

## PRIX DE BEAUTE AS A MULTIPLE INTERSECTION. NATIONAL CINEMA, AUTEURISM, AND THE COMING OF SOUND

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*The period of the transition to sound film offers a splendid example of historical over determination.*

Alan Williams

Multiple versions of films in the period after the coming of sound can be conceptualised around two basic issues. The first could be described as a multiplying of one film into several different ones which oscillate between being identical and non-identical. Different versions of the same film thus stage, foreground and allegorise on the level of *mise-en-scène*, editing, dialogue, acting, sometimes even plot, the basic conflict of any commercial film production between the standardisation of production methods and the differentiation of the product. From a producer's point-of-view, on the one hand, films should be as similar as possible to one another in order to minimise production costs; on the other hand, films have to be different from one another in order to promise a novelty value and to be attractive to an audience. Every film has to take a position on this spectrum. This problem comes to play in the similarity of the different versions of the same film to one another as well as between different films made in language versions. Indeed, the discussions of distinguishing a multi-language version from a remake or a dubbed film with some reshot material revolves around such issues of identity, similarity and difference.

The second issue to be considered comes in through the question of translation, linguistically as well as culturally. Multiple versions propose different solutions to this problem. Whereas Hollywood trusted in the universal appeal of its story lines, stars and production values, and resorted fairly quickly to dubbing, the multi-language versions strike a different note in this balancing act between self and other, between home-produced film and film manufactured in a foreign country. By substituting the actors, the multi-language versions (MLVs) stressed two factors: firstly, the unity of body and voice in its refusal to dub the voices into another language; secondly, the MLVs implicitly trust in the drawing power of stars or well-known actors. The investment of spending extra money on another set of actors was hoped to be recouped by extra revenues at the box office. Since all other elements of the film usually stay the same, the stars were perceived as the most important element in attracting an audience.

Both issues take a paradoxical shape in the way they have to address both poles simultaneously: films produced with the intention to be exported have to try to be as specific and culturally grounded as possible (language, milieu, stars, setting, style) in order to address a specific audience, yet they are also made with the intention to cross borders in linguistic, political, and cultural respect as easily as possible. This translates into the

production context where on the one hand ways have to be found to show a specific place through language, geographical markers, gestures, objects, etc., while also not complicating the production unnecessarily. This “catch-22”-situation, if you will, leaves multiple versions in a difficult position where the solution often has been sought either in an underdetermined setting and places reminiscent of fairy tale locations (operettas in fantastic kingdoms somewhere in the far-flung expanse of the Balkans) while also condensing in an overdetermined manner markers of a cultural modernisation around technological progress and social transformation.

I want to concentrate on a single film, *Prix de beauté*, directed by Augusto Genina, shot in 1929 and released in 1930. A disclaimer to start with: *Prix de beauté* is not a MLV in a traditional sense. The line between MLVs and other “multiplied versions” in the early years after the introduction of sound is notoriously hard to draw. Indeed, there are many cases in which different versions are hard to tell apart from remakes or from dubbed variants. Just to give one example: what is the relation between *Liebelei* (M. Ophüls, 1932–33) and its French version *Une histoire d’amour* (1932–34): is it a remake, a multi-language version or some other sort of deviation? And even within “classical” MLVs we have significant differences: while UFA-MLVs seem to be very similar to one another in regards to camera placement and movement, scene dissection and even look of actors, Paramount obviously shot in a different style, using the same script and the same decorations, but otherwise leaving the directors much more choice as to how direct and edit a sequence. It could very well be that the title of the Gradisca Spring School, “Multiple and Multiple-Language Versions,” maybe addresses exactly the gap between identity and non-identity.<sup>1</sup>

*Prix de beauté* instantiates many of these problems, since the film was fabricated in four different synchronised versions: French, German, English, Italian, as well as in a silent version.<sup>2</sup> Instead of comparing one version to another philologically and maybe even fetishistically so as to find significance in the most minute of differences I intend to take another approach: to look at the different strategies adopted with the coming of sound by production companies and directors to get a more comprehensive overview within which the MLVs would represent one specific position. Any film produced on the threshold between silence and sound raises a number of issues around translatability as well as differentiation/standardisation. This period is fascinating because it opened up towards a huge uncertainty which allowed many different choices until standardisation closed many of these avenues down again. Martin Barnier has similarly argued for an understanding of the transitional period around 1930 as a time of experimentation and opportunity.<sup>3</sup> I believe that the period of the coming of sound with its many different ways of converting and adapting poses a key problem for the emergence of a European film historiography – as opposed to either national or global (which is often just another term for Hollywood) versions of film history.

## Production

*L’odyssée de ce film permet d’évoquer diverses facettes  
de cette irruption du parlant qui charbarde les mœurs du cinéma.*  
Pierre Billard

It was in the spring of 1929 that Georg Wilhelm Pabst suggested the project *Prix de beauté* to his colleague and friend René Clair.<sup>4</sup> Pabst was at that time one of the most

celebrated directors of the European art film. He had turned out a string of film that had struck a chord with critics and audiences alike: *Die freudlose Gasse* (1925), *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (1925-26); subsequently he had imported Louise Brooks from the United States to become the star in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1928-29) and *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (1929).

René Clair, more than ten years Pabst's junior, had at this point just graduated from the avant-garde (*Paris qui dort*, 1923; *Entr'acte*, 1924) into commercial feature making and had scored a huge success with *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie* (1927). Clair had just lost his contract with Albatros when Romain Pinès and Michael Salkin(d) of the French production company Sofar (Société des films artistiques) approached the young director to be in charge of what would become *Prix de beauté*, Brooks' third European venture after the two films directed by Pabst. Pabst's role seems to involve not much more than an idea and the initial push that brought together Clair, Brooks, and Pinès, and later added Augusto Genina to the group. In fact, Genina had worked with Pinès before on *Quartier Latin* (1928), a German-French co-production, while Pabst and Pinès knew each other from the production of *Die freudlose Gasse* with another "transatlantic actress," Greta Garbo, produced through the Berlin office of Pinès' and Salkind's Sofar-production. Thus, as coincidental as this meeting of these European players might seem at first sight, on closer inspection it becomes clear that the net around these actors was already pretty densely woven and only a little push was needed to draw them all together. This project brought together Pabst, Clair, and Genina – three key players in the Avant-garde, the art film, and the popular film which were not that far apart in those days, but had many points of contact.

The immediate production circumstances add transatlantic crossings to the European networking. Louise Brooks had returned to the United States after finishing *Die Büchse der Pandora* in the Winter of 1928-29.<sup>5</sup> Both Paramount and RKO offered her lucrative contracts, but she refused to work under their strict supervision and, more importantly, she did not want to go back to Hollywood, a place she detested. Thus, when a cable from her mentor Pabst arrived in April 1929, she was only too happy to return to Europe. Clair had already drawn up a working schedule, starting with the production on May 6 and wrapping up on July 2 – or so at least he thought. The main reason that the production did not start as announced seems to be that the financing had not been put together yet. Clair was subsequently taken under contract with the French Tobis-subsi-dary which led him to his next project *Sous les toits de Paris* (1929-30) thus making Clair unavailable for *Prix de beauté*. Actually, in a strange twist of fate typical of film history, Clair's first script for *Prix de beauté* contained what later became the first scene of *Sous les toits de Paris*, thus marking an immediate contact between these two otherwise so different films.<sup>6</sup>

When Louise Brooks prepared to return to the United States in early June after some weeks of vacationing at the Mediterranean, Pabst took the opportunity to ask her back to Berlin where *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* was shot in June and July of 1929. In late July Brooks boarded a ship for New York, but she had barely arrived in New York when she was summoned back, since the financing for *Prix de beauté* had finally been secured. She was back in Paris on August 28. In the meantime the Italian director Augusto Genina – himself one of the large number of wandering for-hire directors – had been asked to replace Clair and became attached to the project. The shooting

period of the film lasted from September to November. Louise Brooks left Europe for good on November 29, 1929.<sup>7</sup>

In the first stages of the preparation the film was most probably planned as silent, yet in the course of the year from the first exchanges between Pabst, Clair, and Pinès in spring 1929 to the final stages of synchronisation in Spring-Summer 1930, the context changed completely – and so did *Prix de beauté*. It is not quite clear at what point the film metamorphosed from a silent into a sound feature, and it seems that both forms overlapped in different ways in the production as well as in the finished product. As early as June 1929 when René Clair was still assigned to the project, he was reported as saying that it was being developed as silent, but – as the silent film “is going through a terrible crisis” – Clair sees the possibility that the finished film will have a “synchronisation.”<sup>8</sup> The first positive mention of a sound version in the trade press was on October 25, 1929 when it was announced that the film was currently being shot and will be released in a German-language version.<sup>9</sup>

*Prix de beauté* was meant to be distributed in four languages – English, French, German, and Italian,<sup>10</sup> and there is even mention of Spanish-language songs.<sup>11</sup> Strangely enough, a special screening of the film “very close to its completion” is reported in the German trade press already in December, mentioning “first verdicts which refer to the film as one of the highest quality products of the German sound film to date.”<sup>12</sup> A premiere for January was announced, of which no further traces could be found. Judging from the time lapses between different premieres, the different language versions seem then to have been produced one after the other rather than side by side. The long gap between Brooks’ departure for the United States (late November) and the premiere of the film – in Italy on April 12 in Milan (Odeon), in France on May 9 in Paris (Max Linder-Pathé), in Germany on August 11 in Berlin (Titania Palast) – is probably spent editing and post-synchronising, not an easy task in those days.

## Reception

*Prix de beauté was unusual in many ways: it was antimarriage, proto-feminist, and critical of the working class, the bourgeoisie, and the dilettante rich in equal measure. It was not about “the ruination of her man” but, rather, the attempted liberation of a virtuous woman – for 1929 a fairly advanced theme. Yet as a film, it was neither fish nor fowl: a transition period silent, doctored up with music and some badly post synchronised dialogue.*

Barry Paris

As already mentioned, a relatively long time passed between the end of shooting and the premieres, especially given the fact that with every week the public inclination shifted further toward sound. Thus, every delay and postponement meant a blow to this film, a film that was so precariously balanced between sound and silence, but also between different European nations and *auteurs*. I will now briefly look at the reception of the German version which premiered under the title *Miss Europa* in August 1930 in Berlin. It was the dubbing that met most criticism at the time of its premiere:

*As soon as the dialogue begins, it is terrible. It is not possible to dub a dialogue that is spoken in French later into German. Even though the words of the dialogue were counted syllable by syllable in order to match, the spectator does not believe for a moment that the actors speak the German words because the lip movement does not fit. [...] Miss Europa is a proof for the failure of any linguistic synchronisation. The international sound film has to be put on another basis.*<sup>13</sup>

The reviewer assumes that the dialogue was spoken in French, yet as Louise Brooks did not speak French this at least does not hold true for her. As a means of translation from one nation or language to another, dubbing was not seen as a true possibility at the time of *Prix de beauté's* premiere, at least by the German film critics. In a very similar vein, the *Reichsfilmbblatt* stated: "The acting is French, the talking is German, with mediocre artistry. The contrast leaps to the eyes and ears. Synchronisation encounters after all artistic difficulties, the technical ones can only just be overcome."<sup>14</sup> Thus, critics were well aware that still persisting technical problems could be mastered, yet they did not see dubbing as a method feasible for international distribution from a cultural and artistic point of view. Even if some reviewers were more laudatory, such as the *Lichtbildbühne* which praised Genina's direction, when they briefly dealt with the issue of sound the verdict was, in keeping with most other critics, at best sceptical: "The mainly German dialogue (the film is 100%) is unfortunately awkward and sounds somewhat clumsy. But thankfully [the dialogue] is only very brief, thus not disturbing the overall positive impression."<sup>15</sup> Another generally well-inclined voice remains nonetheless also quite ambivalent: "As a real sound film [the film is] not particularly successful. As a synchronised film it brings considerable novelties."<sup>16</sup> Yet the film obviously did not meet the expectations of the audience. An almost apocalyptic tone of voice can be discerned in the *Variety* reviewer who concluded in early September, three weeks after the premiere, that "owing to bad synchronisation this talker is a failure. After five days it had to be removed. The Titania Palast has at no time done bad business with a film as with this one."<sup>17</sup> One argument for this seeming disaster might be the timing, for the film came at a time when the audience had already gotten used to direct sound. A half year earlier the reception might have been quite different.

## Crossing Borders

Film has been an international art form and business from the very beginning to this day: not only did the diverse technical inventions leading up to cinema originate in different countries, but it was also technical and artistic personnel that circulated across borders. France in the interwar period was no exception to this rule: the two largest contingents of foreign film workers in the interwar period came from the Soviet Union in the 1920s<sup>18</sup> (to name only the top layer: producer Joseph Ermolieff and his production company Albatros, directors Volkoff and Tourjansky, art directors Lazare Meerson and Andrei Andreiev, actor Ivan Mosjoukin), and from Germany in the 1930s<sup>19</sup> (Curt and Robert Siodmak, Kurt Bernhardt, Max Ophüls, Georg Wilhelm Pabst, Seymour Nebenzahl; Anatole Litvak who came to France from Russia via Germany falls in both categories). Moreover, many key figures in the French cinema of this years are of foreign origin: Alberto Cavalcanti and Luis Buñuel, the Italian directors Mario Bonnard, Mario

Camerini, Carmine Gallone, Augusto Genina, and the many Eastern European emigrants who were often referred to as Germans but came from the fringes of the former Habsburg empire.

On the surface *Prix de beauté* would quite obviously seem to be a French film: it was produced by a French company, shot and post-produced in French studios, many of the actors and technicians are of French origin and the story takes place in France, with a short excursion to San Sebastian, just across the Spanish border. Nevertheless, many of the key figures were less interested in a national cinema culture than in a European production space. The director Augusto Genina had in previous years sold his Italian films exclusively to Germany; he understood cinema as an international medium needing a market bigger than one single country. In the mid-1920s, Genina was also involved with the founding of an Italian company, Adia, which was co-producing films with the French Sofar and the German Orplid. The triangle Italy-France-Germany for circulating stories, personnel and market is thus already in place long before *Prix de beauté*, for Genina as well as for producer Romain Pinès. The former's *Quartier Latin* (1928) not only boasts a programmatic title for this production strategy – pitching local specificity as global glamour and vice versa in evoking a multi-cultural Parisian borough whose name is a household word all over the world – but was also a co-production between the Berlin-based Orplid and the Paris-based Sofar. A year later the same group will produce the third European Louise Brooks film, *Prix de beauté*. The period after the coming of sound thus benefits by being situated within a longer history of European co-operation that extends temporally in both directions.

The producer Romain Pinès, a Jewish émigré from Latvia,<sup>20</sup> had worked with Pabst some years before, co-producing in 1924 through the Berlin-subsiary of Sofar *Die freudlose Gasse*. Pinès and his partner Michael Salkind, another refugee from Soviet Union's periphery, had built up a European network of contracts and joint ventures, especially in the triangle between France, Germany and Italy. Its partners and subsidiaries were companies such as Hirschel-Sofar and Hisa-Allianz;<sup>21</sup> the films were deliberately international as were the artists and technicians. Thus, neither Pabst nor Genina were strangers to Sofar. Pinès and Salkind should be seen in a series of trans-European producers such as Erich Pommer and Alexander Korda, Gregor Rabinowitsch and Arnold Pressburger, Sascha Kolowrat and Iosef Ermolieff, Heinrich and Seymour Nebenzahl (and later on David Puttnam, Horst Wendtland, Carlo Ponti, Claude Berri and Bernd Eichinger). These figure heads were the engine behind the countless international contracts and contacts that made up "Cinema Europe". In contrast to what has been labelled "Film Europe" in literature, namely a series of conference and high-profile contracts masterminded by the national associations of producers, distributors or exhibitors,<sup>22</sup> I believe that there was a "Cinema Europe" which, in its more durable and interesting form was instead a "rhizomatic" network of contracts and contacts, of travel and communication, of influence and exchange. The "modernist" attempt of constructing one single market through top-down initiatives under the guidance of Franco-German conferences organized by their national associations failed to deliver what it had promised. Instead, what did materialise and survive well into the 1930s was the bottom-up version of co-operation, a network that also helped many exiles to find work outside the Nazi sphere of influence. For a few years after Hitler's ascent to power.<sup>23</sup> The centralist version of co-operation was international in a very literal sense: representatives standing in for nation states talked to each other on a bilateral basis; the model I propose is transnational in the sense that it down-

played nationality and regional specificity, stressing instead cultural and technological modernisation and mobility which was affecting all of Europe in similar ways. It was the outbreak of World War II which ultimately shattered this network of cont(r)acts. I believe that the strategies of the MLVs are best considered within this European context, as they were the preferred method of those producers who had earlier been the key players in this transnational European context.

*Prix de beauté* is instructive with respect to Film Europe's strategies, as well as to its successes and failures. As a bottom-up collection of small contracts and contacts, of friend and partnerships, Film Europe did not exist as a real entity. Thus a common effort was impossible because there was no means to speak with one voice, nor the power to act in unison. On the other hand European co-operation was an economic and cultural imperative, as most key players from the 1920s continued their transnational efforts after the introduction of sound. Now, *Prix de beauté* is not only simultaneously overdetermined and indeterminate regarding its position within Europe (does it belong to the French cinema, the exile cinema or the international film? is it territorial or extraterritorial?), but the (over)indetermination can be found in respect to its stance *vis-à-vis* the United States.

## Crossing Oceans

[I]n the traffic between Europe and America images are being traded,  
images of America, but also images of Europe.

Thomas Elsaesser

Much of cinema's history can be read as a policy of (mis-)recognitions across the North Atlantic. From its initial dual fathers in the Lumières and Edison, the tension between Europe and the US has played a key role in canonised film history. From the founding fathers of the big American studios, eager to leave behind and shed their Eastern European heritage, to the European *émigrés* of the 1930s and 1940s whose pessimistic and time-convoluted labyrinthine films were labelled *film noir* when they reached France after World War II, a transatlantic mirror maze characterises film history. The *Nouvelle Vague* and the New Hollywood, cinephilia and film studies – the axis Europe-United States (or more precisely Paris-Hollywood)<sup>24</sup> has been central for this field. Much more could be said about this “cultural politics of exchanging compliments”<sup>25</sup> and *Prix de beauté* forms one telling episode in this long history of mutual self-(mis)-recognition – not just in the multiple crossings of Brooks mentioned above.

Louise Brooks could be rightfully called a transatlantic actress, joining a category which boasts the likes of Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo, whose images, careers and personalities took shape in the imaginary as well as real crossings of the Atlantic. American Dream and European Art – all too obvious seems the great divide that these actresses crossed with such ease. Two later entries could be filed in this category. After initial successes in Sweden Ingrid Bergman followed Selznick's call to the US where she first played a martyr to the European resistance against fascism in *Casablanca* (M. Curtiz, 1942) and then a martyr to the French nation in *Joan of Arc* (V. Fleming, 1947) before returning to Europe for a legendary private and professional collaboration with

Roberto Rossellini. Just like Bergman Jean Seberg played the French arch-heroine Joan of Arc for the Austrian émigré Otto Preminger in the American production of *Saint Joan* (1957) after which she was appropriated by Jean-Luc Godard as a Parisian street vendor of the *New York Herald Tribune* in his homage to the American B-movies *A bout de souffle* (1959). Louise Brooks had, as the epitome of the mid-Western girl from Kansas, made her way from a chorus girl to the Ziegfeld Follies to starring roles in Hollywood working in *A Girl in Every Port* (H. Hawks, 1928) and in *Beggars of Life* (W. Wellmann, 1928). After her three European films and a long period of decline and oblivion it was the joint efforts of a European and an American archivist, Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française in Paris and James Card of the George Eastman House in Rochester, which resuscitated her from the past of the living dead. And even though Brooks never played Joan of Arc, we have a statement from possibly the greatest of her admirers, Henri Langlois, that provides us – almost too neatly – with the missing link when he sings the praises of “Louise Brooks’s face, eyes, the hair cut like that of Jeanne d’Arc.”<sup>26</sup>

Only some months ahead of *Prix de beauté* the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer had directed the Italian actress Renée Falconetti as Saint Joan in *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1927-28); the credits both of this and Pabst’s film reveal the cameraman Rudolph Maté, a Polish émigré who had come from Cracow via Budapest (where he had worked with the young Alexander Korda), Vienna and Berlin to Paris. There he was hired as the director of photography for Dreyer on his film about the French saint. Jeanne d’Arc might just be the tip of the iceberg, signalling a cinema in which the tension between a national(ist) icon and the transcendence of boundaries becomes apparent. Without venturing too far into interpretations in this respect, I believe that multi-language versions can be adequately assessed only when viewed within a context of the various forms that cinema had tried out in order to cross and overcome national borders. The MLVs were as much an answer to the coming of sound, as they were an attempt to make the cinema European rather than French, English, Italian or German.

For everybody involved with film the passage from Europe to the United States is more important still than the one in the opposite direction: “The traffic in movie actors traditionally moved westwards, from Europe to Hollywood, where their national characteristics were sedulously exploited. Brooks, who was among the few to make the eastbound trip, became in her films with Pabst completely Europeanized.”<sup>27</sup> Not coincidentally, this article appeared in that most Europeanised of American magazines, *The New Yorker*. Yet on closer inspection at least two other actresses surfaced in the same years around the coming of sound which were likewise US exports: Betty Amann and Anna May Wong. It would be interesting to investigate at what point the import of stars from the US occurs, and what motives the European film industry might have had for this move. The late 1920s were seeing protective measures by many European governments favouring the domestic film industries, as well as strong resistance to Hollywood talkies, rendering more real the perspective of a viable home-grown film production. In addition to the period around 1930, another period saw a similar development: the 1960s when European westerns, often co-produced with many international partners, also resorted to the strategy of importing US actors to Europe. The Italian-Spanish or German-Yugoslavian co-productions boasted the likes of Clint Eastwood and Lex Barker.



## Allegorising the Coming of Sound

*No woman becomes Miss Europe with impunity,  
and least of all at the time when film constantly needs new faces.  
The demon sound film lures Miss Europe.*  
Anonymous

Like many films of this period *Prix de beauté* dissolves characteristics of national identity in favour of a technological and cultural modernisation which goes along with cosmopolitanism and internationalism. It brings this internationalism into focus not only in its crew but even more forcefully in its story line, and in the four (five) different versions which to a certain extent allegorise their own conditions of possibility.

*Prix de beauté* tells the story of Lucienne who works as a secretary at the newspaper *Le Globe* (one of the many overdetermined instants of the film, here foregrounding the globalising turn of the media) where her fiancée André is employed as a printer. They spend their leisure time at fairgrounds or at the open-air swimming pool where the film begins. The French language version opens with the title “Dimanche,” announcing the free day of the week and then showing proletarian Parisians bathing and relaxing in an open-air swimming pool. Immediately two classics from that same year come to mind which also revolve around similar Sunday leisure activities, expressively addressed in their titles: *Menschen am Sonntag* (R. Siodmak, E. G. Ulmer et al., 1929) and *Nogent, Eldorado du dimanche* (M. Carné, 1929). And indeed, the opening sequence of *Prix de beauté* fits in a perfect series with these two films, both of which are closely aligned with the international avant-garde of the interwar period. Especially Rudolph Maté’s mobile hand-held camera underlines this lineage, giving the seemingly spontaneous images of lower-class recreation a documentary feel. The year 1929 – and *Prix de beauté* is no exception to this – marks in many respects a convergence of many different trends in the avant-garde, art cinema and commercial film. With *Drifters* (J. Grierson, 1929) and *Človek s kinoaparatom* (D. Vertov, 1929) that year also saw new trends surfacing which would come to dominate the 1930s: the social documentary, the commissioned film and the political film.<sup>28</sup> And indeed, even the man with the movie camera is visible in *Prix de beauté*, suggesting to the people “faites vous filmer.” The film is thus precariously balanced not only between silence and sound, between different nationalities and auteurs, but also between different schools of filmmaking.

Already the overture plays through the narrative of the film *en miniature*: Lucienne takes the suggestion to be filmed quite literally, and puts herself on display. She undresses in a car – one of the supreme symbols of modernity – and is introduced only through a shot of her legs which dangle out of the door. Her body is reduced to parts, like in a girl revue, that epitome of Americanism where Brooks started her career. I am passing over the gender issue here since this subjugation of women under modernity’s strict regimes has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Lucienne makes a show of herself and provokes André’s jealousy which she then soothes by a song. This song originates from a gramophone so that technology gives her a voice not her own, and this song will then circulate through the film, finally sealing her tragic fate. It is, among other elements, this circulation of a popular song that answers to the “crisis of indexicality” which characterises the coming of sound. The gap that opened up between the body of the performer visible on the screen and the voice heard through the loudspeakers – two com-

pletely unconnected and different technological set-ups, synchronised in order to create the illusion of simultaneity – was indeed very often addressed in the early 1930s films, whether explicitly or implicitly.<sup>30</sup> And in fact, Brooks herself was here into French dubbed by another actress (Hélène Regelly), thus literalising this borrowing of voice from the gramophone. In the beginning, the song is still employed in a playful manner, even though André's final bite of her neck hints already of his lethal jealousy.

From the leisure of Sunday we move to the daily routine of work when a title announces "Lundi" over images of city streets crowded with people rushing to work, and is followed by loudspeakers announcing a beauty contest. A disembodied voice invites all women to join up in a competition that will propel Lucienne out of her daily life as a secretary into the international Jet Set. Let me stress two points before turning to a closer look on the final sequence: firstly, in its insistence on the parameters of mobility and immobility the film allegorises its own production process as the result of a European co-operation. Lucienne wins the Miss France-pageant and is subsequently sent to the Miss Europe-competition in San Sebastian where an international *haute volée* of princes and maharajas compete for the attention of the new Miss Europe. It is social and geographical mobility that allows Lucienne to leave the stability but also the limits of her proletarian life. After she returns home, her enforced immobility in the petit-bourgeois flat is rather crudely metaphorised by a caged bird while she is waiting for André to return from work. Her only comfort is a gramophone record of the initial song and the fan post she still receives as Miss Europe. The film continuously juxtaposes luxury hotels, sleeping coaches and expensive spas with working class amusements, daily labour and the drudgery of a housewife's routine. Two standard approaches can be found in multi-language versions and other productions meant to cross borders: either the films are set in fantastic operetta kingdoms, or they allude to the many markers of modernity and modernisation transcending national limits: ocean liners and overnight trains, upscale hotels and exclusive spas, racing cars and gramophones, fashion, style and revue girls.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the maharaja and the prince embody the simultaneous cosmopolitanism, freedom and mobility, but also uprootedness of the aristocracy. Set against this is the captivity and immobility, but also groundedness of the working class which nevertheless works for a transnational medium (the newspaper *Le Globe*) and falls for the international jet set vacationing at a spa. In its use of cultural modernisation, *Prix de beauté* anticipates some the MLVs' strategies.

My other point would be the film's ongoing foregrounding of its use of sound, the many "Allô! Allô!"-scenes calling attention to sound as a fact in itself.<sup>32</sup> The rather poor lip synchronisation contrasts with the richness of the film's sound effects. Furthermore, the film constantly foregrounds mechanical and electronic devices for recording and replaying sound and images, such as loudspeakers, gramophones, mechanical pianos and indeed even the sound film itself when the prince hires Lucienne for a production of the *International Sound Film Company*. Especially interesting for this self-reflexive aspect is the sequence of the beauty contest. A beauty contest is, after all, a visual event. Yet, as the disembodied voice of the host explains via a loudspeaker, the success of the participants in the contest is measured by aural means, i.e. by the length of the audience's applause measured on a chronograph. In a similar vein to the *Superstar/Idols* style TV shows, the decision process is handed over to the audience in a travesty of democratic decision making. An excessive process of allegorisation seems to be at work in early sound cinema in the way the tension between

silence and sound is played out in dramatic terms, much like in *Blackmail* (A. Hitchcock, 1929).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, early sound cinema had a deep fascination with devices and machines that inscribed, recorded or replayed sound: an obvious example would be *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (F. Lang, 1932-33).<sup>34</sup>

Sound is also dramatised through the way the song enters the narrative in the opening swimming pool scene through the gramophone, and then again, at the end, via the sound film, sealing her fate by guiding her jealous husband into the cinema. The film in the film – in which we see Lucienne singing the theme song in a bourgeois setting and expensively dressed – is called *La Chanteuse éperdue*. In a way, this title sums up Europe's reaction to sound film where the triumphant exclamation "You ain't heard nothin' yet!" of the male American *Jazz Singer* was answered by a troubled female singer imported from the United States. The ending of the film disconnects the body from the voice again: as the first scene gave Lucienne a voice thanks to technology, both in a literal and in a metaphorical way, the last scene severs this allegorical tie again. Her image and voice continue after her death and "over her dead body." Now, while Louise Brooks' (dubbed) singing voice in *Prix de beauté* ironically comments on her tragic fate, life had (one is tempted to say, of course) just one other ironic turn to offer when – after her return to the United States – it was exactly her refusal to lend her voice to a post-synchronisation of *The Canary Murder Case* (M. St. Clair, 1929) that ultimately led to her tragic fate as the Hollywood executives branded her a "difficult" actress, refusing to cast her in any important roles. Thus, while the voice of Lucienne, Brooks' last major role, persisted into the sound film, it was Brooks' silent image that persisted into our day. Her refusal to comply with the Hollywood rules only underscored her retroactive image as a proto-feminist and a stubborn individualist willing to defy the normative power of the Hollywood studio system, granting her thus a honorary membership in cinematic Europeanness.

### Over-In-Determination

I have tried to understand and analyse *Prix de beauté* across a number of topics: the employment of sound; the question of authorship (where much more could be done around the contributions of Pabst and Clair); the issue of national cinema and the question whether it is applicable in any meaningful sense to put this film in relation to other films such as *Casta Diva* and its English version *The Divine Spark* (C. Gallone, 1935); finally, I addressed the cinematic interrelationship across the Atlantic, between the US and Europe. All these topics, which in my opinion are highly important to any discussion of the MLVs and the coming of sound can be found on the level of production history as well as inside the story – a process of condensation and allegorisation is at work. In fact, the way these topics are played through on both levels reveals a high degree of over determination. At the same time, the film ultimately remains poised in between any firm stances, in an indetermined posture.

The same sort of (over-)indetermination, to coin a term, can be found in another quintessential European product with a similar global approach to marketing and scope: the James Bond-series. In its uses of mobility and technological gadgets, but also in its ambition to draw together production crews and actors from widely diverse back-

grounds, and finally in the way it engages the cinematic divide between the US and Europe, the Bond series could be seen as one among many possible objects of comparison to the multi-language versions. Seen under this perspective, the MLVs appear much less an aberration or a dead end, but rather form a central chapter of a transnational and truly European film history which remains as yet to be written.

- 1 See Rémy Pithon, "Les 'Versions Multiples' ont-elles existé?," in Anna Antonini (ed.), *Il film e i suoi multipli/Film and Its Multiples* (Udine: Forum 2003), pp. 123-129.
- 2 The only surviving versions are the French language version and the silent version recently restored by the Cineteca del Comune di Bologna; more on the history of the restoration can be found in Davide Pozzi, "Prix de beauté: un titolo, due edizioni, quattro versioni," in A. Antonini (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 67-78.
- 3 Martin Barnier, *En route vers le parlant. Histoire d'une évolution technologique, économique et esthétique du cinéma (1926-1934)* (Liège: Éditions du Céfal 2002).
- 4 Pierre Billard, *Le Mystère René Clair* (Paris: Plon, 1998), p. 435.
- 5 See for a biography Barry Paris, *Louise Brooks* (London-New York: Hamish Hamilton-Knopf, 1989); see also Brooks' own collection of (autobiographical, critical and historical) articles: Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).
- 6 Thanks to Davide Pozzi for bringing this to my attention.
- 7 For more on this European venture see Malte Hagener, "Unter den Dächern der Tobis. Nationale Märkte und Europäische Strategien," in Jan Distelmeyer (ed.), *Tonfilmfrieden, Tonfilmkrieg. Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern* (München: text + kritik/CineGraph, 2003).
- 8 Claude Doré "Du film ironique au film dramatique. Les projets de René Clair," *Cinémiroir* (June 7, 1929), article reprinted in and quoted after: <<http://www.pandorasbox.com/louise-brooks/pix/articles/6-7-29cinemiroir.jpg>>
- 9 "Der Schönheitspreis," *Kinematograph*, Vol. 23, no. 250 (October 25, 1929).
- 10 P. Billard, *op. cit.*, p. 152f.
- 11 "Au sujet de Prix de beauté," *La Cinématographie française*, no. 584 (January 11, 1930), p. 38.
- 12 *Reichsfilmbblatt*, no. 51-52 (December 21, 1929) p. 37.
- 13 "Miss Europa," *Kinematograph*, Vol. 24, no. 187 (August 12, 1930). ["Sobald der Dialog beginnt wird's fürchterlich. Es geht eben nicht an, einen französisch gesprochenen Dialog späterhin mit deutschen Worten synchronisieren zu wollen. Obgleich die Dialogworte silbengetreu nachgezählt wurden, glaubt der Zuschauer in keinem Augenblick, daß die Darsteller die deutschen Worte sprechen, denn ihre Lippenbewegungen stimmen damit nicht überein. [...] MISS EUROPA ist ein Beweis für das Versagen jeder sprachlichen Synchronisation. Der internationale Tonfilm muß auf eine andere Basis gestellt werden."]
- 14 -go, "Miß Europa," *Reichsfilmbblatt*, Vol. 8, no. 33 (August 16, 1930). ["Gespielt wird französisch, gesprochen wird deutsch mit mäßiger Redekunst. Der Kontrast springt ins Auge und ins Ohr. Dies Zusynchronisieren stößt eben doch auf künstlerische Schwierigkeiten, die technischen lassen sich gerade noch überwinden."]
- 15 H.H. [Hans H. Wollenberg], "Miß Europa," *Lichtbildbühne*, Vol. 23, no. 192 (August 12, 1930). ["Der größtenteils deutsche Dialog (der Film ist 100prozentig) ist leider schwerfällig und klingt etwas unbeholfen. Doch ist er dankenswerterweise sehr kurz gehalten, so daß der günstige Gesamteindruck gewahrt bleibt."]

- 16 I., "Im Titania-Palast: Miss Europa," *Der Film*, Vol. 15, no. 33 (October 15, 1930).
- 17 *Variety* (September 3, 1930), p. 44; reprinted in and quoted after B. Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
- 18 For Soviet émigrés in France see François Albera, *Albatros. Des russes à Paris 1919–1929* (Paris: Cinémathèque Française, 1995); Jörg Schöning (ed.), *Fantaisies russes. Russische Filmmacher in Berlin und Paris 1920–1930* (München: text + kritik/CineGraph, 1995).
- 19 For an overview see Thomas Elsaesser, Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *Les Cinéastes allemands en France. Les années trente* (Paris: Goethe Institut, 1983).
- 20 On the life and work of Romain Pinès see Eric Le Roy "Romain Pinès, ou l'itinéraire d'un producteur racé," *Archives*, no. 73 (December 1997), pp. 22-30.
- 21 "Kleines Lexikon," in Sybille M. Sturm, Arthur Wohlgemuth (eds.), *Hallo? Berlin? Ici Paris! Deutsch-französische Filmbeziehungen 1918-1939* (München: text+kritik/CineGraph, 1996), pp. 179-184, here p. 183.
- 22 I am thinking here especially of the highly valuable work of Kristin Thompson and Andrew Higson. See Kristin Thompson: "The End of the 'Film Europe' Movement," in Tom O'Regan, Brian Showsmith (eds.), *History on/and/in Film* (Perth: History and Film Association of Australia 1987), pp. 45-56; Kristin Thompson, "National or International Films? The European Debate During the 1920s," in *Film History*, Vol. 8, no. 3 (1996), pp. 281-296. See also Andrew Higson, "Film-Europa. Kulturpolitik und industrielle Praxis," in S. Sturm, A. Wohlgemuth (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 63-76. See also the essays in Andrew Higson, Richard Maltby (eds.), *"Film Europe" and "Film America". Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920–1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).
- 23 Francesco Bono's ongoing work on the (loose) production team around Willi Forst, including Géza von Bolváry, Walter Reisch, Arnold Pressburger, Gregor Rabinowitsch and others, with *Leise flehen meine Lieder* as the network node, proposes a very similar model of co-operation to the one that I am putting forward here. See for instance: Francesco Bono, "Casta Diva. Das deutschsprachige Kino und der italienische Musikfilm," in Malte Hagener, Jan Hans (eds.), *Als die Filme singen lernten. Innovation und Tradition im Musikfilm 1928–1938* (München: text + kritik/CineGraph, 1999), pp. 155-165.
- 24 It is not coincidental that Peter Wollen's recent collection of essays is entitled *Paris – Hollywood. Writing on Film*. (London: Verso 2002).
- 25 Cf. Thomas Elsaesser, "Über den Nutzen der Enttäuschung: Filmkritik zwischen Cinephilie und Nekrophilie," in Irmbert Schenk (ed.), *Filmkritik. Bestandsaufnahmen und Perspektiven* (Marburg: Schüren, 1998), pp. 91-114, here p. 107.
- 26 Henri Langlois, "More than Garbo," in Paola Cristalli, Valeria Dalle Donne (eds.), *Louise Brooks, l'européenne* (Paris et al.: Cine Classics, 1999), p. 83, brochure accompanying screenings at the Cannes International Film Festival.
- 27 Kenneth Tynan, "The Girl in the Black Helmet," *The New Yorker* (June 11, 1979), pp. 45-78, here p. 57 ff.
- 28 On the "birth" of the documentary from the spirit of the Avant-garde see the important article: Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*, no. 27 (Summer 2001), pp. 580-610.
- 29 Tracy Cox, "Consuming Distractions in *Prix de Beauté*," *Camera Oscura*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (2002), pp. 40-67.
- 30 A fascinating discussion of this and other issues surrounding the employment of sound in the cinema can be found in James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema. Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- 31 A description and analysis of some of the elements as they are used in the films with Jan Kiepura can be found in Malte Hagener, Jan Hans "Der Sängerstar im Zeitalter seiner tech-

- nischen Diversifizierbarkeit,” in Günter Krenn, Armin Loacker (eds.), *Zauber der Bohème. Marta Eggerth, Jan Kiepura und der deutschsprachige Musikfilm*. (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2002), pp. 299-333.
- 32 This formulation is taken from Marc Chevré, “France années 30: L’Internationale et la voix,” *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 42 (April 1984), pp. IX–X, here IX.
- 33 Cf. also Elsaesser’s reading of *Das Lied einer Nacht*, a film which also excessively dramatises the tension between real, recorded and fake voices. Thomas Elsaesser: “‘Going Live’. Körper und Stimme im frühen Tonfilm am Beispiel von *Das Lied einer Nacht*,” in G. Krenn, A. Loacker (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 271-298.
- 34 Tom Gunning, “The Testament of Dr. Mabuse,” in *The Films of Fritz Lang. Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), pp. 139-159.