the art of the milliner" would further increase the analogy between "the talking play" and the silent picture.²⁸ Ladies' fashion was one of the important links between the legitimate theatre and moving pictures, forming the *mise en scène* of a shared public sphere between the two mediums and exhibition spaces. By the mid-1910s, fashion tie-ins were heavily promoted by the nascent film industry, as a multifaceted address to the female consumer linked department stores with the exhibition spaces and the films themselves.²⁹ Millinery fashions were thus at the crux of the bourgeoisification of the cinema, and the size of the hats symbolically announced women's primary role in mass consumer culture. The buying power of women is most ironically underlined in a *Montreal Daily Star* kitchen stove advertisement featuring a quartet of ladies doffing their large and elaborately decorated hats under the slogan "We Take off Our Hats to 'Pandora' Range!"³⁰ (Figure 4.)

While big hats were undoubtedly a symptom of consumer society, they were also often hand-crafted. The straw and felt bases were industrially produced to meet the demands of the growing female urban populations of the 19th century. Steam blocking produced standardised models that were then trimmed for "originality", and/or according to the latest trends set in Paris.³¹ The milliner's craft was primarily a matter of trimming these forms, which, especially in the Edwardian period, amounted to creating sculptural arrangements of assorted materials. Moreover, department stores also sold these trimmings separately, publishing detailed lists of their new stocks with each new fashion season. Thus, the art of millinery was at once a woman's trade, with guilds and apprenticeship systems, and a creative art for women to develop at home. The *Montreal Daily Star* regularly displayed large advertisements for millinery classes in its

"Meetings and Amusements" section.³² As a key element of the culture of display that emerged around the mass media, big hats were exemplary of the conspicuous consumption of the new leisure class, but within the context of mass-produced ready-to-wear clothing, the hats would also have been personalised fashion statements. The vocabulary of "trimmings" constituted a means of expression in the originality of detail available to professional and amateur milliners.

One of the most exaggerated features of the "Belle Époque" hats was the feathers of exotic birds. A 1911 film called *For Your Hats Ladies* (Cinéma Eclair) detailed the collecting and preparation of ostrich feathers for ladies' hats. According to the catalogue description: "A bird is chased into a corner, and while one holds its head and others its legs, another Arab plucks handfuls of feathers". In the final scene, a lady models a hat adorned with the huge plumes.³³ Not only were the hats the product of a Colonial economy, but also, by wearing them to the afternoon matinée, women put the spoils of that economy on display in the most mundane venues of everyday life. By 1908, entire species of birds, including the bird of paradise in New Guinea, were being exterminated for the fashion industry.³⁴ In 1906, Queen Alexandra denounced feathers for purposes of conservation; and in 1911 Queen Mary, in support of the Audubon Society, renounced plumed headgear.³⁵ Heron feathers were outlawed in New York in 1909.³⁶ Despite such exhortations towards conservation, the big hats continued to be decorated with plumage, including "simulated feathers", until the fashion finally began to shift in 1913.

In the autumn of 1908, reports in the *Montreal Daily Star* seemed to indicate that the big hat was on its way out. Brims of 84" in circumference were deemed passé,³⁷ and by February 1909 the exaggerated styles were pronounced to be "vulgar". The Paris fashions of the spring of 1909 supposedly boasted no

feathers and few trimmings,³⁸ and yet Montreal department stores still promoted large hats in their spring collections, emphasising their most excessive features, such as "massive jet bandeaux", "handsome white osprey plumes" and "great bunches of hydrangeas".³⁹ The spring season of 1909 inaugurated the "peach basket hat" which did rather resemble an upturned basket with no brim. Adorned with bunches of fruits and vegetables, and often covering the face down to the chin, it inspired an increased diatribe in the press. In April and May, the height of the millinery season, hardly a day went by without a quip about the latest styles: "How do you like my spring hat?" "Well, the menu looks attractive, but if I were you I'd flank those vegetables with a nice porterhouse steak."⁴⁰ Even the women's columns began to hesitate at the onset of the peach basket, recognising its potential as an object of ridicule. One columnist invited her readers to write to her about the spring hats: "Do you think them ridiculous or do you think them quaintly charming?"⁴¹

The big hat was evidently a fashion that was hard to shake, although once it became too popular, its dramatic effect wore off. As one "Woman's Corner" column advised, "in order to be picturesque the large hat must have its proper setting, the wearer must have space and a background". The writer recommends "eschewing the immense chapeau unless riding in one's own vehicle, or when in the theatre loge", and notes that "an incoherent jumble of hats of all sizes and colours, and at all elevations in juxtaposition to the huge picturesque chapeau utterly destroys the effect".⁴² One can only imagine the chaotic effect created by those women who did not own their own vehicle, and could not afford a box seat in the theatre, and indeed a great fashion divide was announced in the summer of 1910 between small hats and big hats, with medium hats deemed totally passé.⁴³ By 1910, the big hats had become somewhat more exclusive, featuring very

expensive plumage and gems. The hatpins themselves were so big that they could double as small cosmetics pouches, hiding powder-puffs under their enamelled, hinged lids.⁴⁴

It was in 1908 that the fashion landscape began to incorporate more "modern" shapes, with Paul Poiret's designs for the natural figure. However, while dresses became more comfortable and practical, losing some of their frills and flounces, the big hat lingered on until about 1913.⁴⁵ Shortages of materials and manufacturing personnel stemmed the tide of the big hat fashion with the outbreak of war in 1914. By the end of the decade, the wide brims, high crowns and assorted trimmings had given way to the close-fitting caps and turbans of the 1920s.⁴⁶ In conjunction with the changing fashion landscape of the first two decades of the century, the rise of the department store, and the huge increase in female consumers during this period came an expanded discourse on women's fashion in the popular press.⁴⁷ Women's pages, fashion notes, and news stories about the new seasons accompanied extensive department store advertising in the urban dailies. As Roland Barthes has noted, it is when fashion "passes through communication" that it becomes an autonomous cultural object. "Fashion becomes narrative", he argues, when it begins, through the discourse on fashion, to accrue the signifying function of language.⁴⁸ The exhaustive descriptions of the millinery designs of each new season provide a symbolic narrative for the female consumer to "dream of identity and play", especially when they are conjoined with descriptions of society events such as weddings and balls. Thus, the hat nuisance at moving picture houses coincides with the emergence of the fashion system as a modern signifying practice, as exemplified in the local history of the *Montreal Daily Star*.

Contesting public space

In their stubborn refusal to take off their hats, the ladies were making a fashion statement

that may only be legible nearly a century after the fact.⁴⁹ Miriam Hansen has described the alternative public sphere of the silent cinema as an erosion of the gendered segregation of public and private spaces.⁵⁰ By wearing their hats to the cinema, women were flaunting their power as consumers; and they were also challenging the hierarchy of spectacles within the emergent realm of popular culture. Given that in all the cartoons, comic films and editorials it is the male spectator whose view of the screen is blocked by the towering chapeaux, the extensive discourse on the hat nuisance reproduced what Hansen has described as "the taboo on the active female gaze".⁵¹ Indeed, the discourse on the hat nuisance is exceptionally hostile and patronising. In *Moving Picture World*, for example, we find the following diatribe:

The eternal feminine hat is always a source of much irritation to mere man. It is difficult to see how the admonition to the fair creatures to remove their hats can be dispensed with, for in this regard the average woman is quite a savage person.⁵²

In the *Montreal Daily Star*, a humour column called "The Passing Hour" kept up an ongoing commentary ridiculing the public spectacle of millinery fashions: "There is a promise that the summer hat will be more hideous than the winter style, but its fulfilment is not believed possible".⁵³ In 1909, under the heading "Millinery Opening", we find "Earlie: 'What is a millinery opening, pa?' His Pa: 'The small space between the hats of two women through which a man has to see what he can of the play'".⁵⁴ Other jokes and cartoons compared the hats to wastebaskets, coal-bins and automobiles requiring "squawkers" to warn people they were coming. Humorists recommended innovative techniques such as hypnotism and inflatable hats to solve the problem of the hat nuisance.⁵⁵ The occasional reference to a

woman's view being blocked by another woman's hat is mentioned as a rare comeuppance, and an exception to the general rule of male spectators being the complainants. In *Moving Picture World*, one writer relates an "amusing incident" in which he sits "in eclipse" behind a large hat when "two minutes afterward another woman with a hat which was first cousin to a full-sized umbrella came in and (O joy!) Planted herself down in the seat next ahead of woman no. 1." The first woman ends up walking out, but the writer, who still could not see the curtain, "was almost happy".⁵⁶

One can only conclude from this most unappreciative discourse that women wore the hats for each other as signs of social standing and cultural currency. Husbands may well have been complicit in the display but it seems that for most men, the big hats were quite simply an all-round nuisance. A woman writer in the *Montreal Daily Star* dismisses the satirical commentary of men who could not possibly understand the complexity of a practice "so essentially feminine". "Fancy supposing that anything so important as women's fashions can be killed by such trifles as cartoons or jokes!"⁵⁷ Given the standard role of the "ladies please remove your hats" slide in the exhibitor's pre-screening repertoire, it would seem that the "problem" was more or less institutionalised during this period. Headers featuring ladies actually removing their hats were also used occasionally,⁵⁸ as one more variation of a request that had to be continually reframed, often through humour, in the hopes of it being observed.⁵⁹

The attraction of the hats must have been very strong for women to ignore the satirical slandering that they received on such a consistent basis. The case of Miss Barry in Montreal is partly a story of snobbery, as she felt that her box seat came with privileges; however, it also highlights the social dynamics at work in the new public sphere of the cinema. While the theatre's hired security man

told the court "there's only one law for the rich and the poor here", all of the English-language news stories began by introducing Miss Barry along with her pedigree: "sister of Colonel Barry, clerk to the police committee, and sister-in-law of Judge Choquet".⁶⁰ She attended the Ouimetoscope with a gentleman who was subsequently identified as her brother, and she was essentially a "society lady" attending the pictures, which at this time would have been a somewhat rare event. The judge seems to have been swayed by her social standing, as he noted that Miss Barry had not been treated courteously by the theatre staff. The only law that would apply to the case in Montreal was the law of common courtesy, and if Miss Barry was discourteous by not removing her hat, it was too bad, but she was not breaking the law. The bodily assault committed by the constable was, however, a punishable offence.

The French press in Montreal introduced Miss Barry not by way of her male relatives, but as "Françoise", well-known editor-publisher of *Le Journal de Françoise*, a bimonthly "Family Gazette".⁶¹ While there is no comment to be found in the pages of this journal on its editor's brush with the law, one does find, in the months leading up to the incident, announcements of the reopening of the Ouimetoscope, scene of her profligate hat-wearing. The newly-built 1200-seat theatre that opened on 31 August 1907 was an exceptionally lavish establishment for the period. Replacing a moving picture house opened by Léo-Ernest Ouimet in January 1906 in a converted "café-concert" (a type of establishment where patrons could enjoy a drink while being entertained by singers and variety acts), the Ouimetoscope, compared to the store-front "scopes" that were then popping up all over the city, was in a class of its own. A theatre conceived and built expressly for the exhibition of motion picture films, showing regular programmes and well-staffed, it offered advance tickets at prices that ranged from \$10, \$15 and \$25, to \$35 and

\$50 for boxes. The Ouimetoscope could very well have been one of the very first instances – if not the first – of the movie palace. It was advertised in *Le Journal de Françoise* as being elegant and impressive.⁶² In fact, according to historians, the only other establishment in the Ouimetoscope's class in North America or France at the time of its opening was the Nationoscope, a competing Montreal film theatre that had been inaugurated in May 1907.⁶³

Even in its previous incarnation, the Ouimetoscope had been associated with a gentrified white-collar clientele, but the new establishment lured even more patrons away from the legitimate theatres.⁶⁴ In fact, the type of venue presented by the Ouimetoscope was an issue which played a part in the court case following Miss Barry's assault. The defence lawyer argued that the Ouimetoscope was "not a theatre but a place of amusement", the implication being that different rules may apply.⁶⁵ The whole case seemed to hinge on the ambiguity of the status of the establishment, as Miss Barry's lawyer claimed that his client was ignorant of the house rules about hat removal.⁶⁶ Miss Barry was presumably accustomed to the courtesy codes of the "legitimate theatre" where ladies could do as they pleased, as long as they – and their male companions – paid the price of admission. For ladies such as Miss Barry, the theatre was a society event where the objective was, indeed, "to be seen". In the democratic realm of the moving pictures, such behaviour was not tolerated, and the Barry case was a test of the class rules that would apply in the new venue of the film theatre. While big hats were definitely also an issue in the legitimate theatres, theatre architecture segregated the classes of patrons, and women were certainly not thrown out for refusing to remove their headgear. The Ouimetoscope seats were variably priced, but, as a "place of amusement", the theatre's lawyer argued that the same rules applied to all customers.

Despite the Barry incident, a 1908

Ouimetoscope programme featured a woman in a large hat on the cover, and among their advertisers was a local millinery shop.⁶⁷ The venue was, in a sense, a hybrid establishment that tried to insert the new medium of the movies into the culture of the theatre. "Françoise"'s court case illuminates some of the contradictions informing the public sphere of cinema as the Nickelodeon gradually gave way to larger establishments, and theatre owners tried to make film-going a more "respectable" form of entertainment. In the Barry case, the defence counsel took the rather bizarre step of citing a series of judgments made in Paris concerning the hat issue, indicating that ever since women had been a presence in the public space of the theatre, their hats had been a problem. In a 1837 ruling, women were to be admitted regardless of their headdress; in 1884, "spectators" were required to remove their hats, but that did not include the "spectatrice".⁶⁸

The controversy in Paris reached a peak in June 1906, when a referendum was held in twelve major theatres. The *Montreal Daily Star* writer notes that this was the first time many French women could vote at all, and the vote went against hats.⁶⁹ This was despite a Parisian court case in 1905 that upheld women's right to wear hats in theatres.⁷⁰ The referendum may have gone against hats, but in August 1907 the prominent actress and theatre owner Madame Rejane requested that hat removal be mandatory in her establishment.⁷¹ Sarah Bernhardt also banned hats from her theatre around the same time.⁷² Fashion notes from Europe in 1905 and 1906 included "collapsible theatre hats", and caps and turbans designed specially for theatre wear. While many women may well have been adopting the smaller styles, the extravagant headpieces continued to grow taller and wider throughout 1908. In July 1908, the Theatre Commission of Paris decreed that theatres had the right to request ladies to remove their hats,⁷³ although even this legislation seems

not to have been enforced. A report in *Moving Picture News* in 1909 noted that, with the more excessive styles, women were no longer removing their hats because of the difficulties of remounting. The writer advises that a delegation of movie exhibitors approach the "French fashion dictators" before the spring styles are decreed to beg their case.⁷⁴

A variety of solutions were tried in different cities in North America and Europe, including theatre design and legislation. In Atlanta, Georgia, a city ordinance was passed against hat-wearing in theatres, but the managers of moving picture houses found that the ladies stayed away, and they therefore protested against the law.⁷⁵ An article in *Moving Picture World* in 1910 thus advises exhibitors to "study the ladies" and find ways of accommodating them and their hats.⁷⁶ Special seating was installed in a Boston theatre, a custom which the writer argues is standard "across the Atlantic". Raked floors, special rows reserved for ladies with large hats and special sections were among some of the techniques employed by theatre owners to accommodate the fashionable customers. One theatre in Indiana advertised its high ceiling and level floor that enabled the picture to be thrown high over the heads and hats of the audience.⁷⁷ Along with nurseries and baby contests designed to attract the female patron, many theatre owners acknowledged the fact that "the lady's hat plays a large part in moving picture life".⁷⁸

Such attitudes were not necessarily the norm, however. The problem was actually just as bad in London where a manager who evicted a trio of hat-wearing woman in 1910 and returned them their money was then sued by the women. He won his case, and the judgment upheld the rights of theatre owners to "insist on the removal of feminine headgear".⁷⁹ In the American city of Germantown, crusading citizens managed to ban hat-wearing at the movies. Their argument was that "the moving picture show is the poor man's theatre", and "his [sic] right

to an unobstructed view of the stage should be protected as it is in the big theatres, which are for the rich".⁸⁰ Within the reports from Germantown is the thinly veiled complaint that the invasion of movie houses by "girlies under tremendous topgear" constitutes an invasion of a popular form of entertainment by a new class of women. Millinery was a prominent element of the new ready-to-wear industry, although they were very expensive, as the humorists unfailingly remarked, and thus would have been a major status symbol for this new urban leisure class. In 1910, the *Chicago Nickelodeon* reported that in higher-priced [legitimate] theatres women were generally taking off their hats, while refusing in the moving picture shows.⁸¹

Many of the trade press and daily press articles complaining about the hat nuisance question whether the offending ladies deserve to be called "ladies" at all. In striving to attract female patrons to their theatres, the moving picture men may have been expecting a certain quality of lady; at the same time, however, a "new woman" with independent income, such as "Françoise", was emerging on the scene. The bad manners of the hat-wearing ladies suggested that the female public sphere transgressed the class barrier along with the gender barrier. As the reference to "girlies" suggests, many of the women were not "respectable", even if they followed the trends set by "society ladies" such as Miss Barry. One writer notes that under the hat of a woman in front of him was the unmistakable sign of "quantities of peroxide".⁸² The big hats and the new class of female patrons literally took up space that male patrons were reluctant to give up.

Several stories and jokes appeared in the papers during this period about stampeding women, apparently driven wild by department store millinery sales. In a Swiss theatre in 1905, a riot caused by women refusing to remove their headwear resulted in at least one critical injury.⁸³ Numerous hatpin injuries were reported.⁸⁴ a peach basket hat caught

fire on top of a lady's head in an Atlanta train station,⁸⁵ and women were advised to use hatpins as weapons when alone at night.⁸⁶ One theatre-manager joked about attracting female patrons with this film idea:

Have a splendid bargain day scene in a large dry goods and millinery store. But then! Who knows, the ladies in the audience might forget it was all an optical delusion, and trample the people in front in a wild impulse to be in the game.⁸⁷

Mirrors were the obvious solution to controlling the wild savagery of the hat-wearing women, and they became an important and prominent feature of many of the theatres constructed during this period. While this certainly catered to a perceived narcissism on the part of the female consumer, the mirrors would also have reduplicated and multiplied the excessive imagery of the millinery fashion in question.

Big hats on the screen

During the years of the big hat fashion, women in the films were as top-heavy as the spectators, as the large hat was an especially handy signifier of class in the visual vocabulary of silent film. Moreover, the ridicule that ran through the journalism and cartoons was just as prominent in the cinema. The hat nuisance itself became the topic of quite a few films, starting as early as 1897 with two films from American Mutoscope and Biograph. According to catalogue descriptions, *Theatre Hats* depicts men in a theatre resorting to a telescope to view the stage from behind a woman's hat, and *Theatre Hats Off* frames a dancer on a vaudeville stage through the silhouetted heads and hats of the audience.⁸⁸ In 1907, Pathé made *Décadence d'un chapeau*, which seems to be about the comic misadventures of a large hat.⁸⁹ More films about the hat appeared at the high point

of the big hat crisis around 1908-09, such as *The Matinée Hat Nuisance* (Gaumont) and *The Merry Widow Hat* (Vitagraph). In the former, three male theatre-goers are annoyed by the "vast size of the hats" in front of them, and "turn the tables in a ludicrous manner" which has something to do with sombreros.⁹⁰ In the latter, a woman's hat causes a series of disturbances until the end of the film, when it redeems itself by serving as a spare tyre.⁹¹ (Jokes about the hats being used as cartwheels seemed to be especially prevalent, especially with the introduction of the cartwheel hat.)

Titles and descriptions of films about ladies' hats between 1909 and 1913 include documentaries of hat manufacturing, as well as dramas and comedies about their social impact. (See *Filmography*.) Often the documentaries are as revealing as the fictions about the social roles of the millinery of the period, as *The Ostrich Plume Industry*, mentioned above, suggests. Another "educational picture" from 1912, *Palmetto Hat*

Industry (Lubin), was shot in Florida. Its description is indicative of how the "symbolic language" of fashion emerged as a "democratising" discourse of consumer society:

Excellent scenes of the gathering of the dwarf palm leaves are pictured, then the stripping, plaiting and finally the fashioning into a wonderful crown of glory favoured alike by the grande dame and the humble factory girl. The girl at the bench always tries the hat on when finished. She cannot see herself in it, but likes to imagine how it becomes her. She has evolved a symphony of straw and believes she is an artist.⁹²

The comic films about hats, like the derogatory sexist commentary in the press, betray the anxieties brought about by the gendered transformation of the public sphere. In one of the first animated films,

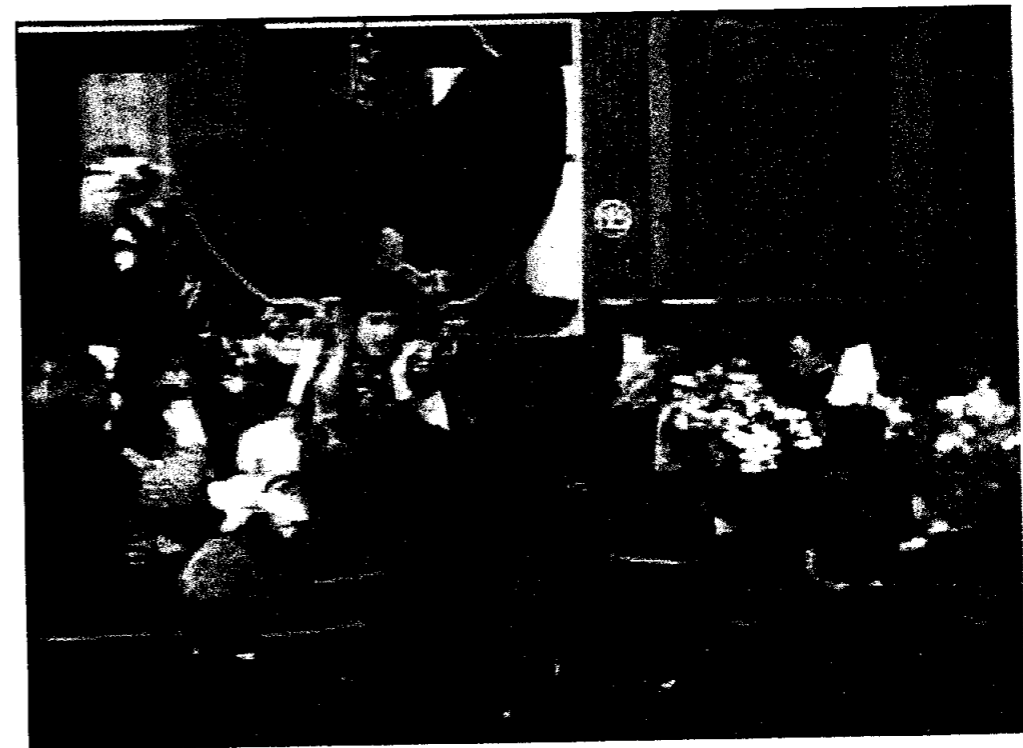


Figure 5: *Those Awful Hats* D W Griffith, Biograph, 1909.

Fantasmagorie (1908), Émile Cohl used simple line-drawings to depict a man pulling the feather plumes from the hat of a woman seated in front of him. The scene is at once aggressive and vaguely erotic, as the two figures move together in a fluid movement of lines and space, ultimately to dissolve into a subsequent, unrelated scene. The short sequence is evocative of Benjamin's comment on women's hats: "The shades of erotic meaning in a woman's hat are virtually incalculable".⁹³ He suggests that the hats put on display in symbolic form that which must remain hidden – the sexual organs. The excessiveness of the spectacle, especially with the Belle Époque inclusion of so much organic material, is indeed a displacement of the embarrassment that the spectacle of woman herself was to genteel segregated society.

D W Griffith's 1909 film *Those Awful Hats* (Biograph) is more downright cruel than Cohl's delicate animation. In this short film, a gamut of special effects are used to show industrial-size grappling tongs drop from the ceiling of a movie theatre to grab the flower-sprouting hats off a couple of women. When a third woman comes in and takes her seat wearing yet another hat laden with flowers, the apparatus takes the woman along with her hat. (Figure 5.) The (mostly male) audience cheers wildly as her flailing body rises above them. Throughout the scene, a film plays in the top left corner of the screen, although it is so routine – so much less a film than the one we are watching – that it is mere wallpaper. *Those Awful Hats* is suggestive of how the activity in the theatre may have at times overwhelmed the images on the screen during the pre-classical period, or "the cinema of attractions". The film concludes with an intertitle asking ladies to please remove their hats. If the film becomes a kind of threat to disobedient women, it is also a rare instance of a lantern-slide genre becoming adopted by moving pictures. (Exhibitors were actually advised to show the film instead of the customary slide.)⁹⁴ One wonders whether this

film is really addressed to women, as the concluding warning suggests, or if, in fact, it is addressed to the jeering men. In any case, the single shot structure, adorned with the virtuoso effects of the grappling tongs and the matte projection, links this short film to the cinema of attractions, which, by 1909, Griffith had otherwise left behind. The film that no one is watching includes well-dressed and hatted women, and is more of the kind that Griffith was making in 1909; thus, the comedy links the big hats to an outdated form of spectatorship.

Chaplin's comedy *A Night at the Show* (Essanay, 1915) is set in a burlesque hall, rather than a movie theatre, but it is suggestive of the class divisions of audiences of the period. As a thoroughly disruptive and unruly spectator, Charlot moves through several spaces of the theatre, ending up perched in a box right beside the stage where he inevitably gets mixed up in the show, heroically "saving" the heroine from a staged aggression. Although he never ventures up to the balcony, several shots of a motley crew of working-class (and black-face) audience-members in the balcony (one of them played by Chaplin himself) in constant motion provide a contrast to the stiff tuxedoed and jewelled patrons in the orchestra seats. Charlot's encounter with the big hat takes place in a box where an enormous woman with a diminutive male companion sits in front of him. He removes the flowing plumes from the hat, replaces them just before the woman gets up to leave, and then grabs them again and flings them at the stage. The whole episode is provoked by a belly-dancer on the stage whom Charlot will eventually try and save. The woman with the big hat gets up to leave in apparent disgust when the navel-swivelling damsel appears on-stage with a man in blackface. Although it is not clear whether it is the sexuality or the racial innuendo that shocks the large woman, it is clear that her size (of her and her hat) is symbolic of her pretensions of moral authority.

As always, the Chaplin character moves effortlessly across and between class divides, and in this case, his appropriation of the hat feathers is a catalyst in his upsetting of bourgeois behaviour. The multicultural and multi-levelled context of "the theatre" provides a carnivalesque setting for his antics. By 1915, big hats were on the wane, and so the heavily plumed chapeau serves a strictly symbolic purpose. Blocking Charlot's view, the hat has become an extension of a stuffy morality that is completely overwhelmed by the on-stage and offstage activities. The detached plumes may be interpreted as symbolic of Charlot's desire for the dancer.

While Chaplin's *A Night at the Show* is an example of how "the cinema of attractions" continued into the 1910s, Griffith's *The New York Hat* (1912), starring Mary Pickford, is indicative of the ascendancy of narrative filmmaking, with its new effects of spectatorship. In this film, written by Anita Loos, the large hat features as an object of desire, its excessiveness again linked to sexuality. A dying woman leaves a note to the minister by her bedside saying: "My husband worked me to death but I have managed to save a little sum. Take it and from time to time buy my daughter the hats of finery she has always been denied. Tell no one." The minister proceeds to buy the daughter, Mary, an extravagant hat featured in the milliner's shop-window with a price tag of \$10 and a sign saying "just in from NYC". An intertitle describes the hat as "The Village Sensation". In the small-town setting, a trio of women gossips have a field-day, especially when Mary brazenly wears the big hat to church on Sunday. When her father finds out, he violently destroys the hat. Finally, the minister reads aloud the mother's note, clearing up the misunderstanding that has so upset the community. In the last scene, the minister places his arm around Mary and she confides to her father that the preacher wants to marry her. The hat, by this time, is nowhere to be seen.

In this typical Griffith Biograph film, the big hat serves as a displacement of the courting ritual. As a figure of the mother's repression, the hat is ultimately also denied to Mary as it seems to be too big and ostentatious for the town to handle. It signifies her availability and sexuality, and thus is destroyed by the repressive father. In the end, as a minister's wife, Mary is effectively reassimilated into the community and receives her father's blessing; and the hat is ultimately relegated to the status of an accident on the minister's part. Nevertheless, it is clear that the spectacle of the hat is designed for the women's gaze. In the shop-window, and on Mary's head, the hat is noticed only by women. Even the minister is only drawn to the desirable object by the crowd of young women outside the shop.

Acres of millinery

The New York Hat alerts us to another issue that impinged on the hat nuisance in the cinema, which is the wearing of hats in church. One of the reasons why women may have been so stubborn about their hats is that Victorian morality dictated that women keep their heads covered when in public. The well-bred lady would have had a selection of hats to wear at different times of the day and the week, not the least of which would have been the hat to wear to church. Several news items in the *Montreal Daily Star* suggest that the big hats were becoming a problem in Canadian and American churches, as pastors in several cities ordered women to remove their hats, which were obscuring the congregation's view of the altar and pulpit, and diverting women's attention away from the sermon.⁹⁵ However, in St. Catharines, Ontario, a hatless woman was thrown out in disgrace by the rector of an Anglican church in 1907, suggesting that head covering was still of some concern even in Protestant churches. In Catholic Quebec, it was essential that women's heads be covered in church and in



Figure 6: "A couple of massive Merry Widows spoiled the view for a number of fans", reads the caption under this photo. However, the depicted hats are actually of the Peachbasket persuasion. (Montreal Daily Star 9 July 1909.)

other public places, and so the hat, or lack thereof, becomes a sign of a lady's moral integrity.

One of the biggest events in the millinery season was, of course, Easter. To the extent that church-going was also a social event, the Easter bonnet was an important sign of one's wealth and one's taste. It allowed the ladies to assert their individual style in their selection of model and trimmings, but the Easter hat was also a major status symbol. The *Daily Star* is crammed full of snide comments on the cost of keeping women in their Easter bonnets. A poem reprinted from *The New York Times* ends with the following stanza:

I had meant to pop the question
Walking home from Church that
morning
And the ring was in my pocket
But her chapeau was a warning
For I knew the modest income
That I made by writing sonnets
Never would suffice to keep her
In those gorgeous Easter bonnets.⁹⁶

In an American church in 1908, a "Merry Widow contingent" reportedly saved the Easter service by blocking the congregation's view of a fire that broke out around the altar, and allowing the clergymen and altar boys to douse the flames before a panic could break out.⁹⁷ It is evident that in 1908, even in churches, by wearing their huge hats, women managed to transform the visual landscape of the public sphere and divert attention away from the main attraction and onto themselves.

In some venues, this seems to have been completely appropriate and expected. The annual horse show was one of the most important events of the Montreal society calendar, at which ladies were unequivocally as much on display as the horses.⁹⁸ Cartoons and jokes about women competing for attention with the horses, including a picture of a horse wearing a big hat, were one of the favourite themes of the Montreal humorists. Women's presence at baseball games seems to have been less appreciated, as this quip from "The Passing Hour" column indicates:

Baseball enthusiasts submit to the management that they do not pay the quarter or the half dollar for the purpose of looking at the tangled wildwood and primeval thicket on the rear exposure of a Merry Widow hat.⁹⁹ (See Figure 6.)

Lectures were also a public showcase for big hats, which could be somewhat disconcerting for a speaker whose view of the audience could be entirely blocked by the headwear. A story in September 1908 tells of a Canadian lecturer in England who could not persuade his female audience to remove their hats. "Eventually Mr. Hughes lectured resignedly to acres of millinery".¹⁰⁰

As a fashion system, the big hats were a means for women literally to take over the public sphere.¹⁰¹ That they could do so in the name of "decency" and class privilege guaranteed their rights to public space; and, insofar as the fashion language was coded in a vocabulary that only women seemed to appreciate, the hat problem was only a problem for men. (Except, of course, for the women fainting under the weight of their hats, being injured by hatpins, and unable to enter tram cars.) Even if the hat nuisance predated the cinema and extended well beyond it, it was in the new moving picture houses that it was apparently most evident, becoming a key element of the new visual culture as it developed into a form of mass entertainment. Indeed, the hats were themselves a form of popular culture, as a new class of female consumers announced their presence in the visual field. The hat nuisance highlights the role of fashion in linking onscreen and offscreen spaces into a new public sphere in which strict demarcation between gender roles and class behaviours no longer held.

Big hats and a feminist public sphere

The coincidence of big hat fashions and women's suffrage did not go unnoticed by

Montreal humorists or advertisers. In "The Passing Hour" we find in March 1908: "Women always lose interest in the universal suffrage movement as soon as the millinery stores put the spring styles on exhibition".¹⁰² And in the same month:

'And now ladies', continued the lecturer on women's rights to her downtrodden sisters. 'I am ready to answer any questions'.

'Would you mind telling us', ventured one fair auditor, 'where you got that perfect love of a hat?'.¹⁰³

A Montreal department store likewise linked women's buying power to the fashionable topic of women's suffrage with the slogan, "If a vote were taken to discover where the most attractive exhibit of the new styles is to be seen, this store would have a large majority".¹⁰⁴ Repeated associations of women's suffrage and large hats render the nascent women's movement just another instance of women being silly and disruptive. As Stamp notes, "suffrage activists were often demeaned through the characterization of their behaviour as hysterical, or excessively feminine".¹⁰⁵

Ironically, the leadership of the women's movement instructed their membership to avoid masculine clothing styles (which were certainly worn during this period as an "alternative" form of dress), and to adopt more feminine modes of attire, including picture hats, so as to protect themselves from accusations of being freakishly unfeminine.¹⁰⁶ In their invasion of public space, women were thus caught between two social stigmas, as their fashionable clothes permitted their opponents to depict them as silly and hysterical. The frivolity of the hats enabled a quick dismissal of suffrage, although the danger of hatpins was recognised by both men and women as a weapon of choice in an increasingly divisive debate. The excessive headgear of the Edwardian era may not have

helped women's claim for more rights in that the hats were in many instances a display of wealth and prestige. However, in their sheer size as obstacle in public, they constituted a visual authority which was a real threat to the gendered hierarchies of the public sphere. Thus, the most infamous lantern-slide of the era, featuring a man climbing a ladder to see over a particularly monstrous chapeau, is also a picture of a man made very small by a lady's hat. (Figure 1.)

The spectacle of the big hat may have symbolised the monstrous threat of women's suffrage, and provided men with an easy target for ridicule; at the same time, these chapeaux announced the primordial role of women's fashion in the emergent mass culture. For Benjamin, "the true dialectical theatre of fashion" was the ever-changing designation of newness fostered by industrial capitalism and its culture of display that he found to be showcased in the Paris Arcades: "Each season brings, in its newest creations, various secret signals of things to come".¹⁰⁷ In the 20th century, he finds that the "collective dream energy of a society has taken refuge with redoubled vengeance in the mute impenetrable nebula of fashion, where the understanding cannot follow".¹⁰⁸ The dissipation of revolutionary energies promised by the new technologies of modernity finds form in the phantasmagoria of consumer society, of which these hats are surely an exemplary instance. If this is why fashion is "the eternal deputy of Surrealism", it is also linked to "the feminine collective", whose motives and understanding for Benjamin are, unfortunately, "unfathomable".

The fashion for big hats lay between the building of the Paris Arcades – the early to mid-19th century – and Benjamin's own time of writing – the 1920s and 1930s. He may not have addressed this particular fashion moment directly, and yet in several ways his remarks on fashion are borne out by "the big hat nuisance". In their assembly of furs, feathers and taxidermy, the hats very literally

illustrate Benjamin's fundamental association of fashion with death: "Every fashion couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, fashion defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve."¹⁰⁹ The abundance of natural materials styled into artificial arrangements registers the transient nature of fashion in absolute terms. These hats were, indeed, "second nature", allegories of experience and emblems of death paraded about as trophies of social status.

The cinema has lately been recognised as an integral aspect of the shifting, sensational and perceptually disorientating experience of urban modernity in the decades before and after the turn of the century.¹¹⁰ Within the density and speed of the electrified, constantly moving landscape of the metropolis, the cinema offered a venue that seemed to capture the novelty of this techno-reality, expanding the horizons of the city into imaginary realms of fictional and exotic spaces. If we can inscribe the excessive sculptural headgear of ladies' hat design into the visual display of the period, it figures the novelty of accelerated modernity in the form of the non-technological organic materials of sex and death. As a fashion intervention, it constitutes a discourse of transience that subsumed even the New Woman and the promise of suffrage under its tiresome weight.

Moreover, the collection of found materials on the hats exemplifies the modernist techniques of collage and appropriation that Benjamin took as the model and method of intellectual pursuit in *The Arcades Project*. Women's hat design was clearly a prominent feature of the visual landscape of public life during this period, inscribing a phantasmagoria of tactile detritus within the burgeoning image-culture of consumer capitalism. The transformation of revolutionary energies into the image culture of consumer society is nowhere better exemplified than in the ways in which the nascent film industry tried to "solve" the hat

problem by furnishing mirrors for female spectators. However, Benjamin's most cryptic remark on fashion, that "the eternal is more the ruffle on a dress than some idea", is, in fact, a basic definition of the dialectical image.¹¹¹ It constitutes his refusal of the concept of "timeless truth", and proof of the transience of historical knowledge. Insofar as fashion is always on the cusp of the new, it is the signal for "new legal codes, wars and revolutions".¹¹²

Adorno reportedly scribbled "counterrevolutions" in the margins of that last remark in Benjamin's manuscript,¹¹³ indicating his dismay at the linkage of fashion to revolution. Indeed, one would not want to argue that women's refusal to take off their huge hats at the movies constituted a revolutionary moment in women's history. Nevertheless, their refusal to remove them marks a moment when fashion enabled women temporarily to take over the public sphere. It marks the death of the passive female spectator, whose public presence may once have been as an accessory or adornment for her male companion. Because the dialectical power of fashion is that "it emerges in the medium of the oldest, the longest past, the most ingrained",¹¹⁴ the women piled high with dead things on their heads, occupying the space of the moving picture house, announces the end of an era.

Filmography

Theatre Hats (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1897)
Theatre Hats Off (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1897)
Grandeur et décadence d'un chapeau (Pathé, 1907)
The Merry Widow (Kalem, 1907)
The Merry Widow Waltz Craze (Edison, 1908)
The Merry Widow Hat (Vitagraph, 1908)
The 'Merry Widow' Hats (Lubin, 1908)
The Matinée Hat Nuisance [A Pleasant

Evening at the Theatre] (Gaumont, 1908)
Fantasmagorie (Émile Cohl, Gaumont, 1908)
The Fashionable Hat (Pathé, 1908)
La valse à la mode (Pathé, 1908)
A Pretty Milliner (Pathé, 1909)
The Peachbasket Hat (D W Griffith, Biograph, 1909)
Those Awful Hats (D W Griffith, Biograph, 1909)
A Tale of a Hat (Vitagraph, 1910)
Hawkin's Hat (Lubin, 1910)
My Milliner's Bill (Edison, 1910)
The Valuable Hat (Itala, 1910)
The Ostrich and the Lady (Essanay, 1910)
Chantecler Atraçoado (Júlio Costa, 1910)
For Your Hats, Ladies! (Éclair, 1911)
The Ostrich Plume Industry, France (Gaumont, 1911)
Wifie's New Hat (Lubin, 1911)
The Hat (Vitagraph, 1912)
Just Hats (Solax, 1912)
My Wife's Bonnet (Selig, 1912)
The New York Hat (D W Griffith, Biograph, 1912)
Palmetto Hat Industry (Lubin, 1912)
Straw Hats Made in Florence, Italy (Cines, 1912)
Hattie's New Hat (Lubin, 1913)
Kindly Remove Your Hat; or She Didn't Mind (1913)
The Making of Hats (CGPC, 1913)
Le Chapeau de Madame Polidor (Pasquali, 1914)
Maria a envie d'un chapeau (Edison, 1914)
Jenny, modes et chapeaux (Edison, 1914)
Her New Hat (1914)
A Night at the Show (Charles Chaplin, Essanay, 1915)
A Woman (Charles Chaplin, Essanay, 1915)

Notes

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- ¹ *Montreal Daily Star* 29 February 1908.
- ² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- ³ *Montreal Daily Star* 21 November 1907.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ *La Presse* 21 January 1895; *Montreal Daily Star* 6 February 1895.
- ⁶ "Les chapeaux au théâtre – en France", *La Presse* (Montreal) 3 April 1897.
- ⁷ *Montreal Daily Star* 23 September 1908.
- ⁸ Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): xiii.
- ⁹ Ibid: xiii.
- ¹⁰ Ulrich Lehmann, *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000): 401.
- ¹¹ Benjamin: 18.
- ¹² Lehmann: 9.
- ¹³ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Film Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000): 25.
- ¹⁴ *Moving Picture World* 6: 13 (2 April 1910).
- ¹⁵ Stamp: 33.
- ¹⁶ Marion Sichel, *Costume Reference 7: The Edwardians* (Boston: Plays Inc., 1978): 52.
- ¹⁷ *Montreal Daily Star* 23 May 1908.
- ¹⁸ For example, in Montreal, *The Merry Widow Waltz* opened on 26 November 1908, and the play opened on 30 January 1909; in April 1910, a parody of the *Chantecler* play opened at the Orpheum long before the play arrived.

- ¹⁹ *Moving Picture World* 25 April 1908, 2 May 1908, 9 May 1908.
- ²⁰ Benjamin: 64 [B1a, 2].
- ²¹ *Montreal Daily Star* 1 September 1908.
- ²² *Montreal Daily Star* 29 February 1908.
- ²³ *Montreal Daily Star* 28 August 1909.
- ²⁴ *Montreal Daily Star* 29 February 1908.
- ²⁵ *Montreal Daily Star* 31 October 1908.
- ²⁶ See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1993); Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick: NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998): 68-79; Ben Singer, "Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama: The Etiology of an Anomaly", *Camera Obscura* 22 (1990): 91-129; Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- ²⁷ *Montreal Daily Star* 17 September 1904, 5 January 1907, 24 May 1907.
- ²⁸ "Dress and the Picture", *Moving Picture World* 9 July 1910.
- ²⁹ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 225; Stamp: 19. In 1913, the Kinemacolor company began releasing a weekly series of "Fashion Films" featuring models posing in society settings. *Motography* 4 January 1913, 19 April 1913.
- ³⁰ *Montreal Daily Star* 3 October 1908.
- ³¹ *Women's Hats Yesterday and Today*, Château Ramezay Museum, Montreal (1989): 24.
- ³² *Montreal Daily Star* 5 May 1909.
- ³³ *Bioscope Supplement* 29 April 1911.
- ³⁴ "Women's Cruelty to Birds", *Montreal Daily Star* 13 February 1908.
- ³⁵ Maureen E Lynn Reilly and Mary Beth Detrich, *Women's Hats of the Twentieth Century* (Atglen PA: Schiffer Publishing Co., 1997): 58.
- ³⁶ *Montreal Daily Star* 16 July 1909.

- ³⁷ *Montreal Daily Star* 30 November 1908.
- ³⁸ *Montreal Daily Star* 23 February 1909.
- ³⁹ *Montreal Daily Star* 18 March 1909.
- ⁴⁰ *Montreal Daily Star* 18 May 1909.
- ⁴¹ *Montreal Daily Star* 10 April 1909.
- ⁴² *Montreal Daily Star* 26 December 1908.
- ⁴³ *Montreal Daily Star* 25 August 1910.
- ⁴⁴ *Montreal Daily Star* 15 August 1910.
- ⁴⁵ Elizabeth Ewing, *History of Twentieth Century Fashion* (London: Batsford, 1992): 66-63.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid: 60.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid: 66.
- ⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, translated by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983): 273.
- ⁴⁹ Benjamin: 482 [N15a, 2] quotes André Monglond: "The past has left images of itself in literary texts, images comparable to those which are imprinted by light on a photosensitive plate. The future alone possesses developers active enough to scan such surfaces perfectly."
- ⁵⁰ Hansen: 115.
- ⁵¹ Ibid: 122.
- ⁵² "The Modern Moving Picture Theatre", Chapter IV *Moving Picture World* 30 October 1909: 482.
- ⁵³ *Montreal Daily Star* 20 February 1908.
- ⁵⁴ *Montreal Daily Star* 1 March 1909.
- ⁵⁵ *Montreal Daily Star* 26 March 1909, 18 August 1910.
- ⁵⁶ *Moving Picture World* 30 October 1909.
- ⁵⁷ *Montreal Daily Star* 13 April 1909.
- ⁵⁸ *Motography* November 1911: 227.
- ⁵⁹ Frequent reports in the trade press indicate that the slides requesting hat removal were being ignored, as in Richmond, VA, in 1910, when the city council of that city was considering legislation against hat-wearing in movie houses. *The*

Nickelodeon 15 March 1910.

- ⁶⁰ *Montreal Daily Star* 11 November 1907.
- ⁶¹ *La Patrie* 19 November 1907; *La Presse* 21 November 1907.
- ⁶² *Le Journal de Françoise* 2 November 1907.
- ⁶³ André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, *Au pays des ennemis du Cinéma: Pour une nouvelle histoire des débuts du cinéma au Québec* (Quebec: Nuit Blanche Éditeur, 1996): 179-180.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid: 133.
- ⁶⁵ *La Presse* 19 November 1907.
- ⁶⁶ *Montreal Daily Star* 14 November 1907.
- ⁶⁷ *Quimotoscope Vues Animées, Theatre Magazine* 5 October 1908.
- ⁶⁸ *La Patrie* 19 November 1907. The 1837 decision marks a moment when society women were going to the theatres in good numbers, and keeping their hats on.
- ⁶⁹ *Montreal Daily Star* 6 June 1906.
- ⁷⁰ *Montreal Daily Star* 7 July 1905.
- ⁷¹ *Montreal Daily Star* 8 July 1907.
- ⁷² Ewing: 32.
- ⁷³ *Montreal Daily Star* 6 July 1908.
- ⁷⁴ *The Nickelodeon* 3: 10 (15 May 1910): 262.
- ⁷⁵ *Moving Picture World* 9 April 1910.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ *Motography* November 1912.
- ⁷⁸ *Moving Picture World* 9 April 1910.
- ⁷⁹ *The Bioscope* 5 May 1910.
- ⁸⁰ *Moving Picture World* 19 September 1908.
- ⁸¹ *The Nickelodeon* 3: 6 (15 March 1910).
- ⁸² *Montreal Daily Star* 31 October 1908.
- ⁸³ *Montreal Daily Star* 23 September 1905.
- ⁸⁴ *Montreal Daily Star* 31 January 1909.

- ⁸⁵ *Montreal Daily Star* 4 August 1909.
- ⁸⁶ *Montreal Daily Star* 27 February 1909.
- ⁸⁷ *The Nickelodeon* 3: 1 (1 January 1910).
- ⁸⁸ Kemp R Niver, *Early Motion Pictures: The Paper Print Collection in the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1985): 324.
- ⁸⁹ Henri Bousquet, *Catalogue Pathé des années 1896 à 1914* (Bures sur Yvette: Henri Bousquet, 1993): 44.
- ⁹⁰ *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* 3: 60 (2 July 1908): 185. This may also have been released under the title *A Pleasant Evening at the Theatre* (Gaumont, 1908), advertised in *Moving Picture World* 25 July 1908.
- ⁹¹ *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* 4: 84 (17 December 1908): 827.
- ⁹² *Motography* 21 December 1912.
- ⁹³ Benjamin: 80 [B10, 1].
- ⁹⁴ *Biograph Bulletins 1908-1912* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973): 57.
- ⁹⁵ *Montreal Daily Star* 1 November 1904, 16 December 1907, 13 March 1909.
- ⁹⁶ *Montreal Daily Star* 9 April 1908.
- ⁹⁷ *Montreal Daily Star* 22 April 1908.
- ⁹⁸ *Montreal Daily Star* 2 May 1908.
- ⁹⁹ *Montreal Daily Star* 20 April 1908.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Montreal Daily Star* 26 September 1908.
- ¹⁰¹ For Barthes (274), "Fashion can constitute itself as a logic, or we might say an exact system", although the rhetorical economy of its signifying process is a system that speaks specifically to the woman as model reader, to whom it offers a euphoric experience: "Fashion immerses the Woman about whom and to whom it speaks in a state of innocence, where everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" (261).
- ¹⁰² *Montreal Daily Star* 12 March 1908.
- ¹⁰³ *Montreal Daily Star* 16 March 1908.
- ¹⁰⁴ W H Scroggie advertisement, *Montreal Daily Star* 16 September 1908.
- ¹⁰⁵ Stamp: 166.
- ¹⁰⁶ Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 127.
- ¹⁰⁷ Benjamin: 64 [B1a, 1].
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid: 64 [B1a, 2].
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid: 79 [B9, 1].
- ¹¹⁰ What is sometimes referred to as "the modernity thesis" is best described and defended by Singer (2001): 131-148.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid: 69 [B3, 7] and 463 [N3, 2].
- ¹¹² Ibid: 64 [B1a, 1].
- ¹¹³ Ibid: 959n3.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid: 64 [B1a, 2].

From the Archive: **Kinemacolor versus "Colour" Cinematography**

Introduced by Luke McKernan

□ Before 1914, there was fierce competition in the cinema industry between rival colour film systems. Gaumont and Pathé had seemingly cornered the market in the mid-1900s with their stencil colour systems. This work, conducted by large teams of women applying colours through stencils to individual frames of film, produced beautiful effects, and attracted high prices. But in 1908 the first "natural" colour system emerged, Kinemacolor, which ran black-and-white film past a rotating red-green filter on the camera, and then on the projector, producing a surprisingly naturalistic effect.

The entrepreneur behind Kinemacolor was Charles Urban, and it was his Natural Color Kinematograph Company which produced this 1911 document, reproduced from a copy held in the Barnes Collection at Hove Museum. Scathing of the claims of stencil colour to reproduce the colours of reality, the document puts the arguments for Kinemacolor representing "the thing-as-it-is-in-Nature". Sadly for Urban, Kinemacolor's claims to the perfect apprehension of life were to be overturned in court in 1914, where Urban's over-confidence fell foul of faulty wording in the patent. The next issue of *Living Pictures* will be devoted to the theme of colour, and will include an essay on the Kinemacolor-v-Pathé battle, and an archive piece from Urban on the history of Kinemacolor.

Luke McKernan is Head of Information at the British Universities Film and Video Council. He is writing his doctoral thesis on Charles Urban. His publications include *Yesterday's News* (2002) and *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema* (1996; with Stephen Herbert).