



# MARCEL L'HERBIER: DOSSIER

EDITED BY CAROLINE EVANS & MARKETA UHLIROVA

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Caroline Evans & Marketa Uhlirova

We thank all the dossier contributors for accepting our invitation to immerse themselves in, and generate new insights about, the cinema of Marcel L'Herbier.

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Cover image: *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926,  
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***I can say that all around me at the time, I encountered a deep-seated lack of regard for filmmakers. Everyone in the world in which I moved – the bourgeoisie – said cinema was an art of the fairground. It's fine for circuses but not anywhere else; it's worthless, just entertainment. There's Max Linder or Chaplin but nothing in cinema constitutes even an embryo of an art form. [This was true] to such an extent that, in a family like mine, to be a filmmaker was considered a disreputable profession. I don't mean that I was disowned by my family - but almost.***



Jaque Catelain and Claude-France Aïssé in *Rose-France*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1918. Courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

**MARCEL L'HERBIER (1969) IN *MARCEL L'HERBIER: POET OF THE SILENT ART*, DOCUMENTARY PROFILE, DIR. LAURENT VÉRAY, 2007.**

# INTRODUCTION

## Caroline Evans and Marketa Uhlirova

This 'dossier' is dedicated to Marcel L'Herbier, a seminal figure in twentieth-century French cinema who, although very prolific, remains little known outside France. It grows out of the 4th Fashion in Film Festival,<sup>1</sup> a film season which celebrated L'Herbier's unique position in French cinema – and cinema more generally – as a driving force behind many significant artistic collaborations, with an emphasis on the extraordinarily fruitful years between 1918 and 1932. Spanning the silent and early sound eras, this was the period in which L'Herbier most succeeded in his vision to enrich cinema by 'synthesising' a wide range of creative fields, including painting, sculpture, architecture, music, furniture, textiles, costume design and, of course, fashion.

Like the festival, this dossier is aimed at an English-speaking audience, and we hope above all to generate more interest outside France in L'Herbier's remarkable but rarely seen work. The dossier assembles newly commissioned essays as well as an array of quotations (compiled by Marlène Van de Castele), photographs, illustrations and other documentary material. We wanted to spotlight texts from the period because only very little of this material has been translated into English.

The relative lack of attention L'Herbier has received in the UK and US may in part stem from the challenge to locate his work in a coherent framework provided by labels such as the avant-garde or impressionism. In reality, L'Herbier's work always tended to oscillate between the distinct – and sometimes antagonistic – concerns of avant-garde and industrial cinema, giving rise to some highly remarkable and singular works while also resulting in an unusually uneven and inconsistent career.

To look at L'Herbier's work through the prism of art and design is to draw attention to the filmmaker's status not only as a significant figure of French cinema but also as a hitherto unrecognised force in French modernism. Motivated above all by his pursuit of 'photogenic' and 'total' cinema,<sup>2</sup> L'Herbier assembled a truly



Jaque Catelain in *L'Inhumaine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1924. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier / Lobster Films.

- 1 The festival, co-curated by Caroline Evans, Marketa Uhlirova and Dionne Griffith, had the same title as this dossier and ran at London's BFI Southbank, Barbican, Ciné Lumière and The Horse Hospital between 10–19 May 2013.
- 2 For more on the term 'photogenic' (*photogénie*) in cinema, see Paul Willemen's chapter 'Photogénie and Epstein' in his *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, London, BFI Publishing, 1994; and Richard Abel, <http://filmhistoryinthemaking.com/category/richard-abel/terms>.

impressive roster of artists, designers and filmmakers, including Robert Mallet-Stevens, Alberto Cavalcanti, Fernand Léger, Claude Autant-Lara, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Pierre Chareau and Paul Poiret. Through cinema, L'Herbier helped to popularise modernism, articulating a version of it that was not only desirable but also more accessible to mass audiences. But, alongside his emphasis on the artistic and stylistic aspects of film, L'Herbier also brought into focus the image of the fashionable man in this period, providing a wonderful opportunity for the Fashion in Film Festival to shift interest from representations of women to men. For this reason the theme of masculinities in interwar cinema is of particular importance here.

Several of these papers were originally given at a symposium, 'Looking at L'Herbier: French Modernism Between the Wars', held on 17 May 2013, or elsewhere during the festival. To mirror the multidisciplinary nature of L'Herbier's work, we have set this dossier up as a dialogue between different fields of study. It is important to us that the dossier is not solely anchored in film studies but also in social and cultural history, art history and fashion history, which we hope makes for a more complex analysis of L'Herbier's cinema.

The range of intellectual and professional backgrounds of our contributors thus enables a variety of approaches unusual in film publications. Mireille Beaulieu is a Paris-based film curator who, in the opening article, brings her extensive knowledge to bear on her overview of the role of fashion and design in L'Herbier's films. She has had unique access both to the L'Herbier family archives and to the oral testimony of the filmmaker's daughter, Marie-Ange L'Herbier, whose generous and open response to our project made the whole thing possible.

The art historian Tag Gronberg looks at the artists Sonia and Robert Delaunay's involvement with Marcel L'Herbier's films. Arguing that the Delaunays' fascination with light and screen surfaces constituted a 'cinema-fication' of everyday life, Gronberg investigates the visual and conceptual commonalities between moving pictures and fashion in motion in the consumer culture of the 1920s. She identifies four interrelated 'iconographies of modernity' to explore these complexities: electricity, the colour disk, screen surfaces, and dance.

The film scholar Nick Rees-Roberts also discusses the themes of modernism and simultaneity in art and design in his article on L'Herbier's 1926 film *Le Vertige*. He focuses, however, on the leading man, actor Jaque Catelain, and his personification of a particularly 1920s type, the *éphèbe*: an androgynous, even effete, male youth. Rees-Roberts foregrounds the actor's dandyish elegance and his chic modernity, situating both in the wider context of early twentieth-century modernism, with reference to the Delaunays and to the



A set from *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Decor featuring chairs by Paul Poiret's workshop Martine. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.



Atelier Martine interior display in the Paris 1925 Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs, showing furniture similar to that used in *Le Vertige*. From Léon Deshairs, *Intérieurs en couleurs* France, 1925. Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.

architect Robert Mallet-Stevens, whose contributions to *Le Vertige* gave it its distinctive aesthetic.

Pursuing the theme of masculinity, the historian Joan Tumblety's article contextualises Jaque Catelain's image by reference to sturdier representations of manhood in popular forms such as sporting culture and celebrity. In film acting, the *éphèbe* was superseded in the early 1930s by more muscular personifications of masculinity. Rejecting, however, any simplistic notion of such a shift, Tumblety both hypothesises a queer audience for images of men in this period and suggests a more nuanced reading of the *éphèbe* and of the sporting celebrity that takes on board complex questions of audiences and identification in the cinema of the interwar years.

This is the first edition of the dossier. In the future we hope to add further essays on L'Herbier's films from the early sound era, notably *L'Épervier* (1933) and *La Mode Revée* (1939), that were also shown as part of the festival.

*You have to create a special fashion for film, or at least interpret current fashion without losing the plot. This way you avoid two snags: creating 'costume', which would be too easy, or seeing clothes go rapidly out of fashion. American film stars seem to feel they lack guidance. The fabulous sums they spend and the complete freedom they are allowed have led to a kind of clothing anarchy or fatigue, which they would like to leave behind. I work hard to try to create a film style. On the other hand, fashion can be promoted by the cinema nowadays. Up to now, film has been content to follow fashion – not the fault of the actors but the directors; they've paid too little attention to the question of costume or else used second or third rate fashion houses.*



Chanel evening dresses, *Femina*, November 1932.  
Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.

*Now let's see... make me some gowns in the six to seven hundred bracket. And... as advertising? No, those ideas are wrong; the publicity this gives is indirect, dress designers who work for the film business can only guide taste, create a trend.*

*Anyway, the women aren't the only ones to dress badly on film. Too many bit-part actors in ready made suits and borrowed dinner jackets at so-called society parties – it's heartbreakingly ridiculous.*

**COCO CHANEL INTERVIEWED ABOUT HER RECENT ENGAGEMENT IN HOLLYWOOD BY EMMA CABIRE IN LA REVUE DU CINÉMA, 1931.**

*We were at the end of the silent era, and I think, today, one can hardly argue against the fact that we had arrived at a very great precision in the technical means employed: this cinema that was going to die was, in reality, a particularly vivacious cinema, and as a result, all across the world, there were highly advanced conceptions of mise en scène.*

MARCEL L'HERBIER QUOTED IN JEAN-ANDRÉ FIESCHI, 'AUTOR DU CINÉMATOGRAPHE, ENTRETIEN AVEC MARCEL L'HERBIER ET JEAN-ANDRÉ FIESCHI' *CAHIERS DU CINÉMA*, NO. 202, JUNE-JULY 1968.

*If we consider the cinema as an indiscreet eye, prowling around a person, catching his attitudes, gestures, emotions, then we have to admit that clothing is the thing most closely related to the individual; clothing follows the figure and embellishes it, or at least distinguishes it from other figures and endorses the person's individuality. Unlike in the theatre, where the actor's body appears only as a mass, in cinema the body and the face are framed by the screen; the lens leans closer and closer towards them like a microscope*

*[...] It would be easy to imagine a film without sets – ships, sea, sky, flat surfaces – whereas it is not at all easy to imagine a theatrical production without costumes, unless of course it was a film depicting the joys of the Garden of Eden. The role of the creator of the set is therefore more complex than the role of either a fashion designer or a theatre designer. He has to combine the skills required of both, at the same time possessing the strongest familiarity possible with the requirements of the moving image. In fact, like a dress designer, he has to create 'fashion', but although cinematographic fashion may borrow its general outline from haute couture, it definitely has to omit any feature that might cause it to look dated. We must remember that from the time a film is made until its first public showing*

*a minimum of six months elapses, often much longer where big productions are concerned; because fashion is in its essence ephemeral and current, the film may seem out of fashion by the time it makes it to the cinema.*

*Cinematographic fashion has therefore to be stylised, a transposition of fashion. A successful style from a brilliant collection has no more painful ordeal than the ordeal it undergoes under the lens; it is almost always a bitter disappointment for the dress designer to see one of his creations even on the News. Nothing, or almost nothing remains of whatever made it elegant or chic in the first place, and this masterpiece of couture born in the Avenue Matignon now seems to have emerged from somewhere between Blanche and Pigalle. Its proportions and volumes have gone missing, as have its values and materials.*

*[...] These mysteries of the photogenic can be fathomed only by long experience. In addition, in real life a dress is designed to be viewed at the level of the human eye. This is not so on the screen where the camera may be placed, for expressive purposes, at a great variety of levels.*

JACQUES MANUEL, 'ESQUISSE D'UNE HISTOIRE DU COSTUME DE CINÉMA', LA REVUE DU CINÉMA 19 – 20 (AUTUMN 1949), 4.

# 'MOVING HUMAN DÉCOR': MARCEL L'HERBIER, FASHION AND CINÉMA TOTAL<sup>1</sup>

Mireille Beaulieu

Central to Marcel L'Herbier's work as a filmmaker was the concept of cinema as a synthesis of all the art forms, which he termed *cinéma total*, or 'total cinema'. An aesthete who was passionate about art, music, literature and theatre, L'Herbier understood the importance of film artistry, from sets, photography and lighting to costume. His films spanned 1918 to 1952, and through them there ran an emphasis on costume and clothing. This article focuses on the role of costume in L'Herbier's films of the silent years, considered by many to be his most creative, and in his films of the early 1930s, in which he continued to deploy contemporary fashion in significant ways. The films discussed here are set in the modern world of the interwar years and reflect the fashions of the times.

## ROSE-FRANCE

L'Herbier's first film, *Rose-France* (1918), was a propaganda film, made under the auspices of the French Military Film Service but written, directed and independently produced by L'Herbier, with some financial backing from the film company Gaumont. In it, L'Herbier turned his back on the patriotic images of heroic soldiers so prevalent at the time, and instead conceived a visual poem dedicated to the eternal spirit of France. The film was an experimental symbolist collage, which aimed to express emotions, moods, ideas and pure sensations. Its split screen sequences, superimpositions, and 'mental images' made it a turning point in French cinema.

The costumes in *Rose-France* were carefully chosen in black, white and shades of grey not only for their strong aesthetic, but also to forward the plot. Catelain plays a decadent dandy who first appears in a white suit with a black and white scarf. Later, when he suspects his fiancée may be in love with someone else, his clothes become black, with white trimmings. A similar change occurs in the costumes of the leading lady, played by Mlle Aïssé, who is at first clad entirely in black, to symbolise her distress at the war. When she feels hopeful again about a possible victory, her long, Pre-Raphaelite style dress and veil transform through a double exposure and become white.



Jaque Catelain and Claude-France Aïssé in *Rose-France*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1918. Courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Marie-Ange L'Herbier, Serge Huart, Caroline Evans and Marketa Uhlírova.

As was to become L'Herbier's trademark, *Rose-France* was a collaborative effort to which several artists contributed. The fashion illustrator Georges Lepape, famous for his collaborations with the couturier Paul Poiret, designed some of the sets and costumes. The painters Marcel Féguidé and Jean Don designed some of the décors, with Don also designing one of the film posters. The theatre and interior decorator Donatien (later to become an actor and an independent film director) lent objects, Chinese furniture and clothes. Jaque Catelain, the film's star, also contributed some set design and set dressing, selecting significant objects, costumes and fabrics, alongside working as the film's make-up artist.

Catelain was then a young man of 21 and, like L'Herbier, came from an upper-class background. An actor, pianist and painter, he was to become L'Herbier's lifelong partner and very close collaborator throughout his career. In many of L'Herbier's silent films Catelain had multifarious roles: star, make-up artist, assistant editor, set designer and wardrobe supervisor for his own costumes. Additionally, in 1922 and 1924, he wrote and directed two feature films for L'Herbier's production company Cinégraphique. He acted for many other European directors and enjoyed considerable popularity in the 1920s.

## LE CARNAVAL DES VÉRITÉS (CARNIVAL OF TRUTHS)

During the shooting of *Rose-France*, L'Herbier had been spotted by the French film company Gaumont, to which he was subsequently under contract for several years. He carried on his technical exploration of the medium in his second Gaumont film, *Le Carnaval des Vérités* (Carnival of Truths), which he wrote and directed in 1919. It is a story about masks and deceptive appearances, which was to become a recurrent theme in his filmography.

The film's leading lady, Marcelle Pradot, was 19 at the time of shooting and went on to star in many other L'Herbier films in the silent era, often alongside Jaque Catelain. Her beauty and personality embodied L'Herbier's feminine ideal, and the two eventually married. In *Le Carnaval des Vérités* Pradot plays a modern, independent girl who is nevertheless pure and honest. Consequently the clothes she wears are predominantly white or in very pale, clear tones with sleek and simple lines. As a contrast, the clothes of the vain, loose character played by the actress Claude France are heavier and somewhat over-elaborate. Pradot was a client at Callot Soeurs where she also bought her screen outfits, assisted by L'Herbier and Catelain in the choice of photogenic colours and cuts. At that time, contemporary dress in French cinema was never designed by professional costume designers. Instead, actors had to

supply their own wardrobes, appropriate to the shooting schedule of the day: street clothing, sportswear or evening gowns. In *Le Carnaval des Vérités*, the clothes for the two supporting actresses, Claude France and Suzanne Desprès, were probably supplied by the fashion houses Parry and Alice Choquet (Parry had been the original name of Jean Patou's company in 1912, but when the couturier returned from the war in 1919 he re-opened in his own name, and the house of Parry was no longer associated with him). The three women's fashion houses used in the film are named in the film's credits and in this regard *Le Carnaval des Vérités* marked a turning point: it is the first French film to credit the fashion designers used. Like the women, the male actors also chose their own garments, probably with the help of Catelain, and their clothing in the film is equally smart, in black, white and grey.

As in *Rose-France*, L'Herbier hired contemporary artists to create the film's sets. The architect, interior decorator and furniture designer Michel Dufet designed the modern interiors, while the future director Claude Autant-Lara designed a strange, symbolic set for a theatre scene. Autant-Lara was only 18 at the time but he already had a diploma in the decorative arts, and was studying sculpture. This was his first job in the film industry. He subsequently went on to work for L'Herbier as a set designer and assistant director. In 1923, L'Herbier produced Autant-Lara's first film, an avant-garde short called *Fait-divers* (Minor News Item), which starred Autant-Lara, Antonin Artaud and Autant-Lara's mother, the stage actor Louise Lara.

## L'INHUMAINE (THE INHUMAN WOMAN)



Georgette Leblanc in *L'Inhumaine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1924. Costume by Paul Poiret. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier / Lobster Films.

In 1922 Marcel L'Herbier left Gaumont and founded his own production company, Cinégraphic. That year he also gave a controversial lecture at the Collège de France provocatively entitled 'The Cinematograph Against Art' (*Le Cinématographe contre l'art*). Here he argued that cinema was not art, meaning that it was not comparable to the ancient arts, but was, in a way, more than art. A year later, he began work on an ambitious film project, *L'Inhumaine* (*The Inhuman Woman*, 1924). The 'inhuman woman' of the title is Claire Lescot, a celebrated opera singer who is fiercely independent, aloof and fascinating to men. She lives in a stylish modern mansion overlooking the city. Her character stands for the present. A young scientist, Einar Norsen, is madly in love with her. He lives in an ultra-modern geometric house and symbolizes the future and the miracle of science. Lescot was played by Georgette Leblanc who was an opera singer in real life too as well as an intellectual and a feminist with a strong personality. She was a close friend of L'Herbier's who shared many of his views on art. With American backing, she provided 50% of



Jaque Catelain in *L'Inhumaine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1924. Costume probably designed by Claude Autant-Lara, laboratory set designed by Fernand Léger. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier / Lobster Films.

the film's funding, seeing it as a way to showcase French cinema in America. In return, however, she expected to star in the film, and to have control over the script. As a result, the storyline is more like an opera plot. Leblanc is a little too old for the part of a *femme fatale*, and she lacks charisma. Nevertheless, without her L'Herbier would not have been able to achieve his goal of *cinéma total*.

*L'Inhumaine* was in this respect L'Herbier's most ambitious to date. In it, he strove to create a manifesto for modern art and, in particular, for the synthesis of different art forms. He had already created a team of close collaborators in his first films: the actors Jaque Catelain, Marcelle Pradot and Philippe Hériat (who also worked as his assistant), and the set designer and assistant director Autant-Lara. At Cinégraphic in 1922, new talents joined the group. The first was the young Brazilian architect and interior decorator Alberto Cavalcanti, who began as a set designer and then worked as an assistant director on Jaque Catelain's *La Galerie des Monstres* (The Gallery of Monsters, 1924). He would later become a talented film director in his own right in France, Britain and, latterly, in Brazil.

Cavalcanti designed most of the indoor sets for *L'Inhumaine*, and Autant-Lara designed an artificial fantasy winter garden for the film. The influential architect Robert Mallet-Stevens designed the exterior set for Norsen's house, a structure that is reminiscent of De Stijl's abstract compositions. At the heart of the house is a modernist laboratory, designed and built by the artist Fernand Léger, who was also responsible for the inter-titles and the film's official brochure.

Cavalcanti's reception rooms for Claire Lescot's extravagant home were designed like an oversized stage set. To decorate them, L'Herbier ordered furniture, fabrics and objects by cutting-edge modern artists and designers: Michel Dufet (who had already worked on *Le Carnaval des Vérités*), the painter and interior designer Jean Lurçat, Atelier Martine (the interior design studio of the fashion designer Paul Poiret) and, most importantly, the architect and furniture designer Pierre Chareau. There are also sculptures by Joseph Csaky, and unidentified modern paintings.

Leblanc's film costumes were supplied by the fashion couturier Paul Poiret. They were selected from his latest collections, probably by Leblanc herself (she was a regular client) who was overseen by L'Herbier and his team to ensure that the clothes also met the camera's requirements. Poiret's clothes, even if they were not specifically designed for the screen, were incredibly photogenic. They have a remarkable screen quality, and the eye is drawn to their shapes, cuts, fabrics, tones and patterns. The menswear in the film is no less striking. Catelain's suits are as elaborate as Leblanc's

costumes, in their own way. Most of his outfits were designed by Yose, the high society men's tailor patronised by both L'Herbier and Catelain. Other outstanding costumes were probably created by Autant-Lara. These include the livery of Claire Lescot's servants, which incorporated geometric patterns into eighteenth-century frock coats, and the constructivist-looking black and white oilskin overalls worn by Einar Norsen and his laboratory assistants.

It is also worth remembering that *L'Inhumaine* was in its time a remarkable showcase for music and colour, both sadly lost as only a black and white print survives today. The original film was colour-tinted and toned, and the final sequence in Einar's laboratory contained patches of pure colours, which flashed on screen as the laboratory exploded. Alongside his frequent use of colour, music was an ongoing interest of L'Herbier's during the silent era and he tried to incorporate it into his films whenever financially possible. On more than one occasion he spoke about film's 'musicality'.<sup>2</sup> His *El Dorado* (1921), for instance, was one of the first French films to benefit from an original, synchronous, symphonic score by Marius-François Gaillard. For *L'Inhumaine*, L'Herbier collaborated with the composer Darius Milhaud who provided a percussion score for specific scenes, including the laboratory sequence.

With hindsight it is obvious that the mise-en-scène of *L'Inhumaine* foreshadowed the 1925 Paris International Exposition of Industrial and Decorative Arts. There were many professional links between the film's collaborators and the art deco exhibition. While shooting the film, L'Herbier was simultaneously preparing for the 1925 Exposition: he was due to be a member of the jury, as well as an exhibitor. Robert Mallet-Stevens, Fernand Léger, Pierre Chareau and Paul Poiret also participated in the exhibition. Cinégraphic-Films L'Herbier had an official stand, and *L'Inhumaine* was re-released during the exhibition.

## LE VERTIGE (THE LIVING IMAGE)

In 1926, the Cinéromans film company, which had just secured a distribution deal with Cinégraphic, asked L'Herbier to adapt for the cinema a successful stage play, *Le Vertige* (The Living Image). The plot was an unlikely melodrama but L'Herbier agreed to do it for financial reasons. Deciding to focus on the dynamic and plastic elements of film, L'Herbier hired some of the artists who had worked on *L'Inhumaine*: Mallet-Stevens designed the sets, Lurçat loaned objects and paintings, and both Chareau and Poiret's Atelier Martine loaned

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Marcel L'Herbier interviewed by Jean-André Fieschi and Jacques Siclier, *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* 202 (June/July 1968).

modern furniture. Other artists who worked on the film included Marie Laurencin and Robert Delaunay, who both lent paintings; and Francis Jourdain, whose furniture and accessories are visible in the Riviera flat of the young hero, which is designed in a style typical of the early 1920s.

The majority of the modernist sets reflected the personality of the hero, the aristocrat Henri de Cassel, played again by Jaque Catelain. A wealthy young man dedicated to pleasure, Henri has highly refined tastes, lives in a radically modern flat, and wears elegant, perfectly cut garments. In developing Henri's character, L'Herbier distorts the melodramatic plot of the original play. Henri never takes things seriously; he jumps around in his flat when in a hurry with fast, stylised gestures. He embodies the young playboy of the Jazz Age: a womaniser with a passion for modern art, sport and parties. Henri can also, however, be seen as a decadent, bisexual aesthete, living with his adoring mother. Indeed, in real life Catelain was the ultimate mid-twenties dandy. As well as being a romantic film idol across Europe, he also appeared in a number of magazine advertisements for clothing and jewellery.

As in *L'Inhumaine*, most of Catelain's clothes for *Le Vertige* were designed by his personal tailor Yose. In one scene, however, the actor wears a striking dressing gown by the painter, textile and fashion designer Sonia Delaunay. Its 'simultaneous' fabric shows off Delaunay's trademark of abstract, sharply contrasting geometric patterns, which suggest dynamic rhythms. Shown in motion, they are very effective on screen. Delaunay's simultaneous fabrics are also used in the cushions that decorate Henri's living room. Her husband, Robert Delaunay, lent his painting *The Tower Behind Curtains* (1911) for the wall of the young man's flat.



Jaque Catelain in *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Set by Robert Mallet-Stevens, sofa and chair by Pierre Chareau, paintings by Jean Lurçat (left) and Robert Delaunay (right). Carpet by Jean Lurçat. Cushions by Sonia Delaunay. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier.

Interestingly, Sonia Delaunay was not hired to create costumes for the leading lady Emmy Lynn. That task fell to the newcomer Jacques Manuel who was here credited as 'art director'. He had just joined L'Herbier's team and initially worked as a general assistant to the art department. He did make-up for the extras, chose most of the costumes, and helped to organise the sets. At this stage he did not personally design outfits as he was to do later, because Lynn insisted on choosing her own clothes. Manuel's job was to accompany the actress to her favourite fashion houses to help her pick suitable garments for the different parts of the film. It was not simple because Lynn apparently had little fashion sense. As well as identifying suitably chic outfits, Manuel had to consider how the garments' shapes, colours and patterns would 'react' to the camera's eye. Once purchased, he had to adapt them for a better onscreen result.

## L'ARGENT (MONEY)

*L'Argent* (Money), released in 1928, is perhaps L'Herbier's greatest masterpiece, a spectacular film based on Emile Zola's 1891 novel of the same name, only set in the present day. L'Herbier wanted to use the film as a vehicle to critique money as a hindrance to the creative process, especially in the film industry, as he had himself experienced it. To strengthen the message, he transposed the story from the 1890s to late 1920s. The film evokes both the power and the evil fascination of money, most often in the shape of monumental art deco sets and lavish haute couture dresses and jewels.

To secure the appropriate funding, L'Herbier once again associated his own production company Cinégraphique with the Cinéromans company, and subsequently with the German UFA, which was the principal film studio in Germany in the Weimar period and home of the German film industry. This production deal obliged L'Herbier to hire professional set designers. His first choice was Lazare Meerson but L'Herbier eventually became dissatisfied with his work and replaced him with André Barsacq. The film's monumental, imposing set design was vital to create its larger-than-life atmosphere. L'Herbier managed to get his close collaborator Jaque Catelain to design one particular element: an impressive chevron light panel in the magnificent modern flat of Baroness Sandorf.

The most enduring image from *L'Argent* is arguably one of Brigitte Helm as the dangerously beautiful Baroness Sandorf, dressed in a sleek gold lamé dress with a long train. The costume was designed by Jacques Manuel, who had imagined it as a 'symbolic, abstract dress'.<sup>3</sup> As well as Helm's sumptuous wardrobe, Manuel designed all the costumes and accessories for the other female lead, the French actress Marie Glory. He collaborated with the couture house Louiseboulanger, which executed his designs for the film. Manuel designed the hats, which were then made by the milliner Mme Agnès, and obtained the furs from Max (André Leroy).



Brigitte Helm in *L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928.  
Gold lamé dress by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

As a costume designer for film, Manuel insisted that each garment should have specific proportions, volumes and relations between colours and fabrics for the camera. For *L'Argent*, he used gold, silver, and shades of white, grey and black. He did not like the contemporary silhouette typified by straight lines, dropped waists and short, knee-length skirts. Instead, he restored the waistline to its natural place and designed longer skirts (well below the knee at the front and even longer at the back, often with a train) and decorated bodices. He later wrote of his collaboration with Maison

3 Jacques Manuel, 'Esquisse d'une histoire du costume de cinéma', *La Revue du cinéma* 19-20 (autumn 1949), 43.



Brigitte Helm in *L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928. Costume by Jacques Manuel, furs by Max.  
 © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.



Day dress by Louiseboulanger, *Femina*, February 1930. Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.



Marie Glory in *L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928. Costume by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

Louiseboulanger that the couturière had been furious because she disliked his new silhouette and he credited himself with creating the '1930 line'.<sup>4</sup> Manuel also claimed that, despite her initial protestations, Louiseboulanger introduced this type of silhouette in her next collection (although it should be noted that other designers including Jean Patou also lowered hemlines and restored the natural waist in 1929).

*L'Argent* was the first film that allowed Manuel to show off his gift for costume design. It is a milestone of French cinema insofar as it saw the emergence of the professional costume designer for films set in the present day. Manuel went on to design costumes for all L'Herbier's films up to the Second World War, and frequently worked as his assistant director and editor. He had a profound understanding of L'Herbier's cinematic vision and shared his ideas on film costume, which concerned stylisation, symbolism and the chromatic range of black and white.

Jacques Manuel also went on to direct films. In 1928, the famous patrons of the arts Marie-Laure and Charles de Noailles commissioned Cinégraphique to make a film at their new modern house in Hyères, on the Côte d'Azur. This was the Villa Noailles, as it is called today, designed by the architect Robert Mallet-Stevens. L'Herbier was busy shooting *L'Argent* at the time, and so he sent Manuel in his place, who created an unusual film called *Biceps et Bijoux* (*Biceps and Bangles*). Manuel later directed two feature films, *Une grande fille toute simple* (*A Tall Simple Girl*, 1948) and *Julie de Carneilhan* (1950).

4 Manuel, 'Esquisse'.

## LE PARFUM DE LA DAME EN NOIR (SCENT OF THE WOMAN IN BLACK)

With the arrival of sound in 1929, and the onset of the economic crisis the same year, new technical and financial conditions made it increasingly difficult for L'Herbier to make art films, or even to pursue personal projects. In 1930, L'Herbier directed a commercially successful adaptation of the cult detective story by Gaston Leroux, *Le Mystère de la chambre jaune* (The Mystery of the Yellow Room), produced by L'Herbier's old friend Adolphe Osso, who asked him to make a sequel. In turn L'Herbier, who was not keen on thrillers, asked for a bigger budget and more artistic freedom. His requests were granted so he accepted the commission and made his second Leroux adaptation, *Le Parfum de la dame en noir* (Scent of the Woman in Black, 1931) in which he was able to emphasise the visual aspects of the film and play with his favourite themes of masks, pretence and deception: the 'comedy of life'.



Vera Engels in *Le Parfum de la dame en noir*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1931. Costume design by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-Françoise Osso-Fontaine, courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier.

L'Herbier had made *Le Mystère de la chambre jaune* as a claustrophobic film with a dark, chiaroscuro atmosphere. It was shot entirely in the studio, and many scenes took place at night. *Le Parfum de la dame en noir* was the opposite; numerous sequences were shot on location on the French Riviera in broad daylight. The interior action takes place in a modern castle, for which L'Herbier asked Jacques Manuel to design the sets as well as the costumes. Manuel's sets, predominantly white, are often imposing and oversized, as was the convention in silent cinema. The stairs, passages and multiple levels of the castle's interior offered opportunities for many dynamic points of view and camera angles. The film enabled Manuel to create a unified world, synthesising an art deco aesthetic with a touch of expressionism.



Kissa Kouprine in *Le Parfum de la dame en noir*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1931. Costume design by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-Françoise Osso-Fontaine, courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier.

Manuel's stunning costume designs for the female protagonists are in black and white, with each costume representing a character's personality. For example, actress Vera Engels plays an eccentric German millionaire with something of the 1920s flapper. At the beginning of the film, she wears a suit with black satin trousers, a white satin collar, and a very long white chiffon negligé, which perfectly suits her snobbish, carefree attitude. The trousers underline the fact that she is an emancipated woman: she is rich, independent and married, though with lovers. The heroine's chambermaid Marie is played by the Russian actress and fashion model Kissa Kouprine. Marie is very ambiguous and seems to have strayed from the set of a silent film: she practically never talks, acting primarily with her eyes. As she is an employee, she wears simpler clothes, often in black.

As in *L'Argent*, Manuel tried to design timeless garments that would not seem outdated a few years later. One black costume worn by Kouprine is particularly stylish and really encapsulates the character: it is very long and close-fitting, medieval in style with its long, flared cuffs and openwork cape. It symbolises Marie's dark, almost gothic beauty. The no-less mysterious male servants are clad in 'oriental' black and white satin costumes decorated with swastikas. When designing these costumes, Manuel had to remember that black fabrics cannot be used for black and white films, because a black surface becomes a 'hole' in the film stock. Instead he generally used different shades of brown, which would appear black on the screen.

Manuel's costumes really work for cinema because they are designed to move and float through the stylised sets of L'Herbier's films. Although the designer is barely remembered today, even in the history of French cinema and film costume, he fortunately left us an important article, 'Towards a History of Film Costume', published in *La Revue du Cinéma* in 1949,<sup>5</sup> in which he outlined his ideas and explained the way he worked for the screen. He wrote that costume in film is even more important than the set, as it gives life to characters. He argued costume has to be thought of as a moving element - he called it 'moving human décor' - and adjusted to the mechanical eye of the camera, which can transform proportions,



The set of *Le Parfum de la dame en noir*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1931. Set design by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-François Osso-Fontaine, courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier.

fabrics, and the cut of clothing, by shooting a scene from different angles. Manuel felt that, for films set in the contemporary world, the costume designer should create new lines, without forgetting that a particular style would be old-fashioned when the film was finally released a few months later. Consequently he or she must create a stylisation, a transposition of the fashions of the day.

*Le Parfum de la dame en noir* was not an ordinary thriller, Manuel created many correspondences between the costumes and the sets. Playing with these elements along with cinematography, lighting and clever sound effects, L'Herbier and Manuel transformed *Le Parfum* into a reflection on the very nature of cinema: a dream, an illusion and a captivating mystery.



Vera Engels in *Le Parfum de la dame en noir*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1931.  
Costume design by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-François Osso-Fontaine,  
courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier.

***L'Argent ... is unquestionably [L'Herbier's] greatest film, I think it's even one of the two, three or four silent films pieces of work which even today can still completely engage our sensibility. It's not as perfect as Pandora's Box by Pabst for example, which for me is the greatest film of the silent era, but it's comparable. And to me, it goes along with, I'd say, Fritz Lang's Mabuse films, Gance's La Roue - those are the few films which today, due to their complexity, the contradictions they examine and so on, remain current. For a long time, I thought it was exclusively down to their technical innovations. It's certainly not the first film to use camera movement that way but it's definitively one of the silent films, if not the first silent film to use them with such zest, such enthusiasm and even ostentation.***

**NOËL BURCH QUOTED IN: MARCEL L'HERBIER: POET OF THE SILENT ART, DOCUMENTARY PROFILE, DIR. LAURENT VÉRAY, 2007.**



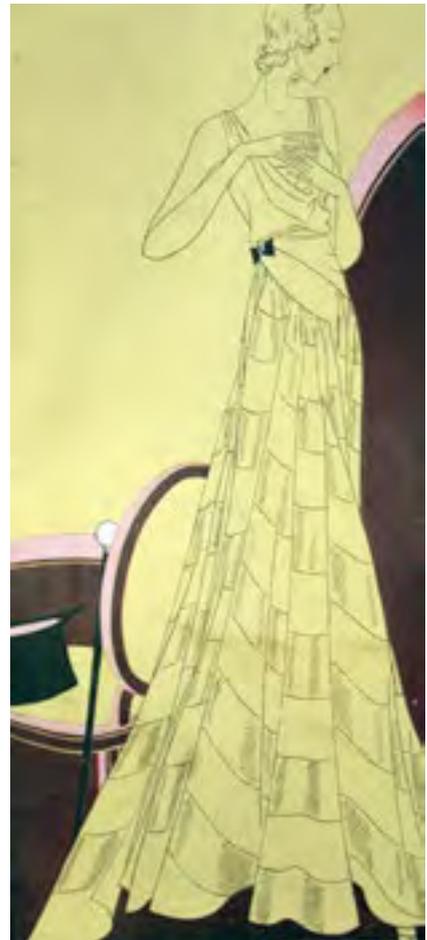
*L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928. Set design by Lazare Meerson and André Barsacq. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.



Brigitte Helm in *L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928. Lamé dress by Jacques Manuel.  
© Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

*L'Argent was a big production and shooting was to last several months. The film would probably not be shown to the public for more than a year after a start had been made. It was important therefore to avoid outfits that could 'look dated'. Marcel L'Herbier asked me to design the clothes for L'Argent. You could say that I had never held a pencil in my hand. You can imagine the sarcastic remarks that greeted the sketches I brought to*

***Louise Boulanger, a fashionable dressmaker at the time; she had been contracted to make the clothes. Her mood became even darker because I was destroying the current 'line'; I had had the cheek to put the waist in the right place, to lengthen the front of the dresses to well below the knee and to lengthen them even more at the back; to use only white, grey and black, gold and silver; to design shaped and trimmed bodices instead of the shapeless sacks launched by Chanel and Patou. [...] Mme Boulanger left the fitting room very quickly and with the assistance of the head seamstresses, the models were created without further drama or complication.***



Evening dress by Louise Boulanger, *Femina*, December 1930. Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.

JACQUES MANUEL, 'ESQUISSE D'UNE HISTOIRE DU COSTUME DE CINÉMA', *LA REVUE DU CINÉMA*, 19-20, (1949) 4.

*[The most most remarkable aspect of L'Argent is] the art of the film, the eroticism of financial dealings of conflicts. Saccard, whose presence dominates the film, is the only character who exhibits desire, the other characters are totally devoid of it, it's very striking. So there is this strange paradox – Saccard, who, in theory, is the least sympathetic character in the film – is in fact the only one we really feel anything for. He has a body, and what a body! He is inhabited by desire, by an ambiguous desire for money and another man's wife – he lusts after Jacques Hamelin's girl. His desire for money and for the girl makes him almost an erotic character. It's a game which he is completely passionate about. There are absolutely extraordinary scenes where the financial relations between characters make the bodies relate to each other in an animalistic way. There's a kind of erotic struggle between the bodies of Saccard and Baroness Sandorf in the famous scene at her home. L'Herbier knew exactly what he was doing, there's no dialogue but there are descriptions which make the scene erotic.*

**NOËL BURCH QUOTED IN: MARCEL L'HERBIER: POET OF THE SILENT ART, DOCUMENTARY PROFILE, DIR. LAURENT VÉRAY, 2007.**



Pierre Alcover as Saccard and Brigitte Helm as Baroness Sandorf in *L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928. Chevron lighting panel designed by Jaque Catelain. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

# SCREENING DESIRE IN 1920s PARIS: SONIA AND ROBERT DELAUNAY'S SIMULTANEITY

Tag Gronberg

*And why, in this age of photography, shouldn't a dress too leave viewers with a pulsating cinematic after effect? – Claire Goll, 1925<sup>1</sup>*

During the 1920s, the painters Robert and Sonia Delaunay reassessed, along with other artists, their pre-war avant-garde practice, in particular the abstract art which had come to be known as 'simultaneity'.<sup>2</sup> Partly due to their reduced financial circumstances, and partly to the new aesthetic climate in France (the revival of figurative art we now know as the 'return to order'), for the Delaunays this also involved a more commercial development of Sonia's textile and fashion designs.<sup>3</sup> In a variety of ways, postwar simultaneous art and design proved mutually validating. On the one hand, the Delaunays' reputation as Paris-based artists enhanced the prestige of Sonia's design products. On the other, the success of her designs asserted the fashionable cachet of their vividly coloured art. The Delaunays' simultaneity came to be associated with the glamorous lifestyle promoted in connection with the postwar revival of Parisian luxury industries. Despite its limitations at this period as a medium still largely restricted to black and white, film played an important role as a showcase for French art and design. The Delaunays joined numerous other artists, designers and architects in collaborating with filmmakers. Simultaneous art and design appeared for example in Marcel L'Herbier's *Le Vertige* and René Le Somptier's film serial

- 1 'Und warum soll uns ein Kleid im Zeitalter des Lichtbilds nicht auch einen filmartigen Eindruck hinterlassen, indem es kontrastierende Formen und Farben gegeneinander ausspielt?' Claire Goll, 'Simultanischer Frühling', *K&E Magazin* 1 (April 1925), 58.
- 2 On the Delaunays' joint artistic practice, see *Robert et Sonia Delaunay: Le centenaire* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, 1985).
- 3 Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1918* (Princeton University Press, 1989); Matilda McQuaid and Susan Brown, eds., *Color Moves: Art & Fashion by Sonia Delaunay* (Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, 2011).



Advertisement for 'Simultaneous' fabrics. *L'Officiel de la couture*, 1924. Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.

*Le P'tit Parigot* (both 1926).<sup>4</sup> Although these black and white films could not reproduce the vibrant colour contrasts of simultaneous art, the Delaunays' work was clearly considered important in conveying a kind of deco 'moderne'. Simultaneity enhanced the filmic narrative's depiction of an affluent, modern milieu, social encounters revolving around sporting activities, motoring, parties and dancing.

Considered thus, the Delaunays' involvement with cinema might amount to not much more than an instance of ornamental modern. As signalled by the quote from the writer Claire Goll with which I begin this article,<sup>5</sup> however, my concern with Sonia Delaunay's patterned textiles and fashions of the 1920s operates at a different (albeit related) level. What interests me particularly are the ways in which the Delaunays' simultaneity related to certain contemporary ideas about the 'cinematic'. Cinematic modernity, it seems, was not something to be discovered only by going to the pictures, but also in the newly unfolding urban environment of 1920s Paris. As I shall demonstrate, contemporaries (such as Goll) discerned a cinematic aspect not only in simultaneous designs, but also in the experience of urban luxury consumption more generally – as both shopping and social encounter. I explore the Delaunays' joint simultaneous practice (in art and design), in the light of this fascination with the cinematic of everyday life by focussing on their preoccupation with light and screen surfaces. The Delaunays' particular brand of modernism involved explicit plays with screen surfaces, in the case of Sonia incorporating an embodied aesthetic of colour, light and movement. Prompted by such artistic concerns we can consider anew how with 1920s silent films (not least those by L'Herbier screened in the Fashion in Film Festival) pleasure in watching movies is enhanced by a sense of viewing screens as not necessarily flat, stretched taut and static, but also as corporeally animated, inhabited and worn. Taking on board this expanded sense of the cinematic will, I hope, provide insights into the complex interactions between art, fashionable clothing and film.

- 4 Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1984); Emmanuelle Toulet, ed., *Le Cinéma au rendez-vous des arts: France, années 20 et 30* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1995); Francois Penz and Maureen Thomas, eds., *Cinema & Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia* (BFI, 1997). These cinematic collaborations can be seen in the context of what Jeffrey Weiss has called 'the theatricalization of avant-garde style', see Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (Yale University Press, 1994). Also see David Cottingham's 'Populism, Consumerism, and Modernity', in *Cubism and the Shadow of War: the Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris, 1905-1914* (Yale University Press, 1998).
- 5 The German-born Claire Goll (née Clariss Aischmann) moved to Paris in 1919 with her husband Yvan Goll, a poet and playwright. The couple moved in cubist, dada and surrealist circles and associated themselves with many artists (including the Delaunays). See Tag Gronberg, 'Sonia Delaunay's Simultaneous Fashions and the Modern Woman' in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (Rutgers University Press, 2003), 109-123.



Jaque Catelain in *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Cushions by Sonia Delaunay, set dressing by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

Let me begin with the imagery deployed in two instances of film set and costume design: the Delaunays' simultaneous art as it appears in L'Herbier's *Le Vertige* and Le Somptier's *Le P'tit Parigot* (both 1926). The elaborate set of a chic interior from *Le Vertige* was reused, it seems, for the *Le P'tit Parigot* serial.<sup>6</sup> In both films, the idea (and glamour) of Paris is clearly signalled through the presence of Eiffel Tower paintings by Robert Delaunay. In *Le Vertige*, we see one of the artist's window series featuring the Tower hung above a pair of sliding doors (the conceit of curtains pulled back in the painting cleverly echoed by the mobility of the doors). Cushions covered in geometric-patterned fabrics by Sonia Delaunay adorn a built-in divan. The ambiance is one of Parisian-style deco elegance. The large reception room shown in the frequently reproduced still for *Le P'tit Parigot* reveals yet more paintings. A monumental vertical panel of the Eiffel Tower and female nude seems to be that exhibited by Robert Delaunay at the recent 1925 Paris exhibition.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Abel, *French Cinema*, 213.

<sup>7</sup> On Robert Delaunay's display at the 1925 Paris Exhibition, see Gronberg, 'Deco Venus', in *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality*, eds. Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott (Manchester University Press, 2000), 142–155, 214–218.



Dancer Lizica Codreano performing in *Le P'tit Parigot*, René Le Somptier, 1926.



Dancer Lizica Codreano performing in *Le P'tit Parigot*, René Le Somptier, 1926.

Other paintings by the artist include an abstract circular disk painting hung over a mezzanine balcony, and a picture from his 1920s 'Runners' series. This selection of simultaneous pictures contrasts 1920s figurative motifs with prewar abstract imagery (the disk motif – in addition to the circular *Disk* painting, a large-scale square-ish canvas of disks hangs next to the *Runners*). A number of stills for *Le P'tit Parigot* show the Romanian dancer Lizica Codreano performing in this reception room. She is clad in a Pierrot-esque costume, with a large disk-shaped collar, and a tight-fitting zig-zag patterned costume. Quite how do such allusions to avant-garde art, design and performance operate at the filmic level?

In order to assess the significance of the Delaunays' cinematic involvement, I propose to focus briefly on four interrelated iconographies of modernity: electricity (as both energy and light), the colour disk, screen surfaces and dance. Claire Goll's 1925 magazine article uses the German word *Lichtbild* for photograph, harnessing it (in the same sentence) to the experience of watching film, another form of picture that materialises through light. Here we find a reference to artificial light (particularly in the case of cinema), and also, intriguingly, to a conjunction of physical movement and optical vibration. According to Goll, the woman passerby (as I shall suggest below, the updated flapper version of Baudelaire's earlier *passante*) creates a fleeting impression, a 'pulsating' optical after-effect, through her dress. Sonia Delaunay had explored something similar, a decade earlier, with her series of studies of urban electric light, for example in the colour sketches (*études*) of electric lighting on the boulevard Saint Michel (1913) and numerous *prismes électriques* (1914).<sup>8</sup> Here too we see a fascination with bodies in motion and with shimmering light and colour. As she said, 'I liked electricity...The halos made the colours and shadows swirl and vibrate around us.'<sup>9</sup> Electricity as (what I am calling) an iconography of modernity received something of an update in the years after the First World War, particularly in its explicit harnessing to a revived Parisian consumerism. There are numerous references in these years to how the theatrical potential of electric lighting could be exploited in the shop window, as one writer put it, to ensure that the commodity 'worked' by night as well as by day.<sup>10</sup> Electric lighting thus formed part of the modern postwar arsenal of consumer allure and enticement.

8 Sherry A. Buckberrough, ed., *Sonia Delaunay: A Retrospective* (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1980).

9 'I liked electricity. Public lighting was a novelty.' Sonia Delaunay quoted in *ibid.*, 29.

10 Gronberg, 'Staging the Commodity: Transformation Scenes', *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris* (Manchester University Press, 1998), 91.

Around the time Sonia Delaunay was pursuing her electric *études*, Robert Delaunay's aesthetic fascination with the city took a somewhat different form. His famous window series began in 1912 and reveals a progressively more abstract sequence of visual meditations on the Eiffel Tower (built 1889), through the glass panes of a window.<sup>11</sup> In these paintings we are made aware of screens as mediating surfaces, the glass window panes but also the stretched and mounted canvas. As with Sonia Delaunay's sketches of electricity, we encounter light not only as something depicted, but also as generated on the picture plane through the judicious contrast of colours. This was of course the theme (one might almost say experiment) of Robert Delaunay's abstract disk paintings, for example what is now often identified as the *The First Disk* (1912-13), and subsequent *Disques simultanés*. These related to the Delaunays' joint interest in colour theory, most famously perhaps with Chevreul's 1837 treatise on the simultaneous contrast of colours, which was to prove influential on several generations of painters. The simultaneous disk (an echo of the colour wheel produced by theorists of colour) became a kind of brand image for the Delaunays' joint practice. We see disk formations adapted to Sonia's interest in the vibration of light with works such as her painting *Electric Prisms* (1914). Indeed the disk was to remain a favoured pictorial motif throughout her long career.

Electricity (both as lighting and as energy) and screen surfaces coincided in Sonia Delaunay's inventive exhibition display for the space conceived as a 'Place publique' at the 1924 Parisian Salon *d'automne*.<sup>12</sup> At one level, a kind of practice run for the boutique in which she exhibited textiles and fashions at the 1925 Paris Exhibition on the pont Alexandre III, the 1924 Salon's *Boutique Simultané* presented viewers with what was in effect a show of coloured abstract cinema. Parallel lengths of Delaunay's boldly coloured geometrically patterned textiles were stretched out over rollers, electrically driven, to create a moving shop window display. The conceit of the shop vitrine as cinematic was however neither new nor the invention of the realm of high art. The June 1923 issue of the magazine *La renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe* depicted the luxury boutiques on the rue de la Paix (probably the most famous shopping street in Paris) as a sequence of photographs laid out as a film strip.<sup>13</sup> The accompanying text compares the experience of window shopping (whether walking or by car) to the unfurling of film footage. It is interesting to note

11 *Robert Delaunay, 1906-1914: de l'Impressionisme à l'abstraction* (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1999).

12 I consider the 1924 display in detail in 'The art of the shop-window', see chapter 4 of my *Designs on Modernity*.

13 The double spread text and boutique 'film strips' are reproduced on pp. 68-69 of *Designs on Modernity*.

that in all these examples (the 1923 magazine, the 1924 Salon and the 1925 world exhibition), urban space – the street and the square – is represented exclusively in terms of up-market shop windows. Here we encounter a kind of hypermodernity wrought by consumerism, an almost hallucinatory immersive experience for which cinema would appear to be the most effective analogy. Conversely, we might ponder what insights into silent cinema are afforded by the 1920s ‘modern’ shop window, often vaunted as a seductive means of wordless ‘silent selling’.<sup>14</sup> It is no surprise, for example, to find in yet another magazine of the period *Vendre: tout ce qui concerne la vente et la publicité* (December 1925) a line illustration of a new mode of advertising: *le cinéma en vitrine*, a small cinema screen in the shop window.<sup>15</sup> In this *mise en abyme* scenario (literally a screen within a screen, the cinema behind the glass pane of the shop window) we see how the moving cinematic image has brought the pavement audience to a fascinated halt. I shall return to this apparent paradox, the movies as a means of effecting arrest, shortly.<sup>16</sup>

I have identified dance as a fourth ‘iconography of modernity’, specifically of course those forms of dance somehow characterised as ‘modern’. Given the preoccupation of different formulations of modernity with movement, this is a widely shared scholarly concern, and there is now an extensive, sometimes interdisciplinary, literature dealing with the artistic and cultural significance of modern dance. Ideas as to what constituted ‘modern dance’ pre-dated the twentieth century, as documented by the many recent publications on Loïe Fuller, whose self-choreographed performances involved voluminous expanses of textiles billowing in the glow of coloured electric lighting.<sup>17</sup> Fuller plays an important role in studies of the pre-histories of cinema. Certainly her work is highly suggestive in this regard: the fabrics were thrown into movement by the gestures of Fuller’s arms to produce what is in effect a dance of textiles. These suggest not only a panoply of *art nouveau* sculptural forms (flowers, for example) but also, a sequence of moving screens, an ongoing process of visual metamorphosis through movement and light.

14 The promotion of Parisian glamour, for example, was crucially aimed at international audiences, both at the level of world exhibitions and cinema. The idea of Paris as a world capital of luxury shopping was revived and intensified after the First World War.

15 See my *Designs on Modernity*, 89.

16 Following a different (but related) trajectory, Caroline Evans speculates on the significance of movement in fashion sales and promotion, in her exploration of the fashion show and early cinema which she considers as parallel developments. See her major study *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900–1929* (Yale University Press, 2013).

17 For recent publications, see Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller’s Performance of Modernism* (Princeton University Press, 2007) and Marketa Uhlirova, ed., *Birds of Paradise: Costume as Cinematic Spectacle* (Koenig Books, 2013).

Sonia Delaunay's textiles (both her patchwork garments and her printed textiles), extend this concept of animated screen surfaces.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere I have written about the patchwork crib blanket Delaunay produced for her son Charles in 1911, where we are invited to picture an animated cubist collage produced by the wriggling infant. Subsequent examples of her work – such as the patchwork outfits she stitched for herself and Robert (a simultaneous dress and waistcoat) to wear dancing at the Ball Bullier dance hall – are more explicitly to do with worn, inhabited, abstract-patterned surfaces. Dancers at the Bal Bullier form the subject of Sonia Delaunay's first major painting (1913) of around the same period, a canvas which takes an unusual horizontal, almost scroll-like format. The dancers are depicted through its vibrant surface of abstracted coloured shapes. There are suggestive interactions here between fabric, dance and coloured picture surface; interestingly, Delaunay herself referred to colours as 'dancing'.<sup>19</sup>

To conclude, let me return to the issue of movement in relation to the dialogue between artistic simultaneity and film. Sonia Delaunay's cinematic moving textiles display at the 1924 *Salon d'Automne* gives an indication of how ideas of movement were important in presenting simultaneity as up-to-the-minute, both aesthetically and in terms of fashion. There is undoubtedly more to explore with regard to the generative role of movement, and in particular to the cinematic interaction between artificial light and movement. Let us look again at the *P'tit Parigot* still of the dancing female Pierrot. We (like contemporary audiences) see this of course in black and white. In fact, there are design similarities with coloured costumes produced by Delaunay for a Russian evening (April 1923) at the Galerie La Licorne in Paris, involving dance improvisations to avant-garde poems and music. (As with the idea of dancing colour, so in this connection Delaunay made the abstract form of the disk dance.) The black-and-white *P'tit Parigot Pierrot* lacks the allure of colour, but viewers are offered the enticement of the vibrant zig-zag pattern, a popular design motif of the era, and perhaps here (as elsewhere) suggestive of electricity. Unlike Parisian galleries and exhibitions, films such as *Le Vertige* and *Le P'tit Parigot* did not offer the Delaunays an avant-garde platform to display their art. Richard Abel for example, categorises such films as 'modern studio spectaculars', popular entertainments which did not make intellectual or aesthetic demands on their audiences.<sup>20</sup> I am curious, however, to press a bit further the question as to what we might learn from such films today, beyond pleasurable access to the social history of the period.

18 Gronberg, 'Deco Venus'.

19 'danser la couleur': see *Sonia & Robert Delaunay*, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1977, entry 265, 78. Delaunay also noted: 'The rhythms made us want to make the colors dance, too': see Buckberrough, 37.

20 See Abel, *French Cinema*, 205 ff.

Specifying modern dance as an 'iconography of modernity' has led me to ponder the possibility of a corporeal dimension in the case of the other three more abstract concerns (electricity, colour disk and screen surfaces). In this I am following certain trajectories of thought laid out by those involved with and interested in artistic simultaneity at the time. The poet Blaise Cendrars, for example, was inspired by Sonia Delaunay's first simultaneous dress (the Bal Bullier outfit) to write his poem 'On her dress she has a body', eventually published in 1919. Here is an extract:

Designers have a stupid trade  
Just like phrenology!  
My eyes are weights that press down upon the sensuality of women.  
Anything that is a bump pushes into the depths.  
Stars dig into the sky  
Colours undress you through contrast  
'On her dress she wears her body'.<sup>21</sup>

This makes an interesting juxtaposition with the quote from Claire Goll with which I began. In both cases we have writers describing the encounter with a 'modern' dress. Cendrars refers to the contrast of colours as the means of revealing a (female) body on the clothing of the wearer. What also emerges, however, is an expression of desire as a visually tactile response: eyes 'press down'. The fabric surface of woman's dress is apparently where the viewer's eyes and the wearer's body get in touch. Like Cendrars, Goll speaks of a contrast of 'forms and colours' reacting with each other; it is precisely this which she credits with creating the cinematic pulsating after-effect of the encounter. Unsurprisingly, given that they address simultaneous clothing, both writers share the reference to a (by this date) long-standing aesthetic interest with colour theory, in particular the simultaneous contrast of colour. But it is worth noting here a telling difference between these two scenarios. Cendrars' raptures are couched in terms familiar from the discourse of *flânerie*. Goll's writing on the other hand perhaps bears more resemblance to fashion journalism. At the same time, both celebrate work by a woman artist. Beyond the fact of Delaunay's gender, however, one might deduce that through the emphasis on colour theory, the gendering of avant-garde practice here receives an intriguing twist. It becomes unnecessary to assume a male speaking voice (for the writing viewer), even in the case of Cendrars' poem. Desire potentially becomes something more fluid, escaping the constraints of stereotypically conceived positions of 'masculine' viewing and 'feminine' viewed.

21 Two translations appear in Blaise Cendrars, 'On her Dress she has a Body', *The New Art of Color: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen (The Viking Press, 1978), 180–181. I have used the version published in Buckberrough, 38.

Clearly, we can get none of the colouristic effect of simultaneity from either black-and-white still images or through the filmic depiction of simultaneous art in *Le Vertige* or *Le P'tit Parigot*. (It should be noted too that as published, Cendrars' verse and Goll's essay were both accompanied by black-and-white photographs of Delaunay's dresses.) This should caution us against assessing the cinematic significance of simultaneity too literally – of considering solely the diageitic at the expense of the exegetic level. In this connection it may be that the realm of 1920s advertising theory points us in a fruitful direction with the *cinéma en vitrine* I discussed earlier. The advertisement's bold declamatory pronouncement 'Écran Stop!', the assertion that the cinematic screen somehow brings crowds of viewers to a standstill on the pavement outside the shop window, is particularly striking. What exactly creates these riveted onlookers? In previous research, I explored early twentieth-century advertising theory in terms of its complex analogies with seduction as wrought by the female body.<sup>22</sup> Put succinctly, the stated aim of such theories was to find means of diverting the intense desire directed at the female body to the inanimate object, the commodity. The 1920s vitrine cinema, I now propose, suggests a different angle on the subject. With the *Lichtbild* (to retrieve that useful German formulation) we are enticed – mesmerised – by the cinematic screen as conjunction of (depicted) physical movement and surface vibration. The electrical luminosity through which cinematic forms materialise as optical flicker are the modern version of Cendrars' stars, a lure through which our psyches are hooked. Which is not to say that the screen's corporeal aspect is thereby eliminated from cinematic viewing; quite the reverse. I mentioned that according to Goll's essay, a pulsating after-effect is generated through the encounter with the fashionably dressed passer-by in her simultaneous ensemble. The body's movement and a sense of surface pulsation are here (as elsewhere) construed as interdependent. Baudelaire, in *À une passante*, and subsequently the Parisian surrealists, played on the concept of the female passer-by in the street in order to articulate modern desire as absence and loss.<sup>23</sup> Flâneurial desire is generated by the unexpected, the contingent,

22 See Chapter 4 (The Art of the Shop-window) in my *Designs on Modernity*. See also my article 'Beware Beautiful Women: The 1920s Shop-window Mannequin and a Physiognomy of Effacement', *Art History* 20, 3 (September 1997), 375–396.

23 Charles Baudelaire's 'À une passante' formed part of his cycle of poems *Fleurs du mal*, published in two editions during the poet's lifetime – in 1857 and 1861. For a connection with the Parisian surrealists, see André Breton's semi-autobiographical novel *Nadja* (1928). Both the poem and the novel depict the chance encounter with a woman in the street. Walter Benjamin famously spoke of 'love at last sight' in his study 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1939): 'The delight of the urban poet is love – not at first sight, but at last sight.' See *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (first English translation 1973, trans. Harry Zohn, NLB), 125.

the ephemeral. With these scenarios, desire – its own form of pulsating after-effect – arises most powerfully through absence: once a woman has disappeared.

As we have seen, simultaneity's starring role in films by L'Herbier and Le Somptier fleshes out narratives of flapper modernity with deco elegance, thereby contributing to the viewer's fun. Artistic simultaneity might also remind us, however, that even with such 'popular' 1920s films, at these movies we are (no matter how subliminally) involved in modernities where screens are somehow corporeal and bodies cinematic. The period's expanded sense of the cinematic has enabled me to explore overlapping realms of art, cinema and consumer culture in terms of a wider dynamics of screened desire. I conclude by proposing that in its simultaneous guise, women's fashion – like shopping, so easily trivialised – can alert us to what was (for the decade of the twenties), not the least of those desires. The simultaneous permutations on flâneurial discourse in the writing of Goll and Cendrars, touched on above, involve change as much as continuation of this nineteenth-century formulation of the artistic persona. By the 1920s, *flânerie* too required modernisation, a long-overdue revamp. As with the waistlines of women's dresses, masculinity's grip on artistic identity urgently needed loosening up. By contrast to Baudelaire's *passante* (who took the form of an obligingly vanishing widow), the modern woman, boldly presented in her simultaneous outfit, whether on screen or off, asserted a more dynamic subjectivity. She stood for – insisted upon – women's desire to play active roles, as viewing subjects but also as participants across the full range of avant-garde artistic practices.

# JAQUE CATELAIN AND THE CULTURAL NEGOTIATION OF MANHOOD IN INTERWAR FRANCE <sup>1</sup>

Joan Tumblety



Jaque Catelain's design for his own make-up in *L'Inhumaine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1924. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier / Lobster Films.

Marcel L'Herbier's links with the artistic currents of the 1920s are well known. It was through high-profile collaborations with the design talents of Robert Mallet-Stevens, Fernand Léger and Sonia Delaunay that L'Herbier fashioned his cinematic style, and the director's enduring reputation is indeed fixed irresolutely to that (long) art deco moment. What I want to pick up on here is the presentation in the 1920s films not of the extraordinary sets and costumes, but of the players. And I will focus in particular on the cinematic performance and the star persona of the actor with whom L'Herbier collaborated most in the 1920s – Jaque Catelain – himself a writer, musician and director in addition to being a high-profile film star across the interwar years. In thinking about Catelain as a lead actor, I want to ask a set of questions designed to take us some

<sup>1</sup> I would like to offer my warmest thanks to Caroline Evans and Marketa Uhlirova for their unwavering professionalism and generosity, to Mireille Beaulieu for her continuing engagement, and to Stephen Beckwith for his research assistance and invaluable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

way towards understanding the meaning of stardom in the interwar years, and towards being able to connect the screen presence of this leading man with the public discussions about gender identity and gender relations that marked the period.

Jaque Catelain (1897–1965) made his acting début for L'Herbier in 1918, in the director's early film about the Great War, *Rose-France*. Much like L'Herbier himself, Catelain had come into film acting through an interest in other creative arts. And in the early 1920s, while he was working regularly as an actor, Catelain also directed two films, *La Galerie des monstres* (Gallery of Monsters, 1924), which, as a story about circus performers, was theatrical in both subject matter and the style of its execution; and *Le Marchand de plaisirs* (The Seller of Pleasure, 1923), which starred the woman who was to become L'Herbier's wife, Marcelle Pradot (they married in 1923). Catelain had first met L'Herbier in 1914. He went on to star in 12 of the director's silent films alone; and at least another seven talkies. It seems to be common knowledge that the two men engaged in a long-lived romantic affair.<sup>2</sup> Catelain's professional and personal relationship with the director certainly extended right across the interwar period, even if he was eclipsed after 1930 or so by a number of other actors – for example Harry Baur and Pierre Richard Willm – as L'Herbier's preferred leads. Catelain's career thus bridged the difficult divide between the silent era and the talkies, and he achieved a fair measure of popular acclaim. A survey conducted among readers of the magazine *Ciné Miroir* in 1929 ranked Catelain the fourth most popular French male movie star of the moment.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the critical reception of Jaque Catelain's acting talents has been mixed. For some he was the pioneer of a new style designed to communicate deep emotion through imperceptible facial gestures; for others he was wooden and inexpressive.<sup>4</sup> Film historian Noël Burch notoriously thinks Catelain a very limited actor, the 'weak point' in all of L'Herbier's films in which he stars, lacking both charm and humour, much like a mannequin in a shop window. In his view, the great artistic success of *L'Argent* – in Burch's opinion

<sup>2</sup> For an account of his own life and relations with L'Herbier, see Jaque Catelain, *Marcel L'Herbier* (Jacques Vautrain, 1950).

<sup>3</sup> Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929–1939* (Indiana University Press, 2002), 268–9. However, according to Phil Powrie, a similar survey published in *Pour vous* in 1928 poll did not place Catelain highly. See his *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom in 1920s French Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Film Society', *Times* (14 February 1927), 7. For a positive account of Catelain's talents, see Laurent Guido, 'Vers l'expression du mouvement intérieur: Jaque Catelain théoricien du jeu et acteur chez Marcel L'Herbier', in Laurent Véray, ed., *Marcel L'Herbier: l'art du cinéma* (Paris: Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma, 2009), 119–132.

Marcel L'Herbier's best film – was due in large part to the fact that the director, normally 'blinded by love', had the good sense not to cast Catelain in it.<sup>5</sup>

What is agreed upon, however, is that Catelain's screen presence was uniformly androgynous, despite his filmic status as a romantic lead; indeed, he remained boyish across the entire interwar period. Catelain can be described as an *éphèbe* – a classically inflected term that was in general French usage in this period to designate a male youth, a being yet to develop the markers of adult maleness (bulk, body hair and muscularity), and, in consequence, one often construed as effeminate in appearance. We are, however, left with the question of how this ephebic masculinity was understood by filmmakers and cinema audiences in the 1920s, and how far the ephebic film actor was dismissed as unmanly. The androgyny of Catelain's performances was certainly remarked upon at the time, and it was not unusual for him to be described as an effeminate actor.<sup>6</sup> According to one British review of his performance in Léonce Perret's 1924 film *Koenigsmark*, a historical drama set in Germany on the eve of the First World War, 'M. Jaque Catelain is the hero, and to begin with it seems that he is going to prove rather an effeminate one, but he never loses his grip on the part, and it is not long before his physical feats effectively banish the first uneasy suspicions.'<sup>7</sup> That effeminacy was widely viewed as suspect in this period, on both sides of the Channel, is incontrovertible.

One reason for this is the longstanding association of the effeminate man with homosexuality. However, what gave any criticism of the *éphèbe* particular bite in France was not so much this link to homosexuality (de-criminalised in France since 1791 after all) but with a refusal of reproductive function. From the late 1890s onwards, the French press was saturated with cries of alarm about the stagnant birth rate: the French, unlike the British and the Germans, had experienced no population boom in the nineteenth century, and in its last decade mortality outstripped live births for five consecutive years.<sup>8</sup> The growth of popular sporting practice and the entrenchment of print culture during the same period facilitated

<sup>5</sup> Noël Burch, 'Ambivalences d'un réalisateur "bisexuel": quatre films de Marcel L'Herbier', in Véray., 204, 210.

<sup>6</sup> *Femmes de France* (30 August 1931), mentioned the 'false elegance' of Catelain, and in general characterised him as effeminate.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Film World: a New French Production', *Times* (6 October 1924), 10.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this crisis of depopulation and its political and cultural impact, see Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-century France* (Cornell University Press, 2000).



Jaque Catelain in *Rose-France*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1918. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier.



Jaque Catelain and Georgette Leblanc in *L'Inhumaine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1924. Leblanc's dress was by designed Paul Poiret. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier / Lobster Films.

a cultural valorisation of muscles, which led to a conflation between muscularity and patriotism. In a very generalised way, then, the éphèbe was letting the side down.<sup>9</sup>

After war broke out, these criticisms bit even deeper. In 1917, the daily conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* ran an article about American and British soldiers stationed in France. The journalist fancied that the well-built Americans were better defenders of civilisation than the English, the latter depicted unflatteringly as *éphèbes*. Even the mature Englishman suffered from this flaw, the article suggested, while Americans were 'men' even in extreme youth.<sup>10</sup> And after the war, weedy men were commonly construed as a danger to the 'race' because their seed might lead to biological degeneration; whereas muscles would save it.<sup>11</sup> However, Phil Powrie and other scholars suggest that in the immediate post-war period there was a short-lived boost to the cultural value of the ephebic male as part of a temporary backlash against martial heroes.<sup>12</sup> And in this light, film scholar Laurent Véray reads Marcel L'Herbier's film *Rose-France*, which the director started to film in September 1918 and in which Catelain stars as a slender, melancholic and angel-faced invalid, as

<sup>9</sup> See Fae Brauer, 'Flaunting Manliness: Republican Masculinity, Virilised Homosexuality and the Desirable Male Body', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 6, 1 (2005).

<sup>10</sup> Polybe, 'Chez les Américains', *Le Figaro* (7 October 1917), 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Powrie, *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom*, 32, 198.



Jaque Catelain in *L'Inhumaine*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1924. Courtesy Marie-Ange L'Herbier / Lobster Films.

a rejection of the prevailing 'cult of strength'. For Véray the film is a studied rumination on the meaning of manliness and its co-option by the destructive forces of war.<sup>13</sup> In this instance, then, it is possible that – if only in L'Herbier's imagination – the ephemic male can channel a subversive cultural critique of conventional war narratives.

Véray's generous reading of *Rose-France* aside, Jaque Catelain's reputation in the 1920s as an effeminate actor undoubtedly had the simultaneous effect of making his opposite female leads appear masculinised, in behaviour if not in appearance. This too could pose a problem in terms of 1920s cultural politics around gender. The reception of the film *L'Inhumaine* (*The Inhuman Woman*) in 1924 is a case in point. The art historian Maureen Shanahan has argued that the poor critical reception of the film may be explained by what she calls the film's 'failed heterosexual romance'.<sup>14</sup> The great age difference between the lead actress Georgette Leblanc (who was 51 years old at the time of filming) and the twenty-something Catelain, led critics to complain that the plot was not convincing; they also blamed the manipulative female protagonist for her perverse resistance to the attentions of men, and dismissed Catelain's character for being insufficiently masculine.

Shanahan sees a parallel between *L'Inhumaine* and the infamous novel *La Garçonne* by Victor Margueritte, published in 1922. The latter was a scandalous story about a young *bourgeoise*, Monique Leblanc, who freed herself from prevailing gender norms by indulging in a life of alcohol, dancing and extramarital sex – on at least one occasion with a bisexual man. Despite the apparent emancipation of its central protagonist, the novel in fact ended with a return to order: Monique is reformed by the love of a war veteran, whom she later marries and with whom she enters a life of motherhood.<sup>15</sup> The problem with *L'Inhumaine*, in Shanahan's view, is that the evident maturity of the leading lady meant that that kind of redemption was never on the cards. So in this reading, the audience members at the premiere who demanded their money back may have been affronted by a tale of gender subversion.

<sup>13</sup> Laurent Véray, 'Rose-France (1918): de l'influence symboliste aux prémices du modernisme cinématographique', in Véray, ed., *Marcel L'Herbier*, 17–20.

<sup>14</sup> Maureen Shanahan, 'Indeterminate and Inhuman: Georgette Leblanc in *L'Inhumaine* (1924)', *Cinema Journal* 43, 4 (2004), 53–75. The interpretation of the film that appears here is drawn from Shanahan's reading.

<sup>15</sup> For the cultural debates over the novel and the meaning of the 'new woman', see Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 46–62; see also Victor Margueritte, *The Bachelor Girl*, trans. Hugh Burnaby (Alfred A. Knopf, 1923 [orig. 1922]).

But let us return to the leading man. However much Jaque Catelain was understood in the context of the time to be effeminate, I would like to qualify the idea of the *éphèbe* as an unacceptable masculine style in this period; and equally, I want to move towards problematising the view that the ephebic model was rejected in a turn to athleticism in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> One way of addressing this problem is to recognise that, if Shanahan's reading of *L'Inhumaine* is correct, there may well have been a 'queer' audience for *L'Inhumaine*, who got the gay references, and for whom the homosexual Catelain – and his bisexual co-star Georgette Leblanc – operated as identifiable icons. Knowledge of Catelain's sexual relationship with L'Herbier notwithstanding, several of the films they made together seem to contain references to homosexual subcultures: *Le Diable au coeur* (Little Devil May Care, 1928), with Catelain's exuberantly performed sailor masculinity in the cabarets of a port town is one good example.<sup>17</sup> In many of his roles, Catelain also incarnated the 'camp' trope of the exaggeratedly suffering male, nowhere more emphatically than as an ostensible suicide in *L'Inhumaine*.<sup>18</sup> That film certainly contained other references to homosexuality. In one scene a poster of an openly homosexual Swedish dancer is prominently displayed, and would have been recognisable to those already in the know. Moreover, the unmistakably phallic fire-eating scene – a scene of 'genuine artistic suggestiveness', in the words of one rather understated review – could not fail to elicit a homoerotic reading.<sup>19</sup>

Another way of qualifying the apparently damned position of the *éphèbe* in the 1920s is to point out that Catelain's heavily made-up and theatricalised look was not at all uncommon in silent cinema, French or otherwise. The British star Ivor Novello and the Italian-American Rudolf Valentino both typified an overwrought and heavily stylised screen persona, as did Pierre Batcheff in France. However much critics and film historians posit Valentino, or indeed Batcheff, as a more 'virile' version of Jaque Catelain, there was much overlap in these stars' screen looks, and indeed Catelain was known in some quarters abroad as the French Valentino.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The notion that this shift occurred is widely accepted, if also qualified, in film histories. See for example Powrie, *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom*, especially chapter 2; and Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, especially chapter 8.

<sup>17</sup> On the widespread association of homosexuality and port towns in France, see Michael D. Sibalis, 'Homophobia, Vichy France, and the "Crime of Homosexuality": the Origins of the Ordinance Of 6 August 1942', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, 3 (2002) 301–318.

<sup>18</sup> Burch, 'Ambivalences d'un réalisateur "bisexuel"', 201–204.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Film Society: "L'Inhumaine" at the New Gallery', *Times* (14 February 1927), 7; Shanahan, 'Indeterminate and Inhuman', 63.

<sup>20</sup> Powrie, *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom*, 32–4; and Shanahan, 'Indeterminate and Inhuman', 58.

More generally, one may argue that there was a continuing stigma around all male actors in the period, not just the ephebic or effeminate kind. This was due to the implicitly emasculating potential of being passive objects of the cinema audience's gaze. Film historian Guy Austin puts it this way: 'playing macho characters and possessing a star body encoded as vigorously masculine only makes matters worse, since the "feminised muscle man" is as much an object of display as the beauty queen.'<sup>21</sup> Thus the most 'heterosexualised' and ostensibly masculine of movie stars – including the ubiquitous Jean Gabin, whose career took off in the 1930s – could and sometimes demonstrably did feel compromised for being an object of display.

It was certainly the case that men were increasingly becoming objects of a popular gaze in 1920s France. And it was the muscular look that was most overtly celebrated, not only in the growing arena of spectator sport, but also in the popular press, the get-fit craze with its explosion of self-help guides and physical culture schools, and the increasing number of beauty contests held for both sexes. Popular fascination with all of these phenomena embedded an aesthetic model of lean but muscular plastic beauty for men. If we look outside the confines of film stardom to consider interwar cults of celebrity more broadly, we find that the movie star – whether in the silent era or in the 1930s – competed with other kinds of star, most notably those drawn from the world of sport.

This state of affairs was facilitated through the increasingly visual culture of print media: technical developments in photography, printing and communications allowed better quality photographs of sporting events to be published almost as soon as they took place.<sup>22</sup> Male and female readers were now routinely bombarded with images of sporting practice in newspapers and magazines. Interwar cyclists (like Henri Pélissier and Roger Lapébie), boxers (like Marcel Cerdan and Georges Carpentier) and tennis players (like René Lacoste and Jean Borotra) were widely celebrated, admired for their steely muscle and spectacular feats of endurance. The exploits of aviators – until the creation of Air France in 1933 more explorers than mere pilots – also received much illustrated coverage in the sports and general press, hailed for their athletic power, technical skill, and exploits of bravery and conquest.<sup>23</sup>

If there is any truth in the claim that the ephebic film star was replaced by an athletic one in the 1930s, it was in no small part due to this enveloping popular celebration of muscular sporting success. It was also underpinned by the shift to talkies after 1929 or so, and

<sup>21</sup> Guy Austin, *Stars in Modern French Film* (Arnold, 2003), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Marcel Huret, *Cinéactualités: histoire de la presse filmée, 1895-1980* (H. Veyrier, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> For more on the appeal of this muscular ideal, see Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body*, chapters 1 and 3.

the more realist cinematic style that accompanied it. Something of that realism seems to have crept into star culture as well, as Guy Austin explains: the 'grand, god-like stars' of the silent era were replaced by 'more realistic, bourgeois and approachable' ones in the 1930s, with attention paid in the popular press to actors' domestic interiors and the ordinariness of their daily lives.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, it is claimed by a range of film historians that the most popular leading men in the 1930s were also more mature in years and more physically substantial than before. Thus Jean Gabin, an enormously bankable everyman by the mid-1930s, with starring roles in such popular films as *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, 1937) and *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937), was celebrated for his working-class authenticity, his homosocial ease, for his apparent lack of artifice as an actor and as a star: as far as the cinema press goes, all of these qualities were manifested by the actor's apparent love of sport.<sup>25</sup> It does seem to be true that Marcel L'Herbier himself turned to older and beefier male leads in the 1930s, whether they be chiselled and muscular, as in the case of Pierre Richard Willm, who featured in a number of L'Herbier's most commercially successful films, or the corpulent Harry Baur, star of the mid-30s colonialist remake, *Les Hommes nouveaux* (The New Men, 1936).<sup>26</sup>

We can, in addition, see an interpenetration of film stardom and sporting celebrity in these years. Neither developed in isolation: cinema and sports existed in the same commercial and mediated world. It was not unknown for sportsmen to become actors – perhaps most famously for this period the case of the boxers Georges Carpentier (in France) and Max Schmeling (in Germany).<sup>27</sup> After the Second World War the American Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller became Tarzan; and in France, Jean-Paul Belmondo, who began his career as a boxer (hence the trademark nose), played one too in his early roles.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, in the 1930s French films featured sportsmen as sympathetic protagonists much more often than previously, not least cyclists and boxers, and then, increasingly, tennis players, golfers and rowers towards the end of the decade

<sup>24</sup> Austin, *Stars in Modern French Film*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, 247, 251.

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Richard Willm starred in *L'Épervier* (The Sparrowhawk, 1933), *La Route impériale* (The Imperial Road, 1935), *La Tragédie impériale* (Rasputin, 1938) and *Entente Cordiale* (1939). By the mid-1930s L'Herbier was one of the most commercially successful filmmakers in France, regularly drawing in audiences of more than 300,000. Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, 318, 323. This output was constituted by crime thrillers and other mainstream fare rather than the innovative style of the earlier films. Andrew Dudley, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 130–131.

<sup>27</sup> On Schmeling's career, see Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, & German Modernity* (New York, 2010), 51, 72, 76, 85. On Georges Carpentier, see André Rauch, *Boxe: violence du XXe siècle* (Aubier, 1992) and Richard Holt, J.A. Mangan and Pierre Lanfranchi, eds., *European Heroes: Myth, Identity, Sport*, (Routledge, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Austin, *Stars in Modern French Cinema*, 49–50.

(the film historian Colin Crisp counts at least 20 such titles in the 1930s alone).<sup>29</sup> Third, from the 1920s onwards the kind of star stories that circulated in the popular film press (what Crisp calls 'characterological discourses') emphasised sporting prowess as a sympathetic – and indeed necessary – characteristic for both male and female actors, as we have just seen in the case of Jean Gabin.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, the Hollywood actor Douglas Fairbanks was pushed as a specimen of physical perfection – muscular and athletic as well as a seasoned player of a number of sports. One 1927 issue of the short-lived lifestyle publication, *Le Muscle*, celebrated the star's sporting 'brio', and this kind of coverage was replicated far and wide.<sup>31</sup>

The popular fixation with sport and athleticism already throughout the 1920s, however, was so strong that even the ephébic Jaque Catelain could be marketed as *sportif* and especially keen on outdoor athletic pursuits such as tennis and swimming. On one level, magazine coverage simply reported Catelain's genuine love of these activities; but equally there may have been an overt attempt on the part of popular journalists, or perhaps Marcel L'Herbier or his funders, maybe even Jaque Catelain himself, to present a 'normal' masculinity to the viewing audience. The actor did, after all, explain his love of sport to the press by asserting that it built boldness, courage and a firm will – in other words, manliness.<sup>32</sup> A journalist who interviewed Catelain for the film magazine *Cinéa* in the early 1920s seemed similarly keen to 'masculinise' the actor, who was described in terms of the stock tropes of interwar normative masculinity: his voice was 'lower than you would think'; his body language suggested self-control and firmness; he was forthright in conversation, and possessed of a 'firm will' (all of this juxtaposed nonetheless with a drawing of the star in evident eye makeup and lipstick).<sup>33</sup> At the same time, there was not always a lot to tell between the different categories of film star. On one occasion the cinema page of the newspaper *Le Figaro*, for example, featured a photograph of the celebrated 'sporty' actor, André Roanne, alongside one of Jaque Catelain: the two stars looked virtually indistinguishable.<sup>34</sup> Any easy opposition between the éphébe and the athlete, then, appears to break down, whether in terms of appearance or star image.

There are pluralities here, I would suggest, rather than a simple shift from one style of filmic masculine bearing to another. As Powrie has noted for the case of Pierre Batcheff, it was possible for the film press to present a star simultaneously as a moody melancholic and

<sup>29</sup> Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, 89.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>31</sup> *Le Muscle: le sport, le travail et la vie* (January 1927), 3.

<sup>32</sup> 'Jaque Catelain nous parle Sport', *Cinéa* (15 July 1923), 17–19.

<sup>33</sup> 'Cinéa chez Jaque Catelain', *Cinéa* (12 January 1923), 4.

<sup>34</sup> On Roanne as a sporty type, see Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, 271.

as a keen tennis player.<sup>35</sup> Crisp also notes the overlap in the 1930s between the figure of the athletic cinematic hero and the sensitive one. One illustration of that fusion may well be the rather morose, introspective and indecisive aviator protagonist in L'Herbier's 1928 film *L'Argent*: the character of Jacques Hamelin (played by Henri Victor) would seem to resist the 'agreed meanings'<sup>36</sup> of the muscular and forceful aviator of the period. And the morally repulsive character of Nicholas Saccard (Pierre Alcover), however un-athletic, more readily conforms to the conventional masculinity of what in film studies is known as the 'desiring subject'.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps one ought to attempt a 'queer reading' of sorts for this film as well.

In conclusion, I would venture that the ephebic look may have worked particularly well in the context of 1920s silent cinema, despite its association with both effeminacy and homosexuality. In this age film retained many theatrical trappings – heavy makeup, exaggerated movements that some may regard as 'camp'; and a propensity for melodramatic plots. In the vehicle of silent film the ephebic style may have thus been both naturalised and normalised. It was a look that fared much less well, however, after the arrival of the more realistic acting style of the 'talkies'. The prevalence of mature, physically substantial heroes in 1930s film was at the same time not determined by technical shifts in filmmaking alone: the *éphèbe* was increasingly competing with another type – the leanly muscled athlete, a figure at the heart of the emerging (competing but also complementing) genre of sporting celebrity.

Ultimately, I would emphasise that stardom in the 1920s and 30s was a plural affair. Douglas Fairbanks could be packaged alongside Jaque Catelain in the *Cinéa* movie star canon: they both had a place in it, as the magazine's regular offer of star portraits for new subscribers suggests.<sup>38</sup> Different tastes were routinely catered for, and the *éphèbe* and the athlete were not mutually exclusive categories anyway. The success of Pauley in the 1930s – an actor who advertised alcoholic beverages like Campari in a way that drew attention to his size and rotundity – both confirms the elasticity of the category of film star, and suggests that interwar audiences had a knowing sense of humour. Jaque Catelain's ephebic qualities may have been troubling for some in the context of the time, but they were also acceptable for many, whether because some film audiences were attuned to homosexual references on screen, or, ironically, because the great popular appeal of sport and the athletic model of manliness could in fact encompass him as well.

<sup>35</sup> Powrie, *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom*, 34. Here Powrie is nonetheless emphasising a shift towards athleticism in the portrayal of Batcheff between the mid and late 1920s.

<sup>36</sup> Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, 255, xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Burch, 'Ambivalences d'un réalisateur "bisexuel"', 210–12. See also Michael Almereyda, 'Money Makes the World go Mad', *Film Comment* (September/October 2009), 45, 5, 14.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, *Cinéa* (15 December 1924), n.p.

# THE LIVING IMAGE: DESIGNING MASCULINITY IN L'HERBIER'S *LE VERTIGE* (1926)

Nick Rees-Roberts

Prefacing a volume on set design, René Clair, influential filmmaker and writer of the 1920s Parisian avant-garde, argued that the height of artistic collaboration was when the designer's aesthetic complemented the film's style so seamlessly that the spectator no longer even noticed its presence. Paradoxically, in Clair's view, the most successful designs were often the most unobtrusive.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately for a contemporary fashion film audience, this was not the approach favoured by Marcel L'Herbier, whose spectacular experiments with cinematography and design (across set, costume and interior design including furniture, glassware and sculpture) in the 1920s earned him the reputation of a man of taste and aesthete, internationally renowned for his cinematic displays of French elegance. His films of the period included collaborations with some of the most celebrated art and design practitioners of the day, most notably architect Robert Mallet-Stevens, artists Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and fashion designer Paul Poiret. L'Herbier's film *L'Inhumaine* (*The Inhuman Woman*) from 1924, described as 'an important staging post in the advancement of French design praxis'<sup>2</sup> and 'the cinematic apogee of the modernism of art deco,'<sup>3</sup> had boldly asserted the modernist paradigm of geometric monochrome, a pure vision of narrative design, aiming, in essence, to present the characters before they appeared on screen. This graphic modernism complemented the principal ambition of French cinema's first avant-garde: the pursuit of *photogénie*, an investigation into the nature of the image itself, defined by David Bordwell in his overview of 1920s impressionist cinema as 'the transforming, revelatory power of cinema, [...] an attempt to account for the mysteriously alienating quality of cinema's relation to reality.'<sup>4</sup>

L'Herbier's film *Le Vertige* (*The Living Image*, 1926) begins with a dynamic flourish staging the overthrow of the Czar during the 1917 Russian revolution in Petrograd (modern-day St Petersburg). While angry

1 René Clair, 'Avant-propos', in Léon Barsacq, *Le Décor de film* (Éditions Seghers, 1970), 7–8.

2 Ben McCann, *Ripping Open The Set: French Film Design, 1930–1939* (Peter Lang, 2013), 29.

3 Dudley Andrew quoted in McCann.

4 David Bordwell, *French Impressionist Cinema: Film Culture, Film Theory, and Film Style* (Arno Press, 1980), 108, 106.



Dress by Drecoll, worn by Emmy Lynn as Natacha in *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Collection of the Cinémathèque Française, Paris.



Coat by Germaine Lecomte, worn by Emmy Lynn in *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Collection of the Cinémathèque Française, Paris.

peasants amass to invade the lavish home of the Count and Countess Sviriska (Roger Karl and Emmy Lynn), the audience is encouraged to admire the display of aristocratic decadence – the opulent setting for the denizens of high society assembled to distract the Countess Natacha, who has been forced into an infelicitous union to avoid her father's social scandal. Emmy Lynn's costumes in these early sequences include a dress designed by the couture house Drecoll and later donated to the *Cinémathèque Française*: a black satin gown with a train, gold lamé cuffs and a skirt embellished with colourful embroidery. Lynn's donation also included a black velvet coat with golden sleeves, designed by Germaine Lecomte, worn by Natacha in the seduction scenes. Costume supervisor Jacques Manuel recalls editing and adapting the film's couture pieces to the demands of the narrative, purposefully choosing pieces to underscore the film's decorative aesthetic, which rubbed up against (what he perceived to be) the un-photogenic couture of the day.<sup>5</sup>

Natacha's lover Dimitri, a second lieutenant in the army, is played by the leading man Jaque Catelain, who had first met L'Herbier in 1914, and went on to appear in twelve of the director's silent films, which transformed him into a major star of the period. Catelain was known for an economical performance style, moving away from the more demonstrative theatricality of screen acting of the silent period. In an article for a special film issue of *Les Cahiers du mois* in 1925, Catelain expressed his admiration not only for the celebrated dynamic performances of actors such as Douglas Fairbanks, but also for the internalised minimalism of Lilian Gish – Charlie Chaplin is cited as the perfect combination of both styles. Catelain's desire to define the artistic specificity of the actor's trace on screen through gesture and movement suited the director's highly aestheticized vision of cinema.<sup>6</sup>

Catelain was celebrated for his good looks, although he was less famous than the more conventionally handsome *matinée* idols Pierre Batcheff and Rudolph Valentino. Batcheff was also cast as a *jeune premier*, a category emphasizing the actor's boyish appearance. In their account of Batcheff's place within 1920s French stardom, Phil Powrie and Éric Rebillard draw on press reports comparing him with Catelain, situating both as prototypes of a post-adolescent male ideal, perceived as a transitional model preceding the more athletic physiques of the leading men of sound cinema in the early 1930s.<sup>7</sup> Not everyone fell for Catelain's charms however: in an attack on the perceived affectations of a certain strand of avant-garde cinema, the surrealist poet Robert

5 Jacques Manuel, 'Esquisse d'une histoire du costume de cinéma', *Revue du cinéma* (Autumn 1949), 36.

6 Jaque Catelain, 'L'Acteur', in *L'Intelligence du Cinématographe*, ed. Marcel L'Herbier (Éditions d'Aujourd'hui, 1946), 284–287.

7 Phil Powrie with Eric Rebillard, *Pierre Batcheff and Stardom in 1920s French Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 10, 32–34.

Desnos described ‘the grotesqueness and vanity’ of a performer ‘who we may take to be the prototype of the avant-garde actor, just as Monsieur L’Herbier is the prototype of the director.’<sup>8</sup> Catelain’s melancholic posture also hinted at effeminacy, even when the effete star was cast in more conventionally masculine roles – as in *Le Vertige*, where he plays a soldier in full military uniform. The initial presentation of the photogenic Catelain in his heavy officer’s coat presents him as an object of desire, which includes medium close-ups of his brooding face, supported by other shots of characters shown reacting to his charismatic presence before receding into the background.

The actor’s role as the soldier’s living image in the remainder of the film shows off Catelain’s distinctive elegance, highlighting how he posed for the camera and how he moved through the frame. Press coverage of *Le Vertige* made much of his dandified appearance as the aristocratic playboy Henri de Cassel, focussing not only on the sophisticated Yose tailoring chosen for the film, but also Sonia Delaunay’s geometric-patterned dressing gown, a ‘simultaneous’ garment shown on the photographic still used to publicise the film – a spectacular image of Catelain’s lithe figure, nonchalantly reclining against the furniture. This standalone shot of the actor, framing him as both potential seducer and object of desire, does not appear within the film itself, but simply illustrates the production’s insistent promotion of both Catelain’s physical allure and the modernist design aesthetic. An article examining cinema’s imagery of male elegance, published by *Le Figaro* in November 1926, singled out the film for its depiction of the lifestyle of the urban dandy, citing Catelain’s Henri as the perfect illustration of this type, with his double-breasted jackets, slim silhouette and matinée-idol looks.<sup>9</sup> Other celebrity accounts focus on the actor’s on-trend moustache, and his particular movements on screen, which are often described as choreographed or feline. Going on popular accounts in *Paris-Midi*, the models of masculinity for French audiences in the 1920s included both Hollywood icons and local stars – sporty gigolos emulated Harold Lloyd but more sophisticated aesthetes copied Catelain’s signature style from head to toe: the light-brown suits, the smoking jacket adorned with a red carnation, and the publicity image of the geometric dressing gown.<sup>10</sup>



Jaque Catelain in a publicity photograph for *Le Vertige*, Marcel L’Herbier, 1926, showing Catelain posing in a dressing gown made from simultaneous fabric by Sonia Delaunay. Robert Delaunay’s painting of the Eiffel Tower hangs on the wall above the double door, chair by Pierre Chareau. © Marie-Ange L’Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

The film’s allusive English title *The Living Image* (it was also released in the U.S. in 1928 under the more functional title of *The Lady of Petrograd*) foregrounds L’Herbier’s articulation of style and decoration in conjunction with fantasy and desire. The title also refers to Catelain’s dual role as the reincarnation of Natacha’s former lover, whose uncanny return to haunt her is set in the glamorous city of Nice. *Le Vertige* documents the emergence of the French Riviera in the early

8 Robert Desnos, ‘Avant-garde Cinema’ (1929) in *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond (BFI, 1978), 36.

9 ‘Les Élégances masculines au cinéma’, *Le Figaro* (18 November 1926).

10 ‘La Mode et l’écran,’ *Paris-Midi* (10 March 1928).

twentieth century as the consumer playground for European high society. (Subsequently, cinema was instrumental in shaping the cliché of opulence that was to reach its heyday with the postwar economic boom.) In these scenes on the Riviera, Natacha is purposefully filmed alone to depict her social alienation from her glamorous surroundings and to enact her mourning the loss of her dead lover, who had been shot by her tyrannical husband before the couple fled Russia. Catelain's performance as Henri makes good use of his charisma and dynamism: he is first pictured surrounded by a throng of female admirers.

Beyond the film's superficial promotion of Catelain as a consumer ideal or a male role model, one of the film's most memorable images – the closest L'Herbier got to the photogenic purity and cinematic specificity so valued by the 1920s avant-garde – is an enigmatic impression of Emmy Lynn. The specific shot is a visual trace intended to capture Natacha's first glimpse of Henri, the expression of horror on her dumbstruck face visualising the metaphor of time standing still, equating to one understanding of *photogénie* as the camera's mechanical capture of the soul.<sup>11</sup> Lynn is positioned behind a glass curtain-wall, taking up the entire screen, framing a transfixed Natacha as a spectral figure; the poetic reflection of the rolling clouds in the background is a device used to create the optical illusion that she is floating through time and space. This particular shot is a symptomatic one in that it establishes the character's subsequent psychological obsession through her troubled attempt to locate the material trace of her lover in the body of another man. This shot also sets up the scenes in Henri's lavish apartment in Paris, where Natacha is shown to be haunted and ailing, suffering from paranoia and vertigo. She lethargically floats through the interior space, gazing at one point at a painting of Henri/Catelain as a boy, suggestive of the hallucinatory quality of both character and star.

The interior sequences contain some spectacular examples of costume and set design, including fashion by Sonia Delaunay and interiors by Robert Mallet-Stevens. Delaunay, a Russian expatriate artist, is remembered for her work that spanned the fine and applied arts, including 'simultaneous' paintings, clothing and textiles that captured movement through the precise organisation of colour. From 1911 onwards, Delaunay developed her embroidery and clothing alongside her painting, but, as Maiten Bouisset explains, 'it was not until 1920, when the Russian Revolution had cut off the income on which the household had lived, that [Delaunay] decided to return to her previous creations and commercialize them in various ways',<sup>12</sup> including the creation of *Maison Delaunay* in 1925. For the designs displayed the same year at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels*

11 David Bordwell, *French Impressionist Cinema*, 107.

12 Maiten Bouisset, 'Sonia Delaunay – Simultaneous Art and Fabrics' in Jacques Damase, *Sonia Delaunay: Fashion and Fabrics* (Thames & Hudson, 1991), 68.



Jaque Catelain and Emmy Lynn in *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Set design by Robert Mallet-Stevens. Set dressing by Jacques Manuel. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

*modernes*, Delaunay used simple geometric shapes to convey colour, time and rhythm. Something L'Herbier's film cannot capture, evidently, is the complex interrelationship between form, shape and colour. In a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in 1927 on the influence of painting on fashion design, Delaunay located the value of geometric forms not simply for their graphic simplicity, but also for their ability to distribute colour.<sup>13</sup> Robert and Sonia Delaunay were both at the vanguard of the emerging technological interest in colour that would radically affect the visual arts. *Le Vertige* is intriguing for how the use of fashion and costume (most notably the striking 'simultaneous' dressing gown) encourages the viewer to replace colour with geometric motif and shape, to re-place colour within the frame.

<sup>13</sup> Sonia Delaunay, 'The Influence of Painting on Fashion Design' (1926), in *The New Art of Colour: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen (Viking Press, 1978), 203–207.

Mallet-Stevens, one of the pre-eminent modernist architects of the period, painted the interiors in shades of grey to differentiate between the tonal values visible on screen.<sup>14</sup> He had already completed what many see as his masterpiece, the Villa Noailles, in 1924: a cubist construction, with its rectangular openings, the building resembled a film set, memorably captured on screen by Man Ray in *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (The Mystery of the Château of the Dice, 1929). He later described it in his autobiography as 'severe and unobtrusive as if trying to hide the opulence that was housed in it.'<sup>15</sup> Mallet-Stevens's view of the relationship between architecture and cinema was radical in its time: rather than simply adapting the theatrical use of décor as a type of stylistic or tonal accompaniment to the narrative, he argued for a more integrative approach to design in which architecture would play a formative role in determining visual style. Modern architecture, he wrote in 1925, was essentially photogenic, made up of straight lines, ornamental sobriety, smooth surfaces, and clear contrasts between light and shadow.<sup>16</sup> His interior designs for *Le Vertige* ignored the film's narrative roots in theatre (it was based on a stage play by Charles Méré), instead emphasizing rationalism, economy and purity. Any ornamentation was channeled into the stylized arabesques that Catelain performed on the austere set for Henri's habitat. The architect's interior designs blend character with setting inharmoniously, an abrupt vision of modernity, at once sharp and elegant, which was only discreetly embellished by Robert Delaunay's paintings and Zadkine's cubist sculptures.

For a film so overtly preoccupied with image, with the body and performance, with the actor's gesture and movement through the frame, and with the aesthetic expression of masculinity through design, it was fitting that L'Herbier chose to collaborate with some of the major figures of Parisian art, fashion and architecture of the period, making *Le Vertige* an enduring cinematic tribute to early twentieth century modernism.

14 Odile Vaillant, 'Robert Mallet-Stevens: Architecture, Cinema and Poetics' in *Cinema and Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*, eds. François Penz and Maureen Thomas (British Film Institute, 1996), 28-33.

15 Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (Penguin Books [1963] 2012), 280.

16 Robert Mallet-Stevens, 'Le Cinema et les arts: l'architecture' in Marcel L'Herbier, *L'Intelligence du Cinématographe* (Éditions d'Aujourd'hui, 1946), 288-290.

# MARCEL L'HERBIER IN THE 1920s AND 1930s: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Marlène Van de Castele

Marcel L'Herbier (1888-1979) was a seminal figure in French cinema, with a career that spanned the silent and sound eras. Not only a prolific filmmaker and a lifelong champion of French film, he was also a film theorist, poet, playwright, theatre critic and amateur composer.

After obtaining a degree in law in 1910 from L'École des Hautes Études Sociales, L'Herbier turned towards literature and criticism, with a particular interest in the symbolist and post-symbolist traditions. His early writing is indebted to his literary heroes Oscar Wilde, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, Friedrich Nietzsche and Marcel Proust. During the First World War, L'Herbier became fascinated by American cinema, especially after seeing Cecil B. DeMille's early melodrama *The Cheat* (1915). Soon after, he had his first direct encounter with the world of filmmaking when, towards the end of the war, he joined the Cinema Service of the French army. It was at this time he began writing film scripts, initially for two productions directed by René Hervil and Louis Mercanton: *Le Torrent* (1917) and *Bouclette (L'Ange de minuit)* (1918).

The first period of L'Herbier's filmmaking is marked by the financial backing of Léon Gaumont, one of France's former cinema moguls; between 1918 and 1922 L'Herbier produced a distinct body of work, characterised by a subjective, experimental approach exploring the expressive possibilities of film. After his first two film releases, *Rose-France* (1918) and *Le Bercail* (1919), L'Herbier obtained a contract from Gaumont to make two more films as part of the 'Gaumont-Série Pax', which eventually became six, including his most impressionistic work, *El Dorado* (1921).

With the foundation of his own film production company, Cinégraphique, in 1922, L'Herbier created a platform for realising his own cinematographic projects, as well as those of other young filmmakers, including his close collaborators Claude Autant-Lara and Jaque Catelain. His next films *Juan and Faust* (1922), *L'Inhumaine (The Inhuman Woman)* (1923) and *Le Vertige (The Living Image)* (1926) constitute a bold showcase of some of the most important formal manifestations in French modernist art, design and architecture. It was in this period that L'Herbier firmly



Marcel L'Herbier, studio portrait. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.



Marcel L'Herbier (far right of photo) during the filming of *L'Épervier* (The Sparrowhawk) 1933.  
Courtesy Les Documents Cinématographiques and Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

established himself as an important figure of the cinematic avant-garde, not least because of his ambitious plan to make cinema into a synthesis of contemporary visual arts and music. L'Herbier's last silent film, *L'Argent* (*Money*, 1928), was made – somewhat ironically – after the arrival of sound. The audacious adaptation of Emile Zola's 1890 novel of the same name has been praised for its ambitious use of space, the virtuosity of its mises-en-scène, its rhythmic camera movements and the complexity of its characters.

The economic crisis of the 1930s and the growing expense of sound film productions brought to an end much of the avant-garde experimentation of the silent era. With *L'Enfant de l'amour* (*The Child of Love*, 1929/30) and *Le Parfum de la dame en noir* (*Scent of the Woman in Black*, 1931). L'Herbier began to make sound films, at first combining explorations of the possibilities of sound with his old interest in high stylisation and illusionism. Throughout the 1930s L'Herbier went on to work with a range of genres which included comedy, féerie, drama, thriller and fashion film.

In 1943-4 L'Herbier founded and became the head of the film school IDHEC whose alumni include Alain Resnais, Louis Malle and Costa-Gavras among others. During his long career he released 58 films and produced over 200 cultural programmes for television. In addition to his filmmaking and educational work, he also authored numerous articles, commentaries and books in which he put forward his theories of cinema as an art form. Ahead of the New Wave in the 1960s, L'Herbier argued for the recognition of the film director as an *auteur*.

# MARCEL L'HERBIER: A SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY, 1918 - 1939

Marlène Van de Castele

## ROSE-FRANCE

France, 1918.

With Jaque Catelain, Claude-France Aïssé (Marguerite Francès), Francis-Byron Kuhn. Costume design Claude Autant-Lara. Sets Georges Lepape, Donatien, Jaque Catelain, Claude Autant-Lara.

## LE CARNAVAL DES VÉRITÉS

(*The Carnival of Truths*), France, 1919.

With Suzanne Desprès, Jaque Catelain, Marcelle Pradot, Paul Capellani, Claude France (Diane Ferval), Marcelle Chantal. Costume design Callot Soeurs. Sets Claude Autant-Lara and Michel Duffet.

## LE BERCAIL

(*The Fold*), France, 1919.

With Marcelle Pradot, Paul Capellani, Jaque Catelain, Claire Prélia, Armand Tallier. Costume design Marcelle Pradot. Sets Robert-Jules Garnier.

## EL DORADO

France, 1921.

With Eve Francis, Jaque Catelain, Marcelle Pradot, Claire Prélia, Philippe Hériat, Paulais, Edith Réal. Costume design Alberto Cavalcanti. Sets Louis Le Bertre, Robert-Jules Garnier, Jaque Catelain.

## DON JUAN ET FAUST

(*Don Juan and Faust*), France, 1922.

With Jaque Catelain, Marcelle Pradot, Philippe Hériat. Costume design and sets Claude Autant-Lara.

## L'INHUMAINE

(*The Inhuman Woman*), France, 1924.

With Jaque Catelain, Georgette Leblanc, Philippe Hériat, Marcelle Pradot, Georges Antheil, Jean Borlin et les Ballets suédois. Costume design Paul Poiret, Yose, Maison Granier. Sets Claude Autan-Lara, Alberto Cavalcanti, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Fernand Léger.

## LE VERTIGE

(*The Living Image*) France, 1926.

With Emmy Lynn, Jaque Catelain, Roger Karl, Claire Prélia. Costume design Jacques Manuel, Sonia Delaunay, Yose; gowns supplied by Germaine Lecomte, Drecoll and others. Sets Robert Mallet-Stevens, Pierre Chareau, Robert Delaunay, Jean Lurçat, René Lalique.

## L'ARGENT

(*Money*) France, 1928

With Brigitte Helm, Marie Glory, Pierre Alcover, Henry Victor, Antonin Artaud, Alfred Abel, Jules Berry, Yvette Guilbert. Costume design Jacques Manuel, Louise Boulanger. Sets Lazare Meerson, Andre Barsacq, Jaque Catelain, Pierre Chareau.

## L'ENFANT DE L'AMOUR

(*The Child of Love*), France, 1929.

With Emmy Lynn, Marie Glory, Jaque Catelain, Jean Angelo, Marcelle Pradot. Costume design Jacques Manuel, Germaine Lecomte, maison Margot, Henri Vergne, Agnès. Sets Lucien Aguettand, Robert Gys.

## LE PARFUM DE LA DAME EN NOIR

(*Scent of the Woman in Black*), France, 1931.

With Roland Toutain, Huguette Duflos, Kissa Kouprine, Van Daële, Bélières, Vera Engels. Costume design Jacques Manuel. Sets Jacques Manuel.

## L'ÉPERVIER

(*The Sparrowhawk*), France, 1933.

With Charles Boyer, Natalie Paley, Jean Marais, Marguerite Templey, Loni Nest. Costume design Jacques Manuel, Lucien Lelong. Sets René Moulaert.

## LES HOMMES NOUVEUX

(*The New Men*), France, 1936.

With Natalie Paley, Harry Baur, Gabriel Signoret, Jean Marais. Costume design Jacques Manuel. Sets Robert Gys.

## ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR

France, 1938.

With Yvonne Printemps, Pierre Fresnay, Junie Astor, André Lefaur, Jaque Catelain, Madeleine Sologne, Pierre Larquey. Costume design Jacques Manuel, Lanvin. Sets Ernest H. Albrecht, Karl Weber.

## LA MODE RÊVÉE

France, 1939.

With Gaby Morlay, Evelyne Beaune, Jaque Catelain, Eve Francis, Jacques Henley, Lisette Lanvin, Drue Layton, Solange Sicard, René Simon, Edward Stirling. Costume design Souplet; dresses supplied by Lanvin, Lucien Lelong, Paquin, Patou, Schiaparelli, Germaine Lecomte, Worth.

# FASHION AND COSTUME DESIGNERS IN THE WORK OF L'HERBIER: SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

Marlène Van de Castele



Louise Boulanger, evening dress, *Femina*, April 1930. Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.



Jaque Catelain posing in a Sonia Delaunay dressing gown for *Le Vertige*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1926. Courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

## LOUISE BOULANGER (1878-1950)

Both before and during the period she ran her own business, Louise Boulanger worked for established couture houses such as Madeleine Chéruit and Callot Sœurs. She and her husband launched their salon *Louiseboulanger* in 1927, its name being an amalgamation of their two names, Louise Melenotte and Louis Boulanger. Located at 3 rue de Berri, the salon moved in 1935 to 6 rue Royale and eventually closed in 1939, at the onset of the Second World War. Louise Boulanger became known for modifying the popular 1920s 'garçonne' style of straight, boyish cut by adding more volume at the hips and lengthening hemlines for a more elegant, feminine look. In 1928 she collaborated with the designer Jacques Manuel on the costumes for Brigitte Helm in Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Argent*.

## SONIA DELAUNAY (1885- 1979)

An important figure among the interwar modernists, Sonia Delaunay brought together the worlds of painting, art theory, fashion, textiles, interior design, theatre and cinema. She was born in Ukraine, grew up in St Petersburg and at the age of 18 moved to Europe to study art. While at the Académie de la Palette in Paris she met Robert Delaunay whom she married in 1910. Robert's research into the theory of simultaneity (seeking to convey modern life through dynamic expressions of colour, movement and rhythm) became the basis for her own experiments which she soon began to apply to fabrics. Delaunay made her first simultaneous dresses in 1913, using the Delaunays' trademark imagery of intermingled geometric shapes, discs, spirals and zig-zags. She soon expanded

into interior furnishings. In 1917 she relocated to Spain and opened her first fashion business, Casa Sonia, as well as starting her first collaboration for the theatre, with Sergei Diaghilev. Returning to Paris in 1921, she created her famous 'poem dresses', mixing abstract imagery and fragments of avant-garde poetry. In 1924 she established her own *Atelier Simultané* which catered for the fashionable elite, including the film star Gloria Swanson. Together with her husband, Delaunay designed costumes, sets and props for two films – Marcel L'Herbier's *Le Vertige* (1926) and René Le Somptier's *Le P'tit Parigot* (1926). She closed her salon in 1930, and returned to painting.



Drecoll, *Chiffons*, 20 June 1926.  
Courtesy Cally Blackman.



Germaine Lecomte, evening dresses, *Femina*,  
October 1930. Courtesy Central Saint  
Martins Museum & Study Collection.



Lucien Lelong, *Femina*, January 1930. Courtesy  
Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.

## DRECOLL (1902-1931)

The House of Drecoll was founded in Vienna in the 1880s by the baron Christoff von Drecoll, and quickly made its reputation as a supplier to the Imperial Viennese court. The house opened a hugely successful Parisian branch in 1902 at 4, Place de l'Opéra, run by M and Mme Besançon de Wagner who had been Drecoll's manager and designer in Vienna. Before the First World War, Drecoll enjoyed international success and Mme Wagner's designs became associated with luxurious and exquisitely decorated evening gowns. In 1922, the house merged with another fashion house, Beer, but continued to trade as Drecoll. By then, the house was known for short, low-waisted 'flapper gowns' which continued to rely on refined craft. In 1925 it moved to 136, Avenue des Champs Elysées. In 1929 the daughter of the Wagners, Maggy (who later took on the name Maggy Rouff and opened a salon in her own name) became the salon's new manager, together with her husband Pierre. In 1931 the salon merged with that of Mme Agnès, to become Maison Agnès-Drecoll.

## GERMAINE LECOMTE (1920-1957)

Germaine Lecomte was a successful couturière as well as a costume designer. She opened her fashion salon in 1920 in rue Richepanse, with her first designs characterised by an elegant, supple and sporty silhouette. In 1941 she moved her salon from rue Royale to 9 avenue Matignon and pursued her business in spite of wartime austerity and restrictions. Throughout her career she combined practical, comfortable daywear and sportswear with fantasy couture. An acute self-promoter, Lecomte not only utilised the press to her advantage but also theatre and cinema. In 1947 she represented haute couture at the Cannes Film Festival and opened several boutiques in Paris, Cannes and Biarritz. Her salon closed in 1957 due to health problems.

## LUCIEN LE LONG (1889-1958)

Born in Paris, Lucien Lelong learned the dressmaking trade from his parents (who owned a small couture house) and uncle (a cloth merchant). In 1918 he took over the family business at place de la Madeleine, moving it to a new location at 16 avenue Matignon in 1924. The following year he participated in the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes in Paris, presenting his 'kinetic line' which was characterised by a supple, dynamic silhouette. Lelong was among the first couturiers to introduce ready-to-wear collections, albeit still aimed at the luxury market. His vision was to combine refined aesthetics and high quality with an industrial and commercial model of production. In 1927 he married Russian émigré Natalie Paley, a member of the Romanov family, who debuted as a mannequin in his salon. Their marriage lasted ten years. In 1937 Lelong became president of the Chambre syndicale de la haute-couture.



Brigitte Helm in *L'Argent*, Marcel L'Herbier, 1928. Costume by Jacques Manuel. Chevron light panel designed by Jaque Catelain. © Marie-Ange L'Herbier, courtesy Bibliothèque du Film (BIFI), Paris.

## JACQUES MANUEL

(1897-1968)

Jacques Manuel began his career as an art department assistant during the shooting of Marcel L'Herbier's *Le Vertige* in 1926. Having tried his hand at accessories, make-up and editing, he eventually moved into costume design in 1928 when L'Herbier asked him to design costumes for his last silent film, *L'Argent*. Manuel went on to collaborate with L'Herbier until 1938, dressing prominent actresses such as Natalie Paley, Gaby Morlay, Yvonne Printemps and Huguette Duflos among others. After the Second World War Manuel directed two of his own films, *Une grande fille toute simple* (1948) and *Julie de Carneilhan* (1950). He also wrote a comprehensive article, 'Esquisse d'une histoire du costume de cinéma' for *La revue du cinéma* (no 19-20, 1949), on the subject of costume design in cinema.



Paul Poiret evening coat, *Gazette du Bon Ton*, no2, March 1920. Courtesy Central Saint Martins Museum & Study Collection.

## PAUL POIRET

(1879-1944)

The 'King of Fashion' was not only a seminal figure in early-twentieth-century haute couture but also a versatile designer who contributed to the fields of perfumery, interior decoration and textiles (through his *Maison Martine*) as well as costume design for theatre and film. Having gained experience at two renowned couture houses, Doucet and Worth, he founded his own salon in 1903 at rue Auber. Poiret's name is commonly associated with the introduction of a simpler, straight-cut silhouette, the abandonment of the corset (he was in fact neither the first nor only designer at his time to do so) and the championing of theatrical orientalism with its brilliant colour palette. Through his ambitious collaborations with artists, illustrators, photographers and filmmakers, his innovations extended beyond design, into the realms of modern fashion representation, entrepreneurship and promotion. Unable to keep in step with the changing requirements of postwar couture clients, Poiret's business declined throughout the 1920s and eventually closed in 1929.



Yose, illustrated by Marc Luc, *Le Théâtre-Comœdia Illustré*, 1923. Courtesy www.diktats.com.

## YOSE

A 'master dressmaker' with a salon located at 97 de l'Avenue des Champs Elysées, M. Yose was, during the 1910s and 1920s, a much sought-after men's tailor. His aim was to create effortlessly elegant clothing which would also be highly practical and 'harmonious'. Yose was one of the personal tailors to both Marcel L'Herbier and his star Jaque Catelain, and his suits feature in several of the filmmaker's silent films.

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