

An Interdisciplinary Reading of the Film Entr'acte

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Preamble

This chapter draws on film history and theory, on philosophy and on discourses in screendance. Furthermore, it brings together a 1920s filmmaker, avant-garde artists, a film theorist from the 1940s, Belà Balàzs, a philosopher from the 1980s, Gilles Deleuze, as well as a few other figures. Why such disparate material, and why, especially, Deleuze?

In an essay on movement and stillness from 2006, the author Yve Lomax points out that the birth of cinema happened exactly at the time when philosophy was trying to put movement into thought.¹ Lomax refers to that fact that ideas, concepts, and thought itself were altered through a reconfiguration of the idea of movement in and around the 1900s, through the writing of French philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson formulated a fundamentally new concept of movement, space, and time, undertaking a perceptual shift whereby a notion of movement as a fundamental illusion, produced through the sequencing of temporal parts that are in themselves immobile, is replaced by a concept in which these constituent parts are themselves mobile and in constant motion, producing a duration which is equivalent to change over time. This shift and the recognition of the possibility of true change over time provoked a shift from a classic philosophy that believed in the eternal order of things, to a new, modern philosophy based on the idea of mobility, the new, and the singular. Henri Bergson's new idea of motion coincided with the advent of film and became symptomatic of the wider twentieth century; it found an expression also in new architectural forms and urban planning, new modes of transport and nomadic lifestyles, fluid concepts of identity and gender, and so on. Whole categories aligned themselves with the idea of mobility, as if assembled on a large slippery slope. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze is

rooted in this shift and is concerned with thinking in terms of motion. As Lomax writes: “Deleuze never stops attempting to put motion into thought. How to keep thought moving? For Deleuze, this is the real question.”²

As a philosopher of movement, Deleuze therefore makes for a good companion in the exploration of the development of film as art and of *Entr'acte*, a cinematic avant-garde project of the early twentieth century. *Entr'acte* was an adventurous collaboration between artists from different disciplines, who came together to celebrate motion and all that which it entailed. Francis Picabia was anti-art and against reason; Renè Clair was disappointed with what film had produced until then. In *Entr'acte*, they attacked bourgeois conventions and their aesthetic traditions, and dismantled the conventional narratives associated with film. Deleuze's theory of cinema is highly sympathetic to their endeavour and concerns itself exactly with the kind of shattered image world which the artists celebrated. Perhaps Deleuze's philosophy also forms part of the legacy of that time; as the French writer and philosopher Catherine Clément notes concerning Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*: “Politics, ethnology, music, women's work, all that ceases to exist: it's philosophy. Or maybe not. It's writing, and maybe thought.”³ Clément's comment highlights the porosity and fluidity of Deleuze's discourse and the uncertainty of its boundaries. She is not even certain if it still is philosophy. Similarly we cannot be sure if *Entr'acte* should be described as a film.

Historical Context and Cultural Debates

In the 1920s, avant-garde artists turned to film as a new medium even though it was not yet established as a medium for making art. As Gilles Deleuze points out in *Cinema 1*, the possibility of film to display actual movement did not correspond to the current remit of art,

“since art seemed to uphold the claims of a higher synthesis of movement, and to remain linked to the poses and forms that science had rejected.”⁴ Film, it seemed, was too realistic, too closely mirroring the flux of the everyday to be considered Art in the traditional sense. The early film clips by the Lumière brothers and the chase films by Mack Sennett were dismissed as amusement for the proletariat, akin to fairground rides and rollercoasters. Some visual artists, however, like Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, as well as filmmaker René Clair, saw the subversive potential that film could offer. A detailed examination of the making of *Entr’acte* will reveal their visions and explore the differences between Dadaist and Surrealist ambitions, in order to pinpoint the exact “co-ordinates” of the film within the Parisian avant-gardes.

Key to the project was Rolf de Maré, an important Parisian figure of the 1920s and the founder of the Ballets Suédois [Swedish Ballet], a famous hothouse for new avant-garde productions. In 1924, he invited Francis Picabia and the composer Eric Satie to make a full evening ballet, giving the artists a carte blanche to experiment and challenge what dance could be.⁵ Picabia and Satie agreed to invite the young filmmaker René Clair to direct a film for the interlude of the ballet, based on initial ideas by Picabia. Clair had only made one film by then, *Paris qui dort* (1923), and *Entr’acte* was a brilliant opportunity to make his second.

The evening ballet was designed to enrage and challenge the bourgeois audiences of Paris. The story goes that Picabia titled the performance *Relâche*, meaning *Theatre Closed* or *Performance Suspended*, in order to avert potential censorship as both he and the Ballet Suédois were known for outrageous performances. In actual fact, the opening performance was cancelled, by coincidence, because of illness of the principal dancer, Jean Borlin. Audiences went home, enraged and delighted at the same time, believing they had been part of a DADA hoax. However the performance did eventually go ahead as planned on the following nights.

Picabia conceived *Entr'acte* as the cinematic parts of the ballet with a short prologue and a longer film for the intermission. The work breaks therefore with the convention of an interval in ballet performances which would normally allow the audiences to socialize and enjoy their own company. René Clair's realisation of Picabia's proposition is perhaps best described as a fast and confusing collage of images and scenes, devoid of narrative and intended to touch the audience by audio-visual means—that is, through a visceral composition of images and sounds which attack the senses of the audiences and give them an almost physical experience. Clair uses a series of Parisian locations such as rooftops, streets, a fairground, and the countryside, and plays mischievously with the spectator's expectations as well as their moral codes. The first section functions as a curtain raiser and shows the slow-motion loading of a canon which fires straight into the auditorium. The second section is screened during the interval of the live performance and begins with a collage of up-side-down rooftops, intercut with images of dolls with rubber balloons as heads which inflate and deflate. This is followed by the infamous close-up from below of a dancer in a tutu who is later revealed to be a bearded man and which is intercut with street scenes and a boxing attack with white gloves, again directed at the audience; the music, composed by Satie, repeats in this moment the musical motif which first underscores the scene of the canon that is fired at the audience. The following film section is a collage of burning matches on a head, again intercut with the ballerina from below; this is followed by a chess board game on the rooftops which is layered with further street scenes and combined with a more lyrical sequence of the ballet dancer. Eventually everything is submerged in water; at this point the musical motif of the attack returns this time underscoring a huntsman firing at an ostrich egg and a second huntsman shooting the first; this leads to a funeral procession whereby the hearse is drawn by a camel; the procession begins in ungainly slow motion and turns into a seemingly unending chase across Paris and out into the countryside; along the route a

paralysed man regains his legs and eventually the dead man or conjurer falls out of his coffin and makes everyone disappear, including himself. Finally, the film promises to end when a character jumps out of the screen towards the audience. He is, however, kicked in his head in such a way that he flies back through the screen and into the film from which he comes, thereby undermining the sense of conclusion the audience may have been waiting for.

In summary, *Entr'acte* is a violent film which directly targets its audience. The images mock their sense of propriety and the non-logical sequencing taunts anyone who tries to make sense. No doubt *Entr'acte* is a subversive element in an already subversive spectacle. But should *Entr'acte* be attributed to Dada or Surrealism? In the 20s the artist Picabia was best known as a painter and as a founding member of Dada, which is why audiences considered *Relâche* to be a Dada event. As George Baker demonstrates in a detailed study of Picabia and his relations with fellow Parisian artists, Picabia's work had been a sort of dialogic practice, informed by the collective of artists like Tristan Tzara, Louis Aragon, Duchamp and André Breton.⁶ Picabia, however, refused any classification of himself by the time he conceived of the film. He had officially broken with Dada in 1921 and Dada itself imploded in around 1922 or 1923.⁷ At the time Breton had started to form a new circle of friends around him and Picabia's relation with Breton turned into a rivalry, leading to an angry, public split. Picabia therefore never joined the Surrealists even though he continued to work alongside André Breton and, in the last edition of Picabia's own magazine, *391*, in 1924, Picabia described himself, despite all differences, as the stage manager for André Breton's Surrealism. André Breton in turn praised Picabia's work on the occasion of Picabia's funeral as "an *oeuvre* based on the supremacy of caprice, on a refusal to follow, entirely directed towards freedom—even to displeasure."⁸

In 1924, the year in which Picabia and Clair made *Entr'acte*, Breton published the Surrealist manifesto while Picabia launched a new movement called "Instantanéisme," or

Instantanism, meaning Snapshot-ism, generally considered to have been an attack on Breton's Surrealism.⁹ Picabia declared: "Instantanéism does not want great men, believes only in today, wants liberty for all, believes only in life, believes only in perpetual motion."¹⁰ The notion of perpetual motion can be read as a rejection of art movements and formations such as Breton's Surrealism. Jennifer Mundy describes Instantanéism as a "post-dada approach to life and art, that embraced novelty, pleasure, optimism, love, laughter, and an immediate appeal to the senses without concern for convention, the past, morality or rationalism."¹¹ This anti-surrealist, post-dada approach is evident in *Entr'acte*, and aptly describes its irreverent tone and visceral qualities. *Entr'acte* could not have been a surrealist endeavour, not least because André Breton and the Surrealists did not appreciate the humorous music and style of composer Eric Satie.¹² Furthermore, the official public announcement of the ballet *Relâche* and *Entr'acte*, presumably authored by Picabia, confirms the event as a post-dada, Snapshot-ist Ballet. It introduces the show as "An instantanist ballet in two acts and a cinematic interlude and the Dog's Tail by Francis Picabia. Music by M. Erik Satie. Décor by M. Picabia. Cinematic interlude by René Clair. Choreography by Jean Borlin."¹³ The event constituted the perfect opportunity for Picabia to unveil his new concept.¹⁴

In the preceding years Picabia and his fellow Dadaists had distinguished themselves through a fierce critique of bourgeois modernity and its materialism, which they considered morally corrupt for allowing the unprecedented destruction of WWI. As Malcolm Turvey points out in his discussion of avant-garde films, the Dadaists' anarchistic and nihilistic tone was directed against the rationalism of an Enlightenment-style modernity, which appeared to be nothing but a veneer for a derailed society.¹⁵ Dadaists revolted against bourgeois hypocrisy and all its institutions, arts, and values, and advocated instead immediacy and a sensual, instinctual self. Picabia promoted the freedom of the individual in the sense of a

liberation from one's own rationality and from institutional constraints.¹⁶ Picabia's critique was directed at what he called a "comatose state of indifference" and laziness of mediocre people, but he was also critical of Dada itself. He wanted "a man who was influenced by no one, who was preoccupied neither with Modernism nor Cubism nor Dadaism; who would be neither Socialist nor Communist nor the opposite; a man who would quite simply be himself."¹⁷

However, as Marshall Berman argues in a study of modernity, avant-garde artists were, to some extent, "denouncing modern life in the name of values that modernity itself [had] created."¹⁸ Malcolm Turvey further contends that modernity was contradictory: "The changes it brings can be liberatory and oppressive at one and the same time. In the case of Dada, the personal freedom of modern life is celebrated in a radical form, while the instrumental rationality that has enabled it, is rejected as a stultifying, deadening constraint on that freedom."¹⁹ Individualism was not invented by the artists but advocated by modernity itself. In other words, the avant-garde artists were part of the society they targeted and their critique and rebellious aesthetic need to be taken with a pinch of salt.

The ambivalence towards the values of modernity is also visible in Clair's *Entr'acte*. Turvey suggests that:

... the chase [scenes] in *Entr'acte* cannot be seen simply as an act of negation and destruction, as part of a Dadaist assault on bourgeois art and society.

While it certainly ... implies that bourgeois civilisation is self-destructive ... it also affirms, even celebrates, film as an art of motion through a controlled, skilful use of accelerating rhythm in editing and camera movement, as well as in graphic contrasts.²⁰

The celebration of motion in *Entr'acte* effectively colludes with those aspects of modernity which privilege mobility. According to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, the

modernist paradigm as a whole is constituted by a kinetic drive, while the modern subject is construed as “being-towards-movement.”²¹ Following Sloterdijk, “progress” is assured through the individual’s self-motivation, a progression that is at first self-initiated and subsequently self-perpetuating. And, just as modern progress is the move towards mobility, modern “freedom” is measured in degrees of mobility.²² *Entr’acte* enacts precisely this construct in which freedom is equated with mobility and it seems reasonable to think that the work satisfied Picabia’s vision. For Picabia, cinema offered radical possibilities because of its unlimited potential to produce movement and, to produce a “movement of thought unconstrained by reason.”²³

Clair pursued a similar cinematic vision but for different reasons; as a filmmaker he was not so much “anti-art” but interested in advancing film as an art form. In particular he wanted to challenge the narrative conventions that were popular with the bourgeoisie. In *Reflections on the Cinema*, Clair writes: “No sooner had the cinema liberated the image from its original immobility than it began expressing itself in disappointing formulas.”²⁴ By disappointing formulas Clair refers to theatrical conventions and to the fact that much of film functioned as another kind of theatre with big sets and epic narratives. He was interested instead in the potential of film to directly affect audiences, to address and to attack their senses. Critical of film as a medium of representation, Clair wanted to “restore the cinema to what it was at the outset,” the cinema of the Lumière brothers and Mack Sennet, cinema magic and the populist chase genre, because it offered the kinetic viewing experience he was after. He writes:

... cinema should not be restricted to representation. It can create.... Thanks to ... rhythm, the cinema can become a new force which, abandoning the logic of facts and the reality of objects, will engender a series of visions hitherto unknown and unconceivable.²⁵

Clair's emphasis on the rhythm of film indicates an interest in the mechanics of film itself and in its capacity to relate to audiences like dance or music. It is not surprising, therefore, that Clair was very fond of composer Eric Satie's contribution to the project. As Clair records in his reflections on the first night of *Entr'acte*: "Satie, the old master of young music, noted down each sequence with meticulous care and so prepared the first composition written for the cinema 'shot by shot', at a time when films were still silent."²⁶

While Clair used *Entr'acte* to push his idea of film, the project was also the product of a closely knit artistic community who contributed in front of and behind the camera. Jean Borlin, choreographer of the Ballet Suédois, did the choreography for *Entr'acte* and was one of the main characters; the artists Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp both feature as performers playing chess; and Picabia and Satie feature in the opening scene loading and charging the large cannon. Conceived for and premiered with *Relâche*, it formed part of the last project staged by Rolf de Maré, mentioned above, during his seven-year lease at the Theatre des Champs-Élysées. De Maré closed the company after *Relâche*, feeling that he could go no further at that point in time, a statement which confirms the significance and success of *Relâche* as an avant-garde production.²⁷ In his later reflections on *Entr'acte*, Clair recalls some of the responses by Parisian critics and writes:

Alexandre Arnaud ... bestowed the most flattering praise on us. Having seen *Entr'acte* again at some film club, a long time after the night at the Champs-Élysées, he wrote: The film is still young. Even today you want to hiss it.²⁸

It is interesting that *Entr'acte* survived and was also well received as a stand-alone film. It had always been designed to be more than a single-screen piece. Conceived as one part of a bigger project, it was different and more "open" than the self-contained films that were popular at the time. Chris Townsend argues in a review of avant-garde film practices that the linear, self-contained, and narrative structure of conventional film mirrored too

closely the regulated temporality of industrial production and labor, and that both Picabia and Clair were fighting against this imposition on the modern subject.²⁹ Townsend writes: “Like Duchamp, Picabia has a theory of ‘kinematics’ well before he is involved in the production of a film; indeed, it is a theory whose temporal dynamics would largely prohibit realization within a film that functioned as a self-contained work.”³⁰ To allow for a broader spectrum of experiences, despite the mechanical regularity of moving images and its indifference to attending audiences, the artists pushed the medium of film towards a more episodic structure. Representational images alternated with semi abstract visual patterns, creating tensions through fast cuts and changing rhythms. As Townsend writes, avant-garde film at the time

... emphasized ... the relationship of film, and projection of light in abstracted patterns and rhythms, to other forms of performance and communication—to the extent that we can describe it as “intermedial,” with its principal relationships in the traditions of avant-garde poetry and performance.³¹

Townsend refers to Dada traditions and to their attempt to break down the boundaries between arts practices. These correlated with avant-garde paradigms that were concerned with disrupting a sense of instrumentalism and passive audiences. With *Entr’acte*, Picabia and Clair returned to a cinematic tradition of the early 1900s. As Clair recalls, “When I met [Picabia], he explained that he wanted to have film projected between the two acts of the ballet, as was done before 1914, during the interval at café concerts.”³² Conceiving film as parts of a dance in a live event constituted an exciting opportunity and an alternative to cinematic conventions. For the avant-garde artists this combination of dance and film served several agendas at once: it celebrated movement and implied freedom; it was a rebellious gesture against the prevailing logic of progress; it sabotaged the privileging of rationality and it challenged bourgeois narrative cinema; and furthermore, it explored film as a non-linguistic practice that was later advanced by film theorists like the Hungarian, Béla Balázs.

Film as non-linguistic and choreographic material

Much film theory discusses film as another kind of “language,” in terms of linguistic structures, but Balàzs proposed that the cinematic image could be an unmediated means of expression. In his “Theory of the Film” (1948), Balàzs suggests that cinema can communicate directly via the body and that it does not need the mediation of language, through which much is lost as in a process of translation. He writes: “It is the expressive movement, the gesture, that is the aboriginal mother-tongue of the human race”³³; he also argues that through film “we are beginning to re-learn and remember this tongue.”³⁴ Balàzs hails emotions and non-rational responses, and laments an impoverishment of experience and atrophy of the human existence, holding modern progress responsible for this development. In his argument, a historical and authentic form of expression is poised against the rationalization inherent in language and in modernity; one might argue today that there is not much ground for such primitivist mythology.³⁵ However, Balàzs’ writing remains useful as a theoretical context for the cinematic explorations of the early twentieth century. It appropriately frames the cinema that Clair and other avant-garde filmmakers were developing, a cinematic form that aims to bypass the rational self and “touches” audiences through audio-visual means to produce an immediate, kinetic experience.

This kinetic experience is achieved in *Entr’acte* through a wild array of movement with boxing gloves, guns, and rifles, which point and shoot at audiences; characters who jump and run in slow motion, with frequent cuts between locations and extreme camera angles; and through a speeding up of movement across shots. As described above, in the second half, the film turns into a spectacular chase with a rollercoaster ride which produces a sense of vertigo in the viewer. Throughout the film, different scenarios follow in quick succession, giving a physical sensation of on-going movement and flow. In terms of content,

however, the film consists of a bizarre series of comic, tragic, and abstract images which do not really make sense. Narrative elements appear but they function mostly as teasers, and a few lyrical moments don't relate to anything else. Even the appearance of the ballerina, which could have constituted a pleasing and familiar sight, is spoiled through an awkward portrayal that mocks the audience's pleasures and expectations.

Entr'acte effectively splits the experience of the audience: on one hand, the viewers are taken on a thrilling kinetic journey and have a sense of movement; on the other hand, their attempts at making meaning are frustrated because the images don't add up. This produces a particular kind of disturbance; as Daniel Barnett writes in *Movement as Meaning* (2008): "Where the mind can move, there's meaning. If we get it we can move on, if not we get stuck."³⁶ Barnett refers to the fact that we like to "follow," both mentally and physically, but *Entr'acte* refuses to provide a coherent experience. The viewer is taken on a sensorial journey but mentally is stuck. Perhaps this was what the critic Alexandre Arnaud referred to when he wrote at a later date that "the film is still young. Even today you want to hiss it," in that the film continues to touch, thrill and bewilder its audiences.³⁷

Deleuze's Movement-image and Time-image³⁸

By advancing a strong kinetic cinematic experience, *Entr'acte* is not only significant as a film of the Parisian Avant-garde, but is key to the wider development of twentieth-century film, effectively signalling a new kind of cinema that is still relevant today. In the following section I will review Gilles Deleuze's proposition of a shift from movement-image and time-image to theorize this new cinema and the contribution of *Entr'acte* to this shift.

In the mid-1980s, Deleuze takes up the discussion of film as a non-linguistic form, considering film unreservedly as "non-language material" and proposing that the image cannot be assimilated to an utterance, or be replaced by utterance.³⁹ More specifically,

Deleuze writes about the movement of the image as that which resists assimilation.⁴⁰ The notion of movement as an excess that is not assimilated and that defies a linguistic forming of resemblance and representation provides a useful lens for the work of Picabia and Clair and their instantanist aims. It also echoes the writing of Balász in that both Deleuze and Balász attempt to theorize the affective power of the filmic image.⁴¹

Investigating the possibility of film as “non-language material,” Deleuze develops a taxonomy of film that differentiates between a classic cinema of “movement-images” and a modern cinema of “time-images.” Deleuze describes the classic “movement-image” as a construction, or montage, of action across space constituting an indirect representation of time. He argues that the movement-image is a clichéd representation of objects, in which the viewer perceives what he wants to see.⁴² Drawing on the writing of Henri Bergson, Deleuze points out that we never perceive a thing in its entirety, but rather through sensory-motor schemata. A cinema that is based on sensory-motor images is therefore limited in the kind of spectatorship it invites. In the montage cinema prevalent in the early 1900s, the spectator would therefore have been entertained and not challenged, indulged with clichés rather than confronted with real images.⁴³

Deleuze proposes that a shift or reversal in the priorities of the image took place when the classic sensory-motor image was replaced by a pure optical and sound image which subordinated movement to time. Deleuze references *Entr'acte* as one of the earlier films in this cinematic shift, along with Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and some of Buster Keaton's burlesque scenes. According to Deleuze, *Entr'acte* pioneers this kind of filmmaking, but the new time-image is only fully realized in the 1940s in the work of Orson Wells, Fellini, Renoir, Antonioni, Ozu, and others. Deleuze writes about this new image: “the sound as well as the visual elements of the [new] image enter into internal relations which means that the whole image has to be ‘read,’ no less than seen, readable as well as visible.”⁴⁴

Referring to the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard's formula, "It isn't blood, it's some red," he argues that internal elements and relations in the image dominate any representation of external objects.⁴⁵ This concern with internal relations within the image is also discussed in *Cinema 1*, where Deleuze first refers to Godard's formula as part of a discussion on colour and its capacity to affect the image itself and all that is within it.⁴⁶ He reflects on the power of aspects like color to absorb characters, objects, and entire scenes, describing color itself as affect, as a "virtual conjunction of all the objects which it picks up."⁴⁷ The capacity of elements to affect and to bear the impact of other elements extends to the relation between image and spectator. More than, or perhaps instead of, a symbolic value of objects, this kind of image offers a play of affects—a register of changing intensities—and addresses the spectator in the same way, implicating him/her as a resonant body. As formulated in *Cinema 2*, the new time-image "brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or justifiable character, because it no longer has to be "justified."⁴⁸ Deleuze's statements indicate the potential of this kind of image making and resonate with the vision of Picabia, Clair, and the Dadaist avant-garde. Even though *Entr'acte* is still in black and white, it could be said to be playing with changing intensities, surrendering or even suppressing the symbolic value of objects and scenes to provoke instead a play of affects in the viewer. The bizarre array of scenes in *Entr'acte*, with the inflating and deflating dolls heads, architectural abstractions, suspended egg and submerged city, the shooting, the white boxing gloves and the burning matchsticks, appear as things in themselves; nothing is justified. Instead of offering narrative content, the film subjects its bourgeois audience to the affective power of the image.

Whilst commenting on very few films of the 1920s avant-garde or on other experimental films, Deleuze assigns *Entr'acte* a pivotal role in his film history. Arguing that European cinema was generally interested in an "automatic subjectivity," an exploration of

phenomena such as hypnosis, hallucination, nightmare, and dreams,⁴⁹ Deleuze cites *Entr'acte* as an example of this kind of work. It consists, he writes, of “unstable [sets] of floating memories, images of a past in general which move past at dizzying speed, as if time were achieving a profound freedom.... Dissolves and superimpositions arrive with a vengeance.”⁵⁰ Deleuze’s reference to dream in this statement does not follow the conventional use of the term, which would imply an imaginative narrative or a more or less coherent representation of the unconscious. Instead, Deleuze describes a hallucinatory and disjunctive visual structure, which lacks precisely the narrative coherence that could be associated with the notion of dream. Perhaps mindful of this ambiguity, Deleuze proceeds by describing the images as “malleable sheets of the past,” which are part of a circularity in which each image is significant only as part of a chain of images.⁵¹ Each image becomes “actualized” through the following image, which, according to Deleuze, “itself plays the role of virtual image being actualized in a third, and so on to infinity.”⁵² This proposition is clear and interesting again with regards to the array of images in *Entr'acte*: while each scenario is a scene in itself, it also fades away as soon as another image appears on the screen. The images do not add up as one might expect in a conventional narrative, but give way to that which follows.

Deleuze’s proposition of a circularity in which each element is significant only as part of a chain of elements can also be found in other aspects of early twentieth-century culture, such as in the visual arts, literature, and architecture. Parallels are evident, for example, between Clair’s cinematographic flow and the urban circulatory system of the early 1900s in Paris. In order to modernize the city, the Parisian Baron Georges Eugène Haussman, Prefect of Paris, had been given the task to revolutionise the urban space, and to create a system of “new roads as arteries in an urban circulatory system.”⁵³ At that time cities came to be seen as organisms, both in spatial and in structural terms, which facilitated mobility, growth, and radical change. The changes in urban life which followed are discussed in Marshall Berman’s

All That Is Solid Melts Into Air (1983). The book's title references Marx's *Manifesto Of the Communist Party*, published 1848, in which Marx critiques the bourgeoisie for the destruction of social conditions and for generating uncertainty and agitation in the name of productivity and progress.⁵⁴ Berman investigates the effect of the bourgeois ideology on the architecture of the city at the turn of the twentieth century and confirms the dissolution of social boundaries this provoked; in Paris thousands of old buildings and neighbourhoods were deliberately destroyed, displacing thousands of people. However, the endeavour provided the stage for a new century and a new society:

It opened up the whole of the city, for the first time in its history, to all its inhabitants. Now, at last, it was possible to move not only within neighbourhoods, but through them. Now, after centuries of life as a cluster of isolated cells, Paris was becoming a unified physical and human space.”⁵⁵

Clair's spectacular viewpoints in *Entr'acte*, the liberal use of locations, and the great race across Parisian sites can also be seen in this wider context of a new spatial mobility as well as in the radical revision of the very idea of change, the whole of which was underpinned by Henri Bergson's concept of movement as constant motion as discussed above. In Clair's film, images and dreams and objects are not metaphors within a linguistic structure but elements in a process that take the spectator on a visual, sensorial journey. One moment gives way to the next.

There is, furthermore, a peculiar redistribution of mobility within the filmed sequences: the main character suffers various forms of paralysis or immobility while the world around him becomes fluid, mobile, and unstable. Deleuze describes this specific filmic environment as a “movement of world” that supplements the normal mobility of the main character, leading to a peculiar conflation in which a person is “motionless at great pace.”⁵⁶ Deleuze's proposition of a cinematic “motionlessness at great pace” could be considered a

significant choreographic thread in *Entr'acte*, and is realized through a number of ploys: first of all there is an inference of death through deadly weapons and the shooting of the huntsman, then there is a suggestion of an invisible dead body at the centre of the funeral; perhaps it is his paralysis that spills over and contaminates the mourners, slowing them down while the funeral hearse speeds up, detaching itself from the procession and racing ahead of its own accord. There is also the suggestion of a disabled or legless man amongst the congregation, who magically “recuperates” his legs halfway through the chase. As the race continues, the world spins faster and faster, turning right, left and upside down. Finally, in the last scene, the coffin rolls into a field, the dead man shakes off his paralysis and turns into a conjurer who makes everyone disappear including himself.

Being motionless at great pace is the kind of sensorial intensity to which Clair aspired in his work. As Turvey writes, Clair was inspired by cinema that provided the viewer with a physical sensation of movement, as in the work of contemporary filmmaker Abel Gance, who was at the forefront of French filmmaking at the time and, like Clair, keen to advance film as art. Recalling Abel Gance’s train ride into the city in the film *La Roue* (1922), Clair describes himself being absorbed by the image as if by a whirlpool.⁵⁷ The chase in *Entr'acte* and some of the cinematic techniques such as the rhythmic accelerating and building of movement across shots may have been inspired by Gance. However, Clair dispensed completely with the melodramatic storylines that ran through films like *La Roue*. In *Entr'acte* the different cinematic techniques no longer support dramatic moments or narratives; rather, they constitute the film in and for themselves. *Entr'acte* is entirely composed of “malleable sheets” as Deleuze would say, in which everything is possible and nothing is true or false, like life itself.⁵⁸

The Choreographic Script

Clair's "movement of world" plays with causality, continuity, and gravity, and uses the whole of Paris as his playground. A Deleuzian approach reads this work as avant-garde cinematography and assigns it a pivotal role in the history of cinema, but the project could equally be read as a seminal choreographic feast. Never mind that the work was conceived and directed by an avant-gardists visual artist and a filmmaker who turned to movement because it allowed them to realize a specific artistic vision, an "image in freedom."⁵⁹ A closer look at the characters that are scattered across the film will reveal more of the choreographic impetus behind the work.

There is, for example, the figure of a disabled man who regains his legs during the chase in *Entr'acte*, a sort of miraculous transformation that is repeated live in Act 1 and Act 2 of the ballet performance, when a male and a female character respectively are wheeled or carried onto the stage only to discard the wheelchair or the stretcher and dance. Clearly the film borrows from, or echoes, a number of ploys from the live performance and the question arises as to what exactly the relation is between the film and the ballet. Based on reconstructions from contemporary accounts, George Baker gives a summary of the live performance on stage which is abbreviated here: following the cinematic prologue, that is *Entr'acte - Part 1*, the performance begins with a single woman, dancer Edith Bornsdorff, coming onto the stage from a seat in the audience, dressed in full cocktail outfit with high heels, smoking and dancing only when the music stops. Jean Borlin follows her onto the stage arriving in a fancy wheelchair, but letting go of it to dance with her around a set of revolving doors. Nine male dancers in black suits join them upon which the female dancer partly undresses to reveal rose-coloured silk tights. Act 1 concludes with one man carrying the woman off stage. After the screening of *Entr'acte - Part 2*, the live show continues and Act 2 reverses the events of Act 1; the male dancers come on stage first and the female dancer is carried in on a stretcher. She gets off the stretcher and dresses while the male

dancers strip down to polka-dot tights and dance, disappointedly, around a female statue, eventually returning to their seats while the woman collects their discarded clothes in a wheelbarrow and also returns to her seat. Act 2 concludes with a small female dancer performing and miming in front of the curtain to a wild song entitled *The Dog's Tail*. Furthermore there is the figure of a fireman who stands on the side of the stage, chain-smoking and pouring water from one bucket into another.⁶⁰ As Baker argues, a movement of reversal carries right through both *Entr'acte* and *Relâche*: the mourners, for example, feed on the hearse's accoutrements, the procession turns into a chase, the legless man starts running, the dead man becomes the conjurer, and the end of the film is not yet the end. Also the much-debated shot of the bearded ballerina is an example for the movement of reversal as the ballerina serves first as an icon of femininity and is later disfigured through male facial hair. Meanwhile, in the live performance, audiences are blinded with the excessive lights of the set, the performers come out of the audience, the female dancer moves only when there is no music and both she and the fireman are smoking; last but not least, Act 1 of the performance is reversed in Act 2. In addition, as Baker argues, there is a reversal in how the different disciplines join forces: "the mediums frustrate one another at their meeting points, rather than fuse in one seamless ensemble."⁶¹ While the music is composed shot by shot and the film and the live event complement each other, each element still remains separate and seemingly interrupts the other. Overall the different mediums do not provide a unified experience. A sense of frustration, which has already been discussed above with regards to the frustrated impulse to making meaning, appears to be the overarching sentiment provoked in this work. It is also reflected in the scene of the nine bachelors who dance either around the one female dancer or around a female statue. And all of the characters are caught by their destiny: they have to live through their story not once but twice, to end up back where they started.

This reading of the scenario of nine bachelors who court a single woman—or bride—invokes the famous work from Picabia’s friend Marcel Duchamp, entitled *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. As George Baker points out, the correlations between the dance performance and the *Large Glass* are striking; in Duchamp’s work a bride is represented in the upper half and the bachelors and mechanical devices in the lower half, all held between two panes of glass. The sculpture was constructed in the years immediately preceding *Relâche*, between 1915-1923, and Picabia was not only a close friend of Duchamp but paid homage to him in several of his works. There are further references to the *Large Glass* in *Entr’acte*, for example through the appearance of Duchamp himself, who is cast as a chess player alongside Man Ray. Also the shots of the ballerina, seen through a glass from underneath and briefly merging with the image of her bachelors through the figure of the bearded dancer, could be read as “the bride stripped bare.” As Baker claims, *Relâche* was “*The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* brought to the stage, to some new meeting place between theatre, music and dance,” as well as to film, in that the ballerina enacts the “*mise-en-scene* of the *Large Glass*, with the Bride above and her bachelors below.”⁶²

Baker’s reading of the ballerina shots is quite different from Erin Brannigan’s, who, in *Dancefilm*, describes the ballerina sequence as “spectacular motion, operating independently of any other element in the film.” She adds that “the activity of dancing is in itself disjunctive, introducing an order of movement that, particularly when highlighted through repetition, duration or altered temporality, is ‘out of step’ with the rest of the film.”⁶³ One could argue instead that the scene is very much in step with the rest of the film, in that the ballerina shots correlate with the slow-motion jumping of Satie and Picabia at the very beginning of the film and with the slow leaps of the mourners at the beginning of the funeral procession; also the repetition and intercutting with other shots is a device frequently

deployed in the film, as for example with the shots of the blow-up dolls. As George Baker notes in his study of *Entr'acte*, even the cross-gender punch line is not unique as travesty runs through the film with more false beards and moustaches as well as a “flapper” in drag amongst the running mourners.⁶⁴ Brannigan’s interpretation is not convincing when compared with Baker’s and appears not to take into account the wider ensemble of live performance and film, which together form a rather coherent visual and kinaesthetic piece of work. I agree with Baker in reading the choreographic core of *Relâche/Entr'acte* as an appropriation and as a tribute to Duchamp. The transposition of this iconic visual art work is, however, shattered and scattered across the different aspects of the production as in a cubist image or a broken mirror, so that nothing is seen whole. *The Large Glass* provided Picabia and Clair, and dancer-choreographer Jean Borlin, with a material that could be celebrated as well as torn apart and mocked.

In *Screendance, Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (2012), Douglas Rosenberg has drawn on the *Large Glass* as a metaphor for the relation of dance (the bride) to technology (her bachelors), in order to signal the potentiality of this marriage as well as to reflect on the on-going schism between dance and technologies.⁶⁵ According to Rosenberg, the *Large Glass* argues, so to speak, that mechanical (re)production is part of the process of creation, not something other, and visualizes eloquently the particular predicament of screendance and its discourses—the enormous attraction and the tension within the artform. *The Large Glass* therefore figures doubly within the history of screendance: as a metaphor for screendance practices and as a work that was instrumental in the historic coming together and falling apart of dance, film, music, and the visual arts in *Entr'acte*.

More research will need to be done to investigate the ramifications and influences *Entr'acte* had on other artists and productions, but it stands as a radical experiment, both with regard to the avant-garde endeavors and in the history of choreographic practices. The

success of the work was due to a shift away from theatre with its literary traditions, linear narratives, and logical sequences, and the move towards dance, music, and the visual arts. Picabia and Clair, together with Borlin, re-envisioned the parameters of both dance and film: a visual art work inspired a choreographic framework which was in turn expanded through the medium of film, while a cinematic vision was realized through choreographic strategies. Turning Paris into a playground in which everything was possible, *Entr'acte* shook off the straightjacket that modern subjects were confined to. As Thomas Carl Wall writes in *Film-Philosophy*,

[Clair] defines an awaiting and a witnessing for which there is no narrative content and no possible citation. This waiting/witnessing is nothing other than a politics. This politics does not take the form of a de-familiarization that reveals either hidden systems of oppression or hidden psycho-historical depths, but is rather a shattering of the normalization of the familiar.⁶⁶

It is not often that a work can be said to shatter the normalization of the familiar, but Clair finds a language, or rather a non-language, with which to do just that. This interest in working with the actual, pure image and with non-linguistic material is what unites dance and film in *Entr'acte*, and is what finds its expression in what we call dancefilm, or screendance. *Entr'acte* is a major project and a milestone in this history.

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Media

Entr'acte (1924). Dir. René Clair. 22min. France.

Paris qui dort (1923). Dir. René Clair. 35min. France.

Le Lys De La Vie (1921). Dir. Loïe Fuller. 15min. France.

La Roue (1922). Dir. Abel Gance. 273min. France.

Abstract: This chapter explores the film *Entr'acte* (Francis Picabia and René Clair, 1924) as an interdisciplinary project that combines cinematographic and choreographic ideas, bringing together artists from the visual arts and film, music and dance. The film constitutes a significant project of the Parisian avant-garde of the 1920s and is driven by a strong conceptual framework. To explore the ideas and dynamics that informed *Entr'acte*, I will focus on Paris in the first three decades of the twentieth century and consider relevant discourses which underpinned cultural, social and economic developments. The chapter will investigate the ambitions of the Parisian avant-garde and Dada in particular, in order to situate *Entr'acte* within the tight net of affiliations and differences.

Entr'acte also constitutes a key moment in a wider development of twentieth-century film. To test this claim, I will review relevant debates and advances in early twentieth-century filmmaking and discuss *Entr'acte* as a significant film in a Deleuzian shift from movement-image to time-image. Finally, to unravel more of the choreographic impetus for

the film, I will explore George Barber's claim that the film, and the shot of the dancer, are informed by Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the impact of this proposition on our understanding of the choreographic structure of the project and the relation between the live work and the film, and consider the significance that Duchamp's work may hold for screendance practices at large. The chapter will ultimately argue for the pivotal role of *Entr'acte* in a twentieth-century map of choreographic practices and screendance.

Key words: Avant-garde, Film theory, Choreography, Language, Balász, Bergson, Deleuze, Time-image, Vertical film form, The Large Glass, Duchamp

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Notes

¹ Yve Lomax, "Thinking Stillness," in *Stillness and time: photography and the moving image*, eds. David Green and Joanna Lowry (Brighton: Photoforum: Photoworks, 2006), 55.

² Ibid., 55

³ Catherine Clément, “Postface 1980: From *Anti-Oedipus* to *A Thousand Plateaus*. Bob Wilson philosopher,” trans. Charles J. Stivale, originally published in *L’Arc* 49 (1980): 94-98, <http://www.langlab.wayne.edu/CStivale/StivalePapers/CClement.html>.

⁴ *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (London: Athlone Press, 1992), 6.

⁵ Erik Näsland, *Rolf de Maré: Art Collector, Ballet Director, Museum Creator* (Stockholm: Dance Books, 2009), 110.

⁶ George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 11.

⁷ Thomas Elsaesser, “Dada/Cinema,” in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E Kuenzli (MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1996), 14.

⁸ “Biography,” *Francis Picabia*, http://www.picabia.com/FP_WEB/UK/biographie.awp.

⁹ George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 304. Elsewhere Baker describes Instantanéism as a “scatological version of Surrealism” (381).

¹⁰ Picabia, 391 19 (October 1924), in Francis Picabia, *I am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, and Provocation*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge, London: MIT Press 2007), 313.

¹¹ Jennifer Mundy, “The Art of Friendship,” in *Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 36.

¹² James Hayward, *Avant-Garde Art/Festival Paris Dada* [LTMCD 2513], *LTM Recordings*, http://www.ltmrecordings.com/festival_dada_paris_ltmcd2513.html.

¹³ René Clair, “Picabia, Satie and the First Night of ‘Entr’acte,’” in *A Nous La Liberté and Entr’acte* (London: Lorrimer Publishing Ltd, 1970), 109.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that in this announcement Picabia describes himself as the author of the event but credits René Clair for *Entr’acte*. According to his own reflections Clair also

considered the film to be his, and took pride in having fulfilled, if not superseded Picabia's original proposition. One might therefore conclude that *Entr'acte* was not so much a collaboration between the two artists as a realisation of Picabia's vision by Clair and that it is ultimately Clair's film.

¹⁵ Malcolm Turvey, "Dada, *Entr'acte* and Paris Qui Dort," in *The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-garde film of the 1920s* (London and Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2011), 78, 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁷ Francis Picabia, "Ondulations Cerebrales," *L'Ere Nouvelle* (July 12, 1922): 1-2, translation by the author.

¹⁸ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 23.

¹⁹ Turvey, "Dada, *Entr'acte* and Paris qui dort," 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

²¹ Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 12. See also the German original: Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996); "Wer begreift, was die Moderne ist, der kann sie nur aufgrund dieser selbstzündenden Selbstbewegung begreifen, ohne die es die Moderne nicht gäbe" (36). In another passage Sloterdijk adds: "Bewegung ist das Ungedachte" (79).

²² Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus*, 36-37.

²³ Turvey, "Dada, *Entr'acte* and Paris qui dort," 99.

²⁴ René Clair, *Reflections on Cinema* (London: William Kimber and Co., 1953), 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶ René Clair, *A Nous La Liberté and Entr'acte* (London: Lorrimer Publishing Ltd, 1970), 109.

²⁷ Näslund, *Rolf de Maré*, 115.

²⁸ René Clair, *A Nous La Liberté and Entr'acte*, 111.

²⁹ Chris Townsend, "The Last Hope of Intuition: Francis Picabia, Erik Satie and Rene Clair's Intermedial Project Relâche," *Nottingham French Studies* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 2011): 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³² René Clair, *A Nous La Liberté and Entr'acte*, 109.

³³ Belà Balázs, *Theory of The Film*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1972), 42.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Balázs' writing see Rachel Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 67.

³⁶ Daniel Barnett, *Movement as Meaning in Experimental Film* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), 11.

³⁷ René Clair, *A Nous La Liberté and Entr'acte*, 111.

³⁸ Sections of the following discussion are adapted from a more extensive essay on Deleuze's theory of film, published by Claudia Kappenberg, "Film as Poetry," *After Deren: The International Journal of Screendance* 3 (2013): 101-119. In that essay Deleuze's ideas are compared with Maya Deren's notion of horizontal and vertical film form.

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 27-29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

⁴³ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 118.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 150.

⁵⁴ Karl Mark, “Bourgeois and Proletarians,” *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx-Engels Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#a1>.

⁵⁵ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 151. As a literary testimony Berman sites Baudelaire’s prose poem “The eyes of the poor” (1864) which chronicles the profound social changes and tensions that resulted from the new urban space; a man sits in one of the new sparkling cafés on the corner of a newly cut Boulevard with the woman he loves; looking out through the large window he sees a poor father in rags with his two children who come past the café and press their noses against the glass looking in. The man is very moved by the family of eyes that stare at them, but to his dismay his companion only feels disturbed by their presence and asks the waiter to send them away.

⁵⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 59.

⁵⁷ Turvey, "Dada, Entr'acte and Paris qui dort," 95

⁵⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 56, 135, 145.

⁵⁹ Picabia, "Interview on Entr'acte," *I am a Beautiful Monster*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 317.

⁶⁰ Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 299-300.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶³ See *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109.

⁶⁴ Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 446, footnote 62.

⁶⁵ Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 93-109.

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