

SLIDE 1**A Story of the London Fog? Adulterated Modernisms in *The Lodger's* Inter-titles**

It is well known that in 1926 Michael Balcon invited Ivor Montagu to refine *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, after the film's distributor, C. M. Woolf refused to release the film. This has been seen as a key moment in British cinema history, when the ethos of pan-European experimentation, as represented by the Film Society's screenings, was merged with the classical approach and elements of British culture embodied by Gainsborough Pictures. Balcon and Hitchcock were both members of Film Society, which Montagu had formed a year earlier. Montagu's involvement is considered to have intensified the aspects of *The Lodger's* style that were informed by the type of German expressionist films shown at the Film Society. Montagu re-edited *The Lodger* and asked Hitchcock to re-shoot a couple of shots. He also removed or replaced the bulk of the intertitles and commissioned E. McKnight Kauffer to design some art titles. **Art titles are intertitles with pictorial backgrounds.**

Analyses of *The Lodger* have often made passing references to the intertitles. However, little emphasis has been placed on Kauffer's striking designs. Indeed, there is a paucity of research on intertitles in British films. If Baron Ventimiglia's cinematography draws on expressionist films, then Kauffer's semi-abstract works fuse several European avant-gardes. The intertitles need to be considered if the film's complex relationship to European, British and American art is to be understood. Moreover, an analysis of the intertitles in *The Lodger* also makes available a slightly different reading of the film's representation of London and its construction of character.

Kauffer, an American, was known for designing posters which, for many, constituted the epitome of popular modern design in 1920s Britain. Like Montagu, he had also travelled widely. His journey to England from 1912 to 1914 was by way of Chicago, Munich and Paris, a circuitous route which allowed him to see examples of German Expressionist fine art, early Cubism and Italian Futurism. His importance largely lies in the fact that he popularised aspects of European modernism in England in the early 1920s, though he made his name as a designer for such English institutions as London Underground. While some of his posters in the early twenties reflected his affinity

with Vorticism, his work generally remained more eclectic, if less complex, than that of his friend, Wyndham Lewis. Crucially, Kauffer was also a key member of the Film Society. **SLIDE 2** He also designed its logo – which was placed as a title card before each screening – the joined FS curving like a strip of film: this is typical of Kauffer – to use metonymy to suggest the inextricable relationship between an institution and the object it has been organised around. His unused poster for *Metropolis* depicts the letters of the word ‘Metropolis’ as components of the machine at the heart of that city.

Before working on *The Lodger* in autumn 1926, Kauffer would have seen at the Film Society Robert Wiene’s *Raskolnikov* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and Paul Leni’s *Waxworks*, along with the Society’s exhibition of Leni’s drawings. **SLIDE 3** Kauffer’s design for the main title card of *The Lodger* reflects the influence of German expressionist film – an influence not found in his poster designs: the distorted angles seem to reflect the psychopathology of the Avenger, the person who murders fair-haired women in the film, as well as initiating the triangle motif which runs throughout the film. The shadow, presumably created by the staple of British melodrama, gaslight, invokes the expressionist topos of doubling, supplying more evidence to support the idea propounded by some critics that the Avenger must have an accomplice, an idea which inculpates the ostensibly innocent Lodger. Even if we discard this reading, the shadow prepares the audience for a narrative in which the lodger is the shadow of police and Avenger alike, in his quest for justice and revenge for the murder of his sister.

However, the frame here, like many of the titles in the film, is more simply abstract than, say, the sets of *Caligari*. **SLIDE 4** This is emphasised as the V shape closes in, almost but not quite enveloping the figure. Many of the film’s art titles are animated. **SLIDE 5** This can be understood in relation to Ivor Montagu’s belief that ‘one must have titles if only to give the spectator the relief and interruption of the static breaks they form.’ **SLIDE 6** Thus, when the design in *The Lodger*’s art titles moves, the spectator is disconcertingly given no such break for reflection. The animation is much sparer than, say, that of the titles in Douglas Fairbanks movies. It is semi-abstract and therefore resists an absolute literal interpretation. The shapes that move in the art titles are not only animated, but seemingly animistic.

On the other hand, the closing V shape, placed as it is next to the film's subtitle, 'a story of the London fog', can also be read literally as fog closing in. **SLIDE 7** The design's angularity therefore not only draws on Expressionism, but also extends the theme and Vorticist style of some of Kauffer's earlier posters, in which slanting pedestrians are caught in geometric rain. However, while the velocity of rain – that is, its speed and direction - predisposes it to such poetic licence, an amorphous and obscuring fog does not. A neurotic ordering of amorphousness is implied in *The Lodger*, a theme picked up in another art title, which also represents a setting illuminated by gaslight.

SLIDE 8 In his notes on the intertitle revisions, Montagu calls this design 'Art Lamp-post'. Significantly, it appears three times in the film. Unlike some of the film's simpler art titles, this image is not animated. So, the audience is invited to dwell on detail rather than movement here. This is an idiosyncratic design, in that it patently combines several modernisms. A lamp-post divides the frame and seems to cast two forms of illumination in different directions. To frame left, the light follows the laws of nature, to the extent that it is visible because it is reflected by buildings. However, odd expressionistic angles are created, with some patches brighter than others. The city revealed by the light is also stylised in two ways. Firstly, the architectural logic is rearranged cubistically, so that a chimney is strangely positioned below the windows. The chimney is drawn in perspective, but set against flat planes, while the smoke from the chimney is displaced: is this a plume of smoke or is it the London fog?

The cubism here is bolder and more simplistic than that of Picasso. This simplicity implies a subjectivity that has regressed to childhood. At the same time, the left of the frame draws on expressionism. **SLIDE 9** Compare it with a shot from *Caligari*, in which skewed chimneys and a window form a key part of the composition, along with high contrast lighting and dramatic use of shadow.

SLIDE 10 The art title draws on similar modes of composition to those in *Caligari* in order to place emphasis on a world in which the city – summarised as windows and chimneys – is perceived through a distorted perspective: a point of view belonging either to The Avenger or to Joe the detective and the lodger, both of whom exhibit neuroses similar to The Avenger. At the same time, the distortion reflects a more general response to the chaotic world of the modern city.

However, while representational shapes occupy the left of the frame, to the right the lamp projects an abstract, angular beam which is visible despite the fact that it is not reflected off objects. The light forms an abstract scheme of triangles and concentric circles. **SLIDE 11** This is not unlike El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites With the Red Wedge*. Lissitzky and Russian Constructivism both became more widely known in Western Europe from 1922, when the Exhibition of Russian Art was held at the Van Diemen Gallery in Berlin. I am not suggesting that Kauffer necessarily drew on or even knew of this poster in 1926, but a comparison between the art title and Lissitzky's poster is certainly revealing.

The two images are from markedly different contexts and Lissitzky works with shapes that have colour and body – appropriate for symbolising masses organised by contrasting politics. **SLIDE 12** In *The Lodger*, the lamp's beams consist of lines: the triangle created by the beams could represent either the Avenger's calling card or, in the way it points to the centre of a roundel, the direction of the detectives' pursuit of their target, the Avenger. Both *The Lodger's* art title and Lissitzky's poster use abstract, geometric shapes in a symbolic schema. However, while the opposition between the Bolsheviks and the Whites is clear cut in Lissitzky's poster, the shapes in *The Lodger* are deployed in a thriller context, in which the morals of police and killer are not always distinguishable.

Like the Lissitzky poster, the right side of the art title implies a projected design, a vision of the world organised into discrete units that can be easily assimilated by the psyche, while the cubistic left side suggests a chaotic world, which needs cutting apart and rearranging to make sense. The right side suggests a psychotic reordering of the left side. Thus this art title provides access to a subjective vision which is central to the film's articulation of the themes of looking, aesthetic appreciation and urban life.

The perspective represented in the art title is a response to modernity that can be theorised in terms of Roger Fry's essay 'The Artist's Vision', first published in 1919. Fry – another member of the Film Society – had a huge influence on Kauffer. Fry distinguishes between what he terms the aesthetic vision and the creative vision. The aesthetic vision is a contemplative, analytical perspective. **SLIDE 13** As Fry says,

‘Those who indulge in this vision are entirely absorbed in apprehending the relation of forms and colour to one another.’ **SLIDE 14** On the other hand, there is the creative vision, which is transformative: ‘as [the artist] contemplates the particular field of vision, the (aesthetically) chaotic and accidental conjunction of forms and colours begins to crystallise into a harmony...Certain relations of directions of line become for him the full meaning.’

SLIDE 15 On the left, the art title represents the aesthetic vision of the city, and on the right, the creative vision of the city. That creative vision might belong to the Avenger - the Jack the Ripper figure who carves up and reorganises bodies to satisfy his morals – **SLIDE 16** or it might belong to the policeman, Joe and the lodger, who both organise the messy cartography of the city around abstract shapes. Either way, the view is a psychopathic reaction to the disorder of a certain part of the city: a part of the city narrated by *The Lodger*. **SLIDE 17** As Fry states, ‘the artist is more likely to paint a slum in Soho than St Paul’s and more likely to do a lodging-house interior than a room at Hampton Court’. Indicatively, for Fry the epitome of the creative vision is the artist Walter Sickert, who expressed an interest a lodging house which was at the centre of the real Jack the Ripper case. In 1990 Jean Overton Fuller published her theory that Sickert was, in fact, Jack the Ripper.

SLIDE 18 The windows in the title remind the audience of the shot where the shadow of a window frame quarters the lodger’s face, making both a martyr and a split personality out of him. **SLIDE 19** Likewise, the stylistic promiscuity of the art title evokes the narrative’s theme of split-personalities and the sense of ambiguity bound together by fog that pervades the film. The title’s representation of several, adulterated modernisms suggests that the purity of vision sought by Avenger, lodger or detective is a chimera.

Indeed, the art title and the lamp it depicts are both linked to the film’s technique and theme of misdirection. The positioning of the title contributes to the first-time-viewer’s impression that the lodger is the avenger. **SLIDE 20** On the first and third occasions that it appears - illustrated here - it links a shot where the lodger looks off frame with a shot of Daisy, as if she is the object of the type of gaze encapsulated in the art title. **SLIDE 21** Its second appearance links a conversation between Joe and

Daisy's mother about the lodger, with a shot of the Golden Curls sign, this time suggesting that the reorganising vision is Joe's. Joe admits earlier that he is keen on golden hair, same as the Avenger. Likewise, what Charles Barr calls 'the lucid the timescale' of these particular art titles is not always ingenuous: on one occasion we are led to believe it is simply 'one evening, a few days later', only to discover soon after that it is in fact Tuesday, the fatal day of the week when the Avenger does his ripping.

The art title is also proleptic: it foreshadows the centrality of Friar's Yard where the lamp-post is: later a woman is killed here. Daisy and the lodger become a couple here and later escape to the lamppost when the lodger has been handcuffed. The yard is a place where fallacious perception and dubious storytelling seem to take place. **SLIDE 22** It is here that Joe, glancing at the lodger's footprint, illuminated by the lamp, connects several clues to leap to the conclusion that the lodger is the avenger. It is also here that the lodger tells the story of his sister's murder. The verisimilitude of this story, as other critics have shown, is thrown into doubt by the fact that a person switching off the electric light could not possibly manage to murder the sister before the lights are restored. So, in *The Lodger* artificial light sources only lead to false assumptions or dubious claims.

The viewer is caught in a world which is dominated by moving electronic illuminations: **SLIDE 23** think of the flashing advertisements for the Golden Curls and the news headlines at the start of the film. The objectification of women's hair and murders is sinister enough, but the way in which these moving signs are abstracted from their physical contexts makes for a viscerally disturbing experience. Ironically, it is not the London fog that threatens or confuses, but the modern lights which permeate it. Sound too is constantly threatening, particularly over the modern medium of the radio. **SLIDE 24** Hitchcock's original title read 'Murder! With a broadcasting accent'. What could have been a comment on class becomes one on the cultural role of modern technology – 'Murder- Hot over the Aerial'. To represent broadcasting, the image is animated so the writing seems to expand, like radio waves.

SLIDE 25 In the same way, Daisy's role as a model projects her as an attraction and potential target for the lodger. This is emphasised when the triangle next to her name

expands like the aerial title. Hitchcock's original title introduced Daisy in a more conventional, if ironic way: **SLIDE 26** 'Daisy was the breadwinner --- in a Bond Street Shop. Her figure proved the family's fortune.' In stripping down the film's intertitles, Montagu removed this introduction to Daisy and replaced it with several intertitles that just read 'Daisy'. He took inspiration from Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*, which had been released the previous year. **SLIDE 27** In Chaplin's film, the main female character and object of Charlie's desire is called Georgia. Her name touchingly appears several times next to an image of a rose. This self-consciously clichéd metaphor becomes a disturbing metonym in *The Lodger*. **SLIDE 28** Every time the title 'Daisy' appears it is next to a triangle. For this title, Kauffer abstracted the recursive triangle common to Art Deco. Kauffer was perhaps the main proponent of Art Deco in Britain at the time – **SLIDE 29** you can see an upside down, recursive triangle in context in this poster for London Underground. **SLIDE 30** The film's recursive triangle, combines both the shape the Avenger uses and the Art Deco system of design to which Daisy belongs as a model. So fashion is sinisterly associated with The Avenger's murderous desires.

The Art Deco triangle is another glowing sign abstracted or ripped from its context in a brutal city, where the night lights offer only false and dangerous illumination. Unlike the men, though, Daisy does not seek illumination in gas or electricity. **SLIDE 31** Joe's moment of enlightenment proves to be his undoing, but when Daisy learns about the lodger's sister and when she is reunited with him at the end, she gazes upwards, in what seems like some kind of spiritual rapture, rather like the Holman Hunt picture, *The Awakened Conscience*.

This may be a sign of Hitchcock's religiosity, particularly at a time when his fiancée was converting to Catholicism. However, the film as a whole is not so optimistic. **SLIDE 32** The art lamp-post design posits what seems to be an anti-Constructivist image on its right hand side. If Constructivism is essentially a utopian art, depicting the ideal society from the designer's point of view, in which technology and life merge, then here we see a dystopian representation of a psychopath's ideal perspective of modern life. The film's intertitles thus exposed British audiences to continental avant-gardes, before they were widely disseminated in Britain in their own

right. However, while the film achieves this, the psychopathology of the detective genre still holds sway in it.