

CONCEPTS & CONSTELLATIONS



Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

FEMMES FATALES

“Is this still a human being – a woman – at all? Is it not rather the flower of some poisonous plant?” (Eisner, 299)

“[Asta Nielsen’s] Loulou the man-eater devoured her sex victims” (Brooks, 94).

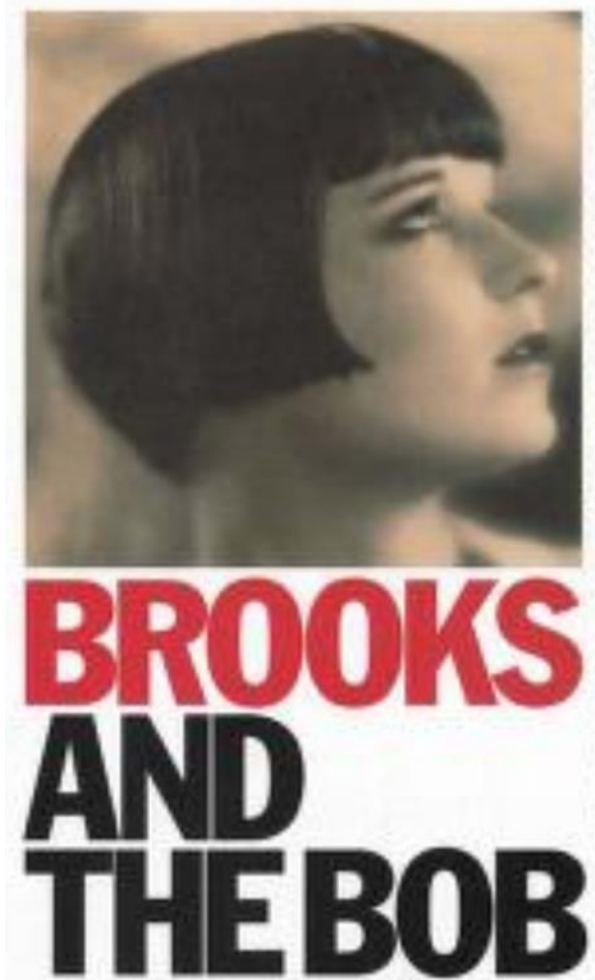
“Wedekind's Lulu remains at the threshold of mythology and human and thus provides a projection screen for male fantasies” (Hake, 63).

“If Lulu is a *femme fatale*, she is one whose predominant quality is that of innocence, a lightness of being which is precisely what acts as a lure to those she carelessly fascinates [...]” (Wollen, 25).



Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

THE NEW WOMAN



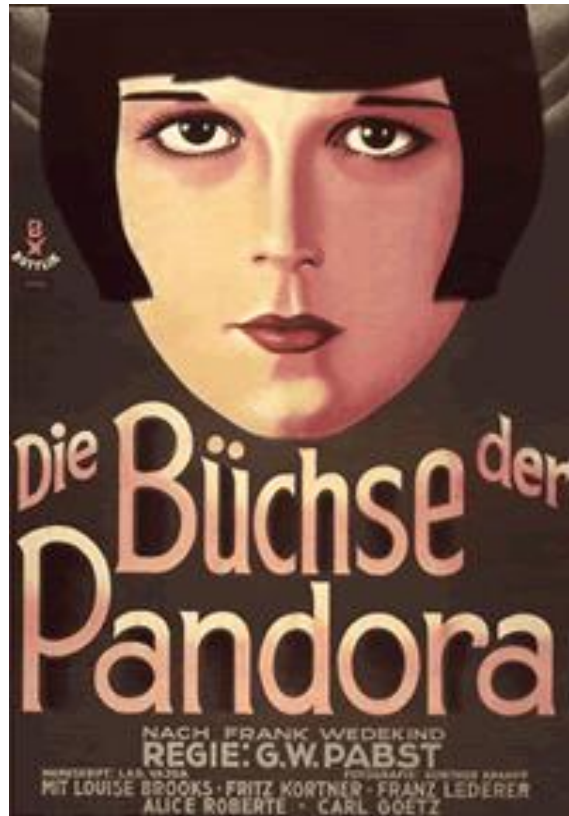
“A new type of girl: the epitome of modernity, Louise Brooks’ appeal was determined by the way she looked — and primarily by her haircut” (Wollen, 23).

“Louise Brooks, the silent movie actress from small-town Kansas whose helmet of bobbed brunet [sic] hair became her trademark and a symbol of the disdainful flapper of the 1920’s [...]” (Mitgang).

“Brooks came to be identified with a particular hairstyle, a shiny helmet of black hair alternately known as the Dutch bob, pageboy, or (in German) the Bubikopf. [...] Her androgynous look advertises the values of 1920s body consciousness and American girl culture, with all traces of the maternal erased for a symbolic participation in male privilege” (Hake, 64).

Peter Wollen, “Brooks and the Bob,” *Sight & Sound*, February, 1994. Digitized on [Internet Archive](#).

THE MOVIE STAR



German-language poster for *Die Büchse der Pandora*, 1929

“Brooks’ face became a kind of logo” (Wollen, 24)

“In the eyes of many contemporaries, Louise Brooks possessed "The Look," a phrase that be witness to her status both as a star and a commodity” (Hake, 63)

“Those who have seen her can never forget her. She is the modern actress par excellence because, like the statues of antiquity, she is outside of time.” (Henri Langlois, quoted by Card).

“In film, everything depends on this suggestive power of personality. Only the truly great are good enough. Only stars! A film must be written on a body, on a meaningful, expressive, and suggestive body.” (Balázs, “Only Stars!” 326).

LESBIANISM

“Only five years earlier, the famous Danish actress Asta Nielsen had condensed Wedekind’s play into the film *Loulou*. There was no lesbianism, no incest. Loulou the man-eater devoured her sex victims [...]” (Brooks, 94).

“The sexual modernity of the late silent film, *Pandora’s Box* (dir. G. W. Pabst, Nero-Film, Germany, 1929), depends on the presence of one character: the Countess Augusta Geschwitz, played by Alice Roberts. Yet, critical commentary on the film tends to relegate the Countess to a marginal role in its history, or she is simply—or, in my case, perhaps symptomatically—forgotten.” (Potter, 23)

“Critical claims that the Lulu/Brooks figure instantiates an appealingly mobile and ambiguous screen eroticism inevitably rely on the celluloid presence of the Countess as a kind of sexual counterpoint, a figure whose sexual identity is apparently easily determined and fixed. The identification of the Countess as the lesbian character of *Pandora’s Box* exhumes her from the archive as a fully formed figure continuous with present-day sexualities while occluding the historicity of her sexual intelligibility. Turning away from the charismatic star configuration of Lulu/Brooks to attend to the forgotten figure of the Countess—a seemingly perverse endeavor that goes against the film’s design and its predominant mode of reception—enables the historiography of cinematic representations of sexuality to be problematized.” (Potter, 24)

“By the time *Pandora’s Box* was adapted to film in the late 1920s, another discourse of sexuality was emerging in popular culture in relation to which the character of Geschwitz may have been understood, a discourse whose potentially more fluid understandings of identity and desire nevertheless remained both inflected by and in tension with the retrogressive temporal orders of sexology. The transition from the stage to the film version of the Countess character can be read as a transition from understandings of sexual inversion, which included but were not limited to same-sex desire, to a Freud-ian notion of homosexuality founded on same-sex object choice.

The director of *Pandora's Box*, G.W. Pabst, was familiar with the work of the preeminent psychoanalyst.” (Potter, 30)

“Above all, the lesbian relationship between Lulu and the Countess Geschwitz is vital to the film. Charles Weidman, the ex-Denishawn dancer, once observed: ‘Louise, everybody says you’re a lesbian, but you’re not really, you’re a *pansy*’” (Wollen, 25).



“The fact that the public could believe an actress’s private life to be like one role in one film did not come home to me till 1964, when I was visited by a French boy. Explaining why the young people in Paris loved *Pandora's Box*, he put an uneasy thought in my mind.

‘You talk as if I were a lesbian in real life,’ I said.
‘But of course!’ he answered, in a way that made me laugh to realize I had been living in cinematic perversion for thirty-five years.” (Brooks, 99).

Lulu and Countess Geschwitz, from a spread titled “Film von heute und morgen.” Promotional materials for the film for its Vienna premiere. From [*Der Tag*](#), March 1, 1929, p. 12.

Der Rumpf ruht natürlich auf dem Knochen-
gerüst und den Sehnen, die, verbunden mit den
Hüftknochen, das Becken bilden. Jedermann
weiß, daß bei der Frau das Becken, das die
Eingeweide und die
Geschlechtsorgane ein-
schließt, in seinem Aus-
maß größer als das des
Mannes ist. Dieser Un-
terschied ist rein äußer-
lich, wie folgt, festzu-
stellen: Von vorn durch
die Erweiterung der
Hüften und von hinten
durch die — zart aus-
gedrückt — „vergrößerte“ (oder „Verschö-
nerung“) der Sitzge-
legenheit.

In den Augen des
Plastikers sind die Kon-
turen der Hüfte und die
des Gesäßes derart innig
verbunden, daß man,
wenn man auch ihre
möglichen Grenzen gut
unterscheiden kann, sie
doch nicht trennt. Wenn
dieses Ensemble voll-
kommen sein soll, muß
der seitliche Umkreis
von zwei Ovalen ge-
bildet sein, deren Hüften-
scheitel die große Achse
bildet und der bis zur
Mitte des Schenkels die
äußere Linie jedes Beines
verlängert. Was die so
umrahmte Oberfläche
betrifft, so muß sich sein
Profil so weit wie mög-
lich dem einer rechten
Halbkugel nähern, die,
in zwei Spindeln oder
Scheiben eines Ganzen
geteilt, dessen Kreise
von der unteren Hüfte
aus sich auf die Quer-
falte der Schenkel stüt-
zen, wie Viertel großer runder Früchte auf
einem glatten Säulenschaft.

So wenigstens erscheint das berühmte Modell
der Venus Kallipygos.

Man erkennt diese Kugelgestalt besser im Profil,
erzeugt durch das Gesäß, das somit den Anblick eines
Kreisschnittes, ähnlich einem Halbkreise, annimmt.

Unglücklicherweise zeigt das Gesäß sehr oft,
ebenso wie die Brüste, Fehler in der Struktur,
die verbunden mit dem Hüft- bzw. Kreuzbein,
die weniger erfreulich anzusehende Seite des
Frauenkörpers bilden.

Es kommt z. B. häufig
vor, daß der Umfang des
Gesäßes, der Schwer-
punkt des Körpers, das
Maß oder Gewicht über-
steigt, welches einer
bestimmten Statur zu-
kommt. In diesem Falle
spricht man von einem zu
starken Gesäß der Frau.

Die Rundung der For-
men unterliegt anderer-
seits einer großen Zahl
von Mißbildungen, die
die schönen, plastischen
Formen zerstören: sei
es durch eckige Hüft-
knochen, die fast bis zu
einer zugespitzten Form
ausarten, sei es, im Ge-
genteil, ein flaches Ge-
säß, schräg abfallende
Hüften, eins wie das
andere häßlich anzu-
schauen. Für diesen
Körperteil, noch mehr
wie für die Brüste, ist
es jedoch am häßlich-
sten, schlaff und ver-
welkt zu sein; dies ist, wie
man hinzusetzen muß,
der einzige Körperfehler
den der Plastiker voll-
kommen ablehnen muß.
Aber nicht nur in der
Ruhe, in der statuen-
haften Schönheit, son-
dern auch in der Be-
wegung bilden ein
schöner Rücken und
seine Fortsetzung, so-
wie gutgebildete Hüften
einen Hauptpunkt in der
Anmut des Frauen-

leibes. Der Gang, das Schreiten einer Frau
hängt in hohem Maße neben der Form der
Beine von der Bildung dieser Körperteile ab.
Für den Begriff Grazie und Anmut, der sich
auf Stellung und Bewegung bezieht, wird ge-
fordert, daß nirgends Massen, Ecken und un-
schöne Konturen zum Vorschein kommen. 79



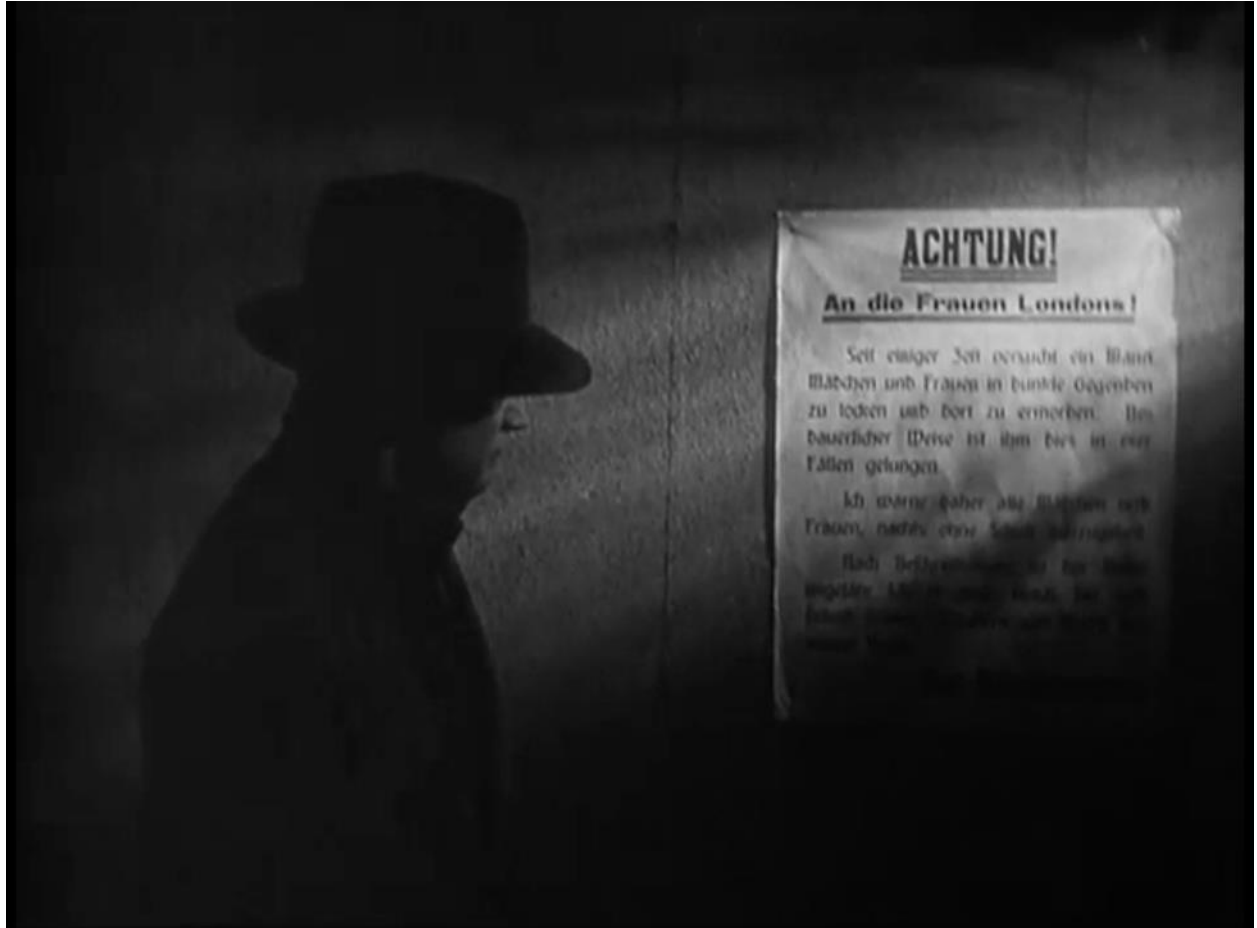
Foto: Stellen, Berlin

LUSTMORD

„Totschlagen mußt Du mich, wenn
Du loskommen willst von mir.“

You'll have to kill me
to get rid of me.

Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)



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Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

“In the role of Dr. Schön, Kortner had feelings for me (or for the character Lulu) that combined sexual passion with an equally passionate desire to destroy me. [...] Pabst’s feelings for me, like Kortner’s, were not unlike those of Schön for Lulu. [...] [Pabst] was not aroused by sexual love, which he dismissed as an enervating myth. It was sexual hate that engrossed his whole being with its flaming reality” (Brooks, 97-98).

PROSTITUTION



Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

“On the dialectical function of money in prostitution. It buys pleasure and, at the same time, becomes the expression of shame. [...] The shame-reddened wound on the body of society secretes money and closes up. It forms a metallic scab.” (Benjamin, “Prostitution, Gambling [01a,4],” 492).



Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

“Apropos of Freud’s conjecture that sexuality is a dwindling function “of” the human being, Brecht remarked on how the bourgeoisie in decline differs from the feudal class at the time of its downfall: it feels itself to be in all things the quintessence of humankind in general, and hence can equate its own decline with the death of humanity. (This equation, moreover, can play a part in the unmistakable crisis of sexuality within the bourgeoisie.) The feudal class, by virtue of privileges, felt itself to be a class apart, which corresponded to the reality. That enabled it, in its waning, to manifest some elegance and insouciance.” (Benjamin, “Prostitution, Gambling [011a,3],” 511).



Screenshot from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

“Love for the prostitute is the apotheosis of empathy with the commodity.” (Benjamin, “Prostitution, Gambling [011a,4],” 511)

“The modern prostitute is a mass article in the ‘precise sense,’ due to the fashions and makeup that camouflage her ‘individual expression,’ and package her as an identifiable type: ‘later this is underscored by the uniformed girls in the review.’” (Buck-Morss, 190-191, with quotes from Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*).



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Frauen auf der Straße*, 1915, oil on canvas, 126 x 90 cm. Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany. Public Domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

SHOWGIRL CULTURE: VARIÉTÉ SHOWS, CABARET, REVUES



Louise Brooks as Lulu. From [Das Kino-Journal](#), January 19, 1929, no. 964, p. 9.

“Nobody has ever equalled Pabst’s portrayal of the back-stage fever of the opening night of a big show [...]. Lulu appears like some pagan idol, tempting, glittering with spangles, feathers, and frills, against a wavering, out-of-focus background” (Eisner, 298).

“Pandora’s Box [portrays] a shimmering world of revue and cabaret in which showgirls like Lulu mingle with the rich and powerful, as well as with a *demi-monde* of lesbian artists and low-life pimps” (Wollen, 25).

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