Étienne de Beaumont, Surrealist Dance, and Transformations in the Paris Avant-Garde, 1913-1938

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS
Department of Art History and Archaeology

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Étienne de Beaumont, Surrealist Dance,
and Transformations in the Paris Avant-Garde, 1913-1938

by
Amanda Holly Beresford

A dissertation presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
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requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations............................................................................................................iv

List of Abbreviations..........................................................................................................ix

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................x

Abstract..................................................................................................................................xiii

Introduction: The Changing of the Avant-Garde.................................................................1

Chapter 1: Count Étienne de Beaumont in the Networks of Modernism..............................28

1.1 A Declaration of Hostilities..........................................................................................28

1.2 A “Grand seigneur of the Twentieth Century”.........................................................33

1.3 “A Gentleman’s War” and its Aftermath.................................................................40

1.4 Life Imitates Art: The Balls of Comte d’Orgel.........................................................61

1.5 Art Imitates Life..........................................................................................................75

1.6 Life and Art after Soirée de Paris..............................................................................87

1.7 Networks of Influence...............................................................................................105

Chapter 2: Staging “the New Soul of our France:” Soirée de Paris, 1924..............................117

2.1 Scene and Dramatis Personae....................................................................................118

2.2 Artistic Synthesis in the Service of National Regeneration.......................................126

2.3 Soirée de Paris: Prologue.........................................................................................139

2.4 The Program: The Ballets and Other Dances............................................................151

2.5 The Program: The Plays............................................................................................162

2.6 The Art Exhibition......................................................................................................169

2.7 Mercure: Transcending Cubism...............................................................................172

2.8 Epilogue.....................................................................................................................200
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 3: Embodying the Avant-Garde: Dance in Futurism and Dada

3.1 Introduction .......................................................... 202

3.2 Futurist Dance in Paris and Italy, 1909-1930 ...................... 203

3.3 Dada Dance in Zurich, 1916-1919 ................................. 220

3.4 Dada Dance in Paris, 1920-1923 .................................. 237

## Chapter 4: Disembodying the Avant-Garde: Surrealists Don’t Dance

4.1 Introduction .......................................................... 241

4.2 Case Study of a “Surrealist” Ballet: *Romeo and Juliet*, 1926 ...... 243

4.3 Surrealism and Dance: Potential Affinities ....................... 253

4.4 Personal Antipathies .................................................. 259

4.5 Political Antipathies ................................................. 261

4.6 Psychological Antipathies: Surrealism and Music ............... 265

4.7 Philosophical Antipathies .......................................... 271

4.8 Re-embodying Surrealism: *L’Exposition internationale du surréalisme*, 1938 .................................................. 276

## Conclusion and Outlook ............................................. 289

## Bibliography .......................................................... 297

## Appendices ............................................................ 316

## Illustrations ........................................................... 328
List of Illustrations

Chapter 1

Figure 1.1: Count Étienne de Beaumont at home..........................................................328
Figure 1.2: Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Count Étienne de Beaumont, 1920.......................329
Figure 1.3: Jean Cocteau, caricature of Beaumont with Marie-Laure de Noailles, 1931......329
Figure 1.4: Countess Edith de Beaumont..........................................................................330
Figure 1.5: Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Countess Edith de Beaumont, 1921.....................330
Figure 1.6: Hôtel Masseran under renovation, June 2015.............................................330
Figure 1.7: Hôtel Masseran: view from the gardens, c.1920.............................................331
Figure 1.8: The grand salon, Hôtel Masseran, 1920.......................................................331
Figure 1.9: A gallery of historical dandies........................................................................332
Figure 1.10: Some of Beaumont’s associates....................................................................333
Figure 1.11: Profile of Paulet Thevenaz, Vanity Fair, 1916..............................................334
Figure 1.12: Dalcroze Eurhythmics students, Hellerau, 1925/6........................................334
Figure 1.13: Beaumont in the uniform of his volunteer ambulance unit, c.1916................335
Figure 1.14: Bernard Faÿ near Verdun, c.1916.................................................................335
Figure 1.15: James Reese Europe conducts his Harlem Hellfighters, Paris, 1918............335
Figure 1.16: Georges Braque, Bottle of Rum, 1914........................................................336
Figure 1.17: Georges Braque, Guitar and Still Life on a Gueridon, 1922..........................336
Figure 1.18: Pablo Picasso, Fruit Dish, Bottle and Violin, 1914.......................................337
Figure 1.19: Pablo Picasso, decorations for La Statue retrouvée, 1923...............................337
Figure 1.20: Pablo Picasso, Man Leaning on a Table, 1915-16....................................338
Figure 1.21: Max Ernst, Tree of Life (1927/8).................................................................338
Figure 1.22: Pablo Picasso, stage curtain from Mercure (1924)........................................339
Figure 1.23: Picasso’s Mercure curtain in the salon at Hôtel Masseran..........................339
Figure 1.24: Picasso, Guitar and Sheet Music on a Gueridon, 1920; at Hotel Masseran.....340
Figure 1.25: Picasso, Guitar and Sheet Music on a Gueridon II, 1920; as firescreen.........340
Figure 1.26: Raoul Dufy, Le Boeuf sur le Toit, lithograph, 1920....................................341
Figure 1.27: Production photograph from the Le Boeuf sur le toit, 1920...........................341
Figure 1.28: Paul and Denise Poiret, Thousand and One Nights ball, 1911.......................342
Figure 1.29: Artists’ Ball, Maison Watteau, Montmartre, 1924........................................342
Figure 1.30: Beaumont at “Les Visions chinoises” ball, 1923........................................343
Figure 1.31: Beaumont and the Duchesse350 d’Ayen, Bal baroque, May 1923...............343
Figures 1.32-1.35: The Count and Countess in costume for several balls, 1926-35............344
Figures 1.36-1.37: Jean Hugo, costume sketches for Valentine Hugo, Bal Baroque..........345
Figures 1.38-1.39: Valentine Hugo at Bal des jeux, 1922; Bal Baroque, 1923...............345
Figure 1.40: Guests at the Charity Ball for Soirée de Paris, 1924.....................................346
Figure 1.41: Picasso with Olga Koklova and Eugenia Erazuriz, Charity Ball, 1924............346
Figure 1.42: Sara and Gerald Murphy in “automotive” costumes, 1924.........................346
Figure 1.43: Lady Iya Abdy as a Siamese dancer, Bal colonial, 1931...............................347
Figure 1.44: Marie-Laure de Noailles with Serge Lifar, Racine ball, 1939.........................347
Figure 1.45: Marie-Laure and Charles de Noailles, Bal des matériaux, 1929..................347
Figure 1.46: Valentine Hugo and Paul Morand, Bal des matériaux, 1929.........................347
Figure 1.47: Jean Marais, Racine ball, 1939.................................................................348
Figure 1.48: Christian Dior, Bal des rois et des reines, 1951..............................348
Figure 1.49: Marchesa Luisa Casati with her snake......................................................348
Figure 1.50: Edith, possibly at Les Visions chinoises ball, 1923.................................348
Figure 1.51: Picasso, Composition for Bal de mer, 1928..............................................349
Figure 1.52: Picasso, sketch for a Mardi-Gras ball, 1922...............................................349
Figure 1.53-1.54: Picasso, designs for costumes for the Bal des jeux, 1922...................349
Figure 1.55: Beaumont, unidentified ball, probably 1924.............................................350
Figure 1.56: Beaumont’s collage memorializing the Bal colonial, 1931.........................351
Figure 1.57: Watching a film in Man Ray’s Paris studio, c. 1925..............................352
Figure 1.58: Stills from À quoi rêvent les jeunes films? 1925........................................352
Figure 1.59: Poster for Fête des diadèmes, 1925............................................................353
Figure 1.60: Still from Man Ray’s film Les Mystères du château du dé, 1929...............353
Figure 1.61: Léonide Massine and Alexandra Danilova in Gaîté Parisienne, 1938.........354
Figure 1.62: Beaumont’s design for Danilova’s Can-Can costume..............................354
Figure 1.63: Frederic Franklin as the Baron in Gaîté Parisienne, c.1938.......................354
Figure 1.64: Beaumont’s sketch for Franklin’s costume..............................................355
Figure 1.65: Advertisement for Beaumont’s jewelry designs for Schiaparelli, 1939........355
Figure 1.66: Valentine Hugo, program cover for concert, 1941....................................355
Figure 1.67: Picasso, program cover for Olivier Messiaen’s Harawi, 1946....................355
Figure 1.68: The bar at Le Boeuf sur le toit c. 1922-27................................................356
Figure 1.69: Francis Picabia, L’Oeil cacodylate, 1921.....................................................356
Figure 1.70: A beach costume party at La Garoupe on the Côte d’Azur, 1923................357
Figure 1.71: Beaumont on the promenade at La Garoupe............................................357
Figure 1.72: Beaumont aged 67 at one of his last parties, 1950.....................................357
Figure 1.73: Picasso, Portrait of Count Étienne de Beaumont, 1920............................358
Figure 1.74: Letter from Beaumont to Picasso, December 25, 1943............................358

Chapter 2

Figure 2.1: Marie Laurencin, poster for Soirée de Paris, 1924....................................359
Figure 2.2: A part of Montmartre, with La Cigale, from an early 20th century map........360
Figure 2.4: The Théâtre de la Cigale, 2017.................................................................361
Figure 2.5: Interior: the stage and auditorium, 2017....................................................361
Figure 2.6: Summary program for *Soirée de Paris* listing the full season........................................362
Figure 2.7: Guillaume Apollinaire in hospital after head surgery, 1916.............................................363
Figure 2.8: His revue, *Les Soirées de Paris*, no. 1 (February 1912).................................................363
Figure 2.9: The cover of the souvenir program for *Soirée de Paris*................................................363
Figure 2.10: The *blason* of the city of Paris.........................................................................................363
Figure 2.11: Beaumont directing proceedings from the wings, 1924....................................................364
Figure 2.12: Loïe Fuller, 1918..............................................................................................................364
Figure 2.13: Marc Allégret, c.1920........................................................................................................364
Figure 2.14: Picasso at the charity ball for *Soirée*, 1924, photo by Man Ray....................................365
Figure 2.15: Marie Laurencin, 1924, photo by Man Ray.................................................................365
Figure 2.16: André Derain, 1924, photo by Man Ray........................................................................365
Figure 2.17: Georges Braque, 1922, photo by Man Ray.................................................................365
Figure 2.18: Jean Hugo with his designs for *Roméo et Juliette*, 1924............................................365
Figure 2.19: Valentine Hugo by Man Ray, 1920s..............................................................................365
Figure 2.20: José Maria Sert by Ramon Casas....................................................................................365
Figure 2.21: Roger Désormière, conductor................................................................................……366
Figure 2.22: Erik Satie, 1920s..............................................................................................................366
Figure 2.23: Henri Sauguet.................................................................................................................366
Figure 2.24: Darius Milhaud, 1920s....................................................................................................366
Figure 2.25: Marcella Meyer, pianist, 1920s.......................................................................................366
Figure 2.26: Jane Bathori, mezzo-soprano, 1920s.............................................................................366
Figure 2.27: Léonide Massine as Mercury, 1927.................................................................................367
Figure 2.28: Lydia Lopokova, 1922....................................................................................................367
Figure 2.29: Stanislas Idzikowski in *Petrouchka*...........................................................................367
Figure 2.30: Ida Rubinstein, 1920s......................................................................................................367
Figure 2.31: Rupert Doone, by Nina Hamnett, 1920s....................................................................367
Figure 2.32: Tristan Tzara and Jean Cocteau by Man Ray, 1924.....................................................368
Figure 2.33: Paul Morand, 1920s.........................................................................................................368
Figure 2.34: Marcel Herrand.............................................................................................................368
Figure 2.35: Andrée Pascal................................................................................................................368
Figure 2.36: Yvonne George..............................................................................................................368
Figure 2.37: Louis Aragon and André Breton, by Man Ray, 1922....................................................369
Figure 2.38: *Salade*, with Braque’s set and costumes, 1924.........................................................369
Figure 2.39: *Le Beau Danube*; London revival, 1935.................................................................370
Figure 2.40: Scene from *Mouchoir de nuages*, 1924.................................................................370
Figure 2.41, 2.42: Jean Hugo, costumes for *Roméo et Juliette*, 1924............................................377
Figure 2.43: Jean and Valentine Hugo and Jean Cocteau, scene, *Roméo et Juliette*.....................371
Figure 2.44: Georges Seurat, *Parade de cirque*. Oil on canvas, 1887-88........................................371
Figure 2.45: Picasso, *The Three Graces*, sketch for *Mercure*......................................................372
Figure 2.46: Picasso, *Three Women at the Spring*, 1921..............................................................373
Figure 2.47: Picasso, Ballet Dancers, 1920.................................................................373
Figure 2.48: The Three Graces with Cerberus, Mercure, 1924.................................373
Figure 2.49: “Synthèses,” cartoon by Louis Touchagues (March 1, 1925)...............373
Figure 2.50: The Abduction of Proserpina, Mercure, 1924......................................374
Figure 2.51: Picasso, sketch for The Abduction of Proserpina, 1924.......................374
Figure 2.52: Picasso, the three Managers from Parade, 1917..................................375
Figure 2.53: Picasso, Mandolin and Clarinet. Construction 1913..............................375
Figure 2.54: Fernand Léger, design for a god, La Création du monde, 1923...........375
Figure 2.55: The Bath of the Three Graces, Mercure, 1924......................................376
Figure 2.56, 2.57: Picasso, sketches for the Bath of the Three Graces, 1924............376
Figure 2.58: Picasso, Three Bathers by the Shore, 1920.........................................377
Figure 2.59: Stage curtain for Le Train bleu, Ballets Russes, 1924.........................377
Figure 2.60: Picasso, sketches for “Night” scene in Mercure, with stars, 1924.........378
Figure 2.61: Picasso, sketch for “Night” scene, with “étoile” in place of stars, 1924...378
Figure 2.62: Picasso, Still life with Mandolin, 1924...................................................379
Figure 2.63: Picasso, dot and line drawings, in La Révolution surrealist., 1925.........379
Figure 2.64: Three Women at the Edge of a Beach, 1924........................................379
Figure 2.65: Picasso, design for Pulcinella, 1920.....................................................380
Figure 2.66: Picasso, Design for Polichinel from Mercure, 1924...............................380
Figure 2.67: Picasso, Pierrot and Harlequin, 1920....................................................380
Figure 2.68: Picasso, Seated Harlequin, 1923.............................................................380
Figure 2.69: Picasso, Au Lapin agile, 1905.................................................................381
Figure 2.70: Massine as Mercury, Polichinel, and dancers, Mercure, London, 1927...382
Figure 2.71: “Olympic Events at La Cigale,” cartoon by Touchagues, June 20, 1924...382

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1: Valentine de Saint-Point, Manifesto of the Futurist Woman, 1912...........383
Figures 3.2, 3.3: Valentine de Saint-Point in La Metachorie, Paris, 1913.................383
Figure 3.4: Fortunato Depero, design for Mimismagia, 1916......................................383
Figure 3.5: Giacomo Balla, design for Feu d’artifice, Ballets Russes, Rome, 1917.....384
Figure 3.6: Fortunato Depero, model for Le Chant du rossignol, Ballets Russes, 1917..384
Figure 3.7: Fortunato Depero, designs for Le Chant du rossignol, Ballets Russes, 1917..385
Figure 3.8: Giacomo Balla, design for Macchina tipografica, 1915............................385
Figure 3.9: Fortunato Depero, I miei balli plastici, 1918..........................................386
Figure 3.10, 3.11: Ivo Pannaggi and Vinicio Paladino, Ballo meccanico Futurista, 1922..387
Figure 3.12, 3.13: Fortunato Depero, Anihccam del 3000, 1924...............................387
Figure 3.14: Poster for Prampolini’s Théâtre de la pantomime futuriste, Paris, 1927....388
Figure 3.15: Jia Ruskaja............................................................................................388
Figure 3.16: Giannina Censi performing the Aerodance, c. 1930..............................388
Figure 3.17: Fortunato Depero, *Rotazione di ballerina e pappagalli*, 1918..........................389
Figure 3.18: Gino Severini, *Blue Dancer*, oil on canvas with sequins, 1912..........................389
Figure 3.19: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913..........................389
Figure 3.20: Alexander Sacharoff embodying a synesthetic experience.................................390
Figure 3.21: Dancers practicing at Monte Verità, 1917..............................................................390
Figure 3.22: Sophie Taeuber and her sculpture *Dadakopf*.......................................................391
Figure 3.23: Marcel Janco, *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916.................................................................391
Figure 3.24: A masked Mary Wigman performing *Hexentanz*................................................392
Figure 3.25: Program for the *Sturm-Soirée*, Zürich, April 14, 1917..........................................392
Figure 3.26: Sophie Taeuber dancing, in a costume by herself and Jean Arp, 1917-19...................393
Figure 3.27: Taeuber with her sister in Hopi-inspired costumes she designed............................393
Figure 3.28: Hugo Ball in his “Magical Bishop,” costume, *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916.......................393
Figure 3.29: Valentin Parnakh performing an eccentric dance, Moscow, 1924.............................394
Figure 3.30: Picasso, portrait of Valentin Parnakh, 1922.............................................................394
Figure 3.31: Lizica Codreanu performing to Satie’s *Gymnopédies*, 1922....................................394
Figure 3.32: Lizica Codreanu posing as a sculpture in Brancusi’s studio, 1922.............................394
Figure 3.33: Scene from Tristan Tzara’s play *Le Coeur à gaz*, 1923..........................................395
Figure 3.34: Breton and Paul Soupault’s play *Vous m’oublierez*, Paris, 1920..............................395

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1: Program page for *Romeo and Juliet*, London, June 21, 1926.................................396
Figure 4.2, 4.3: Joan Miró, designs for Act I, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1926.......................................397
Figure 4.4: Act I of *Romeo and Juliet* in rehearsal .................................................................398
Figure 4.5: Act I of *Romeo and Juliet* in performance .............................................................398
Figure 4.6: André Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, *Les Jambes de l’Opéra*, 1862.................................398
Figure 4.7: Joan Miró, *Dream Painting*, 1925, used as front cloth, *Romeo and Juliet*..............399
Figure 4.8, 4.9: Tamara Karsavina as Juliet; Serge Lifar as Romeo...........................................400
Figure 4.10: Karsavina and Lifar eloping by aeroplane in the final scene....................................400
Figure 4.11: Joan Miró, costume design for male dancers..........................................................401
Figure 4.12: Joan Miró, costume design for female dancers.....................................................401
Figure 4.13: Joan Miró, costume design for Alice Nikitina as Juliet ..........................................401
Figure 4.14: Max Ernst, *The Night*; backcloth for Act II, Scene 4............................................402
Figure 4.15: Max Ernst, design for cloth for *The Death of Juliet*..............................................402
Figure 4.16: Max Ernst, *The Sun*, 1926. Design for drop, *Romeo and Juliet*............................402
Figure 4.17: Max Ernst, *The Sea*, unused design for *Romeo and Juliet*.................................403
Figure 4.18: Joan Miró, *Dream Painting*, 1925.................................................................403
Figure 4.19: Max Ernst, *The Wheel of the Sun*, 1926.............................................................404
Figure 4.20: Max Ernst, *Iceflower Shawl and Gulf Stream*, *Histoire naturelle*, 1926..............404
Figure 4.21: Max Ernst, *The Bird Who Sits and Does Not Sing*, 1926.......................................404
Figure 4.22: Breton and Aragon, “Protestation,” leaflet, 1926…………………………………...405
Figure 4.23: German groteske dancer Valeska Gert, 1919……………………………………405
Figure 4.24: René Magritte, Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt, 1929……………406
Figure 4.25: Invitation to vernissage, L’Exposition internationale du surréalisme, 1938………407
Figure 4.26: Salvador Dali, Taxi-pluvieux, 1938………………………………………………...407
Figure 4.27, 4.28: Mannequins, Rue surréaliste, 1938…………………………………………408
Figure 4.29: Artists examining artworks by flashlight, 1938……………………………………408
Figure 4.30, 4.31: Hélène Vanel performing L’Acte manqué, 1938……………………………409
Figure 4.32: Vanel apparently entrancing a group of Surrealists, 1938……………………409
Figure 4.33: Sheila Legge, “Phantom of Sex Appeal,” London, 1936…………………………410
Figure 4.34: Françoise Sullivan, Danse dans la neige, Quebec, 1948…………………………410

Conclusion and Outlook

Figure C.1: Man Ray, Explosante-fixe, from Amour fou (1937)…………………………………411
Figures C.2, C.3: Das Totale Tanz Theater, Berlin, 2019-20……………………………………..412

List of Abbreviations

BnF: Bibliothèque nationale de France
BRMC: Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo
IMEC: L’Institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine
JRDD: Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts
LRS: La Révolution surréaliste (journal)
MOMA: Museum of Modern Art
V&A: Victoria and Albert Museum
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Amanda Beresford

Washington University in Saint Louis

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Étienne de Beaumont, Surrealist Dance,
and Transformations in the Paris Avant-Garde, 1913-1938

by

Amanda Holly Beresford

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History and Archaeology

Washington University in St. Louis, 2020

Professor John Klein, Chair

This dissertation puts into conversation the career of the aristocratic French patron and would-be impresario of modernism, Count Étienne de Beaumont, and the conflicted relationship between Surrealism and dance in Paris during the period between the two World Wars. Beaumont and Surrealism represent respectively an older, reactionary, and a newer, radical, manifestation of the avant-garde in French culture. Beaumont’s flamboyant self-performance—his eccentric personal style, his extravagant costume balls, his wide network of associates in the Parisian artworld, and his ambitions as a Maecenas to rival Diaghilev—establish him as a central figure of reactionary modernism in the 1920s. This tendency inscribed a taste for advanced art as the preserve of an elite class, and tied it to a desire for a resuscitation of the past as a means to renew French culture. Against this, Surrealism proposed a revolution of the world and the mind; an overthrow of rationalism, order, and tradition in society and the individual consciousness.

Dance (modernist ballet, chiefly the fashionable Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois) was central to the vanguard aesthetic and social formation of Beaumont and his circle, which included artists of the pre-war avant-garde; it had also, as freier Tanz or free dance, been an
essential means of expression and provocation for the historical avant-gardes, Futurism and Dada. However, Surrealism decisively rejected all dance and music, signaling a rupture with not just mainstream culture but also with its own precursors in the oppositional cultural formations of the early twentieth century.

Beaumont’s circle and André Breton’s Surrealists clashed publicly over a dance performance in 1924: Pablo Picasso, Léonide Massine and Erik Satie’s innovative ballet Mercure, the climax of Soirée de Paris, the Count’s hubristic project that assembled a galaxy of modernist talent for a brief season of dance and theatre. This confrontation of the established and emergent avant-gardes launched the Surrealist movement and confirmed dance’s banishment from its repertoire. For this study, it constitutes a stage on which tensions between different formations of the avant-garde were played out—ultimately proving to be a pivotal moment when the French avant-garde changed, the old overtaken by the new. Yet dance’s vital role in Futurism and Dada argues that it should have merited a place in the Surrealist experience. The reasons for its exclusion were deeper than they appear, and include complex personal, political, psychological and philosophical antipathies, despite grounds for affinity such as the potential for automatic expression. The collaboration of Surrealist painters Max Ernst and Joan Miró on the Ballets Russes’s production of Romeo and Juliet in 1926 demonstrates a failed attempt to produce a Surrealist dance, its aesthetics compromised by its politics. L’Exposition international du surréalisme in Paris in 1938 finally witnessed dance that could be called authentically Surrealist, in a performance by Hélène Vanel that sets the terms for such an alliance, and created a precedent for future experimental work in dance and performance art.
Introduction

The Changing of the Avant-Garde

This dissertation puts into conversation two principal subjects: the flamboyant aesthete Count Étienne de Beaumont (1883-1956) in his role as aristocratic patron of the avant-garde; and the relationship between Surrealism and dance during the period of his chief activity, in Paris between the two world wars. These subjects come together in an examination of how the historical avant-garde evolved during that time, first by gentrifying under the influence of Beaumont’s cohort and the values and priorities he represented, then by forcibly rejecting those values and carving out a radical new path alongside the old one in the shape of Surrealism. I have chosen to focus on dance—which the Surrealists, alone among the avant-gardes, rejected—as the index of change, since its embrace and rejection mark a significant rupture between the old and the new avant-gardes.

Identifying the Avant-Garde

What unites and then separates the two groups under consideration—Beaumont’s and Surrealism’s—is the idea of avant-garde, both as an attribute of art and as a group identification. Avant-garde here functions as a fault line between an older and a newer generation of art communities who shared an aspiration to embody “the new” despite their ideological differences. I examine the tensions between them through the lens of the moving human body, in its different role and status for each group. Avant-garde, as both idea and group formation, is a notoriously protean word with “an almost uncontrollable diversity” of meanings in contemporary and
historical criticism.¹ I intend to situate it with some specificity to ensure that its use in the following chapters is meaningful. To begin, some historical context for the language is necessary.

Originally a French military expression, avant-garde’s first modern use in a wider sense was at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the political theorist Count Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), to describe the new social formation he proposed in the aftermath of the French Revolution. This reborn society would be led by the scientists, the industrialists, and the artists who were the “men of imagination” (as opposed to reason); art as a broadly constituted entity would form the social “avant-garde.”² The term migrated over the century, acquiring an aesthetic as well as a sociopolitical valence. The notion of an advance guard existing within art was first coined by the poet Charles Baudelaire in the 1860s; his scorn for “the littérateurs of the avant-garde” expressed a fear that the term’s militarist connotations of discipline and conformity threatened art’s creative freedom. The expansion of commodity capitalism and the consequent commercialization of most aspects of life alienated many artists from society and from the traditional institutions of art, such as the academies; it also produced a psychic alienation that led them to question their social roles. The most aesthetically experimental artists and advocates were often socially marginal as well: anti-establishment and drawn to non-conformist lifestyles and radical politics.

Avant-garde as an idea coincided with its existence as a social formation. The existence of a recognizable aesthetic avant-garde has its origins in these urban artistic subcultures of the

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late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, initially in Paris as the cultural hub of Europe. This vanguard self-identified as progressive and against the mainstream, strove to make art that was new and defied convention, that claimed aesthetic autonomy, engaged with new materials, technologies, and popular culture, addressed itself to the nature of its medium, and declared itself in opposition (mainly) to the dominant values and systems of bourgeois Capitalism. The first World War drastically changed those cultures along with much of European society, and brought forth a radicalized new generation of artists with different priorities. Still committed to the creation of new and innovative forms of art, they were often overtly politically committed, and promoted a variety of revolutionary agendas for art and politics as means to transform society.

After the war, the previous generation was still active and still innovating, but had been to a greater or lesser extent assimilated, or gentrified, into the dominant bourgeois culture—a culture whose taste now endorsed its products, sanitized of political dissent, as conferring both social kudos and economic advantage on its patrons in the expanding market for art as a highly desirable consumer good. The formerly outrageous was now daringly chic, so long as it did not threaten but enhanced the status and prosperity of its patrons. The term avant-garde fell out of common use between the wars, but the idea of it, often reframed as “the new” in a usage promoted by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918), was no less manifest. Both the avant-gardes had a great deal of cultural capital invested in what they conceived of as the new; they aspired to lead aesthetic culture by colonizing its economies and setting themselves up as its avatars.

Beaumont and the Surrealists represent these two different generations and ideological formations of the postwar avant-garde, but both can legitimately be described using the term. The avant-garde, as David Cottington points out, was never monolithic, and not all those involved were committed to revolutionary politics, despite a shared belief in art as a force for
Beaumont saw himself, and was seen, as leading the vanguard, but his nationalist values were reactionary, and neither he nor his artist collaborators were politically engaged. He was committed to a pursuit of modernity that saw itself in relation to established history, as its heir and reinventor. In contrast, the Surrealists were vehemently political in their support of the Communist party, rejected nation and history as instruments of bourgeois repression, and sought to demolish existing social and psychic structures to remake the world and the human consciousness from scratch. Yet both were, in profoundly different ways, avant-garde, and their opposition illuminates some of the contradictions in the idea as proposed by theorists.

If, as Peter Bürger claims—in a narrow definition of the avant-garde that includes only the politically radical movements—its purpose was “an attack on the status of art…as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men [sic],” it is unsurprising that the Surrealists chose to clash with Beaumont. If Peter Bürger’s concept makes sense in relation to the Surrealist rejection of theatre and dance, which seemed to them irredeemably removed from and irrelevant to “the praxis of life.” However, it puts Beaumont outside the pale of the avant-garde. For Beaumont and the older modernists in his circle, art was autonomous, in the sense of separate and self-referential, “confine[d] in an ideal sphere,” and not required to be part of practical life. While they fervently believed that art had the power and the responsibility to critique and even change society for the better, they had no desire to overthrow society, and no sense that art needed further integration into their practice of life. A problem with calling this formation avant-garde (as I and others do), according to Bürger, is that art’s separateness from

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3 Cottington, 95-7; 211-12.

life isolates it and, despite its call for change, “relieves the existing society of the pressure of those forces that make for change,” rendering it ineffectual. Yet the integration of art into the life process, which Bürger claims is the goal of the radical avant-garde, absorbs it and neutralizes its ability to effect change, because art “will lose the capacity to criticize it [i.e. society], along with its distance.” The contradiction that Bürger identifies here, I argue, risks calling into question the effectiveness and perhaps even the identity, on its own terms, of the avant-garde.

The two generations of the avant-garde I discuss encapsulate a central aporia of the concept, as identified by Matei Calinescu, who asks, echoing Baudelaire: “is it not the case that the systematic nonconformism of the avant-garde generated a new type of conformity (however iconoclastic)?” There can be no doubt of a contradiction between Surrealism’s professed desire for freedom, its angry rejection of the bourgeois conformity of Beaumont’s class, and “its final submissiveness to blind, intolerant discipline” of another kind in the pursuit of its aims, as will be discussed in chapter 4. The desire of Surrealist leader André Breton (1896-1966) to freight his movement with a programmatic mission works, in theory, against the free operation of the artist’s imagination. While opposed to the rationalist order of official society, this alternative program nonetheless resembles it in imposing an orthodoxy that the artist is obliged to follow.

The tensions summarized here justify my identification of a specific moment in 1924 as a key point of rupture between two formations of the avant-garde in the aftermath of World War I. This moment, which I describe fully in chapter 1 and analyze in chapter 2, erupted in a violent protest by Breton and a group of Surrealists at the public dress rehearsal of the ballet Mercure, designed by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), choreographed by Léonide Massine (1896-1979), scored

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5 Calinescu: “is it not,” “discipline,” 111.
by Erik Satie (1866-1925), and produced by Beaumont, as the highlight of Soirée de Paris, Beaumont’s season of self-proclaimed “new” theatre, at the Théâtre de la Cigale, Montmartre. The Surrealists’ disruption, I will argue, exposed that what was at stake in the contest for the new was the very identity of the avant-garde, and their protest decisively signaled that this identity was shifting. A closer examination of the interwar cultural politics exemplified in the Mercure protest will reveal Étienne de Beaumont as more important than he may appear, both as an individual actor and as an emblematic figure in the dynamics of this transformative time.

Count Étienne de Beaumont, Quixotic Maecenas of the Avant-Garde

Who was Count Étienne de Beaumont, and why is he important? A man who straddled several eras of modernity, he epitomized a memorable cultural moment, as I show in chapter 1, and presided over a critical turn in the fortunes of modernist culture. He was also a unique, strange, and fascinating individual, an outsize character whose public life was an elaborate performance of his own self-fashioning. An energetic patron of and advocate for modern art, he was a Parisian of the old noblesse, to which he clung staunchly while promoting the avant-garde, even as his world of hereditary privilege dissolved under the escalating democratization of the twentieth century. Born in 1883 in the midst of the Third Republic, into a world of Belle Epoque opulence, he came of age as the Dreyfus Affair was drawing to its end. He saw action in the Great War as the director of a volunteer ambulance corps. In the 1920s, at the height of his fame, he pursued a glittering if erratic career as a society host celebrated for his eccentricity and the bizarre glamor of his costume balls, and as a passionate Maecenas of new art in the hothouse world of Paris’s années folles. His circle of acquaintance and influence included the most famous artists, writers, musicians and theatre people of the era, as well as the gratin of Paris society.
Adored, sought after, and ridiculed in equal measure, he was the subject of two works of satirical fiction. Suspected (probably unfairly) of collaboration during the Second World War, he promoted new French music and worked to preserve cultural life in occupied Paris. He died in 1956, as the Fourth Republic ended and France was embroiled in a vicious colonial war in Algeria. Beaumont was, as his friend Lucien Daudet put it, “a Grand Seigneur of the Twentieth Century:” someone who seemed to embody the most creative and forward-looking qualities of his age where the arts were concerned, despite his ancien régime heritage, and who was fearless in using his ample means and distinctive personality to advance them, even if his efforts were sometimes compromised by his own hubris and disorganization. Indeed, he exemplified the paradox that defined a modernist aristocracy of taste: someone in whom established wealth and privilege licensed a passion for an advanced art that defied the traditions he represented, and whose patronage contributed to a gentrification of avant-garde culture that ultimately ensured its mainstream assimilation, even as a more aggressive, fundamentalist, and politically radical avant-garde arose to usurp the older one’s dominance.

Though Beaumont has not been forgotten, he has certainly been neglected, undervalued, and misrepresented by most scholars of his time and his milieu. Neither his persona nor his activities have been adequately analyzed for what they can tell us about the problem of avant-garde identity in this period. Yet he is worthy of our consideration not only for his own sake, but because of what he represents: as an exemplar of reactionary modernism (a term on which I will expand in chapters 1 and 2), and because he focuses the discursive themes that cluster around that phenomenon. He represents the world that Surrealism rejected, that of the traditional social elites, as well as the avant-garde “pretenders” who flaunted progressive taste as an emblem of their elite status. His story enriches our understanding of his period and his milieu, of the
relations between artists, patrons and the wider culture, and of the conflicting currents in the avant-gardes of interwar Paris. He was a major patron, a mainstay of the community that sustained the art world and its artists at a financial, and often at a social, level and who played a major role in the promotion and reception of art in several disciplines—albeit with larger ambitions than most. He was a minor but not insignificant impresario who sought, and ultimately failed, to lead and influence the culture of elite modernist taste, but whose support assisted the careers of many. In chapter 1, I demonstrate how through his wealth and position, his extraordinary parties, his connections, his impresario activities, and his personality, he became for a while a fulcrum for the nexus of power and influence in modern art—painting, music, theatre, and dance—during an intensely fertile and volatile period.

We can speculate here as to some reasons for the scholarly neglect of such a key figure as Beaumont in a terrain as overworked as French modernism. The more obvious reasons are the (hitherto) elusive nature of his archive, and the ephemerality of most of what he produced; he left few tangible traces. But it has been standard practice to dismiss him as not serious enough to merit attention: he was too rich, too upper class, too ancien noblesse, too frivolous, too outrageously camp (if that’s possible nowadays, yet it is held against him), too lacking in conventional talents, too much of a dilettante, not successful enough at what he attempted—in short, he was an over-privileged, reactionary, talentless, pretentious, self-promoting lightweight. Even if not in these words, such glib and unfair judgement biases the work of Claude Arnaud, Frederick Brown, Nicholas Foulkes, Lynne Garafola, Marius Hentea, and especially John Richardson, Picasso’s biographer. Even Cocteau’s biographer, the mainly balanced Francis

Steegmuller, finds him hard to accept at times. Some—notably the eminent Satie scholars Ornella Volta and Robert Orledge—treat him fairly, but most contemporary authors use him as a target for their own aversions.

A problem with Beaumont is that he doesn’t fit some of the principal narratives of modernism. However much he cut an exceptional figure in his era; promoted new and daring art as a patron, impresario, and collector; performed a remarkable role as a self-conscious artist of his own unique image; and pursued an eclectic cultural vision that mixed high and low, classical and modern—he incarnated tradition and conservatism by virtue of being, inescapably, who he was. He was born on the wrong side politically, and modern critics cannot forgive him for that, or allow him to go beyond it. That a few of his contemporaries disparaged him for the same reasons or found him ridiculous does not help. The result is that Beaumont has been allowed to all but disappear from most narratives of Parisian art and society between the wars, and hence from our understanding of French modernism, leaving a scholarly gap that this study aims to fill. It is more than time now to look beyond reverse snobbery and reassess Beaumont as the central character he is. I make the case here not only for the importance of his contribution to the culture that interwove art, dance, theatre, music, and the pursuit of pleasure in the interwar years, but also for the extraordinary historical interest of his life.

Beaumont achieved much of his stature by positioning himself at the center of a complex web of human relations. He was known as the first to facilitate a mix of artistic and high society


7 Francis Steegmuller, Jean Cocteau (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1986).

at his gatherings after the war, and he used his networks ingeniously to engineer his own ambition to lead the cultural scene. In mounting *Soirée de Paris*, the season of theatre he produced in 1924 at the Théâtre de Cigale, discussed in detail in chapter 2, he wove together a stellar company of diverse talent that reads like the guest list for one of his costume balls. Beaumont’s social networking was not confined to his human relations, and here we may usefully apply some insights from Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) to understanding how he functioned in postwar Parisian society. Latour suggests that the “social” designates “a trail of associations between heterogeneous elements;” these elements may include not only people but objects, ideas, places, institutions, and all manner of “things not themselves social.” Their connections form “a collective existence” that describes or maps the human sphere.9 Beaumont employed all his material assets as actors in the operation of his networks: he used his title and position, his great house, his manner and appearance, his wealth, his parties, his cultural activities, even his reputation, as well as his impressive range of human contacts as agents in a campaign to promote himself to an influential position in the networks of avant-garde art of all disciplines in Paris. These non-human material assets are as important as the human ones in that they help constitute the texture of society, and function as actors in acts of social connection. Equally, it is important to realize that much of what Beaumont both used and achieved was ephemeral and discontinuous, in the form of dance performances and one-off events that left little definite trace. When considered in the context of ANT, such artistic phenomena become as significant as more lasting objects like paintings and novels and symphonies: they are co-constitutive elements of social and cultural reality, whose

interdependence reveals “the capacity of art to embody social relations.” The longer narratives of modernism may have undervalued the importance of these ephemeral moments; ANT allows us to see them as integral to the web of artistic innovation and cultural change. The actors in these networks, whether individuals, objects, events, or ideas, exist in shifting patterns of relationships. They interact in ways that are cooperative and collaborative, oppositional and obstructive, or simply coexistent. They assist, impede or collide with each other like atoms in a reactor, and every interaction is part of the process of generating the energy that creates culture.

_Soirée de Paris and Rupture in the Avant-Garde_

Beaumont’s networks coalesced in 1924 with _Soirée de Paris_, an extraordinary collaboration among artists including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque (1882-1963), André Derain (1880-1954), Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), Léonide Massine, Lydia Lopokova (1892-1981), Ida Rubinstein (1883-1960), Erik Satie, Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), Loïe Fuller (1862-1928), and more. In chapter 2, I expand upon how under Beaumont’s unreliable direction, they produced a season of theatre that sharply divided critics, public, and other artists, and left surprisingly little artistic legacy. It did, however, provide an unexpected platform for André Breton’s nascent Surrealist group, whose protest at _Mercure_, the most avant-garde work on the program, became an opportunity to launch their movement in public. This protest, the revolutionaries against the reactionaries (as they saw them), connects my subjects and allows me to consider them together as part of the same, albeit turbulent, conversation. It was a conversation in which both sides, although committed in different ways to the renewal of

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art and society, came from such dissimilar places, held such opposing positions, and took such incompatible approaches that their mutual lack of sympathy made conflict inevitable.

Beaumont’s and his collaborators’ notion of progressive art was bound up with nationalist ideology. In their thinking, the project of making art new was tied to that of remaking France out of the trauma of war and destruction, the mass slaughter, and the scarifying mutilations visited on the bodies of the French and on the fabric of France itself. To make new was to cleanse, heal, reinvigorate, and invest in the future. Those concerned with such renewal were determined to do this not by rejecting the past but by reinventing it in a modernist idiom, proposing that the great traditions of French culture would be strengthened and made newly relevant to a postwar society. They sought a synthesis of all the arts, in Beaumont’s words, to “reveal… the new soul and youngest face of our France”—an irony, given that most of the artists in Soirée were not the youngest but, rather, survivals of the prewar (or wartime) vanguards.¹¹

The youngest, in fact, had no interest what Beaumont was selling. The Surrealists’ desire for renewal looked not out to contemporary society nor back to tradition and nostalgia for historical greatness, but inward to the individual unconscious. Nor were they particularly interested in artistic synthesis, despising music, theatre and dance as affectations of the bourgeois culture they opposed. In liberating the unconscious by means of literature and painting, their preferred artforms, they would achieve their political agenda: to sweep away the repressive, failed order that had brought about the catastrophic war, and that inhibited personal psychic freedom. This, they believed, was the authentic, and revolutionary, route to societal change. Beaumont and his collaborators’ and supporters’ privileged frivolities stood for the old order

they challenged in what was, for them, a class war as well as an aesthetic and philosophical one. Nationalism, bound as it was to a revivification of tradition, was an enemy value that sought to control and channel individual expression into the service of an external ideal, and ultimately of the bourgeois state. Such an aim was inimical to the exploration of inner realities and the quest for the unique and the marvelous that Surrealism’s adherents professed. Their protest at Mercure, and the issuing of Breton’s Manifesto of Surrealism a few months later, announced a major shift in the terms of artistic renewal. From something that experimented within a largely familiar context, new art was moving towards genuinely uncharted territory; unknown and unexplored, and its discoveries were unpredictable. Surrealism was intended to be a more authentically dangerous and disruptive type of modernism than the variety safely contained by the elite milieu represented by Beaumont, and by extension, the artists he commissioned. Beaumont’s notion of avant-garde—artistic synthesis in the service of national regeneration—required a network of established artists with proven achievements and reputations, and the will for collaborative endeavor. It also required established patronage in the form of a cultured, privileged class with the wealth to support experimentation, in return for the cachet that accompanied association with the new and daring. This elite, imbricated in the global capitalist economy, provided financial backing, an audience, and a market—safety nets that the untried Surrealists lacked. Yet Soirée de Paris disappeared with little trace, Beaumont’s reputation faded, and Surrealism gained in strength and influence to become a major movement in art and ideas of the later 1920s and 30s, and one of the most consequential cultural phenomena of our time.

Having assimilated artists and attitudes from Cubism and to some extent Dada, Beaumont’s generation’s world-view still saw itself as avant-garde—and it still was, in many ways. However, the emergence of the younger, aggressive, artistically fearless and politically
radical Surrealists changed all that. While they rejected nationalism, defied bourgeois capitalism and its institutions, disdained the burdens of history, and sought to subvert the rule of Enlightenment rationalism over intellectual and creative activity, the Surrealists also rebelled against their immediate antecedents in the avant-garde movements that had nurtured them. Chief among the creative disruptions practiced by these movements—Zurich Dada, Italian and Russian Futurism, Constructivism, and German Expressionism—but abandoned by the Surrealists was live public performance, which included dance in its most experimental forms, as I discuss in chapter 3. Breton and his colleagues Louis Aragon (1897-1982), Philippe Soupault (1897-1990), and Paul Eluard (1895-1952) had never been fully in sympathy with Dada’s performative emphasis; once they had determined to launch their own movement, the Surrealists’ proscription of dance and music performance was absolute. But dance, in its most establishment identity as ballet, was a prominent feature of Parisian cultural life, and it was at this time the principal object of Beaumont’s interest and patronage, a fact guaranteed to anathematize him to Breton. The *Mercure* protest made it clear that no accord between Surrealism and dance was possible, and that henceforth the avant-garde mission to change the world would proceed without the benefit of live performance—especially dance, in any form.\(^\text{12}\) The new avant-garde no longer had any use for what had, until then, been one of the avant-garde’s primary means of self-actualization: the subversive and exploratory potential of the moving human body. This was a major change, and it put dance in France, at least, in the uncomfortable and then unfamiliar position of trying to sustain a connection with the newest artistic ideas, while being repudiated

\[^{12}\text{This rejection of performative modes does not include film, which became an important Surrealist vehicle, notwithstanding Breton’s initial skepticism. Despite its performance aspect, film lacked the social and personal associations of dance that repelled Breton. The screen also imposed a hard barrier between the viewer and the inescapable physicality of the performing body which, as will become apparent, was a serious obstacle.}\]
by the artists and the movement that were their source. How could it continue to boast its own progressive credentials if the leaders of the new avant-garde were treating it as aesthetically retrograde and socially irrelevant at every turn?

My characterization of this transformation in the avant-garde hinges on the exclusion of live, performing bodies from its expressive means. This was new, and it was a significant departure from precedent: both Futurism and Dada developed and employed radically experimental forms of dance in public performance throughout their existence, as did Expressionism and the Russian avant-gardes. The proponents of all these movements regarded dance as a vital element in the propagation of their agendas, and as an important vehicle for the exploration of new ideas about the function of art in the social as well as the aesthetic revolutions they were pursuing. The centrality of dance to these avant-gardes makes its exclusion from Surrealism the more remarkable; dance had become a critical point of rupture.

**Dance and Surrealism**

My focus in this dissertation is on early twentieth-century dance in France, which developed separately—and differently—from dance in Germany, and to an extent in Russia, and on the dance artists outside France whose work influenced its expression there.\(^{13}\) When considering the avant-garde manifestations of the 1910s and 20s, it is difficult, and only sometimes valid, to separate dance into a category of its own distinct from performance that included some form of movement-based expression. The range of these expressions exists on a

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\(^{13}\) The isolating effects of the first World War and the Russian Revolution are obvious reasons for this; there were others connected with each nation’s performance traditions.
spectrum with much of the standard Ballets Russes repertoire at one extreme, and the Dada performances in Zurich from 1916-19, and occasionally in Paris between 1920-23, at the other. In between lies the more innovative work (almost everything else) presented by the Ballets Russes, the Ballets Suédois, some of Soirée de Paris, Cocteau’s dance-mime productions, the work of the German Ausdruckstanz pioneers, some Futurist performance, and independent performances by individual dancers who identified with Futurism, Dada, or just declared themselves as experimental performance artists, some of whom appear in chapters 3 and 4. On this spectrum, the best-known, most artistically successful and most stridently avant-garde performances, all in Paris—Parade, Les Mamelles de Tirésias, Mercure, Relâche, La Création du monde, Le Boeuf sur le toit, Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel—stand out as radical, ingenious works of art attempting a new type of theatre that strove for a particular effect of surprise and disorientation.\(^\text{14}\) This desired effect was to be achieved as much by the works’ form as by their content: a syncretism among dance (mostly ballet and its derivations), music, sounds of other descriptions, painting, kinetic sculpture, and spoken word, often augmented by elements of “low” entertainment—acrobatics, clowning, marionette theatre, circus, cabaret or music-hall, and film, which had not quite found its niche in the cultural hierarchy. The alliance of high and low cultural forms, defiantly embraced by their practitioners, was very much the point—as was the outrage these self-consciously impertinent spectacles frequently provoked amongst their spectators.

The word dance itself, in avant-garde performance, covers multiple and diverse forms as well. Many of these performances were called ballets, even if their choreography bore scant

\(^{14}\) Guillaume Apollinaire stressed the importance of surprise in new art and theatre (see ch. 2) but he was not the only one to do so. Tristan Tzara, for instance, speaks of “la surprise, cet élément si important en art” in his review of Alexander Tairov’s Kamerny Theatre of Moscow’s Paris season, March 1923. *Oeuvres complètes I: 1912-1924*, ed. Henri Béhar (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 616.
relation to classical form and technique, because they were produced by ballet companies and ballet choreographers and dancers, and because the dance world had not yet evolved a vocabulary flexible enough to account for its rapidly diversifying styles. Avant-garde dance included not only modernist ballet as practiced by the Ballets Russes and Suédois—a looser, more expressive and athletic form of the traditional *danse d’école*, with innovations by individual choreographers (Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Bronislava Nijinska, Massine, Georges Balanchine, Jean Börlin) but also imitation “primitive” dances; jazz-inspired movement; notional revivals of classical Greek dance; mime; movement derived from everyday actions or film; “character” or folk-based dance; and a variety of individual movement styles devised by their creators and performers. The work of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, Rudolf Laban, Isadora Duncan and their disciples; the movement innovations of Nikolai Foregger and many others in early Soviet Russia; Oskar Schlemmer and his Triadic Ballet at the Bauhaus in Germany; German Expressionist dancers, notably Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss; American Modern dance artists such as Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn; cross-cultural innovators like Michio Ito, among others—although essential for a comprehensive history of avant-garde dance—is mainly outside the scope of this discussion. I am not aiming to be comprehensive; my focus is on dance in France and its direct antecedents, specifically on dance artists and on works that would have shared a mutual cultural awareness with Surrealism.

The reasons for Surrealism’s rejection of dance, which I analyze in chapter 4, are complex but identifiable and go deeper than the obvious antagonisms on display at the *Mercure* protest in 1924. Nonetheless, there were serious points of contact between dance and the ideas and images of Surrealism; as Annabelle Melzer claims, “the ballet continued to furnish a vital experimental stage for the avant-garde, and what the legitimate theatre could not dare and the
avant-garde could not afford, the ballet could and did.”15 Ballet ignored Surrealism’s prohibition, took what it wanted from the art and ideas of the new movement, and developed on its own terms. We must recognize too that the manifestations of Surrealism, however pervasive, did not have a monopoly on avant-garde expression; ballet, a vital art always in dialogue with but not dependent on the other arts, went on creating its own vanguard forms, sometimes in concert and sometimes in parallel with them.

It may be objected that since dance did not form part of Surrealism proper, there is no reason to discuss it, nor any material, historical, or aesthetic basis for consideration. Yet calling attention to absence—in this case a conscious exclusion that goes against precedent—provides a new perspective from which to view familiar terrain, and can reveal much about the way in which the movement chose to constitute itself, and about its relationship to the other players in the historical avant-garde. An exposure of dance’s absence from the Surrealist experience gives meaning to its eventual though fleeting presence there—at the 1938 Exposition international du surréalisme, as we shall see in chapter 4—and enables an assessment, finally, of the conditions that might have been necessary for the largely hypothetical existence of a Surrealist dance.

Summary

Chapter 1 opens on June 15, 1924, with the Surrealist protest at the répétition générale of Mercure. I introduce Beaumont—his life, career, achievements, ambitions and reputation, profiling him as a leading, if eccentric, exponent of reactionary modernism. His life as a performance, his ambition to position himself as an impresario of new art, music, dance, theatre,

and film in post-World War I Paris, his famously extravagant costume balls, his entrepreneurial activities during both wars, the fictionalization (actual and metaphorical) of his fabulous lifestyle, and his close relationships with many of the era’s major artistic personalities are all analyzed. Drawing on aspects of Actor-Network Theory to reconstruct his social situation, I argue for a reassessment of Beaumont as an essential figure in the narrative of interwar modernism.

Chapter 2 is concerned with Soirée de Paris in 1924, an homage in name and ideology to Apollinaire, and to his influential notion of l’esprit nouveau. I examine Soirée in its context: the significance of Montmartre as the venue, the cast of participants, the disarray of Beaumont’s organization, the program of dances, plays, and art, and the season’s sharply polarized reception. The ballet Mercure is analyzed from several perspectives; I argue for it as a new inscription of Picasso’s artistic persona, and as an experiment in fusing art, dance and cinema on the stage. I revisit the Surrealist protest from chapter 1, and situate it as a critical moment when Beaumont’s elitist vision of modern art and patronage is challenged by the voice of a new, politically and aesthetically radical avant-garde.

Chapter 3 considers the role of dance in the historical avant-gardes—Italian Futurism, and Zurich and Paris Dada—Surrealism’s antecedents, which used live performance as a weapon in their attacks on tradition and bourgeois values. I discuss F.T. Marinetti’s Manifesto of the Futurist Dance, and survey Futurist dance from its earliest exponent, Valentine de Saint-Point, through marionette and machine dances, Diaghilev’s experiments, and attempts to fuse dancers, costumes and scenography in a mechanized theatre, to Futurism’s return to corporeal movement in the 1920s. Dance in Dada is evaluated through the collaboration of the Laban School dancers,
especially Sophie Taeuber, in the Zurich cabarets; its less prominent role in Paris Dada is also examined. I argue that the moving body was an underrated partner in Dada’s subversive project.

Chapter 4 tackles the conflicted relationship of Surrealism and dance, and asks why the topic has been neglected by scholars. I consider both the presence and absence of interactions between Surrealism and dance, and interrogate the absence. Potential affinities between the two entities are established; personal, political, psychological, and philosophical antipathies are next investigated. Surrealism’s difficult relationship to music is examined as a contingent factor. I consider how the embodied response dance invites plays into its rejection by Surrealism. Diaghilev’s 1926 ballet *Romeo and Juliet* functions as a case study of Surrealist art in the service of dance, with mixed results. Based on a performance over a decade later, by Hélène Vanel at the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* in 1938, I propose a scenario for an authentically Surrealist dance.

In the Conclusion, I suggest areas for further research and introduce a present-day dance theatre initiative which presents future possibilities for avant-garde dance in a Surrealist spirit.

**Literature and Other Sources**

It will be clear that this dissertation is not a study in a single, easily defined field. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary one that (like the art with which it deals) is syncretic: it draws strands from an eclectic range of interrelated fields and studies them together, with the aim of presenting a new perspective on the culture of the avant-garde in interwar France. I have therefore consulted a wide array of literature from many areas, and as a result, I have incurred a great many general
debts across many disciplines, but few specific ones deserving mention as constituting a
discursive field.\textsuperscript{16}

The field most important to this study is the burgeoning one of cultural studies of dance.
In the past three decades authors including Gabriele Brandstetter, Mark Franko, Ramsay Burt,
Juliet Bellow, Susan Jones, and Felicia McCarren have begun to investigate the connections
between modernist dance and innovations in the visual arts, literature, music, theatre, fashion,
film, technology, politics, and philosophy in the context of wider cultural changes in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from theoretical as well as historical positions.\textsuperscript{17} They
have reached across all these disciplines, using insights gained by considering them together, to
reveal that dance is more central to a full account of modernist culture and its transformations
than previous, standard studies have realized or allowed. This work has been and is being done
principally by dance and cultural historians, but also by art, music, and literature scholars who
have emulated their subjects in the historical avant-gardes in crossing boundaries between
formerly isolated disciplines. Their work challenges old ideas, repositioning dance as a crucial
and representative force in the development of modernism; in so doing it reveals and elucidates
correspondences that productively complicate our understanding of the cultural dynamics of the
era. It is no accident that many of these studies, such as those by Ruth Hemus and Nell Andrew,
are from a feminist perspective; the marginalization of women in aesthetic culture by

\textsuperscript{16} References are given in these notes to only the principal works consulted for this study by each author mentioned. For further references, please consult the bibliography.

conventional histories is a major reason for the neglect of dance, often mistakenly regarded as a primarily female artform.¹⁸

I aim to contribute to the growing scholarly emphasis on dance in its relationship with other aspects of culture as a key part of the narrative of modernism. My intention is to situate dance as a significant actor in the fortunes and indeed the definition of the avant-garde; I do this first by resuscitating the career of one of the more influential but less examined patrons of the old vanguard. By re-inserting Beaumont into a central place in the narrative of French modernism I re-evaluate his significance. Second, I contribute to a new perspective on the avant-garde by re-examining Surrealism, the formation that emerged in the 1920s in opposition to Beaumont’s. As no previous study has done, I focus on the Surrealists’ rejection of dance and its associations, and suggest that this was an important element in defining the movement and in changing the nature of the avant-garde. I finally locate Hélène Vanel’s performance as Surrealism’s primary contribution to the history of vanguard dance and performance from 1938 up to the present day.

I have been inspired in this project by the writing of many scholars. Chief among them are Gabriele Brandstetter on the interrelation of dance and the other arts in the context of early twentieth-century cultural shifts; Nell Andrew on Futurist and Dada dancers, and on links between avant-garde dance and painting; Felicia McCarren on dance and machine aesthetics; Ramsay Burt on issues of race, gender and sexuality in modernist dance; Susan Jones on modern poetry and dance; and Mark Franko for a theoretical approach to a politics of modern dance. Juliet Bellow’s account of the Ballets Russes as an essential modernist enterprise provides

context for modernist ballet in the 1920s and insight into Picasso’s use of film in his stage work. Surveys of modern dance (as opposed to ballet) in France by Jacqueline Robinson, and in Europe and America by Annie Suquet, provided historical evidence and context; the Pompidou Museum’s catalogue of their 2011 exhibition Danser sa vie is a rich interdisciplinary resource of theory, criticism, history, and vignettes that create a multifaceted portrait of modernist dance. John Bowlt and Natalia Chernova’s volume on Russian modernist dance and movement culture illuminates an area little known in the west; Lynn Garafola’s pioneering work on Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in its cultural context and her argument for modernist ballet culture as an aristocracy of taste influenced my thinking; it is augmented by her wider scholarship on dance and modernism. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen’s collection of readings on dance theory and criticism provides important historical texts, enabling the reader to follow a trail of perceptive writing about dance over the past century.19

On Futurist dance, I have been influenced by Gunter Berghaus on Valentine de Saint Point, Giannina Censi, and dance in the context of Futurist polemics of theatre; Patrizia Veroli’s critical surveys of the field; Gabriella Belli on Fortunato Depero’s machine ballets; and by Mirella Bentivoglio, Franca Zoccoli, and others on Futurist women. I have benefited from critical discussions of Sophie Taeuber and the other Dada dancers by Nell Andrew, Jill Fell, Ruth Hemus, and others. Leah Dickerman in the catalogue of the National Gallery’s Dada exhibition of 2005 was the first in a major forum to consider dance as a serious contribution to

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Dada. There is, as I have stated, no work dealing specifically with Surrealism and dance, but I am indebted to Richard Emerson’s recent monograph on Hélène Vanel and her associates for a serious study of a dancer who identified as Surrealist.²⁰

Two more general books on avant-garde theatre have been useful in understanding the territory in which dance operated. Annabelle Melzer’s *Dada and Surrealist Performance* partly inspired the subject of this dissertation; she resuscitates and revalues a once underrated area of avant-garde expression, giving dance its due. Gunter Berghaus’s *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde* is an excellent source of historical evidence and analysis; he reveals larger cultural currents at play within the trajectory of the avant-garde, even if he largely ignores dance—in this work, although not elsewhere. My discussion of Surrealism and dance in indebted for aspects of its methodology to Sébastien Arfouilloux’s *Que la nuit tombe sur l’orchestre: surréalisme et musique*. His work enabled me to make meaningful connections between Surrealism’s relationships to music and to dance, and helped me to conceptualize how to approach investigating an absence.²¹

The other discursive field of most importance to this study deals with the cultural politics of reactionary modernism, French nationalism, and the arts. I situate Beaumont and his enterprise

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in Soirée de Paris, his costume balls, and his other activities in this context, and argue for it as a key feature of his version of avant-garde. The notion of renewing French culture through a nostalgic recuperation of the past, central to his operations, is explored in an essential essay collection on the arrière-garde edited by Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris.22 Its application to art as the “call to order,” an articulation of modernism that located aesthetic advancement in a modern reinvention of tradition, is analyzed by many scholars. I have found the work of Romy Golan, Christopher Green, Kenneth Silver, and the Tate Gallery’s catalogue On Classic Ground by Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, especially helpful.23

Since this study is partly the story of an individual’s life in connection with other individuals’ lives, I have found scholarly biographies of Beaumont’s principal associates, and of some of the more minor ones, to be invaluable sources. Chief among these biographies are those of Picasso, by John Richardson; Cocteau, by Francis Steegmuller and by Claude Arnaud; Satie, by Ornella Volta and by Robert Orledge; Massine, by Vicente Garcia-Marquez; Proust, by Jean-Yves Tadié; Diaghilev, by Richard Buckle; and Breton, by Mark Polizzotti.24 Others will be found in the bibliography. In addition to scholarly secondary sources, published primary materials—journals, correspondence, memoirs, autobiographies, and histories by Beaumont’s


associates—have furnished crucial evidence and a range of viewpoints throughout. These sources are referenced as they occur.

Whereas all four chapters use a combination of secondary critical work, published primary material, and reviews and articles in periodicals, the first two also rely extensively on archival sources, many of which have not hitherto been examined, or not in this context. Of these, L’Institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine (IMEC) at Caen, France, which houses the Beaumont and Satie papers formerly in the Fondation Satie, has been vital to my research. In Paris, I have consulted the Beaumont–Picasso correspondence in the Musée Picasso Archives; the Soirée de Paris press clippings and programs file in the Rondel Collection, Département des arts et spectacles, at the Bibliothèque nationale de France’s Richelieu site; and the Boris Kochno and Ballets Suédois collections at the Bibliothèque-musée de l’Opéra, Palais Garnier, as well as material at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou. In the U.K., I consulted the John Maynard Keynes and Lydia Lopokova Keynes papers at Kings College, Cambridge; the Ballets Russes and Bronislava Nijinska archives at the Royal Ballet School, White Lodge, Richmond; the press clipping and biographical files and the costume collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum’s Theatre and Dance Division Archives; and the Pictorial Collections and National Art Library at the museum itself, in London. In the U.S.A. I have consulted the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo archives, the Nancy van Norman Baer papers, biographical files, video and audio recordings in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts; the Walter Berry papers at the University of Illinois at Carbondale; and Rare Books and Special Collections at Olin library, Washington University in Saint Louis.
A Note on Translation

Much of the primary and secondary source material quoted in this study is in French. Where I have quoted from it in the text, used other French expressions, or mentioned titles of works, I have done so for the most part in English translation, with the original French (and in a few cases, Italian or German) given in the footnotes. Exceptions to this practice are where: (1) the original language is sufficiently clear that a translation seems unnecessary; (2) the quoted material and its translation consist of no more than one or two words each, in which case the original is also in the text; (3) French words or expressions are in customary usage in English; (4) I have judged that preserving the unique character of the original language is important to the communicate the tone of the utterance. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
Chapter One

Count Étienne de Beaumont in the Networks of Modernism

For if there was one thing which really characterized this social milieu, it was its prodigious capacity for coming down in the world.

—Marcel Proust

1.1 A Declaration of Hostilities

Violent protests at the premieres of avant-garde works of theatre were nothing new in early twentieth-century Paris. Alfred Jarry’s Ubu roi in 1896, the Ballets Russes’ Le Sacre du printemps in 1913, their Parade in 1917, the Ballets Suédois’ Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel in 1923, and Luis Bunuel’s film L’Age d’or in 1930, among others, had all been greeted by angry demonstrations. However, in the summer of 1924, one such protest signaled a seismic shift in the cultural values of the times: a group of artist-provocateurs from the former Dada movement disrupted the fashionable premiere at the Théâtre de la Cigale in Montmartre of a ballet created by Pablo Picasso, Erik Satie and Léonide Massine, leaders of the French modern movement in art, music and dance. Such Dada manifestations had become commonplace, but this one was a turning point; the progressives were suddenly cast as the Establishment and the agitators, led by André Breton and Louis Aragon, would soon announce themselves as Surrealists, claiming an uncharted new trajectory for the avant-garde. The ballet was Mercure, the much-anticipated


2 Choosing the appropriate collective noun to describe Breton and his cohort at the time of the Mercure protest is not straightforward. Were they Dadas, Dada-Surrealists, or Surrealists? Dadas is how they had been identified until then, and how their contemporaries mainly described them, but Dada in Paris had ceased to exist in July 1923, after the disastrous Soirée du coeur à barbe (Evening of the Bearded Heart, see Chapter 3, p. 243). Surrealists is how they would soon definitively identify themselves after the publication of the first Surrealist Manifesto in October 1924.
climax of Soirée de Paris, a season produced by an aspiring impresario, Le Comte Étienne de Beaumont. 

An aristocratic patron of the arts, Beaumont was a prominent figure in the avant-garde networks of postwar Paris. He had devised Soirée, an ambitious six-week season that brought together new dance, painting, music, theatre, and poetic writing, with the intention of revitalizing the format of a traditional French forain as well as that of the music-hall. Intended as a way of synthesizing the talents of his many friends and associates in the intersecting worlds of Parisian arts and high society, the project would, he hoped, advance his own credentials as a Maecenas to rival Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929) of the Ballets Russes and Rolf de Maré (1888-1964) of the Ballets Suédois. Mercure, the most radically experimental piece of the season, with the most distinguished lineup of creative personnel, was the final work to open, with its répétition générale or public preview on Sunday, June 15. No-one had anticipated that Breton’s Surrealists, hostile to music and dance in general and to Satie in particular, would upstage what should have been Beaumont’s finest moment: the unveiling of the production that would ensure his status as the (self-appointed) presiding genius of avant-garde Paris. Aside from that modest ambition, he

For the intervening period, sometimes called the mouvement flou, scholars have used either, both, or cumbersome variants such as would-be or nascent Surrealists. I have chosen to call them Surrealists, or Dada-Surrealists, based on Breton’s statement to André Parinaud in 1951 that, after July 1923, “the era of Surrealism properly speaking had begun;” Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism (Entretiens), translated by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 56. Admittedly, that was a retrospective judgement; but that is true of all histories, including this one.

3 Forain: a traditional fairground entertainment, consisting of different types of acts, such as clowns, comic and satiric singers, jugglers, acrobats, trick riders, dancers, and assorted musicians. This had been a rich source for modern artists since Seurat, and had inspired the scenario of Parade, the Ballets Russes’ groundbreaking modern ballet of 1917, of which Beaumont was a sponsor. Both the variety of performances and the vernacular content of the forain were part of Beaumont’s intention for Soirée de Paris, which partly explains his choice of the louche Montmartre venue, a former music-hall. He claimed that, in Soirée, he was aiming “to transform the music hall, to bring together its major elements and thus to show the fulfillment of our poetry, our painting, our music, our dance.” (de transformer le music-hall, d’y réunir des elements majeurs et de montrer ainsi l’épanouissement de notre poésie, de notre peinture, de notre musique, de notre danse); René Crevel, “Les Soirées de Paris,” Les Nouvelles Littéraires, May 10, 1924: 7.
had hoped that Mercure would redeem the shambolic organization and the mainly negative reviews that had bedeviled his enterprise thus far. Instead, it reaffirmed them.

Mercure was last on the program and as it began, the “faux-dadas,” as Satie called them, staged a noisy demonstration from the house, whistling and shouting “Long live Picasso! Down with Satie!” as they showered the audience with leaflets inveighing against the co-option of art by bourgeois interests. They proceeded to confront Picasso and his wife Olga in their box and, charging through the audience, thrust a written declaration at Beaumont. The police were called and the Surrealists were ejected, but not before Louis Aragon had exchanged blows with the composer Henri Sauguet (1901-1989) on the theatre steps. The audience was bemused by the uproar; some assumed it was all part of the show, others asked the staff, who assured them that the troublemakers were “actors who got in without paying.” In the midst of it all sat the Count, according to his friend Bernard Faÿ (1893-1978), “motionless…without saying a word, like Marius amid the ruins of Carthage.” Satie, principal object of the Surrealists’ fury, avoided much of the excitement, leaving before the end of the performance so as not to miss his train home to Arcueil in the suburbs of Paris. Satie encountered the protesters on his way out, but

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4 “Fake dadas:” Satie, in a letter to Darius Milhaud, June 16, 1924; Satie: Correspondance, 618. “Vive Picasso! À bas Satie!” Reported in several sources. For a reliable eyewitness account, see Lydia Lopokova’s letter to her fiancé John Maynard Keynes, June 16, 1924. Lydia Lopokova was a prima ballerina with Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. She accepted a contract with Beaumont for his season and danced the lead in several of the ballets, but refused a role in Mercure, since she felt the piece was “no ballet, no parody, but somehow a stupid fake” (see ch. 2, p. 198). Her letters to Keynes are the principal verified eyewitness accounts of Soirée (other than critics’ reviews) and its preparation. They are held in the Keynes Archive at King’s College, Cambridge, U.K., where I consulted them. Edited selections are published in Polly Hill and Milo Keynes, editors, Lydia and Maynard: The Letters of Lydia Lopokova and John Maynard Keynes (New York: Scribner, 1990). The Russian ballerina’s idiosyncratic English is preserved in all quotations from her letters given here. Lopokova claims there were also shouts of “Down with E. de Beaumont, the boys [homosexuals], and the whole of Soirée de Paris” (En bas E. de Beaumont, les garçons, etc. Soirées de Paris), and that opposing pro- and anti-Picasso and Satie camps were involved in the imbroglio. See also the first-hand account of Bernard Faÿ in Les Précieux (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1966), 73.

5 “‘Ce sont des acteurs, qu’il a mis à la porte sans payer,‘” “Étienne se tenait immense, immobile, au milieu de la scène, sans dire un mot, tel Marius sur les ruines de Carthage;” Fay, 73. Bernard Faÿ was a historian of Franco-American relations who was an intimate of many members of Beaumont’s network, and of Gertrude Stein. He was later Director-general of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
“they said nothing to me,” he wrote to Darius Milhaud next day. In a letter to the critic Wieland Mayr a few days later, Satie caustically referred to “my old friend, the famous writer Brétuchon”—a portmanteau of Breton’s name and cochon (pig); the hostility was mutual. Given that the protesters would soon identify themselves as Surrealists, the dancer Lydia Lopokova’s verdict on the disturbance is unintentionally apt: “humanity is very ugly when [sic] loses control of the mind.” Mercure was largely misunderstood by critics and unappreciated by audiences; hostile reviews and undersold houses forced its closure after five performances, with that of the whole season, on June 28.

Its run may have been brief, but Mercure’s fame survived it, due in part to the Surrealist protest which earned it a place on the distinguished list of avant-garde theatre productions disrupted by audience riots. However, unlike most others on that list, Mercure’s riot came not from the reactionary bourgeoisie but from the radical fringe. That demonstration, and what it meant for the avant-garde, will be analyzed in greater depth in chapter 2. This chapter will examine Étienne de Beaumont himself, as an individual and as an actor in a diverse number of intersecting social, intellectual, and creative networks in postwar Paris. I will argue that he may be identified as an important point of convergence within these networks and that as such, he assumes a historical and cultural significance beyond anything he represents on his own. At stake in the operations of these networks are several issues: chiefly, for my purposes, that of the contested nature of the avant-garde at this moment in the history of modernism. Beaumont’s position in these networks situates him as an exemplary representative of reactionary

6 “J’ai, en sortant, traversé le groupe “Faux-dada”: ils ne m’ont rien dit.” Satie to Darius Milhaud, June 16, 1924. Satie, Correspondence, 618.


8 Lopokova to Keynes, June 16, 1924.
modernism—a version of avant-garde identity that stood for the “aristocracy of taste” that he embodied—and I argue that positioning him in this way supports my case for Beaumont as a figure worthy of our attention.\(^9\) The dance historian Lynn Garafola analyzes the idea of an aristocracy of taste in the 1920s when a taste for and patronage of new art had come to occupy the space of wealth and social privilege, thereby increasing the market value of modernist art, with the result that art which might have begun as a cry of defiance against the Establishment became a signifier of that Establishment’s status.\(^10\) This is the inevitable paradox of the avant-garde’s trajectory: expressive means that originally attacked, derided, and sought to overturn the values of the dominant class become co-opted and gentrified by the very demographic they set out to undermine and, safely domesticated, end by serving the interests of that class—and their interests are always themselves: their own fortunes, privileges, and exclusivity.

To appreciate Beaumont’s importance in the networks of modernism in Paris at this critical moment in modernism’s history, it is necessary to profile him, his activities and his relationships in some detail; this is what the remainder of this chapter will do. He occupies a position that is highly distinctive and indeed unique, at the center of a complicated web of intersecting relations among widely diverse personalities, tendencies and events. The distinctive nature of Beaumont’s achievement in bringing together a significant number of notable artists in an ambitious series of theatrical spectacles in *Soirée de Paris* has been noted by other scholars, but this role has never been theorized in a broader context, nor has the whole of his career ever been examined.\(^11\) Otherwise, Beaumont has appeared in scholarly and general historical

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\(^9\) Reactionary modernism is identified and discussed in Adamson, Norris, et al, 1-24.

\(^10\) Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, 357-60.

\(^11\) The only studies dedicated to Beaumont himself have been in the context of *Soirée de Paris*. These are: Anne Bertrand, *Les Soirées de Paris du Comte Etienne de Beaumont 17 mai-30 juin 1924*, unpublished DEA thesis
literature merely as a supporting actor in someone else’s story, and in fiction caricatured as a parody of himself\(^{12}\); he has been ridiculed, dismissed, misrepresented, trivialized, treated as a sideshow freak and a charlatan, and subjected to errors of fact and interpretation to serve various authors’ personal and academic agendas. Rarely has he been taken seriously as a significant actor in any narrative of modernism—except by his own contemporaries, who either admired or loathed him, but who did not underestimate him. This primary study will present him center stage as the leading actor in his own narrative, and as a highly significant player in one of the important narratives of modernism. He created a Utopian space around himself at the confluence of multiple currents of modernism, in which, for a brief moment, everything seemed possible, and he seemed destined to be its facilitator. Paying attention to the detail of his intersecting relations allows us to appreciate his importance, and to understand the exceptional contribution he made to cultural life in the interwar period of the twentieth century. It can also reorient and enlarge our understanding of modernism in France in this period.

1.2 A “Grand seigneur of the Twentieth Century”\(^{13}\)

Étienne Jacques Alexandre Marie Joseph Bonnin de la Bonninière de Beaumont was an exceptional character (fig. 1.1). Refined, exquisite, flamboyant, and possessed of impeccable

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taste and great artistic ambition, but without a great deal of specific talent, he was born in 1883 into a noble Touraine family dating from the twelfth century, whose chevaliers of that era rode to the Crusades, and whose more recent fortune was said to derive from the Château Latour wine business.\textsuperscript{14} What first struck observers was Beaumont’s stature, and then his voice: he was “immensely tall and thin…with huge, round, shining eyes that swiveled as he darted them to and fro,” and he “didn’t speak, he yelped” (fig. 1.2).\textsuperscript{15}

Jacques Chastenet describes Beaumont’s affect during the interwar years, when he was in his forties and at the height of his celebrity and influence:

The count is tall, with all-embracing gestures, silvery hair, a profile like Louis XIV, a high-pitched voice, his manners imperious but extremely courteous. Whimsical in his friendships…his most regular artistic collaborators are Picasso, Chirico, Cocteau, Erik Satie, Tristan Tzara, Jean Hugo; his public is the “upper crust” of Saint-Germain and the sixteenth arrondissement. A fertile union of avant-garde art and snobbery; we will never again see such successful, refined frivolity.\textsuperscript{16} (fig. 1.3)

Whereas Bernard Faÿ, who knew him well, offers a more penetrating assessment:

Beaumont possessed neither Cocteau’s creative instinct nor Lucien Daudet’s ingenuity. A man of little education, he adored literature, which he judged well; without gifts for painting or music, he had a lively taste for artworks and discerned in the blink of an eye the quality of a canvas, an object, or a piece of furniture; lacking practical experience, he nonetheless managed men with dexterity; he quickly discovered their weak point and guessed from the start how to take advantage of a situation. He even used his outlandish


appearance artfully; he liked to emphasize it with clothes and gestures to create an image that was striking rather than unintentionally absurd.\textsuperscript{17}

Such was his idiosyncratic charisma that many of those who knew Beaumont believed he dominated, and even embodied the unique moment of his ascendancy, Paris between the two World Wars: Lucien Daudet (1878-1946) called him “one of the most representative characters of an era and a society,” and the Surrealist poet René Crevel (1900-1935) characterized him as “this ‘noble lord’ of the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{18}

In 1907, Étienne married Edith Marie Elisabeth de Taisne de Raymonval (1876-1952), scion of an even older line (fig. 1.4). The Countess, a serious scholar of Greek literature, published a translation of Sappho illustrated by Marie Laurencin in 1950, and despite (or perhaps because of) Étienne’s discreet but well-known bisexuality, the couple seemed well matched.\textsuperscript{19}

They were childless, although Francis Steegmuller claims that the Countess had “several unsuccessful pregnancies.”\textsuperscript{20} No beauty, but reportedly a charmingly strange and rather dreamy person in her own right, Edith is said to have invigorated her husband and licensed his fantastical tendencies: “he could not do without her…nor her free spirit that liberated him from reality when he tired of it.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Vogue} regularly praised her elegance of dress and demeanor, and the writer Paul

\textsuperscript{17} “Beaumont ne possédait ni l’instinct créateur de Cocteau ni l’ingéniosité de Lucien Daudet. Peu cultivé, il adorait la littérature et la jugeait bien; sans dons pour la peinture ou la musique, il goûtaît les tableaux et discernait d’un coup d’œil la qualité d’une toile, d’un objet, d’un meuble; dépourvu d’expérience pratique, il n’en maniait pas moins les hommes avec dextérité; il découvrait vite leur point faible et devinait d’emblée les ressorts à employer pour tirer parti d’une situation. Il utilisait même avec art son apparence démesurée, qu’il se plaisait à souligner par ses vêtements et ses gestes, pour en faire une image frappante plutôt qu’un ridicule involontaire.” Faÿ, 33-34.


\textsuperscript{20} Steegmuller, 140.

\textsuperscript{21} “Il ne pouvait se passer d'elle…de cette indépendance, qui l'affranchissait du réel, quand il en était excédé.” Faÿ, 33.
Morand (1888-1976), capturing Edith’s slightly masculine appearance, described her as having “short hair à la Joan of Arc, ravishing, resembling Titian’s Man with a Glove” (fig. 1.5).\footnote{22}

The couple inhabited the ancestral Beaumont home where the Count had been born, at 11 rue Masseran or 2 rue Duroc, depending on which entry one used. Hôtel Masseran, or Duroc, familiarly dubbed “the Church of the Uppercrust Muses,” occupied (and still does) a large estate between the rues Masseran and Duroc and the Boulevard des Invalides in Paris’s seventh arrondissement, in the heart of the hyper-exclusive Faubourg Saint-Germain.\footnote{23} Built for the Prince de Massérano by the distinguished Louis XVI-era architect Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart in 1787, just two years before the Revolution, Hôtel Masseran had housed the Spanish Embassy during the first Empire. Beaumont’s family on his paternal grandmother’s side had owned it since 1836. The mansion’s opulence, so it was said, rivalled that of the Louvre:\footnote{24} it boasted a grand ballroom decorated with gilded boiseries and full-length mirrors that Jean Cocteau imagined as “the gates of death;”\footnote{25} a music room with an eighteenth-century organ; dazzling salons full of valuable Louis XVI furniture and paintings ancient and modern; and manicured gardens bedecked with fountains and neoclassical statuary (figs. 1.7-1.8).\footnote{26} Hôtel Masseran was a suitably fabulous backdrop for the fabulous existence the Count created for


\footnote{23}{“Le Temple des muses mondaines.” Faÿ, fig. 5, between pages 60 and 61. The translation is Brown’s, 307.}

\footnote{24}{Garcia-Marquez, 175.}

\footnote{25}{Because the guests reflected in them aged year by year, inevitably disappearing altogether; Steegmuller, 364. Cocteau’s 1950 film Orphée testifies to his lifelong association of mirrors with death.}

\footnote{26}{After Edith de Beaumont’s death in 1951, the Count sold the mansion to the Baron Elie de Rothschild, who gifted it in the 1970s to Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the president of the Republic of Ivory Coast, as his Parisian residence. Still the property of that nation, it had been allowed to deteriorate after the president’s death in 1993 until 2008, when many of its furnishings were sold, through the Paris auction house Osenat, to finance its restoration by the Direction régionale des affaires culturelles for the Ile-de-France region. This appeared to be complete as of 2017, but the DRAC has not responded to my request for further information (fig. 1.6).}
himself and Edith; a gilded theatre for his passions, his fantasies and his diversions, which their many friends were permitted to share when he chose to invite them. Beaumont’s home was the hub of his network, the core of his operations, and the key to his identity, as much an actor as he and the choice acquaintances with whom he surrounded himself in the captivating drama of his life. The Beaumonts also received certain carefully chosen friends at the family’s ancestral chateau at Fontaine-l’Abbé near Rouen in Normandy. In his novel *Pastesch es et mélanges* (1919), Marcel Proust (1871-1922) fictionalized Hôtel Masseran as “the Count and Countess de Beaumont’s … magnificent and incomparable dwelling…that seemed to have awaited them for a hundred years,” and was visited by the King of England.\(^27\) The reality was scarcely less extraordinary.

The persona Beaumont affected was a performance of calculated unconventionality, tempered by an air of aristocratic disdain. He was in all essentials a classic nineteenth-century dandy, but with a large helping of the bizarre and the playful—an exponent of the aesthetic and sensibility of “camp,” just as it was starting to assert itself as part of affluent (and particularly homosexual) consumer culture (fig. 1.9). Susan Sontag named and defined the camp sensibility in an influential essay in 1964; despite much subsequent dispute, many of her insights remain useful to an understanding of Beaumont’s character and career.\(^28\) Camp, Sontag argues, is an “unmistakably modern” sensibility that sees the world as an aesthetic phenomenon, but values excess and artifice above conventional notions of artistic quality: “a vision of the world in terms of style.” “The farthest extension…of the metaphor of life as a theater,” camp is playful and

\(^{27}\) “…du comte et comtesse de Beaumont où s’était déjà rendu le roi d'Angleterre…leur magnifique et singulière demeure… où elle semblait les attendre depuis cent ans.” Marcel Proust, *Pastesch es et mélanges* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1919), 86-87. King George V, as far as we know, never visited the Beaumonts.

performative, but deeply serious about the frivolity it produces. As Christopher Isherwood wrote, “You can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously. You’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it. You’re expressing what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance.” Beaumont with his singular appearance, his house, his balls and parties, his theatrical projects and his gallery of famous friends, could not have put it better (fig. 1.10). It will become apparent in this chapter just how well the criteria for camp apply to him.

For Sontag, camp is the dandy’s answer to modernity: it is his adaptation to the age of mass culture. Dandyism was invented in Regency England, and was an almost exclusively male preserve; its earliest and preeminent exemplar, George “Beau” Brummel, established a cult of understated elegance and perfection in dress and manners. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the dandy, as articulated in the writings and sometimes the personae of Thomas Carlyle and Benjamin Disraeli in England, and Charles Baudelaire and Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly in France (among others), evolved into a flamboyant aristocrat of taste, standing for originality and intellect against a rising tide of bourgeois vulgarity and materialism. His natural habitat was high society, although he despised its conformity as much as he despised that of the common herd, and his sartorial fastidiousness transformed into a penchant for masquerade. For the Symbolist mentality, he was an ideal type of the artist: Joris-Karl Huysmans and Oscar Wilde

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took him to extremes as an androgynous, sexually ambiguous aesthete, who performed “life as a fine art” before an increasingly vulgar public.\textsuperscript{32} By the early twentieth century, mass culture had coarsened the image of the dandy and made his cultivated exclusivity difficult to maintain, and dandyism had become identified with homosexuality: Proust and Cocteau were representative of this late phase. Here, Sontag’s observations are relevant, allowing us to see that the irrepressible dandy’s response was to parody himself, so that camp—always a possibility—blossomed in the radically changed society that emerged after the first World War.

In her authoritative history of dandyism up to the end of the nineteenth century, Ellen Moers argues that “when solid values such as wealth and birth are upset, ephemera such as style and pose are called upon to justify the stratification of society.”\textsuperscript{33} Thus after the war, when traditional social boundaries were dissolving and class identity had become fluid, Étienne de Beaumont’s personal dandyism and his performance of camp may be seen as a means to affirm a new social hierarchy: one based on taste and style. This new elite—which absorbed some of the old aristocracy as well as the newly wealthy—sought to appropriate the avant-garde to solidify its claim to social and cultural leadership: a process I describe as gentrification.

In his time, Beaumont was the epitome of the aestheticization and theatricalization of experience. Although he lacked the necessary gifts for making art himself, he possessed a genius for recognizing and cultivating talent: he collected exceptional people, assembling a gallery of human distinction like a modern cabinet of curiosities, and he exploited their talent in every way imaginable. But his most serious efforts went into the construction and performance of a persona


\textsuperscript{33} Moers, 12.
and an existence at which his contemporaries marveled, and which continues to intrigue: his
great work of art was himself.

1.3 “A Gentleman’s War,” and its Aftermath

The almost unimaginable privilege of Beaumont’s circumstances did not insulate him
from the realities of war and suffering that dominated the century’s second decade. Unlike many
aristocrats who, sensing that the modern world required something more of their class than
previous eras had done, threw money at pet causes, he threw himself personally and
wholeheartedly into every one of the many projects—practical and aesthetic—which he adopted
in the course of his seventy-two years. He was evidently possessed by a desire, not necessarily to
be assumed among the nobility, to be active and useful. The Count’s first foray into public
engagement with the modern world occurred during the First World War, when, despite his
exemption from military service, he organized and led a volunteer mobile ambulance brigade
(fig. 1.13) Reports of this enterprise are fragmentary; the most reliable come from his friends, the
historian Bernard Faÿ (1.14), and the artist Jacques-Émile Blanche (1861-1942), both of whom
served in Beaumont’s Convois auxiliaires d’ambulances automobiles, which was officially under
La Société française de secours aux blessés militaires (The French Society for Aid to the Military

34 Jean Renoir, 1937: “in certain ways, that world war [1914-1918] was still a war of formal people, of educated
people—I would almost dare say, a gentleman’s war.” Quoted in James Chapman, War and Film (London:
ten million men were killed in that period from 1914 to 1918, the war was still…a ‘gentleman’s’ war.” The witness
of men at the front contradicted this view of the war’s politesse. The artist Fernand Léger, for instance, wrote:
“…the current war has become a nasty, harsh war, a war of defenses, trenches, attacks and counter-attacks to gain
barely 50 metres of terrain…for the past three weeks we have been living…in the advance tunnels that we dug…It’s
an appalling life…this trench warfare is full of small murders…you sleep, you eat, in the mud and the rain…I don’t
know how men can do it. It is incomprehensible to me.” Letter to Louis Poughon, October 27, 1914. Quoted in
In 1915, frustrated by the SSBM’s inaction on behalf of wounded troops, Beaumont pressed the authorities until he was granted permission to assemble a mobile first-aid unit that would bring relief to casualties at the front, transporting them to hospitals in Paris where necessary. He later developed this into surgical units that treated the men on site instead, dubbed “autochirs” by the soldiers. Neither facility had previously been available to the French army. According to Blanche, Beaumont acted with considerable courage and was several times mentioned in dispatches, but Faÿ’s version invests the proceedings with a carnival air. Writing in 1966, many years after the events he describes, Faÿ perhaps sought to palliate the true horrors confronted by the unit’s volunteers, who at first included Countess Edith:

An hour after her [Edith’s] departure, the little hostelry she had just left received the last of the bombs that demolished it. A month of scarcity, of cold in the darkness, at the edge of the phosphorescent sea, under the *tauben* [German bombers], the zeppelins, and the shrapnel; impassable roads, ambulance work impossible. The B.s’ car had to pass over two artillery horses, a red mush still smoking from the impact of a shell.

Beaumont was not the first to mount a convoy; the artworld hostess Misia Sert (1872-1950) co-opted Paris taxis and department store delivery trucks to ferry casualties from the front to Paris soon after the war started, but her effort was short-lived and provided little medical assistance.

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35 Fonds Beaumont, BMT 1.1, Institut mémoire de l’édition contemporaine (IMEC). La Société Française de secours aux blessés militaires (SSBM) preceded La Croix-rouge Française (French Red Cross), which replaced it in 1940.

36 An abbreviation of “automobiles chirurgicales” (surgical vehicles).


38 “Une heure après son départ, la petite hôtellerie où elle descendait a reçu les dernières bombes qui la démolirent. Un mois de disette, de froid dans l’obscurité, au bord de la mer phosphorescente, sous les tauben, les zeppelins et les shrapnels; chemins impraticables, travail d’ambulance impossible. L’auto des B. dut passer par-dessus deux chevaux d’artillerie, une bouillie rouge, fumante encore d’un obus reçu.” Blanche, 148.

The Count’s entourage set out from Paris for the Belgian front at Nieuport-Coxyde, in sector 131, in November 1915. Their number included several artists, actors, writers, and critics, notably Beaumont’s protégé Jean Cocteau, who was exempt from war service on medical grounds. The Count had designed their uniform himself: “an austere outfit” which each one embellished according to his own idiosyncracies, giving them the appearance of “Russian admirals or Argentinian policemen,” so that in the end they “looked more like a traveling circus, to Beaumont’s dismay” than a paramedical unit. Ever the contrarian, Cocteau wore the uniform he had asked the couturier Paul Poiret to design him for Misia’s convoys. They arrived at the front despite breakdowns, bombardments, misdirections, hostile officers and other obstacles, to find it “more crowded than the Place de l’Opéra at noon.” The troops to whom they ministered included Moroccan Zouaves and Senegalese snipers; Beaumont was soon obliged to rescue Cocteau from a disemboweling by a Zouave sergeant who objected to his over-friendly attentions to the men. A court-martial was threatened, but the Count’s liberal gifts and his diplomatic skills preserved the peace—and Cocteau was dispatched back to Paris before he could cause more trouble.

The story most often repeated about Beaumont’s ambulance is a masterwork of camp myth-making: it describes his troupe taking over an inn on the Normandy coast and appearing for dinner, led by himself and Cocteau in pink silk pajamas with jingling ankle bracelets, before the astonished gaze of British Commander General Sir Douglas Haig, his wife, and twenty British officers who were also staying there. Faÿ (who was present), is the source, so the tale


41 “Plus encombré que la place de l’Opéra à midi.” Faÿ, 32.
appears to be true, but its repetition (often to the exclusion of other information about Beaumont’s wartime activities) distorts the record, turning Beaumont’s charitable intrepidity into farcical performance and setting him up as merely the narcissistic dilettante he is often represented as being. The incident reveals the aspect of Beaumont that reveled in flamboyant theatricality and masquerade, but it gives a by no means full picture of his war service, nor of his many-faceted character. Faÿ speaks of his “simple hatred of the slaughter and his active compassion for the poor soldiers,” and Blanche describes his leadership, concisely invoking the dual realities of Beaumont’s world just then:

And de B. is brave and even reckless, the life and soul of the group; he is one in whom gallantry is part of a good education. He conducts himself under shrapnel fire just as he does under the chandeliers at a party. He will leave [Paris] the day after tomorrow with as little effort as he arrived yesterday. The service he organized, from the start, has served as a model for other voluntary undertakings.

Cocteau supplies his own unreliable but poetic vision, drawn from his experiences with the Count’s ambulance, in his first novel. Published in 1923, Thomas the Impostor evokes a sense of bizarre unreality, suffusing the hellish conditions at Nieuport-Coxyde in a dream-like atmosphere in which terror transforms into a nightmarish beauty, not unlike that of the Comte de Lautréamont’s Les Chants de Maldoror:

They could see nothing. They could hear the 155 m.m.’s and the 75 m.m.’s exploding like bottles of dry champagne, their shells like tearing silk, the English gun whose position they could never determine, the anti-aircraft guns that crown aeroplanes with

42 Faÿ, 31.

43 “sa simple haine du massacre et sa pitié active pour les pauvres soldats;” Faÿ, 34.

44 “Et de B. est brave et même teméraire, le boute-en-train de la bande; en voilà un pour qui la bravoure fait partie de la bonne education. Il se tient sous la mitraille comme sous les lustres de la fête. Il n’a point d’effort à dépenser et repartira, après-demain, comme il est venu hier. Le service qu’il organisa, dès le début, aura servi de modèle aux autres entreprises volontaires.” Blanche, 150-51.

45 Les Chants de Maldoror (published 1868) by the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse) was a seminal text for the Surrealist movement.
little round clouds like the Virgin Mary’s train of seraphim, the heaving North Sea, oyster-coloured, with its water that was so cold and grey, so like the formula H₂O NaCl that you would have rather burnt yourself to death or buried yourself alive than have bathed in it.⁴⁶

Beaumont’s ambulance and surgical services expanded all along the western front, a dozen or more units operating throughout the war years. He also organized with the American Red Cross to install and maintain refueling and food supply centers in the trench warfare zones. All Beaumont’s entrepreneurial activities during the war were financed from his own resources—a fact that was adduced by the Countess in a letter she wrote around 1926 claiming them as acts of Catholic charity “deriving from the family fortune.”⁴⁷ In the latter part of the war Beaumont served as a Chargé de mission for the French government, making numerous trips on a diplomatic passport to England, Norway, Romania, Crimea, and Russia.⁴⁸ Steegmuller mentions Beaumont’s “making a propaganda tour in Romania and Russia with [the Foreign Office diplomat] Philippe Berthelot” sometime in 1916-17;⁴⁹ in February and March 1917 he was in Petrograd, and thus had the rare experience for a western European of witnessing the February Revolution at first hand.⁵⁰ The writer Paul Morand (at that time attaché to the French ambassador in London) repeats Beaumont’s dinner-party anecdotes of riot, bloodshed, and chaos in Petrograd as the revolutionary forces massacred soldiers and civilians (including an incident in

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⁴⁷ “Oeuvres catholiques provenant de la fortune de la famille.” Undated, c.1926. IMEC, BMT 1.1.

⁴⁸ Documentation of this service, in the form of passports, travel permits, official letters, and government orders of mission are in the archives at IMEC, BMT 1.1, 10.1.

⁴⁹ Steegmuller, 172.

⁵⁰ The first Russian Revolution, in March 1917, which overthrew Tsar Nicholas II and set up the Provisional Government, took place mainly in and around Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg). The Russians still used the old Julian calendar at that time, hence the name February Revolution. The October Revolution of 1917 saw the Bolsheviks under Vladimir Ilyich Lenin take power.
the Hotel Astoria where he was staying, in which he was spared only because of his French nationality), and the Imperial court behaved in a “despicable” fashion. Russia, he reported, was “going to pieces.” Morand comments that Beaumont was among the few who had reservations about the benefits to France of the Russian Revolution, when “the rest of Europe… is exalting.”

His travels gave Beaumont a sense of authority: a month after his return, he was protesting loudly at Diaghilev’s use of *The Song of the Volga Boatmen* as the Russian national anthem at the Ballets Russes’ performance of *The Firebird*, claiming that the song was “a fake which no-one in Petrograd would think of using,” and he was unimpressed when an immense red flag was unfurled across the stage. His experiences in 1917 give a logic to his preference for Russian refugees’ charities as beneficiaries in his later projects, including *Soirée de Paris*.

Between ambulance sorties and diplomatic missions, Beaumont found time for pleasure in spite of the war in a busy round of social engagements. In 1917, he was in Paris giving and attending dinners, parties, and premieres, including that of the Ballets Russes’ startlingly new piece *Parade*, at the Théâtre du Châtelet on May 11—indeed, the Beaumonts were enthusiastic supporters of Diaghilev and were prominent among *Parade’s* sponsors. This ballet was the first collaboration between Cocteau, Massine, Picasso, and Satie, whose combined talents Beaumont himself would engage in pursuit of his own impresario ambitions several years later. Proust, who was a close if somewhat capricious friend and of whose work Beaumont was a passionate

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51 Morand, *Journal* (April 25, 1917), 222. Twelve years later, Beaumont revisited Russia, now the Soviet Union, and published a short piece, “Impressions de Russie,” in *Vogue* (June 1929: 40, 48). His “impressions” avoided any mention of the social upheaval that followed Stalin’s assumption of absolute power in 1927 (if he witnessed it at all), but focused on the stoic perseverance of the Russians, the equal status of women under the new regime, and the state of the Russian film industry.


advocate, mentions meeting and being hosted by the couple at several social engagements during the last two years of the war. One of the more memorable occasions involved a session of hypnosis at one of the Beaumonts’ own parties at the Ritz hotel, with Étienne himself as the guinea pig. The amateur hypnotist, a M. de Lagarde of Compiègne, was “very stupid, but extraordinarily fluid,” and apparently had no difficulty in getting him to succumb; while he was thus entranced, the hypnotist began to stick pins into the unfortunate Count in order to demonstrate the efficacy of his method (“an experiment in insensibility”). Morand, who also describes the scene in his journal, reports that at this point Countess Edith began to scream, and Beaumont “who, when awake, has plenty of spirit and color,” as Proust charitably observed, duly awoke. Proust later remarked cattily to Célèste Albaret, his housekeeper: “M. de Beaumont…is one of those men who borrows what little wit they have from those around him. So the hypnotist didn’t have much trouble influencing him.” Not known for his generosity to anyone he deemed his intellectual inferior, even if they were his social superior, Proust further remarked that the hypnotist (naturally!) realized that the technique would not work on himself.

The Beaumonts’ balls and parties, for which they were rapidly gaining an enviable reputation, were more than just frivolous diversions. They represented a significant shift in the relationship between the milieu occupied by many artists, actors, dancers, musicians and writers, and that of their actual or potential patrons. The Count and Countess acted as progressive social engineers, hosting the first gatherings in twentieth-century Paris at which the invited guests


included both the crème of high society and selected representatives of left-bank artistic
bohemia. The war greatly increased social mobility, and the modern liberalization of ideas on
strictly segregated hierarchies meant that social barriers were becoming more permeable; as
Frederick Brown puts it, “mongrel dinner lists” which included not only artists and the social
elite but Jews (it was only ten years since the end of the Dreyfus Affair) began appearing
everywhere.57 Aristocratic names like the Princesses Soutzo and Murat and the Prince de
Faucigny-Lucinge, the American-born sewing-machine heiress Princesse de Polignac
(Winnaretta Singer) and members of her extensive family, the Vicomte and Vicomtesse Charles
and Marie-Laure de Noailles, the eccentric Italian Marchesa Luisa Casati, the Queens of
Romania and of Portugal, together with high-ranking dignitaries from the diplomatic and official
spheres—the British Ambassador Lord Derby, for instance—were conventional guests at a
Faubourg Saint-Germain soirée. Chez Beaumont, they mingled freely with less conventional
ones like musicians Satie, Reynaldo Hahn, Darius Milhaud, Ricardo Vinès, Marcelle Meyer and
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971); artists Picasso, Man Ray (1890-1976), André Derain, Marie
Laurencin (1883-1956), Jean-Victor Hugo (1894-1984) and his wife Valentine Gross Hugo
(1887-1968); writers Proust, Daudet, René Crevel or Paul Morand; as well as rising stars from
the worlds of cinema, ballet and the stage. Jean Cocteau, who specialized in occupying several
worlds simultaneously, acted as the Count’s conduit between the gratin and the Paris art world—
or some of it. Not invited were those “in trade”—like Coco Chanel (1883-1971), who, despite
having been consulted (inside Hôtel Masseran) on the décor for a party in 1920, spent the
evening outside the gates with Picasso and Misia Sert, watching and mocking the guests as they

57 Brown, 120. Proust’s numerous mordant descriptions of fashionable Paris salons in In Search of Lost Time vividly
depict this social mix. Partly as a result of the Dreyfus Affair, Jews were not generally accepted in society in the
1890s and early 1900s. Proust himself, whose mother, Jeanne Weill, was Jewish, was a notable exception.

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Chanel did eventually find her way into society thanks to the Beaumonts, and was soon a regular at their soirées. Misia, Diaghilev’s closest confidante and an inescapable character of those years, was another figure who swung between the arts and society, and had long spanned both spheres. She was an occasional Beaumont guest with her third husband, the Spanish artist José-Maria Sert (1874-1945), who sometimes decorated their parties. The bon vivant chronicler André de Fouquières (1874-1959) remarks in his memoir that “at the Beaumonts’ parties, people who would never have had the opportunity to meet elsewhere rubbed shoulders,” and Faÿ remembers: “you never knew who you might meet…neither parties, theatre, nor cinema ever offered me a spectacle more varied, more diverting, more stimulating.” After the war, the parties expanded into grand guignol costume balls that became a byword for refined frivolity; they will be discussed later in this chapter.

That this mix of le monde and le demimonde was something new and refreshingly daring cannot be overemphasized. Such a social mélange would have been unimaginable in, for instance, the prewar Belle Époque salons of Proust’s In Search of Lost Time, and even after the war, the noted patron of modern music the Princesse de Polignac did not invite to supper the

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58 The story was recounted by Misia in a chapter omitted from her autobiography, but published in Gold and Fitzdale, 198-99. On Chanel, see Maurice Martin du Gard, Les Mémorables (Paris: Flammarion, 1957), 120.

59 Born Misia Godebski in St. Petersburg to Polish parents, she married first Thadée Natanson, editor of La Revue blanche, second Alfred Edwards, newspaper magnate, and finally José-Maria Sert. Immensely wealthy and aggressively gregarious, Misia was a celebrated Belle Époque hostess and an accomplished pianist, painted by Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir, Vuillard and Bonnard, and a muse to composers including Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. She became the principal supporter of the Ballets Russes, and was a model for Proust’s social-climbing hostess Madame Verdurin. No cultural history of the Beaumonts’ era can avoid her. Paul Morand called her, not entirely flatteringly, “a monument, imported from a foreign country to Paris, like the obelisk, and placed in the axis of French taste like the needle of Luxor in the axis of the Champs-Élysées;” Journal, 161.


61 “…on ne savait jamais qui l’on rencontrerait…Jamais soirée, jamias théâtre, jamais cinéma ne m’offrit spectacle plus varié, plus divertissant, plus stimulant.” Faÿ, 42.
musicians and singers, however celebrated, who had performed at her salons. De Fouquières claims that Beaumont was being faithful to French aristocratic tradition in encouraging the artists of his own time, but that he tended to prefer those who “affected to show themselves least faithful to [artistic] tradition”—that is, the moderns. Enlightened patronage was certainly a venerable practice, but before the twentieth century, artists would not have been invited to share their patrons’ salons and dinner tables. Ever conscious of his ancien régime heritage, Beaumont honored his tribal traditions not by abandoning them but by reinventing them for the modern era. That he did so speaks to his passion for the arts and artists, and his readiness to defy convention in both his personal and his social life (as he had when he set up his ambulance corps). He was prepared to be a driving force for change, to transgress entrenched social barriers to make artists part of his world, and to immerse himself, albeit on his own terms, in theirs. I would also argue that he saw an opportunity and seized it: if he could assemble a stable of dependent artists and promote them, he could reinvent himself as a patron and leader of avant-garde Paris. Beaumont liked to lead in whatever social context he chose to be a part of, and the time was propitious, as patronage of new art in the 1920s was rapidly becoming the purview of the wealthy elite. René Crevel wrote of Beaumont: “What Parisian, indeed, could better…merge the elements of popular life and aristocratic dilettantism that characterize the art of our time?” His motives, however,

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62 Proust’s seven-volume novel À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time) was published between 1913 and 1927. Several editions and translations exist; I refer to the most recent: Christopher Prendergast, General Editor, various translators (London: Viking Penguin, 2002). Its action takes place from the 1880s to the immediate aftermath of World War I; Proust anatomizes the mores of fashionable French society during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth. Many of the people in Beaumont’s and his parents’ circles served as models for the novel’s characters. On the Princesse de Polignac’s exclusionary policies, see Henri Sauguet, La Musique, ma vie (Paris: Librairie Séguiier, 1990), 200.

63 “Affectaient de se montrer les moins fidèles aux traditions.” Fouquières, 180.

64 “Quel parisien en effet pouvait mieux fondre...les éléments de la vie populaire et du dilettantisme aristocratique qui caractérisaient l'art de notre temps?” Quoted in Schneider-Maunoury and le Buhan, 75.
were more complicated than straightforward self-interest. This was no cynical power grab: Beaumont was genuinely passionate about modern art. Lacking the ability to produce serious art himself, but in possession of the funds to enable others to do so, he chose the role of impresario. As in many of his enterprises, he combined benevolence with personal advantage.

The eclectic social mix at his soirées emphasizes Beaumont’s importance as an agent of change: he started a fashion and others in his class followed suit. Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, who were important patrons of Surrealist painting and cinema, the Count and Countess Pecci-Blunt, and the Prince and Princess Jean-Louis Faucigny-Lucinge all gave opulent costume parties where the elite mingled with Bohemia. These elite gatherings quickly became vital opportunities for young artists to network, to socialize with wealthy patrons who could encourage their careers and ensure their livelihoods with lucrative and socially advantageous commissions. That they could not reciprocate the invitations was potentially problematic, and put them under a weighty obligation to their hosts—which they usually repaid with their art. It was an economy which Beaumont, for one, was not slow to exploit when he wanted favors, such as artists to provide décor for his balls and entertain his guests; this co-dependence resembled a Renaissance system of princely patronage, but with a modern twist. Such a social dynamic represents a significant point of convergence in the increasing number of heterogeneous but intersecting networks of relationship and influence of which the social fabric of wartime and

65 Man Ray describes some of these in his autobiography Self Portrait (Boston; Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1963), 160-70.

66 Whether the artists were paid for these services is moot. The Count did pay Satie (eventually) for performing Trois Morceaux en forme de poire at a reception for the Queen of Romania in 1919, as the composer’s anxious notes to the Countess afterwards attest. See Satie, Correspondence, 358-60. There is no evidence of payments to Picasso or other artists, for instance, for the decorations for several costume balls, nor to Massine for his dances—although he was compensated with free accommodation in a dépendance (outbuilding) at Hôtel Masseran for a time.
postwar Paris was woven: a fabric that was rapidly growing more complex and multifarious than it had ever been.

The Count’s desire to be involved in new developments in the arts took not only a beneficent but also a participatory aspect; although his principal role was to be that of impresario, what he really wanted was to be an artist himself. Before the war, he made his avant-garde credentials known as a defender of the Ballets Russes’ *Rite of Spring*, “raging against the stupid incomprehension” at its tumultuous premiere in 1913; as an early champion of Proust’s work, and as a supporter of progressive artistic expression in general. According to the writer (and Proust’s former lover) Lucien Daudet, he was then “the first…apart from groups as yet unknown, to take an interest in a new movement which, as we now know, would amount to a revolution.”

In 1914, Beaumont was taking classes in Eurhythmics with Paulet Thévenaz (1891-1921), a young Swiss painter and dancer who was engaged in a romantic relationship with Cocteau (fig. 1.11). Eurhythmics, a method of training one’s innate musical sense through exercises in rhythmic movement (fig. 1.12), was developed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) in Geneva in the 1890s, and was highly influential in the growth of modernism in dance: the Ballets Russes’s Michel Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky (1889-1950), German *Ausdruckstanz* founder Mary Wigman (1886-1973), and the American modern dance pioneer Ted Shawn were all enthusiasts. The technique enjoyed a wave of popularity in Paris in 1914. Thévenaz, a

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67 “Déchaîné devant la stupide incompréhension;” “le premier…en dehors des groupes encore inconnus, à s’intéresser à un nouveau mouvement qui équivalrait, nous le savons maintenant, à une révolution.” Daudet, *Comoedia.*


graduate of the Geneva school, was an instructor at the Dalcroze studio in rue Vaugirard; he gave demonstrations and courses in various Paris locations. He evidently also gave private lessons, as Beaumont, together with Cocteau and Daudet, was to be seen performing eurhythmic exercises in the gardens of Hôtel Duroc under Thévenaz’s guidance, all three clad in black bathing trunks.70 Faÿ speaks of the close “triangular friendship” (amitié triangulaire) that united these three; whether this went further than a mutual camaraderie is a matter for speculation.

Beaumont’s interest in Eurhythms may possibly have been connected with the prevalent feeling of “malaise” and the attendant fervor for new artistic experiences that some commentators identify in Paris in the months leading up to the outbreak of hostilities.71 His personal obsession with the latest and most advanced form of artistic expression outlasted the war, and indeed, proved to be the governing passion of the rest of his existence. In August 1918, leading the wave of américanisme that flooded postwar Paris, Beaumont became the first person to give a private party whose main attraction was an African-American jazz band. The band at this “fête nègre,” the purpose of which was to benefit the American Red Cross, was almost certainly Lieutenant James Reese Europe’s “Harlem Hellfighters” of the 369th Infantry Regiment (fig. 1.15). The “Hellfighters” were the most prominent of the black regimental bands that toured France late in the war as goodwill ambassadors for the U.S. forces, performing for French, British and American troops as well as for French civilians. On August 18, 1918, they played at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the following year at a concert in the Tuileries gardens during the Paris Peace Conference; both times they hired themselves out for private functions,

70 Faÿ, 33.

71 Steegmuller, 116-17.
which was presumably how Beaumont had obtained their services. Jody Blake argues that these regimental bands began the French influx of American jazz musicians: a migration that sparked the nightclub, cabaret and dancing scene that was a defining feature of Jazz Age Paris. Beaumont continued to enliven his balls and parties with American jazz: at his New Year’s Eve ball of 1921–1922, Proust speaks of watching guests performing “danses les plus 1922”, in other words, the latest jazz-inspired social dances. The Count’s first jazz party introduced his guests to a type of music, as well as a whole cultural ambience, that was unfamiliar and exotic to most of them, that captured in its wild syncopations the collective desire for release and celebration after the years of trauma, and that carried the aura of a new, more emancipated, more outward-looking era just ahead. The jazz historian Chris Goddard writes: “the very word “jazz” seemed to suggest a clash of cultures, something brazenly cocksure and contemporary…few people had heard jazz in 1918 and fewer still had any idea what to make of it.” In October 1918, Hellfighters band member Noble Sissle wrote to the jazz pianist Eubie Blake: “Jim [James Reese Europe] and I have Paris by the balls....” Beaumont was among those who had helped to facilitate their

72 Francis Poulenc’s biographer Carl Schmidt claims that Poulenc’s Rhapsodie nègre (1917) was played that night; Entrancing Muse: A Documented Biography of Francis Poulenc (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001), 44. Volta denies this (Satie: Correspondance, 670), calling it a “persistent legend” (une légende tenace). The Americans would probably have been unaware of the young French composer and his piece, although it is possible that Poulenc himself played it, as a tribute to the visitors.

73 Les dancings or bar-dancings were intimate, American-style nightclubs (hence the English nomenclature) with a jazz band and a bar. Beaumont tried to provide “un dancing” in the foyer of the Théâtre de la Cigale during the Soirée de Paris season, and even hired Moysès, the reknowned proprietor of the highly fashionable nightclub Le Boeuf sur le toit to run it, but it failed to attract many patrons and closed after a week.

74 Jody Blake, Le Tumulte noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz Age Paris (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2003), 63-65. The famed tap dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson was allegedly the band’s drum major.


conquest. His party may be regarded as the beginning of the Count’s career as an impresario of the new; it was also his inaugural gesture as a promoter of Franco-American cultural relations.

Having worked with the American Red Cross during the war, Beaumont was interested in promoting further cooperation between France and the U.S. Perhaps surprisingly, he never visited the country, although his later work with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo revived his American connection. Combined with his philanthropic impulses, that connection made him a formative actor in the cultural current of enthusiasm for all things American that pervaded Paris in the 1920s. Together with Walter Berry, the wealthy Francophile American lawyer and collector, he formed the Association Franco-Américaine, with himself in the pompous-sounding post of Secretary-General. The Association, which seems to have been mainly a two-man enterprise, operated out of Beaumont’s Hôtel Masseran, its purpose to promote cultural ties between France and America, to give assistance to French artists in various disciplines, and to raise money for charitable causes benefiting war victims. It funded its activities and established its credibility by securing the patronage of highly placed members of society and the government. These activities consisted mainly of presenting art exhibitions, as that was Berry’s chief interest, but the Association also helped to fund several of Beaumont’s theatrical projects, including Soirée de Paris. Notable among its achievements was the major Ingres exhibition held at the Chambre syndicale de la curiosité et des beaux-arts from May 8 to June 5, 1921, which raised 300,000 francs to benefit the mutilés de guerre of both nations. Vogue claimed that the Association had chosen “to establish from the start its traditionalist intentions,” by showing the

77 Walter van Rensselaer Berry (1885-1927) was president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris from 1916 to 1923. A distinguished international jurist and diplomat, he was a close friend of expatriate American writers, and an intimate of Proust, who dedicated Pastiches et mélanges to him. The Franco-American Association was, presumably, a subsidiary of the Chamber of Commerce. His papers are held at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
“undisputed French master” who “lays claim to the schools of both yesterday and tomorrow.” Beaumont would soon take the Association on a far less traditional path.

The Ingres exhibition was of particular interest to Picasso, by then a member of the Beaumonts’ network, whose admiration for the French neoclassical master was already evident in his work. Among the six or so exhibitions the Association sponsored in the next few years, all dedicated to war charities, were the Exposition d’art américain in 1923, and in 1922 one of illustrations by Beaumont’s old Eurhythmics teacher, Paulet Thévenaz. The cautious tone of the American art show, which featured works by John Singer Sargent, Dodge MacKnight, Winslow Homer, and similar painters was probably due more to Berry’s “traditionalist” taste than to Beaumont’s experimental inclinations. It might have seemed a poor exchange for the Armory Show, the groundbreaking exhibition of European modernism shown in New York and Chicago in 1913, whose progressive tone would have better matched Count’s own interests.

A keen collector of modern art, although on a more modest scale than his wealthier peers the Noailles, Beaumont owned around fifteen modern pictures, by Georges Braque (1.16-1.17), Max Ernst, and Marie Laurencin, as well as several Picassos. The latter included a large Cubist still life, *Fruit Dish, Bottle and Violin* (1914, fig. 1.18), now in the collection of the National Gallery, London, and an ethereal panel in grisaille of the *Three Graces* that Picasso painted as a decoration for the *Bal baroque* in the music room at Hôtel Masseran in 1923, together with its

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79 IMEC: BMT 1.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 12.6, 12.7. The Ingres exhibition excited much attention as the Louvre was still closed after the war (it re-opened at the end of 1921) and Parisians were starved of exhibitions of historical (as opposed to modern) art.
pendant, *La Grecque* (fig. 1.19).

He may or may not have owned *Man Seated in Shrubbery* (later retitled *Man Leaning Against a Table*, 1915-16) which was the subject of Diego Rivera’s charge of plagiarism against Picasso in 1915 (fig. 1.20). The Count evidently kept some or all of the décors he commissioned from Picasso and other painters for his balls, which was an ingenious way of acquiring a collection without paying market prices; one of these, the nine-and-a-half by seven feet canvas entitled and dated by the museum *Composition for Bal de Mer* (1928, fig. 1.51), is now in the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia. There may have been others: Beaumont’s Max Ernst painting was presumably *Tree of Life* (1927/8, fig. 1.21), measuring around nine and a half by six and two-thirds feet and now in the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, probably commissioned as a companion decoration for the Chrysler’s panel. He also retained, and proudly displayed, Picasso’s stage curtain from *Mercure*, as an

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80 The National Gallery purchased this picture (NG6449), in 1979; it is at present on long-term loan to Tate Modern. Picasso made a series of drypoint etchings based on the *Three Graces* panel in autumn of 1923.

81 John Richardson is possibly mistaken in claiming that Beaumont owned *Man Leaning Against a Table*, having acquired it from the Chilean heiress and patron Eugenia Errazuriz; *Picasso*, vol. 2, 412-17. The painting, which is still in private hands, is listed in Christian Zervos, *Pablo Picasso* (Paris, Cahiers d’Art: 1952, vol. II, ii, 550) and Pierre Daix and Joan Rosselet, *Picasso, the Cubist Years, 1907-1916: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings and Related Works* (London: Thames and Husdon, 1979, 889) as belonging only to Mme. Errazuriz during Beaumont’s lifetime; he is not mentioned in its provenance in either catalogue, nor in the catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum’s major Picasso retrospective of 1980. Mme. Errazuriz did sell at least two of the *Seated Man* series of 1915-16, which includes this work, to Rolf de Maré; this may be the source of the confusion.

82 A study for the Chrysler panel is in the Musée Picasso’s collection (MP1553). There is an ambiguity as to its original intention and date; see n. 112, p. 67. The Count’s heirs sold some of his artworks in 2006; Braque’s *Bottle of Rum* (1914), went to the American collector Leonard Lauder, who gifted it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. *The Three Graces*, formerly in the collection of Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, is an unusually serious example of Picasso’s neoclassical style. Its companion panel, *La Grecque*, was once owned by the novelist W. Somerset Maugham.

article by the poet Blaise Cendrars in *Vogue* of January 1929 demonstrates (figs. 1.22-1.23).\(^8^4\) Count Harry Kessler visited Hôtel Masseran in 1930 and commented on the pictures “which do not accord perfectly with the Louis XIV [sic] surroundings but at any rate look better there than modern trash;” an odd statement since he was himself a patron of modernism.\(^8^5\) Beaumont might have wished he had the means, or the knowledge, to collect art on a more serious scale: after a visit to Gertrude Stein in 1923, he joked to Picasso that “my jealousy of her collection turns me Bolshevik.”\(^8^6\) Malcolm Gee claims that he was a follower rather than a leader in collecting modern painting; one of a group of aristocratic patrons who bought mainly from the dealer Paul Rosenberg, “the acknowledged supplier of modern art to ‘Society’,” and tended “to follow advice” that oriented them “towards those artists who were the most admired by a small sector of expert opinion, and the most depreciated [sic] by the general public.”\(^8^7\) This does not agree with the provenance of some of the works, and contradicts Daudet’s insistence in 1926, previously quoted, that before the war Beaumont was a pioneering voice in support of avant-garde art among his cohort; his taste for radical pictures might not have been matched by his income, but

\(^8^4\) *Vogue* of January 1929 featured a piece by the poet Blaise Cendrars on Beaumont’s Picassos (“Picasso,” 36-38). Illustrated but not named in this article are two Cubist works, both titled *Guitar and Partition on a Gueridon* (*Guitare et partition sur guéridon*, gouache, 1920): one, framed and hung on its side, Cendrars mistakenly calls a “rug” (un tapis, fig. 1.24) and the other, dubbed a “witty drawing” (dessin spirituel) is mounted as a firescreen (fig. 1.25). Both are part of a series reproduced as “Dix Pochoirs,” a limited edition of ten pochoir prints issued by the Rosenberg Gallery in 1920; it is not clear whether Beaumont owned the prints or the originals. Part of Picasso’s stage curtain for *Mercure*, now in the Centre Pompidou, Paris is shown hanging on a wall. According to Zervos (vol. 5, nos. 192, 204-211, 448), Beaumont also owned several of Picasso’s drawings: studies for *Mercure* and for dancers.

\(^8^5\) Count Harry Kessler, *Berlin in Lights: The Diaries of Count Harry Kessler (1918-1937)*, trans. and ed. Charles Kessler (New York: Grove Press, 1999), 381. Harry Graf Kessler was an Anglo-German art collector, writer and diplomat of cosmopolitan sympathies. He had known the Beaumonts since before the war.

\(^8^6\) “Ma jalousie de sa collection me rend bolchevique,” letter from Beaumont to Picasso, March 2, 1923. Archives Musée Picasso.

\(^8^7\) Gee identifies the Beaumonts’ “salon” as the epicenter of aristocratic patronage of the avant-garde between 1917 and 1924; 185-6.
he seems not to have begun collecting seriously until after the war. He could hardly have done so until 1913 when he acceded to the title on the death of his father, and presumably came into his fortune; wartime activities left scant opportunity for collecting. He did try to buy a canvas directly from Picasso on at least one occasion, as an Easter present for Edith; he may have done so more often as he added more artists to his network.\textsuperscript{88}

In 1920, Beaumont’s Association Franco-Américaine expanded its activities from sponsoring art exhibitions to include live performance, producing two “spectacle-concerts,” proposed by Cocteau in the interests of promoting his musical protégés, the group of young avant-garde composers known as “les Six,” and of their mentor, Erik Satie. Cocteau had recently published \textit{Le Coq et l’arlequin}, his manifesto on contemporary music, and the Count was happy to indulge the former’s campaign to advance the careers of its exponents as well as his own.\textsuperscript{89} The first of these was an evening at the Comédie des Champs-Elysées in February 1920. The program consisted of performances of their own compositions by Satie, Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), and Georges Auric (1899-1983), but the main event was Cocteau’s “ballet-pantomime,” \textit{Le Boeuf sur le toit (The Ox on the Roof, or The Nothing-Doing Bar)} to music based on Brazilian folk tunes by Darius Milhaud, another of les Six, with a set by Raoul Dufy, and costumes and masks by Guy-Pierre Fauconnet, who died accidentally a few days before the premiere (figs.

\textsuperscript{88} Letter from Beaumont to Picasso, April 2, 1925: “J’aimerais faire à Edith un cadeau pour Pâques. Je sais qu’elle aime tant un tableau de vous…Voudriez-vous me le vendre? Et quel prix?” (I would like to give Edith a present for Easter. I know she is very fond of a painting of yours…would you sell it to me? And for what price?) Archives Musée Picasso.

\textsuperscript{89} Jean Cocteau, \textit{Le Coq et l’arlequin} (Paris, 1918), in \textit{A Call to Order}, translated by Rollo H. Meyers (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), 7-57. Darius Milhaud (one of les Six) encapsulates his argument: “he attacked the so-called serious music…and the influence of Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff, and impressionism in the manner of Debussy. He exalted the barbarian feeling of Stravinsky’s \textit{Sacre du printemps}…he called for a decisively French type of music.” Milhaud, \textit{My Happy Life} (London; New York: M. Boyars, 1995), 84. The other members of les Six were Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honegger, Germaine Taillefaire and Louis Durey.
This farcical short piece featured the Fratellini brothers, the celebrated clowns from the Cirque Médrano, in drag and wearing oversized papier-mâché heads, in an absurdist scenario set in a fantasy American bar during Prohibition. “An American farce, done by a Parisian, who has never been to America,” was how Cocteau described it. Le Boeuf elaborated and burlesqued the American movie theme Cocteau had introduced into his scenario for Parade three years earlier, and borrowed Picasso’s device of turning the performers into living puppets. As well as providing the Association’s imprimatur and its cash, Beaumont helpfully bought up all the seats in the boxes and orchestra stalls for the opening, sending tickets to his society friends, and persuaded the Shah of Persia to pay ten thousand francs for the front box. It was a novel form of sponsorship, but it made the production viable.

The second spectacle-concert was the Festival Erik Satie on 7 June 1920, dedicated exclusively to Satie’s work and held at Hôtel Masseran. This concert cemented one of Beaumont’s most important artistic relationships, which extended to the composer’s death and beyond. The reclusive, notoriously eccentric Satie was inducted into high society at the Beaumonts’ reception for the Queen of Romania the previous year, where he had been engaged to play; he subsequently became a regular attendee at their soirées (when not too shy or too much the worse for alcohol), and in due course, an essential collaborator in the Count’s projects. He was a prolific correspondent, penning hundreds of letters on tiny sheets to both the Count and to

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90 Satie’s contribution was Trois petites pièces montées, composed for the occasion; Poulenc’s was Cocardes, and Auric gave Adieu, New York.


92 “The Shah of Persia even paid ten thousand francs for a front seat from which he could not see a thing but was himself in full view of everyone.” Milhaud, 87.
Countess Edith, whom he seems to have found a less alarming presence than her frequently quixotic spouse. After the Festival, Satie wrote to thank the Countess for the couple’s support, which he felt had helped his reputation recover from accusations of “bochisme.”93 “At last, thanks to you, people finally see me as a bit more “French” than they did before.”94

Classical as well as avant-garde musical soirées were a regular feature of life at Hôtel Masseran, as were literary meetings.95 Cocteau gave a reading of his new poem Le Cap de bonne esperance in the drawing-room on January 26, 1919. It did not go well: his delivery was greeted with bemused silence; Breton pointedly walked out, and Beaumont, intentionally or not, punctured the poet’s modernist ambitions by declaring, “my dear little Jean, you are Voltaire!”96

An early admirer of Proust’s work, the Count assembled a group of friends at his home in 1913 to read and discuss Du coté de chez Swann (Swann’s Way) the newly published first volume of In Search of Lost Time. The Proust readings continued after the war, and Hotel Masseran was known as one of the houses where the author’s work was seriously appreciated.

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93 “Bochisme” meant German sympathies. Satie’s collaboration with Cocteau, Picasso and Massine on Diaghilev’s ballet Parade (1917) had seen charges of unpatriotic sentiments levelled against all of them; during the war, modern art in general was regarded as un-French, and Parade was taken as evidence of pro-German leanings. Cries of “Sales boches!” (filthy krauts) had greeted its premiere.

94 “Enfin, grâce à vous, on me voit un peu plus “français” qu’avant.” Satie to Edith de Beaumont, June 11, 1920. Correspondance, 412.

95 Mary Davis mentions a recital at the Beaumonts’ of eighteenth-century music for harpsichord and piano by Mozart, Handel, Couperin et al, performed by the celebrated Polish harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, in 1920, Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 232. Programs for classical recitals from 1905 and 1912 at IMEC (BMT 3.2) suggest this was a long-established practice.

96 “Mon petit Jean, vous êtes Voltaire!” Faÿ, 270.
Models of discretion, the Beaumonts seem to have entertained on a relatively modest scale (for them) during the war; nonetheless rue Duroc was regarded as a haven of “healing frivolity” against the death and horror that had invaded so many people’s lives. But Beaumont’s friends reproached him, as Faÿ reports: “Étienne, you have done so much for the wounded, the soldiers, the Americans, but nothing for your friends! It can’t go on.” He agreed to organize Saturday gatherings with music thenceforth, because “that’s the best thing for the end of a war.”

What sounds like insensitivity here may have been war-weariness on his friends’ part and an excessively refined sense of occasion on the Count’s. Seizing the occasion, and extracting the maximum advantage from it, was one of his talents. Gatherings that started life as polite musical salons transformed into something altogether more grandiloquent after the armistice: the spectacular costume balls the Beaumonts staged and for which they became famous in their time, beginning in 1922 and continuing until 1951, pausing only for World War II. These events began as frivolous diversions; they soon became a means by which the Count advanced his campaign to become a Maecenas of the avant-garde in Paris’s new era.

To understand the role that Beaumont’s parties played in the social nexus of 1920s Paris and in the narrative of his personal ambition, a brief historical background is required. Costume balls and masquerades—also known as *travestis*—have a long history in France dating back to the reign of Charles VI (1380-1422) as the playtime of the aristocracy. Escapist fantasies for the kings’ courts, they were always a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that combined the arts of painting, costume, scenic decoration, music, literary invention, and dance into a form that merged the

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97 “Étienne, vous faites beaucoup pour les blessés, pour les soldats, pour les Américains, mais rien pour vos amis! Cela ne peut durer.” “Cela convient mieux à une fin de guerre.” Faÿ, 41.
aesthetics of performance with the ethos of celebration. François I (reigned 1515–47) made them
a fixture of court life, and the involvement of well-known artists was part of the tradition.
Leonardo da Vinci spent his last years at Fontainebleau under François’ patronage designing
masques on allegorical, historical and mythological themes, as he had previously done for Duke
Ludovico Sforza at the court of Milan. Louis XIV’s court at Versailles (1643–1715) saw the
flowering of Baroque masquerade, with the king as the leading participant; ballet as an
independent theater art has its origins in the highly formalized performances at le roi soleil’s
court. Masques were an essential aspect of life at most European courts in the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries: in Jacobean England (1603–49), the architect Inigo Jones and the
playwright Ben Jonson collaborated in the creation of elaborate events that often lasted for
several days. Augustus the Strong (1694–1733), Elector of Saxony, promoted a culture of
politically motivated theatricals at his court. For these absolute rulers, the masquerade also
functioned as a means of international diplomacy and national display: allegorical themes sent
messages to foreign states regarding the sovereigns’ intentions and proclaimed their power, and
the brilliant spectacle signaled the wealth of their exchequer and the splendor of their personal
image to their own subjects as well. Such practices must have lent the participants an illusion of
invincible otherness, a sense that they inhabited a different world, and breathed different air,
from the rest of humanity. A trace of this attitude may be detected in the twentieth-century
revelers’ motives, which were nothing if not elitist. The pastime of masked balls extended to a
wider population in 1713, when the Académie royale de musique was granted permission to hold
the Bal masqué de l’opéra annually during the Carnival season. The form of this event has its
origins in Venetian Carnival masquerade as well as in French court rituals. The public ball

quickly became an institution, surviving a ten-year ban during the Revolution, and courtly masquerades reappeared during the First Empire (1804–15), when Napoleon’s court staged costumed entertainments designed to honor the Emperor’s triumphs.

The opera ball spawned imitators, and *bals masqués* were firmly entrenched in Paris social life throughout the nineteenth century, when they were depicted by Edouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean-Louis Forain, Gustave Doré, and many other artists. As well as these events, private *bals travestis et tableaux vivants* (fancy-dress balls and living pictures) continued largely as the province of *le monde* (high society); these were the ancestors of the Beaumonts’ balls, but they absorbed some influence from the exhibitionist spectacles of the more demotic *bals de l’opéra*. Caroline Weber vividly describes lavish such occasions in Belle Epoque Paris, with Beaumont’s own parents among the guests. These served as models for Proust’s semi-fictional balls, and for Beaumont and his circle’s twentieth century restagings. The popularity of masked balls towards the end of the nineteenth century is reflected in their prominence in guidebooks for visitors to Paris and in their coverage in the press. Published manuals, in England as well as in France, also advised readers on appropriate fancy dress for different types of themed balls, and on all the elements essential to producing a successful *fête*. Lauded in the press as examples of taste, style, and originality, fashionable society’s rituals of self-display continued to flourish in Paris, the rest of Europe, and America until the First World

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War. Beaumont’s immediate prewar exemplar was the flamboyant couturier Paul Poiret (1879-1944), whose spectacular fancy-dress bals masqués, climaxed by his famous Thousand and One Nights ball in 1911, had broken the upper classes’ exclusive claim on the private costume ball and brought it into the modern world (fig. 1.28). In 1921, Paris society reinstated its pleine saison (high season)—a whirlwind of balls, parties and charity events lasting from mid-May to mid-July—suspended during the war: a series of color-themed balls climaxed in the Bal grand prix de l’opéra in La Grande Semaine, (the Great Week, in May) but it embraced a much broader demographic now than it had prewar. The writer and social gadfly Maurice Sachs (1906-1945) bemoaned the “hypocrisy” of these events’ charitable pretext, and their indiscriminate social inclusiveness: “The truth is that we can no longer live without parties; that everyone wants them; that they must be enormous so everyone can go, and public to avoid the exclusivity of a guest list. It’s a democratization of pleasure,” predicting, with chilling accuracy, “there will be balls until the next global catastrophe.” Bohemian Paris held its own costume balls, at artists’ studios or at dance halls such as Bal Bullier in Montparnasse and the Moulin de la Galette in Montmartre. These, like the Bal des quat’z’arts, the art students’ ball, had a reputation for louche decadence, with cross-dressing and sexual shenanigans as their main attractions (fig. 1.29).

Although many others followed their lead, it was the Beaumonts who spearheaded the revival of the private, exclusive, society costume ball after the war, paying homage not only to

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102 For a description of American masked balls in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Foulkes, 28-40.


104 “La vérité, c’est qu’on ne peut plus se passer de fêtes; que tout le monde les désire, qu’il les faut immenses pour que tout le monde puisse y aller et publiques pour éviter les exclusives d’une liste d’invités. Il y aura des bals jusqu’à la prochaine catastrophe mondiale.” Sachs, Au Temps, 151.

Poiret’s theatrical extravaganzas, but also to the tradition of courtly masques. Their events were masterpieces of refined hedonism, capitalizing on the postwar mania for self-indulgent masquerade and self-conscious spectacle, and raising the costume ball to the level of an advanced artform (figs. 1.30-1.50). The Beaumonts gave several costume parties on a smaller scale during and straight after the war, including the Soirée Babel (1916), the Soirée contes de Perrault (fairy tales, 1919), and the Fête de nuit (party of the night, also 1919) but, once Paris’s fixed social calendar resumed, the balls for which they became famous began in grand style with a mardi-gras ball, the Bal des jeux, (toys and games, 1922, figs. 1.38). Thereafter, the Beaumonts’ costume balls were an annual institution. Each ball had its own theme: those remembered by participants include the Bal baroque, also called L’Antiquité sous Louis XIV (dramatizing the Count’s ancien régime sympathies, 1923, 1.31, 1.36-1.37, 1.39); the Charity Ball held during the run of Soirée de Paris (1924; themed as circus, music-hall, and café-concert, figs. 1.40-1.42); the Bal des entrées de l’opéra (the opera, 1925); the Bal de mer (on a maritime theme, 1928, fig. 1.34); the Bal colonial (French colonies, 1931, fig. 1.43); the Bal des tableaux célèbres (famous paintings, 1935, fig. 1.35); the Bal du tricentenaire de Racine (celebrating the tricentenary of Racine’s birth, 1939, figs. 1.44, 1.47); and, according to hearsay,    

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106 Between the wars, costume balls proliferated in Paris to such an extent in the pleine saison (mid-May to mid-July) that the Beaumonts must have attended at least as many as they hosted.

107 Cocteau in particular was fond of fancy dress and was given to donning costumes—not just at balls—while assuming their corresponding personae. For examples, see Steegmuller, 307-309.

108 Ornella Volta believes that the Bal baroque intentionally invoked Poiret’s grand ball of 1912, where he attempted to recreate Jean-Baptiste Lully’s Festes de Bacchus, first performed at Versailles in 1674. Satie Seen Through his Letters, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1989), 160.

109 This ball took place on May 31, 1924, at the Théâtre de la Cigale itself, and the principal dancers were required to perform without payment (as their charitable contribution) for the guests, much to Lydia Lopokova’s indignation. The ball’s date makes it clear that it could not have been an opening-night party for Mercure, as several sources claim: Mercure did not open until June 15, and there was no reason why it would be the only piece on Soirée’s program to have its own party.
one which piquantly stipulated that guests must “leave exposed that part of the body that one considered the most interesting.” There were only two more balls after World War II: the penultimate, in 1949, was the *Bal des rois et des reines* (kings and queens, fig. 1.48). The last one, nostalgically titled the *Bal des cent ans d’élégance, 1800-1900* (one hundred years of elegance, celebrating the nineteenth century), took place not long after Edith’s death in 1951.

The Paris ball-giving and going community was highly competitive and incestuous, but few events other than the Beaumonts’ are now remembered. Of these, the one most often cited is the Noailles’ stylishly modern *Bal des matières* (new materials) on 18 June 1929 (costumes were to be of plastic, cardboard and other “unorthodox” materials, 1.45-1.46); for this Beaumont arranged a (not very modern sounding) *Divertissement gothique* for the guests accompanied by Poulenc’s *Aubade*, written for the occasion. Other dances were choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska, guests assembled at Hôtel Masseran for photographs beforehand, and even some Surrealists attended, Marie-Laure de Noailles being one of their principal patrons.

Organization of these masterpieces of ephemera proceeded like a military operation—the Count’s experience at the Belgian front must have come in handy. The theme was chosen and the evening carefully planned months in advance, by Beaumont and a team of artistic and logistical advisors, who devised many of the more important *entrées* (dramatic entrances) ahead of time (see Appendix A). Once the (nervously awaited) invitations were sent out, guests had to prepare their costumes and the tableaux they would present as their “entrée,” and to convey this information, with sketches, to the Count. This requirement explains the existence in the

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110 This anecdote, which dates the ball in 1919, was related to Francis Steegmuller by Reginald Bridgeman, then secretary to the British Ambassador, Lord Derby. No title has been found for this event, however, nor any mention of it in a primary source. Cited in Steegmuller, 227n.

Beaumont family’s collection of several rough designs by Picasso for costumes for the *Bal des jeux* (figs. 1.53-1.54). There is also a sketch in the Musée Picasso which is clearly a study for the large panel entitled *Composition for Bal de mer* owned by the Chrysler Museum, both previously mentioned, in which the prongs of Neptune’s trident form the letters “BAL” (fig. 1.51-1.52). This sketch, and the Chrysler’s full-sized panel, are generally considered to have been intended for the *Bal des jeux*; the subject, the size of the panel, and the existence of the similarly sized painting by Ernst for the *Bal de mer*, suggest that the Picasso panel was originally created for the *Bal des jeux* and later re-purposed for the *Bal de mer*.

The house and gardens were open for several days beforehand, for the guests to practice their entrées; the bedrooms were scenes of riotous dressing-up on the night of the ball. The evening began with the entrées: posed tableaux vivants on the ball’s thème du jour, sometimes with music and a few dance steps, or a brief skit, performed in programmed order by each group.

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112 There is some ambiguity as to the origin of the Chrysler’s panel, and its sketch in the Musée Picasso. The latter catalogues the sketch as a design for a curtain for a Mardi-Gras ball (this was the *Bal des jeux*, 1922), and dates it (inaccurately, if that was its purpose), early 1923. Richardson, citing no sources, claims that a “large decorative panel” was done for the *Bal des jeux*; he describes the one in the Chrysler Museum, for which the Musée Picasso’s sketch is clearly a study (*Picasso*, vol. 2, p. 211). Faucigny-Lucinge (*Parties*, p. 16) also connects the sketch with a work at the Chrysler he calls (like the Musée Picasso) *Composition for a Mardi-Gras Ball*. Yet the Chrysler titles its work *Composition for Bal de mer*, and dates it accordingly as 1928, the year of that ball. This identification was presumably made on the basis of the painting’s iconography: the painting and sketch both depict a figure with tridents for legs, holding a fish, and another with a sun or shell-head and shell-encrusted limbs, holding a trident whose prongs form the word “BAL,” on a ground covered in horizontal strokes indicating waves or water. While the identification with *Bal de mer* seems plausible, it also seems unlikely that the Musée Picasso, Richardson, and Faucigny-Lucinge are all mistaken. Further, the Chrysler Museum’s files reveal that when Walter Chrysler purchased the work in 1955, enquiries were made of Picasso and Beaumont, both of whom identified it as having been done for the earlier ball in 1922. I believe that the work’s resemblance to other sketches made for that ball, and the fact that no sketches by Picasso for any other of Beaumont’s balls are known to exist, but there are several more for the *Bal des jeux*, tend to support the earlier date. I propose, therefore, that the identifications of those who were involved (and those who knew them) are correct, and the painting was, in fact, done for the *Bal des jeux*, and was later re-purposed by Beaumont for the *Bal de mer*. Indeed, his possession of the Picasso may have given Beaumont the idea for the 1928 ball; the existence, oceanic theme, and equivalent dimensions and palette of the Ernst *Tree of Life* panel, certainly commissioned for that ball, suggest that it was made as a companion to the Picasso. I am grateful to Lloyd DeWitt, Curator of European Art at the Chrysler Museum, for information from the museum’s files. Drawings by Picasso for costumes for the *Bal des jeux*, 1922, in the possession of the Beaumont family, are illustrated in Schneider-Maunoury and Le Buhan, 68, and Faucigny-Lucinge, *Parties*, 16. There are none in Zervos.
of guests, who would then be permitted to join the party and watch the rest of the show. For a few years while Massine was in his orbit, Beaumont engaged him to direct the proceedings. As if in the theatre, everything was organized and rehearsed to the last detail, Beaumont the producer using his artistic friends as production staff while he and the Countess performed the roles of master and mistress of ceremonies. Picasso, Cocteau, Sert, Marie Laurencin, Christian Bérard, and Jean and Valentine Hugo all had a hand in the decorations and many of the costumes on different occasions; Satie and the composers of “les Six”—Milhaud, Auric, and Poulenc in particular—provided musical accompaniments; and danced entertainments featured, among others, Olga Picasso (formerly Olga Kokhlova of the Ballets Russes), Ida Rubinstein, and Massine with his wife, the ballerina Vera Savina. The dancers and choreographers of the highly fashionable Ballets Russes were in great demand: the Noailles engaged Nijinska to arrange the dances for their Bal des matières, and Serge Lifar and George Balanchine were sought for rival parties. Guests, costumed according to the theme of the night by Paris couturiers Lanvin, Vionnet and Chanel, made their grand entrées while Picasso sketched them and Man Ray snapped their portraits. The less affluent improvised their own outfits, so haute couture and borrowed theatre costumes blended with kitchen-sink ingenuity against the lavish backdrop of the mansion and its illuminated fairytale gardens. Jean Hugo remembers the dressing-up as being more fun than the actual ball, but the press was on hand to transmit a fantastic imaginary to readers avid for news of the lives of the rich and notorious.¹¹³ Fawning press coverage had been part of the ritual since the nineteenth century, and Vogue publicized the events at Hôtel Masseran—including the feverish rehearsals—in advance (possibly to increase the envy of the

uninvited), and reported them “live” in breathless prose. Here is the magazine’s running commentary on the start of the *Bal baroque*, held on May 30, 1923:

It is from the garden that the entrées depart, proceeding to salute the Countess de Beaumont, seated at the foot of the great table at the end of the grand salon in a decor magisterially conceived by J.M. Sert; the effect is splendid. It is difficult to see and follow each entrée; the crowd is such that it’s necessary to pull oneself up onto the chairs to try to discern, among the movements of the figures in the entrées, this or that person from Mount Olympus, others from the tragedies of Racine, exotic dancers, Molière’s doctors etc. etc…. We don’t know where to look: the luxury of the costumes surpasses anything we’ve seen for a very long time. Is it a memory from before the war? Not at all. Rather an evocation of all that the imaginations of our young people have created… Only the deliciously artistic imagination of the Count de Beaumont could have achieved such a party.114

The entrées were really the main point of the evening; once they were over the buffet was notoriously meagre, the hosts having little interest in food, and many guests either went home, took advantage of the house’s many bedrooms to pursue more amorous pleasures, or carried on partying rowdily in the surrounding streets.115 Those who remained at the *Bal baroque* were treated to a remarkable firework display after midnight.

The *Vogue* report suggests that an audience other than the participants may have witnessed the entrées (who or what was “the crowd”?) Photographs in the Beaumont archives also show crowds of spectators: in one case in the garden at Hôtel Duroc, in another, seated in an interior, watching as a costumed Beaumont and others pose on a small stage.116 It is not clear

114 “C’est du jardin que partent les entrées pour venir saluer, au pied de la grande table, la Comtesse de Beaumont, assise au fond du grand salon, dans le décor magistralement traité par J.M. Sert, l’effet est splendide. Il est difficile de voir et de suivre chaque entrée, la foule est telle qu’il faut se hisser sur les banquettes, pour tâcher d’apercevoir, entre les mouvements des figures d’entrée, tel out tel personnage d’Olympe, ceux des tragédies de Racine, des danseurs exotiques, des médecins de Molière, etc., etc… On ne sait où regarder: le luxe des costumes dépasse tout ce que nous avons vu depuis bien longtemps. Est-ce un souvenir d’avant-guerre? Du tout. Plutôt une évocation de tout ce que l’imagination de notre jeunesse avait créé… Il faut l’imagination artiste et délicieuse du Comte de Beaumont pour avoir réalisé pareille fête.” “La Grande Semaine de Paris,” *Vogue* (July 1, 1923), 10.

115 See Fouquières, 174.

exactly who these spectators are, but they are not in costume and they appear in a passive role relative to the posing and processing actors in the entrées. If these events were staged at least partly for the benefit of a non-participant audience, who were presumably not the invited guests and who included the press, this changes the social valence of the balls, implicating them in a wider network of connections than is usually thought. It positions them more fully as not just private amateur theatrics, but as a form of performance art whose identity and meaning included the presence of an outside audience to complete it, either in person or vicariously by reading about it. Thus, we can propose a model of Beaumont’s social landscape as one in which costume balls were more than mere frivolities, disposable diversions with no more significant purpose than to alleviate the boredom of a spoiled social class. They appear as essential, constitutive elements, embedded in the matrix of social relations between aristocratic patrons, artists of all kinds, and the consumers and publicists on whom they depended to propagate their reputations.

The invited guests mingled the aristocracies of society and the arts, the diplomatic world and bohemia, and invitations were highly prized; the sadistic Beaumont amused himself by deliberately not inviting different people each time “to…make them suffer,” perhaps inspired by Proust’s Duchesse de Guermantes: “like a book, like a house, the quality of a salon, Mme. de Guermantes quite rightly thought, depended essentially on what you excluded.”\(^{117}\) Proust, having “made a particular gesture of friendship…by staying up all night at their New Year’s Eve ball,” for December 1921, took offense at not being invited to the next, in February: “they evidently thought otherwise…,” and fussed to Hélène Soutzo over whether the invitation might have gone

astray. Proust was an occasional and demanding guest, invited more often than he attended. On the evening of the 1921 New Year’s Eve ball the hosts were subjected to a flurry of telephone calls from Célèste making sure that the room would not be draughty, and that he would be served scalding hot herbal tea on arrival. Proust had already written to Beaumont making his requirements known, asking him as well “not to introduce me to too many intellectual and fatiguing ladies.” In the event, he arrived at midnight and spoke only to dukes, causing Picasso to remark to Jean Hugo: “look at him, he’s on the job.” But it was already too late; the valetudinarian author’s last outing, in October 1922, two months before his death, was to a Beaumont soirée, where he may have caught the final cold that carried him off. Indeed, the Count’s gatherings truly constituted the last gasp of Proustian society: as Célèste Albaret observes of that particular visit to Hôtel Duroc, it was “the supreme gala of the society he had wanted to know and observe in his youth, and of which he alone probably foresaw the death, at the same time as his own which would precede it.” In a gesture that now seems postmodern avant la lettre in 1928, six years after the author’s death, the Prince and Princesse Faucigny-Lucinge held a Proust-themed ball, with guests costuming themselves as characters from In Search of Lost Time—but never as the master himself. That, as Proust’s intimate friend the Princesse Soutzo insisted, would have been sacrilege.


119 “…de ne pas me présenter à trop de dame intellectuelles et fatiguante.” Proust to Beaumont, December 31, 1921, Correspondance XX: 1921, 601-2.

120 “Regardez-le; il est sur le motif.” Hugo, 201. The apt translation of Picasso’s idiom is John Richardson’s: Picasso, vol. 3, 207.


122 Faucigny-Lucinge, Parties, 53.
As has been observed, the conceptualization and execution of Beaumont’s balls, from the elaborate, themed costumes and décor and the mood of inspired eccentricity to the choreographed entrances and tableaux, situated them within the tradition of Royal court fêtes—a connection made explicit by the Baroque-themed event, for which Beaumont dressed as le roi soleil himself. His patronage of leading artists sealed his seigneurial role, Picasso playing Leonardo da Vinci to the Count’s François I. The notion of the choreographed entrée, as Nancy Davis notes, “originated as a balletic interlude in performances of comedy” at Louis XIV’s court.123 Many of the balls’ themes echoed their reactionary aesthetic: whether he decreed they would be Baroque courtiers, or characters from old master paintings, operas, fairytales, Racine’s tragedies, or France’s colonial empire, Beaumont dressed and orchestrated his obedient crowd of merry-makers in terms of elsewhere and the Other, especially the past. “Reincarnating one’s ancestors,” as André de Fouquières observed, seemed to be an obsession.124 Even the “famous paintings” ball featured impersonations of no works more recent than Renoir’s Danse à Bougival (1883), or none that were photographed or reported.125 Beaumont’s parties were a living homage to France’s pre-modern (and often pre-revolutionary) history and culture, as well as a move to revive its spirit in a modern context. The success of his efforts in the eyes of his cohort was both acknowledged and ensured by Vogue’s praise: “Count Étienne de Beaumont unites a sense of tradition with an understanding of achievements in contemporary art.”126

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123 Davis, 283 n.81.
124 Fouquières, 187.
125 Faucigny-Lucinge, Parties, 35.
126 “Le Comte Étienne de Beaumont unit le sens de la tradition à la comprehension des efforts de l’art contemporain.” Vogue (March 15, 1921), frontispiece.
The formula may have been ancient (and Poiret had adopted it equally self-consciously) and the ideology reactionary, but the ambition was indeed modern. The artists, musicians and writers chosen to help plan and execute the guests’ entrées and other entertainments were drawn from the group who still regarded themselves as avant-garde (even if some of their credentials were pre-war), solidifying Beaumont’s claim to be regarded as a leading patron of advanced modernism. Costumes, tableaux and entertainments were all required to be as original, witty, and creative—even outrageous—as possible, but the theme was often quite loosely interpreted.

Valentine Hugo attended the Bal des jeux as a fairground carousel, the Princesse Soutzo came as a Christmas tree, and Raymond Radiguet as a shooting-gallery. The Marchesa Casati liked to accessorize her outfits with a live boa-constrictor (fig. 1.49). Expatriate American socialites Gerald and Sara Murphy attended one ball dressed in welded metal outfits; this may have been the Charity Ball for Soirées de Paris, to which Picasso went as a matador (figs. 1.41, 1.42). Costumes for the post-World War II balls were equally inventive: Christian Dior attended the Bal des rois et des reines as a lion (fig. 1.48). Misadventures were celebrated as all part of the fun: at the Bal de mer, the Maharani of Jhansi, as a tray of caviar, was carried in by

127 The Murphys’ metallic costumes are well known from a much-reproduced photograph by Man Ray, but their provenance is something of a mystery. The couple’s friend, the writer Archibald MacLeish, and their biographer Amanda Vaill, citing the Murphys’ daughter Honoria Murphy Donnelly, identify them in this image as dressed for “Étienne de Beaumont’s benefit gala, an ‘automotive ball’ held at the Théâtre de la Cigale;”; MacLeish, Riders on the Earth: Essays and Recollections (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1978), 124; Vaill, Everybody Was So Young: Gerald And Sara Murphy, A Lost Generation Love Story (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 137. Yet that ball’s theme was not automotive, but music-hall, circus and café-concert, as documents at IMEC and a photograph from it showing tables of theatrically attired guests confirm (fig. 1.40). Although the Murphys’ outfits certainly look “automotive,” no reliable reference has been found to Beaumont’s having given such a party, and he does not mention it in a handwritten list of his balls up to 1931 in the files at IMEC, BMT 12.9. The notion of an “Automotive Ball,” which has gained some currency, is possibly a reverse deduction from the costumes themselves by Honoria Donnelly, who owns the photograph but was a child at the time. The ball can only have occurred between 1921 and 1924 when the Murphys were active in Parisian society, and attended Soirée de Paris, as Gerald recalled many years later: “…there was a tension and an excitement in the air that was almost physical. Always a new exhibition, or a recital of the new music of Les Six, or a Dadaist manifestation, or a costume ball in Montparnasse, or a premiere of a new play or ballet, or one of Etienne de Beaumont's fantastic 'Soirées de Paris' in Montmartre—and you'd go to each one and find everybody else there, too.” Calvin Tomkins, Living Well is the Best Revenge (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 30.
“attendants”—and dropped by Jean Hugo, to the other guests’ hilarity. The same ball saw the ballroom transformed into a simulacrum (up to a point) of a gigantic aquarium. Good taste by today’s standards was not at a premium: Coco Chanel appeared in blackface as a “negro sailor” (marin nègre) at the Bal colonial. Ostentatiously modern variations on classic themes were encouraged and applauded as being exceptionally smart, even if the execution was sometimes less successful than the concept. A notable instance, where electricity was to provide the surprise, was the Marchesa Casati’s appearance as Saint Sebastian pierced by luminous arrows: a faulty circuit cut short her entrée, and she disappeared in a cloud of smoke accompanied by sparks and crackling. Upstaging his guests, Beaumont himself would change disguises several times in an evening, appearing as an Oriental prince, a manta ray, a Hungarian hussar, an inflated pink cupid throwing toy arrows (“amour grotesque”), and other extravagant fantasies. In his self-presentation, outrageousness competed with androgyny for shock value: his balls were a space in which the Count could freely express his sexual ambivalence, protected by the license fancy dress afforded. Beaumont’s campy antics, bizarre as they appear, were in some ways symptomatic of a culture of polymorphous perversity among the privileged elite at that time. *Travesti* balls provided an outlet for more than a few to indulge publicly in a milder form of what they took to greater extremes in private—and didn’t write about later. André de Fouquières’ comment in his memoir on “the repressions to which some of the disguises confessed” tacitly acknowledges this form of coded expression. Beaumont was the most extrovert of these: photographs show him bedecked in feathered and gilded headdresses and long curling wigs,
trailing gauzy, spangled draperies and glittering tinsel fringes, with heavy eye makeup and outsized bauble earrings. His huge, heavy-lidded eyes fix the camera with a histrionic glare, or he looks away with a fey smile; in costume, he could perform to his heart’s content (fig. 1.55).

1.5 Art Imitates Life

Arresting photographs of the costumed partygoers are one of the main reasons Beaumont’s balls are still remembered, even though no costumes survive, at least not in the public domain. Taken by leading photographers from the worlds of avant-garde art and fashion—Man Ray, Baron Adolphe de Meyer, and Horst P. Horst—images of these self-consciously stylish people in their fantasy creations were published in *Vogue*, *Femina*, and other lifestyle periodicals, accompanied by fulsome reports of their goings-on. Another reason for the persistence of their memory is that many of those who lived through that turbulent period found their own experiences sufficiently interesting to justify writing memoirs (Jean Hugo, Léonide Massine, André de Fouquieres, Prince Jean-Louis Faucigny-Lucinge, Darius Milhaud, Bernard Faÿ, Misia Sert, Man Ray and more) or journals (Maurice Sachs, Paul Morand, Maurice Martin du Gard). The correspondence of others—Proust, Satie, Cocteau—has been published posthumously. All these records confirm the fact that society balls and parties were an important space (there were others, as we shall see) in which the gentrification of the avant-garde—the mostly willing co-option of advanced artists by the elite class—occurred and was on display.

Given the continual interpenetration of art and life in Beaumont’s world, it was inevitable that he would be immortalized not only in the documentary accounts of his contemporaries, but in fiction as well. Paris in the 1920s, as Faucigny-Lucinge remarks, has been fictionalized so often that “these days, there is a weakness for creating a Hollywood vision of the past;” in
particular, the balls of that era have “become a gilded legend.” In fact, the mythologizing began while it was all still happening. Two literary parodies exist of the Count in his role as the Maecenas of the costume ball: the novel *Le Bal du comte d’Orgel (Count d’Orgel’s Ball, 1923)*, by Raymond Radiguet (1903-1923), Cocteau’s precocious protégé, and a play, *La Fleur des pois* (literally, *The Flower of the Peas, 1932*), by Edouard Bourdet, a popular playwright who was another member of the party set. Radiguet’s *roman à clef*, a psychological study of suppressed love, is a scathing portrait of the fashionable Parisian society to which Cocteau had introduced him, depicted (with some exceptions) as shallow, self-obsessed and mindlessly hedonist. Most of the characters are identifiable; their leader, Count Anne d’Orgel, is an exaggerated refraction of Beaumont. A man of “extraordinary superficiality” (117) whose “sole talent is his social grace” (8), Anne d’Orgel’s “time is entirely taken up by frivolities” (59). His life is a performance, but he fails to understand this, or to comprehend the real lives and emotions of other people, including his wife Mahaut (who was not modelled on Edith): “Count d’Orgel was unable to perceive the reality of anything but what took place in public” (159). His passion is masquerades, which induce him to “act like a clown” (149); the novel’s climax is an impromptu orgy of dressing-up that gets out of hand during a planning party for his next costume ball:

They went back downstairs and threw the finery ['scarves and turbans’ and other clothing] on the rug. The guests started fighting over it. They saw those rags as an opportunity to become what they would have liked to be…in the midst of this sudden

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132 *La fleur des pois*: a colloquial expression, often used in the negative (“she’s not the flower of the peas”), indicating a person or group whose social distinction and elegance sets them above the commonality. Of seventeenth century origin, it returned to popular use in the interwar period. An English equivalent is “the cream of the crop.”

133 The name Anne for a male is purposely anachronistic as well as androgynous; it was in use among the aristocracy of the ancien régime. The relevance to Beaumont is obvious, and he even had an ancestor so named: Anne Charles Claude Bonnin de la Bonninière, second Marquis de Beaumont (late 1700s-mid 1800s).

134 Quotations are from Radiguet, *Count d’Orgel’s Ball*. Page references are given in the text.
bacchanal, Anne d’Orgel went wild. His face looked as feverish as that of a child excited by play. He kept disappearing and reappearing in a number of hardly dissimilar disguises which drew more or less applause...in his childish foolishness he seemed to have forgotten all human kindness (148-9).

Yet even while Anne d’Orgel is “revealing himself...as his enemies portrayed him” (149), Radiguet remarks on “the beauty and nobility that this frivolous appearance concealed” (150). It is a complex and cruel representation of a man whom Radiguet had spent five years observing in his social element, including as a guest at two costume balls. The Count was deeply wounded, but since the novel was published after Radiguet’s premature death from tuberculosis in 1923, he had no redress. He could only fob off an interviewer from Paris-soir by claiming disingenuously that he had not read the novel and “hardly knew” its author, who had visited his home “no more than two or three times.”135

Beaumont appears again in La Fleur des pois in an even more vicious caricature as Toto, Duc d’Anche, a dictatorial and bisexually predatory character obsessed with elaborate costume parties, who uses his self-indulgent fantasies to tyrannize a group of pathetically cowed aristocratic followers. The vain and quixotic Toto, with his “habitual trumpeting voice” bears a more than passing resemblance to Beaumont; he spends the play organizing a “fête nautique” that reads like a copy of the Bal de mer of 1928, in a palatial mansion obviously modelled on Hôtel Masseran, with himself as Neptune at the head of a ramshackle procession of tritons and nereids.136 At the same time, he is engaged in devious games of seduction and betrayal with characters of both sexes. The play’s depiction of the sexual manipulations and callous amorality of the social elite offended some contemporary observers: Robert Kemp in La Liberté called it

136 “La voix claironnante qui lui est habituelle,” Bourdet, La Fleur des Pois, 17.
no satire but a “mistake,” with a cast of “grotesques” and a scenario that bore no relation to real
life. Others were entertained: Charles Méré in *L’Excelsior* praised Bourdet’s comic adroitness,
by which “the most scabrous situations become the funniest.”\footnote{“La Fleur des pois et la critique,” *L’Avant-scène* (1960), 45.} Whatever the author’s intention
(and Bourdet denied that his characters were based on actual persons, claiming that he merely
“wanted to depict high society snobbery”) Beaumont was devastated by such a public pillorying,
and this time he revenged himself on the playwright by expunging him and his wife from the

An indirect connection with another fiction deserves mention. We have already observed
that Proust fictionalized the Beaumonts and Hôtel Masseran in *Pastiches et mélanges*, but that
was not the only intersection between his writing and their lives. The porosity of the barrier
between fiction and reality prescient of Beaumont’s world comes most vividly alive in the *bal
des têtes* scene in *Finding Time Again*, in which Proust’s Narrator, after the War’s end and many
years’ absence from Paris society, enters an elegant soirée to find there everyone he used to
know, but so changed in appearance are they that he at first believes he has stumbled upon a
grotesque costume ball. He soon realizes in horror that the guests’ distorted visages are not
masks but their actual faces, the victims of Time’s cruel alchemy. His further investigation
reveals that they are also changed socially and morally, for better or for worse: the more
outwardly disguised they appear, the more their true selves are revealed.\footnote{Proust, *Finding Time Again*, 226-304. Proust’s recollections of costume balls mainly evoke the glory days of Belle Epoque society, but he was well aware of their continuity and change postwar.} The metaphor of the
costume ball as a stage for the transformation of both visuality and identity, that blurs the
distinction between real and fictitious versions of both, links Beaumont’s fabulous masquerades to Proust’s hallucinatory vision; the modelling may have been reciprocal.

Despite the shortcomings of his fictive personae, the real Beaumont exercised an impressive degree of co-ordination, vision and imagination in the planning and execution of his balls, which competed with a reputation (mostly among those he was late in paying) for being disorganized and haphazard. His creative efforts went even further, as the Count himself attempted to preserve the memory of his grand parties in a characteristically idiosyncratic manner. As a souvenir of each ball, he created a large and intricate mixed media composition using photographs of the costumed guests supplemented by drawings of his own and paper images cut and pasted from various sources onto a painted backdrop, which he decorated to construct a fantasy projection fitting the ball’s theme (fig. 1.56). These collages, or more precisely, photomontages, are still in the Beaumont family’s possession and not accessible, and they have rarely been reproduced or shown in public. Vogue reports an exhibition of them at the Galerie Bonjean, Paris, in June 1935, together with several decorative screens, also Beaumont’s work. Traditional in style and motif, these artworks were made using the old technique of découpage, or cut and pasted paper, lacquered to achieve a hard surface. Several of the photomontages were shown in the exhibition Au Temps du boeuf sur le toit: 1918-1928, which ran from May to July 1981 at Artcurial Gallery, Paris.

Measuring around one metre square, these works are extraordinarily complex and sophisticated, despite the naïve, folk-art charm of their execution: tiny partygoers are situated in ingenious proximity to gigantic flowers, birds, fish, insects, vegetation, signage, maps, sailing


141 See the catalogue of the exhibition by Schneider-Maunoury and le Buhan, 72.
ships and fantastic creatures. Discontinuities of scale, illogical perspectives, and irrational juxtapositions are fused into disorienting but coherent compositions by such framing devices as a theater proscenium, the ballroom at Hôtel Masseran, the auditorium and loges at the Paris Opéra, tropical islands above and below the water, or a ruined temple in an Asian jungle.\textsuperscript{142} Beaumont did not just make these as souvenirs of his own masquerades: the 1981 exhibition also included his \textit{Collage-Souvenir of the Ballets Russes} (no date) in the same technique and style.\textsuperscript{143} Interestingly, these works were made at the same time as the Berlin Dadaists and the Russian Constructivists were experimenting with photomontage, of which he may or may not have been aware. Beaumont’s decorative pastiches lack any of their polemics, although they share a whimsical quirkiness inherent in the medium. Whether or not his collages were consciously inspired by the Cubist \textit{papier collé} technique invented by Picasso and Braque is impossible to say; but he did own one of Picasso’s synthetic Cubist paintings (fig. 1.18); it is more likely that he borrowed the idea from his grandparents’ photo albums. The effect of Beaumont’s pictures is almost surrealist, but in detail and composition they resemble more closely the early sixteenth-century paintings of Hieronymous Bosch. It is tempting, retrospectively, to read these images of Beaumont’s balls—and the balls themselves—through Bosch’s apocalyptic iconography: bevies of heedless players cavorting in their “garden of earthly delights,” oblivious of whatever fate awaited them at the end of their epoch of decadence and excess.\textsuperscript{144} The dramatic irony is, of course, that the players would not have recognized themselves in that description.

\textsuperscript{142} For the \textit{Entrée des opéras} and \textit{Bal baroque}, the \textit{Bal des jeux}, the \textit{Bal de mer} and the \textit{Bal colonial} respectively. Several are reproduced in Schneider-Maunoury and le Buhan, 72, and in Faucigny-Lucinge, \textit{Parties}, 25-27.

\textsuperscript{143} Schneider-Maunoury and le Buhan, 40.

\textsuperscript{144} Bosch’s great triptych, \textit{The Garden of Earthly Delights} (c.1500, Prado, Madrid), imagines the Garden of Eden, the follies of this world, and the torments of hell.
Just as the photomontages synthesize media, real images and fantasy, the masquerade ball in the 1920s was a form that demanded a synthesis of several disciplines of art and decorative arts. Beaumont exploited the ball’s potential for collaborative creation in the entrées he organized using the talents of his prominent artistic associates; it was here that he rehearsed for his hoped-for future role as Maecenas. The most substantial of these entrées was a divertissement for organ and trumpet entitled *La Statue retrouvée*, for the *Bal baroque* in 1923, the purpose of which was to inaugurate the newly restored eighteenth-century organ in the Beaumonts’ music room. Devised by Cocteau, composed and accompanied by Satie (for whose sake the restoration had been done) and choreographed by Massine, who also danced together with Olga Kokhlova and the socialite Daisy Fellowes, with costumes and décor by Picasso (his *Three Graces* and *La Grecque*, already mentioned), this short work allowed Beaumont to reassemble the creative team behind *Parade* for the first time since 1917. He may have quite deliberately intended to encroach on Diaghilev’s territory by doing so; it is probable that the experience of producing *La Statue retrouvée* with these avant-garde collaborators was a direct impetus to his launching *Soirée de Paris*, his own full-scale season of public theatre, in January the following year.

The Proustian echo in the title of the piece was probably not accidental. Although *Le Temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*), the last book of Proust’s novel, was not published until 1927, a version of it had appeared in 1919 in *Pastiches et mélanges*, and its title was well known. Proust had died only six months before the *Bal baroque*, and Cocteau, who had been close to him, was sufficiently sentimental and disrespectful to both remember and parody him in this

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145 The score, long thought to be lost, was rediscovered in the 1990s and edited by Robert Orledge. It is published with an introduction by Ornella Volta (Paris: Salabert, 1997).

146 See Proust to Beaumont, after December 17, 1921, *Correspondance XX: 1921*, 590. Proust jests that he looks forward to chatting with “‘l’Ami retrouvé’” (‘the friend regained,’ i.e. Beaumont) at the latter’s party on December 31. The next sentence reads “*Le Temps retrouvé* won’t be out this year…”
way. Although “hardly first-rate” musically, according to Satie scholar Robert Orledge, *La Statue retrouvée* is interesting for several reasons.\(^{147}\) The divertissement’s slight storyline involved a classical statue of a woman coming to life—a Pygmalion motif—which prefigures Cocteau’s interest in transformation narratives, most obviously in his first film, *The Blood of a Poet* (*Le Sang d’un poète*, 1930). It might also be read as an allegory of the rebirth of art in postwar France—a rebirth that Beaumont was positioning himself to lead. *La Statue retrouvée* was an example of artistic synthesis: the blending of painting, music, poetry and dance that had been the aesthetic rationale for the Ballets Russes for a decade and for the Ballets Suédois since its inception in 1920, and that had been invoked by Guillaume Apollinaire as the sign of the “new spirit” (*l’esprit nouveau*) vital to reviving the arts in France.\(^{148}\) Beaumont would claim a version of this new spirit, embodied in aesthetic synthesis, as his intention in his program note for *Soirée de Paris*: “Dance, painting, music and poetry tend to reveal, each in its own way, the new soul and the youngest face of our France. Our purpose has been to create a synthesis of all their endeavors.”\(^{149}\)

Indeed, the costume balls of the postwar years may be seen as an expression, in their own idiosyncratic way, of Apollinaire’s *esprit nouveau*. They revived French tradition in a new spirit of modernity, guided by the imaginations of their participants, who invoked the element of

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\(^{148}\) Apollinaire mentions *l’esprit nouveau* in his program note for *Parade* in 1917; *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*, edited by Roy C. Breunig, translated by Susan Suleiman (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 452-453. He elaborated the concept in an essay in *Mercure de France*, 130 (December 1, 1918), 385-396, (“L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes”). The imperative for a postwar revival of French society and culture was an urgent political and artistic cause, but Apollinaire was among the first to link it to a specific notion of aesthetic practice, as will be shown in chapter 2.

surprise to construct a temporary alternative reality that transcended the everyday one, as Apollinaire had prescribed. Indeed, I would argue that they were as explosive and imaginative a reaction to the end of war as Dada had been to the war itself, but with an opposite political valence. On the surface, both traded in absurdity, fantasy, outrageous costumes and masks, and in an extreme kind of performance, the purpose of which was, for different reasons, to efface the performer’s self. But whereas Dada opposed military destruction with destruction of artistic conventions and bourgeois values, and the unreason of a world gone mad with the overthrow, in its own expressive means, of rationality and convention, costume balls opposed wartime austerity with extravaganza—a restoration of the former status quo, greatly exaggerated within established conventions to the point of escapist fantasy. Whereas typical Dada cabaret presented at least the impression of spontaneity, the balls were meticulously planned, scripted, and rehearsed. Whereas the Dadaists placed themselves deliberately outside society, which they sought to demolish, the balls’ participants were Society with a capital S, and their aim was its restoration. But what they shared was an uproarious, uninhibited, collective release of tension in response to the extreme trauma of a catastrophic war, and this took opposite forms appropriate to their radically opposing political agendas. Both, however, asserted life against senseless death, color against monochrome, delight against fear, and extravagance against restraint. Considered as a form of anti-Dada artistic expression, post-World War I costume balls are a cultural phenomenon of much interest; such an interpretation helps to justify the hostility of the Surrealists to Beaumont, his productions, his collaborators, and everything he stood for, as will become apparent.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ It is not clear what Beaumont thought of Dada. Of all his class cohort, he had been the most interested in all the newest cultural developments since before the war, as Daudet relates (see p. 51) and he continued to keep up to date in the 1920s. A reporter for Vogue mentions seeing Dada publications in the drawing room while waiting to interview Edith in 1920, at a time when the Dadaists were not yet widely known in Paris. (May 7, 1920), 16, but
Why did the nobility, so despised by the next generation of avant-gardists, develop such a mania for costume balls between the wars, taking them to heights of extravagance not seen since their glory days before the Revolution? The conventional explanation given by memoirists such as Prince Jean-Louis de Faucigny-Lucinge, André de Fouquières, and Baron Alexis de Rédé, that they provided a necessary release at the time, is only part of the truth. The upper classes always had a fondness for masquerade: they may have felt that they had been obliged to suppress their full selves during the war years, and the opportunity to assume false identities that were larger than life was compensatory, and liberating—as masking has traditionally been. The costume balls of the interwar years have exercised a powerful fascination on their own and later generations, and explanations for the practice tend to be similar. André de Fouquières, a veteran of many parties of that era, offers one of the most extensive accounts of Paris’s interwar social scene from within. His combined critique and defense is based partly on pop psychoanalysis and partly on nostalgia, and he is acutely conscious of the need to justify a lifestyle that he acknowledges is widely criticized as “mere frivolity.” He describes the febrile world of *la vie mondaine* in the 1920s and 1930s: an establishment feverishly trying to cling to its traditions as they crumbled in the face of a new order that he mainly deplores. He argues that many of the society hosts concealed the true purpose of their parties, which was to raise money for charitable causes. This above all, he believes, justifies them against the “short-sighted moralists” who would criticize “this disorder, this frenzy of enjoyment…this society that had abandoned itself.” Observing that the taste for disguise “was not just a fad, but perhaps the expression of deep-

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Beaumont would probably have found himself on the wrong side politically, before he knew what it was. Hentea offers an analysis of the hostility between the aristocracy and the avant-garde but he misreads Beaumont and his argument lacks primary evidence.
seated needs,” he nonetheless protests that “everyone had no ambition other than to be amusing, without fear of making themselves ugly.” Unable to decide whether these revelers were fun-loving bienfaisants, psychoanalytical cases, or self-deluding sybarites, Fouquières ultimately defends their attachment to the past: “we must pay tribute to those who refused to abdicate and who tried to reconnect with the true traditions.”

Written in the early 1950s, Fouquières’ ambivalent memoir is fascinating as a study of the mentalities that produced the era of early twentieth-century costume balls. While understandable in the context of his post-World War II French society’s absolute rejection of the past, it is nonetheless inadequate as an analysis of the balls’ cultural meaning.

Also unsatisfactory are glib appreciations written long after the events, like that of the twenty-first century writer and socialite Nicholas Foulkes, who concludes that those years supported a highly-cultivated leisure class, unburdened by guilt or social conscience [here Fouquières would differ], who lived life on an eighteenth-century scale without the slightest inhibition about the pursuit of pleasure…this sophisticated group…was tempered by a level of education and cultural awareness that enabled them to create a rich and textured world.

Foulkes also makes the inflated claim that “Beaumont’s balls were underpinned by an essential awareness of their own cultural significance;” a notion that might have surprised their carefree participants.

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151 Fouquières: “passer pour bien frivole” (181); “moralistes à courte vue” (181); “ce désordre, à cette frénésie de jouissance…cette société qui s’abandonnait” (167); “n’était pas une simple manie mais peut-être l’expression d’exigences profondes” (171); “chacun n’avait pas d’autre ambition que d’être amusant, sans craindre, pour y parvenir, de s’énlaidir” (171); “Il faut rendre hommage à tous ceux qui refusèrent d’abdiquer et qui tentèrent de renouer avec les vraies traditions” (168).

152 Foulkes, 42.

153 Ibid., 110.
Contemporary memoirs and present-day popular surveys like these contain some pertinent observations, to be sure, but they lack analysis or critical distance. I argue that what is at work in the twentieth-century history of costume balls is a form of self-validation by a class that was being forced to witness the decline of its hereditary privilege and the relegation of its status to that of a historical anachronism in the face of the inexorable democratization of the modern world. Confronted with the realization of their own irrelevance, and shorn—by wars, revolutions, the death of monarchies and the rise of the mercantile and working classes—of the power and influence that had validated them throughout a millennium of European history, the aristocracy and its allies retreated into defiance through play. It made no difference whether they were surviving remnants of ancient houses like the Beaumonts or noblesse d’empire created after the Revolution by Napoleon and his heirs; they all indulged as if equally entitled. By taking pointless excess to the extreme, just because they could, with their wealth and their great houses and their servants, they challenged egalitarianism and the tyranny of bourgeois virtues of frugality, moderation and strict morality. It is interesting to note in this context that the guest lists do not appear to have included the haute bourgeoisie—captains of finance and industry—nor any politicians. Despite the postwar relaxation of social barriers, such people, deemed vulgar and half-witted by the social arbiters of Proust’s salons, were still not considered acceptable by the gratin. By reliving the fabulously elegant times of their ancestors, the Beaumonts and their ilk were enabled to escape briefly to the era of their class’s unassailable pre-eminence, before a succession of revolutions and wars began to level the field, and the old aristocracy could never again claim the divine rights it had once assumed. It was no accident that the balls’ participants mostly dressed as characters from royalty, the social elites, or the arts of previous centuries, or from the timeless exotic imaginary. Few if any themed events placed their guests in the modern
world or referred to modern concerns (the Noailles’ *Bal des matières*, with its theme of contemporary industrial materials, and their *Futurist Ball* (c.1927) were notable exceptions).

Nostalgia was the rule at the great majority of costume balls from 1918 to 1939, notwithstanding all the avant-garde creative personnel they employed. After the Second World War, the craze for costume and masked balls gradually dwindled and died out, and their chroniclers agree that such affairs—unsurprisingly given the radically altered mindset of the postwar world—would no longer be possible in the twenty-first century.\(^{154}\)

### 1.6 Life and Art After Soirée de Paris

*Soirée de Paris*, Beaumont’s sole experiment in large-scale theatrical production, was a commercial and, many judged, an artistic failure, and it is often assumed that he gave up his impresario ambitions and retired to his own and other peoples’ ballrooms after 1924. The truth, however, is that although he never again attempted anything on the scale of *Soirée*, Beaumont by no means abandoned his interest in theater and in organizing artistic spectacles in the public domain. Nor did he quickly step aside from his quest to become a leader of the avant-garde.

Undeterred by his bruising experience with *Soirée*, Beaumont’s next self-invention was as a producer of avant-garde cinema. Richard Abel in his history of early French cinema states that Beaumont asked Henri Chomette (1896-1941) to make “several short films” for *Soirée*, “to compete with de Maré.”\(^{155}\) Frederick Brown also claims that he commissioned a film for *Soirée*, entitled *Reflets de la lumière et de la vitesse* (Reflections of Light and Speed), from Chomette,

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\(^{154}\) See Brooke Astor, Foreword to Faucigny-Lucinge, *Parties*, 6; Fouquières, 186; Foulkes, 12, 42.

whose better-known younger brother, filmmaker René Clair (1898-1981), had been a member of the Count’s wartime ambulance corps.\textsuperscript{156} René Clair made \textit{Entr‘acte} for de Maré’s Ballets Suédois’ final production in 1925, the Dada ballet \textit{Relâche}, devised by Francis Picabia (1879-1953), so Beaumont’s attempt to work with Clair’s brother was conceivably another of his acts of Maecenas-envy.\textsuperscript{157} However, no record exists of a film being shown at \textit{Soirée}, and I believe that the truth is somewhat different. The film historian William Moritz tells an intriguing story, which he had orally from Man Ray in 1972, concerning a film project which Ray and Chomette asked Beaumont to finance in 1924 (fig. 1.57).\textsuperscript{158} Beaumont agreed, on the condition that “some scenes of beautiful women” be included along with the more abstract shots (fig. 1.58).\textsuperscript{159} When the film, punningly titled \textit{À quoi rêvent les jeunes films?} (\textit{What do Young Films Dream of?}) was made, Beaumont so admired its “madcap Dada nonsense”, “surreal moods,” and “American tempo,” that he held on to the negative.\textsuperscript{160} Archival research reveals that, presenting it under his own name, the Count accompanied the film to a screening at the London Film Society in December 1925, although he had refused to let it be seen at an important festival in Berlin in

\textsuperscript{156} Brown, 288.

\textsuperscript{157} I have found no evidence of any dealings between Beaumont and de Maré, but the Countess ignored Satie’s repeated entreaties for tickets to \textit{Soirée’s répétition générale} for the Swedish impresario; there may have been some professional jealousy in play. Satie to Edith, May 15, June 11 and 14; Satie to de Maré, May 15, June 16, 1924; \textit{Correspondance}, 612-13, 617-18.


\textsuperscript{159} He later specified in a speech to the London Film Society that these were in fact “images of some of the most prominent women in Paris today, celebrated for their beauty and their talent” (images de quelques unes des femmes le plus en vue de Paris actuel, et célébrées par leur beauté et leur talent), including Anna de Noailles and Daisy Fellowes. Typescript of notes for speech, dated December 15, 1925, IMEC: BMT 3.7.

\textsuperscript{160} “Madcap,” “surreal,” “American,” Moritz, 120. “À quoi rêvent les jeunes filles?” was a popular expression. The film’s title substitutes “films” for “filles” (girls).
early May 1925, where Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy’s *Ballet mécanique* and Clair’s *Entr’acte*, as well as new work by Viking Eggeling, were to be shown. According to Moritz, Man Ray claimed that he and Chomette in due course secretly repossessed the negative from the Count during a photo session at Hôtel Duroc, staged for the purpose. They cut it apart and each one incorporated his own footage into his own film: Man Ray’s in *Emak Bakia* (1926) and Chomette’s in *Cinq minutes de cinema pur* (*Five Minutes of Pure Cinema*, 1925/6). The footage that remained must be what survives under the title *Jeux des reflets et de la vitesse: Fragments* (*Games of Reflections and Speed: Fragments*) but Man Ray does not acknowledge this, claiming in his own memoirs, “I would have nothing to do with such a hybrid production.”

Ray heavily edits this incident in his autobiography, and he told Moritz that he had suppressed the truth in order “not to make enemies of people like the Beaumonts.” However, there is more to the story than the published accounts indicate. In its August 1, 1925 issue, *Vogue* devoted a page and a half to Beaumont’s “very modern and unexpected concept” of a film, which he showed to guests at the *Fête des diadèmes* (Tiara Party) at the Ritz on May 27, 1925, in aid of one of his war charities (figs. 1.32-1.33). The Count must have wanted to launch it before an audience of his friends in Paris, which might explain his refusal to send it to Berlin the same month. It is clear from *Vogue*’s account and the still photographs that accompany the article that part of this film is identical with either the surviving seven to eight minutes called *Jeux des reflets et de la vitesse: Fragments*, or *Cinq minutes de cinéma pur*, or both; the rest

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162 Moritz, 134, n.6.

sounds very much like Emak Bakia. The film he showed at the Ritz was the complete print of À quoi rêvent les jeunes films? which he sometimes referred to as Film sans titre (Untitled film). It is a plotless, characterless exercise in cinematic image-making, in which, to quote Beaumont, “the camera itself was dreaming.” A play of light refracted off and though abstract forms, dissolving into a montage of women’s faces superimposed on flowers, followed by a headlong rush through Paris by boat and train as seen by the camera’s eye, ending in an explosion of pure light, the film explores the camera’s potential for rendering the everyday poetic and surreal.

In 1925 Chomette, either grateful to Beaumont or still hoping for his patronage, dedicated an article to him in the revue Les Cahiers du mois which extolled film’s generative power, “abandoning the logic of facts and the reality of objects, to beget a series of unknown visions—inconceivable outside of the union of the object and moving film.” He subsequently pleaded with Beaumont to allow Jeunes films to be screened at the Section cinématique de la fédération des artistes’ pavilion at the major Exposition des arts décoratifs in Paris in October 1925, but this did not happen. The Count did, however, agree to send it to Geneva, where it appeared at the Exposition internationale de TSF cinématographie on a program with Ballet mécanique and Entr’acte, in December 1925. Beaumont personally took it to London later that month, where it was shown at the Film Society, Regent Street, on December 20 with Robert Wiene’s Raskolnikov. The film and the Count were both well received and there was discussion of a British distribution. Beaumont had also accepted an offer to send the film to America; it was

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shown in New York, at the Klaw Theater off Broadway on April 4, presumably in 1926.\footnote{Flyer: “The Film Associates/ present/ for the first time in America/ the abstract film/ ‘Of What are the/ Young Films Dreaming?’/ by/ Count Etienne de Beaumont / Photography by Man Ray/The Klaw Theatre/April 4th.” IMEC: BMT 3.7. Also, see Edith’s list of Catholic charitable works, c. 1926, BMT 1.1.} At all these showings, public and private, the film was billed as “presented by” or “produced by” Beaumont, with “mise-en-scène” or “direction” by Chomette, and “ciné-portraits” or “photography” by Man Ray. According to Abel (who does not mention its prior history), the film had its public premiere in Paris in the late spring or summer of 1926 at the Studio des Ursulines, a small cinema at 10, rue des Ursulines, dedicated to showing new experimental short films—including \textit{Ballet mécanique}, which premiered around the same time.\footnote{Abel, 268, 394.} Was this after \textit{Jeux des reflêts et de la vitesse}, as it was now once more called, had been liberated from Beaumont’s jealous guardianship by its actual makers? Whether his name was still attached to it, and whether it happened before the footage was divided, Abel does not say. The title and date of a detailed review by the critic Émile Vuillermoz suggests that the film was still under the Count’s control at that point.\footnote{Émile Vuillermoz, “Devant l’écran: \textit{Jeux des reflets et de la vitesse},” source unknown, June 4, 1926, n.p. IMEC: BMT 3.7.} Abel does state, confusingly, that Chomette’s \textit{Cinq minutes de cinéma pur} was also on the program; \textit{Emak Bakia} followed at the Ursulines a year later.

Was this the film allegedly commissioned for \textit{Soirée}? It is possible that Beaumont initially hoped to show it then, but when it was not finished in time, he made other plans. What else is not certain is the exact nature of his role in the film’s creation. Ray’s version of the story is selective with the facts, especially in view of the film’s brief career, which is more complicated than he indicates, and in which, as we have seen, Beaumont did not take sole credit. It is hard to believe he would have appropriated a work to which he had made a financial but no
creative contribution, and from what we know of Beaumont, we may presume that he was both liberal and forceful with his ideas for the filmmakers. Chomette referred to it as “our film” in a letter to Beaumont of October 10, 1925, indicating that he regarded it as a collaboration. But whose concept was it originally?

In his article “Of What are the Young Films Dreaming?” in the Winter, 1926 issue of *The Little Review*, the Paris-based English language arts journal, Beaumont styles himself as the film’s author (see Appendix B). Presumably intended to cement his claim to the film’s creative genesis, the piece is a poetic but insightful meditation on the potential of cinema to render intelligible the relative nature of the individual consciousness: “I have enjoyed imagining things in motion; I have stirred up atoms of all kinds and compared them with forms grown human…The art of the cinema offers us a new expression of thought; it allows us to attempt the translation of our dreams.” Neither Chomette nor Ray is mentioned. This article, and the speech he gave to the London Film Society, display a deeply imaginative investment in the work, and he certainly persuaded the film community in several countries of his auteurship. Vuillermoz praised Beaumont’s cinematic innovation: “for the first time in its life, cinema has had permission to have fun without a second thought, to trace randomly on the white page of the screen…a writing that it had never before been allowed time to learn.” He also mentions Chomette’s and Ray’s “collaboration.” Later critics have been less generous: Georges Sadoul

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170 Chomette to Beaumont, October 10, 1925. IMEC: BMT 3.7.


172 “Pour la première fois de sa vie, le cinéma a eu la permission de s'amuser sans arrière-pensée, à tracer au hasard sur la page blanche de l’écran…une écriture qu'on ne lui avait jamais laissé jusqu'ici le temps d'apprendre.” Vuillermoz, “Devant l’écran.”
calls it “more irritating than abstract,” and of little influence.\textsuperscript{173} After 1926, the much-lauded film apparently disappeared; it is not clear when it reappeared in its present form.

Beaumont failed to capitalize on what appeared for a while to be a budding cinematic career, which might suggest that he was indeed claiming more credit for \textit{Jeunes films}, or \textit{Jeux des reflets}, than was his due. Finally, the film’s abrupt disappearance from the catalogue of French avant-garde cinema, and its present depleted condition under a new title (\textit{fragments}), suggests that Man Ray’s account of its ultimate fate is probably true. It is possible too that the allocation of authorship credits between a producer, a director, and a cinematographer, especially in a film without a story or actors, was something of a grey area, and that Beaumont took advantage of this to advance his own cause, even though the other two had originally approached him. The whole business demonstrates the extent of his artistic ambition, and how both ruthless and naïve he was about his own prospects. Despite Man Ray’s bitterness at the time, his resentment against Beaumont must have subsided (or been salved by the Noailles’ money) by 1929, when the Count appeared, briefly and masked, in Ray’s film \textit{Les Mystères du château du dé}, financed by Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, and shot at their chateau at Hyères on the Riviera (fig. 1.60).\textsuperscript{174}

Boosted by his venture into the world of avant-garde cinema, Beaumont’s public image as an avatar of the new and daring was riding high in fashionable society in 1925, helped by praise like this from the same \textit{Vogue} article that profiled the film:

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{174} There were at least two more dalliances with the film world: first, a contract dated July 14, 1930, formalizes Beaumont’s sale to L’Édition universelle of the sound film rights to \textit{Mercure}, with fifty per cent of the profits going to him. No record has been found of such a film being made, and this seems to have been another unrealized project. IMEC: SAT 16.9. Second, in 1933, he made a short publicity film for the Palace Hotel, St. Moritz, with the company Éclair-Tirage. IMEC: BMT 3.6.
\end{itemize}
The Count de Beaumont is a man of astonishing energy backed by sharp intelligence; nothing that tempts him fails to bring us novelty, and he understands his epoch so well that he knows how to support and advance art by encouraging young artists. Moreover, is it not at Count Beaumont’s home that we see the birth of so much new talent, whether painters, musicians or dancers? Who would contradict me? None of us can forget “Soirées de Paris” last year at the Cigale.175

This was certainly the reputation he sought; even though the critics had largely dismissed Soirée, and some of its artists and spectators might have preferred to forget it, Beaumont still had his supporters, and he had one more show of his own to produce: the second Festival Erik Satie, on what would have been Satie’s sixtieth birthday, May 17, 1926, to commemorate the composer who died on July 1, 1925.

Despite occasional frustrations, the acerbic Satie had remained loyal to his patron: after Soirée he wrote to Rolf de Maré: “This poor count—who is, after all, a good man [un brave homme]—instead of compliments has only received insults and other nice things…that’s life! Most consoling!”176 Beaumont remained loyal too; he arranged for the dying composer to be moved from his squalid apartment to the Count’s luxurious private room at the Hôpital Saint-Joseph, and paid for his medical care and his funeral. The memorial concert at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées was an artistic success, although it failed to raise enough for a promised funerary monument by Satie’s close friend Constantin Brancusi, as Beaumont had hoped it would.177 Cocteau gave an address, and a range of distinguished artists including mezzo-soprano Jane Bathori, conductor Roger Désormière, pianist Marcelle Meyer, composer Germaine Tailleferre, poet Lucien Daudet, and Dadaist Tristan Tzara performed the late composer’s

175 Vogue (August 1, 1925), 56.
176 Satie to Rolf de Maré, June 29, 1924, Correspondance, 622. Translation in Ornella Volta, Satie...his Letters, 172.
177 Correspondence at IMEC: SAT 5.25, 5.87. See also Orledge, Satie, 240; Correspondance, 702. Brancusi’s wood sculptures Socrates (1922) and Plato (1919-23) were influenced by Satie’s composition Socrate (1918).
works. Among these were his ballet-pantomime *Jack in the Box* and the marionette opera *Geneviève de Brabant*, the scores for both of which were thought to have been lost years before, but were discovered behind a grand piano in his apartment at Arcueil after Satie’s death.

*Geneviève*, which Satie had dedicated to Edith de Beaumont, was performed with fourteen puppets for which Madame T. Lazarski, a Parisian specialist marionette-maker, was paid the considerable sum of eight thousand francs from Beaumont’s own funds. Valentine Hugo praised them to Beaumont for “their mysterious and graceful gestures that would be humanly impossible to translate. Geneviève de Brabant is a marvel—the music so delicate and fresh. The delightful scenery and Lucien [Daudet]’s beautiful poem that dedicates the enigma.” Other audience members and critics were similarly impressed with the entire undertaking, which Beaumont managed without the drama and disorganization that had bedeviled *Soirée*.

Beaumont engaged in months of courteous but careful negotiations with Diaghilev over the rights to *Jack in the Box*, which he owned, but which Diaghilev wanted to stage as a ballet. This he in fact did, dedicated to Satie’s memory, at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt, Paris, on June 3, 1926, with choreography by George Balanchine and designs by André Derain. In return for Beaumont’s granting Diaghilev performance rights to *Jack*, the Ballets Russes’ director had allowed Beaumont to have Satie’s *Parade* score gratis for the Festival in May. The correspondence between these two rival impresarios reads like two wolves circling each other, maintaining civilities but each slipping in a nip when he has the chance. While both are professionally generous, Beaumont, who had more to lose and never missed an opportunity for

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178 The Festival Satie on May 17, 1926, is documented extensively in IMEC: SAT 5, 6, 24, 25, 41.

179 “Marionettes…leur gestes mystérieux et si gracieux qu’ils serait humainement impossible à traduire. Geneviève de Brabant est une merveille—la musique si tendre et si fraiche. Les ravissants décors et le beau poème de Lucien qui dévoû l’enigme.” IMEC: SAT 6.43, 6.59.
self-promotion, insisted that the program for the Ballets Russes’ production of Jack state that it was presented with his authorization, and that he “gives his full assistance to make it as brilliant and successful as possible.”

The Festival Satie was Beaumont’s last public spectacle as Maecenas; very likely he was finding the financial burden and the organizational stress of full-scale arts presentation unsustainably demanding. Things began to go less well for him. There was the abortive film project, and even a tour to America of costumes and set-pieces from Mercure in which he was involved in 1926 proved costly and aggravating, with compensation for the resulting damage sustained to Picasso’s sets and curtain taking years to resolve with the American and French insurers. The Franco-American Association with its wealthy patrons seems not to have been in evidence after Soirée in 1924, and the Count bore much of the expense of his projects himself, although he did refer to his “Comité des organisations théâtrales” in a letter to Derain in 1926.

It is not clear that this was any more than Beaumont’s retrospective version of the Association, reformulated to make it look like his personal art and theatre production agency, which in some ways it always had been. However, his reputation survived, if only among his friends: shortly after Diaghilev’s death in 1929, Massine wrote to Beaumont proposing that he assume the leadership of the now rudderless and penniless Ballets Russes:

Étienne! Do you want to take over direction of the Ballets Russes?…We would create masterpieces—Picasso will help us…I am full of enthusiasm…we will take another direction—there are so many beautiful things to be done…Étienne—you are the only person who could succeed.

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180 Correspondence between Beaumont and Diaghilev over Satie’s rights, IMEC: SAT 5.51 and 5.6.

181 Correspondence, contracts and other documents are in IMEC: SAT 6.64.


183 Quoted in translation in Garcia-Marquez, 209.
It was an offer that even Beaumont probably found easy to refuse.

He did, however, continue to work with Massine in the 1930s and 1940s as a costume designer: initially for Colonel de Basil’s Ballets Russes, for which he designed *Scuola di ballo* (1933), *Nocturne* (1934), and *Les Imaginaires* (1934). Beaumont’s first attempt at costume design had been for *Beau Danube*, one of Massine’s ballets for *Soirée de Paris*; his designs were also used in restagings of that ballet by Massine for de Basil in 1933, and by Serge Lifar for the Paris Opéra Ballet in 1940. In 1937, when Massine set up his own company, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, he brought the Count on board as an old (and financially useful) friend, along with Salvador Dali, Gabrielle Chanel, Boris Kochno, and several other of his former collaborators. With Beaumont as designer and librettist, he created the company’s flagship ballet, *Gaîté Parisienne* (the title was the Count’s), which opened the first season in Monte Carlo (figs. 1.61, 1.63). This is a frothy, nostalgic confection set in a notoriously racy Paris café of the Second Empire, to music by Offenbach, full of cocottes, bohemian artists, dashing hussars and can-can girls; Beaumont, who did not share Massine’s populist instincts, had initially visualized something more in the style of the chilly aristocratic portraits of Franz Xaver Winterhalter. French audiences found it vulgar but the Americans loved it, and *Gaîté Parisienne* proved to be an enduring box-office favorite, never off the repertoire. Dance historian Malcolm McCormick describes Beaumont’s colorful, “slightly tawdry” décor mirroring the high energy level of the choreography, and the “enduring smartness” of the costumes, but his designs had to be radically reinterpreted to make them both functionally and aesthetically acceptable.\(^{184}\) Beaumont was no

draftsman, and he seems to have had little sense of what dancers needed. The drawings are dull, clumsy and unoriginal, muddy in color and distinguished by neither artistry nor imagination.

(figs. 1.62, 1.64) Frederic Franklin, the company’s premier danseur, explained:

These costumes for what they call the “Cocodettes” never came out looking like this. They [the designs] weren’t feasible. They’re much shorter…the whole thing had been changed [to accommodate the dancers in motion]. The headdresses were even different…[in order] to make it work, make it feasible for the dancers.\(^\text{185}\)

Massine’s new company was the longest lasting of the several competing successors to Diaghilev’s original Ballets Russes.\(^\text{186}\) It was based in New York and Monte Carlo, but Beaumont insisted as part of his contract that he would operate only from his home in Paris. He proposed that he assume the role of the company’s European representative, “I will be part of your artistic counsel, but without material liability on my part,” and offered Massine two rooms in his house as an office for the company’s European operations.\(^\text{187}\) He also consulted the couturière Elsa Schiaparelli about setting up a costume shop in Paris or Monte Carlo for the Ballet. Beaumont must have been uncomfortably aware that the roles in his relationship with Massine had reversed, as the younger choreographer-turned-entrepreneur was now acting as his patron, offering him work. He may have seen this as an opportunity, however, to recapture something of his role as an impresario, which had been dormant for a decade; he was also more careful than previously to avoid any personal loss. His tone in letters to both Massine and Sergei

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\(^{186}\) Dance historian Jack Anderson traces the complicated history of these companies in “Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo,” Spangenberg, 13-25; an excellent documentary on the companies, with visuals and interviews with many of the original dancers, is Ballets Russes, by Dayna Goldfine and Dan Geller, Zeitgeist Films, 2005.

Denham, the company’s Manager, is superior, cautious and legalistic. Presumably nothing came of his offer; when war broke out in Europe in 1939, the company was stranded in America and communications with France were disrupted. Beaumont’s proposed collaboration on at least one more ballet—*The Ball at Metternich*, to music by Carl Maria von Weber, orchestrated by Paul Hindemith—was made impossible. After Massine left the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1943, Beaumont’s connection with the international ballet world was over. He remained in contact with Denham until 1953 due to a protracted legal wrangle over the tardy payment of royalties owed him for performances of *Gaîté Parisienne*, which was only settled after twelve years of lawyers and court summonses in New York. There is scant record of Beaumont’s short-lived involvement with the post-Diaghilev Russian Ballet companies, but Frederic Franklin’s recollection of him during that time suggests he affected an even more flamboyant persona than he had in the 1920s:

> I must say, Étienne de Beaumont was a character. I’d never seen a man—tall—that talked with a lisp [and] that had violent red hair. Orange hair: there was nothing natural about him. He was a Parisian character, fusses and carried on. He petted us [the dancers]; I thought this was wonderful. But he’d also been connected with the Diaghilev era, so he was no newcomer. Underneath all of it, he was intelligent, there was no question.

At the beginning of the 1930s, when he branched out into professional costume design for ballet, Beaumont had apparently given up trying to produce avant-garde art of any sort for the public. He was designing jewelry for Cartier, Chanel, and Schiaparelli, in the 1930s; an advertisement from 1939 illustrates his work, but no actual examples have been found (fig. 1.65). The reasons for his retreat from the public eye are not clear, but they may be connected

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190 “Les Créations d’art du cte. Étienne de Beaumont,” with photos by Boris Lipnitzki. Source unknown. Several contemporary sources testify to the Count’s activity as a jewelry designer (e.g. Massine, 89).
to the change in the avant-garde ascendancy, and the growing influence of the Surrealists, a situation that will be discussed in chapter 4. Yet he was one of the sponsors of the Exposition international du surréalisme in 1938, and he was still throwing parties on a lavish scale.

Beaumont’s Bal du tricentenaire de Racine in 1939 was the last masquerade given before World War II; an evocation of an age and a style whose memory seemed in danger of vanishing forever. The Count’s activity during that war was in some ways questionable; he was one of the many aristocrats who, eager to maintain the social life they had always enjoyed, co-operated if not exactly collaborated with the Germans occupying Paris. Indefatigable in pursuit of his ambitions for artistic leadership, he appears to have tried to take advantage of the new regime to advance his career. The dancer Serge Lifar (1905-1986), Diaghilev’s last favorite and by this time director of the Paris Opéra Ballet, was another whose relations with the occupiers were equivocal. He claims that Beaumont, “released from the army…went off to Vichy to get himself made director of the Opéra, of which he proposed to make himself Maecenas. He failed in his attempt.”

Lifar also alleges that the Beaumonts’ mansion was “wide open for Franco-German intellectual contacts which were much encouraged.” This was true of several other aristocratic hosts and, in particular, hostesses: Marie-Laure de Noailles kept a lively salon all through the war, at which German officers socialized with French cultural figures, including writers and musicians such as Georges Auric, who was a Vichy supporter. It was a time of intense fear and confusion, when Parisians could not be sure who was on which side: Cocteau’s journals record that in 1944, Edith de Beaumont was arrested and interrogated—and released a day later—by a

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192 Ibid., 207.
group of youths from Action Française, a far-right faction, for having entertained “suspect people” (gens suspects) such as Picasso and the writer Albert Camus.\textsuperscript{193}

It is difficult to know how to judge Beaumont's political morality: according to Bernard Faÿ, he tried at first to send ambulances to the aid of the French army as he had done in the First World War, but lacked the necessary resources to continue, and found the task overwhelming: “We found ourselves at rue Duroc, persuaded… that we were witnessing a catastrophe like nothing we had ever before encountered.”\textsuperscript{194} Beaumont’s writings from this time bear witness to his patriotism, and his dismay at France’s plight: on Christmas day, 1943, he wrote to Picasso: “[19]44 is looking hard. It is likely to be a terrible year,” (fig. 1.74) but he may have been one of those who believed that France was better served by civilized discourse with the enemy than by resistance.\textsuperscript{195} Had they been dealing with a civilized enemy, such a stance might have been more credible. It was also a way of rationalizing his class's readiness to compromise its morality in order to hold on to its luxurious lifestyle. There is evidence in his unpublished papers that he was profoundly troubled by his own position during the Occupation, and that he turned to spiritual sources for consolation.\textsuperscript{196} But he did more than this: it is not generally known that Beaumont took advantage of the times in a characteristically audacious manner, exercising his skills as an

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{193} Jean Cocteau, \textit{Journal 1942-1945} (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 585.
  \item \textsuperscript{194} “On se retrouvait rue Duroc, persuadés… que nous assistérions à une catastrophe tel qu’une nous n’en avions jamais encore connu.” Faÿ, 233. During the winter of 1939-40, the ambulances were used as mobile libraries, delivering books and magazines to the troops at the Maginot line. Douglas Cooper, later a friend and scholar of Picasso, was part of the team. John Richardson, \textit{The Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Picasso, Provence and Douglas Cooper} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{195} “[44 s’annonce durement. Puisse celle année qui sera terrible.” December 25, 1943. Archives Musée Picasso.
  \item \textsuperscript{196} The archives at IMEC contain prayers and other texts of a devotional nature in Beaumont’s hand, dated 1940, 1941, and 1946, testifying to his troubled state of mind, his spiritual struggles, and his desire for grace and absolution. There is no evidence that these are not his own work. BMT 1.5-1.8.
\end{itemize}
impresario to give substantial support to French music and musicians, with the goal of enhancing the cultural life of occupied Paris and providing comfort for its citizens.

In November, 1940, Beaumont established the Centre d’échanges artistiques et de culture française, which operated out of Hôtel Masseran and whose stated purpose was “to assist French intellectual and musical life by encouraging new initiatives, serious research, and interesting events.” The Centre d’échanges artistiques was a concert association which “despite the inherent difficulties of the times” staged a continuous series of serious musical events at the rate of at least eight each year until 1949, well after the war’s end. Subscriptions were invited to defray costs, which included the printing of professional-looking programs, some with cover illustrations by Picasso and Valentine Hugo (figs. 1.66-1.67). The repertoire ranged from Baroque to contemporary, and the emphasis was decidedly French: Couperin, Rameau, Chabrier, Gounod, Fauré, Ravel, Debussy, Poulenc, and Sauguet dominated, with some Russians (Stravinsky, who counted as French, and Prokofiev), a few Italians (Pergolesi, Scarlatti), and only occasional, canonical Germans (Mozart, Bach). A patriotic tone to the enterprise, though not explicit, is nonetheless apparent; one concert, on February 21, 1942, was devoted to the theme of “The Armed Man” as expressed in “the very rich treasure of French song…and the beautiful accents of our ancient tongue.” Bernard Faÿ, now Administrator-General of the

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198 “Malgré les difficultés inhérents à l’époque,” appeal for subscriptions in a printed schedule for the concert series for 1941-42. IMEC: BMT 3.2.

199 Picasso’s drawing of The Three Graces appears on the cover of the program for Olivier Messiaen’s Harawi, undated, but in fact 26 June 1946 according to Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, Messiaen (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005), 168. Valentine Hugo’s drawing of the goddess of music (“musique adorable, Ô Déesse!”) adorns the program cover for a concert by La Société des Instruments à Vent, April 17, 1941. IMEC: BMT 3.2.

Bibliothèque Nationale, handled publicity, Beaumont’s old associate Roger Désormière, who had been musical director of Soirée de Paris, regularly conducted, and the programs featured a wide variety of noted French singers, soloists, and chamber ensembles. Readings of French poetry were often a feature of these events, students of the Paris Opéra ballet sometimes performed (in costumes designed by Jean Hugo), and special recitals were given for university and Conservatoire students.

The serious, even academic ambition of the Centre d’Échanges Artistiques is evidenced by Beaumont’s championing throughout the 1940s of the composer Olivier Messiaen, whose work represented the most advanced French music of the time. Beaumont’s Centre gave the second Paris performance, in January 1942, of Messiaen’s new Quartet for the End of Time (Quatuor pour la fin du temps), with the composer reading his own commentaries before the start of each movement. At its public premiere at the Théâtre des Mathurins a few months earlier, the work had been “unanimously greeted as a French masterpiece.”201 The premiere of the song-cycle Harawi, “his most explicitly Surrealist work,” took place as a Centre d’échanges artistiques event in the music-room at Hôtel Masseran in June 1946; the dramatic soprano Marcelle Bunlet sang, and Messiaen himself played piano at both recitals.202 The final concert, on March 24, 1949, was of music by Mozart, Brahms and Liszt, performed by the celebrated Hungarian pianist Géza Anda. There is no record of the reason for the association’s demise. The word “exchange” in its title does raise the question of the Center’s intended relationship with the

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201 L’information musicale, 11 July 1941, 757, quoted in Hill and Simeone, 114. Copies of the program and the text of the commentaries in Messiaen’s hand are at IMEC: BMT 3.2. The first performance of the Quartet was in 1941 at the German prisoner-of-war camp at Görlitz, where the composer wrote the piece while imprisoned. According to Hill and Simeone, Beaumont had suggested a commission for a chamber work to Messiaen in 1942, and paid him a 1,000 franc retainer, but nothing came of it, although “Beaumont continued to encourage Messiaen for several years.” (116).

202 Hill and Simeone, 168.
German occupiers; it is often taken to imply some form of collaboration. In this case, however, the evidence shows no such activity, and the name may have been intended to mollify the Nazis.

Beaumont’s concert society was clearly no mere exercise in collaboration, but he took advantage of his social position to exercise a freedom that was not open to artists of various kinds who openly resisted the Germans. Should his wartime activity be interpreted as an opportunistic attempt to derive personal kudos from an appalling situation, or an original and humanitarian gesture to relieve Parisians under duress while working to maintain French cultural identity in the face of an invader? Both readings are probably to some extent accurate, but I believe that Beaumont deserves greater leniency than he has received from critics. What the evidence does show is that, given the ambiguity surrounding his and many others’ activities, it is far from safe to convict him too easily of practicing “not even minimally decent” wartime behavior, as some writers have done.203

Afterwards, Beaumont resumed his social life but on a less extravagant scale (1.72); he was not accused of collaboration—he had committed no crime—but after the Centre d’échanges artistiques ceased he made no more attempts to succeed as a Maecenas. He must have realized that the world, and especially the arts world, had moved beyond his ability to direct or understand it. Edith died in 1951, and the Count was lost without “the unconditional companion of all his fantasies.”204 He could no longer maintain Hôtel Duroc, which he sold to the Rothschilds, although he continued living there.205 Beaumont’s final years were spent, according to reports, as a ghost from his own heyday, “a creepy white-haired figure, hung about with


205 See note 26, p. 36.
tarnished tinsel from the past.”206 Now “a troubled being,“ “curious, forlorn, and lonely,” stripped of all that had given his life meaning, he lived for a while in Tangier and died in Paris of a cerebral hemorrhage on 4 February 1956, aged seventy-two.207 Barely fifty mourners paid their last respects to the Count at his final spectacle, but his favorite artist again provided the setting: he was laid out, as if on stage, “below a large Picasso picture,” performing until the end his allegiance to modern art.208

1.7 Networks of Influence

The intersecting networks of human relationships that coalesced and fragmented around Étienne de Beaumont, crossing class, nationality and profession, would not be remarkable nowadays. In the 1920s, they were a sign that things were opening up: established social divisions were becoming more porous and the range of many peoples’ personal, social and professional interactions was increasing in ways that held an unprecedented promise of productive collaborations. Nor was the breadth of Beaumont’s acquaintance unique in his own time, among aristocratic patrons of modernity in the arts. The Noailles were early supporters of avant-garde film, converting their ballroom into a movie theater and financing Louis Buñuel Un Chien andalou (1929) and L’Age d’or (1930) as well as Cocteau’s Le Sang d’un poète (1930) and Man Ray’s Les Mystères du château du dé (1929); the Princesse de Polignac was a serious

206 Susan Mary Alsop, letter quoted in Foulkes, 125. Alexis de Rédé notes that he wore his hair in a net, to keep the wind from disturbing it. Rédé, 11.

207 Faucigny-Lucinge, Parties, 14; Rédé, 45.

and admired promoter of contemporary music who hosted frequent recitals.\textsuperscript{209} However, he was
the most aggressively self-promoting of all of them, the most flamboyant and eclectic, the most
eager to throw himself into the milieu he sought to advance and to try and become an active part
of it, by association if not necessarily by achievement. An artist manqué, Beaumont did not
sublimate his creative desires into mere gracious patronage. Failing to maintain the traditional
discreet distance between benefactor and recipient that his elite peers observed, he channeled his
passions into an impressive range of practical engagements with the arts world, equally as happy
in bohemia as he was in the salons of \textit{le monde parisien}.

Beaumont’s natural peer group consisted of those of his own social class, but as the ranks
of the \textit{gratin} began to relax, celebrities from the worlds of the theatre, eminent writers and
intellectuals, highly regarded artists, composers, performers, and plausible social climbers of
sometimes obscure backgrounds all infiltrated, by invitation, accident, or concerted campaign.
After the First World War, Americans were a source of fascination; as well as the numerous
heiresses who had married into the French nobility (usually for financial reasons on the part of
their spouses), the flow of expatriates brought individuals like Gerald and Sara Murphy, whose
refreshing talents and social ease seemingly unhampered by class constraints were adopted as
curiosities by many society hosts. Socially adventurous operator as he was, Beaumont’s
acquaintance extended through all these types and levels of human life and endeavor. As the
holder of an ancient French title, a brilliant host, a convivial partygoer, a gregarious socializer, a
munificent patron, an ambitious theatrical Maecenas, an aspiring creative artist, and a notorious
eccentric, he positioned himself as one nexus of a great web of social and cultural activity.

\textsuperscript{209} The Noailles’ sponsorship of Luis Buñuel’s \textit{L’Age d’or} in 1930 created a scandal owing to the film’s perceived
anti-clericalism; many of their friends abandoned them, Charles was forced to resign from the prestigious Jockey
Club, and there was even a threat of Papal excommunication. On this occasion, to their discredit, the staunchly
Catholic Beaumonts joined in the condemnation.
We have seen that one locus for those webs to come together was the party scene. Another was the theater, a milieu to be explored in the next chapter. Yet another, perhaps the most public in the Paris of the 1920s, was the ultra-fashionable nightclub *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, at 28, rue Boissy d’Anglas in the eighth arrondissement. Named after Cocteau’s *spectacle-concert* of 1920 that Beaumont had financed, and presided over by the bar-owner Louis Moysès (himself something of a celebrity), *Le Boeuf* was the mecca of chic society between 1922 and 1927, or as Jean Hugo remembers, “the crossroads of destinies, the cradle of love, the hearth of discord, the navel of Paris (fig. 1.68).” Le *Boeuf* has lent its name to at least one exhibition and two books of memoirs celebrating that era, whose titles represent the club as a defining force in the era’s sensibility.

Like its predecessor, Moysès’ equally trendy establishment *Le Gaya, Le Boeuf* offered the absolute latest in evening entertainment: a *bar-dancing* with a jazz orchestra—in fact, it was “one of the nervous centers of the jazz revolution,” according to French art historian Georges Bernier. Francis Picabia’s large and enigmatic painting of an eye, *L’Oeil cacodylate* (1921, fig. 1.69), hung over the bar, where it was signed by scores of habitués who included most of the Paris arts scene and the more adventurous members of high society. *Le Boeuf* was a popular spot for assignations and licentious display among its polymorphous and polysexual clientele. The composer and house pianist Jean Wiéner sets the scene:


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210 “Le carrefour des destinées, le berceau des amours, le foyer des discordes, le nombril de Paris.” Hugo, 131.


They kiss Anna de Noailles; she is joined by Lucien Daudet, who has just come in with Marcel Herrand. Yvonne Georges, down the back, laughs loudly with Auric and Princess Murat. Léon-Paul Fargue is all alone by the door...Jacques Porel signals to him to join his table. Fernand Léger gets up and asks us to play Saint-Louis Blues...Artur Rubinstein is coming tonight after his concert...Moyès tries to elbow a passage to the middle of this throng...[Maurice] Ravel...is there with Hélène Jourdan-Morhange...they are seeking Misia's table...

Even Proust was persuaded to venture out to Le Boeuf in its first year (1922), which was his last (he found the service not up to the standard of the Ritz). It almost goes without saying that the Beaumonts were keen habitués—the Count was the only aristocrat routinely named as present—and that the Surrealists shunned the place, preferring the Certa bar in the passage de l’Opéra, off the boulevard des Italiens. Le Boeuf's clientele included businessmen, politicians, and workers as well as intellectuals, celebrities of the artworld, fashion, the theatre and the ballet, the upper crust and foreign royalty: le beau monde came to be part of the spectacle; ordinary folk came as spectators at the performance.

The bar’s legendary status is preserved in countless anecdotes, such as that of Proust’s funeral: it was to Le Boeuf that Beaumont, Cocteau, and several other mourners from “la grande pédérastie parisienne” (the great Parisian homosexual community), as the journalist Maurice Martin du Gard put it, repaired for crêpes midway through the procession, before rejoining the cortege (by taxi) at Père Lachaise cemetery. The club functioned as one nexus in the same human networks in which Beaumont’s mansion was another. It was where the spectacle of the

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213 Ibid., 7. Some of these celebrities need no introduction; others we have encountered already. Of the rest, Allégret was Gide’s lover and a future filmmaker; Kochno, a dancer, was Diaghilev’s secretary; Mistinguett (Jeanne Florentine Bourgeois) was a celebrated cabaret singer and film actress; Volterra was a theatrical producer; Anna de Noailles was a Romanian poet and novelist, married into the French aristocracy; Herrand and Georges were actors; Fargue, a poet, once challenged Beaumont to a spelling duel; Porel was a writer and friend of Proust; Jourdan-Morhange, a violinist, was possibly Ravel’s mistress. Half of all those mentioned, as well as Moyès himself, worked with Beaumont on Soirée de Paris in 1924, or in some other context.

214 Martin du Gard, 264. His account of the events recalls the absurdist funeral in René Clair’s film Entr’Acte, made for the Ballets Suédois’ Relâche three years later.
interpenetration of artistic, intellectual and aristocratic milieux that constituted the avant-garde of the early 1920s was on public display.

The Beaumonts were seen everywhere: at balls and parties, nightclubs and dinners, private recitals, readings of new literary works and showings of avant-garde films, premieres of the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois, society weddings (including Pablo and Olga Picasso’s, where the Count was a witness) and funerals. They were among the guests at some of the decade’s memorable frivolities, including the famous party aboard a barge in the Seine thrown by Gerald and Sara Murphy, part of the Beaumont network since 1921, for the opening night of the Ballets Russes’ *Les Noces* on June 13, 1923.\(^{215}\) With other revelers, they made regular nighttime excursions to the village of Robinson, outside Paris, where treehouse bars, restaurants, and a chateau owned by an ex-convict named René de Amouretti catered to a fashionable urban clientele, and where riotous evenings of dancing and drinking—in particular the party for the premiere of the Ballets Russes’ *Pulcinella* on May 15, 1920—inspired scenes in Radiguet’s *Le Bal du Comte d’Orgel*. In summer, they vacationed at the chic coastal resorts of Antibes and Cannes on the Cote d’Azur, and Dinan in Normandy with “international birds of paradise” like the Picassos, the Valentinos, Mistinguett and Chevalier, the Murphys, Hemingways, Fitzgeralds and other jazz age luminaries.\(^{216}\) True to “the deepest passion of the men of his class throughout the centuries: that of masquerades,” Beaumont would organize “fancy-dress bathing suit

\(^{215}\) The Murphys’ party for *Les Noces* has often been described. See especially Tomkins, 32-33

\(^{216}\) Françoise Gilot, *Life with Picasso*, with Carlton Lake (London: Virago, 1990), 144; Richardson, *Picasso* vol. 3: 213, 236, 288, 338. Richardson states that the Beaumonts “went every summer” to the Hotel Majestic, Cannes.
contests” (concours en costume de bain) on the beach for the adults and children, the memories of which are preserved in photographs taken by Sara Murphy (figs. 1.70-1.71).\textsuperscript{217}

Complex relationships of patronage and friendship interpenetrated in Beaumont’s life until the lines blurred and ceased to exist. Outcomes varied, and Beaumont’s philanthropic motives are always present, but at the root of these is frequently a sense of his need for control. At the same time, he recognized and adored genius—and wanted to collect it. We have seen how Beaumont’s intervention as patron rehabilitated Satie’s late career, how his humane care managed Satie’s death, and how he commemorated the composer with a staged tribute. Beaumont had made himself, in effect, Satie’s heir and the guardian of his memory: after Satie’s death he quickly obtained the rights to his unpublished pieces \textit{Jack in the Box} and \textit{Geneviève de Brabant}, as well as to \textit{Mercure}, which he retained even after granting Diaghilev performance rights.\textsuperscript{218} We have also seen that with Massine, relations became strained when the power dynamics between the two were reversed, and Beaumont retreated from his earlier indulgent devotion into a reserved, aristocratic formality. He was generous to those artists he regarded as friends, housing Massine, Marie Laurencin, Eugenia Errazuriz, and several others at different times in a \textit{dépendance} in the grounds of Hôtel Masseran. Valentine Hugo declined this offer: her biographer Béatrice Séguin suggests she was wary of placing herself in his debt, but Valentine

\textsuperscript{217}“Masquerades,” Radiguet, 148; Radiguet echoes Proust’s observation in \textit{The Guermantes Way}, 577-80, when the Duc de Guermantes turns away the messengers bringing news of his cousin’s death, to avoid having to go into mourning and miss a costume ball that same evening. Photographs, Tomkins, between 77 and 78; Vaill, 124.

\textsuperscript{218}The correspondence between Beaumont and Conrad Satie (Erik’s brother and executor) and Diaghilev is in IMEC: SAT 5.3, 5.6, 5.87, 16.7, 16.8.
was concurrently engaged in an affair with André Breton, and was deliberately distancing herself from former acquaintances he regarded as enemies.219

Two important artistic relationships worth elaborating are those with Picasso and with Proust. Picasso was introduced into the Beaumonts’ network by Cocteau at the Count’s 1916 Soirée Babel, and, with the socially ambitious Olga, became an indispensable member of the inner circle after the war, as designer of costumes and settings for balls, a regular guest at dinners and other gatherings, part of the summer vacation scene, and one of the mainstays of Soirée de Paris. Picasso drew seated, full-length portraits of both the Count and Countess, in 1920 and 1921, and a profile head of the Count, possibly a year earlier, in the style sometimes called “Ingresque” that he employed for a series of (mainly but not exclusively) artists associated with the Ballets Russes, including Massine, Satie, Stravinsky, Manuel de Falla, and Enrico Cecchetti (figs. 1.2, 1.5, 1.73).220 Beaumont owned more paintings by Picasso than by any other modern artist. It seems likely that he factored Picasso’s cachet into his plans to advance his own career, but he did not count on the artist’s refusal to be part of an economy of obligation. When Picasso tired of Olga and the elite social scene she craved around the ballet and the Beaumonts, he withdrew his company and left the Count without a star artist in his stable. Beaumont was already finding him maddeningly elusive in 1926, when Picasso’s formal agreement was required for Diaghilev to use his designs in the Ballet Russes’ restaging of Mercure.221 A


220 Richardson (Picasso, vol. 3, 526 n. 8) notes that Picasso’s full-length portrait of Beaumont is often misdated to 1924; it is visible in the background in a drawing of the artist’s studio dated June 12, 1920, Zervos no.78. The head is identical in style, so it may date from the same time—or it may not, given Picasso’s tendency to suit style to subject, regardless of the date.

persistent behavior pattern was now established; Count Harry Kessler reports in 1930 that the Beaumonts were perturbed by Picasso’s apparent disappearance, and his failure to return calls or respond to invitations. He had relegated the Beaumonts to his past—part of what Max Jacob called Picasso’s “Epoque des duchesses”—and he never renewed the intimacy the Count had so prized, despite pressing but spasmodic invitations, gifts (Edith sent him a copy of her Sappho translations), and increasingly pathetic entreaties to meet, in the name of “our friendship so very dear” to Beaumont.\(^{222}\) The artist was not, however, averse to calling in a favor when he needed one: in 1942 he apparently asked Beaumont to use whatever influence he had with the Vichy regime to obtain “des commissions” for his son Paulo.\(^{223}\) He seems, however, to have mainly ignored both Beaumonts’ persistent attempts, extending into the early 1950s, to rekindle their earlier relationship (fig. 1.74).

Proust was a different matter. Beaumont called him “one of the men who will mark our age” and worshipped the author and his work with apparently selfless devotion. Proust’s attitude to the Count was more equivocal. In a polite exchange of letters early in their relationship, the two men address each other formally as “cher Monsieur”: Beaumont thanks the writer fervently for the gift of his translation of Ruskin’s La Bible d’Amiens, vowing that it deeply inspired his religious and aesthetic sensibilities; Proust responds with elaborate compliments and asks Beaumont to call him “mon cher Marcel.” Proust appears eager to flatter Beaumont: at that time

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\(^{222}\) Kessler, 381. Richardson, \textit{Picasso}, vol. 3, 375, argues that the reason for Picasso’s elusiveness lay in his concurrent affair with Marie-Thérèse Walter. This was certainly a factor, but Picasso continued to mainly avoid the Beaumonts. “Époque de duchesses”: Richardson, \textit{Picasso}, vol. 3, 177. “Notre amitié qui m’est très chère,” letter from Beaumont to Picasso, December 25, 1943, Archives, Musée Picasso, Paris.

\(^{223}\) Telegram from Beaumont to Picasso, May 2, 1942: “Je pars lundi matin à 8H. pour Vichy et puis emporter des commissions pour votre fils...” (I leave Monday morning 8 a.m. for Vichy and will bring back commissions for your son) Archives, Musée Picasso, Paris.
he was also enquiring solicitously after his recovery from kidney surgery, in letters to Edith and
other mutual acquaintances. Their correspondence thenceforth established a mutually respectful
and mainly affectionate tone, but as the relationship progressed, Proust was often less
complimentary when speaking of the Count to others, and bridled at real or imagined slights. In
1921, it was necessary for Cocteau to act as intermediary in reassuring Proust that Beaumont was
“among your most loyal admirers,” and that the writer was never spoken of other than “in
glowing terms” at Hôtel Masseran; we have seen how he took offence at a missed (or unissued)
invitation in 1922. Beaumont was indeed loyal: as previously mentioned, he held readings of
Proust’s work at his home, and in January 1919 he was trying to obtain a copy of Swann’s Way
(out of print just then) from the publisher, Gallimard, having given all his own copies away to
friends. In May of 1921, the solicitous Beaumont arranged an after-hours viewing for Proust, to
suit his invalid’s schedule, of the Ingres exhibition that the Count’s Franco-American
Association had organized at the Hôtel des Antiquaires et des Beaux-Arts. Proust reciprocated
the Count’s attentions with grace interlaced with occasional spite, but accepted his frequent
invitations (when his health permitted) from 1917 until a month before his death. He was
obsessed with Beaumont’s genealogy and quizzed him closely about it on several occasions—
“although not with the intention of writing a monograph.”224 For his part, Beaumont was deeply
moved by Proust’s intimate and panoramic evocation of the vanished prewar world of his own
class—in whose aftermath they both lived—at the same time as he watched Proust transform it

224 The preceding citations in this paragraph are all from Proust, Correspondance XVII-XXI: “un des hommes qui
marqueront notre époque” (Beaumont to Proust, April 12, 1918: XVII, 183); “mon cher Marcel,” (c. April 12 1918:
XVII, 186-88); letters to Edith (March 7, 1918: XVII, 146); other mutual acquaintances (Lucien Daudet, April 8,
1918: XVII, 170); “parmi vos plus fidèles admirateurs,” (Cocteau to Proust, January 6, 1921: XX, 48); “d’une façon
elogieuse” (to Beaumont, May 9, 1921: XX, 251); “ayant donné aux uns et aux autres ses différents Swann” (to
Mme Lemarié, January 21, 1919: XVIII, 49); Ingres exhibition (to Beaumont, May 9, 1921: XX, 251-3); “bien que
n’ayant pas l’intention d’écrire une monographie” (to Beaumont, December 17, 1921: XX, 589-92; to Hélène Soutzo,
into art. His experience of *In Search of Lost Time* may have helped to inspire the Count’s own bids at immortality through aesthetic metamorphosis. Maurice Sachs confirms in 1919 that Proust was an advanced taste as well as an elite one, and that Beaumont was in the vanguard of his connoisseurs: “A revolutionary book has appeared called *Swann’s Way*; another is *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*…They are discussed in certain particularly enquiring and enlightened houses like that of Count Étienne de Beaumont… but the general public scoffs at them.”

The connection with Proust discloses another important network within the larger social web of the time: that of homosexual men of an aesthetic disposition, involved in the arts as creators, patrons, or highly committed spectators. Usually assumed, but rarely addressed specifically in studies dealing with men of that culture who happened to be gay or bisexual, this subculture provides an essential dimension to any understanding of the complex social and artistic networks that operated in Paris between the wars. Beaumont’s circles included a significant number of men like himself—“la grande pédélastie parisien”—whose ambivalent or gay sexuality was an open secret. Some, such as Diaghilev and Cocteau, were more open than others. Some married aristocratic men were known to prefer other men (Charles de Noailles was another; Beaumont was far from unusual in this respect), but they were generally more discreet

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225 “Il a paru…un livre révolutionnaire…qui s’appelle DU CÔTÉ DE CHEZ SWANN, un autre qui s’appelle À L’OMBRE DES JEUNES FILLES EN FLEURS… On en parle dans quelques maisons où l’on est particulièrement curieux et éclairé comme chez le comte Étienne de Beaumont… mais le grand public s’en moque.” Sachs, *Au Temps*, 32-33.

226 Erik Näslund discusses Paris’s artistic/homosexual scene as a context for avant-garde ballet in *Rolf de Maré: Art Collector, Ballet Director, Museum Creator*, translated by Roger Tanner (Alton, Hampshire: Dance Books, 2009), his extensive study of the Ballets Suédois’ founder; see “Aberrant Inclinations,” 212-242. It is perhaps surprising that more scholarship on this subject does not exist, especially given the many studies on the thriving lesbian artistic culture in Paris at that time.

227 Martin du Gard, 264; see p. 108.
than unmarried male artists, some of whom had recognized partners. All these men formed a loose community of mutual understanding, a freemasonry whose shared sexual orientation made for ties of a particularly sensitive but resilient nature, often partly or wholly submerged beneath a veneer of normative social behavior. Their network, which co-existed and intersected with all the others, gave them a space for self-expression within which their sexual and personal identities were at worst tolerated and at best freely accepted, even flaunted, even though homosexual behavior by men and women was illegal in France at that time.\(^{228}\) It was not that homosexuality had been invisible before the war (Proust and Daudet were prominent among the gay aesthetes of the Belle Epoque, and Gertrude Stein, for example, lived openly with Alice Toklas as her partner) but in the less inhibited climate of postwar Europe it became a badge of the new social freedoms, and indeed, a mark of progressive chic. One major aesthetic and social focus for this fashionable, gay, urban subculture was the ballet: a state of affairs that resulted from the realignment of modernist ballet as a site for coded homoerotic desire. As reinvented by the Ballets Russes—largely thanks to Nijinsky’s challenge to heteronormative images of masculinity—and taken to extremes by Jean Börlin and the Ballets Suédois, ballet projected an aesthetic of ambiguous sexuality and androgynous self-presentation that attracted a similarly-inclined audience.\(^{229}\) The fact that Breton and most of the Surrealists were vehemently homophobic set them apart from the Boeuf and ballet set; it was one important reason for the antagonism between Breton’s cohort and the people around Beaumont, “the most spectacular of

\(^{228}\) That non-normative sexual identity could be both acknowledged and submerged is a paradox at the core of its social formation, argues Elisa Glick, citing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 15: “gay identity is fundamentally shaped by the duality of secrecy and disclosure…at once hidden and revealed.”

\(^{229}\) See Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 74-100. For a fin-de-siècle attitude toward male dancers from upper-class men, see Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 171-75.
the group,” and for their opposition to dance and the dance-oriented spectacles he produced. When they jeered at him “down with E. de Beaumont, les garçons [i.e. homosexuals], et toutes Soirées de Paris” from the balcony of the Théâtre de la Cigale, they were identifying a major fault line between his milieu and theirs, and damning Soirée as a sexually deviant enterprise.230

The homosexual network was interwoven with the other social and artistic networks within which Beaumont moved and of which he formed a hub. Awareness of this particular network enlarges our ability to understand the motives, the affinities and the antipathies at work in the operation of other networks, although the perspective it provides is by no means definitive; the model I propose of Paris artistic culture in the 1920s is multi-dimensional and interdependent. The coming together at the premiere of Mercure on June 15, 1924, of networks and actors from many sources, all focused on the person of Count Étienne de Beaumont, represents a watershed: a brief but significant moment in the life cycle of the avant-garde, when an older idea of what that avant-garde was and what it stood for was forced to give way to a new and unexpected one. That moment will be explored in the next chapter.

230 Arnaud, 495. This situation is more complex and will be explored in chapter four. Breton also objected to the association of ballet, and hence gay male aesthetic culture, with bourgeois and aristocratic values, and with money, which made a commodity of art. “Down with…Paris;” see note 4, p. 30.
Chapter Two

Staging “the new soul of our France”: Beaumont’s Soirée de Paris, 1924

Dance, painting, music and poetry tend to reveal, each in its own way, the new soul and the youngest face of our France. Our purpose has been to create a synthesis of all their endeavors.

—Count Étienne de Beaumont

The saga of Soirée de Paris, Count Étienne de Beaumont’s first and only essay in full-scale commercial theatrical production, was a tragi-comedy worthy of Raymond Radiguet’s pen, had the precocious novelist not died the previous year. If it left little trace in terms of either reputation or repertoire, it bore an unanticipated legacy as an exuberantly baroque swansong of the old avant-gardes in 1920s Paris, and a herald of a new, more austere and politically committed one.

This chapter will examine the geo-cultural site and introduce the personnel for Soirée de Paris; analyze the ideological forces behind its name and Beaumont’s cultural ambitions for it, particularly its debt to Apollinaire; and unpick the tangled artworld negotiations that it entailed, before analyzing its program of spectacles, paying detailed attention to the ballet Mercure. It will conclude by arguing for the larger significance of that work’s disruption by André Breton’s Surrealists, and by commenting on the saboteurs’ motives, as a prelude to chapters 3 and 4.

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2 The title is variously written in the singular (Soirée) and the plural (Soirées) de Paris. I refer to it here as Soirée, singular, for three reasons: to distinguish Beaumont’s production from Apollinaire’s literary review, Soirées de Paris; because that is how the name appears on the program for the season; and because in the singular it better conjures Beaumont’s vision of aesthetic synthesis—one expressive movement that unites all the arts.
2.1 Scene and Dramatis Personae

*Soirée de Paris* ran from May 17 to June 28, 1924, at the Théâtre de la Cigale, a former café-concert and music-hall in Montmartre, with a “slummingly chic” reputation.³ The significance of Beaumont’s choice of Montmartre as the site for his experiment deserves attention, especially when his rivals, the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois, were entrenched in the very right-bank Théâtre du Châtelet and Théâtre des Champs-Élysées respectively, both south of the Paris Opéra in the fashionable first and eighth arrondissements. Although his reasons are nowhere stated, the unconventional location of La Cigale accords so well with Beaumont’s ambition for *Soirée* that it is probably safe to assume that it was chosen deliberately, and not by default.⁴ The emphasis placed on Montmartre in a publicity flyer for *Soirée* supports this idea, with its reference to the artists who “so loved this corner of Montmartre and who here conceived their most remarkable works.”⁵

Montmartre had a long-standing identity as a subversive locale; geographically, socially, culturally, sexually, and politically on the Paris fringe (fig. 2.3). Situated north of the city of Paris on and around a high butte in a village that was annexed in 1860 as the eighteenth arrondissement, Montmartre retained the narrow, winding streets and ramshackle buildings of the pre-Haussmannized city, preserving its distinctive village-like character. Since the beginning

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³ Davis, 202. The season was advertised as May 17 to June 30, but it closed two days early. This was partly due to declining ticket sales and rising costs, and partly to the withdrawal of *Mercure* after only three more performances. Satie to Wieland Mayr, June 21, and to Rolf de Maré, June 29, 1924; *Correspondances*, 619, 622.

⁴ Nothing touching on Beaumont’s decision to hire La Cigale as venue has come to light during my research, but I have not had the opportunity to consult any papers that may still reside with the Beaumont family.

⁵ “…qui ont tant aimé ce coin de Montmartre et qui y ont conçu leurs oeuvres les plus remarquables.” Beaumont or possibly Marc Allégret, printed flyer for *Soirée de Paris*. IMEC: BMT 12.4.
of the Third Republic in 1871, this neighborhood had been home to a self-identified bohemian population of artists, writers, entertainers, activists, and other anti-establishment individuals, who cultivated a culture of opposition to the bourgeois norms of Republican society, like industry, sobriety, and chastity; what historian John Kim Munholland calls a “delinquent community.” Satirical cabarets including Le Lapin agile, Le Chat noir, Les Quat’z’arts, and Le Mirliton lampooned the government and the bourgeoisie and served as sites where class barriers, conventional proprieties, gender roles and strict bourgeois morality among their patrons dissolved. They promoted a climate of sexual license where pleasure of many kinds was its own justification, and where women experienced fewer restrictions on their freedom than they did in the society beyond the village.

As the birthplace of the Paris Commune of 1870-71, Montmartre remained a haven for radical politics, especially anarchism, which enjoyed a considerable following from the 1880s to the First World War. A vibrant print culture of satirical and oppositional literature, polemics, graphic art and posters was based to a large extent in the cabarets, many of which produced their own journals. These activities nourished Montmartre’s subversive ideology and gave it tangible form. Engaged with these social discourses and pursuing their own kind of revolution were the artists who created modernism. From the earlier groups, the Incohérents and the Hydropathes, to the Impressionists, post-Impressionists, Symbolists, Cubists and others without specific affiliation, they congregated in the butte’s congenially non-conformist environment from where they launched their assaults on artistic orthodoxies and stale conventions, giving Montmartre its

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7 This culture is profiled in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905*, exh. cat. (New Jersey: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, 1996).
cachet as a site of artistic experimentation and the cradle of new ideas and new forms. In addition to their technical innovations, these avant-garde artists employed the imagery and the topical references of Montmartre’s popular culture of leisure, entertainment, graphic advertisements, and political satire in their works; high artistic ambition in dialogue with popular taste transformed art’s reach and resonance.

By the turn of the century, Montmartre’s frisson had begun to dilute under the irresistible force of commercialization from the mass of bourgeois interlopers seeking counter-cultural thrills, collapsing it into “a tourist trap feeding upon nostalgia.”8 The war decimated its bohemian population and destroyed much of its vibrancy, and by the 1920s, cheapened nostalgia was its main currency. However, the allure of its recent past still made Montmartre a site whose signifying value appealed to an impresario seeking to stake a claim to theatrical and artistic innovation of a daring kind involving painters, musicians, poets and performers. As a venue, the Théâtre de la Cigale was particularly appropriate to Beaumont’s aim to revive and “transform” the art of the music-hall or cabaret, Montmartre’s great contribution to French theatre.9 But how did he propose to transform it, and into what? It is not obvious that this was absolutely clear even to him, but he offered an idea of his intentions, however imprecise, in a publicity release he drafted for the show:


9 “Something as important and beautiful as the music hall, an attempt to transform it” (une chose aussi importante et aussi belle que le music-hall, essayer de la transformer), Typescript for a publicity release for Soirée, probably by Beaumont, IMEC, BMT 12.5. He repeats this claim in an article by René Crevel in Les Nouvelles Littéraires (May 10, 1924), p.7. See also: Beaumont’s letter to Picasso on the question of costumes for Mercure, 21 February 1924: “you know how to find a way to dress in music-hall style the excellent nudes you have drawn” (vous saurez trouver la façon d’habiller pour le music-hall les nus admirables de vos dessins), Musée Picasso archives, quoted in Ornella Volta, Satie et la danse (Paris: Editions Plume, 1992), 76-78; and his letter to Stravinsky, February 1924: “It will consist of a Music Hall section and a literary section at the same time. I wish for these two parts to be mounted with the greatest care” (Il comportera à la fois une partie Music Hall et une partie littérature. Je voudrais de ces deux parties soient montées avec le plus grand soin), IMEC: BMT 10.8.
The idea of these performances is to give, in a Music-Hall, a show that is quite similar to those that are usually seen there, but is created by important participants and interpreted with a care unknown until today…the Count Étienne de Beaumont…has attempted to bring to it all the care of which he is capable, with a rigor concerning himself and his company that is not customary in theatrical affairs.¹⁰

Beaumont’s suggestion that he would apply higher artistic standards and greater professionalism to the form than anything music-hall’s former exponents could manage is not only elitist and patronizing from a class perspective, but shows a fatal lack of understanding of the nature of the popular theatre he claimed to espouse. He seems to have felt that his (presumed) natural class superiority entitled him to take over a tradition with its roots in working class culture and “transform” it by reimagining it from an elite position for an elite audience—and furthermore, that his superior personal qualities guaranteed its success. But in his smug self-assurance Beaumont missed the whole point of music-hall. By taking it out of its context of class antagonism he annihilated its essential nature as a form that existed to lampoon the social group he represented. His obliviousness to the class-inflected resonances of his chosen form, and the inherent constraints of his own status, doomed Beaumont’s project from the start. While he managed to produce something charming, attractive, occasionally amusing (and in Mercure’s case, aesthetically innovative), in Soirée de Paris, it was tame and toothless compared to the original music-halls of Montmartre. The only offense Soirée provoked was, ironically, due to its perceived snobbism and vacuity—apart from the offense taken by Breton and his cohort, and that was a different matter.

¹⁰ “L’idée de ces spectacles est de donner dans un Music-Hall un spectacle assez analogue à ceux qu’on y voit généralement mais fait par des éléments majeure et interprété avec soin inconnu jusqu’au jour…Le comte Étienne de Beaumont… a essayé d’y apporter tout le soin dont il est capable avec une sévérité vis-à-vis de lui-même et de sa troupe qui n’est généralement pas coutumière dans les choses de théâtre.” IMEC: BMT 10.8.
However, the Count did forge a link of a kind between his project and Montmartre’s recent history: the notion of a self-consciously elite artform which builds on but transcends its colloquial sources in unspecified ways sets up an affinity with the butte’s prewar artistic elites—post-Impressionists, Symbolists, Cubists—who (correctly in their case) saw themselves as exceptional, and in their reinvention of artistic tradition engaged popular forms, materials, and techniques to signify their rebellion and to transform the whole idea of art. Beaumont appears to have believed he was perpetuating, and enhancing, a heritage of avant-garde expression; situating it at La Cigale was, in effect, a public declaration of his agenda. The fact that the venue disconcerted some of his upper-crust associates probably reinforced his own sense of exceptionalism.

La Cigale (the Cicada) sits at the base of Montmartre butte, at 120 Boulevard de Rochechouart near Place Pigalle, a block from the Moulin Rouge cabaret (fig. 2.2). It opened in 1887 on the site of a former cabaret, La Boule Noire, as a café-concert, then as a venue for comedy, dance and music. La Cigale reopened as a music-hall in 1894 under its second director, the theatrical author Léon Nunès, who renovated and enlarged it, engaging the architect and graphic artist Adolphe Léon Willette to decorate the ceiling. It hosted many stars of the Belle Epoque, including Mistinguett, Arletty and Maurice Chevalier. By the 1920s La Cigale, its fortunes now in decline, was serving an eclectic menu of vaudeville, music-hall and operetta. It closed in 1927, then reopened around the time of the Second World War as a cinema, and was classified as a historical monument in 1981. Proud of its heritage, La Cigale operates nowadays as a venue for rock concerts, fashion shows and alternative theatre.11 (figs. 2.4-2.5). At the time

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11 See the theatre’s web site: http://www.lacigale.fr. When I visited in June 2017, it was again being upgraded, thanks to the Mairie de Paris and the Centre national de la chanson, des variétés et du jazz.
of Soirée, the Cirque Médrano, another treasured Montmartre institution of popular spectacle, was located across the road. La Cigale occupies the liminal region of Montmartre between respectable Paris and the once-decadent heart of the butte, more easily accessible to outsiders (who would have constituted its main patrons) than were the cabarets-artisitiques like Le Lapin Agile or Le Chat Noir further up the hill, but still part of the seedy-glamorous world of Montmartre entertainment. Beaumont’s staging his season there had a cultural significance beyond the thematic or symbolic, although he would not have been aware of this: Soirée de Paris was a symptom and a contributing factor in the commercialization of the area, of its gentrification into a simulacrum of its early Third Republic character and identity. Henri Sauguet, then a young musician excited to be a part of this glamorous event, recalls that the performances

brought to the Boulevard de Rochechouart, until then poorly frequented, the splendor of the great Parisian soirées…luxury cars, evening dress, princesses, duchesses, marshals, famous personalities came, causing enormous interest and animating that part of Montmartre, which had remained fairly provincial.12

The program of Soirée de Paris constituted a novel mixture of theatrical elements (fig. 2.6): there were nine new ballets—Salade, Le Beau Danube, Les Roses, Premier amour, Gigue, Vogues (consisting of three pieces), and Mercure—all but one choreographed by Léonide Massine, and two plays: Jean Cocteau’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s Roméo et Juliette, and Mouchoir de nuages, a “tragedy in fifteen acts” by Tristan Tzara.13 These were interspersed with shorter divertissements: several plotless danced pieces by Massine; a Ballet espagnol performed

12 “Leurs manifestations amenaient sur le boulevard de Rochechouart, jusqu-là mal fréquenté, le faste des grands soirées parisiennes…Voitures de luxe, tenues de soirée, princesses, duchesses, maréchaux, personnalités connues y vinrent, causèrent un grand mouvement de curiosité, et animèrent cette partie du Montmartre d’alors, demeurée assez provinciale.” Sauguet, 204.

13 One of the short pieces in Vogues was choreographed by Beaumont himself, uncredited in the souvenir program.
by Ida Rubinstein; “contemporary dances” (danses actuelles) by the faux-American French jazz dancer Harry Wills; and an exhibition of serious visual art occupied the foyer. The collaborative ensemble that came together to realize this “season of spectacles” was equally unprecedented.

The talent assembled by Beaumont for his ephemeral project reads like a roll call of avant-garde Paris, or the guest list for one of his costume balls. For his most ambitious project to date, he called on practically everyone in his diverse social and artistic networks. In addition to those already mentioned, scenic and costume designs were provided by Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, André Derain, Jean and Valentine Hugo, José-Maria Sert, and Marie Laurencin (figs. 2.14–2.20); music was composed by Erik Satie, Darius Milhaud, and Henri Sauguet, with Roger Desormière (1898–1963) as musical director and Marcelle Meyer as accompanist (figs. 2.21–2.25). The writers Paul Morand and Lucien Daudet (figs. 2.33, 1.10) contributed to the literary content, and the fashion houses Jeanne Lanvin, Hermès, Lus et Befve, and Perugia to the costuming. Loïe Fuller, the American dancer and innovator of spectacular theatrical lighting effects, extravagantly celebrated in Belle époque Paris and now in the twilight of her career, was hired as lighting director (fig. 2.12). The Ballets Russes’ prima ballerina Lydia Lopokova and former principal Stanislas Idzikowsky (1894–1977) headed Massine’s company (figs. 2.27–2.29), well-known actors Yvonne George (1896–1930) and Marcel Herrand (1897–1953, who had previously appeared in Guillaume Apollinaire’s play Les Mamelles de Tirésias and at least one Dada soirée, figs. 2.34, 2.36) were cast in Tzara’s and Cocteau’s plays (fig. 2.32), and the modernist soprano Jane Bathori (1877–1970, fig. 2.26) led the chorus for the ballet Salade. The celebrated Russian performer Ida Rubinstein (fig. 2.30) and the French amérikanist jazz dancer Harry Wills appeared in solo interludes. Sets were executed by Vladimir (1880–1957) and Elisabeth Polunin (1887–1950), respected scenic artists who normally worked with the Ballets
Russes. Numerous other artists and performers—Igor Stravinsky, Henri Matisse, Moïse Kisling, Francis Poulenc, Paul Valéry, André Gide—were invited but declined to sign on, some of them due to pressure from Diaghilev, whose rivalry with Beaumont provided an offstage drama (more of a farce) that enlivened the season’s offerings. The writers André Breton and Louis Aragon, as we have noted, made an unscripted appearance that almost upstaged the main events (fig. 2.37). During the entr’actes, the audience was invited to view an exhibition of seventy works of “Art of the Theatre, Music-Hall and Circus” by Edgar Degas, Paul Cézanne, Édouard Manet, Georges Seurat, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and other Impressionist and post-Impressionist painters in the foyer. Some works were borrowed from the collections of the Count’s friends, while other loans were facilitated by the influential dealer Léonce Rosenberg (1879-1947). A piano bar and un dancing, run by Moysès of Le Boeuf sur le toit with the Boeuf’s house pianist Charles Doucet, was available in the foyer (until it lost so much money it had to close); the Count and his team were determined to give Soirée’s audiences the fullest experience possible of Parisian artistic bohemia. But Le Boeuf’s—and Soirée’s—patrons were not the impoverished garret-dwellers of Henri Murger’s Second Republic immortalized in Giacomo Puccini’s opera La Bohème, nor were they the non-conformist fringe and adventurous bourgeoisie of prewar Montmartre. Since the War, advanced art had become fashionable and expensive, and a taste for modernist expression in all its forms was part of the currency of a modern aristocracy. These artists were now members of chic society, and the connoisseurs were their well-heeled and often titled patrons. Through Walter Berry and the Association Franco-Américaine, Beaumont exploited his contacts in the aristocracy, the diplomatic service, the senior ranks of the army, and the

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14 Scènes de la vie de bohème (1847-49) a collection of short stories by Henri Murger (1822-1861), was the source for Puccini’s opera La Bohème (premiered 1896).
government of the Republic to finance the enterprise and to lend the prestige of their names to its list of distinguished sponsors. All these people constituted the artistic personnel, the audience, and the financial backing for *Soirée de Paris*. A brief theatre season thus became one of the most densely woven coalescences of diverse networks of individuals and entities in postwar Paris.

### 2.2 Artistic Synthesis in the Service of National Regeneration

It is not clear exactly when the idea for *Soirée* originated, but it most likely developed out of the entrées at the Count’s costume balls, and was encouraged by his network of admiring and often dependent artistic friends. The divertissement *La Statue retrouvée* is usually regarded as having been a direct stimulus for the larger project. Beaumont appears to have fused the notion of an expanded costume ball with the rhetoric of cultural renewal current in many areas, in an attempt to stake a claim for vanguard art—visual and performing—as a crucial player in re-forging, as he stated in his program notes, “the new soul…of our France.”\(^{15}\) Such a project makes sense of his decision to borrow the title of Guillaume Apollinaire’s prewar literary and artistic revue, *Soirées de Paris*, published between 1912 and 1914, to grace a season of avant-garde theatre (figs. 2.7, 2.8).

The Surrealists naturally disapproved of Beaumont’s appropriation of their hero for “these evenings of banal music-hall entertainment;” Yvan Goll lashed out in *Le journal littéraire* at “*Les Soirées de Paris* at La Cigale, which resulted in an intellectual and artistic fiasco, for abusing the title of Apollinaire’s famous review of the same name. Fraudulent bankruptcy!”\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\)“La nouvelle âme …de notre France.” Beaumont, “Preface.”

But Beaumont was not merely paying homage to the late “impresario of the avant-garde;” he was consciously invoking Apollinaire’s hailing in his program note for the Ballets Russes’ Parade in 1917 of an “esprit nouveau” (new spirit) in the arts, a spirit that “achieved…that alliance between painting and the dance, between the plastic and mimetic arts, that is the herald of a more comprehensive art to come,” and which furthermore embodied “the marvelously lucid spirit of France herself.” This New Spirit, he claimed, “has given rise, in Parade, to a kind of sur-realism,” thus coining one of the most consequential words of the century. Apollinaire reiterated the theme in the program for his own “drame surréaliste,” Les Mamelles de Tirésias (The Breasts of Tiresias), which premiered a month after Parade, announcing that “we are trying here to infuse a new spirit into the theater.” This was an idea that Beaumont would enthusiastically adopt. Apollinaire expanded upon it in his lecture “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes,” delivered on November 26, 1917 at the Théâtre Vieux Colombier, and printed in Le Mercure de France a few weeks after his death from influenza in 1918. In this, his final and definitive word on the subject, Apollinaire universalizes the concept of l’esprit nouveau while applying it particularly to literature and investing it with a strongly nationalist character:

The new spirit that will dominate the whole world has appeared in poetry nowhere as it has in France. The strong intellectual discipline that the French have always imposed on themselves allows them…and their spiritual allies, to have a conception of life, Arts and Letters that, without simply recording Antiquity, is neither equivalent to the beautiful scenery of Romanticism.
His lecture envisions an avant-garde movement that will revitalize the arts by ingeniously reconciling the invaluable lessons of the past with the radical impulses of the present, and by exploiting the creative possibility of modern technologies, which “can go very far still and consummate the synthesis of arts, music, painting and literature.”"\(^\text{22}\) Despite its universal ambition, this spirit, he assures his audience, is not limited to any one discipline, and remains above all “an individual and lyrical expression of the French nation.”\(^\text{23}\)

As one of \textit{Parade}’s patrons, the Count had a personal investment in this pioneering expression of \textit{l’esprit nouveau} by the Ballet Russes; as a culturally active Parisian committed to the idea of avant-garde art, he may well have attended Apollinaire’s lecture, or read it in \textit{Le Mercure de France}, or both. He was certainly aware of the late poet’s ideas. Beaumont echoes the wording as well as the sentiment of Apollinaire’s \textit{Parade} essay in his own program preface for \textit{Soirée}: “Dance, painting, music and poetry tend to reveal, each in its own way, the new soul and the youngest face of our France. Our purpose has been to create a synthesis of all their endeavors” (see Appendix C).\(^\text{24}\) Echoing President Raymond Poincaré’s invocation in 1914 of the \textit{union sacré}—the “sacred union” among political parties that subsumed ideological differences for the greater strength of a unified nation—Apollinaire raised the flag of aesthetic synthesis and the promise of the avant-garde in the name of wartime patriotism, the arts all

\begin{quote}
forte discipline intellectuelle que se sont imposée de tout temps les Français leur permet... et à ceux qui leur appartiennent spirituellement, d'avoir une conception de la vie, des Arts et des Lettres qui, sans être la simple constatation de l'Antiquité, ne soit pas non plus un pendant du beau décor romantique.” \textit{“L’Esprit nouveau,”} 1.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
22 “Peuvent aller très loin encore et consommer la synthèse des arts, de la musique, de la peinture et de la littérature.” \hspace{1cm} Apollinaire, \textit{“L’Esprit nouveau,”} 2.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
23 “Une expression particulière et lyrique de la nation française.” \hspace{1cm} Apollinaire, \textit{“L’Esprit nouveau,”} 3.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
24 “Danse, peinture, musique et poésie tendent à reveler, chaque à son côté, la nouvelle âme et le plus jeune visage de notre France. Notre but à été de faire conjuger leur effort.” \hspace{1cm} Beaumont, \textit{“Preface.”}
\end{quote}
joining together like good citizens to sustain the French patrie.\footnote{President Raymond Poincaré, from \textit{La Journée du 4 août} (Paris, 1914, 6-7), cited in Silver, \textit{Esprit de Corps}, 25.} Beaumont harnesses such a synthesis to the project of postwar reconstruction of the nation and its culture, but the message is the same: the way forward is creative collaboration leading to a melding and dissolution of boundaries among art forms. This \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} was good for art; it was therefore good for France.

It is pertinent here to offer some background to one of the most reiterated and repurposed verbal expressions of the era. Invocations of the new spirit or soul of France—\textit{l’esprit nouveau}—arise out of the turbulent politics of the early Third Republic. The 1890s saw both progressive Republicans and conservative Royalists using it as a catchphrase as they struggled to claim the moral, ideological and pragmatic high ground that would reconstruct a damaged body politic in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune of 1871. In 1875, the historian Edgar Quinet published a book entitled \textit{L’Esprit Nouveau}, a liberal, nationalist text claiming that although defeated, France had won the moral victory in the war, and a calling for a revitalized, optimistic and Republican nation.\footnote{Edgar Quinet, \textit{L’Esprit nouveau} (Paris: Librairie de la société des gens de lettres, 1875).} At the same time, \textit{L’Esprit nouveau} was used briefly as the name of a far-right movement, precursor of the anti-semitic and anti-Dreyfusard Action Française.

Concurrently, violent conflicts between anarchists and government troops were causing serious public disturbance and raising fears of civil war. The historian John Cameron cites Eugène Spuller, Minister of Public Education and Sects in the Socialist government of 1893-94, calling for a rapprochement between radical and conservative factions and a renunciation of
extreme measures on both sides: a “‘new frame of mind’ (esprit nouveau)…to reconcile all French citizens and bring about a revival of common sense, justice and charity.” Cameron argues that the young Wilhelm de Kostrowitzky (Apollinaire’s original name) was likely influenced by Spuller’s well-publicized rhetoric, and much later translated its principle into his own artistic credo: a new way that conciliated traditional and progressive impulses to serve a nationalist ideal. Kenneth Silver claims an opposing political provenance for the phrase, arguing more generally that “l’esprit nouveau” had been “the catchphrase for a morally reconstructed France” since the 1890s, when the expression was a rallying cry for conservative forces seeking to identify themselves with old Imperial and aristocratic elites, to counter a perceived threat from Socialists within the government.

The phrase had filtered into cultural criticism by 1898, in the title of a book by Léon Bazalgette, *L’Esprit nouveau dans la vie artistique, social et religieuse*, which argued for a new way forward beyond reactionary tendencies like Symbolism and mysticism. Apollinaire himself used it before 1917 in a purely aesthetic sense, referring in 1913 in the newspaper *L’Intransigéant* to the Armory Show of French modern art as “the new spirit that is happening in New York.” Margareth Wijk argues that calls for “l’esprit nouveau” as a response to political and moral crises like that of 1893-94 re-emerged forcefully during France’s next such

27 Quoted in translation in Cameron, 6.


29 Léon Bazalgette, *L’Esprit nouveau dans la vie artistique, social et religieuse* (London: Forgotten Books reprint, 2017). Roger Shattuck also cites as precedents Havelock Ellis’s *The New Spirit* (1890) and François Paulhan’s *Le Nouveau mysticisme* (1891). Both books discuss the modern sensibility as an accord between spiritual and technological tendencies, but lack the element of French nationalism vital to the other sources mentioned, and reiterated by Apollinaire. More examples exist; the phrase achieved a wide currency.

moment, the First World War, as a patriotic slogan. Apollinaire’s use of it in his lecture of 1917
was thus not coincidental. This was France’s darkest moment: national morale was devastated, as
was the country itself, the war seemed endless, and there appeared no way forward. Invalided out
of the army, he was going back into battle for France—on the cultural front this time—delivering
a message of inspiration “to defeat an enemy more difficult to identify: demoralization and
pessimism.”³¹

Whether originally used to unite and inspire progressive Republican or conservative
Royalist factions, or to conciliate them, the effect was the same: the “new spirit” meant national
renewal of a kind that situated constructive action in either a reconciliation with, or a return to,
the past to empower the present and transform the future. In the arts, for Apollinaire, this meant a
rapprochement between tradition and innovation, the arts and technology, avoiding extremes
such as Futurism,³² but drawing on the power of the (specifically French) imagination to
generate something new and remarkable, distinguished above all by the quality of surprise:
“Surprise is the greatest new resource. It is by surprise… that the new spirit is distinguished
from all the artistic and literary movements that preceded it.” [Apollinaire’s italics]³³

Apollinaire’s appropriation of “l’esprit nouveau” reinvented a political rallying cry as a program
for the arts to recuperate France.

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³¹ “Pour vaincre un ennemi plus difficile à cerner: la démoralization et le pessimism,” Wijk, 42. Shattuck, more
cynically, calls L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes “an enormous cliché of modernism shot through with conciliatory
statements about traditional values,” p. 296. Whichever way it is now regarded, it struck a chord with Beaumont.

³² Apollinaire was highly critical of the Italian and Russian Futurists, whom he felt went too far, characterizing them
as “sureenches” (overreaching) “filles excessives de l'esprit nouveau, car la France répugne au désordre” (excessive

³³ “La surprise est le plus grand ressort nouveau. C'est par la surprise…que l'esprit nouveau se distingue de tous les
mouvements artistiques et littéraires qui l'ont précédé.” “L’Esprit nouveau,” 5.
By the time that Apollinaire used it to spur on the arts, the phrase had become established in the wider nationalist lexicon. For example, in his wartime polemic *Le Réveil de la France* (the reawakening of France) Charles Saroléa writes of a “new spirit” among the French populace, forged by war, that will overcome the German enemy, and calls for a rebirth of France in its political, moral, social, and artistic spheres.\(^3^4\) Patriotic appeals to French exceptionalism couched in similar language could be found in arts publications as well during the war: the dramatist-poet Pierre Albert-Birot’s avant-garde journal *SIC*, to which Apollinaire contributed, announced its aim in 1916 as “summarizing all that characterizes the French spirit and constitutes the distinctive charm that so powerfully seduces all peoples: taste, elegance, simplicity.”\(^3^5\)

Apollinaire’s use of the term, as reiterated by Beaumont, had deeply nationalist and even reactionary underpinnings, and it found other expressions after the war: *L’Esprit nouveau* was also the title of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier)’s and Amédée Ozenfant’s modernist journal, mouthpiece of new Purist ideas in art and architecture and advocate of a radically modern, if distinctly French aesthetic. Its inaugural edition, in 1920, proclaimed “There is a new spirit abroad: it is a spirit of construction and synthesis… this spirit animates the greater part of human activity today.”\(^3^6\) This was the paradox of this new, postwar conception of the avant-garde: a dedication to art that proclaimed itself to be radical, advanced and subversive of blind adherence to tradition while nonetheless indebted to the past, promoted by a rhetoric linking it to


\(^{35}\) “Résumant bien tout ce qui caractérise l’esprit français et constitue ce charme particulier qui séduit si fortement tous les peuples: le goût, l’élégance, la simplicité); quoted in Wijk, 102-103.

a social and political agenda that was nationalist and generally quite conservative.\textsuperscript{37} The appearance of a non-oppositional avant-garde at this historical moment was a feature of the national mood of retrenchment in postwar France. As Romy Golan argues, a widespread crisis of confidence resulting from the trauma of the war produced a “collective ethos…and a vision infused…by nostalgia and memory” which affected the arts at the same time as artists were attempting to recapture their prewar ground of modernist innovation.\textsuperscript{38} This spirit of (some would say retrogressive) change, often referred to as the “call to order” (rappel à l’ordre), was driven by a newly reactionary cultural politics that desired some form of resuscitation of the past; it stimulated a paradoxical discourse of the avant-garde, one that looked back—to a classical, Latin tradition in which the destructive modern tides of industrialization, the global militarism that it had enabled, social materialism, and mass culture played no part—in order to move forward.

It was this impulse, untheorized but pervasive, that informed most aspects of \textit{Soirée de Paris}.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, I argue that Beaumont’s season stands as an exemplary display of “reactionary modernism;” a slippery definition that applies in a variety of ways to the phenomena I have just described and that makes \textit{Soirée de Paris}, far from being a vanity event of only marginal relevance, one that is central to a major tendency in modernist culture. As Natalie Adamson and

\textsuperscript{37} Many similar instances of this rhetoric can be found in the war and postwar period. See Silver, \textit{Esprit de Corps}, 215-16.

\textsuperscript{38} Golan, ix.

\textsuperscript{39} The expression “rappel à l’ordre” was coined by Cocteau as the title for a collection of essays and aphorisms on the arts, culture and France, including \textit{Le Coq et l’arlequin: notes autour de la musique} (Cock and Harlequin: Notes Concerning Music, 1926; see n. 89, p. 58). Cocteau was primarily writing about modern French music in \textit{Le Coq}, but the expression quickly gained a much wider application and has been applied to a variety of classicizing, simplifying, rationalizing impulses in the visual arts, music, dance, literature, and criticism dating from the decade before the first World War. The stress on the Latin origins of the French tradition, and thus the essentially classical character of French (and other Mediterranean) cultures, was a crucial aspect of the “call to order.” Apollinaire was one of its earliest exponents, in \textit{Les Peintres cubistes} (Paris, 1913).
Toby Norris argue, “‘traditional’ developments across the intellectual spectrum were in fact integral to the very conceptualization of modernity.”40 In addition, Beaumont’s desire to achieve an Apollinian synthesis of the arts in his quest to recuperate the music-hall tradition in a modern framework sets his project apart from other revisionist aesthetic activity of his era, as well as adding to its complexity and interest.

Despite his enthusiasm for vanguard art, Beaumont was no radical; by birth, lifestyle, religion and instinct, he was a member of France’s old hereditary nobility and furthermore, one of its cultural elite. In his Soirée program as much as in his costume balls, he embodied a set of values that tied a taste for avant-garde art to wealth, privilege and exclusivity. He represented the result of what Silver has described as an entente between Paris’s aesthetic “right” and “left” factions: the monied aristo-haute bourgeois crowd who adored the Russian ballet and extravagant parties, and the austerely radical painters and musicians of the pre-war avant-garde. This process of rapprochement was stage-managed by Cocteau, who had introduced both Beaumont and Diaghilev to Picasso, and who saw his own future as a leader of the resulting fusion: “I understood that there existed in Paris an artistic ‘Right’ and an artistic ‘Left’….which it was perfectly possible to bring together,” who could be persuaded to subscribe to “the discovery of a middle-of-the-road solution attuned to the taste for luxury and pleasure, of the revived cult of French ‘clarity’ that was springing up in Paris even before the war,” he wrote.41

As Lynn Garafola argues, modernist ballet in particular promoted an “alliance of radical form with an older social ideology.”42 And ballet was (and is) an expensive art form, both to

41 Cocteau, in Steegmuller, 138; quoted in context (he was referring to Parade) in Silver, Esprit de Corps, 125-26.
42 Garafola identifies this as part of a broader cultural phenomenon: “the containment of modernism’s potentially disruptive force within a milieu of social privilege” via the marketplace for luxury entertainment and collecting. Ballets Russes, 359-60.
produce and to consume, making it seem counter-intuitive as a platform for avant-garde experiment.\footnote{Although, as Juliet Bellow points out, the Ballets Russes confounded conventional distinctions between conservative and avant-garde. Its seasons reached a socially diverse audience, despite their high-finance and elite society backers, through a range of ticket prices, and widespread coverage in the popular (as well as the more cultured) press. The company also contested social, aesthetic and gender norms, through its performances and its dancers’ personae. Modernism on Stage, 3-4.} A venerable art steeped in tradition, ballet nonetheless made dramatic innovations in style, technique, subject matter, visual and musical aesthetics, and in its relationship to contemporary society, pursued in synchrony and frequently in close collaboration with modernist experiments in painting, sculpture, literature, and of course music. It was, however, constrained by high budgets and by the related imperative of maintaining its social status, which translated money into cultural capital, making ballet a commodity art par excellence. Rather than the oppositional politics and self-consciously marginal positioning of the hardcore avant-garde of that era, ballet cultivated progressive chic, daring enough to excite but rarely to shock its audiences. There were exceptions: \textit{Le Sacre du printemps, L’Après-midi d’un faune, Parade, Les Noces, Relâche}—but these tended to be succès de scandale, soon assimilated into the mainstream repertoire, and (except for \textit{Relâche}, which finished the Ballets Suédois), posed no real threat to the companies’ need to generate an income. In dance, the truly radical avant-garde was elsewhere, with the experimental work of Futurism and Dada, and the practitioners of modern \textit{freier Tanz} (free dance) in Europe, Russia and the United States.

However, such experiments were little known in Paris at the time and had scant following there, or at any rate not one with sufficient social and economic cachet to get them noticed by a wide public. The Count was an avid ballet enthusiast and many in his network were involved with the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois as artists or patrons; \textit{Soirée} was above all a ballet program. Garafola’s claim that “the primacy of talent and taste defin[ed] a modern aristocracy”
applies particularly well to Beaumont. As the old nobility’s claims to pre-eminence waned to the merely symbolic, those with the taste and the money to patronize modern art were becoming the new elite, and the avant-garde was now an elite taste. His program preface makes it clear that he was aiming to please principally “connoisseurs,” while hoping to carry “ordinary spectators” along in their wake, by “only offering them the best.”

Ticket prices reflected this ambition, ranging from 10 francs for a single seat in the gallery to 5,000 francs for a six-Saturday subscription in the six-seat avant-scène boxes. However, if his artistic fare proved too rich for the common people, tant pis, he had offered them the best; the Count knew where his real constituency lay.

Beaumont was canny: he aimed to represent both the old and new elites, the Right cohabiting with the Left, and he cultivated both assiduously. In the elaborately theatrical social display of his costume balls and salons, the Count emulated ancien régime courtly entertainments, supported by the cream of Paris’s artistic world. In Soirée de Paris, under the patronage of scores of France’s titled leaders of state and society, he staged a season of ballets and plays that conjured the romance of the nation’s pre-Republican and Imperial past as much as the excitement of its modern present. In imitating the high aristocratic frivolities of the grand siècle in a spirit of modernist innovation, Beaumont and his collaborators set the tone of a certain

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44 Garafola, Ballets Russes, 360.
46 Ticket prices appear to have allowed for a diversity of incomes, ranging between 10 francs (approximately US$1.82) for the galerie and 300 francs (US$54.51) for a six-seat box in the Orchestra avant-scène (overlooking the stage). Subscriptions, which were available for all six Saturdays, were (curiously) more expensive. The cheapest was an Orchestra seat for 300 francs, rising to 5,000 francs (US$1,357) for two six-seat boxes in the avant-scène. Subscriptions do not appear to have been sold for the cheaper balcony and gallery seats. This makes prices slightly less than today’s—although how they would have compared with incomes in 1924 is another question. In 2020, La Cigale, now a venue for rock concerts and other popular music, charges anything from 20 euros (US$22) to 89,50 euros (US$98) for general admission, with special entry rates for imported acts rising to 169 euros (US$186).
style of contemporary avant-garde: aesthetic experimentalism in an elite social and a
conservative political context that tamed its capacity for any meaningful challenge to the status
quo. When he extended his activities into professional theatre with *Soirée de Paris*, Beaumont
added another timely component—that of French postwar renewal—led by the newest advances
in the arts.

A further ideological context exists in the season’s sponsorship by the Association
Franco-Américaine, whose name featured prominently in the program as the organizing body.
With Walter Berry at the head of *Soirée’s* steering committee, the theatrical season took on an
internationalist tone whose vague aura of Americanism was in keeping with 1920s French
cultural fashion and was therefore commercially astute, even if such an impression was not borne
out by the season’s content. Perhaps to counter possible perception of it as a vanity project, as
well as to generate support, *Soirée* was billed as a benefit for war widows and Russian refugees,
thus enabling the organizers to appear humanitarian and socially sensitive: to the still-fresh
memory of the slaughter that had so scarred the French populace, and to the sufferings of the
exiles from revolutionary Russia. Beaumont’s own first-hand experience of the Revolution in
1917 had made him skeptical of the Bolsheviks, and his class sympathies with the exiled
aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie can safely be assumed. The implication of anti-Bolshevism
may have made some artists uncomfortable, but it aligned with the French nationalist and pro-
American rhetoric of the event’s promotion.

All of which should not be taken to imply that *Soirée’s* politics were an entirely
conscious strategy on Beaumont’s part; they were a combination of class instinct, artistic
sensibility, suggestions from his confederates, and expediency. However, all these coalesced into
a powerful expression of the idea of avant-garde art as the province of the social and political
establishment, and as a force in the forging of a new, forward-looking concept of French national identity whose roots were firmly embedded in the hierarchical and imperial past. “The novelty proclaimed in the two words ‘New France’ is not new either…An ancient tradition is renewed,” declared literary critic André Beaunier in 1915; the process of co-option of the avant-garde by the establishment in this period, of which Soirée’s promotion was only one instance, seems to validate his claim.\footnote{47} In symbolic reinforcement of these values, the program’s cover featured a simplified version of the blason (coat-of-arms) of the City of Paris (figs. 2.9–2.10), with the royal fleur-de-lys and a sailing ship tossed on the waves, “a kind of shorthand for a traditional, enduring notion of the state” dating back to Louis XIV, as Silver argues, which had acquired a renewed patriotic significance during World War I. Debora Silverman shows that “the use of this seal after 1889 symbolically attached the Third Republic to a monarchical and imperial tradition.”\footnote{48}

In addition to its Apollinarian and nationalist implications, the title of Soirée de Paris has an important, but overlooked, significance: that of Paris itself, city of spectacle, as the program’s proud display of the city’s blason advertizes. Roger Shattuck draws an extended metaphor in The Banquet Years, his seminal study of the French avant-garde, of Paris in the Belle Époque as a great theater, its citizens performing their public and private spectacles in their boxes at the actual theaters, in the salons, in the cafes, and in the streets for an audience of each other: “Paris was a stage where the excitement of performance gave every deed the double significance of private gesture and public action…the city beheld itself endlessly and was never bored or

\footnote{47} Quoted in Silver, Esprit de Corps, 92. “New” France meant a connection, paradoxically, with a revival of venerable values and hallowed national traditions.

It was this Proustian, exhibitionist aspect of Paris that Beaumont tried to revive after the war, first in his own soirées and balls and then in *Soirée*. In the light of his parties, *Soirée* may be regarded as a grand public fête in the inimitable Beaumont style, synthesizing all his theatrical interests and progressive artistic aspirations, thrown for not only the Count’s friends but for the whole of Paris. He wanted Paris to celebrate itself with a big, multifarious spectacle that reminded Parisians that their city was still the center of the world of art, heir to a glorious theatrical tradition, and that the future was theirs to create.

### 2.3 *Soirée de Paris: Prologue*

There seems little doubt that, emboldened by his success as a social Maecenas, Beaumont decided that a season of public performances involving all his usual collaborators should be his next step. He may well have been inspired by the examples of the Ballets Russes and Suédois, the latter then at the height of its success. From his position on the fringes of both companies’ entourages, Beaumont was ideally placed to observe and emulate their tactics. Another important impetus was Massine, who having recently resigned from the Ballets Russes after a bitter quarrel with Diaghilev, and having failed in his attempt at a solo program in London, arrived in Paris needing patronage. The Count was obsessed with “le divin Massine,” as Satie snidely referred to the dancer, and devised the *Soirée* season as a way of relaunching him while showcasing his genius, giving Massine almost total creative control over the ballets, the Hôtel Masseran’s salon as a rehearsal studio, and a free hand in hiring whomever he wanted. Massine persuaded

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49 Shattuck, 6, 9.

50 “Beaumont…had not hidden from me his worship of the dancer Massine, called ‘the divine Léonide’ by his admirers” (Beaumont…ne m’avait pas caché le culte qu’il portait au danseur Massine, celui que ses admirateurs...
Diaghilev’s former prima ballerina Lydia Lopokova to join the project for a fraction of her usual fee, and Stanislas (Stas) Idzikovsky, another Ballets Russes principal now on the loose, who had often partnered Lopokova, signed on as well.

Contemporary observers inferred that the Count was attempting to challenge Diaghilev on his own turf: Lopokova, for one, reports that at her initial meeting with Beaumont to solicit her participation, “we gossiped over Big Serge [her nickname for Diaghilev] …I see that it is a competition to S. as this programme hopes to come to London this summer.”

51 Diaghilev certainly took the whole idea of Soirée as a personal affront. Massine, out for revenge after his acrimonious break with the impresario, was determined that his project would equal if not surpass anything the Ballets Russes had done or would do, and the infatuated Beaumont was only too happy to indulge him. If such hubris seems ill-considered in retrospect, it is perhaps understandable in the overheated cultural climate of postwar Paris, where everyone vied to be the newest sensation. The Ballets Suédois of Rolf de Maré and Jean Börlin had emerged as a serious rival to the Ballets Russes since 1920, and now with another potential threat to his cultural supremacy, Diaghilev had reason to worry. Many of his wealthy patrons, as well as his former artistic personnel, had (as he saw it) defected to Beaumont, and he was not above resorting to threats and blackmail to prevent others from doing the same. Not only Massine, Cocteau, Picasso, Lopokova and Idzikovsky, but artists Laurencin, Braque and Derain, and composers Satie and Milhaud were committed to the Soirée. Diaghilev bullied Georges Auric and Francis Poulenc into refusing contracts, though Poulenc was frustrated at turning down a commission he


51 Lopokova to Keynes, Feb 9, 1924.
would otherwise have accepted. Milhaud refused to be intimidated, sticking to his “strict Jewish code of honor” and delivering scores for both impresarios: Salade for Beaumont and Le Train Bleu for Diaghilev. Cocteau, an adept at playing both ends against the middle, wrote Diaghilev a craven letter excusing his own participation, protesting that “I am doing nothing that is in any way like your productions, and I am confining myself to theatre theatre.”

Beaumont’s biggest disappointment was failing to secure Stravinsky’s participation; Diaghilev again seems to have been an indirect cause. The composer declined Beaumont’s request to arrange his Octet for Wind Instruments for a ballet, even though the Count offered him the incentive of working with Picasso, for whom he had “boundless admiration.” Stravinsky wrote to Beaumont that the piece was “self-sufficient” and “has not yet lived enough just in its own symphonic quality to offer the listener in plastic [i.e. danced] form.” Beaumont then attempted to negotiate, through Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, to produce Stravinsky’s multi-media work The Soldier’s Tale either for Soirée (which she called “an arty program”) or on a later occasion. A contract was drawn up but Stravinsky refused to sign it, citing an “old grudge”

52 He told them he would not present their ballets in Paris. (Les Biches was Poulenc’s; Les Fâcheux was Auric’s. Both were Nijinska’s choreographies). Buckle, Diaghilev, 425. In a letter to Beaumont (undated, but early 1924), Poulenc expresses frustration and strongly implies that Diaghilev had exerted pressure on him; IMEC: BMT 12.8.

53 Buckle, 426.


55 “Pour [Picasso] j’ai une admiration sans borne…;” “se suffisent d’elle[s]-même[s];” “…ont encore trop peu vécu précisément en cette qualité proprement symphonique pour qu’elle[s] soient déjà offertes à l’auditeur sous une forme plastique.” Stravinsky, letter to Beaumont, February 13, 1924; IMEC: BMT 10.8. On Stravinsky and Massine, see note 57. Stravinsky was highly cautious about repurposing music for dance that he had originally composed for a concert setting, and he insisted on the separation of the different performative elements of his ballets to retain the integrity of the score. See Charles M. Joseph, Stravinsky’s Ballets (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 226.

56 Gabrielle Buffet, then married to Francis Picabia, was a writer, musician and critic active in the Parisian avant-garde. She was close to many contemporary composers, including Stravinsky, for whom she acted as an agent. She was also the Paris agent for the New York Foreign Press Service. Stephen Walsh suggests that the composer asked her in January 1924 to find a production opportunity for The Soldier’s Tale. She approached Beaumont, rather than
(vieille rancune) against Massine and the Ballets Russes, which might have been an excuse; his biographer Stephen Walsh suggests that he may have wanted to avoid conflict with Diaghilev as a result of working with Massine.\(^{57}\) It is also possible that Stravinsky had doubts about Beaumont’s competence, and was not prepared to entrust his work or his international reputation to someone he probably regarded as an amateur with no real theatrical experience.

The roll call of artists of various kinds who turned down an invitation to participate in \textit{Soirée} is almost as distinguished as the list of those who accepted. In addition to those already named, Beaumont approached Henri Matisse (1869-1954) (he misspelled his name “Mathis”), inviting him to design the costumes for a divertissement set to Strauss (evidently \textit{Beau Danube}) that would be “brilliant” and “gay,” in the “beautiful artistic tradition” of the Cirque Médrano. Matisse’s reply from Nice to the Count’s elaborately courteous invitation was a terse telegram: “Impossible to accept ballet thanks Matisse.”\(^{58}\) The specter of Diaghilev lurks behind this refusal too: Matisse had designed the sets, costumes and curtain for \textit{Le Chant du rossignol} (\textit{Song of the Nightingale}) for the Ballets Russes, with choreography by Massine, in 1920, and had found the reverse, and he was certainly keen to go ahead with the proposal. \textit{Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia and France 1882-1934} (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 387. Their correspondence indicates that he regarded the potential inclusion of a work by Stravinsky as a major coup for \textit{Soirée}; IMEC: BMT 10.8.

\(^{57}\) Letter from Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia to Beaumont, March 12, 1924. IMEC: BMT 10.8. It is uncertain what underlay Stravinsky’s mention of a grudge against Massine, as he had worked harmoniously with him on three previous pieces for the Ballets Russes in 1920: the revival of \textit{Rite of Spring}, \textit{Pulcinella}, and \textit{Le Chant du rossignol}, and he mainly respected Massine’s scholarly approach. The \textit{Pulcinella} experience had been fraught with conflict (mainly with Diaghilev), but Stravinsky had not always been happy with Massine’s choreographic interpretation of his music for that ballet. If there was a “grudge,” it may have been that, if not an excuse as Walsh suggests (387). See also Joseph, 98; 213-14; 226. The perennial problems in Stravinsky’s relationship with Diaghilev concerned payment of royalties and commission fees, and what Walsh calls “contractual squabbles” (306), though there seems no reason why these should have prevented his signing a contract with Beaumont.

\(^{58}\) “Nous voudrions en faire une chose brillante; gaie et dans cette belle tradition artistique qui représente Medrano et son entourage;” letter from Beaumont to Matisse, March 7, 1924. “Impossible accepter ballet compliments remerciements Matisse;” telegram from Matisse to Beaumont, March 19, 1924. IMEC: BMT 12.8. The famed Médrano Circus, opposite La Cigale at 63 Bld. Rochechouart, was a pillar of Montmartre’s alternative culture.
experience so traumatic that he was anxious not to repeat it.\textsuperscript{59} The poet Paul Valéry refused the offer to compose a verse prologue for a ballet; instead Paul Morand wrote the poem for \textit{Le Bain de minuit}. André Gide responded to a request to pen a preface to the souvenir program with a rebarbative letter opining that his name could not help a production for which “the interest should be self-explanatory” and for which Beaumont would receive all the credit anyway. Gide was already angry with Beaumont for hijacking his young protégé Marc Allégret (1900-1973) as an assistant and was not inclined to be helpful.\textsuperscript{60} The painter Moïse Kisling, for whose collaboration a contract was prepared, is absent for reasons unknown. Other artists mentioned in Beaumont’s notes as potential designers include Gino Severini, Kees van Dongen and Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita, but whether they were ever approached is not known.\textsuperscript{61} There were discussions too with the Fratellini brothers, the celebrated clowns from the Cirque Médrano who had performed so hilariously in Cocteau’s \textit{Le Boeuf sur le toit} in 1920. Nothing came of this, despite the Fratellinis’ enthusiasm for the idea of contributing some authentic circus content to the proceedings.\textsuperscript{62}

Having failed to derail the Count’s enterprise, Diaghilev cunningly turned it into an opportunity for self-promotion, posing for the press in front of a \textit{Soirée} poster while announcing, “It’s a Ballets Russes season where only my name is missing!”\textsuperscript{63} His response to the


\textsuperscript{60} “L’intérêt s’expliquère de lui-même;” letter from Beaumont to Gide, April 12, 1924, and Gide’s response, same date, IMEC: BMT 12.8. On Marc Allégret, see p. 146, and n. 68.

\textsuperscript{61} IMEC: SAT 16.18, 16.20; BMT 12.6.

\textsuperscript{62} IMEC: BMT 12.8.

\textsuperscript{63} “C’est une soirée des Ballets Russes à laquelle ne manqué que mon nom!” Kochno, 256.
performances was mixed: he scorned the ballet *Beau Danube* as “pure trash,” but grudgingly admired *Salade* (“a definite step forward”), and was sufficiently impressed with (and worried by) *Mercure* to acquire the performance rights from Beaumont for the Ballets Russes in 1926, the only instance of his ever using a work from another repertoire. According to his obviously biased assistant Boris Kochno (1904-1990), Diaghilev was reassured after having attended the premiere of *Soirée* (uninvited), since he “realized the dilettantism of Beaumont’s undertaking.” Although some observers styled the 1924 season “the battle of the impresarios,” the Ballets Russes at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées concurrently mounted its strongest repertoire since the War. Under the auspices of the French Olympic Committee’s *Grande Saison d’art de la VIIIe olympiade*, which was to be held in Paris that summer, the company presented revivals of *Parade* and *Rite of Spring* (with Massine’s 1920 choreography replacing Nijinsky’s original), and three new pieces from Nijinska, who had succeeded Massine as choreographer, including the popular favorite *Le Train bleu*, with Cocteau’s libretto, Coco Chanel’s costumes, and the curtain after Picasso’s painting *The Race*. Diaghilev need not have feared competition on artistic grounds.

Nor could Beaumont approach the professionalism of Diaghilev’s operation, although he did assemble an impressive list of elite patrons that the Russian would have envied. The program

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64 “Trash,” García-Márquez, 183. Serge Lifar reported that Diaghilev was “pale, agitated, nervous” after seeing the ballet. Buckle, 434. The Ballets Russes presented *Mercure* in London in 1927, but it was poorly received; the *Times* called it “outmoded,” and “a dull affair,” and found Picasso’s designs “ridiculous.” *The Times* (July 12, 1927), in Nesta Macdonald, *Diaghilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States 1911-1929* (New York; London: Dance Horizons; Dance Books Ltd., 1975), 351.

65 Kochno, 257.

66 See the season program: “Grande saison d’art de la VIIIe olympiade / Ballets Russes / de / Serge de Diaghilew / Théâtre des Champs-Élysées / mai-juin 1924.” The Grande Saison ran from May 26 to June 30, exactly concurrently with *Soirée de Paris*. Beaumont had evidently approached Jacques Hébertot, the Grande Saison’s director, about the possibility of involving his project in the Olympic arts season. Hébertot offered to show something of Massine’s but declined to take on the whole production: letter to Beaumont, March 6, 1924; IMEC: 12.8.
names the President of the Republic and the President of the Council and their wives, Marshall and Madame Foch, twelve ambassadors and senior diplomats, the Minister of Fine Arts, the Prefect of Police, assorted military, civil and arts officials, and eighty “Dames Patronesses”—titled and socially prominent ladies, including a Princess of the Bourbon family—as committee members. All these luminaries lent the enterprise prestige and credibility, which helped raise needed financial support. Their presence also inscribes Soirée as an expression of official French culture, sanctioned by and supporting the state and the status quo, and linking the country’s social aristocracy and political elites to the cause of avant-garde art, thus consecrating new art’s mission to assist in the renewal of France—aspirationally, at least. But it was a new France paradoxically still led by the old regime, Beaumont’s class comrades; whether they would all support his passion for advanced art and performance was doubtful. The apparent disconnect between Soirée’s audience and patronage and the avant-garde image the Count sought to project potentially undermined the project’s modernist credibility—a fault line exposed by the Surrealists’ protest.

Despite its impressive packaging, Beaumont’s organization was a shambles. Bernard Faÿ summed it up: “What troubles, what mistakes, what wrangling!” Beaumont had no proper experience in commercial theatre, his only ventures having been to sponsor Cocteau’s cabaret Le Boeuf sur le toit at the Comédie des Champs Élysées in 1920 and to stage a “festival” of Satie’s works the same year at his home; he therefore relied heavily on the assistance of a team of dedicated friends and professionals, whom he was remarkably inept at managing. As an administrative assistant the Count hired Marc Allégret, André Gide’s lover, an efficient youth who demonstrated a talent for publicity and would later become a prominent filmmaker (fig.

67 “Que d’ennuis, que d’erreurs, que de criailleries!” Faÿ, 73.
Unforeseen complications included costly modifications to the theatre itself to accommodate some technical requirements, and a time-consuming tussle with the British Consulate over the visiting dancers’ passports. Further, artists and performers were not paid according to their contracts, set construction and costume manufacture was delayed, subscriptions were unsold, and the whole complicated production machine lacked an authoritative hand.

The Count was soon overwhelmed; Jean Hugo reports that during rehearsals he would stand in the wings, moaning “I’m going to die very soon” (fig. 2.11). The stagehands punningly dubbed him “le Comte courant” (the current [bank] account, with a secondary meaning of the running Count). The nickname refers to the fact that he was hemorrhaging money—he was continually signing checks—but also implies frantic activity. Lydia Lopokova complained constantly about poor organization and the Count’s ineffectual attempts at playing the impresario: “there is not one controlling [sic] voice in the situation, except the Count’s polite but

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68 In an act of symmetry, Allégret’s last feature film in 1970 was an adaptation of Radiguet’s novel Le Bal du Comte d’Orgel, whose eponymous character was a barely fictionalized portrait of Beaumont. Gide was furious that Allégret was working for Beaumont, fearing his protégé’s career would be ruined by association with what he felt was a vain effort—and that Cocteau would corrupt the young man. See Faÿ, 69-70.

69 The Consulate refused to allow the dancers to travel to France without contracts stipulating they would receive a minimum of four pounds a week’s salary. Beaumont, trying to hire them cheaply, had supplied only letters the authorities deemed “insufficient;” however, faced with the loss of almost his entire ensemble he somehow managed to persuade the Actors’ Association to accept three pound salaries. The Consulate also insisted that female dancers must not be fined for infringements such as missed rehearsals. The Count got his dancers eventually, after much bureaucratic wrangling, but rehearsals began late and with a disgruntled troupe. See IMEC: BMT 10.2, 11.4, 11.5.

70 “Je vais bientôt mourir.” Hugo, 231.

71 Hugo, 232. The accounts for Soirée, held at IMEC (BMT 10.2-10.8, and randomly elsewhere) are spread over several thick files containing thousands of invoices, receipts, canceled checks, letters of demand for late payments, and sheets of budgetary calculations, in haphazard order, with no overall accounting. No estimate of the season’s total cost to Beaumont exists (it would be a huge task, which he does not seem to have undertaken), but it must have run into many thousands of francs. Despite funds raised through the Association Franco-Américaine, Beaumont’s personal expenditure certainly exceeded the total income by a considerable sum.
weak falsetto.” During one of their arguments she told him “that director should be a director and not overlook mishaps,” and concluded resignedly, before the first week was over, “Our season is not well organized, our costumes…ordered in cheap places…and I cannot see any competition with big Serge yet our season could be a good success, that is annoying.”

To add to the Count’s troubles, tensions escalated among the performers, and with good reason. Lopokova bemoaned ugly costumes, delayed payments, a punishing rehearsal schedule (“I lead such an ‘iron life’ at present and see nothing but the demolished ball rooms of Beaumont, where we rehearse… I go back again to slave in pink legs”), and her demeaning billing at the charity ball Beaumont decided to throw mid-season to recoup funds. Her old rivalry with Massine resurfaced: “He does everything to shadow me and not make me his equal…we can’t change nature of Massine, it is always twisted in the wrong direction.” She told him “that except himself he considered the other dancers as mud.” The other dancers also complained of Massine’s high-handedness and despotism; the narcissistic Idzikowsky threw tantrums. Massine merely responded, “I did not ask of the dancers what I did not ask of myself.”

Pressure on Massine was intense: he faced the challenge of setting ten or so new dance pieces of varying length and complexity on a motley company of mixed-ability dancers, most of whom had never worked together, in under four weeks, without the professional support to which he was accustomed. As well, the resuscitation of his career depended on his making a success of it.

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72 Lopokova to Keynes, this paragraph and next: “Falsetto,” May 13, 1924; “director,” May 31, 1924; “our season,” May 20, 1924; “‘iron life,’” May 3, 1924. In fact, she loved many of her costumes, especially Braque’s for Salade. On the charity ball of May 31, see Chapter 1, pp. 65, 73, n. 127; “Massine,” May 18, 1924; “mud,” June 13, 1924.

73 Quoted in Garcia-Marquez, 179.

74 Massine began composing the choreography in February, but full company rehearsals could not begin until Lopokova arrived in Paris on April 25. Idzikowsky was already there. Rehearsals with the orchestra at La Cigale began on May 9; Soirée opened on May 17.
The dancers were not alone in feeling ill-treated. Cocteau was infuriated by the Count’s lack of interest in *Roméo et Juliette*; in fact his and Tzara’s plays were included to make the pro-Massine purpose of *Soirée* slightly less obvious, which piqued Cocteau’s vanity. Satie allegedly joined the chorus of discontent with his claim that Beaumont had withheld the scenario for *Mercure* from him for weeks, responding to his requests for it with “Ah, my friend, that’s very difficult—because it’s a surprise!” This must have been one of Satie’s jokes (the Apollinarian echo may have been deliberate) or exaggerations, although it does sound typical of the Count. The composer in fact completed the score (commissioned on February 20) under some duress and delivered it, in parts, between March 7 and May 10; Massine needed it urgently for the choreography. The opening of *Mercure* had to be delayed by a week, from June 7 to June 14, as it was not ready, and once *Soirée* itself was underway, Beaumont had to contend with a one-night strike by the orchestra, who complained they were being underpaid.

Beaumont’s plan to mount a program that would unite all forms of visual and performing art, music, and music-hall in a spirit of avant-garde experimentation in a venue that many thought eccentric, generating an event that would be a social imperative for an elite audience, was doomed by its own ambition. If he was trying to recoup prewar Montmartre’s avant-garde credentials for his own project Beaumont was too late, and his social position worked against his reviving a cultural force that depended on its actors’ outsider status for its impact. The times were moving in ways he could not anticipate, but which would make themselves apparent before the season was over. He spent his personal fortune freely, and he and Walter Berry exploited their contacts ruthlessly attempting to raise money and sell subscriptions, but costs mounted and

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75 “Ça, mon ami, c’est bien difficile—car c’est une surprise!” The story, whose source is unknown, is cited by Ornella Volta, in *L’Ymagier d’Erik Satie* (Paris: Éditions Francis Van de Velde, 1979), 81, and *Satie...Letters*, 169. It does not appear anywhere in Satie’s own prolific *Correspondance*. Satie scholar James Harding, following Volta, cites it seriously: *Erik Satie* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), 211, but I here register my skepticism.
the finances of the enterprise became increasingly precarious. As the season went on, the houses dwindled. One night, the Dowager Countess Henriette de Beaumont, Étienne’s mother, bought up all the seats, but forgot to send the tickets to her friends; she and two other old ladies were the only audience. On June 10, Lopokova wrote “Last night we had to dance… once more to an empty theatre”—empty but for the Queen of Romania and her entourage, who arrived late.76

Gossip said that Beaumont cared more for the quality than the quantity of his audience, but the specter of financial failure haunted him. It soon became obvious that the season was largely a critical failure as well—or at least a misfire. Notwithstanding Beaumont’s intention to present a grand interdisciplinary synthesis that would capture the essence of the “new” in the arts, not all the individual components of his program can be said to have been truly innovative; the exception was *Mercure*. Although Massine boasted that in that work he would “revolutionize accepted choreographic traditions,”—and he partly succeeded—the rest of his ballets repeated established Ballets Russes and older formulas.77 Their choreography was usually vivacious and striking and they were for the most part superbly danced, but their originality, where it existed, lay chiefly in the contributions of their artist-designers and composers. The originality, and the potential for disruption, of *Soirée de Paris* as a whole resided in the remarkable constellation of unique, diverse, but complementary talents that Beaumont managed to assemble, despite all obstacles.

Looking back from the end of the decade, Maurice Sachs recalled fondly “never in the years before or since has there been anything in Paris to equal it [Soirée]. The experience was unique…the Comte de Beaumont was without doubt the only person in Paris who could have

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76 Lopokova to Keynes, June 6, 1924.
77 “Révolutionner les traditions admises en chorégraphie;” quoted in Bertrand, 65.
organized such a spectacle.” He was probably the only person sufficiently egotistical and naive to have wanted to do so—but not everyone shared Sachs’s admiration. Depending on where one’s sympathies lay, Soirée de Paris was received as either a brilliant display of advanced artistic ingenuity, or as a self-indulgent, retrograde waste of time, money and talent. The manner in which it polarized the artistic community was an index of divisions in the avant-garde. To sum up, Beaumont’s circle—aristocratic and socially active patrons of modern art, together with the gentrified artists and artistic professionals who socialized with them and benefited from their patronage, were mainly supportive—even those not directly involved. His rival, Diaghilev, was professionally jealous and publicly dismissed the enterprise, but he and his cohort privately admired some of the ballets. Critics from the mainstream press who scorned what they saw as elitist pretentiousness savaged the program, while journalists at chic publications like Vogue acted as the Count’s cheer squad, and the arts press provided a more balanced, and often quite perceptive, viewpoint. The younger, aggressively radical avant-garde, who came from less privileged backgrounds and who despised the recently acquired society connections of those artists who had led the charge before the war, were Soirée’s fiercest detractors.

It is difficult to do justice to the diversity of Soirée’s reception, but two quotations, one from either extreme, give a sense of its range: “A frightful mixture of snobbery and imaginative laziness condemns these spectacles of sterility. A vulgar spirit of publicity is mixed up with it…it’s long, it’s boring, it’s so stupid I could cry,” complains an anonymous reviewer; whereas Paul Collaer, a musician and one of the smart set, rhapsodizes: “What talent, what beauty, and what charming insouciance! ...The most aristocratic thought was joined to a powerful popular instinct, and out of this meeting a series of essentially French spectacles was born.” This last

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comment captures Beaumont’s aim precisely; too precisely, in fact. The program’s reception reveals that he was playing to a chorus of his own aristo-artistic cohort, and this was at the root of the season’s chief problem. Soirée exposed the limitations of Beaumont’s capabilities as a gentleman Maecenas: he could not hope to exert much influence outside his own circumscribed world, as his subsequent career demonstrated, and neither the newer avant-garde nor the wider public were prepared to tolerate his solipsistic brand of aristocratic patronage. The faux-populism of his aims and the elitism of his means were a combination that proved fatal to his planned conquest of the avant-garde.

But what were these “spectacles of sterility,” or, alternatively, of talent, beauty, and charm, that moved their audiences to such flights of hyperbole? An analysis of Soirée’s program follows, with the intention of providing some perspective on the violently divided sentiments that this brief season generated.

2.4 The Program: The Ballets and Other Dances

An exact reconstruction of the order and arrangement of the program is not within the scope of this chapter, and may only be partly possible. Daily newspaper notices give some

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79 “Un affreux mélange de snobisme et de paresse d'imagination frappe ces spectacles de stérilité. Un bas esprit de publicité s'y mêle... c'est long, c'est ennuyeux, c'est bête à pleurer,” anonymous author, *Le théâtre indiscret de l'an 1924* (Paris: G. Crès, 1925), 107. “Que de talent, que de beauté, et quelle charmante désinvolture!..La pensée la plus aristocratique s'alliait à un puissant instinct populaire, et de ce croisement est issu une série de spectacles essentiellement français,” Paul Collaer, *Darius Milhaud* (Anvers: N.V. de Nederlandische Boekhandel, 1947), 111. IMEC holds files of press clippings for Soirée (BMT 4.2), but the largest number are assembled in the Collection Rondel, RO12580-81, in the Département des arts du spectacle, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Richelieu library.

80 Sally Banes has attempted a classification of the program based on the listings in *Le Figaro*. See “Soirée de Paris,” in Banes, *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press; University Press of New England, 1994): 82-91. For my listing of the entire season’s repertory, including principal artistic personnel, see Appendix D.
sense of the schedule, but these are unreliable as it often changed at the last minute. The publicity stated that on each of the six Saturdays, an entirely new program opened, although this is hard to reconcile with the fact that eleven items in total were produced; what is certain that all the pieces were given in repertory, and not concurrently. A typical evening appears to have featured three ballets, one drama and an interlude. Cocteau’s play replaced Tzara’s halfway through the run, and Mercure opened with a gala subscription performance on June 14, together with Les Roses, Vogue and Premier Amour; their répétition générale was on June 15.

The order in which I discuss the following pieces owes nothing to their performance order: ballets are first, followed by danced interludes, plays, and the art exhibition (see Appendix D). I leave Mercure until last, as it was the most significant work of the season, artistically and historically, as well as the one that provoked the most extreme reactions. More importantly, its larger implications for my purpose here—as the catalyst for an open declaration of rupture between old and new notions of avant-garde art, and for the launching of a reinvigorated avant-garde—warrant a more extensive examination. The public reception of Soirée’s program enables an assessment of its real-world effect in Paris’s cultural environment, fraught with rival claims to artistic supremacy.

The season led with Salade, or Insalata, with a score by Milhaud and décors by Braque (fig. 2.38), a Commedia dell’Arte themed work of love and mistaken identity reminiscent of Massine’s and Stravinsky’s Pulcinella (1920). Its motifs of disguise and romantic imbroglio echoed Massine’s Les Femmes de bonne humeur (The Good-Humored Ladies, 1917), and Le Astuzie femminili (Feminine Wiles, 1920). Massine again danced the part of the clown-hero, to

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81 The program calls the ballet Salade; Massine and Milhaud both use the Italian translation in their respective memoirs. The title is from a sixteenth-century collection of Spanish popular tunes or ensaladas. At least one critic noted the family resemblance: W. Haddon Squire commented on the Paris Opéra revival in 1936: “‘Salade’ is
which he brought “a tragic dimension,” according to Madeleine Milhaud, the composer’s wife.\footnote{Garcia-Marquez, 95.} Uninhibited by Diaghilev, Massine was now able to produce a work that he regarded as genuinely experimental. On the familiar formula he and his collaborators built a new and inventive piece of theatre. Beaumont later wrote: “For the first time, choreographic art is here applied to the internal expression of feelings…as Massine had arranged the play of the limbs, and Braque the play of the lines, so Darius Milhaud arranged the play of sounds…one of the most typical examples of the modern French school of orchestration…” \footnote{Comte Etienne de Beaumont, “The Soirées de Paris,” \textit{The Little Review}” (Winter 1926), 55-57, here, 56.}

Billed as a “choreographic counterpoint in two acts,” this “ballet chanté” featured a chorus led by the mezzo-soprano Jane Bathori which was sung and spoken from the pit while the dancers performed onstage to Milhaud’s orchestration of antique Italian motifs, which he had transformed into “harsh, aggressive, broken rhythms.”\footnote{Massine, 159. The treatment of this material is typical of Milhaud’s fondness for adapting folk sources.} The idea of counterpoint was carried through to the visual effects: Massine had the dancers carry lanterns that they placed along the front of the stage, casting flickering shadows over their tableaux to “emulate the sculptural effect of the works of Donatello and other Renaissance masters,” as well, he said, as the layered planes of color in Cubist painting.\footnote{Massine, 159.} Braque’s set which suggested “the raw, hard-working side of Neapolitan life” divided the stage with a line of arches, enabling separate but simultaneous actions; his décor and costumes, according to Jean Hugo, captured all the tones of dry leaves, appropriately named but a more accurate title would have been ‘Resurrection Pie à la Diaghileff’.” \footnote{“A French Salad,” \textit{Christian Science Monitor} (February 11, 1936), 14.}
from black to pale yellow. Lopokova (who was not in the cast) mainly admired the work (“one of the best of Massine’s”) especially Braque’s costumes, although she did opine that “there is too much ‘futuristic’ movements” in the choreography.

Critics’ comments echo Lopokova’s suggestion that Massine’s quest for choreographic innovation in *Salade* may have involved some reference to Futurist machine and marionette dances (which he would have known from the Ballets Russes’ sojourn in Rome in 1915-17, and his collaboration there with Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla. I discuss these in chapter 3). Gilson MacCormack admired the piece’s “uncompromising” modernity, and called Massine’s choreography “virile…stark and angular,” whereas G. Allix, in *Le Monde musical*, deplored “this hectic choreography [that] tires the eyes and the spirit” and turned the dancers into “puppets dangling from imaginary strings” although he called Braque’s designs “a joy for the eye.” The Russian critic André Levinson, never an enthusiast for modernism in ballet, found the theme incomprehensible, the score strident, and the choreography chaotic and dissonant. Braque’s décor, Levinson claimed, revealed his theatrical inexperience; Massine’s choreography was “grimacing and violent” his dancing “strained and twitchy,” and the whole, despite some charming interludes, he dismissed as “a rough, irritating show.” Music critic Boris de Schloezer, on the other hand, echoed *Soirée’s* nationalist tone in praising Milhaud’s “rhythmical

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86 “Pour aller au noir au jaune pâle, le décor et les costumes de Braque passaient par tous les tons exquis des feuilles sèches.” Hugo, 232.

87 Lopokova to Keynes, May 17 and 2, 1924. Lopokova was not a fan of abstract or mechanical movement styles.


frenzy allied with an almost mechanical vigor...here is truly one of the most lively images of the
‘young, musical France’.”  


91 Milhaud, 125.


93 Constantin Guys was the subject of Charles Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863). He specialized in scenes of Second Empire Parisian life and leisure.

94 “Les dandys et les jeunes cocodettes élégantes;” “un athlète, une danseuse et un acteur comique.” Soirée de Paris, souvenir program.

95 Lopokova to Keynes, May 17, 6 and 2, 1924.
of the mid-Victorian epoch of the feeblest and most sentimental kind…the corps de ballet was, without exception, the worst I have ever seen.\textsuperscript{96}

He agreed with Levinson that the choreography was a waste of the dancers’ abilities.\textsuperscript{97} La \textit{Nouvelle Rêvue française} critic R. Richard thought the piece looked like something from Diaghilev, who, he said, would have done it better; Massine had in fact devised the work earlier, after his split with Diaghilev, as a reaction against “the intense seriousness of \textit{Parade} and \textit{Le Sacre du printemps}.”\textsuperscript{98} Musically, \textit{Danube} ignored the current fad for more jazzy ballet scores; it represented Massine’s strong attraction to bright romantic comedies that vied with his interest in modernist experimentation. In tone it echoed the Ballets Russes’s postwar move to predominantly lighter, farcical themes, and away from edgier avant-garde fare like \textit{Parade}.

\textit{Gigue (Jig)}, called “an elegant trifle” by Massine, was another more traditional work; a suite of Baroque-inspired “dances on classical themes,” to airs by Bach, Handel and Scarlatti. Such plotless, pure dance pieces were a staple of the classical repertoire.\textsuperscript{99} Charming and intentionally insubstantial, they were meant to delight audiences as vehicles for virtuoso displays by star principals. Michel Fokine’s \textit{Les Sylphides} (1909), to Chopin, was an early Ballets Russes version of the form, an homage to Romantic ballet updated with Fokine’s more supple and expressive modern choreography. The dancers in \textit{Gigue} were accompanied by solo pianist Marcelle Meyer (1897-1958) (“the most advanced of our moderns”), one of the musical circle of Cocteau and les Six, which Lopokova found “rather nice” instead of the full orchestra.\textsuperscript{100} Despite

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{MacCormack, 896-7.}
\footnote{Levinson, 411.}
\footnote{Done it better; R. Richard, “Rêvue mensuelle de littérature et de critique,” \textit{La Nouvelle Rêvue française} (June 1, 1924), 120; coll. Rondel, BnF; 8-RO-12581; “intense seriousness,” Garcia-Marquez, 182.}
\footnote{“Danses sur les thèmes classiques;” Massine, 159; \textit{Soirée de Paris}, souvenir program.}
\footnote{“Moderns,” Beaumont, “The Soirées, ” 56; “rather nice,” Lopokova to Keynes, May 21, 1924.}
\end{footnotes}
the ballet’s somewhat generic character it was not entirely retrogressive, as Derain’s designs
gave its Grand siècle setting a self-consciously modern twist. Urged on by Beaumont, who had
proposed an amusing contrast between old and new with the contrasting music and visuals,
Derain created an “ironic glimpse of royal ‘Baroque splendor’;” a stylized rendition of Versailles
offset by sumptuous costumes in vivid violet and salmon tones that conveyed “the sharp falsity
of artificial flowers.”101 The artist had at first been reluctant to work with Beaumont, but the
Count, ravished by Derain’s work on La Boutique fantasque for Diaghilev, was insistent. The
result was another instance of the “period modernist” aesthetic already seen in Massine’s Les
Femmes de bonne humeur (1916), and Nijinska’s Les Fâcheux (1923) for the Ballets Russes;
ballets with modern choreography in stylized seventeenth-century French settings were popular
in Diaghilev’s postwar repertoire.102 The Ballets Suédois, too, followed this period trend with
Jean Börlin’s Le Tombeau de Couperin (1920). Such ballets, with their evocation of an ordered,
aristocratic milieu, served a conservative agenda in which frivolity was linked to elite taste
within a hierarchical conception of society. The popularity of that era of French history in the
1920s may be explained as well by the fact that it was understood as the high point of French
classicism in the arts, and therefore of French art itself. The Grand siècle was thus a touchstone
for the contemporary resurgence of interest in the classical, in all its forms, as an aesthetic
principle and as a stylistic reference across the artistic spectrum. The idealized Baroque past of
ballets such as Gigue came to be regarded as an epitome of Frenchness, which added a
nationalist gloss to their appeal. Given the Count’s ancien régime affinities, a Baroque-themed
ballet was an inevitable if not mandatory inclusion.

102 “Period modernism”: see Garafola, Ballets Russes, 90-95.
Two more minor ballets, *Les Roses* and *Premier amour* (*First Love*), and a set of divertissements continued the theme of mannered frivolity. *Premier amour*, to Satie’s *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (*Three Pear-Shaped Pieces*) played at each performance by the composer and Marcelle Meyer, echoed the toy-fantasy themes of Fokine’s *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911), as well as his *Petrouchka* (1911) and Massine’s *La Boutique fantasque* (*The Magic Toyshop*, 1919): a girl dreams of falling in love with her puppet who comes to life to woo her, with her dolls as jealous rivals; she wakes and the dream vanishes. Lopokova, cast as a doll, “did little more than pose.” She thought it “not of much importance,” and her friend Harold Bowen dismissed it as “inconceivably feeble.”

*Roses* or *Le Ballet d’Eros*, another plotless one-act piece, was composer Henri Sauguet’s first ballet. Its most notable aspect was its design by Marie Laurencin, credited only as “N” in the program to avoid offending Diaghilev; she had also designed Nijinska’s stylish, sexually ambiguous *Les Biches* for his concurrent season. Her hand is unmistakable, however: the watercolor backdrop (which doubled as the season’s poster, fig. 2.1) featured a signature Laurencin *Amazone*—an elegantly garbed equestrienne—against a ribbon-like arabesque, and the costumes in her characteristic pastel palette asserted a wistful femininity or as Cocteau put it, a “naïve luxury.”

The *Suite de danses*, to music by Emmanuel Chabrier, included a waltz with variations, a rigaudon and a mazurka—more character dances, performed by principals Lopokova and Idzikowsky; Beaumont himself designed the costumes, of which there is no record. The modernity of these pieces lay in Loïe Fuller’s lighting, a galaxy of flickering colors projected onto a cyclorama backdrop. Beaumont may have gallantly dubbed her

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104 Cocteau, *Call to Order*, 64.
“that goddess of light,” but Fuller’s technical artistry merely irritated the dancers: Lopokova
complains of having to wait around all day while the “big fat toad” played with her effects and
hid their movements.105 Keynes confessed to her, “Loïe Fuller’s lights terrify me.”106 Fuller’s
lighting also alarmed Picasso and the other visual artists, who feared that “she risked perverting
everything” and overwhelming their work.107 Beaumont responded to their protests by confining
her “abstractions” (apart from the Suite de danses and Tzara’s play), to the entr’actes, when they
were “animated” by Marcelle Meyer playing Scarlatti.108

Vogue, subtitled “Trois pages dansées,” struck a more modern and commercial note, as it
was sponsored by Vogue magazine, for which Valentine Hugo, who designed the piece, worked
as an illustrator. Vogue contracted exclusive sponsorship rights to Soirée: in exchange for
supplying the haute couture costumes, the editor, Philippe Ortiz, demanded “the maximum
amount of publicity possible” in the program and everywhere else.109 “Danced advertising,”
sneered Levinson, accurately; the backdrop was a painted advertisement for Vogue, and the
dancers wore fashions by Lanvin, Marcel Lus, and Hermès, who advertised in the program.110

105 “Goddess;” Rhonda Garelick claims that Beaumont said this in Crevel’s article in Les Nouvelles littéraires, in her
Loïe Fuller’s Performance of Modernism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 215. The phrase does not, in
fact, appear there, and its actual source, if genuine, is unknown.

106 “Toad,” Lopokova to Keynes, May 12 and 13, 1924; “terrify me,” Keynes to Lopokova, May 14, 1924. See also
Lynn Garafola, “Lydia Lopokova and Les Soirées de Paris,” Legacies of Twentieth-Century Dance (Middletown,


108 Letters between Beaumont and Berry, April 16, 1924. IMEC: BMT 11.5.

109 “Le maximum de publicité qu’il soit possible de lui faire;” correspondence between Beaumont, Ortiz and other
Vogue staff is at IMEC: BMT 11.2.

110 “Publicité dansé;” quoted in Bertrand, 70.
As the Count’s first choreographic outing, *Vogue* was undistinguished, but the scenarios of the three individual “pages dansées,” devised with Valentine Hugo, reveal his preoccupations and his (admittedly rather stereotyped) modernist instincts. All were superficially chic or vapid “lifestyle modern” mises-en-scène, like animated *Vogue* covers: *Les Filles mal gardées* (*The Badly Guarded Girls*) apparently bore no relation other than in name to the venerable ballet *bouffe* of 1789, but concerned two girls squabbling over a four-leaf clover. *Le Favori* (*The Favorite*), broadly reminiscent of Nijinsky’s *Jeux*, dealt with two girls and a jockey flirting at a racecourse. The third, *Le Bain de minuit* (*The Midnight Swim*), had more depth by virtue of its literary rationale. A danced enactment of an unpublished poem by Paul Morand, recited onstage by the actor Marcel Herrand, it depicted a sexually ambiguous love triangle between a woman and two men who meet in a midnight swim. The temperamental English dancer Rupert Doone (1903-1966), who was Cocteau’s current lover, was cast as the younger man. Lopokova was scornful about the piece and refused to dance it, claiming the role was “not in my nature.” She let others believe her objection was based on discomfort with the sexual situation, but in fact she felt the piece was “foolish in itself” and, as a mere curtain-raiser, too trivial for her status as a prima ballerina.111

Slight and poorly conceived though *Vogue* may have been, it exemplifies well the developing relationship between fashion, art and theatre in the postwar era—as well as speaking to the commercial side of Beaumont’s aspirations. Dance in particular put fashion on stage, providing a showcase for couturiers’ creations in ballets themed around modern lifestyle tropes that were the subjects of articles in fashion magazines like *Vogue* and *Femina*; Nijinska’s *Le Train bleu* with costumes by Coco Chanel, and her *Les Biches* with Laurencin’s stylish outfits.

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(both Ballets Russes) were prime examples. The Ballets Suédois’ *Le Tournoi singulier*, designed by Foujita, was another. As Nancy Troy points out, clothes became the actual, if not the ostensible, subject of many dance pieces for the first time. In turn, fashion magazines promoted the shows in the guise of “reviews” that were little more than effusive puffs, the houses advertised in the programs, and the companies’ and stars’ names lent artistic credibility to the fashion industry, to their mutual commercial benefit. Paris fashion also participated in the first of the plays commissioned to diversify the emphasis on ballet that *Soirée’s* program betrayed, Tristan Tzara’s *Mouchoir de nuages* (*Handkerchief of Clouds*). According to the program, the leading actresses, Andrée Pascal and Marcelle Romée, were “dressed by Lanvin” and “shod by Perugia.”

Two shorter danced interludes between the ballets and the dramas received lower billing. Ida Rubinstein’s *Danses espagnoles* was designed and perhaps partly conceived by José-Maria Sert; the Spanish artist had a good reputation for scenic design and was a longtime collaborator of Rubinstein’s. The Russian Rubinstein, whose exotic appearance as Cleopatra had ravished audiences in Diaghilev’s first Paris season in 1909, had since pursued a solo career. Although not a trained dancer, she projected a stage presence of immense fascination in a series of danced dramas with which she toured Europe. The interconnections of artistic networks were close and complicated: Sert was married to the formidable Misia, who commanded respect verging on fear in the French theatre world. She was Diaghilev’s closest confidante, and, as one story relates, she managed to silence all applause by the sheer force of her presence on the one night she attended

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112 Troy, 94.

113 See, for example, Jean Laporte, “Les Soirées de Paris à la Cigale” (review), *Vogue Paris* (1 July 1924), 25, 54. The article is adorned with line drawings of Parisian society ladies, including Countess Edith de Beaumont, dressed in lovingly described haute couture fashions.
Soirée. What she thought of her husband working with the opposition is not recorded, nor is any other detail of Danses (or Pavanes, as they were also called) espagnoles.

The other interlude was billed as Danses actuelles (modern-day dances), by the French jazz and cabaret dancer Harry Wills, whose stage identity as an American catered to the fashion for “américanisme” in 1920s Paris. Levinson enthused about this “French hoofer disguised as an American,” praising his flexible body and fluid movements. If his inclusion strikes a slightly discordant note, it seems to imply a gesture toward Franco-American cultural relations that might have pleased Walter Berry. Beaumont claimed to represent the younger face of French culture in Soirée, and the contemporary flavor Harry Wills supplied will have been an attempt to mitigate the perceived elitism of the rest of the program by appealing to not only “les connaisseurs” but also “les spectateurs ordinaires.” It helped diversify the highbrow content with a dash of popular entertainment, in line with Beaumont’s stated aim to revive music-hall traditions. However, the popular element in Soirée appears to have been rather token.

2.5 The Program: The Plays

Even though his role as Soirée’s producer did not include performing, Beaumont could not resist taking the spotlight when the opportunity arose. He would appear on stage to announce

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114 The oft-repeated story may be sourced to Jean Hugo: “The next day, when Massine first appeared, Beaumont cried “Bravo!” while clapping loudly. There was barely an echo. Misia had entered. She incarnated the Ballets Russes, which Massine had betrayed. She did not go unnoticed and when the curtain fell, many hesitated to applaud.” “Le lendemain, à la première apparition de Massine, Beaumont cria: “Bravo!” et battit bruyamment des mains. Il n’y eut guère d’écho. Misia entra. Elle incarnait les Ballets Russes, que Massine avait trahis. Elle ne passait pas inaperçue et quand le rideau tomba, beaucoup hésitèrent à applaudir.” Le Regard, 232.

115 “Stepper français camouflé en Américain;” Levinson, 412.

116 Beaumont, “Préface.”
program changes, always concluding with “Voilà, ta-ta-ta!” and his “inimitable giggle” to the
“stunned” audience, who must have thought he was part of the show—as did he. But he was
just the curtain-raiser; the programmed plays were Tristan Tzara’s Mouchoir de nuages, and
Cocteau’s prose-and-dance/mime adaptation of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet.

Mouchoir de nuages, which Tzara described as “an ironic tragedy or tragic farce,”
particularly agitated the house (fig. 2.40). By turns romantic, mock-heroic, and farcical, the
play is the least dada of Tzara’s dramatic works. A superficially conventional frame—a love
triangle between a banker, his wife, and a poet—encloses what one critic called “coqs-à-l’âne” of
poetic but absurd action and language. In its eclectic reference, the play draws on and parodies
Greek classical drama, Shakespeare (Act XII pastiches scenes from Hamlet), and the Symbolist
poetry and prose of Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Huysmans. In its form it derives openly from
Luigi Pirandello (though Tzara never admitted this), and its visual style is a conscious attempt to
import cinematic effects into the theatre. There may even be an oblique allusion to Skating
Rink, the Ballets Suédois’ success of 1922, designed by Fernand Léger (1881-1955). The
source that Tzara—now alienated from his former Dada collaborators—specifically denied
plundering was Surrealism, stating that “the vagueness of forms has nothing to do with the

117 “Rire inimitable;” Sauguet, 204.
118 See Hugo’s account, 233. “Une tragédie ironique ou une farce tragique,” Tristan Tzara, “Le secret de Mouchoir
de nuages,” Le Gaulois (May 17, 1924), coll. Rondel, RO12580-81. BnF.
“Coq-à-l’âne” is a French colloquial expression meaning abrupt, illogical juxtapositions, usually applied to
language.
120 Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author had premiered in France a year earlier, as some critics noted. See Gabriel Boissy, “Mouchoir de nuages” (May 20, 1924), unidentified journal, coll. Rondel, RO12580-81. BnF.
121 Skating Rink also featured a love triangle in which the disruptive character is a poet (and a madman), apaches
(Paris street toughs) play a crucial role as they do here, and the story, like Mouchoir’s, ends with a tragic death,
although the roles differ from those in Mouchoir.
Mouchoir’s staging was its most original contribution. The play’s structure alternates between action among the characters, which takes place on a central platform, and commentary by Greek chorus-like Commentators named A, B, C, D, and E, which is delivered from lateral and frontal aprons. Lighting changes illuminated the relevant playing area, and the actors and crew remained in full view of the audience throughout. The influence of experimental film here was innovative: Tzara declared that “the action…comes from the world of serial novels and the cinema,” and the projected scenic backdrops, consisting of “reproductions blown up from illustrated postcards” furnished a cinematic mise-en-scène. Like contemporary cinema, the play also experiments with flashbacks, and other temporal and spatial dislocations unusual in live theatre at that time. Loïe Fuller’s characteristic effects incorporating lighting and fabric were responsible for the production’s striking visual aspect, including the projected images in lieu of scenery, the ethereal quality of a scene set within the Banker’s Wife’s memory that takes place behind a translucent tulle drop, and the Poet’s ascent to heaven on a cloud (or perhaps a large handkerchief) of glimmering, silvery silk at the play’s end.

Mouchoir de Nuages’ self-reflexive purpose (like Pirandello’s) marked it as inescapably modern. “The whole play,” Tzara stated, “…is based on the fiction of theatre.” The open

122 Tzara, “Le secret de Mouchoir de nuages” (revision of earlier article), Intégral no. 2 (April 1, 1925), 30. Quoted in Melzer, 195.


124 Garelick attributes the entire set design to Fuller, who is credited in the program only for her “projections.” Garelick further states, erroneously, that Beaumont hired Fuller “to design the lighting and many of the sets” for Soirée, 214. That Fuller was assigned “full charge of the ‘mise-en-scène’ of the lighting” for the entire show and exhibition, using her own equipment, is confirmed in Beaumont’s correspondence (in English) with both Fuller and Walter Berry, April 16, 1924; IMEC: BMT 11.5. There is no evidence of Fuller designing anything else; Mouchoir had no real set, and Picasso, Braque, Derain, Laurencin, Hugo and Beaumont designed all the other scenography.

125 “Toute la pièce, d’ailleurs, est basée sur la fiction du théâtre,” Tzara, “Le Secret.”
dressing room and visible crew, and the use of the actors’ own names for their characters make this clear. The Commentators’ meta-commentary on the play itself emphasizes the notion of competing and possibly interchangeable realities:

B: The fact that you act the role of Andrea’s friend on stage does not give you the right to believe that you are her friend in real life.
A: But she could easily be his friend outside this dramatic action, this play, in real life, in her own life—how would you know?
C: Oh! There is nothing so tedious as these endless discussions on the difference between theatre and reality!  

Tzara handles his ontological inquiry into what was by now territory familiar to modernists with an irreverent wit that partly alleviates the deliberate tedium and absurdity of much of the play. Critical response ranged from bemused appreciation (“theatrical and very odd… the symbolism of the title escaped me”), to scorn for it as derivative and obscurantist (“M. Tzara… has surprised no one and become the victim of his own mystification”), but the visual effects were generally praised as startlingly original.

Cocteau’s anti-naturalist French redaction of Romeo and Juliet also used its visual effects, which were unique, to remind its audience of “the difference between theatre and reality.” Although the play was one of Soirée’s most original offerings, it was of little interest to the Count, much to Cocteau’s frustration, as it did not involve Massine. Cocteau had already begun a campaign of adapting classical texts and subjects in a modernist idiom with Antigone in 1923, which he continued with Orphée in 1925. With Roméo et Juliette he determined to

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127 Hugo amusingly recounts that the house grew increasingly restless as an actor, alone onstage, intoned “Le temps coule; le temps coule … goutte par goutte …” (“time flows flows flows … drop by drop drop drop …”) repeatedly for several minutes. Le Regard, 232-233; translation, Tzara and Robbins, Act XIV Commentary, 128.

128 “scénique et fort curieuse … le symbolism de ce titre m’a échappé,” Allix, “Soirée de Paris, à la Cigale,” Le Monde musical (28 May 1924), 167; Boissy, “Mouchoir.”
“operate on a drama by Shakespeare, to discover the bone beneath the trappings”—to remove the “patina” and rejuvenate the play, using a French prose translation since he did not read English. Unsurprisingly, the result in terms of dialogue was more prosaic than poetic, but Cocteau provided a visual substitute for Shakespeare’s missing lyricism in the dance-like movements he gave the characters, interspersed with frozen tableaux. These he employed as an alternative, gestural language, to convey the characters’ inner states. He called his version a “mise-en-scène chorégraphique,” and a “ballet-parlé;” it foregrounded gesture and movement, somewhat at the expense of poetry and dramatic irony but kept much broad comedy, notably in the character of Juliet’s nurse. Critics were captivated by the actors’ motion, “already stylized into a half-dance,” and one even claimed that, in his semi-choreography, Cocteau had succeeded in transmuting Shakespeare’s reality into “sur-réalisme.” This last comment must have infuriated Breton, who hated Cocteau, and was either writing or soon to begin his “Surrealist Manifesto” at the time; he was determined to appropriate Apollinaire’s terminology for his own movement, thus controlling the poet’s coveted legacy.

The Hugos’ décor and costumes were transformative (figs. 2.41-2.43). Jean Hugo and Cocteau decided to employ the Elizabethan device of dressing the tragic stage in black; against this backdrop, Valentine proposed costuming the actors in black velvet, decorated with hand-


131 “Stylisée et formée déjà une demi-danse,” Fernand Gregh, source unknown (June 14, 1924); “sur-réalisme,” Paul Fierens, Journal des débats (June 5, 1924); both quoted in Aschengreen, 143.
painted details in vivid colors, the stage lit by candlelight alone. This had the effect of obliterating outlines—only the disembodied colors and the actors’ heads and hands were visible against the black. The shadowy lighting detached “words, bagpipes, gloves, heads, essentials of costume and decor…” according to Cocteau. Combined with movements “adjusted to be like a ballet” this created a highly arresting visual effect that critics appreciated, even if the actors found it depressingly funereal. Consciously or not, Cocteau’s and the Hugos’ staging recalled an important innovation of Montmartre’s recent past: the shadow theatre, originated by Henri Rivière at Le Chat Noir café and popular between 1887 and 1897. The shadow theatre form was widely adopted, and not only on the stage; its aesthetic was taken up by painters such as Toulouse-Lautrec and the Nabis. A review by the theatre critic Francisque Sarcey, of the Symbolist producer Lugné-Poe’s stage design for his shadow production of Maurice Maeterlinck’s Pelléas et Mélisande in 1893, could equally have been discussing Roméo et Juliette:

One had an impression of watching a succession of images projected by a magic lantern…the beings that we see acting on stage look like shadows. They live, speak and move in the atmosphere of artifice; they are creatures of a dream.

Milhaud commented that the production was “startlingly original;” Levinson, waxing enthusiastic for once, compared Cocteau to Vsevolod Meyerhold as a theatrical prodigy who “betrayed the author [Shakespeare] for his true master, the god Theatre,” and who had created a

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133 “Réglé comme un ballet,” Levinson, 413.

134 Sarcey, Le Temps (May 23, 1893), quoted in Phillip Dennis Cate, “The Spirit of Montmartre,” in Cate and Shaw, 1-93; here, 63. See pp. 55-69 for a detailed discussion of the visual aspect of the shadow theatre in the 1880s–1900s.
new language of movement “in order to express, in plastic form, certain emotions of the soul.”\textsuperscript{135} Cocteau had, in fact, attended Meyerhold’s rehearsals in Paris in 1913. R. Richard in \textit{La Nouvelle Revue Française} also compared Cocteau’s interpretation of a classic text to Russian avant-garde theatre—Aleksandr Tairov’s Théâtre Kamerny de Moscou—and to the English director Edward Gordon Craig, declaring that \textit{Roméo et Juliette} was “one of the strongest theatrical impressions I have experienced in France since the war.”\textsuperscript{136} The comparisons were apposite: Cocteau had been deeply impressed by the Kamerny production of \textit{Phèdre} at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1923, and struck by the way in which Tairov’s actors’ bodies spoke a language of their own, becoming “a plastic means of expression and eloquence.”\textsuperscript{137} The Russians’ experiments chimed with his own long-standing interest in fusing dance, acting and voice to achieve an anti-naturalistic, hyper-theatrical unity that transcended banal realism. \textit{Roméo et Juliette} was an important step in Cocteau’s quest for a stylized and abstract theatre.

The production went ahead “amidst the usual troubles”: Cocteau, worn out and still suffering from the trauma of Radiguet’s death in December 1923, played Mercutio “with much artificial elegance, precision, and great range.”\textsuperscript{138} Calling it all “a blinding nightmare,” he was frustrated by Beaumont’s disengagement from his piece, and he was beset by a group of “gracefully androgynous” admirers—Mercutio’s “pages,” who “were every day more numerous”


\textsuperscript{136} “Une des plus fortes impressions théâtrales que j’ai subies en France depuis la guerre,” R. Richard, 120.

\textsuperscript{137} Aschengreen, 140. See Cocteau, “Phèdre chez Tairoff,” in \textit{A Call to Order}, 257-60.

\textsuperscript{138} “Parmi les tribulations habituelles,” Hugo, 232; “Avec beaucoup d’élégance synthétique, de minutie et de grands écarts,” J. Catulle-Mendès, source unknown (June 4, 1924), quoted in Aschengreen, 146.
according to Hugo.\textsuperscript{139} Valentine put them to work painting costumes. Although Marcel Herrand’s Romeo was judged “a fine, masterful presence,” other actors disappointed: Yvonne George, playing the Nurse, was an opium addict; Andrée Pascal (fig. 2.35) as Juliet was said to be so unfeminine that she earned the show the nickname “\textit{Roméo et Jules};” Cocteau’s lover Rupert Doone (fig. 2.31) was a prima donna and “a terrible bore” who “clings to [Cocteau’s] coattails like a stray dog.”\textsuperscript{140} In spite of these odds, and Cocteau’s view of it as “an excuse for a stage production,” the play was generally a success. A dissenting absence was André Breton, who left the theatre before it started, trailed by a dozen “obedient disciples.”\textsuperscript{141} Hugo commented: “they refused to attend a play by Cocteau,” their bête noire.\textsuperscript{142} The Dada-Surrealists were watching Beaumont’s efforts closely, but they saved their direct intervention, and their public rejection of Beaumont and his concept of aesthetic innovation, for the protest they staged against \textit{Mercure}.

\textbf{2.6 The Art Exhibition}

Where painting was concerned, postwar modernism appeared only in the various scenic décors. The exhibition of easel paintings in La Cigale’s foyer displayed a nostalgic taste for exclusively prewar—indeed, pre-twentieth century—imagery, which may have looked oddly

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} “Brillant cauchemar,” Cocteau, \textit{Lettre à Jacques Maritain}, quoted in Aschengreen, 146–47; translation by Steegmuller, 330.
\item \textsuperscript{140} “aux grâces androgyniques,” Aschengreen, 142. “étaient chaque jour plus nombreux,” Hugo, 232.
\item \textsuperscript{141} “Excuse,” Steegmuller, 328. “Disciples obéissants,” Hugo, 234.
\item \textsuperscript{142} “Ils ne voulait pas assister à une pièce de Cocteau.” Hugo, 234.
\end{itemize}
discordant with the more contemporary ambitions of Soirée’s live program, although it was a more accurate reflection of the tastes of many of the event’s patrons. This “Exposition de l’art au théâtre, au music-hall et au cirque” was intended to provide a historical and aesthetic context for Beaumont’s project of reviving traditional forms of French vernacular theatre, specifically those whose traditional home was Montmartre, and to iterate the idea of artistic synthesis via the representation of those forms in the visual arts, and their common genesis in the village: “The exhibition…will reunite the works of the most important painters of the nineteenth century who so loved this corner of Montmartre and who here conceived their most remarkable works.”

Lucien Daudet’s poetically melancholy preface to the exhibition in Soirée’s program eulogizes these works by Impressionist and post-Impressionist masters as repositories of a kind of pre-lapsarian innocence, inhering in them as “being prior to the cataclysms.” Possibly they provided the less adventurous audience members with some relief from the more assertively modernist tone of (some of) what was happening on stage.

Seventy paintings, prints and watercolors were displayed, principally by Paul Cézanne, Honoré Daumier, Edgar Degas, Eugène Delacroix, Edouard Manet, Georges Seurat, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (the most-represented artist with one-third of all the works, mainly from the prolific collector Lucien Henraux). The display also included a selection by nineteenth-century illustrators Alfred Andrieux, Achille Deveria, Constantin Guys, Paul Gavarni, Alfred Grévin, and H. Lamy. The works of art came from several private collections including those of

143 “L’exposition…réunira les œuvres les plus importantes des peintres du XIXe siècle qui ont tant aimé ce coin de Montmartre et qui y ont conçu leurs œuvres les plus remarquables.” Beaumont or possibly Marc Allégret, printed flyer for Soirée de Paris. IMEC: BMT 12.4.


145 Beaumont’s initial plan for the exhibition was rather more ambitious. An early list of projected loans names works by Goya, Rubens, Renoir, Benozzo Gozzoli, and even Botticelli’s Birth of Venus. IMEC: BMT 1:12.
Beaumont himself, Walter Berry, the dealers Bernheim-Jeune and Arnold Seligman, and the critic Félix Fénéon. The prize exhibit was Seurat’s *Parade de cirque* (1887-88, catalogued as *La Parade*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, fig. xx), from the Bernheims. Seurat’s *Le Chahut* was requested unsuccessfully; a drawing for it substituted. On 26 February 1924, Beaumont had sought the cooperation of Léonce Rosenberg in assembling a collection of suitable works. The dealer was enthusiastic at first, but withdrew when the Count would not accede to his demand to be sole organizer; however, his influence was instrumental in procuring many of the pictures. Another problem was the venue: important collectors refused to lend works to be displayed in a theatre foyer, and insurance was difficult to obtain. However after much negotiation and expense a respectable exhibition was assembled in time for the opening.

Given the participation of Picasso, Braque, Derain, Hugo and Laurencin as scenic designers, some of their studio art might have been expected to feature in the exhibition, and this was indeed Beaumont’s and Rosenberg’s original intention. However, showing work by living artists would have created difficulties with their dealers, and Beaumont was forced to abandon the idea when Rosenberg withdrew. Its absence, however, serves to distinguish contemporary art of a progressive stamp, which was alive and performing on La Cigale’s stage, from the art of the recent past, which passively depicted a theatrical context.

What was happening in the auditorium was, quite literally, *l’art vivant* (living art), to use the critic André Salmon’s term, coined in 1920 to classify vanguard as opposed to academic or traditional art. Picasso and the other artists were already providing the spectators with art as a

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146 Correspondence between Beaumont and Rosenberg, and several other dealers and collectors, IMEC, BMT 12.17.

performer, art in four dimensions; there was no need for their easel pictures to appear alongside those of their modern precursors from the previous century.\textsuperscript{148} The arrangement at La Cigale both physically and symbolically separated their work from the art on display in the foyer—which although not academic, was already consecrated to French tradition—thus embodying the simultaneous coexistence of, and difference between, the old and the new. It makes a point about the art of the moment’s expanded capacity as a living part of a modernist \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk}, set against its historical role as a recorder and interpreter of the artist’s response to the world, while presenting this twentieth-century development as an exciting reinvention of venerable tradition. As Beaumont wrote, the exhibition was intended to “elevate the French tradition that connects Soirées de Paris with the past.”\textsuperscript{149} The exhibition thus reiterates the raison d’être of the total project of \textit{Soirée}: the creation of advanced cultural forms that renew the heritage of France.

\textbf{2.7 \textit{Mercure}: Transcending Cubism}

Kenneth Silver’s characterization of \textit{Parade}—“classicism and Cubism as equal partners in an advanced aesthetic”—applies with even greater accuracy to \textit{Mercure}.\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Mercure} was the most genuinely avant-garde spectacle in \textit{Soirée}’s season, but the degree of advanced modernism as opposed to traditionalism of much of Beaumont’s program was not clear-cut, even at the time. Themes that now seem trite and clichéd were still novel for ballet in the 1920s; Massine,

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\textsuperscript{148} I discuss the notion of art as performer in the designs for ballets by Picasso for the Ballets Russes and Léger for the Ballets Suédois in my unpublished M.A. thesis “The Performance of Art: Picasso, Léger, and Modernist Ballet 1917-1925,” Washington University in Saint Louis, Department of Art History and Archaeology (2012).

\textsuperscript{149} “Monteront la tradition française qui rattache les Soirées de Paris au passé,” Beaumont, typescript text for a publicity release. IMEC: BMT 12.5.

\textsuperscript{150} Silver, \textit{Esprit de Corps}, 126.
Beaumont and their colleagues regarded Commedia dell’Arte narratives and what Lynn Garafola calls “lifestyle” and “period” modernism, as well as plotless, largely abstract dance pieces with a familiar visual if no narrative theme, as avant-garde art. However, these seemed infuriatingly elitist and irrelevant to artists in the Dada movement, who believed that art’s future lay in exploring the potential of the irrational aspects of human psychology, the liberatory power of creative disjunction, and the subversion of bourgeois aesthetic tradition rather than the construction of elegant variations upon it. In the summer of 1924, the stage was set for a confrontation between Beaumont’s inspired frivolities and the Dada-Surrealists; the public dress rehearsal of Mercure provided the occasion.

If Mercure is remembered as primarily a vehicle for Picasso, despite the extensive contributions of Satie and Massine, it is hardly surprising given Beaumont’s later insistence that “in Mercure the musician and choreographer served purely as accompaniment to the painter.”

The ballet’s scenario, although credited to Massine in the program and developed by all three collaborating artists, was originally Beaumont’s idea, but it seems to have been inspired in part by certain of Picasso’s drawings. He wrote to Picasso that “my point of departure for the

151 Garafola, Ballets Russes, 115, 92.
153 There has been some debate over the origin of the idea for Mercure. Anne Baldessari claims that Beaumont first proposed the project to Picasso in the summer of 1923 at Cap d’Antibes, and that he was inspired by the sketches Picasso produced for his Mardi Gras ball, Bal des jeux, in 1922; The Surrealist Picasso (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 20. Since these works have been misdated to 1923 by the Musée Picasso (see p. 67, n.112), and have no mythological content, I query this identification. Robert Orledge first published the existence of three typed pages of scenario by Beaumont; these are now at IMEC: SAT 16.10; Orledge, “Mount Etna,” 232. There exists in addition, on the Count’s personal notepaper, a detailed plan of the ballet, scene by scene: IMEC: SAT 16.15; a carbon copy with notes in Satie’s hand (see Appendix E) is in the BnF Music Department: MS-9596 (2). In a letter to Satie dated February 20, 1924, Beaumont confirmed his commission for “eight to ten minutes of divertissement…on the theme of the adventures of Mercury” (huit à dix minutes de divertissement…sur le thème des aventures de Mercure), Correspondance, 591-92. He further sent a typed letter of intent to Picasso (Musée Picasso Archives), with (slightly variant) copies to Satie (Correspondance, 592) and Massine, all dated February 21, which begins “forgive me for writing to you on the machine I am going to specify my ideas to you the writing needs to be clear.” (excusez moi de vous écrire à la machine je viens vous préciser mes idées il faut que l’écriture soit clair.) He further states “What I am asking you for are several (ce que je vous demande ce sont des) TABLEUX VIVANTS.” (My italics; the lack of
mythological dance has been your drawings,” but it is not clear which ones he meant.\textsuperscript{154}

\textit{Mercure}’s farcical aspect seems in addition to have served as a dig at Cocteau, who had a penchant for dressing up as the god Mercury and flitting about annoying guests at the Count’s costume balls—and who was concurrently playing Mercutio, a Mercury derivative in both name and nature, in his \textit{Roméo et Juliette}. The former \textit{Parade} team were glad of his exclusion from this project; he and Satie had acrimoniously severed all relations at least a year previously, he was on strained terms with Picasso, and Massine resented his interference. Satie, however, adored working with Picasso, whom he called “\textit{Amazing!} I find him a magnificent collaborator, \textit{“sane”} and \textit{“genuine”}—something quite different from the skeleton, the \textit{“omelette”} of the rue d’Anjou [Cocteau].”\textsuperscript{155} In retrospect, according to Douglas Cooper, everyone involved agreed that \textit{Mercure} was “essentially Picasso’s ballet,” the force and originality of his design solutions decisively dominating the overall impression. As Sylvie Blin observes, “Picasso became, in effect, the dramaturge.”\textsuperscript{156}

Taking Picasso’s drawings—possibly those on classical themes—as his inspiration, Beaumont envisioned for the ballet a series of tableaux vivants that, eschewing specific literary punctuation is Beaumont’s). All these documents strongly indicate that the original concept for \textit{Mercure} was indeed Beaumont’s, although Satie, Picasso and Massine may have contributed, as they certainly did to its development. Massine corroborates this in his autobiography: “My last ballet for \textit{Les Soirées de Paris}...was \textit{Mercure}...This mythological character had always fascinated me, and I was delighted when Beaumont asked Satie to write the music for the ballet and Picasso to design the set and costumes;”\textsuperscript{159-60.}

\textsuperscript{154} “Mon point de départ pour la danse mythologique a été vos dessins;” Beaumont to Picasso, February 21, 1924. Musée Picasso archives.

\textsuperscript{155} “\textit{Épatant!} J’ai en lui un magnifique collaborateur \textit{“sain”} et \textit{“vrai”}—autre chose que la squelette \textit{“omelette”} de la rue d’Anjou.” Satie to Mme. Guérin, September 29, 1924; \textit{Correspondance}, 633-34. The reference to an \textit{“(h)om(m)elette,”}—a little, feminized man—was a nasty joke of Satie’s against Cocteau’s homosexuality.

reference, used mythology as a “sort of universal alphabet” that had the capacity to “translate the human condition in simple terms that everyone understands.” His instructions indicate an interest in a very modern use of mythological imagery, stripped of conventional associations, to reflect on the enigma of existence. He wrote to his collaborators, “do what you like and just take this little story as the catalogue of letters that the child has at his disposal for making words.” As interpreted by Picasso and Massine, to each of whom he gave total creative freedom, these “letters” became the “poses plastiques” of the subtitle. Beaumont’s stepping back from involvement in the execution of his instructions left the way open for the others—Picasso, Massine, and Satie—to use the ballet as a platform for pursuing some of their own ideas, and to slyly parody their patron as Bacchus in the final tableau. If he recognized himself in the caricature, he seems not to have minded.

*Mercure* was structured as three scenic tableaux, or “elements,” each containing four episodes representing various facets of Mercury’s mythological nature: messenger, trickster, magician, musician, thief, and emissary of Hades, or psychopomp. Beaumont’s libretto specifies three “categories of characters:” the Gods (Mercury, Apollo, Venus, Pluto, Proserpina, and Cerberus—a late addition); the Elements (Chaos, Night, Destiny); and the Accessories (the Three Graces, the guests of Bacchus). The plot, as one critic observed somewhat redundantly, was “a parody of antiquity.” It may be summarized thus:

First tableau: Jupiter chases Mercury from the heavens; he arrives on earth where Night clears away the day, in preparation for Apollo and Venus, who dance a love duet with the signs

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157 “Tant qu’alphabet universel;” “traduit de l'être humain en termes simples que tout le monde comprend;” “faites ce que vous voudrez et ne considérez pas la petite histoire apporté que comme le catalogue des lettres que l'enfant a à sa disposition pour faire des mots.” Beaumont’s letter to Picasso, February 21, 1924, Musée Picasso archives; a slightly different version written to Satie is in his *Correspondance*, 592. He sent another to Massine, not found.

of the Zodiac as chorus. Jealous Mercury has been watching; he kills Apollo with his “divine baton,” (his wand or caduceus) then instantly revives him, meanwhile stealing Apollo’s arrows and Venus’s belt; Night restores calm.\textsuperscript{159}

Second tableau: Mercury plays his lyre for the Three Graces, who dance, then strip and bathe. He steals their pearls, and is pursued by the furious Cerberus. The Graces freeze in piteous attitudes, as “all their beautiful poses turn clumsy.”\textsuperscript{160}

Third tableau, “Ball chez Mercure at the foot of Mount Etna”: at Bacchus’s feast, Mercury invents the alphabet, and devises a “polka of letters” for the guests (both honoring and parodying Beaumont’s instructions to use mythology as “a sort of universal alphabet” and a “catalogue of letters”) who include a Philosopher and a “Polichinel” (Pulcinella or Pierrot).\textsuperscript{161} Chaos intervenes; Pluto appears from Etna in his chariot and abducts Proserpina, with Mercury’s help. Black volcanic smoke envelops the lamenting guests; Destiny announces, “that everything is predestined [written] and there is nothing more to be done.”\textsuperscript{162}

Picasso’s designs for \textit{Mercure} were the most original work he had done for the stage since \textit{Parade}, and the most consequential for his painting. With this ballet he returned to using the theatre as a laboratory for his studio practice, animating in three and four dimensions formal

\textsuperscript{159} “Divin baguette.” Libretto summarized from Beaumont’s typescript “MERCURE: Danse mythologique en 3 éléments,” IMEC, SAT 16.10. See also the synopsis of \textit{Mercure: poses plastiques} in the souvenir program for \textit{Soirée de Paris}. The danced work varied slightly from the original libretto.

\textsuperscript{160} “Toutes les attitudes de beauté devenant des gaucheries.”

\textsuperscript{161} “Bal chez Mercure au pied de l’Etna.” Ornella Volta suggests that the Philosopher is a tribute to Satie, whose \textit{Socrate} (first performed 1920) was an early instance of the postwar interest in classical subject matter in the arts. The composer was regarded as something of a sage by his younger colleagues. “Picasso and Italy: The Last Memories of his Journey,” in Jean Clair (ed.), \textit{Picasso: The Italian Journey 1917-1924}, 87-92 (New York: Rizzoli, 1998), 88. The invention of the alphabet is the only incident that can be sourced to standard accounts of Mercury’s actions (Beaumont forbade literary references); the remainder were invented by \textit{Mercure}’s creators.

\textsuperscript{162} “Que tout est écrit et qu’il n’y a plus rien à faire.”
experiments that he was simultaneously developing on canvas and on paper. Mercure’s scenario gave him the opportunity to explore theatrically his long-standing interest in classical subject matter. The scenography and costuming allowed him to project and animate several of his favorite pictorial techniques in three-dimensional space: notably flattened Cubist forms in abrupt juxtaposition, and drawings of groups of figures in a single continuous line, a virtuosic method at which he was highly adept. Simultaneously, he was revisiting his strategy from Parade of collaging living dancers and artificial puppet-like creations in the same space, with unnerving effect. Situating real bodies in a pictorial world that seemed to be all surface, he once again challenged the dimensional logic of both the canvas and the stage. Even more, Mercure saw Picasso moving into a radically new territory: his designs fused Cubist stylization with a dreamlike irrationality and metamorphic suggestiveness that prefigured Surrealism.

Beaumont was delighted with all that Picasso did: “nothing could please me more than your idea. I’m very excited!” he wrote. However, his plan for a lofty meditation on the universal human condition was rather subverted by the artist’s tendency to “amuse himself with his collaborators” (sometimes at the Count’s expense); the ever-mischievous Satie was happy to participate, and Massine went along with the prevailing mood. Picasso burlesqued classical tradition on stage as he had on canvas in his monumental nudes of 1921-25 (fig. 2.46), and his bather and ballet dancer drawings of 1920 (fig. 2.47), but here in a minimalist, Cubist shorthand. The second tableau’s final image of the Three Graces, an enduring Picasso motif, consisted of simplified, over-life-sized painted canvas shapes adorned with wire tracery and tiny, periscopic

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163 “Rien ne pouvait me plaire plus que votre idée—je suis très excité!” Letter from Beaumont to Picasso, with measurements for “panneaux” (panels) on verso; undated but probably February 1924. Musée Picasso Archives.

heads supported by “plaited necks like telephone extension wires (figs. 2.48).”  

Mercure’s climax, “Abduction of Proserpina,” was performed in front of two practicables (movable, flat, scenic structures) made of wire shaped in a continuous line into a calligraphic, rearing horse and chariot bearing Mercury and the swooning Proserpina. The practicables for this and other scenes mainly concealed the dancers who manipulated them, although Cerberus’s snarling triple head, painted on a disc, was supported by a very visible pair of legs. The concept of “décor qui bouge,” (moving scenery) in Cocteau’s phrase, had begun with Picasso’s three outsized Managers—dancers inside mobile, collaged constructions—in Parade, from which his cutouts in Mercure were schematized evolutions (fig. 2.52). The Managers were themselves animated elaborations of his earlier Cubist still life constructions and figure paintings (fig. 2.53). Cocteau had described their dancing as “an organized accident;” Mercure’s set-pieces, perhaps as a result, did no more than pose. 

It is worth noting that the Ballets Suédois had staged La Création du monde only eight months earlier, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Léger’s towering mobile gods and metamorphic creatures for that ballet (fig. 2.54) had taken the idea of moving scenery to a new level; it is highly possible that Mercure constituted Picasso’s parodic response.

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166 Picasso worked with the continuous line technique extensively in his sketches for the ballet; many of these are more jeux d’esprit than practical designs for costumes or scenery (fig.2.45).

167 Quoted widely; Cocteau uses the phrase in the libretto for Le Boeuf sur le toit (1920). See Margaret Crosland, ed. and trans., Cocteau’s World: An Anthology of Writings by Jean Cocteau (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1972), 166. In Cock and Harlequin, Cocteau describes the Managers as “a sort of human scenery, animated pictures by Picasso, and their very structure necessitates a certain choreographic formula;” “The Collaboration of Parade: Letter to Paul Dermée,” 53.

Picasso may or may not have parodied Léger, but he was not above parodying himself, as well as the whole classical tradition, as he had been doing in some of the work executed in his Neoclassical style ever since Parade. The “Bath of the Graces” scene was performed by male dancers *en travesti*, with gross red papier-mâché breasts and blonde raffia wigs, posing in a flat paper bath (fig. 2.55-2.57). The total effect was of a staged *papier collé*, with the dancers’ heads and breasts as quotations from the real world.\(^{169}\) The absurd eroticism of this tableau was too much for many spectators: “a cheap outrage,” sniffed one critic.\(^{170}\) But what Picasso was after, according to Werner Spies, was something more subtle—a “theatrical unity analogous to the unity of a picture;” a seamless unity of décor, costumes, and performers that would integrate a non-illusionistic set with the real bodies inhabiting it.\(^{171}\) The allusion in this tableau to the artist’s statuesque nudes and draped women in antique settings, such as *Three Women at the Spring* (1921, fig. 2.46) is obvious. It may also have been a nod to Diaghilev; on June 20, five days after Mercure had opened, he premiered *Le Train bleu* at the Champs-Élysées with a curtain reproducing a greatly enlarged version in the same style, by scenic artist Prince Alexander Schervashidze, of Picasso’s *Two Women Running on the Beach* (*The Race*, 1922, fig. 2.59).

Gertrude Stein described Mercure’s scenery as “written, so simply written, no painting, pure calligraphy,” dissociated, she said, from ideas or emotion—in other words, “really

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\(^{169}\) The false breasts were probably an homage to Apollinaire, whose “Surrealist drama,” *The Breasts of Tiresias (Les Mamelles de Tirésias)*, (1917), had featured similarly accoutered male actors.

\(^{170}\) A production photograph of this scene suggests an affinity with the series of bather on the beach studies Picasso made at Juan-les-Pins, in Provence, in the summer of 1920. Several of these are three-figure compositions with at least one nude in the water; see, for example, *Three Bathers by the Shore* (pencil, Metropolitan Museum of Art, fig. 2.58). The latter work is an early example of the fluid contour line that appears, stylized, on the cutouts for Mercure. “Une outrance facile,” Nozière, “Soirées de Paris, théâtre;” IMEC, BMT 4.2.

Perhaps the purest Cubist gesture was indeed writing: the appearance of dancers holding placards that read “ETOILE’ (star) in the opening Night scene (figs. 2.60-2.61). The word as sign for the object was transposed directly from Picasso’s and Braque’s Cubist canvases, in particular the papier collés; it had not previously been seen on the Paris stage. As Christopher Green has noted, Picasso’s “childlike” decorative aesthetic in his designs for Mercure—Breton approvingly called them “tragic toys for adults,” praising the ballet’s “spirit of escapism”—is reiterated in several austerely simplified but highly patterned Cubist still lifes he made in the summer of 1924 (fig. 2.62), as well as in a series of contemporaneous dot-and-line drawings (fig. 2.63) in which he explores the multivalent expressive potential of abstract pictorial signs, first seen at La Cigale. Green argues that it was the metamorphic potential of these Cubist signs for multiple and possibly uncanny unconscious associations that attracted the Surrealists to Mercure, which in other respects they despised. Certainly Breton recognized a revolutionary quality in Picasso’s arresting visuals, one comparable, in his view, to that of Les Demoiselles d’Avignon.

He wrote to the collector Jacques Doucet (who had recently purchased Demoiselles):

I think Picasso’s collaboration on Mercure is the most important artistic event in recent years, an act of genius…and displays more than ever a marvelous liberation from any form of constraint imposed by reputation or taste. I speak of it in exactly the same way as the Demoiselles d’Avignon. “Mercure” in 1924 is as astonishing, as admirable in its time as the great canvas of 1906 [sic].

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173 “Childlike;” Green, Cubism, 100. “… on the occasion of the ballet Mercure…playing a part in the drama whose only theatre is the mind, Picasso, creator of tragic toys for adults, has obliged man to grow up…” André Breton, Surrealism and Painting, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 1972), 7.

174 Notable works in this respect include Still Life with Mandolin (1924, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, fig. 2.62). Two pages of the dot-and-line drawings were reproduced in the second edition of the Surrealist journal La Révolution surréaliste (January 15, 1925),16-17. See Green, 69, 71-2, 100.

175 “Je tiens la collaboration de Picasso à “Mercure” pour l’événement artistique le plus important de ces dernières années, un acte de genie…et qu’il est plus merveilleusement affranchi que jamais de toutes les contraintes de la réputation et du goût. J’en parle des Demoiselles d’Avignon, exactement. “Mercure” en 1924 est aussi étonnant, aussi admirable dans le temps que la grande toile de 1906.” Letter from Breton to Doucet, June 18, 1924, quoted in Agnès Angliviel de la Beaumelle et al, André Breton: La Beauté convulsive, exh. cat. (Paris: Éditions du centre
Satie too was sympathetic to Cubist abstraction, claiming “if it has a subject, this ballet has no plot. It is purely ornamental.” His score, which was a conscious attempt to “translate [Picasso’s ideas] musically,” almost doubled the length of the original scenario from eight to fifteen minutes, and incorporated music-hall and fairground tunes into a unified orchestral composition, which, he said, was “without stylization, and has no rapport of any kind with things artistic.” On Satie’s typescript carbon of Beaumont’s libretto in the Bibliothèque nationale, the composer has written “(Cubisme)” in pencil next to the typed title “Rapt de Proserpine,” and again on the verso of the sheet: “Nocturne (cubisme)”, apparently indicating his desire to concert with Picasso as he composed the score (see Appendix E).

Ornella Volta hypothesizes that the ballet’s apparently disjunctive structure in fact embodies a great alchemical scheme, deriving from Satie’s dabbling in Rosicrucian philosophy in the 1890s and his lifelong fascination with esoteric teachings. However plausible such a reading may be, it does not at first sight accord with any of Beaumont’s stated intentions; whether or not he was aware of, or in sympathy with, it can only be conjectured. Volta calls the music “brash,” and Roger Shattuck comments tersely that it is “not Satie’s best work,” although James Harding in his biography of Satie judges that

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Pompidou, 1991), 170. Breton, who worked as Doucet’s art advisor, had engineered his purchase of Demoiselles from Picasso’s studio in late 1923; Richardson, Picasso, vol. 3, 243-44.


177 BnF MS-9596 (2). According to music historian Caroline Potter, these notes suggest “the influence of Cubism on Satie’s thinking” regarding the Mercure score; “Collaborative Works in Satie’s last Years,” in Potter, ed. Erik Satie: Music, Art and Literature (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 175.

178 Volta, L’Ymagier, 81. Julia Walker has suggested to me that Satie’s interest in esoteric philosophy may have been shared by Beaumont (his desire for a “universal alphabet” is suggestive), and that Mercure may, in fact, encode Rosicrucian or Theosophical meanings. This intriguing possibility calls for further investigation.
Mercure “is possessed of a beauty and tenderness as fine as anything else in his work.”

Contemporary critics were equally divided: Paul Bertrand in Le ménestrel disliked the “teeth-grinding passages whose significance remains impenetrable,” while Charles Tenroc in Le courrier musical enjoyed the “tart and fragmented musical irony.”

If Mercure is musically uneven, that may be a result of the stress under which Satie composed it. Both Beaumont and through him, Massine, were continually pressuring the composer to produce music against ever-tighter deadlines, so that the choreography could proceed and the dancers could rehearse. Working feverishly, Satie delivered the score in several installments, writing to Massine in exasperation on April 7, “it’s impossible for me to go any faster, my dear Friend: I can’t hand over to you work that I could not defend to myself. You who are conscience personified will understand…” Satie’s relationship with the dance aspect of his ballets was always uneasy. In 1922 he advanced, for the first time, his desire to compose the music on the choreography, rather than the reverse, which was standard practice. His experience with Parade had left him distrustful of dancers, and especially of Massine, as he felt their striving after choreographic effects diverted attention from his music. In a letter to Edith de Beaumont dated March 23, 1922, Satie boasted excitedly that he, André Derain, and Massine had “talked about this ‘initial’ choreography: starting with the choreographer, which is very ‘new’

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180 Paul Bertrand, Le Ménestrel (27 June 1924); Charles Tenroc, Le Courrier musical (1 July 1924); coll. Rondel, RO12580-81, BnF. Both are quoted in translation in Orledge, “Mount Etna,” 246-247. Music scholars have discussed the score in detail elsewhere: see Volta, L’Ymagier, Orledge, “Mount Etna,” Caroline Potter, Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer and his World (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), and Whiting, Satie the Bohemian.

181 “Il m’est impossible d’aller plus vite, mon cher Ami: je ne puis vous remettre un travail qui ne serait pas défendable par moi. Vous qui êtes la conscience personifiée me comprendrez…” Correspondance, 606.
and has *never been done.* It’s me who suggested this idea to Massine” (Satie’s italics).\(^{182}\) Around the time of *Mercure,* he repeated his idea to Moïse Kisling, proposing that the choreography for the dancers should precede “the music that should illustrate their movements.” He declared (ironically) that composers should “make our art like a machine,” since (he felt) dancers and audiences mostly disregarded the composers’ efforts.\(^{183}\) The idea of composing the choreography without a score was not well received by Massine the first time—he never worked that way—and it did not happen. Satie does not seem to have proposed it again to either Massine or Beaumont for *Mercure;* but their treatment of him rankled. On his deathbed in 1925, he complained to the composer Robert Caby that Massine had rushed him over *Mercure,* threatening to “demolish his plan. He was terribly constrained by this…”\(^{184}\) Nevertheless, despite his intense resentment at Massine, and his disgust with the disorganized proceedings at La Cigale, Satie told Madame Paul Collaer that *Mercure* would be “a great and beautiful ballet.”\(^{185}\)

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\(^{182}\) “Nous avons parlé—tous les trois—de cette chorégraphie *initiale*: partir du chorégraphe, ce qui est très *neuf* & n’a jamais été fait. C’est moi-même qui a proposé cette idée à Massine.” *Correspondance,* 475. Orledge believes that this conversation happened in connection with a proposed ballet, *La Naissance de Venus:* “Mount Etna,” 238. That ballet, which may have involved Cocteau, was projected for the Ballets Russes’ 1922 season, but it never eventuated. A scenario and other documents are in IMEC, SAT 15.12-13. For more detail see Potter, *Erik Satie,* 218-21. However, Satie was wrong in claiming that this “has never been done;” Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, working together from 1914 and later independently, never composed dances to pre-existing music. When they used music at all, composer and dancers worked collaboratively to create the piece. Performances by Laban’s students at Galerie Dada, Zurich, in 1917-19 used improvised sound and spoken word (see ch. 3); Satie does not appear to have known of their work. His idea, however, anticipates choreographic experiments in the 1960s and 1970s by Merce Cunningham and John Cage. Cage greatly admired Satie and revived his *La Piège de Méduse* (*Medusa’s Snare,* 1913) with Cunningham as choreographer and dancer at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in 1948. Katherine Marksoski writes that they developed “a system that allowed them to compose independently with the understanding that, in performance, dance and music would intersect at pre-arranged points.” “The Formation of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company,” in Helen Molesworth, *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957,* exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art and Yale University Press, 1915), 360-65; here, 361.


\(^{185}\) Satie to Mme. Collaer, May 19, 1924: “Un grand & beau ballet;” *Correspondance,* 614.
Certainly, Valentine Hugo and Boris Kochno, among others “competent to judge its merits,” found *Mercure* “lyrical, humorous, moving and beautiful to watch.” Much of its perceived beauty undoubtedly resided in Picasso’s stunningly original sets and costumes. The costumes, an assortment of simplified classical chitons, modified harlequin outfits, and pastel bodysuits in a rainbow of colors, were shown to better advantage in the “poses plastiques” than in the movement, to judge from the surviving production photographs. The gloves the dancers wore puzzled some critics; these were not in fact Picasso’s intention but the result of a misreading of his drawings, but he liked their accidental aspect and kept them. Sets were minimal; according to the scene-painter Vladimir Polunin, they consisted of a series of screens of intense and definite color bound together in a masterly manner…[which] served as a background for wire structures, introduced for the first time on the stage…Picasso took, as usual, an active part in the execution of the work, examining the composition of the tones and the process of the painting. These screens, or *portiques*, supported flat, stylized, wood-and-raffia Cubist images of extreme simplicity, such as the Three Graces’ bath. Polunin and his wife Elizabeth found Picasso “very pleasant” to work with, “thanks to his interesting innovations and unchangeable decisions.” Douglas Cooper describes the sets and costumes in considerable detail in *Picasso Theatre*: apart from the colorful dancers in the Chaos sequence, they reiterate the color scheme of Picasso’s

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186 Cooper, 56. Cooper, an ardent supporter of Picasso, makes no secret of his artistic snobbery.

187 Several production photographs survive in IMEC and the Musée Picasso; with Picasso’s sketches, they provide a good visual record of the ballet itself and of Picasso’s ideas for it. After Jacqueline Picasso’s death in 1986, a great number of the artist’s works, including twenty-four previously unseen sketchbooks, were donated to the French state by her daughter in lieu of death duties; three of these (Carnets 12, 13 and 14, now in the Musée Picasso) contain around two hundred and seventy preparatory studies for costumes, sets, and other ideas relating to *Mercure*. With the previously known drawings (mostly from Beaumont’s collection), these provide an unparalleled record of Picasso’s thinking about any of his ballets, and indicate this one’s significance to him at the time. Twelve of these more recently revealed sketches are published in Marie-Laure Bernadac et al, *Picasso: Une Nouvelle dation*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), 212-221.

curtain design for Soirée, which doubled as Mercure’s curtain—shades of grey, brown, cream and blue with black lines and red or pink highlights—and they dramatize several pictorial methods he had been working with around that time. As well as the continuous outline drawings of single figures and groups already mentioned, these include images in which flat colored forms, unmoored from the contours that notionally describe them, intersect in floating layers, their dynamism accentuated by their discontinuous modes of description (fig. 2.64). The curtain itself, whose original title was Music (Pompidou Center, fig. 1.22) combines both techniques, featuring a Harlequin and a Pierrot with their instruments, drawn in a black continuous outline and positioned in indefinite space over amorphous blocks of color.

Both these figures are signatures in Picasso’s art, and point to what I believe is an overlooked source for Mercure: they are stock characters of the Italian Commedia dell’Artè. The apparently incongruous Polichinel who pops up in the finale of Mercure may have been Picasso’s tongue-in-cheek way of signing the ballet (he designed Massine and Stravinsky’s Pulcinella for Diaghilev in 1920, fig. 2.65)—but it also reiterates a persistent theme. Commedia figures, including a harlequin and a polichinelle, appear on the curtain for Parade (although they are absent from its scenario), perhaps as a way of indicating that the show about to be revealed celebrates the Commedia tradition. Indeed, Harlequin (Arlecchino), an agile trickster who carries a wooden sword or bat, may be seen as a type of the god Mercury with his

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189 Cooper, 58–59. A list of curtains, friezes and floorcloths in IMEC, SAT 16.17 confirms this, although exhaustive costume lists in SAT 16.12 suggest a brighter and more varied palette for the dancers. Léger and Raoul Dufy are among artists who experimented with the same technique of color/line separation at different times.

190 Beaumont sold the curtain (AM 3377 P) to the Musée national d’art moderne in 1955.

191 Picasso’s interest in characters from the circus and Commedia dates from his early years in Paris, c.1901-05; he resurrected the Commedia theme around the time he began working with Diaghilev on Parade, and it featured prominently in his work into the late 1920s.
“divin baguette” (caduceus); Pulcinella/Polichinelle is his Neapolitan counterpart, with variations, sometimes conflated with Pierrot. Martin Green and John Swan have shown that the Commedia’s popularity in seventeenth-century France resulted in these two, with their female partner Columbine, becoming “essentially Parisian inventions” thenceforth, so they were familiar and dear to Paris audiences.¹⁹² I propose that seen through this lens, Mercure is a Commedia farce in classical guise, with Mercury fulfilling the traditional role of Harlequin, the criminal trickster, murderer, thief, and servant of Chaos, and the other figures behaving for much of the time more like actors in Jean-Gaspard Deburau’s Funambules theatre than like denizens of Olympus.¹⁹³ This would also explain Polichinel’s presence; Picasso’s design for his costume (fig. 2.66) is a composite of Harlequin and Pierrot with the addition of a Greek chiton skirt, semi-classicizing the iconic figure in a cross-cultural pastiche consistent with the ballet’s eclectic and parodic spirit.¹⁹⁴ Thus with Mercure, Picasso completed a trifecta of Commedia-inflected ballets that began with Parade; the two indirectly allusive works—the beginning and end of his involvement with ballet—bracket his only straightforwardly Commedia subject in Pulcinella. The Commedia association is important too because it legitimizes Mercure’s ludic, even farcical

¹⁹² Martin Green and John Swan, The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell’Arte and the Modern Imagination (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 163. Green points out that the identities of these characters were fluid and interchangeable. I am unconvinced by Volta’s claim that Picasso “intuitively” understood the Commedia figures’ complicated classical genealogy, which she misrepresents in any case (“Picasso and Italy,” 88-89), but he was certainly aware of their iconographic appropriateness to his ballet.

¹⁹³ The great actor/mime Jean-Gaspard Deburau (1796-1846) adapted and popularized the Commedia tradition at his Théâtre des Funambules in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the role of Pierrot, he caught the attention of literary intellectuals like Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire, and was thus indirectly responsible for the elevation of the Commedia to the realm of high culture. See Green and Shaw, 5-6. Deburau was immortalized by Jean-Louis Barrault in Marcel Carné’s classic film, Les Enfants du paradis (1945).

¹⁹⁴ Theodore Reff points out that in his early circus paintings Picasso often conflated the costumes and identities of the characters, including Harlequin and Pierrot: “Harlequins, Saltimbanques, Clowns, and Fools,” Artforum 19 (Dec 1971): 30-43, here, 32. The costume list at IMEC: SAT 16.2 indicates that Polichinelle wears a white velvet jacket with one blue and one pink sleeve, tights with one blue and one pink leg, and a black “polichinelle” hat.
tone, providing a rebuttal to those critics (then and now) who have dismissed it for that very reason. Furthermore, it grounds the ballet in a tradition of popular theatre—originally borrowed from Italy and akin to the music-hall—which had become French by translation and inheritance.\textsuperscript{195}

From his earliest appearance in Picasso’s paintings of his Rose Period, in 1905-06, Harlequin functioned as an alter-ego for the artist himself; a metaphorical—and sometimes actual—self-portrait (fig. 2.69).\textsuperscript{196} This is also the case in the paintings of Picasso’s Neoclassical period, circa 1916-25, when Harlequin resurfaced with élan, even if he no longer displayed the artist’s own features (fig. 2.67-2.68). That he should reappear, barely disguised, in a ballet is appropriate given the artist’s elective affinity with theatre folk and theatricality in general. 

\textit{Mercure} adds another facet to Picasso’s crafting of his allegorical persona: it allows us to triangulate Picasso and Harlequin with the god himself. If Mercury is Harlequin, and Harlequin is Picasso, then Mercury is revealed as Picasso, an incarnation of the artist’s mythologized self. Let us consider Mercury’s characteristic actions, as represented in the ballet: he kills a god then resurrects him, while observing and mocking the gods’ conventional rituals; he steals the treasures of the beauties, afterwards turning them into grotesque parodies; he teaches party guests a new language and a new dance; he then calls down chaos on the old order, effectively consigning it to the underworld and restoring order on his own terms, finally asserting the irrevocability of his accomplishment: it’s done and it can’t be undone. The analogy with

\textsuperscript{195} If my reading is correct, we must assume that Picasso and Massine, both lovers of Commedia, saw the potential in Beaumont’s scenario. Yet none of their published comments mentions that possibility, although Satie, the most vocal of the team, refers to his score in the context of the fairground and the music-hall; \textit{Paris-journal} (May 24, 1924). Perhaps they all thought the connection would be obvious, or perhaps it was their joke on the audience.

\textsuperscript{196} Notably \textit{Au Lapin agile} (1905, Metropolitan Museum of Art) and \textit{The Family of Saltimbanques} (1905, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.).
Picasso’s own career hardly needs explicating. Mercury is a metaphor, as well, for Picasso’s artistic personality: Picasso the trickster, the multifarious, shape-shifting, quicksilver god, always a step or two ahead of the other gods, dazzling and bewildering the mortals, impossible to pin down.\(^\text{197}\) Yve-Alain Bois characterizes Harlequin, with reference to Picasso, as:

> constantly changing, constantly on the move. Agile and crafty, he evades or deflects the rules by his many guises—and from his cornucopia of identities the one likely to emerge at any given moment is rarely the one you would expect. Harlequin is diversity personified. He is, like the devil, plural.\(^\text{198}\)

As is the Mercury of Mercure: he is one head of a three-headed entity, like the dog Cerberus, the other two being Harlequin and Picasso. The concept of such a trinity returns us to Apollinaire’s invocation in his poem “Crépuscule” (1909) of Picasso as “arlequin trismégiste,” or Harlequin Trismegistos, which conflates the artist with Hermes Trismegistos (thrice-great), legendary magician-god of antiquity, origin of the Hermetic tradition, and patron of alchemists. Walter Burkert characterizes Hermes (the Greek deity, from whom the Hellenistic-Egyptian Trismegistos was derived) as the “god of boundaries and the transgression of boundaries…the most uncanny of the boundaries which Hermes crosses is the boundary between the living and the dead.”\(^\text{199}\) As an Olympian who spends more time on earth than most of the gods, he also navigates between the divine and mortal realms. These distinctly Picassoan attributes identify him with Apollinaire’s Arlequin who “having unhooked a star, proffers it with outstretched

\(^{197}\) See Yve-Alain Bois, “Picasso the Trickster,” in Bois (ed.) Picasso Harlequin (Milano: Skira, 2009), 19-35. Bois elaborates the notion of Harlequin as a metaphor for Picasso. He also claims the early Harlequin pictures’ affinity with that figure’s “dark side”—one of his precursors, the medieval Hellequin (31). In Norman French legend, Hellequin was the leader of a demonic band of riders who roamed the countryside, dragging wrongdoers off to hell—a more diabolic version of Mercury’s role as a psychopomp, or conductor of dead souls to Hades.

\(^{198}\) Bois, 19.

hand,” in an act that links heaven with earth, the seen with the unseen.  

Hermes was, of course, the Greek original of the Roman god Mercury; Picasso had been Mercury long before Count Étienne de Beaumont unwittingly asked him to design a ballet based on the character. The ballet Mercure constitutes the mercurial Picasso’s ultimate invention of a persona—one which he also animated and inserted into a narrative both staged and lived.

Soirée’s curtain—originally intended as the curtain for Mercure alone—itself clearly alludes to the prevalence of Commedia figures in modernist painting (especially Picasso’s) at that time as well as to the curtain for Parade. It equally invokes the Commedia’s heritage in French theatrical tradition, and in the French pictorial tradition of Antoine Watteau, Honoré Daumier, Manet and Cézanne; it communicates the rhetoric of France’s Latin heritage for which these figures had become a type of aesthetic shorthand in the work of many artists immediately after the War into the 1920s. The curtain’s image evokes patriotic associations that were well established by 1924, and that its audience would have understood instantly. This perfectly encapsulated the ethos of progressive modernism grounded in national tradition that was Beaumont’s stated intention for Soirée, and the image’s generalized suggestions of poetry, drama, music and dance express his desire for a fusion of these arts in a space of performance. And whatever else it was, Mercure, in the grand tradition of Commedia, was meant to be funny (although perhaps not by Beaumont). Picasso and Massine told Cooper that the ballet was intended to be experimental, “witty and entertaining,” rather than provocative, and that it aimed

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to show that Diaghilev’s brand of classical dance “had become a restrictive convention which deprived ballet of a great range of expressive possibilities.”

Although there is little record of Massine’s choreography—he danced Mercury—it seems clear that he did indeed use his collaboration with Picasso and Satie to escape the restrictions of the Ballets Russes and explore possibilities hitherto unprecedented for ballet; their Cubist aesthetic evidently informed his work as well. Choreography may have functioned partly to provide a setting for the tableaux; the movement vocabulary seems to have been more mime than dance, and was not the focal point of this work in any conventional way. Perhaps the only eyewitness account to give any literal sense of it comes from the critic W. H. Shaw, describing the dance of Chaos as “executed by a group of dancers entirely covered by different colored tights, reaching even over their faces, crawling across the stage, supporting other dancers on their heads and backs.”

Ornella Volta’s reading of the movement vocabulary in Mercure raises another intriguing possibility; pointing out that the subtitle “poses plastiques” emphasizes the ballet’s visual aspect, inscribing Mercure as a whole with Picasso’s personality, she claims that it also indicates that Massine had broken down his choreography into a series of instantaneous still images, evoking…the “tableaux vivants” of the masked balls at rue Duroc…the brief duration of these images (barely twenty or thirty seconds) was dictated by the brevity of the corresponding musical parts: veritable drops of mercury.

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201 Cooper, 56.

202 *The Criterion* (n.d.); quoted in Lincoln Kirstein, *Ballet, Bias and Belief: Three Pamphlets Collected and Other Dance Writings of Lincoln Kirstein* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1983), 16, n. 9. I am grateful to Julia Walker for pointing out the affinity between this description and Jaques-Dalcroze’s production of Glück’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* at his school at Hellerau in 1913—another highly plausible target for *Mercure’s* parody.

203 “Tient compte aussi du fait que Massine avait décomposé sa chorégraphie en une série d’images fixes instantanées, évoquant…les ‘tableaux vivants’ des bals masqués de la rue Duroc…la durée tres courte de ces images (parfois de vingt ou trente secondes à peine) était dictée par la brièveté des parties musicales correspondantes, véritables gouttes de mercure.” Volta, *Satie et la danse*, 78.
I would further argue that the continuous series of rapidly changing poses may have produced a visual effect akin to a series of film stills or a slowed-down reel of cinema footage: a flickering, staccato procession of brief images that coalesced into a narrative stream of mesmerizing retinal effect for the spectator. Milhaud’s comment tends to support this reading:

Here everything is short, collected, concentrated...each dance, each plastic pose forms part of the work, complete in itself, and each one succeeds the next in offering themselves to one another, passing from the most brilliant vivacity to the most exquisite sweetness or the most sober grandeur. 204

I suggest that in Mercure, Picasso and Massine were continuing their experiment, begun in Parade, of attempting to impart a cinematic quality to the staging of live dance, or even of fusing ballet and cinema to produce an entirely new medium. 205 In the process, they were challenging the spectators’ perception and disorienting their experience of the work by introducing effects from a new, technologically driven medium into a traditional, human-driven one. Not only that, they were raising questions about how actual moving bodies could be viewed and understood in relation to virtual ones—especially if they occupied the same physical space. By using rapidly repeating moments of stasis to give an illusion of movement in the same way that film uses a succession of still frames, Massine’s choreography creates a teasing ambiguity between live and recorded performance, analogous to Cubist investigations into the relationship of painterly representation and the material world. In addition to its play with the discontinuous temporalities of film, stage performance, and real life, Mercure sets up another kind of visual dialogue with the cinema. The emphatic flatness of the practicables and the wire outline forms

204 “Là tout est bref, ramassé, concentré...chaque danse, chaque pose plastique forme une partie de l’œuvre, complète en soi, et chacune d’elles se succède en s’offrant l’une à l’autre, passant de la verve la plus brillante à la douceur la plus exquise ou à la grandeur la plus sobre.” Darius Milhaud, “Chronique musicale,” in Les Feuilles libres (Sept-Oct, 1924), quoted in Volta, Satie et la danse, 78.

205 Bellow discusses of the influence of film on Parade, 87-127.
mimic the flat movie screen that reduces all its objects to a uniform two dimensions. Interacting with the corporeal bodies of the dancers, these planar elements stage a Cubist-style confrontation between reality and its image. Both these strategies recall Nijinsky: respectively, his notoriously jerky choreography for *Rite of Spring* (1913); and the flatness of his staging with the constrained, profiled movement vocabulary he created in *L’Après-midi d’un faune* (1912), which the critic Charles Méryel described as a “cinematography of bas-reliefs.” Such references to the Ballets Russes’ repertoire argues that more credit is due to Massine in planning the look and the effect of *Mercure* than he is usually given.

Juliet Bellow identifies *Parade*’s lineage in “a longstanding theatrical trope in which uncanny human replacements such as puppets or automata share the stage with their live counterparts;” these include the classical ballet *Coppélia* and the Ballets Russes’ *Petrouchka* (1911). The Russians’ *La Boutique fantasque* and, as has been mentioned, the Ballets Suédois’ *La Création du monde* were more contemporary instances, as was, in *Soirée* itself, Massine’s *Premier amour.* *Mercure* belongs to the same trope, with its cardboard Graces (transposed breasts and all) and Cerberus, and its moulded wire horse and chariot. Bellow goes on to cite *Parade* as Picasso’s contribution to a “transitional moment in the histories of film, painting and dance, when modern viewers grappled with the relation of illusionistic space to that of the real world.” In *Mercure*’s play with humans and their simulacra, Picasso—and Massine—go a stage further than *Parade* and its other antecedents did, paradoxically using real bodies to simulate illusory ones and still poses to counterfeit movement. *Mercure* thus offers its own

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206 From a review of the ballet, quoted in Bellow, 91, no source given.

207 Bellow, 92. The Italian Futurists were engaged in experiments in a similar vein at the same moment; the influence of Futurism on Picasso’s designs for *Parade* is discussed in chapter three.

208 Ibid., 118.
unique inquiry into the conversation surrounding the relationship of art, technology, and live performance, at a time when many artists in a variety of media were experimenting along these lines. Such intermedial ambiguities would have disrupted the spectators’ experience, disturbing their expectations and interfering with their sense of what they were seeing. This effect of defamiliarization, produced by “a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities” as Breton put it (quoting the poet Pierre Reverdy) in his first Manifesto of Surrealism, is precisely what the Surrealists were seeking in a work of art. Their presumed recognition of it in Mercure would have been a major reason why they admired the piece.

If this was indeed the case, it is hardly surprising that Mercure’s cinematic aspect was lost on its audience; there was no direct thematic reference to the movies here as there had been in Parade, and neither Picasso nor Massine was much given to explaining his intentions. Further, Mercure would have powerfully resisted assimilation within a conventional balletic mode, which would account for many viewers’ hostility to it. However, the possibility of such experimentation elevates Mercure’s status as a work of avant-garde innovation, and the sense that something genuinely new was being attempted may have helped to shape the strongly positive reactions to the ballet from other artists, as well as the Surrealists.

In its integration of choreography, music, and art, its irreverent take on classicism, its allusion to the Commedia and the cinema, its suggestions of more abstruse experiments of several kinds, and its hints of semi-obscure meanings beyond the literal, the ballet was indeed a strikingly original work of avant-garde theatre as well as a statement of artistic position. On the lighter side, it was also a potpourri of contemporary references and in-jokes—perhaps more than

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209 André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism (1924),” in Manifestoes of Surrealism, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 20. Surrealism later referred to this effect as depaysement, and it became one of the movement’s canonical terms.
Beaumont himself was aware of. As well as the parodying of Cocteau as Mercury, and a possible reference to Léger’s constructions for the Ballets Suédois, *Mercure* took aim at Wagner (the bathing Graces as Rhinemaidens), Paul Poiret, Diaghilev, and Beaumont himself. The tableau of Bacchus’ feast burlesqued the Count’s costume balls, with an obvious stab at Poiret’s *Festin de Bacchus* of 1912, and pilloried the frivolous pretensions of self-styled smart society and its nonsensical entertainments. It might not be too great a stretch to read the abduction of Proserpina assisted by Chaos as a piquant comment by its creators on the shotgun marriage of art and aristobourgeois aspiration that *Soirée* represented, and Destiny’s final decree (“that everything is predestined and there is nothing more to be done”) as an ironic acceptance of that state of affairs—a provocation to be sure. But *Mercure*, as we have seen, was more than “an amorphous farrago of elaborate skits…to settle…scores in the artistic community,” as one present-day author dismisses it, even if some of its contemporary critics thought so.  

As the most hyped piece in the program, *Mercure* provoked strong and contradictory reactions: the most common, from the general public, was the suspicion that the ballet was a form of emperor’s new clothes. It was received with excitement by the artistic community, but mainly with bewilderment by the critics, who found it obscure and disappointing, and with hostility by at least one dancer. Lydia Lopokova was cast as Proserpina but declined to participate, claiming “Mercury to me seems a decadence…no ballet, no parody, but somehow a stupid fake” meant to “pull the noses of the public.” There were some who did get it, however: Gilson MacCormack wrote: “The ballet fully came up to our expectations. It is humorous in

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210 Foulkes, 120-21. Such judgments suffer from the misprision that a humorous intention disqualifies a work from being art.

211 Lopokova to Keynes, June 15, 1924.
content; and the fantastic humor of Picasso’s décor and costumes is quite equaled by the
music…and the choreography…of Massine was full of whimsicality. The fantasy was admirably
danced by all concerned.”212 The French critics were less impressed than the English: “there are
only two possible explanations: insanity, or a desire to mock the public,” and the décor: “an
impoverished, bedraggled, infantile extravagance against which we are not even allowed to
protest.”213 Cyril Beaumont (no relation), reviewing its revival by the Ballets Russes in London
in 1927, found “the whole thing … incredibly stupid, vulgar, and pointless” (fig. 2.70).214 The
cartoonist Louis Touchagues satirized Mercure and its Surrealist protesters as “Olympic Events
at La Cigale” in Paris-Journal of June 20, 1924 (fig. 2.71); these included “long distance race
with floats” (the Three Graces and their breasts), “middle distance race Ingres against Dada,” and
“automobile race: Mercury on a scooter,” heckled from on high by a “surprise race referee:
Breton and d.r.a.g.o.n” [sic] (Breton riding a fire-breathing dragon representing his co-agitator,
Louis Aragon).215 One of the highest—and perhaps the most perceptive—accolades, however,
came from the dragon himself: Aragon wrote “nothing stronger has ever been brought to the
stage…it transcends Cubism as Cubism transcended realism.”216

212 Quoted in Banes, “Soirée de Paris,” 91.

213 R. Brunel: “… que deux explications possibles: l’aliénation mentale ou le dessein avéré de se moquer du public” (June 17, 1924); G. Pioch: “… d’une indigence, d’un débrayé, d’une enfantine extravagance qu’il n’est même pas permis de railler.” No journal sources are given; quoted in Bertrand, 75.

214 Quoted in Cooper, 56.

215 “Les epreuves Olympiques à la Cigale;” “course de fond avec flotteurs;” “course demi-fond Ingres sur Dada;” “course d’automobiles: Mercure sur trottinette;” “arbitre course surprise: Breton et d.r.a.g.o.n.” Paris-Journal (June 20, 1924); BnF, Collection Rondel, 8-RO-12581.

216 Aragon, “Pour arrêter les bavardages,” Le Journal littéraire (June 21, 1924), 10; quoted in Baldessari, 20. Green argues in this context that the Surrealists by now saw and admired Picasso as “an artist who had moved beyond Cubism.” 255.
Aragon’s and Breton’s enthusiasm, such as it was, was directed solely at Picasso’s contribution, and risked being swamped by the general brouhaha surrounding the event. The motivation for the protest against *Mercure* by the Dada-Surrealists needs to be unpacked; it lay in a complicated web of ideological opposition, personal animosity, and artistic difference, as will become apparent in chapter 4. Massine wrote that the protestors were “enraged by our Cubist production,” and Breton himself described them as “exaspérés,” but this glosses over the reality.\(^{217}\) A major motive originated in the factional rivalries within the Paris Dada group.

Breton and his friends were bitterly opposed to Tzara’s faction, which included Satie. The poet and the composer had publicly humiliated Breton three years previously, at the mock trial of the writer Maurice Barrès, and they had feuded ever since; the *Mercure* protest was part of Breton’s revenge, intended to demonstrate his support for Picasso, whom he lionized as the only genuinely avant-garde artist, at Satie’s expense.\(^{218}\) Breton and Aragon had other motives too, as will be discussed in the next chapter: they opposed the co-option of art by commerce, exemplified here by Beaumont’s brand of aristocratic dilettantism (as they saw it), which they also despised on class grounds. That this was occurring in the context of ballet and music—notably anything comic—which they both personally loathed, especially infuriated them.\(^{219}\) In return, Satie, a meticulous organizer of his own material, had nothing but contempt for the Surrealist preoccupation with chance, automatism, and subconscious processes. The Dada-Surrealists disapproved of the way that Picasso, for whom they had the highest admiration, was,

\(^{217}\) Massine, 160; Breton, cited in Bertrand, 74. “Exaspéré” may be translated as exasperated or infuriated.

\(^{218}\) This oversimplifies a complex network of feuds and allegiances. See Matthew Gale, *Dada & Surrealism* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 173-205, for a deeper account; and from a Satie viewpoint, Orledge, *Satie*, 234-5.

\(^{219}\) Breton’s detestation and incomprehension of music are well documented and will be discussed more fully in chapter 4. For a thorough examination of the complex relationship between Surrealism and music, see Arfouilloux.
so they felt, allowing himself to be used by an elitist, state-sanctioned enterprise like \textit{Soirée}, “for the profit of the international aristocracy.”

Breton attempted to clarify and separate his Picasso-worship from his vendetta against Satie and Beaumont in an article, “Hommage à Picasso,” in \textit{Paris-journal} of June 20, 1924, signed by fourteen artists, musicians, and poets (see Appendix F). Printed immediately below the Touchagues “Olympic events” cartoon (which may have slightly sabotaged its earnest intent) this homily pledged the signatories’ “deep and total admiration for Picasso, who, scorning consecration, has never ceased to create troubling modernity at the highest level of expression,” and who, moreover, “appears today the eternal personification of youth and the undisputed master of the situation.”

The Surrealists were anxious to gain Picasso’s approval in order to give credibility to their own project, but they also wanted him free of the aristocratic associations he had accrued since his marriage to Olga Kokhlova and his immersion in Parisian high society. Thus their protest was somewhat conflicted. Picasso himself did not take sides, being above the Dadas’ feuds; he remained calm and amused throughout the episode, although secretly pleased by the attention.

Richardson suggests that Picasso in turn needed Breton’s

\begin{itemize}
\item “Notre profonde et totale admiration pour Picasso qui, au mépris des consécration, n’a jamais cessé de créer l’inquiétude moderne et d’en fournir toujours l’expression la plus haute;” “apparaît aujourd’hui la personification éternelle de la jeunesse et le maître incontestable de la situation.” The signatories were: Louis Aragon, Georges Auric, Jacques-André Boiffard, André Breton, Georges Delteil, Robert Desnos, Max Ernst, Francis Gérard, Max Morise, Pierre Naville, Benjamin Perèt, Francis Poulenc, Philippe Soupault, and Roger Vitrac. The letter was also published in Picabia’s journal \textit{391}, 18 (July 1924): 3.
\item Lopokova describes Picasso’s equanimity in other trying circumstances during \textit{Soirée}: “He is also discontent how they treat his ideas and although they run ‘Picasso, Picasso’ they do not do what he tells them about his things, but he is wise and smiles and so do I.” To Keynes, May 19, 1924. Michael Fitzgerald cites Picasso’s own clipping of the “Hommage” letter, which he kept for the whole of his life; \textit{Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-Century Art} (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1995), 138.
\end{itemize}
support in case of a challenge to his own “leadership of the avant-garde” by Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), so it appears that a delicate entente was being negotiated beneath all the rhetoric. Picabia was unimpressed by Breton and his ambition to lead a new movement; he was collaborating with Satie on Relâche for the Ballets Suédois just then and sprang to the composer’s defence in Paris-journal, accusing the “pseudo-Dadaists” of opportunism. Calling Mercure Satie’s “triumph,” and querying “this wild admiration for Picasso,” he opined that “Picasso really doesn’t need defending any more, he was already famous and had found his place when Aragon and Breton were making their first communion!” Their demonstration, he mocked, “serves their little political ends, which consist entirely of cheap publicity.”

Or perhaps there was more to it. Michael Fitzgerald argues persuasively, from the perspective of Picasso’s reputation and its marketing, that Mercure was pivotal in resurrecting the artist’s somewhat tarnished position at the head of the avant-garde and in launching a fresh, more spontaneous later Cubist style in his art. This latter he identifies with the imagery of the stage curtain, and its separation of line from colored form (see p. 185). Picasso’s enfant terrible status had certainly suffered from his association with Diaghilev, Beaumont, and the fashionable Paris elite, and he was accused by some critics of having sold out to the establishment. Breton and Aragon, claims Fitzgerald, were actively promoting Picasso’s restoration by publicly isolating him from his mondain milieu, seeking to advance him and his alleged new style as a radical departure that they could harness to their cause. Fitzgerald’s thesis concurs with my own contention that Mercure represents a critical moment in the realignment of the cultural politics of

223 Richardson, Picasso, vol. 3, 262.


225 Fitzgerald, 136-41.
the avant-garde. I am not convinced, however, that the ballet’s aesthetic was as transformative for Picasso’s art as Fitzgerald believes. The innovations showcased in *Mercure* were present in his work before its staging; what the ballet did was to supply a provocative, alternative forum—one he had used previously and understood—for presenting them to a larger audience than he might have reached through a dealer’s exhibition. I also believe that Fitzgerald gives the Surrealists too much credit for trying to be helpful. It seems clear that they were working to maneuver Picasso into position as the figurehead of a resurgent avant-garde consisting solely of themselves and their followers, but their actions were motivated chiefly with an eye to their own interests, not his—as seemed evident to their contemporaries.

The French art historian Anne Bertrand argues, certainly correctly, that the Surrealists’ demonstration compromised *Mercure*’s reception, diverting critical attention from its aesthetic merit to it as a source of scandal and controversy. The production’s legacy, at least partly, has been that it supplied a platform for Breton and Aragon to assert their position in relation to the current art scene several months ahead of the official foundation of Surrealism in October 1924, and the publication of the first *Surrealist Manifesto* in the first edition of the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* in October, 1924.226 These writers had already been asserting themselves and their ideas energetically in several more esoteric arenas for some time, and it was only their “Hommage à Picasso” that revealed their position to the wider public; the actual demonstration, as far as the audience was aware, was a confusing outburst by unknown agitators. Their intervention, however, had important consequences: in the short term it forced the closure of the whole season two days early, and in the long term it supervened *Mercure* itself in historical memory, ensuring Picasso’s ballet a place in the record of radical modernist expression less for

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226 Bertrand, 75-76.
its own significance than as an unintentional platform for the proclamation of a new, revolutionary avant-garde.

2.9 Epilogue

Soirée de Paris was not a success—critically, financially, or for the artists involved in its production. The Count lost heavily on the season, and he cancelled plans to take it to the London Coliseum theatre the following year. Massine revived several of his pieces in the 1930s for the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo, but his hopes that Soirée would help launch his own repertory company were disappointed. Even Picasso’s innovations in Mercure were all but forgotten, although he reworked some of the formal experimentation of his designs in his painting and sculpture. Diaghilev’s revival of Mercure in Paris and London on June 2 and 11, 1927, was a failure, and the ballet has never been restaged in its original form (fig. 2.70)—surprisingly, considering it was such a rich source of associative material. The contributions of Satie, Milhaud, Braque, Cocteau, Tzara, and the rest left no lasting mark. Soirée de Paris, despite its brilliant cast of collaborators, its wide-ranging eclecticism and disjunctive form, its aesthetic innovations, its range of contemporary and historical association, and the ambition and

227 In July 1924, he was in discussions with F. Zenon, a Russian promoter, regarding a possible U.S. tour. Zenon dissuaded Beaumont from the idea, owing to his lack of a prima ballerina “with a world reputation,” and a “sufficiently extensive” repertoire for an American audience. Letters between Beaumont and Zenon, July 26, 1924; IMEC: BMT 10.8.

228 Massine completely reset the work for Diaghilev’s revival, claiming to have forgotten the original choreography. Mercure has been revived several more times in different forms: by former Ballets Russes principal Adolphe Bolm in Chicago in 1926 under the title Parnassus on Montmartre; by Frederick Ashton for Marie Rambert’s Ballet Club (now Ballet Rambert) in London, probably in the late 1920s or early 1930s; again for the company’s diamond jubilee in 1987 by the Australian choreographer Ian Spink; and by Lorca Massine, the choreographer’s son, at Venice’s historic Teatro La Fenice in 1980. In each case, all or some of the choreography, staging, décor, libretto and even the orchestration were re-imagined. See also Volta, Satie et la danse, 80.
drama of its brief existence, proved to be not the memorably definitive event of French modernism that should have been expected, but a piece of ephemera recalled mainly in contemporary accounts and archival traces.

The legacy of Soirée de Paris was that it heralded a pivotal point for an idea of avant-garde culture in postwar France that tied advanced art to wealth and privilege, with their ideological allegiances to nation and heritage. The moment at Mercure’s premiere when the representatives of that ideology were confronted by those of the ideology that challenged it marked the undisputed emergence of a newly energized and motivated generation of artists, determined to seize the art’s trajectory from the established groups and individuals who had defined it since the war and to reorient it in unimagined ways. After and perhaps partly because of Soirée, the vanguard belonged to artists with no allegiance to elite status or tradition, and a powerful interest in subverting them, to make a new world that owed nothing to the old one.
Chapter Three

Embodying the Avant-Garde: Dance in Futurism and Dada

Dance has always taken its rhythms and its forms from life.

—F.T. Marinetti, *Manifesto of the Futurist Dance*¹

3.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have argued that Count Étienne de Beaumont was a more complicated and significant figure in the conflicted world of the Parisian avant-gardes than has been formerly recognized. However, we must now leave him as an individual actor in his milieu, allowing him to stand for a particular aspect of it—a cultural value system characterized by an elitist and reactionary approach to its own promotion of new art—and look more closely at the historical context of the artistic environment within which he sought to dominate. Central to Beaumont’s cultural value system and therefore anathema to Surrealism was dance, which forms the subject of the next two chapters.

The fracas at Mercure, a ballet performance, was no random outburst; it was part of the Surrealist campaign to promote their agenda of revolution: an overthrow of the social, intellectual and psychic norms of the contemporary world. Their protests at theatrical performances were a calculated strategy. They not only earned publicity by disrupting high profile public events, hurting the Surrealists’ designated enemies who produced and attended these events, they also demonstrated the group’s rejection of all forms of theatre itself, especially

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music and dance. That they did this through a performative act, in a manner that was itself highly theatrical, effectively upstaged the targets by turning their own methods against them, making the protestors the focus of the audience’s attention. The rejection that all this represented was notable for its break with precedent in the historical avant-gardes. Live performance as a means through which to launch their movements, to capture and convert the public imagination, to propagate new ideas, to provoke the reviled bourgeoisie and publicly scorn its values had been an essential weapon in the arsenals of Futurism in Italy and Russia, Expressionism in Germany, and Dada everywhere. However, this was not to be the case for Surrealism, a movement that opposed itself to not just the stultifying conventions of postwar society, but to pre-existing avant-garde cultures as well. In common with Beaumont and his circle of aristo-bourgeois modernists, these avant-gardes allocated a vital role in their performance ethic to dance. To prepare for an analysis of dance’s rejection by the avant-garde in chapter 4, the present chapter will investigate its crucial function in Surrealism’s immediate precursors: Italian Futurism, and Zurich and Paris Dada.

3.2 Futurist Dance in Paris and Italy, 1909-1930

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) published Manifesto of the Futurist Dance in July 1917, six years after his publication of the Founding and Manifesto of Futurism in 1909. Dance occupied a more ambiguous position in the Futurist movement than it did in Dada, and it took the Futurists some time to become aware of its potential; still, it has received considerable critical attention, some of which asks whether it is even possible to speak of a Futurist dance—an
indication of the notion’s slipperiness. The following survey of dance in Futurist theory and practice examines intersections of various kinds, and discusses the problematic nature of the inquiry. Marinetti wrote his dance manifesto not from a choreographic perspective, but from a martial one. “Futurist dance,” he announced, “can have no other purpose than to immensify heroism, master of metals, and to fuse with the divine machines of speed and war.” Marinetti applies to dance the dynamic kinetics enunciated in the original Futurist Manifesto, in which he extols “the beauty of speed…the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap,” and the poet’s duty to “swell the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements,” all ideas with relevance for a theory of dance, but which had not previously been articulated specifically for that purpose.

Given the centrality of movement and theories of dynamism in Futurist ideology, dance should have been a natural partner in Futurist practice. However, prior to the First World War the Futurists had little understanding or experience of either the traditional ballet that dominated the Italian stage (which they rejected as “passéist”) or of modern “free dance” experiments in other countries. In his Dance Manifesto of 1917, Marinetti critiques dance past and present, noting approvingly those who have led the way in throwing off tradition and creating movement styles for the modern era, and rejecting those bound to passéism and sentimentality. The former include Nijinsky’s “pure geometry…free of mimicry and without sexual stimulation,” and the Ballets Russes’ “perfect and original expression of the essential strength of the race,” as well as Émile

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4 F.T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (February 20, 1909), in ibid., 39-44; here, 41.
Jaques-Dalcroze, but with reservations. He dismisses Isadora Duncan’s “childishly feminine” emotionalism, declaring that “we Futurists prefer Louie [sic] Fuller and the cakewalk of the Negroes” for their “utilization of electric light and mechanisms.” Characterizing dance in terms of painting, Marinetti claims that Duncan is too Impressionist, whereas Nijinsky constructs forms like Cézanne, and under Picasso’s Cubist influence, “a dance of geometricized volumes was created, almost independent of the music,” but he gives no instance of the latter. However, the Futurists had no idea of dance as an autonomous art form, nor any formal sense of how the style or technique of a Futurist dance might appear. When dance occurred in their early years, it was performed by the Futurists themselves, integrated into the overall fabric of their violently provocative, political-theatrical serate (soirées)—events that served as vehicles for the dissemination of Futurist polemics and the physical expression of Futurist ideas about art and performance. Marinetti was strongly attracted to the music hall and variety theatre with their boisterous dance choruses, mass audiences, topical themes, and energetic exchange between spectators and stage action. His manifesto “The Variety Theatre” (1913), calls for a new theatre born from “electricity” and modelled on the cinema, whose “new elements of astonishment,” will create “the Futurist marvelous,’ produced by modern mechanics” and will include “jugglers, ballerinas, gymnasts…spiral cyclones of dancers spinning on the points of their feet.” Marinetti believed that theatre was the only medium capable of stimulating the Italian public; as the chief weapon in the culture war the Futurists were waging against bourgeois complacency

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5 Marinetti, “Futurist Dance,” 137-8. The cakewalk was a syncopated, rhythmic dance invented by African-American slaves, incorporating bouncing marching steps, hops and kicks. To the Futurists (who will have seen it on film) it must have looked attractively puppet-like and mechanical.

6 Marinetti cannot have seen Dada “Cubist” dances in Zurich as he did not visit the Dadaists during their residence there, however, the two groups were in contact so he may have known of them.

and stifling tradition, it enabled “the brutal entry of life into art.” Like Dada’s founder Hugo Ball and his mentor Wassily Kandinsky, they fervently believed in the integration of art and life through theatre as a means to renew society, transform art, and liberate the individual; unlike them, the Futurists tied this aim to a call for political revolution.

The first and most important career dancer to engage seriously with Futurism was the French poet and painter Valentine de Saint-Point (1875-1953), who turned to dance to express her vitalist philosophy and to translate her own poetry into plastic form. Saint-Point met and became romantically involved with Marinetti in Paris around 1906, while performing her dances and readings at her own and then at early Futurist soirées. She published her Manifesto of the Futurist Woman in 1912 (fig. 3.1) as a riposte to Marinetti’s blatant anti-feminism in the first Futurist manifesto, where he notoriously claimed, “we wish to glorify war…and the scorn of woman.” Asserting that a “complete being” is “composed of feminine elements and masculine elements at the same time,” Saint-Point forcefully calls on women to become more virile, “even to the point of brutality,” in order to renew the race, “corrupted by its femininity.” Despite her anti-Marinetti stance, she declares that “Futurism, with all of its exaggerations, is right,” exalting women as Furies, Amazons, and ferocious warriors. Saint-Point’s Futurist feminine is conflicted: while claiming a place for women in Futurism’s misogynist pantheon of heroes, she locates women’s strength in their sexuality and fertility. Although she believed that women should reject tradition and live according to their own desires, her idiosyncratic view of sexual equality was at odds with contemporary feminism, which, she writes, is “a political error” destined to make

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8 Marinetti, “In tema del futurismo,” 1915, quoted in Berghaus, Theatre, 101. He claimed that “90% of Italians go to the theatre, whereas only 10% read books.”
“woman…lose all of her fertile power.” She further elaborated these ideas in her *Futurist Manifesto of Lust*, published in 1913. Recognizing a congenial ideology, Marinetti supported Saint-Point at first, inviting her to give readings and performances in Italy, and including her in the directorate of the Futurist movement under “Azione femminile” (feminine action) in 1913. In Paris the same year, she staged *La Métachorie* (Metachoric Dances), a multi-media, synesthetic spectacle which represented the apotheosis of her career, and which she repeated in New York in 1917. Saint-Point broke with Futurism in 1914, and subsequently pursued her own increasingly esoteric path before converting to Islam and retiring to Egypt in the 1920s.

The dances of *La Métachorie*, based on Saint-Point’s kinesthetic theory of *Métachorie*, published a month later in *Montjoie!* the journal edited by her lover, the poet Ricciotto Canudo, were intended as *danses idéistes*, dances of ideas rather than of psychology, narrative, or musical interpretation. Disdaining the sensuality and emotionalism of Duncan, she sought to express “the spirit which animates my poems” in a corporeal language—*idéisme*—that embodied a synthesis of idea and feeling, as part of a performance which itself synthesized poetry, theory, dance, music, lighting, visual art and even scent. *Métachorie* literally means taking dance beyond physical choreography into the realms of intellect and spirit; for Saint-Point this was to be achieved by engaging the viewer’s response on several levels simultaneously, to an extent not

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10 *La Métachorie*’s single Paris performance was at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées’ Salle Léon Poirier on December 20, 1913. The New York performance took place at the Metropolitan Opera House on April 3, 1917.


previously attempted. She sought a mode of expression that, in line with Futurist aims, was mechanical and impersonal, conveyed strength and force, and produced “a union of all the arts:”

A geometric figure of a certain meaning, an atmosphere, a costume, a veiled face, a voice emanating from an invisible body, precise movements, rigorous attitudes… Instead of an instinctive and sensual dance, my dream is of a dance which ranks equal with all the other arts.13

Her conception of the dances, however, owed at least as much to Symbolism and to her interest in Theosophy and Greek tragedy as to Futurism: Saint-Point believed in form as the bearer of esoteric meaning.14 Her face veiled to essentialize, desexualize, and de-gender her message, and clad in a variety of costumes from Greek drapery reminiscent of Duncan and diaphanous veils echoing Loïe Fuller to oriental harem dress and medieval armor (figs. 3.2, 3.3), Saint-Point performed dances on the themes of Love, War, and “Atmosphère”, to music by Claude Debussy, Erik Satie, Maurice Ravel, Florent Schmitt, the Futurist Francesco Balilla Pratella, and Maurice Droeghmans, who conducted the orchestra.15 Adding an element of modernist self-reflexivity to the performance, the dances were preceded by a lecture on her ideas delivered by the actor Georges Saillard; another actor, Edouard de Max, recited her poems from the wings as accompaniment. A backdrop of arcane-looking geometric figures, electrically illuminated in changing symbolic colors, and exotic “parfums de Bichara” wafting through the stalls completed the desired synesthetic fusion.16 What then were the ideas of these danses


14 This seems obvious from all accounts of La Métachorie, yet many scholars include it uncritically in a canon of Futurist performance. Nell Andrew argues for a more complex and nuanced reading in Bodies of the Avant-Garde, 81-146.

15 The “War” dance was devised jointly with Marinetti. Satie composed Les Pantins dansent (The Puppets Dance) a “poème ironique,” especially for Saint-Point. See Potter, A Parisian Composer, 221.

16 From the program for La Métachorie, December 20, 1913. Reproduced in Andrew, Bodies, 234.
idéistes? Mirella Bentivoglio suggests that Saint-Point aimed to personify “the various facets of the feminine psyche;” Nell Andrew argues that she used her multi-sensory performance ambitiously to “achieve a transcendent goal for all of art;” for Gabriele Brandstetter, she was “presenting the body as thought.”¹⁷ Mark Franko claims her work of “de-essentializing the feminine” in the Futurist woman’s sexuality uncouples “male-gendered music from a female-gendered dance,” freeing the latter by replacing sensation with Idea.¹⁸ Certainly, _La Métachorie_ was Saint-Point’s supreme artistic manifesto, imbued with her politics: a text translated and redistributed through a variety of media, in whose interplay was produced the multi-vocal articulation of her own idealistic notions of art’s—and woman’s—potential.

Whatever her intentions, the critics were cynical and predictably misogynist: one called _La Métachorie_ a “séance of Swedish gymnastics in Merovingian costume,” and complained that “futurist perfumes” choked the spectators; another criticized Saint-Point’s incompetence as a dancer and her derivative movement style, remarking that “dance plays only a feeble role” in her display.¹⁹ She seems to have borrowed from Duncan and Dalcroze, alternating fluid, rhythmic gestures with precise, geometric ones in a gymnastic-style routine; publicity photographs show her striking sharply angular poses. She anticipated the Zurich Dada dancers in her androgynous masking and in the juxtaposing of movement and the spoken word. However the latter was done in a cognitively associative manner, not in the direct, visceral style of the Dadaist Sophie Taeuber, where the sound generated the gesture, as discussed later in this chapter. Although she

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¹⁷ Bentivoglio and Zoccoli, 10; Andrew, _Bodies_, 82-3; Brandstetter, 307.

¹⁸ Franko, 21, 22.

aimed to embody the “cerebral essence” of dance, Saint-Point’s lofty ideals generated no distinct style, and she inspired no followers.\textsuperscript{20}

Was this Futurist dance? In that it was performed by a dancer at that time associated with the movement, and in the absence of anything else until then fitting the description, it both was and was not.\textsuperscript{21} Saint-Point’s work must have had some enduring relevance for Futurism, since her War dance was revived in Rome on January 30, 1923, by the Futurist dancer Jia Ruskaja with sets by Enrico Prampolini (1894-1956), a fact that has been ignored by most scholars.\textsuperscript{22}

What \textit{La Métachorie} shared with other non-Futurist experiments in avant-garde movement was a conviction that dance, especially in the context of either a synthesis or a simultaneity of several arts, offered both the performer and the audience access to realities beyond everyday experience. For Saint-Point, this was \textit{idéisme}: the “cérébrisme of the body,” the revelation of Ideas.\textsuperscript{23} For others, transcendence released the soul, the emotions, the hyper-alert senses, or the unconscious.

Brandstetter argues that Saint-Point’s “designation of dance as the pivotal and framing art form” for the other arts in her intermedial theatre went beyond the \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} and constituted the true avant-garde significance of her work.\textsuperscript{24} Although her metaphysics were inconsistent with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Veroli, “Futurist Aesthetic,” (2000), 427.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Saint-Point’s disenchantment with Futurism was mutual: in his dance manifesto of 1917 Marinetti dismissed her work as “passéist…abstractions danced but static, arid, cold, emotionless.” Even so, the program for the restaged \textit{Métachorie} in New York in 1917 shows that she expanded the “Poèmes de la guerre,” (war) including a “Hommage aux morts,” (homage to the dead) to occupy the entire program, although she had left the movement by then. Berghaus, “Dance and the Futurist Woman,” 42, n.15.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} At the Teatro degli Independenti. Berghaus alone (“Futurist Woman,” 42, n.15), mentions this performance in passing in a footnote. It seems surprising that it has not received more attention, since it speaks to the contested issue of the extent to which Saint-Point’s work can be called Futurist.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{Cérébrisme} was a doctrine articulated by Ricciotto Canudo in his \textit{Manifeste de l’art cérébriste}, which Saint-Point adapted for dance: it called for a pure form of art that stimulated the mind and not the emotions or senses.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Brandstetter, 305, 307.
\end{itemize}
Futurist materialism, the heroic and anti-naturalistic aspects of Saint-Point’s ideas helped prepare the way for the Futurist project to reimagine dance along mechanical lines, and to reinvent the dancing body as a machine.

Marinetti opens the *Manifesto of the Futurist Dance* by declaring “dance has always extracted its rhythms and its forms from life.” His demand that “one must imitate the movements of machines with gestures…thereby preparing the fusion of man with the machine, to achieve the metallicity of the Futurist dance” which will be accompanied by “organized noises” instead of “incurably passéist” music, is his prescription for a dance that abandons tradition and reflects the “rhythms and forms” of industrial modernity.\(^{25}\) Marinetti’s notion of dance conceived it as a function of real, dynamic, industrialized *life*, as opposed to bourgeois aestheticism that insisted on its elevated status as art, and consequently separated it from life. The Roman Futurists—Giacomo Balla (1871-1958), Fortunato Depero (1892-1960) and Prampolini—had been exploring the potential of mechanization in performance, including dance, since before the War. Balla and Depero visualized “art performances:” art in four dimensions that eliminated the boundaries between objects, scenic architectural space, and actors/dancers, seeking an innovatory, abstract, and dynamic concept of live artistic experience that utterly repudiated naturalism. They aspired not to represent the perceptible world, but to recreate it on Futurist principles.\(^{26}\) Prampolini published *Futurist Scenography and Choreography* in 1915: in it he proposed an entirely new, autonomous artwork of the stage that would integrate movement, sound and light with scenery and costuming, creating a total environment that cast the décor as

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\(^{25}\) “La danza a sempre estratto dalla vita i suoi ritme e le sue forme,” Marinetti, “Futurist Dance,” [http://www.homolaicus.com](http://www.homolaicus.com); and Flint, ed., 138. Flint translates only extracts from Marinetti’s full text of the manifesto; translations of other portions are my own, as indicated.

the performer, and automating the human element, or effacing it altogether. In 1916, Depero exhibited costume designs for *Mimismagia* (fig. 3.4), an unrealized and possibly hypothetical project, of interest for its revolutionary approach to fusing choreography and costume. The dancers’ bodies would be deformed by mechanized costumes involving light and sound sources, which their own movements would transform onstage into “living plastic complexes;” these were quite likely inspired by the example of Loïe Fuller, whom the Futurists admired.27

This subordination of the performer to the scenography would appear to leave little space for dance as it was usually understood. Nonetheless Serge Diaghilev, based in Rome with his company during the War, was vitally interested in the Futurists’ experiments, and sought a collaboration; the result was his commission to Balla to design the staging for Stravinsky’s orchestral work *Feu d’Artifice* (Fireworks) in 1917.28 In this audiovisual “choreography of the set itself”, human dancers were replaced by large painted geometric structures, illuminated from within and without, as dancing beams of colored light animated Stravinsky’s music, representing “the ‘fireworks’ state of mind” that it induced (as Balla told Massine), in the first ever purely technological ballet (fig. 3.5).29 Seeing great potential in his association with the Futurists, Diaghilev next engaged Depero to design the ballet *Le Chant du rossignol* (*The Song of the Nightingale*), for the spring 1917 Paris season, but ultimately rejected his designs. The reasons are unclear, although Diaghilev probably decided that Depero’s proposals were not viable. The artist’s notes and photographs reveal that he planned to encase the dancers in stiff carapaces with “headlight-eyes / megaphone-mouts, funnel-ears / in movement and transformation /

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27 Depero, quoted by Daniela Fonti, “Fortunato Depero,” in Macel and Lavigne, 130.

28 Presented at the Teatro Costanzi, Rome, on April 12, 1917.

mechanical clothes,” distorting, abstracting, and dehumanizing their appearances, so that “interest will center, above all, on the movement of volumes.” (fig. 3.7)30 His costumes would have seriously limited the dancers’ capacity to move, and the “stage machinery”—a tangle of fantastic, industrial-sized flowers and foliage (fig. 3.6)—appears from photographs to have overrun the performance space.31

Depero’s association with Diaghilev lasted through the Roman spring of 1917 as he worked closely with Picasso, devising and constructing the Manager characters for Parade (fig. 2.52) which opened in Paris on May 18. Parade’s debt to Futurism is apparent not only in its Managers—giant marionettes crossed with Cubist sculptures propelled by concealed humans—but also in its anti-naturalistic scenario, the mechanistic parts of its choreography, its popular variety theatre context and cinematic references, and in Satie’s score with its clashing street noises. The influence of Futurist ideas on staging had a pervasive effect on avant-garde dance theatre in Paris in the 1920s, and is evident, to name a few, in Jean Cocteau’s Le Boeuf sur le toit, the Ballets Suédois’ La Création du monde, and in Mercure. Other potential collaborations between Diaghilev and the Futurists also came to naught, but one worth mentioning is Balla’s Macchina tipografica (Printing Press), a mechanical ballet or “mimic action” he offered to the impresario in 1915. In this scenario, twelve dancers mimic “the soul of the individual pieces of a rotary press,” moving in machine rhythm while violently declaiming “onomatopoeic sounds and verbalizations.”32 Balla’s sketch of stick figures with arms spinning like wheels and pumping


31 Photographs reproduced in Kirby and Kirby, pp. 106-9; and Belli, 17; “‘machines’ scéniques”, Fonti, 130.

32 From the account of the Futurist architect Virgilio Marchi, La Stripe (March 1928), 159-63; quoted in Kirby, 96.
like pistons (fig. 3.8) demonstrates the desired effect in schematic form. The piece was performed privately for Diaghilev but he declined it, presumably deciding that “Futurist ideas were not consistent with the necessities of dance such as he conceived them.”

Depero, Balla and Prampolini continued to develop the concept of mechanical dances—with and without human bodies—for the next two decades, and their experiments produced several notable performances. Their efforts in this regard were more radical and more sophisticated in their visualization of automated movement than were the three dances “extract[ed]… from the three mechanisms of war”, for which Marinetti gives instructions in his dance manifesto, written around the time that *Feu d’artifice* was staged. The Dances of the Shrapnel, the Machine-Gun and the Aviatrix (he assumed dancers were always female) were intended “to give the ideal synthesis of the war.” Felicia McCarren draws attention to the gendered, erotic discourse at work here that conflates the mechanical with the feminine: since the Futurist love of the machine is “cast in the language of male heterosexual desire, if machines are women, then female Futurist dancers can become machines”34—as in the second dance, when “the danseuse, on hands and knees, will imitate the form of a machine gun.” These bellicose but naïve and mostly unperformable exercises describe not choreography but amateurish pantomimes, with bathetically literal directions (“The danseuse [more aeroplane-machine than aviatrix-woman] will heap up a lot of green cloth to simulate a green mountain, then will leap over it”) punctuated by signboards held up by the dancer like intertitles in silent films: “600 metres—avoid mountain.”35 The Aviatrix Dance became the Aerodance, the signature Futurist

33 Veroli, “Futurism and Dance,” 228.

34 McCarren, 103.

35 All quotations from Marinetti’s “Futurist Dance,” are from Flint, ed., 139-41.
dance of the 1920s and 30s; appropriately, Futurism channeled its enthusiasm for the mechanics of flight through the one art form that had traditionally sought to defy gravity. But Marinetti’s idea of dance demonstrates his inability to imagine a coherent movement style and vocabulary that could signify Futurist ideology, or that dance could signify in anything other than the most obvious ways. He seems to have had scant interest in doing so; Marinetti imagined dance as an entertaining vehicle for propaganda. The Futurist idea of staging dance, at its most inventive, had more to do with scenographic innovation than an aesthetics of movement or corporeal expression.

The Futurists were well aware of the ideas of Edward Gordon Craig; his concept of the Übermarionette, or dehumanized actor, and the puppet-plays of Alfred Jarry and Maurice Maeterlinck showed a way forward to realizing Marinetti’s desire for a fusion between the human and the machine.³⁶ Depero’s first successful solution to depersonalizing and automating human bodies was to replace them with marionettes, in his Balli plastici (Plastic Dances) co-choreographed with the poet-Egyptologist Gilbert Clavel in 1918.³⁷ “Ballets constructed with applications of automatic contraptions which dance new and entertaining mimes,” were his goal; his own painting of Act Five of the spectacle (fig. 3.9) shows rows of brightly colored automata in a Cubist fantasy setting.³⁸ Alternatively, real bodies were transformed into mechanized objects in Ivo Pannaggi and Vinicio Paladini’s Ballo meccanico futurista (Futurist Mechanical Dance)

³⁶ Craig published Marinetti’s “The Variety Theatre” (1913) in his review The Mask in 1914.

³⁷ Staged on April 14, 1918, by Teatro dei Piccoli at Rome’s Palazzo Odescalchi.

³⁸ Quoted in Berghaus, Theatre, 116. A sketch and photographs of the “The Great Savage” marionette (Berghaus, Theatre, 118; Kirby 108-9), from the ballet I selvaggi (The Savages) bear a striking, and perhaps not coincidental, resemblance to Léger’s designs for La Création du monde (1923). Depero’s canvas I miei balli plastici (My Plastic Dances) 1918, is in the Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.
in 1922 (fig. 3.10, 3.11).39 Here, Russian dancer Jia Ruskaja with actors Ikar and Ivanov, encased in their costumes as a robot and a puppet, improvised constrained mechanical movements to the accompaniment of a motorcycle’s roar. Anihccam del 3000 was Depero’s human-machine hybrid dance of 1924, in which two actors concealed in rigid cardboard tubing impersonated locomotives enamored of a stationmaster (fig. 3.12, 3.13).40 This formed a double bill with Prampolini’s Psicologia di macchine (Machine Psychology), a semi-stationary “ballet,” both were ridiculed by the audience.41 Merging performers with their costumes, and often their environment, to create an all new, anonymous, inhuman entity which was neither dancer nor object but a species of mobile scenery was revolutionary theatre, even if the physical limitations it imposed did undermine the Futurist credo of speed and dynamism. However, it did not constitute a new direction in dance, although the impact of these experiments, as we have seen, reached beyond Italy into French avant-garde performance, eliciting a certain amount of reciprocal influence.

Prampolini staged several mechanical dances in Italy in the early 1920s, including the Dance of the Propeller.42 Dancer Elena Ivanov, encased in a gigantic silvery propeller, simulated takeoff, flight, and finally self-destructed, accompanied by an orchestra including a metal sheet and wind machines. Recalling Saint-Point’s multi-sensory atmospherics, gasoline fumes were reportedly piped into the auditorium during the show; the audience survival rate is not known. Having moved to Paris in 1925, Prampolini, responding to Diaghilev and de Maré (and perhaps

39 Given on June 2, 1922, at the bar of the Casa d’Arte Bragaglia in Rome.
40 Anihccam spells macchina backwards.
41 At Teatro Trianon, Milan, on January 11, 1924.
42 At Teatro Verdi, Gorizia, from April 1, 1923.
to Beaumont as well) started his own dance company, Théâtre de la pantomime Futuriste. Its two seasons (fig. 3.14) will certainly have been seen by other artists there involved with theatre and dance. He designed the sets and costumes; libretti came mainly from Futurist writers and one from Luigi Pirandello; and composers including the Futurists Francesco Balilla Pratella and Luigi Russolo provided the musical scores. The dancers were drawn from modernist-trained freelancers currently available in Paris; Prampolini, as co-artistic director together with the dancer Maria Ricotti, was probably responsible for at least some of the choreography. The company presented an eclectic repertoire at the Théâtre de la Madeleine: mechanical Futurist, anguished Expressionist, and mystical Symbolist dances; Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois-styled Orientalist, Commedia-themed and folkloric pieces; and the occasional marionette show, “all more or less robotic, all more or less mimed,” according to Veroli. Prampolini went on to choreograph displays of “Italian Sports dances” in Turin in 1928 in support of the Fascist regime.

Meanwhile, Depero and Léonide Massine planned a collaboration which never materialized on a ballet, New York, New Babel, in New York in 1930.

In the 1920s and 30s, a return to the choreography of the real human body engaged Futurism with two professional dancers of interest. Jia Ruskaja (1902-1970), a Duncan-method free dance artist, formed a company that pursued a Futurist choreography in Rome in the 1920s, and published her own manifesto, La danza come modo d’essere (Dance as a way of being) (fig. 3.15). Ruskaja performed in a revival of Saint-Point’s “War” dance with sets by Prampolini in Rome in 1923. “Her body is no longer flesh, muscle, nerve or tendon, but a mysterious fluid, a

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43 Veroli, “Futurism and Dance,” 229. A program cover by Prampolini for the 1927 season (ibid., 231) features a marionette-like figure resembling Picasso’s Chinese Conjurer for Parade, who appeared on the program and poster for the Ballets Russes’ 1917 season.

44 Jia Ruskaja, which means “I am Russian” was the stage name of Evgenia Borissenko, a Russian dancer who fled the Revolution and settled in Italy.
new metal, forged in the flame of her own heat,” wrote Anton Giulio Bragaglia, who first presented her at his Casa d’Arte Bragaglia theatre in Rome.\footnote{“Son corps n’est plus de chair, de muscle, de nerf ou de tendon, mais d’un fluide mystérieux, d’un nouveau métal qui se forge dans la flamme de sa propre chaleur.” Bragaglia, quoted (in French) in Adrien Sina, “Avant-gardes féminines au début du xx\textsuperscript{e} siècle, dans le champ de la performance de la danse,” in Macel and Lavigne, 110-17: 115.} She appeared in films and briefly became a fascist icon before founding the Italian National Academy of Dance in the 1940s. In the 1930s classically-trained Giannina Censi (1913-1995), Ruskaja’s pupil, performed at Futurist events animating poetry and paintings by Marinetti, Prampolini and Depero; she became the leading interpreter of the Aerodance, transforming it from a pantomimic series of gestures into a “‘multiplied body’ born of the fusion of the bodies of the aviator and the aircraft’s fuselage” (fig. 3.16).\footnote{“Corps multiplié’ né de la fusion entre le corps de l’aviateur et le fuselage de l’avion.” Sina, 115.} It is doubtful whether she identified as a Futurist, although she may have realized a uniquely Futurist mode of dance on Marinetti’s terms more closely than anyone else. Other performances, manifestos, theories and experiments of diverse kinds could be enumerated in an exhaustive account of Futurism and dance; those mentioned here are generally regarded as the most significant.

It should also be noted that Futurist artists employed images of dancers in motion (among many other objects chosen for this purpose) to explore the possibilities of “plastic dynamism” in different media.\footnote{Belli, 59.} Depero (\textit{Rotation of Ballerina and Parrots}, 1918, fig. 3.17), Balla (\textit{Duo}, wire sculpture, 1921), Gino Severini (\textit{Blue Dancer}, 1912, fig. 3.18), Prampolini (\textit{Danzatrice}, 1917) and others wanted to reproduce not “a moment in the universal dynamism which has been stopped, but the dynamic sensation itself…”\footnote{Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, and Gino Severini, \textit{Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto}, quoted in Simonetta Fraquelli, “Modified Divisionism: Futurist Painting in 1910,” 78-89, in Greene, 79.} They struggled to represent the underlying
dynamics of real motion in a static, two-dimensional medium, invariably choosing to depict classical or folk dancers rather than modern ones. Severini’s collage *Articulated Dancer* (1915), wittily incorporates the potential for actual motion in its dancer with movable cardboard limbs and dress tacked to the canvas. The most effective Futurist representation of corporeal dynamism was not specifically an image of a dancer: Boccioni’s *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913, fig. 3.19).

Depero wrote, “my rhythmic style has inevitably led me to dance, as dance is just a stylized action of movement…every step, movement, or vibration will be uniformly rhythmic and stylistic, developing a broad horizon for the dances of the future.” The investigation of the mechanics of movement, and the movement of mechanisms, was fundamental to any Futurist interest in dance, yet the Futurists were not themselves dancers and did not engage with the dance profession in any systematic way. Their attempts to translate Marinetti’s desire for a dance that was “discordant, rudely ungraceful, asymmetric, synthetic, dynamic, free-associating (*parolibera*),” into performance were erratic, and (despite their internal logic) never progressed beyond the theoretical and broadly performative into “a practice that might characterize human movement and assign it a new artistic dimension.” As McCarren observes, the Futurists admired dancers but sidelined them, ultimately preferring “the dancing of machines to that of any body.” Nonetheless, the dance medium played a notable and ongoing role in the Futurist

49 “Mon style tout en rhythm m’a fatalement mené à la danse, car la danse n’est qu’une action stylisée du movement…chaque pas, déplacement ou vibration sera uniformement rhythmique et stylistique, en développant un vaste horizon pour les danses futures.” Depero, quoted in French translation in Fonti, 130.

50 “Disarmonica, sgarbata antigraziosa, asimmetrica, sintetica, dinamica, parolibera;” Marinetti, “Futurist Dance.” *Parolibera* literally translates as “words in freedom,” but the Futurists applied it to other activities in addition to poetry and declamation. My translation seeks to capture its spirit with respect to choreography.

51 Veroli, “Futurism and Dance,” 227.

52 McCarren, 108.
project and provided an important vehicle for the expression of its ideas. It proved an ideal means for experiments in a new theatre art that gave primacy to the scenographic and technological aspects of live performance. The concept of performing scenery works optimally with a highly physical, mostly non-verbal expressive mode of the moving body which can be costumed, deformed, disguised, used as a vehicle, or otherwise translated into the status of an object, and is plastic enough to adapt accordingly. Bodies in motion without psychology, sensuality, emotion, or dialogue can readily transform into a kind of technology; denying, hybridizing, or mechanizing their humanity to express the supremacy of mechanical dynamism crucial to Futurist ideology. It might be said that dance thus enabled the production of a Futurist politics of movement.

3.3 Dada Dance in Zurich, 1916-1919

Dada’s founder, Hugo Ball (1886-1927), was profoundly influenced by the ideas of Kandinsky in *The Blue Rider Almanac* and in his treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Ball worked with Kandinsky in Munich between 1912 and 1914, and found himself in sympathy with the artist’s vision of “the regeneration of society through the union of all artistic mediums and forces.” Both men believed in synthesizing aesthetic experiences of diverse kinds through the medium of theatrical performance. Kandinsky’s vision of a total work of art based on “inner necessity” rejected the Wagnerian model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as too limited in its notion of how a fusion of artforms might work and what it should include. Instead, he proposed a stage

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54 Melzer, 18.
art that would reveal spiritual realities through interactions of music, color, words, and physical-pychical impulses, all translated through movement. Kandinsky worked closely with the dancer Alexander Sacharoff (later attached to Rudolf Laban’s school in Zurich, fig. 3.20) on experiments in synesthesia involving music, dance and his own watercolor paintings. He became convinced that all artistic media were capable by correspondence of embodying the same essential theme or idea, and that this could be powerfully communicated to the spectator through the perceptions of all their sensory apparatus which were expanded by their experience in the theatre. Kandinsky planned a new kind of experimental “artist’s theatre” in Munich to explore his ideas in practice before an audience. Ball was closely involved in the planning; he wanted a theatre that touched the subconscious: “the new theatre will use masks and stilts again. It will recall archetypes and use megaphones” he wrote; “only the theatre is capable of creating a new society.”

Ball’s blueprint for a Künstlertheater included ballet, and he proposed Michel Fokine (1880-1942) as the representative artist. The Ballets Russes’ original choreographer, Fokine was an innovator in modernist ballet, but a staid choice compared to the new freier Tanz being created in Germany just then. Owing to the outbreak of war the projected artists’ theatre never materialized, and Ball, fleeing the war and conscription, arrived in Zurich in 1915 with his partner, the cabaret artist Emmy Hennings. Here he was soon to discover a much more radical type of dance with which he could partner, in a theatrical venture more extreme than he had imagined, where he could attempt to realize some of the ideas he had absorbed from Kandinsky.

Dance became part of Zurich Dada, appropriately enough, by chance. Right from the start, the serendipitous coincidence of Cabaret Voltaire and the winter premises of Laban’s experimental Art of Movement School both operating in the city in the spring of 1916 facilitated

55 Ball, 8, 9.
intimate liaisons of an artistic as well as a sexual nature between the male Dadaists and the female dancers. As Richard Huelsenbeck (1892-1974) wrote, the Dadaists “quite aggressively” pursued the “most beautiful girls” in the group and made “every effort to draw them into our erotic fantasies,” and Hans Richter (1888-1976) records that the Laban school became their “celestial headquarters…into this rich field of perils we hurled ourselves as enthusiastically as we hurled ourselves into dada. The two things went together.” Very soon the two groups were interacting closely in a reciprocal exchange of creative energies. The Dadaists attended costume parties at the house of Mary Wigman, Laban’s disciple and collaborator, and the originator of Ausdruckstanz, the new German Expressionist dance, who “danced Nietzsche” for the Dadaists at the Café des Banques. Laban and the dancers were frequently to be found in the audience at Cabaret Voltaire’s soirées. They experimented together with masks, costumes, invented movements and rhythms; by the time Cabaret Voltaire’s successor, Galerie Dada, got underway

56 Rudolf Laban (1859-1978) was a Hungarian painter and dancer, a visionary teacher who sought to revolutionize the practice of dance through a system based on “the natural, organic movement of the human body, and the principles of tension and relaxation.” (Melzer, 90) He stressed the dancer’s connection to the earth and an awareness of the body’s real mass in space, as opposed to the weightless, ethereal illusionism of classical ballet. Laban evolved complex theoretical analyses of movement and its spatial dynamics, and he developed Labanotation, the system of coded dance notation, still in use. He was one of the principal progenitors of Modern dance.


58 Hans Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-Art (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 69-70. Melzer observes that the art nouveau Café Odeon where the group met was, by contrast, their “terrestrial base.” This was conveniently located midway between Cabaret Voltaire in Spiegelgasse and the “celestial” Laban studios in Seegartenstrasse; 89. Based on Richter’s statement, Ruth Hemus notes the equivalence, for the men, of Dada action and sexual conquest, 64.

59 Zarathustra (Nietzsche) was one of Wigman’s first compositions. Huelsenbeck appreciatively describes her “waving Zarathustra about,” although he admits that he personally “never particularly cared for, or understood much about, the dance;” Memoirs, 11.

60 Ball mentions a costume party at Mary Wigman’s in his diary entry for March 18, 1917, possibly to celebrate Galerie Dada’s opening; 100-101. Wigman also describes herself and Sophie Taeuber having to be “sewn into our costumes”—probably for the same party; The Mary Wigman Book: Her Writings, ed. and trans. by Walter Sorell (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 77. Laban himself apparently had reservations about what he saw as the Dadaists’ ethic of “debility and degeneration;” Valerie Preston Dunlop, “Rudolf Laban: The Nightmare Years in Zurich, 1914-1919,” Dance Theatre Journal 10:3 (Summer, 1993): 14-19; here, 18.
in 1917, dance pieces of different kinds were an established part of most performances, a collaboration that continued until the end of Zurich Dada in 1919.

The dancers who assembled around Laban in Zurich had worked with him in Munich before the War and at his dance colony Monte Verità at Ascona, Switzerland (fig. 3.21). They included the Dalcroze-trained Wigman, Katja or Käthe Wulff, Maria Kruscek, the couple Clothilde von Derp and Alexander Sacharoff (Kandinsky’s former protégé), Suzanne Perrottet, and Sophie Taeuber (1889-1943). Taeuber had met Jean Arp (1886-1966) at Galerie Tanner in Zurich in late 1915, before his involvement in Dada, and they became partners, marrying in 1922. She was the essential link between the two groups: it was through her agency that the greater part of the Laban dancers’ contributions to Dada’s programs occurred. There is no question that Taeuber (fig. 3.22) was the principal performer and creative force in Dada dance; she was also a visual artist and teacher, a painter, puppet and tapestry-maker, and she had a long and fruitful artistic career, in occasional partnership with Arp. Written and photographic evidence of the period reveals her central role above that of the other dancers; as a result, she has been the subject of revealing critical attention from feminist scholars in recent years.61 However the focus on Taeuber to the virtual exclusion of others has tended to obscure a broader view of the significance of dance for Dada’s program in Zurich. The following account seeks to readjust that focus and consider the function of Dada dance as process and idea, rather than as an attribute of an individual.

Dada from the outset articulated itself primarily through live, public performance requiring an audience to complete it. As a performative art, dance fitted in perfectly and it

accorded so well with Ball’s ideas that its presence there seems almost inevitable. If Dada needed its audience to insult and provoke, to react against, and that audience in turn to react against it (often violently), then it needed a new kind of dance to complement its provocations. Laban’s (equally fanatical) students were ideally situated and only too happy to assist in Dada’s project of creative disruption; as Suzanne Perrottet recalled, “I wanted to get away from harmony, from a consistent style…I wanted to screech, to fight more.”62 Mary Wigman remembered:

We…were a small experimental club in which everything was tried out which the imagination would yield and which the bodily abilities would permit. But we all without exception were fanatics, obsessed with what we were doing.63

It was a perfect match. These dancers of Dada—all women—invented an unprecedented mode of performance, often improvised; an aesthetic unrelated to either ballet or Laban’s principles of organic harmony. They strove for effects of dislocation and strangeness, unpredictability, angularity, jerky speed and broken line, a denial of feminine beauty and an aleatory alternative to conventional musicality. The Laban dancers did not take part in Cabaret Voltaire, (which operated nightly from February 5 until the end of June, 1916, fig. 3.23) other than as spectators—Ball records their first visit on April 2.64 “Negro” dancing, with poetry, songs and drumming was performed regularly by the men and Emmy Hennings, at first the only female Dada performer, as part of the general physical manifestations; for the Dadaists the drum channeled the “primitive,” conjuring an incantatory atmosphere redolent of magic and ritual.65

62 Hemus (2009), 64.

63 Wigman, quoted in Melzer, 100.

64 Ball, diary entry for 2 April 1916: “…visited the cabaret. Also Herr von Laban with his ladies;” 58.

65 “Negro” (nègre, Neger) was used as an unspecific catchall term, meaning non-Western “primitive” of any description, not necessarily African.
Tzara’s exuberant prose in his *Zurich Chronicle* embeds it in all the totality of simultaneous noise and action in such a way as to conjure a chaotic melee in which no individual form of expression was to be privileged:

…simultaneous poem 3 languages, protest noise Negro music/…DADA! latest novelty!!! bourgeois syncope, BRUITIST music, latest rage, song Tzara dance protests—the big drum—red light, policemen—songs cubist painting post cards song Cabaret Voltaire…and so on and on. He records a “cubist tinkle dance” on February 26, and on July 14, at the Waag Hall Soirée, “Cubist dance, costumes by Janco, each man his own big drum on his head, noise, Negro music…” amid audience protests, fighting, and general excitement.66 The poster for this special event advertised “music, the dance, theory, manifestos, poems, pictures, costumes and masks.”67 Calling the dances “Cubist”—Huelsenbeck also described them thus in a lecture he gave in Berlin in 1918—construes them formally in terms of the dominant mode of avant-garde painting as anti-naturalistic, fragmented and abstract.68 It suggests abrupt, disjointed, angular, jarring movements, uninformed in this case by any notion of skill or technique. This was deliberate: presenting dance as a seamless part of multifarious action by untrained practitioners deskills it, subverting its status as an elite discipline with an academic basis. Dance is placed on an equal footing with all other expressive modes, and reinstated as a fundamental human instinct. Such a strategy, which licenses the free use of the body for subversive ends, is consistent with Dada’s attack on the intellect as the driving force in making and understanding art; it matches

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67 Quoted in Melzer, 69.

68 Huelsenbeck spoke of Cabaret Voltaire’s “ecstasy of two-step and Cubist dances;” “First Dada Lecture in Germany” (1918), *Dada Almanac* (London: Atlas, 1993), 111. Ball expressed Dada’s worldview in Cubist terms: “The dadaist…no longer believes in the comprehension of things from one point of view, and yet he is still so convinced…of the totality of all things, that he suffers from the dissonances to the point of self-disintegration.” Diary entry for June 12, 1916; 66.
Dada’s campaign to reduce poetic language to pure sound and rhythm, and painting to pure form and color. It also approaches Ball’s ideal theatre which would “regenerate society through the union of all artistic mediums and forces.”

This primitivizing of dance, which is how the Dadaists saw it, was facilitated by the exotic costumes and masks Marcel Janco (1895-1984) created, in imitation of African and other non-Western art. The masks liberated their wearers, removed their “civilized” inhibitions and compelled them to move in ways that released their atavistic impulses. Furthermore, they revealed a vital, unseen, and more intense reality. Ball describes the moment when Janco introduced them to the group:

Janco has made a number of masks for the new soiree…they are reminiscent of the Japanese or ancient Greek theatre yet they are wholly modern…we were all there when Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness… the masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance.

The masks “inspired us to invent dances,” for each of which Ball spontaneously composed music: “Fliegenfangen” (Flycatching); “Cauchemar” (Nightmare); and “Festliche Verzweiflung” (Festive Despair), which involved a ritualistic repetitive movement cycle.

Without realizing it, the Dadaists found themselves caught up in an early experiment in automatism. “What fascinates us about the masks,” wrote Ball, referring to the Great War, “is that they represent not human characters and passions, but characters and passions that are larger than life. The horror of our time, the paralyzing background of events, is made visible.”

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69 Ball, prologue to his diary, 8.

70 Ball, diary entry for May 24, 1916; 64-5.

71 Ball, diary entry for May 24, 1916: “Dances,” etc. 64; “what fascinates,” 64-5.
may detect echoes here of Mary Wigman’s work with masks, her ritualistic performances like Hexentanz (Witch Dance, fig. 3.24), and dark, tragic-supernatural themes. Wigman was dedicated to the pursuit of “absolute dance,” always without music, often accompanied by gongs and drums, and often masked. The Dadaists sometimes attended her Zurich showings, and although she may not have contributed greatly to their work, she took a strong interest in their activities. Ball’s detailed account makes it clear that stimulated by Janco’s props, actual choreography had entered Dada performance. It may have been this, in part, that led to the involvement of the Laban dancers in the movement’s next iteration, Galerie Dada at Bahnhofstrasse 19, beginning on March 29, 1917.

Galerie Dada’s opening saw the Laban dancers become Dada collaborators in earnest, with dance assuming its most important role yet. In the advertising and the programs themselves, dance was now distinguished from the other performative acts as an event in its own right; in practice it acquired a more organized and professional tone, although it was still sufficiently iconoclastic to satisfy Dada’s anti-academic stance. For the opening celebration, Ball records “abstract dances (by Sophie Taeuber; poems by Ball; masks by Arp)” and “expressionist dances”

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72 See Melzer, 92-100. This foundational history of Dada performance emphasizes the crucial part dance played in Zurich Dada. I believe, however, that Melzer is mistaken on the participation of the Laban dancers in Cabaret Voltaire: none of the chroniclers (Ball, Tzara, Huelsenbeck, Richter) who later gives them due place mentions them in the earlier context (but see following note on Tzara’s approach to Wigman). Further, the marked change in the type of dance content between the soirees of 1916 and those of 1917-19 indicates a change in personnel. There is no evidence that Taeuber was present on 24 May 1916 when Janco unveiled his masks, as some scholars have assumed, although she certainly wore them later at Galerie Dada.

73 Tzara was evidently looking to expand dance’s profile in Cabaret Voltaire from the first, as he asked Wigman to be part of a Dada soiree in 1916. She wrote to him on June 26, apologizing for being unable to participate, and hoping “that there will be another occasion to bring the planned dance to fruition;” Berghaus, Theatre, 170-71; 268 n.133. Tzara mentions her name, together with those of Flake (i.e. the Falke sisters), Taeuber, and Chrusecz (Maria Krusecz, his girlfriend) in his Chronicle entry for December 31, 1918, in connection with “the cardboard phenomenon dance,” so she may have performed with the Dadas at least once. Motherwell, 239.

74 Hans Richter confirms this in “Dada XYZ…” (1948), in Motherwell, 288: “…the Laban school… danced “in abstract settings by Arp with abstract masks by Janco and the choreography by Sophie Taeuber”.
by Claire Walter, another one of the group. Tzara’s account of the evening connotes the onstage performance merging ecstatically with the audience: “Dances: Mlle Taeuber…C. Walter, etc. etc. great enchanted gyratory movement of 400 persons celebrating.”

Taeuber danced “Gesang der Flugfische und Seepferdchen” (Song of the Flying Fish and Seahorses or Hippocamps) not to music but to sound and spoken word: the beating of a gong and Ball’s recitation of his poems. Her performance elicited from him a poetic description which captures brilliantly the actual effect she created:

Abstract dances: a gong beat is enough to stimulate the dancer’s body to make the most fantastic movements. The dance has become an end in itself. The nervous system exhausts all the vibrations of the sound…and turns them into an image…a poetic sequence of sounds was enough to make each of the individual word particles produce the strangest visible effect on the hundred-jointed body of the dancer…there came a dance full of flashes and edges, full of dazzling light and penetrating intensity.

In a later essay quoted appreciatively by Arp, Ball added that Taeuber’s dance was “full of invention, whimsy and caprice…the lines of her body break, each gesture decomposes into a hundred precise, angular and sharp movements,” to produce an atmosphere of “witty and ironic fun. The figures of her dance are at the same time mysterious, grotesque, and ecstatic.” The conjunction of paradoxical elements—whimsy and ecstasy; poetic imagery and edgy abstraction; dazzling beauty and grotesquerie—perfectly expresses Dada’s ethos of contradiction, its commitment to an art that could not be categorized or codified, that was shockingly new and yet ephemeral. Ball’s passage also suggests a dancer of considerable skill using her ability to create something quite new and unfamiliar, and using her deep understanding of dance conventions to

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75 Tzara in Motherwell, 237.
76 Ball, diary entry for March 29, 1917; 102.
subvert them in specific ways: using art to give an impression of artlessness. Janco speaks of “the expressive force and the aggressive abandon of her gestures,” and likens her “jerky and syncopated expressions” to “the chords of good jazz.”

78 Arp’s memorial poem “Sophie danced” captures a similar image:

She danced / the suspense elevated, thoughtful / the sharp interlacings / the piercing reflections / the jump and the snap / of what splashes, what beats on the wind / of the seahorses and the flying fish.79

The most striking aspect of her dance was that it performed a physical response to two different sources of sound: a beating gong and the hypnotic sound-stream of live Dada phonetic poetry; perhaps separately, perhaps simultaneously transcribing words into movement. Declaimed energetically from the stage, the rhythmic assonance of Ball’s syllables—“gadji beri bimba,” “gaga di bling blong,” “galassassa,” “zack hitti zopp”—furnished a resonant substitute for music, their kinetic suggestiveness capable of generating a whole new movement aesthetic; they demanded to be danced. Taeuber’s dancing body became a conduit for pure sensory vibrations, a synesthetic entity that will have transformed her audience’s experience of what they heard, saw, and felt in an entirely unpredictable fashion. Clearly, pure provocation was no longer the sole aim of Dada performance (although it was still very much an aim), as the dancers introduced (and Ball and Arp, at least, responded to) an element of aesthetic invention, albeit of a radical kind. Ball’s characterization of Taeuber’s dance unifies sound, image, poetry, rhythm, and movement into a total theatrical experience of the type he had long sought; the full presence of dance in the cabarets allowed Dada, he felt, to approach its potential “to give the times their


innermost form.” On April 8, 1917, he wrote: “Gave my lecture on Kandinsky. I have realized a favorite old plan of mine. Total art: pictures, music, dances, poems—now we have that.”

The second Galerie Dada performance, the “Sturm [Assault] Soirée,” on April 14, 1917, (fig. 3.25) featured “Negro music and dance…five Laban-ladies as Negresses in long black caftans and face masks. The movements are symmetrical, the rhythm is strongly emphasized, the mimicry is of a studied, deformed ugliness.” “Negro music” (drumming and other percussive sounds) had always been part of Dada cabaret; now, inspired by Janco’s “savage Negro masks,” it was complemented by choreography based on the participants’ imagining of African dances.

This kind of primitivizing display became a feature of subsequent soirées; it played into the Dadas’ rejection of over-civilized European culture in favor of what they regarded as more vital non-Western traditions, their quest for visceral expressive modes, and their adoption of Cubist aesthetics. Embracing the “savage” primitive was also intended as a defiant gesture in repudiation of the Great War’s savagery inflicted in the name of so-called civilization. It mattered too that this gesture was corporeal: war unmade the modern body, but Dada remade it, transfigured, through dance. It was all part of the subversion of artistic conventions: ugliness opposed beauty; cacophonous noise and harsh rhythms opposed harmonious composition; nonsense sounds opposed poetic language; deformed, faux-Afro “Negertanz” movement opposed the classical grace of ballet’s European heritage. Arp wrote: “we searched for an elementary art that would, we thought, save mankind from the furious folly of these times.”

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80 Ball, diary entries for April 8 and 10, 1917; 104-5.
81 Ball, diary entries for April 10 and 14, 1917; 104-5.
82 “Savage Negro masks”: Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-Art, 78.
83 Arp, 39.
with the febrile energy of her dance, Tzara writes of Taeuber on another occasion: “delirious strangeness in the spider of the hand vibrates rhythm rapidly ascending towards the paroxysm of a capriciously beautiful mocking madness.” Rhythmic movement as a path to inspired madness; in other words, dance as the gateway to an alternative state of consciousness. As Jill Fell observes, Tzara’s description looks forward to André Breton’s idea of “convulsive beauty” in *Nadja* (1928). It also prefigures his “incandescent testimony to the love of the irrational and the irrational of love,” the essential Surrealist notion of *l’amour fou* (mad love), articulated in his 1937 novel of that name. Descriptions of Taeuber’s moving body obeying its deepest impulses, seemingly independent of rational control, look forward to the Surrealist preoccupation with automatism. However, dance’s obvious potential as a vehicle for automatic expression was one that Surrealism failed, or refused, to see.

Zurich Dada’s farewell performance, the Grande Soirée at the Saal zur Kaufleuten (Merchants’ Hall) on 9 April 1919, was a spectacular event, and its dance aspect was particularly dramatic. The usual menu of simultaneous poems, declamatory lectures, avant-garde music and absurdist skits went ahead; after dances by Suzanne Perrottet in “a Negroid mask by Janco” to the music of Arnold Schönberg and Satie, five dancers led by Käthe Wulff performed “Noir Cacadou,” (Cockatoo Black) choreographed by Taeuber. They wore “savage Negro masks” and “abstract costumes” that “fluttered like butterflies,” and danced in front of a backdrop of abstract shapes resembling gigantic black cucumbers painted by Arp and Richter. Yet another dance

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84 “Bizarrerie délirante dans l’araigné de la main vibre rythme rapidement ascendant vers le paroxysme d’une démence goguenarde capricieuse belle.” Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, 558.


86 Richter’s description of the costumes does not quite agree with those of Tzara and Ribemont-Dessaignes, quoted here; he may have been confusing *Noir Cacadou* with a different dance; 78-80. The word *cacadou* has a curious etymology. It is a neologism, a phonetic transcription into French of the German *kakadu*, meaning cockatoo, a parrot.
featured “6 enormous dazzling masks.” At some point the audience rioted—according to Richter, that was what they had come for—apparently provoked beyond endurance, but not by the dancers, who it seems helped to calm their fury. Tzara wrote: “NOIR CACADOU, Dance (5 persons) with Miss Wulff, the pipes dance the renovation of the headless pythecantropes stifles the public rage.” Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes also recalled the dancers being “concealed in weird-looking pipes.” Ultimately it all satisfied the fractious audience, who, noted Tzara triumphantly, “experienced the commotion of the NEW.”

The dancers’ costumes seem to bear a resemblance, hardly coincidental, to Ball’s “Magical Bishop” outfit of cardboard tubes in the well-known photograph of him (fig. 3.28) performing his phonetic poems including Karawane (Caravan) and Gadji Beri Bimba. Another marked resemblance is to Taueber in an abstract costume in the only surviving photograph of her dancing (fig. 3.26). In both cases, the limbs are encased in tubing, and Tauber’s head, hands native to Australasia. The actual French is cacatoès; all these translations derive from the Malay, kakak tua. But Kakadu is also the name of a vast region, now a national park, in the far north of Australia, rich in sacred Aboriginal cultural sites. In this case, the name may also be related to the Gaagudju language of that region’s traditional owners. If the Dadaists were unaware of this, it lends their final dance an even more exotic and primitivist resonance than they realized. Tzara, however, may have known something of Australia: his Poèmes Nègres includes one entitled “Le Kangourou,” which names several kinds of indigenous flora, as well as the eponymous marsupial; Tzara, Oeuvres, 443-4. Eric Robertson offers a different, but not contradictory, scatological analysis of cacadou. He also claims that Tzara was especially fond of the word, and played a game he called cacadou while wearing a sack with a length of piping on his head; Arp: Poet, Painter, Sculptor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 180-81. An affinity with the dancers’ costumes seems obvious.

87 “6 masques énormes et éblouissantes.” Tzara, Oeuvres, 568; translated in Motherwell, 242.

88 “Les tuyaux dansent la rénovation des pythecantropes sans tête, asphyxie la rage du public.” Tzara, Oeuvres complètes, 567-8; translated in Motherwell, 240. “Pythecantrope” (pithecanthropus) is an obsolete word for a hypothetical creature forming an evolutionary link between apes and humans, in other words, a missing link; Tzara’s verbal ingenuity thus represents Dada primitivism of an extreme kind.

89 Ribemont-Dessaignes, in Motherwell, 108.

90 “Sentit la commotion du NOUVEAU.” Tzara, Oeuvres complètes, 568, translated in Motherwell, 242.

91 Scholars have worked hard to attach this photograph to one of the performances on record: see Andrew, “Dada Dance,” 12-29, and Fell, “Sophie Taeuber,”—but this is guesswork, and it is almost certainly staged. For my purpose, it stands as a representative image of the approach to costume and masking in Dada dance in general.
and body are wholly concealed in a motley, vaguely Cubist collage of abstract forms of different materials, effectively dehumanizing her and effacing both her identity and her female gender.\footnote{92} Such masking, argues Melzer, was central to Dada’s mission; Tzara and Ball frequently wrote of the power and importance of masks: “But the mask was necessary, it took the place of an underground shelter to hide the faces too shocking to be seen.”\footnote{93} For the Dada performer, masks served several crucial and interconnected functions: their form and imaginative origins linked them to primitive ritual; the idea of them connected with submerged basic human instincts; their defamiliarizing effect estranged the wearer from their own self and from their audience; and their alienation and anonymity licensed extreme kinds of action. Arp recalls they were “terrifying, most of them daubed with bloody red. Out of cardboard, paper, horsehair, wire, and cloth…”\footnote{94}

These makeshift disguises asserted a raw reductiveness against the professionalism and polish of legitimate theatre.

Whether or not the dancers from Laban’s school “considered themselves to be Dadaists” (it is not clear that they did not) they were full-blooded collaborators, and from the foregoing discussion, it will be apparent that dance occupied a considerable place in the performances of Zurich Dada, yet its role has seldom been sufficiently acknowledged by scholars of either Dada

\footnote{Taeuber had primitivist interests of her own, in Hopi culture; photographs exist of her and her sister in costumes inspired by Hopi dancers (fig. 3.27).}

\footnote{92 Andrew offers the intriguing possibility that the identically clad arms of both Ball and Taeuber, in tubes with fluttering paper streamers over the hands, refer to a French 75mm field gun, the most modern, high-powered artillery piece then in use at the front; “Dada Dance,” 14. Scholars have also claimed a resemblance between this costume and the puppets Taeuber was making around this time; see Fell, “Sophie Taeuber,” 276. Andrew goes further, claiming that Taeuber’s “transposition of repeated forms across media”—from dance to graphic art to weavings, is an exercise in the transmission of symbols that critiques the prevailing order; “Dada Dance,” 21.}

\footnote{Tzara, letter to Emmy Hennings (n.d.), quoted in Melzer, 33.}

\footnote{Arp, 46.}

233
or of dance. It tends to be either ignored or viewed as an anomaly. Part of the reason for this is the ephemeral nature of all dance, and Dada dance in particular: the difficulty of recapturing in words a performance of which there is little record, which was often improvised or the result of chance, and for which there was no precedent to which it could be referred. Yet this is also true of the other aspects of the soirées. Dance is non-verbal and is therefore often wrongly presumed to be non-cerebral, which works against its being taken as seriously as other forms of artistic expression. This is largely a gendered prejudice, underscored by the conventional linkage of women with corporeal and men with cerebral pursuits: Dada dance was a mainly female endeavor, planned and executed by women within and subject to an (almost) all-male milieu. Further, these women did not leave written memoirs of their experiences; it is unsurprising that their contribution has been minimized by history. As Ruth Hemus observes, their names are rarely cited; they have become footnotes. The claim by critics such as David Hopkins that dance didn’t fit into Dada cabaret, that its need for costumes, choreography, and rehearsal went against Dada’s spirit of “edgier, more anarchic” spontaneity, cannot be sustained; Dada soirees were not all pure, impromptu outbursts. Manifestoes, skits, and poems, however radical with language, were written in advance, masks constructed, and backdrops painted; readings from already published plays and poetry were held, programs devised and printed, and soirées

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95 Berghaus claims they did not consider themselves to be Dadaists, apparently due to their professional training; Theatre, 268, n. 138. However, records of Käthe Wulff’s vocal contributions to soirées demonstrate an unmistakably Dada polemic. Even contemporary male scholars have tended to assume that women could not be counted as true Dadaists: hence the marginalization until recently of not only Taeuber but also Emmy Hennings, Hannah Höch, Elsa von Freitag Loringhoven, and others.

96 Hemus, 63. Only in the last two decades has Sophie Taeuber’s name and significance been recuperated. See p. 223, n. 61.

scheduled and advertised. Even bruitist music was executed by performers who knew at least what instruments or objects they would use. Besides, much of the dance was unscripted: Tauber’s *Flying Fish* piece to Ball’s sound-poetry was improvised, and clearly stunned its viewers. In comparison to the kind of dance they were probably used to, it was anarchic indeed.

Equally misconceived and patronizing is the judgement that what the dancers did was just “alternative lifestyle” experimentation, and “not, in the strictest sense, motivated by Dada concerns.” Dada was, by definition, eclectic and open to any available means to realize its aims; the idea that dance was somehow outside its parameters denies its nature, and subjects it retrospectively to rules its members would not have recognized. It also denies dance the possibility of a role in making serious art. In fact, the dance experiments discussed here not only shared concerns with Dada, they enlarged the articulation of those concerns in practice in several important ways.

First and most obviously, dance expanded Dada’s range and furthered its agenda of subversion and provocation; experiments with moving bodies gave the cerebral polemics of its soirées an alluring, disturbingly visceral dimension. Rejecting its ballet heritage, dance became an accomplice in Dada’s attack on conventional modes of art and performance. Second, dance also gave bodily form to the group’s interest in primitivism. A primal art with roots in ancient and non-Western cultures, dance served to connect the ritual and magic of “pre-civilized” societies with Dada’s avant-garde manifestations, opening the door to the irrational. It licensed the abandon of socialized inhibitions, and was the ideal partner in the Dadaists’ exploration of

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98 Hopkins, 116. Claims like this are motivated by a belief that serious art cannot be made on the body. This stance, now discredited by the wealth of contemporary scholarship on dance, art and culture, underlies the neglect or marginalizing of dance in cultural histories until recent times.
more elemental forms of artistic expression that they hoped would regenerate humanity and free it from the tyranny of modernity.

Third, as an inherently abstract art, dance complemented and reinforced Dada’s commitment to abstraction in visual art and poetry. As an art of signs, dance holds the potential for multi-layered, ambiguous interpretation. It goes beyond naturalistic representation to achieve a subjective effect through suggestion, communicating on a level deeper than literality. Fourth, Dada valued process over product—the act of revealing and anatomizing art’s formation, over the finished artwork. Dance, especially improvisation, is simultaneously process and product. As the contemporary British choreographer and dance theorist Wayne McGregor teaches, dance is “thinking with the body.” The embodied cognition of dance was fully engaged in Dada’s experimental processes of art-making. Fifth, Dance was an ideal partner in Dada’s multi-disciplinary performance mode that sought to integrate diverse artforms and engage the audience. Collaborating productively with other arts to create a total theatrical experience, dance intensifies and complicates the expressive force of its partners, engaging all the senses and potentially unlocking a synesthetic experience in the spectator.

Finally, dance was often seen as a portal to alternative states of being, a notion often thematized in dance narratives (this was not true of Futurism, which objected to any separation of art and everyday life). The pioneers of modernist dance longed to recapture its origins as a form of primordial, ecstatic worship meant to invoke the supernatural. Laban wrote “behind external events the dancer perceives another, entirely different world...a hidden, forgotten

99 “Thinking with the Body” was the title of an exhibition held at the Wellcome Institute, London, in 2013 devoted to McGregor’s interdisciplinary investigations into “the nature of dance-making and the intelligence of the body.” https://waynemcgregor.com.

100 The theme of existential transformation is present in, for example, the romantic and classical ballets Giselle, Swan Lake, and La Sylphide, as well as modern works such as Le Spectre de la rose, Firebird, and Petrouchka.
landscape lies there, the land of silence…dance also comes from these regions…”—a sentiment that sits uneasily with Dada’s ethic of disruption, its raucous soirées and scorn of Expressionist introspection.101 Yet some Dadaists revealed a metaphysical bent, for instance Arp: “The world of memory and dream is the real world. It is related to art, which is fashioned at the edge of earthly reality.”102 Dance is complicit with the desire, expressed differently by many artists of the avant-garde, to access a reality beyond the everyday through art. Whether this lay within the unconscious, in dreams, on a spiritual dimension, or in a heightened state of awareness—even in madness—the aim was to transcend the rational world, to find psychic release and the privileged knowledge that the Surrealists called “the marvelous.” With Dadaists dancing like dervishes possessed by Janco’s masks, and Taeuber vibrating into delirium, Dada dance had the power to effect that transition.

### 3.4 Dada Dance in Paris, 1920-1923

In January 1920 Tristan Tzara took Dada to Paris, where he was greeted by an eager crowd of would-be Dadaists impatient to carry on the work of cultural anarchy. Given Tzara’s enthusiasm for dance in Zurich, it might have been expected that he would make an effort to incorporate it into the Paris program. However, dance made scarcely an appearance, and was not mentioned in any of the Dada manifestoes issued in those years. Lack of suitable recruits may have been an issue: there was no equivalent of the Laban school of willing experimental dance

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students available. Paris’s dance scene—even in its more avant-garde aspect—was for the most part more sedate and established, still mainly in thrall to ballet tradition and dominated by the Count de Beaumont’s mainly reactionary brand of advanced modernism in the shape of the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois; due to the War, the new German dance of Laban, Wigman and their colleagues had made little or no inroads. A few independent avant-garde dancers did perform in minor roles at Dada soirées, but dance was not the dynamic force in Paris Dada that it had been in Zurich.103 As well, there was resistance within the shifting and refractory group of artists that constituted the Paris Dadaists.

For the first performance of Tzara’s play Le Coeur à gaz (The Gas Heart) at the Galerie Montaigne in June 1921, the “Chaplinesque” Russian dancer-poet Valentin Parnakh (figs. 3.29, 3.30) as The Dancer performed his own piece The Miraculous Fowl in a pair of wings, with an artificial foot attached to his arm.104 Berghaus credits Parnakh with helping “to raise the profile of dance in the Dada spectrum of modern forms of artistic expression,” but little is known of his other activity in Paris just then.105 Sonia Delaunay designed the Cubo-Futurist costumes for this show and for the play’s revival on July 6, 1923 at the Théâtre Michel, as part of the Soirée du coeur à barbe (Evening of the Bearded Heart) (fig. 3.33). Romanian dancer and Constantin

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103 Independent dancers from France and elsewhere also performed in matinees at Dance Fridays (Les Vendredis de la danse), run by Jacques Hébertot at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées during the 1920s. See p. 258.


105 Berghaus, 171. Valentin Yakovlevich Parnakh (1891-1951) was a Russian avant-garde dancer and choreographer, like Lizica Codreanu (see next note) part of an itinerant population of emigré dance artists working in postwar Paris, many of whose names are now at risk of becoming obscured. Parnakh traveled in the middle east and studied at the Sorbonne. He published Motdynamo, a poetry collection with lithographs by Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, in Paris in 1920, and Histoire de la danse, with his portrait sketch by Picasso, in 1932. In between these visits, he returned to Soviet Russia, taught modern dance at the Proletkult Drama Workshop, and worked with Vsevolod Meyerhold, Nikolai Foregger, and Sergei Eisenstein. Parnakh achieved fame in Russia as a choreographer and exponent of “eccentric dance,” as well as a poet, musician, translator—and as the pioneer of Soviet jazz. Resettling in the U.S.S.R. in the 1930s, he was sent to the Gulag in 1937 and died in obscurity.
Brancusi’s protegé Lizica Codreanu now took Parnakh’s role. (figs. 3.31, 3.32) Both dancers had been working with the Russian avant-gardist Tcherez theatre group which staged the play (since by now the other Dadaists refused to be part of it); their leader, Iliazd (Ilya Zdanevich), an associate of Tzara’s, had organized the evening. Echoing Sophie Taeuber, Codreanu, dressed by Delaunay, had previously improvised to Iliazd’s poetry with music by Francis Poulenc at La Licorne theatre. This time, Le Coeur à gaz was upstaged by a violent fracas in which Breton broke the arm of poet Pierre de Massot during a chaotic evening that signaled the final implosion of Paris Dada.

In other instances, Raymond Duncan (Isadora’s brother) had posed in a toga at a Dada manifestation at the Club Faubourg in February 1920; Ribemont-Dessaignes contributed a dance to a soirée at the Théâtre de l’œuvre in March; and in May 1920 for the Dada Festival at Salle Gaveau, he gave “a motionless frontier-dance,” encased like Hugo Ball in cardboard tubing, while the audience flung vegetables and raw meat at him. There were likely more instances, but these spasmodic showings did not amount to anything like a vital dance presence; it was more of an accessory to the main event. Parnakh’s performance sounds like pantomime, or perhaps a preview of the jazz-inspired “Eccentric dance” style he made famous in Petrograd and Moscow after his return to Russia in 1922. Codreanu probably gave what Tzara would have called a Cubist dance: photographs of her in Constantin Brancusi’s studio wearing geometrically-patterned outfits with sculptural headdresses designed for her by the sculptor suggest as much. These two seem to have been the principal—perhaps the only—professional dance artists to

106 Lizica Codreanu (1901-1993) arrived in Paris in 1921 after training in modernist dance in Bucharest. Introduced into avant-garde circles by her compatriot Brancusi, she performed at various avant-garde events, worked with Satie and Sonia Delaunay, appeared in a film, Le P’tit Parigot, directed by René le Somptier and designed by Delaunay, and danced with Rubinstein’s and Nijinska’s companies. In the 30s, she opened the first Hatha Yoga studio in Paris.

participate in Paris Dada; their efforts served to diversify the fabric of Dada performance with bodily expression, their unconventional style contributing to the attack on tradition and on the formulaic content of bourgeois theatre. At the same time, Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault were strongly averse to anything theatrical—even though theatricality was at the heart of Tzara’s conception of Dada in Paris as it had been in Zurich.

Following Tzara’s lead, these three writers initially participated in the theatrics of Dada’s manifestations, and even wrote and performed in plays of their own (fig. 3.34). However André Gide, among other witnesses, reported that they seemed inhibited, “stiff, stilted…it seemed that precisely for fear of jeopardizing themselves, no one dared budge.” They were always uncomfortable with the performing Dada required of them, although Breton’s attitude to theatre was more ambivalent. He may have declared, in Nadja (1928), “I have never been able to tolerate the theatre,” but as Melzer demonstrates, he often employed theatrical structures and metaphors in his writing. By the time Dada in Paris split and then disintegrated, the Surrealist contingent had committed to literary forms and not live performance as its expressive preference, and Breton’s personal dislike of the stage had hardened into an ideological objection to conventional, commercial theatre and all its products—especially music and dance.

108 Breton and Soupault together wrote S’il vous plait (If You Please, 1919) and Vous m’oublierez (You Will Forget Me, 1920). Both plays were performed at Dada soirées, and both were intended to be “completely different from the regular theatre…scandalous…against the academies.” Soupault, interviewed by Annabelle Melzer (1971), in Melzer, 175.

109 André Gide, quoted in Melzer, 142.

Chapter Four

Disembodying the Avant-Garde: Surrealists Don’t Dance

Choreography and music are surrealist arts par excellence since the reality they express always surpasses nature.

—Guillaume Apollinaire

4.1 Introduction

André Breton, as far as we know, never made an explicit pronouncement concerning dance. He did not need to: dance was so enmeshed with his other enmities that its unacceptability could be safely assumed. Besides, as mere entertainment for “les snobs”, it was beneath consideration for a serious intellectual, as he styled himself. Music (he felt) merited different treatment: it was an enemy that needed reckoning with, and he took the trouble to articulate his opposition to it in Surrealism and Painting (1928). In his study of Surrealism and music, French critic Sébastien Arfouilloux points out that the period of Surrealism’s formation was also one of major innovation and change in music, and poses the question: why could Surrealism not have chosen to assimilate some of that change as part of its own revolutionary agenda? This observation and this question hold equally true for dance, whose (almost total) absence from Surrealism, I believe, is as significant as is the absence of music. Previous


2 But see Mad Love, 61-3, in which Breton mentions “how much I admired the comparison of feminine gait to the art of dance.” Although he still objected to dance in the context of commercial theatre and performance, this comment seems to suggest that by the mid-1930s, he was not entirely averse to it in an abstract sense.

3 Arfouilloux, 216.
scholarship on both dance and Surrealism has failed to interrogate this absence closely; my methodology in this chapter is to do just that—to subject it to a close reading, by looking at the evidence in two ways. I will examine the traces of Surrealism’s relationship with dance in terms both of what exists and what does not exist: interactions that occurred between them, but also the absence of other interactions where we might expect to find them. This twofold scrutiny enables an assessment of the conditions necessary for Surrealist dance to occur—as it fleetingly did.

The reasons for Breton’s (and hence Surrealism’s) position on dance at first sight seem obvious, and have been taken as self-evident by most scholars of both dance and Surrealism: it was produced and patronized by individuals he personally despised, and had designated as enemies of Surrealism; dance as theatre was a part of a capitalist institution that produced art as a commodity—as superficial entertainment for commercial gain; and (in France) it was inseparable from music, which as we have seen in chapter 2, Breton personally loathed, and which was promoted by his enemies. I believe, however, that there are more complex issues to unpack. The failure of critics to examine the Surrealist rejection of dance, to assume that it is too obvious or trivial to merit discussion, gives a pass to what does not exist, as if its absence signifies its unimportance. I set out here to correct this scholarly neglect and to show how it misses exposing a nexus of motivations and contradictions that illuminates Surrealism’s intricate relations with its culture in previously unexamined ways.

On a level deeper than the everyday, as I will argue, Breton had a philosophical as well as a personal objection to somatic arts—dance and music. These artforms demand, as part of their

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4 I should be clear that reference to Breton’s position on any given subject may be taken as synonymous with Surrealism’s position, at least in the 1920s. At first, Breton was Surrealism: he dictated its rules and held himself as its epitome, and he demanded unqualified obedience from others, frequently expelling dissenters from its ranks. Not for nothing did Yvan Goll dub him “the Pope of Surrealism” (an epithet he disliked). It was not possible to disagree to any real extent with Breton and still be counted as part of the movement. Goll, “Une Réhabilitation du Surréalisme,” *Journal littéraire* (16 August 1924), 8. Quoted in Polizzotti, 189.
communicative process, a form of embodied response which Surrealism could not countenance, as it transgressed the movement’s emphasis on cerebral processes (despite its members’ commitment to sexual freedom) as the means to personal and social liberation. The platforms of antipathy to dance which I identify in this chapter—personal, political, psychological, and philosophical—were not discrete but interwoven. I will develop this taxonomy to map the spaces of Surrealist opposition to dance, and of its resistance to dance’s potential for Surrealism’s revolutionary agenda. However, a rapport between Surrealism and dance did materialize, albeit only momentarily and not within a conventional framework: the *Exposition international du surréalisme* in Paris in 1938 was the scene of their first and perhaps their only true alliance, and I conclude with an examination of that event. But first, I will set the stage with an account of a high-profile attempt at a union of dance with Surrealism, the Ballets Russes’ production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1926, which misfired on several fronts and seemed to confirm the core Surrealist belief in their fundamental incompatibility.

4.2 Case Study of a “Surrealist” Ballet: *Romeo and Juliet*, 1926

Despite the hostility of official Surrealism, several attempts were made by both dancers and Surrealists to bridge the divide and forge a common purpose in productions that integrated the aesthetics of Surrealist painting—and to some extent, aspects of Surrealist theory—with choreography. If *Mercure*, as we have seen, intrigued the Surrealists by being the first dance production to capture something of their spirit, it did not set out to be a Surrealist ballet; none of those that did, it hardly needs saying, met with the group’s approval. However, that did not prevent Serge Diaghlev and Rolf de Maré from producing ballets that aimed to reflect this
newest expression of the avant-garde sensibility in Paris, by enlisting artists associated with Surrealism and Dada as designers and librettists. As well as Max Ernst (1891-1976) and Joan Miró’s (1893-1983) *Romeo and Juliet*, the Ballets Russes presented Giorgio de Chirico’s (1888-1978) *Le Bal* (1929), and the Ballets Suédois hired him to design *La Jarre* (1924). Their Dada ballet *Relâche* (1925) was the brainchild of Francis Picabia, with Marcel Duchamp, Erik Satie, and the filmmaker René Clair collaborating. Also for De Maré, Jean Cocteau’s *Les Mariées de la tour Eiffel* (1921) was an absurdist gesture in a broadly dada spirit, meant to show the Dada-Surrealists that he could play their game even if he was not admitted into their club. In the 1930s, some of the artists who were expelled or had resigned from Breton’s closed church collaborated on ballets: André Masson, Miró, and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) all produced decors for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo or Colonel de Basil’s Ballets Russes. Of all these collaborations, *Relâche*, the work of Breton’s antagonists and made partly to spite him, was the most notorious and ingenious, but it has been extensively discussed elsewhere. I propose to take as a case study the relatively neglected *Romeo and Juliet*, the single attempt at an alliance between Surrealism and the chief representative of aristo-bourgeois theatre in Paris, Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, to consider what an attempt to make a Surrealist ballet within a conventional framework both could, and failed to, achieve.

Was *Romeo and Juliet* intended to be a Surrealist ballet? Apparently only by Diaghilev, whose Russian pride had been hurt by the group’s casting him as an anti-revolutionary. In putting Surrealism on the stage, his grand plan was to win over—or at least neutralize—his

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6 Diaghilev supported the 1917 Revolution, up to a point, although he declined the provisional government’s offer to him to return and be Cultural Commissar in the new Soviet regime.
critics in the avant-garde, while simultaneously scoring a major coup in his ongoing quest to marry new art and modernist ballet, but he failed to muster his team of fractious artists sufficiently well to realize his aim in a coherent fashion. How invested the two Surrealists were in the project is uncertain. Picasso had recommended them to Diaghilev and needing the money, they had accepted the commission. Ernst claims to have been “repelled” by ballet, but his son Jimmy recalled his father’s lasting gratitude to Picasso for arranging the commission. Their effort consisted mainly of providing existing pictures for enlargement as drops by Diaghilev’s scene painter Prince Alexander Schervashidze (1867-1968), and they also produced a few rudimentary sketches. Diaghilev, as ever, was pursuing novelty, and was no longer concerned with creating the great synthetic fusion of art forms that had distinguished his earlier productions; the imperative of a theatrical unity between visual décor, music, literary sense, and choreographic form was for him a thing of the past.

*Romeo and Juliet* was originally intended as an “English ballet” from exclusively young English artists, with a score commissioned from the composer Constant Lambert (1905-1951) and decor from his friend the painter Christopher Wood, but the concept altered radically after Diaghilev discovered the work of Miró and Ernst (again, on Picasso’s recommendation) in Paris in early 1926. He conceived the idea of an experimental reframing of Shakespeare’s tale, probably inspired by but exceeding Cocteau’s version for Beaumont two years earlier, with its semi-balletic movements. Diaghilev’s assistant Boris Kochno, who was not keen on the Surrealists’ work, produced a loose scenario, and Bronislava Nijinska, who had resigned from

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8 Kochno, 236. Diaghilev’s original intention explains why the title was kept in English. Wood, a neo-Romantic painter, came recommended by Cocteau.
the Ballets Russes a year previously, was coaxed back to choreograph a final project with the company, since Diaghilev judged his new choreographer, Georges Balanchine, unsuitable for the challenge (although he was permitted to contribute an entr’acte). Miró and Ernst were summoned to Monte Carlo to create the designs for what was now dubbed “a rehearsal, without scenery, in two parts.” This move precipitated Wood’s resignation in protest, to Lambert’s fury and despair: “the idea of seeing a Surrealist production of his ballet horrified Lambert,” according to Kochno. The composer frantically petitioned Diaghilev not to use the “imbecile” painters, threatening to withdraw his score, but Diaghilev persisted, anticipating a new sensation, and the ballet opened in Monte Carlo on May 4, 1926 to an appreciative audience. Diaghilev was now obsessed with Surrealism and had brought several paintings with him to Monte Carlo to present to Serge Lifar, who recalls him staying up all night discussing art with Ernst.

The scenario employed a play-within-a-play theme combined with a self-referential life-imitates-art motif, with a surprise twist (fig. 4.1). Act I takes place in the Ballets Russes’ practice studio where the company, as themselves, are taking class. A couple of lovers (Tamara Karsavina, 1885-1978, and Lifar), are cast as Romeo and Juliet, but their amorous play causes them to forget their steps. Their colleagues whisk them away to the theatre, where a rehearsal for the ballet itself is about to happen. Act II is set in the theater, where various scenes from the play

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9 A photocopied document handwritten in Russian in the Nancy van Norman Baer papers, JRDD, seemingly a form of contract between Diaghilev and Nijinska, suggests that she was very well paid for the commission. My thanks to Dominick Lawton for translating this.

10 Program for the first London performance of Romeo and Juliet at Her Majesty’s Theatre, June 1, 1926. Nancy Van Norman Baer papers, JRDD.

11 Kochno, 236; “Diaghilev had chosen two 10th-rate painters from an imbecile group called the Surrealists,” from Lambert’s letter to his mother, quoted in Buckle, 467.

are performed, ending with the couple’s deaths. The curtain falls but the couple are missing from the curtain call—they are revealed eloping by aeroplane, in aviator costumes. The ending, looking more Futurist than Surrealist, recalls Giovanna Censi’s performance of Marinetti’s Aerodance, which was (coincidentally or not) current in Italy at the time. Apart from the décor, some aspects of the piece do gesture towards Surrealism: the primacy of illicit, passionate love (amour fou according to Breton’s notion, perhaps?) in its capacity to disrupt the everyday, and to subvert the social order and rational behavior (the aeroplane, erstwhile emblem of modern technological progress, may be taken here as standing, perversely, for the triumph of irrational desire); and the victory of imagination over convention. Other aspects display a more general modernist sensibility: the reworking of a classic text in a contemporary mode so as to draw attention to its artifice, thus presenting the ambiguous relationship between art and life, modernity and tradition; a climax that appears to celebrate modern technology (although this was not a Surrealist value—it was conceivably Diaghilev’s late tribute to the Futurists he had admired during the War). But Kochno was no Surrealist sympathizer, and it is unlikely that Ernst or Miró had any input into the scenario, so the ballet Romeo and Juliet cannot really be regarded as Surrealist in its content.

We are unable to judge whether or not the choreography was in tune with Diaghilev’s desired tone, although he constantly interfered, making changes even after Nijinska had left Monte Carlo. Lifar recalls her as being particularly inflexible, putting him through an exam before permitting him to dance Romeo.\(^\text{13}\) Sergei Grigoriev, Diaghilev’s régisseur (stage manager) and a man of conservative taste, records that there was much mime but little dancing,

\[^{13}\text{Lifar, 51-2.}\]
and that “the whole conception of the ballet seemed to be based on a desire to shock.”

Yet according to Kochno, Nijinska produced a disappointingly “conventional, realistic pantomime,” as if setting a straight dramatic work. Karsavina found the ballet “choreographically insignificant,” but her young alternate Alice Nikitina felt many scenes were “really beautiful and full of invention.” In view of such disparate responses, how the choreography actually looked can only be conjectured. Nijinska had imbibed Constructivist principles in Russia, and taught their application in her own new theory of movement. She had left Diaghilev in 1925 partly from a desire to explore a more abstract dance language than he would accept, but how sympathetic she was to the Surrealist aesthetic that he now craved is unknown. Interestingly, she wrote in 1920 that modern dancers needed to capture “the living movement of the automobile or airplane, those perfected machines representing the latest achievements of industry.” Was the finale in fact her contribution? Lambert’s score had certainly never been designed to carry a Surrealist idea: Grigoriev thought it “second-rate modern music,” and critics called it “charming,” “young,” and “noisy.” Perhaps the most surreal touch in the staging was Balanchine’s entr’acte without music (Lambert refused to supply any), in which the curtain stopped a foot or so above the stage, showing just the lower legs of dancers hurrying to the theatre for Act II, and leaving


15 Kochno, 236-7.

16 Quoted in Nancy van Norman Baer, *Bronislava Nijinska: A Dancer’s Legacy* (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), 44.


everything else to the spectators’ imaginations. (Prosaically, they tended to assume the mechanism had malfunctioned).

Despite such absurdist gestures, Miró’s and Ernst’s designs were responsible for whatever Surrealist credentials the ballet could claim. Their participation, rather than the work itself, provoked a riotous demonstration by Breton, Aragon and company at the work’s Paris premiere at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt on May 18. In a by now familiar scenario, the Surrealists greeted the start of the ballet with a cacophony of whistles and catcalls, showered their denunciatory leaflets from the gallery, unfurled a banner reading “Vive Lautréamont!” and attacked patrons in their seats; as if the whole thing were scripted the curtain was lowered, the protestors ejected, and the performance duly recommenced. Diaghilev had been forewarned and had the police ready, as had Miró and Ernst who prudently stayed away.

Grigoriev, who found Surrealism “pointless and ugly,” echoed most observers in feeling that the painters’ “design had no relation to the subject, the music, or the choreography.” No immediately obvious relation, perhaps. Diaghilev had decided that the ballet should have no set, “since Shakespeare used no scenery,” but neither did he want a completely bare stage. He commissioned drop cloths and scenic adjuncts for Act I as well as costumes from Miró, and a front curtain and back cloths for Act II from Ernst. Some paintings, sketches and a few photographs survive, principally in the Serge Lifar Collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, but the exact role of all the designs is now hard to determine. Miró

20 The entr’acte recalls the well-known carte de visite of 1862 “Les Jambes de l’Opéra” by the Paris photographer André Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri (fig. 4.6), a collage of just the legs of male and female opera and ballet stars of the day. Balanchine was probably aware of it, but whether the reference was intended or not is unknown.

21 Grigoriev, 225.

22 Grigoriev, 221.
installed a ballet barre on three sides of the practice room space, and hung it with “a few mysterious objects:” portable screens, a window with a sun, a pink dressing gown on a peg (fig. 4.2, 4.3). Visible on the back cloth in production photographs are an anthropomorphic cloud, a comet, and a flying stick figure (figs. 4.4, 4.5). The critic W.A. Propert refers to a “tiresome worm” on another drop cloth; the source appears to have been a painting in the Lifar Collection (fig. 4.7) depicting a narrow, twisting shape above a lozenge radiating wavy lines—the painter’s sexual symbols. Miró’s sketches include playful and irreverent touches: a bowler hat, a star-shaped form, and the word “fenêtre” where a window was intended. He drew yellow tunics for the women and plain practice clothes for the men, and stipulated that the Act II costumes were to be “bought at a common bazaar.” In Act II Romeo, Juliet, and the Nurse wore approximations of period costume, with Romeo in a black-and-white variation on a harlequin suit; the lovers donned stylish leather aviator outfits for their elopement (figs. 4.8-4.10). Miró’s sketches only minimally indicate the costumes as geometric patches of color; instead, they emphasize the figures wearing them, in an abbreviated but fluid line that suggests the dancers’ graceful body lines and motion (figs. 4.11-4.13). Certainly, there was no attempt to create a Shakespearian look or atmosphere, unlike in Cocteau and Hugo’s version.

Ernst produced designs for at least four drop cloths (it is not clear how many were used), representing “The Sun” (also called “Day”), “The Night,” “The Sea,” and “The Death of Juliet” (figs. 4.14-4.17). The first three feature amorphous or hard-edged discs, black, red, and

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24 This was apparently scribbled on one of the costume drawings. Quoted in Melissa McQuillan, *Painters and the Ballet 1917-1926: An Aspect of the Relationship Between Art and Theatre* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1979), 682.

25 Ernst’s sketches are in the Serge Lifar collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. See *The Serge Lifar Collection of Ballet Set and Costume Designs* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1965); 44-5, 64.
multicolored, floating in space and crossed or flanked by horizontal or diagonal bands of woodgrain frottage. Their imagery suggests celestial bodies at different times of day, and may refer to Juliet’s invocation to Night in Act III, scene 2 of the play:

Come, night; come, Romeo; come, thou day in night;  
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night  
Whiter than new snow on a raven’s back.  
…all the world will be in love with night  
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Her words recall Miró’s black-and-white costume for Romeo, and suggest that the two artists must have concerted on the project, and that the dissimilarity of their designs was deliberate. One of Miró’s costume drawings, for Alice Nikitina as Juliet (fig. 4.13), is inscribed “pour Mlle. Nikitina, titi [tutu] bleu comme le tableau d’Ernst” (for Miss Nikitina, blue tutu like Ernst’s painting), also indicating a joint effort. Ernst’s fourth drawing, for Juliet’s death scene (fig. 4.15), seems to have been used for the ballet’s 1927 London revival. It depicts a submarine environment with sinisterly entwined snake-like forms in funereal blue-black, using the grattage technique he had recently developed. Enlarged to proscenium size for the curtains and theatrically lit, these images must have carried a powerful emotional charge.

Each artist’s uniquely styled designs correspond to the dynamic of each act: Miró’s busy and circumstantial, crowded with enigmatic shapes for the practice room; Ernst’s moody, dreamlike, and full of foreboding for the play itself. Each artist adapted his designs from work on which he was concurrently engaged or which already existed. Miró drew on his “dream pictures” or peintures-poesies from 1925-6 for his drops; his set and costume sketches repeat whimsical forms and motifs from that series—clouds, stars, dotted lines, calligraphic words—in similar arrangements and palette (fig. 4.18). The “worm” painting features the artist’s personal phallic

27 See Jacques Dupin, Miró (Barcelona; New York: Ediciones Polígrafa; Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 112-149.
and vaginal symbols, appropriately for the play’s theme of passionate love. Ernst’s minimalist designs are related to work from his *Histoire naturelle* series of paintings and *frottage* drawings, which depict elemental desert landscapes and seascapes, some with stark horizons dominated by burning wheels of suns, likewise done in 1925-26 (figs. 4.19, 4.20). These experiments with the automatic techniques of *frottage* and *grattage* eloquently express the free play of the unconscious and convey a mood of deepening tragedy—a mood subverted by the jaunty “aerial” finale, which had no backdrop. Ernst created a series of paintings of amorous bird couples the same year: some are titled *Doves*; one is *The Lovers*; in some the birds are imprisoned. These were perhaps a result of his work on the ballet of the two doomed lovers; several of them repeat motifs from his ballet designs (fig. 4.21). Diaghilev found Ernst’s images very beautiful, and called them *tableaux* (pictures) rather than decors; he took great pains to light them evocatively. The Surrealism of both artists’ imagery, with their oblique references and private symbolism, their irrational, oneiric sense, and their appeal to the spectators’ imaginative faculties proved unexpectedly captivating, and one critic wrote that the audience showed more interest in them than in the music.

The ballet proved popular with audiences, the Surrealist protest having generated considerable publicity. Predictably, critics were slow to accept a more modern aesthetic, and bemoaned the absence of the old opulence and color. One wrote “the modernist decors are not calculated to rejoice the eyes. All is very severe… grace entirely banished” and he lamented, of

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30 Grigoriev, 225.

the Ballets Russes, “the splendor that was has departed.”\textsuperscript{32} André Levinson at least recognized the decors’ “symbolic signs,” but found them “entirely inconsistent with the spectacle,” praising only their “irresistible humor.”\textsuperscript{33} Others scorned the ballet as “silly,” or applauded it half-heartedly as “a midsummer joke…daintily ephemeral.”\textsuperscript{34} No one beyond those directly involved seems to have seen it as Surrealist.\textsuperscript{35} Notwithstanding the views of later critics, the fact that \textit{Romeo and Juliet} could be called Surrealist solely on the evidence of how it looked without taking the concept, music or choreography into account is symptomatic of a superficially visual approach to ballet aesthetic that was generally accepted at that time. Such facile attachment to surface display over essential meaning was, legitimately, a major part of the problem the Surrealists had with ballet; until a performance could genuinely claim to have imbibed Surrealism into every facet of its being, there could be no such thing as Surrealist dance. Before examining the moment when this finally did happen, however, we must analyze in greater depth the reasons for the absence of dance from the Surrealist revolution in the twenties and early thirties. First, I consider the potential for affinities between Surrealism and dance.

\section*{4.3 Surrealism and Dance: Potential Affinities}

Since the late nineteenth century writers and other architects of modernist thought have taken dance seriously, finding something fundamental and compelling in its forms and processes.

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\textsuperscript{32} Victor Glover, unidentified journal, Paris (May 27, 1926), quoted in Schouvaloff, 197. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Levinson, 54, 58: “emblèmes symboliques;” “tout à fait inconsistent du spectacle;” “irresistible drôlerie”. \\
\textsuperscript{34} Critics in \textit{The Times} and \textit{The Observer}, London (June 22 and June 27, 1926), quoted in Schouvaloff, 197. \\
\textsuperscript{35} If audiences would even have known what that meant in 1926.
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The critic Frank Kermode, for instance, supports the views of poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, and T.S. Eliot in his assertion of

the fundamental principle that dance is the most primitive, non-discursive art, offering a pre-scientific image of life, an intuitive truth…dance belongs to the period before the self and the world were divided, and so achieves naturally that ‘original unity’ which…modern poetry can produce only by a great and exhausting effort of fusion.36 Breton was clearly not of the same mind as these modern thinkers. Had he been, he would have accorded dance a place in the Surrealist canon, since by Kermode’s formulation, it is an art that fulfills Surrealism’s principal criteria—primal in origin, non-rational, intuitive, inherently poetic, and possessed of an essential unity of disparate elements. Dance’s primordial roots, function in ritual and magic, and central role in non-Western cultural practice should have commended it to Surrealism and made its mysteries worthy of their investigation. Germaine Albert-Birot articulated the prevailing view, writing in SIC in 1918:

Dance par excellence…is the savages, the savages above all, crying, screaming, gesticulating, stamping, expressing rhythmic feeling madly with all their being.37

In ancient and what were then regarded as pre-rational cultures, dance had served to induce trance-like states facilitating access to the supernatural, to heightened states of consciousness and privileged knowledge, and to an enhanced perception of reality—what the Surrealists in the movement’s formative stage had tried to achieve through experiments with sleeping, hypnosis, and automatism. Some of the original modern dance theorists like Laban, as previously

36 Frank Kermode, “Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev” (1958-61), in Copeland and Cohen, 145-160; here, 148. See also Mallarmé, “Ballets” (1886-97), 111-115, and Valéry, “Philosophy of the Dance” (1936), 55-65, both in Copeland and Cohen. In Eliot’s “Burnt Norton” from Four Quartets (1943), he uses dance to evoke a paradoxical experience of timelessness within time, stillness within movement: “at the still point of the turning world…/ there the dance is, / but neither arrest nor movement…/ where past and future are gathered…” Susan Jones argues that, unlike Mallarmé, Eliot uses dance as more than a metaphor here; he constructs it as an expression of a “modernist sublime,” a sacredness or transcendence consonant with his own literary search: “‘At the still point’: T.S. Eliot, Dance, and Modernism,” Dance Research Journal, 41:2 (2009): 31-51.

discussed, believed that dance allowed them to reach “unseen” realities which were often identified with the unconscious; if as Sébastien Arfouilloux argues, “reconnecting with the Dionysiac furor was one of the aims of Surrealist writing,” then they might well have found a more intuitive pathway in dance than in poetry. This experience of transcendence through psychic possession could be shared with an audience, uniting dancer and spectator in a type of collective activity of a kinesthetic nature, thus agreeing to some extent with another one of Surrealism’s precepts, that of the necessity for collective action and experience.

“Psychic automatism” was the central platform of Surrealist research, the means through which the unconscious was to be unlocked. We have seen that the Dadaists’ experiences with dance and masks resulted on occasion in activity that could qualify as automatic: spontaneous and free from the control of reason, morality, or aesthetics (Breton’s stipulation), as was much non-Western dance. Breton defines Surrealism in the first Manifesto (1924) as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought” [my emphasis added], yet this was at first applied exclusively to writing; drawing or painting was admitted later, “as an afterthought,” and no “other manner” was considered. In 1930, in the second Surrealist manifesto, Breton still insists that the “problem which Surrealism set out to deal with…is the problem of human expression in all its forms” (Breton’s italics).

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38 Arfouilloux, 10.


40 Breton, “Second Manifesto of Surrealism,” Manifestoes, 151.
The failure to recognize dance’s potential as a vehicle for automatic expression may have been a deliberate choice, an inevitable result of the social position of dance in Paris in the 1920s (as I will discuss), or both. To be truly automatic, dance would have to return to fundamental human movements, as Rudolf Laban’s dancers and the Dada dancers had done; ballet’s emphasis on technique disqualified it from such experimentation. Moreover, Surrealism privileged verbal language as the source of psychic revelation (at first, until it admitted the pictorial) and dance’s decidedly non-verbal, corporeal vocabulary put it outside the bounds of acceptability or interest. As Philippe Soupault recalled, “we were struck by the remarkable importance of images and compared those that ornamented everyday language, those that poets…and had created, with those that illuminated dreams.” Poetry was “a liberation,” as it alone could generate the imagery of dreams and the marvelous.41 The notion that the body was capable of speaking in a language not dependent on words, and that it could create images as startling, liberating and poetic as could words, was alien to Surrealist philosophy, and may not have occurred to them.

One quality the Surrealists valued in automatic writing, which according to Arfouilloux links it to music, was the tonal resonance of words arranged otherwise than according to reason; an aesthetic of sound and rhythm which transcends their referential value and gives them an abstract, poetic truth.42 An affinity between this phenomenon and bodily movement is also discernible, in the way movement signifies through patterns of symbolic forms whose arrangements bypass literal reference and constitute an intangible poetic affect. Thus, not only is automatic creation a vital property of certain forms of dance, but the Surrealists’ own tested


42 Arfouilloux, 408.
forms of automatism possess a structural parallel in dance’s communicative process. Dance, like music, is a more fundamental human function than language. Writing on Surrealism and music, French scholar Nicolas Castin asserts that music is “anteriour to speech and more durable, inscribed in the density of the body’s texture,” and that words, “automatic or not,” can rarely reach the depths it penetrates. Dance even more than music is “inscribed in the density of the body’s texture;” it is no surprise then that the Surrealists rejected both artforms.

We should note that, while there were other, specific reasons for alienating dance and music (including opera), in the beginning Surrealism chose to disavow all forms of artistic and other expression that served to maintain the existing order of reality. In 1923 Breton banned literature, in particular the novel, declaring, “I will not engage in literary activity at all,” and he forbade his followers from writing for newspapers or the theatre as it would “dirty” them. Some of these interdictions were modified over time, and the Surrealists did not stop writing, but they strove to do so “exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.” But as we shall see, dance was different, as were other forms of theatre; it was convenient to reject it outright, and to make a statement by doing so, repeatedly and publicly.

Had the Surrealists been aware of new developments in dance outside France—in Germany, Russia and America, especially—they might have been prepared to acknowledge its power to command not only a metaphysical dimension, but also a political one. That dance could be subversive and provocative on more than an aesthetic front, that it could critique

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existing social conditions and confront its audience with a call for revolution, was not obvious from the Paris scene. Yet dance as a force and advocate for social change, or at least raised social awareness, was widely practiced between the wars by performers of different political ideologies including cabaret artist Valeska Gert and Laban disciple Kurt Jooss in Weimar Germany; Futurist dancer Jia Ruskaja in Fascist Italy; Constructivist movement artist Nikolai Foregger, jazz proponent Valentin Parnakh, choreographer Kasian Goleizovsky, and the agit-prop Blue Blouse troupes in Bolshevist Russia; Edith Segal’s Red Dancers, “mass dance” proponent Jane Dudley, and the Workers’ Dance League (whose manifesto claimed that “dance is a weapon in the revolutionary class struggle”) in the United States, and many others.\footnote{Ellen Graff, \textit{Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942} (1997), 7; in Suquet, 726.} Even in Paris, politics crept into ballet, albeit somewhat aestheticized, with Nijinska’s \textit{Les Noces} (\textit{The Wedding}, 1923), and Massine’s Constructivist-styled \textit{Le Pas d’acier} (\textit{Step of Steel}, 1927) for Diaghilev. Some of this work from other countries presumably reached Paris: French and foreign modern dancers of all types passed through the city, performing at various independent venues or at Jacques Hébertot’s “Vendredis de la danse” (dance Fridays) at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées, the major forum for free dance artists in Paris for the next decade.\footnote{Robinson, 44.} The Surrealists may have seen some of these but they gave no indication of interest, presumably rejecting all dance along with ballet as innately reactionary and inimical to the revolutionary struggle they claimed to espouse.

Another reason why dance might have been an appropriate partner in Surrealism’s quest for poetic imagery has to do with its form. At the start of official Surrealism, Max Morise, writing in the first edition of the journal \textit{La Révolution surréaliste}, conceptualizes the Surrealist project partly in terms of movement. Stating that “stream of thought cannot be viewed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Les Noces} (\textit{The Wedding}, 1923),
\item \textit{Le Pas d’acier} (\textit{Step of Steel}, 1927)
\end{itemize}
statically,”—an argument against pictorial representation—he invests the idea of the surreal with an innate dynamism (not unlike Futurism), which might plausibly have been realized, or symbolized, through the moving human body—except that thought was presumably incompatible with corporeal expression. He further claims that “secondary attention distorts an image,” in other words, that painting is too mediated by its materials to be a true agent of the surreal; it is not the actual unconscious but an aesthetic treatment of it.47 (Pierre Naville unequivocally restated this objection as “everyone knows there is no surrealist painting”).48 The same charge—it is not the unconscious but a matter of “secondary attention” to it—could be levelled at dance, but here the only mediating factor is the body: no extrinsic materials intervene, and as I have already observed, the potential for spontaneous, improvised expression is far greater. Dance is thus closer to a direct expression of inner psychic function than any other “secondary” artform. This argument works both ways, for dance’s acceptance (it is spontaneous and relatively unmediated) and for its rejection (it is corporeal), but this can only be academic speculation. Despite the logic of the above claims for their affinity, dance was never in contention as a vehicle for Surrealist expression in the 1920s, for reasons that I will discuss next.

4.4 Personal Antipathies

Whatever Breton might have thought of dance in a larger sense, if he thought of it much at all, there was too much that he found objectionable in its most prevalent forms in Paris in the early twenties for him to contemplate its alliance with Surrealism. For a start, dance was deeply

47 Max Morise, “Les yeux enchantées,” La Révolution surréaliste 1 (Dec 1, 1924), 27. Quoted in Foster, xv.

48 Pierre Naville, “Beaux arts,” La Révolution surréaliste 3 (April 15, 1925), 27. Quoted in Foster, xvi.
embedded in the aristo-bourgeois culture the Surrealists had vowed to overthrow, and it was represented by many of the people they had targeted as objects of their revolution. From a Surrealist perspective, the Parisian theatre scene, with its celebration of grand spectacle, its extravagance, its frivolity and its mindless hedonism, supported a self-indulgent ethos of superficial entertainment for its own sake. The dance offerings, from the madly chic Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois to the more traditional Paris Opéra Ballet, the more demotic cabarets and music-halls, and probably the modernists at the Comédie, were alike in their collusion in such futile pastimes. The fashionable milieu was the worst, as it included both society people—“snobs,” like Beaumont, who were class enemies—and Breton’s rivals in the Dada group, whom he execrated perhaps even more than the wealthy and entitled.\textsuperscript{49} Tristan Tzara, Francis Picabia, Erik Satie, and others involved with ballet were all former colleagues with whom Breton and his cohort had clashed in the Dada years; at the time Surrealism was launched in 1924, they were still bitter foes, and their presence condemned any enterprise with which they were associated. In any case, the emergent Surrealists were anxious to distance themselves from Dada; spurning one of Dada’s preferred modes of expression was also a way of emphasizing their separation.

Of all his enemies, Breton hated none more than Cocteau, and Cocteau was everywhere, including some places Breton himself would like to have been: in the Dada scene, in the theatre, music, and ballet worlds, in the press, and in the salons of the elite. The legendary rivalry between these two aspiring leaders of the avant-garde verged in Breton’s case on the pathological. Calling Cocteau “the most detestable being of our time,” “a trickster and a

\textsuperscript{49} “Snobs” was the Surrealists’ favorite term for anyone associated with the theatre world, whom they disliked on class grounds; see, for example: “…the weary snobs of the music hall and the circuses…,” Louis Aragon, \textit{Paris Peasant}, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Exact Change, 1994), 108; “…the musical realm, which was colonized by snobs…,” Soupault, 18, and many other usages.
chameleon,” Breton despised and envied the older man’s social fluidity, his money and haute-bourgeois origins, and the easy success with which he promoted his own reputation.\textsuperscript{50} He was repelled by Cocteau’s mannered personal style and his dandified homosexuality, and resented what he saw as Cocteau’s facile pastiches of others’ new ideas (including Surrealism’s) for faddish sensation. Cocteau filled the role for Breton of an evil twin, the antichrist to his messiah; he represented for the Surrealists “the artist they feared becoming,” according to his most recent biographer, Claude Arnaud.\textsuperscript{51} With his connections in the Ballets Russes and Suédois and his promotion of Satie and les Six, Cocteau incarnated the world of stylishly new dance and music, and his presence ensured the Surrealists’ rejection of them. His sexual orientation, shared with Diaghilev, de Maré, Beaumont, and many more in that world, compounded the problem; Breton’s virulent homophobia revolted at a culture dominated by gay men. “I accuse pederasts,” he told Louis Aragon in 1928, “of testing human tolerance with a mental and moral deficit.”\textsuperscript{52} With Cocteau as an inescapable face of dance in Paris, any involvement with official Surrealism was unlikely.

\section*{4.5 Political Antipathies}

The political dimension of the Surrealists’ rejection of dance might be regarded as a rejection by default: ballet’s heritage as a courtly and aristocratic art par excellence and its modern status as part of the reviled institution of commercial theatre inevitably damned it in their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[51] Arnaud, 320.
\item[52] Polizzotti, 262.
\end{footnotes}
Surrealism’s commitment to the destruction of bourgeois institutions—notably religion, the nation, (hetero)sexual morality, and the family—extended to any socially sanctioned entity that upheld tradition, including artistic tradition. By this ideology, the theatre appears as a monolithic haven for deathly convention, supported by and pandering to the upper class and bourgeoisie. It commodifies art and systematizes it, denying art’s potential for spontaneous revelation and making it a tool of capitalism. The “Protestation” leaflet Breton and Aragon produced to denounce Ernst’s and Miró’s involvement in *Romeo and Juliet* in 1926 (fig. 4.22), makes their position clear:

The participation of the painters Max Ernst and Joan Miró in the next production of the Ballets Russes would not implicate the *Surrealist* idea along with their degradation. It is an essentially subversive idea, incompatible with such enterprises [the ballet and commercial theatre in general], whose aim has always been to domesticate, for the profit of the international aristocracy, the dreams and revolts born of intellectual famine.

Calling their former colleagues “antirevolutionary,” Breton and Aragon defiantly refused to sacrifice “our sense of revolutionary reality” for the sake of their friendship.53 Miró and Ernst had hoped that Picasso’s recommendation and his precedent as a designer for ballets would shield them from censure; it did not.54 Matthew Josephson, the American journalist who was a familiar of the Surrealist circle, claims that Breton’s fury was directed mainly at Ernst, whom Breton saw as his protégé; he took the artist’s working for the “blue bloods” as a personal betrayal.55 Their opposition to theatre was particularly intense in the early years of the

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53 Breton and Aragon, “Protestation”; see n. 220, p. 197, for details.

54 Breton had initially raised no objection when Ernst asked his opinion on working for Diaghilev. Ironically, it was Picasso’s goading Breton over his anti-revolutionary capitulation to “the White Russian” that prompted his outrage.

movement, when Breton and several others were orienting their ideology towards Marxist politics and involving themselves with the French Communist Party.

Breton’s personal and political animosities prejudiced one attempt to produce dance under a Surrealist banner that should have been ideologically acceptable to the group’s revolutionary mindset in those years. In November 1926, Breton’s adversary Yvan Goll staged a program he called “Surrealist Dances” at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées, featuring the German Groteske dancer Valeska Gert (1892-1978, fig. 4.23). Goll was aiming with this display to challenge Breton by promoting his divergent notion of Surrealism. Gert’s idiosyncratic and deliberately confrontational style was brutal and unmusical; she used abrupt, awkward gestures and exaggerated grimaces to critique the corruption of Weimar society, and to arouse the social and political conscience of the spectator: “the old world is rotten…I want to help knock it down. I believe in the new life! I want to help build it!”

Gert had performed with the Berlin Dada group, “in terrifying forms, before the deeply stricken audience.” Defiantly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois, she was too concerned with fighting social degradation to be a Surrealist (although the newspaper Der Tag had called her that years earlier), but she might have struck a chord with the Breton crowd had he not been feuding with Goll over leadership of the movement and ownership of its name, appropriated from Apollinaire. To see “Surrealist” applied to a dance concert infuriated Breton, further antagonizing him against both Goll, whom he regarded as an unethical socialite, and against dance itself.

Breton and cohort staged their usual disruptive

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58 See Arfouilloux, 202-3, for an analysis of motives on both sides. Goll, an avant-garde theatre artist, was the leader of a rival faction in the mid-1920s competing with Breton’s group for the name and direction of Surrealism. Goll attempted to infuse theatre with his version of Surrealism, which he defined, against Breton, as “the most forceful
protest, throwing rotten eggs and catcalling. Clearly the movement style and the performer’s philosophy—both in stark contrast to Paris ballet fare—were irrelevant; the Surrealists’ judgement was already overdetermined by the context of the program.

The preceding evidence would seem to suggest that Breton’s rejection of dance was based on a circumstantial combination of personal and political oppositions particular to his cultural context. Was context then the whole story, or was there anything inherent in the art form to justify his stance? Might other forms of dance, in other contexts of its production and reception, have generated different outcomes? Could Surrealism have accepted dance, as it accepted painting, and found a productive relationship with it under other circumstances? This eventually did happen, as we shall see, but it had to wait until 1938, and the form it took was very different from anything that had preceded it.

A major problem innate to ballet lay in its status as an academic art structured by complex rules and requiring extensive training and skilled technical ability, as well as intensive preparation and usually quite elaborate and expensive staging, all of which the Surrealists rejected as part of the repressive machinery of “bourgeois reason.” Instead they advocated art that was spontaneous, experimental, edgy, and unfettered by artistic convention, and disdained the skill, tradition, and self-conscious artistry vital to ballet. Yet this objection fails to account for their disdain for the many other forms and contexts for dance then available in Paris, including, occasionally, freier Tanz like Gert’s, whose anti-conventional ideology they shared. Even so, another barrier existed: all dance maintained a theatrical separation between performer and audience—despite the element of shared kinesthetic experience referred to earlier—that the negation of realism.” This “dramatic alogic,” which “must ridicule all our banalities of language” informed his plays, demonstrating a heritage from Alfred Jarry’s Ubu plays. See his “Preface to Methusalem or The Eternal Bourgeois” (1922), in Drain, 38-9.
Surrealist concept of art opposed. The art they wanted sprang from the experience of everyday life, or from chance encounters in the street (such as those dramatized in Breton’s novels *Nadja* and *Mad Love*), hence their preference for vernacular forms of entertainment. These were more real than the rarified artifice of any dance, and thus more open to the poetics of the surreal and marvelous. Indeed, the requirement for the dancer or actor to perform a false self on stage was an important part of the objection to theatre in general; Surrealism put a premium on discovering and bringing to light the true, inner self, submerged in the unconscious. As Michel Leiris said, “for surrealism to exist, there must be realism; there has to be a reality to manipulate.”

By this logic, theatre and ballet, which traded, essentially, in lies—masks and illusions—left no place for reality, and hence no opportunity for revelation of the truth of the surreal.

### 4.6 Psychological Antipathies: Surrealism and Music

One fruitful, if oblique, approach to the question of dance’s inherently problematic nature for Surrealism is through the Surrealists’ relationship with music; an inquiry which suggests that there was more to their resistance than just how dance was situated in the Paris scene of the 1920s. Breton’s relationship with music was complex, and it was well documented by his contemporaries, some of whom shared his aversion (or claimed to). For reasons already discussed, the Surrealists objected to the social position of music in Paris—“colonized by snobs” (notably Cocteau), as Soupault put it—and they opposed on principle all artistic enterprises of the *Boeuf sur le toit* set. Even so, an exception to the general Surrealist

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59 “Pour qu’il y ait surréalisme, il faut qu’il y ait réalisme; il faut qu’il y ait une réalité à manipuler;” Michel Leiris, in Sally Price and Jean Jamin, “Interview with Michel Leiris,” *Gradhiva*, 4 (1988), 32-3; quoted in Arfouilloux, 218.
proscription of music was sometimes made for jazz, which could be construed as an expression of revolt against Western, “civilized” values. But there was more: Breton articulated his opposition to music at a deeper level in the opening paragraphs of *Surrealism and Painting*:

[I] grant to plastic expression a value that… I shall never cease to refuse to musical expression, the most deeply confusing of all forms. Auditive images, in fact, are inferior to visual images not only in clarity but also in strictness [*rigueur*]… so may night continue to descend upon the orchestra, and may I… be left with open eyes, or with closed eyes in broad daylight, to my silent contemplation.60

Breton did not return to the topic in that essay; he evidently felt compelled to declare his opposition at the outset, to set painting against music for the purpose of establishing the unequivocal superiority of the former as an agent of enlightenment and inner vision, and to demolish the latter once and for all. He only slightly modified his views in later years in the essay, “Silence is Golden” (1946). Here Breton reiterates his “horror of music,” bolstered by the aversion of other artists and writers, or so he claims. He nonetheless argues (unconvincingly) for a reconciliation between the two arts based on an affinity of the “inner word” of poetry with an “inner music”—entities that share a foundation in auditory images—while continuing to declare actual collaboration between music and poetry to be undesirable.61 Breton consciously and consistently echoed the views of Giorgio de Chirico, whose complaint that “with music, you never know what’s going on” encapsulates the Surrealists’ attitude.62 Music, they believed, can only provoke vague and imprecise “spiritual realizations,” in contrast to the “precise and

60 Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 1.


distinct” insights derived from poetry and painting. Music was too vague and too abstract to stimulate intellectual activity, according to Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, and “absolutely out of touch with reality” according to Leiris, therefore incapable of generating surrealism.64 Inimical to psychic illumination, the “night” of music obscures inner sight, frustrating the mind’s ability to “see” poetic imagery such as that generated by language and, to a lesser degree, by the visualizations of external reality that constitute painting (especially non-figurative styles). These inner images are not equivalent to those of the sensible world, but possess a higher truth, providing access to the unconscious and the oneiric realm. Ironically for the Surrealists, Freud also distrusted music—but for reasons opposite to theirs. He believed it to be an “empty illusion” that facilitated (rather than prevented) the release of dangerous inner urges and fantasies; he wrote of music: “some rationalistic…turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me.”65 As some authors have argued, Freud may have been “afraid of music’s suggestive and manipulative power and its direct connections to the irrational powers of the unconscious.”66 Breton may not have known this, but he would have agreed with the principle, if not the rationale for Freud’s unease.

Like Freud, who claimed to be “a completely unmusical person,” Breton also had subjective reasons for his rejection.67 His companions testified that he found musical sound

63 Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 1.

64 Afouilloux calls these views a “caricature” of music’s capacities, 220: Ribemont-Dessaignes, cited in ibid., 217; Leiris, “la musique …ne touch pas absolument à la réalité,” quoted in ibid., 218.


67 Quoted in Cheshire, 1131.
painfully unpleasant and could not recognize or distinguish tunes; as he told Georges Auric, “you know that I am completely insensible to music,” and Francis Poulenc recalled “they all [the Surrealists] detested music. For Breton, for example, music had no meaning, it was useless and cumbersome.” It has been suggested that Breton and Freud were both subject to a neurological anomaly called amusia, a form of musical deafness (also known as tone deafness) which affects the brain’s ability to process musical stimuli. Characteristically, Breton weaponized his putative deficiency, using it to provoke the musical community and to justify a Surrealist rejection of music and related arts while promoting painting. As the composer Virgil Thomson remarked, “Breton, posing as a universal intelligence, had no ear for music, so had to invent reasons why music was an inferior art.” He turned a private aversion into official policy, and censured anyone who deviated from the party line. Breton’s musical intolerance will have made it virtually impossible for him to watch dance receptively, even had there been no other impediments to its acceptance.

Although primarily a visual and kinetic art, dance is usually complemented by the auditory experience of music. Even if the Surrealists had believed that dance possessed a visual poetry capable of generating inner images, they would likely have felt that its combination with music in performance would compromise any such process. The close association of the two

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69 See Arfouilloux 173-4.

70 Virgil Thomson in conversation with Mark Polizzotti, quoted in Polizzotti, 265.

71 On a more basic and perhaps humanly forgivable level, dance was something of which Breton had no practical knowledge or experience and for which he had no aptitude, hence he saw nothing of value in it.
artforms (sometimes with poetry as well) in Paris in the 1920s, pursued by composers and choreographers whose interest lay in crafting some form of aesthetic synthesis in performance, will have further prejudiced Surrealism against dance. That this was precisely the kind of alliance that Apollinaire had strongly advocated didn’t matter; the Surrealists were perfectly capable of ignoring anything inconvenient to their campaign of merciless antagonism towards their chosen enemies, and Apollinaire’s advocacy may have seemed less relevant in 1924 than previously. We have seen how they ignored signs pointing to an intuitive affinity between Surrealism and dance, such as dance’s potential for automatic expression and Dionysiac abandon. They also engaged in historical revisionism with respect to the origins and original meaning of the word surrealism, which was itself a product of a cultural moment focused on dance and music in performance. Breton acknowledged his appropriation of the word as an hommage to Apollinaire in the Manifesto;\textsuperscript{72} but although Apollinaire had first used it in his program note for the Ballets Russes’ Parade in May 1917 and applied it again in June to his play Les Mamelles de Tirésias (see p. 127), Soupault ignored this and claimed in 1963 that “surrealism” originated in the poet’s essay Onirocritique (1908).\textsuperscript{73} Breton elsewhere claimed part-authorship of the word, asserting that he had collaborated with Apollinaire on the preface to Mamelles where it appeared; the irony of the movement’s name having been coined for a ballet devised by Cocteau would have been unbearable.\textsuperscript{74} Breton cannot have known that Apollinaire told Massine just after Parade’s premiere that “choreography and music are sur realist arts par

\textsuperscript{72} Breton, “Manifesto,” in Manifestoes, 24.

\textsuperscript{73} Soupault, 18.

\textsuperscript{74} “Je puis dire que j’ai collaboré à la preface de Mamelles,” (I must tell you that I collaborated on the preface to Mamelles). Breton to (probably) Théodore Fraenkel. From Henri Béhar, André Breton, le grand indésirable (2005), 67, quoted in Arfouiloux, 41.
excellence since the reality they express always surpasses nature,” but he knew the poet’s 
enthusiasm for new, subversive forms of these arts.\textsuperscript{75} Surrealism’s fierce ideological 
independence, its policy of anti-conformism to accepted modes of thought, meant that it felt 
under no obligation to adopt the views of its guiding figures wholesale, yet such a reversal of 
something that was an article of belief for Apollinaire suggests a certain perversity in claiming 
his legacy, while at the same time rejecting ballet and music.

On the rare occasions when the Surrealists visited ballet, apart from protesting, their only 
interest was in the scenography, which they saw as an end in itself. They seemed unable or 
unwilling to conceive of the visual artists’ contributions as just one part of a theatrical whole that 
included dance and music as (in theory) the dominant partners. Breton’s enthusiasm over 
\textit{Mercure}, calling it “Picasso’s most important artistic event in recent years,” and comparing it to 
\textit{Demoiselles d’Avignon}, makes this clear (see p. 180), as does their response to \textit{La jarre} by the 
Ballets Suédois in November 1924. René Crevel praised de Chirico’s scenery for that ballet in \textit{La 
Révolution surréaliste}, and echoed Breton in claiming that it was greatly improved by “the 
departure—finally—of the unwelcome dancers.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} See n. 1, p. 241. It is also true that under Breton, the meaning of the word shifted away from Apollinaire’s usage.

Quoted in Arfoiulloux, 182-83. Although they enjoyed the evening, the ballet was pronounced the “antithesis of 
avant-garde.” It is difficult to reconcile Crevel’s Surrealist activities with his sycophantic pieces of journalism about 
Beaumont and \textit{Soirée de Paris}, quoted in previous chapters. Perhaps, as a notoriously insecure gay man (the only 
one admitted into the Surrealist circle, he committed suicide in 1935), Crevel was currying favor where he could.
4.7 Philosophical Antipathies

The preceding discussion presents several perspectives—personal, political, and psychological—on Surrealism’s rejection of dance. Finally, I propose a different type of perspective, from an intuitive rather than an intellectual standpoint, which illuminates their position in a way that they probably would not have articulated. This perspective involves the embodied relationship which dance invites from its spectators. It has been recognized since the modernist era that bodily movement, especially movement of a rhythmic nature, generates a sensory empathy, or proprioception, whereby a viewer feels in their own musculature an echo of the mover’s actions; it is the most direct and fundamental of the ways in which dance communicates. This embodied empathy enables a kinesthetic appreciation, resulting in what the dance critic John Martin has called metakinesis: the idea that “the physical and the psychical are merely two aspects of a single underlying reality,” or as Mallarmé expressed it poetically in the 1890s, that the dancer’s movements constitute “the visual embodiment of an idea.”

Numerous writers and thinkers have commented on this simultaneously visceral and psychic connection between dancer and viewer. The poet Paul Valéry wrote in 1936 that we must “consider the dance as a kind of inner life, allowing that psychological term a new meaning in which physiology is dominant;” this “resonates” with us as spectators so that “a part of our pleasure…consists in feeling ourselves possessed by the rhythms so that we ourselves are virtually dancing.” T.S. Eliot spoke in 1924, as a spectator, of “the vital flame, that impersonal,


and, if you like, inhuman force which transpires between each of the great dancer’s movements,” suggesting an intangible power communicated in the act of watching dance. More recently, French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy told the filmmaker Claire Denis that “watching ballet…even if you don’t know how to dance, you can feel the dance in your body as an audience.” The ongoing work of the visionary choreographer Wayne McGregor in collaboration with researchers in experimental psychology and cognitive science, referred to in chapter 3, investigates embodied cognition through choreographic work and live performance; as he has said, "the human body is a complex, memory-laden, thinking entity that provides an unrivalled window into human experience." An increased awareness of the embodied nature of how dance is experienced by viewers has led to its serious consideration from the perspective of phenomenology—a philosophy which proposes that our basic engagement with the sensible world is not only intellectual but corporeal, and that we apprehend reality first of all through a varied combination of our sensory, affective, and motor capacities.

The notion that dance requires a different kind of engagement from other arts—a felt state of bodily empathy, capable of communicating directly and powerfully—has implications for Surrealism’s resistance to dance in any form. Surrealism’s philosophy, a “revolution of the mind” concerned above all with “the disinterested play of thought,” their emphasis on “the


“sovereignty of thought,” (Breton’s italics) might well, in its cerebral emphasis, rebel against a somatic art—one which privileged bodily expression and demanded bodily engagement from its audience.\(^83\) Music too is somatic in its stimulus of sensory response, as Breton instinctively understood. More than any other sensory stimulus, music is most often the gateway to synesthetic experience: Kandinsky, for instance, first experienced synesthesia at a performance of Wagner’s *Lohengrin*. Active listening plays on the nerve receptors of the body, engaging sensation in a visceral way that generates an emotional response. The neuroscientist Jonah Lehrer explains the infamous riot at the premiere of *Rite of Spring* in terms of Stravinsky’s unfamiliar musical arrangements causing physical pain and temporary psychic derangement in its auditors.\(^84\) It was, of course, the combination of radical music with Nijinsky’s brutal choreographic attack on ballet tradition that caused that audience’s fury; their corporeal senses could no more empathize with the movement than their auditory ones could assimilate the sound.

Breton was neither theoretically nor in practice averse to physicality as such—he professed a fervent belief in the sacredness of uninhibited sexual expression (for men, if not for women)—but his position was ambiguous, and his own behavior evidenced a certain puritanism in regard to bodily matters. Josephson records Breton’s disgust at being taken to a high-class Parisian brothel by Soupault in 1923, and in Marseille the previous year he was upset and embarrassed by a visit to the red-light district with Picabia, as such places “depressed him terribly,” according to his wife Simone Kahn; there were other telling instances.\(^85\) It is notable,


too, that the Surrealist profession of freedom from sexual repression did not extend to homosexuality, which Breton, for one, abominated. Despite Surrealism’s credo of liberation, the personal psychology of its members was inevitably determined by their cultural and temporal context. The “Récherches sur la sexualité,” group discussions among the (male only) Surrealists beginning in 1928 and continuing into the 1940s or longer, revealed Breton’s unease about sexual matters, despite his genuine commitment to breaking social taboos on the subject. He refused to consider female sexual experience and idealized monogamy; the whole tenor of the sessions underscored the Surrealist denial of female subjectivity and their colonization of female sexuality, evident in much of their art and writing, as well as their fetishization of women as “femme-enfants” or quasi-mythic conduits for male creativity—“woman’s transcendent vocation,” as Breton wrote. Mark Polizzotti speaks of Breton’s “distance from eroticism, his distrust of women and pessimism about intimacy in general,” and Breton himself claimed that he “did not know what sexual ‘pleasure’ was.”

René Magritte’s photocollage Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt (1929; fig. 4.24) comments on the largely theoretical nature of the “Récherches,” an exercise he, at least, found “facile” and “predictable.” It is plausible that, as Jean-Paul Sartre said of Breton in relation to his ideas on social revolution, the latter’s notion of sexual, bodily freedom “remained a rather Platonic affair;” while it would be reductive to suppose that his personal squeamishness translated directly into a hostility toward dance as an art made on and by the (mainly) female

86 Transcripts of the first two sessions were published in La Révolution surréaliste, 11 (March 15, 1928) under the title “Récherches sur la sexualité.”


89 Polizzotti, 264.
body and the (often) homosexual male one, the two attitudes—a combination of visceral and intellectual revulsion—can hardly be unrelated.\textsuperscript{90}

During the 1920s, Surrealism adopted not only poetic writing, but painting, film, and three-dimensional art as objects of their revolutionary agenda, but they showed no interest in extending that agenda to dance or to music. I have argued that the Surrealists’ rejection of dance in the 1920s is both consistent and inconsistent with their ideological positioning. Such a contradiction was perhaps inevitable, given the unstable relationship I have described between politics, culture, and the personal in Surrealism. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss state that ‘the political’ for Surrealism may best be described as an experience of freedom grounded in the imaginative possibilities revealed through creative endeavor. It is this experience that constituted the link between the artistic or literary plane and the social plane, between culture and politics in Surrealism.\textsuperscript{91}

According to this formulation, Surrealism should have accepted a creative endeavor that sought a freedom of body and mind in the quest of a primal, ecstatic, and integrated experience of reality, as much modernist dance did. Clearly, the ballet of Paris’s commercial theatres did not, and the ballet’s social space made it part of the problem the Surrealists challenged. However, they made no attempt to resolve this contradiction by investigating dance’s more diverse potentialities at this early stage; establishing their adamantine opposition to the status quo and all its works was their priority in the 1920s.

\textsuperscript{90} Cited in Josephson, 337.

4.8 Re-embodying Surrealism: *L’Exposition internationale du surréalisme*, 1938

Surrealism finally discovered its unique performative mode not in any kind of theatre, but in an artfully manipulated space of its own imagining: the Surrealist exhibition. From the first one in 1925, Surrealist exhibitions occurred irregularly until the 1960s, incorporating and elaborating on the concepts of the Dada exhibitions and cabarets of the war and immediate postwar years. The Paris *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* of 1938 was the first to deploy Surrealist display tactics, using them to construct an immersive environment of disorientation and fetishization that inverted expected categories of aesthetic display for the purpose of cultural subversion. It was also the first time that Surrealism and dance willingly converged, in an orchestrated display of physical and psychic provocation.

The 1938 *Exposition* was a highly theatricalized and deliberately shocking experience; it ensnared visitors in a collective journey that compelled them to question their own sense of reality, assaulting their imaginations, exciting their primal, erotic urges, and plunging them into a staged but veristic world of alarming fantasy. The Surrealists transformed Georges Wildenstein’s exclusive and sedate Galerie Beaux-Arts into a travesty of a conventional exhibition space: they discarded light, clarity of purpose, rational display order, cleanliness, and pleasing museum aesthetics, replacing them with murky darkness, obscurity, irrationality, disorder, filth, and obstructed viewing of the exhibits. Breton later said that the Surrealists had “concentrated…on creating an atmosphere as far as possible from that of an ‘art’ gallery.”92 In doing so, they subverted not only the core values of aesthetic display, but also those of modern bourgeois

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society, especially its veneration of art and art’s spaces as sacred and inviolate. The wider political context adds another layer of significance to their transgressive project; the Exposition took place in a climate of widespread anxiety about the rising tide of political authoritarianism in Europe. Only a few months prior to its opening on January 17, 1938, the Nazi regime had staged their two diametrically opposed exhibitions, the Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung (Great German Art Exhibition) and the Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) show in Munich. The Surrealist Exposition was a riposte and a challenge to the social vision that both these represented, a defiantly ideological manifestation in which, for the first time in Surrealism’s history, dance played a role. Interestingly, Étienne de Beaumont is credited among its financial backers on the Exposition’s checklist, along with (less surprisingly) Charles de Noailles. It appears the Count was still supporting avant-garde art, even if he no longer aspired to produce it; he must have been present at the vernissage, or private view, but his reactions are not recorded.

The Exposition’s idiosyncratic installation, masterminded by Marcel Duchamp, has been well documented elsewhere; a short summary here will serve to contextualize a discussion of its dance aspect, which is my focus. The Exposition ran for several weeks, but dance appeared only once, at the vernissage (fig. 4.25). On this occasion, the guests in evening attire had first to negotiate the courtyard dominated by Dalí’s Taxi-pluvieux (Rainy Taxi, fig. 4.26), with its

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93 See Filipovic for a compelling dissection of the dynamic between these three exhibitions. Another critic who discusses the political context is Maria-Rosa Lehman, “The 1938 Exposition internationale du surréalisme and Acte manqué: The Terror of Memory and the Terror to Come.” Lingua Romana 13:1 (2018): 99-112.

94 Lewis Kachur, Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2003), 29. We can only speculate as to whether Beaumont, like Noailles, was a lender to the Exposition. If so, might he have lent Ernst’s Tree of Life, now in the High Museum? I have found no record of his having owned any other Surrealist work, and neither does his Ernst appear in any photograph or report of the Exposition, so this seems unlikely.

95 See Kachur, especially.
glamorous but snail-covered mannequin and her driver, his head encased in a shark’s jawbone, drenched by a continuous shower of water inside their vehicle. They next ran the gauntlet of the rue Surréaliste, or Mannequin street, a corridor simulating a Paris street lined with sixteen female mannequins, each costumed by a different Surrealist artist in an array of ingenious and erotic fetish outfits (figs. 4.27, 4.28). Real and imaginary Paris street signs punctuated this parade of simulated streetwalkers, alternating with a variety of pictorial and printed material including photographs of Hans Bellmer’s dismembered dolls, extreme illusionary counterparts to the “real” women on display. This indoor street finally deposited the visitors in the central grotto, or boudoir: a large, dark room with an immaculately made up double bed in each of its four corners, the floor covered in sand and dead leaves, a reedy pool of water, and Duchamp’s 1200 sacs à charbon (1200 coal sacks) stuffed with paper suspended from the ceiling, creating an atmosphere of intense claustrophobia and leaking coal dust onto the visitors, to the acoustic accompaniment of (recorded) insane laughter and German military marches. In a bizarre contrast, the smell of roasting coffee (“odeurs de Brasil,” as advertized) inexplicably pervaded the gallery. The walls were crowded with artworks, and surrealist objects—uncanny hybrids of furniture and human body-parts—were randomly displayed; all these were barely visible, the only illumination emanating from a coal brazier glowing dimly in the center of the room, and the hand-held flashlights issued to the visitors (fig. 4.29). Two adjacent smaller rooms further intensified the atmosphere of the marvelous and the strange, the suspension of rational order, and the inversion of the real and the imaginary, of interior and exterior space. As the painter Marcel Jean wrote, the gallery had been transformed “into a space in which the marvelous coincided…with an
essential disorientation, a fantastic metaphor in which the spectator found himself plunged, whether he wanted or not.”96

Their senses by now thoroughly deranged thanks to the bewildering onslaught of Surrealist dérèglement, the confused visitors received one last shock in the form of a surprise dance performance—promised on the invitation to be sure, but unexpected in timing, location, and form.97 At midnight, the dancer Hélène Vanel burst from the shadows of the central grotto “like a tornado,” and proceeded to give the only known performance of her piece, the provocatively titled L’Acte manqué (which translates as parapraxis or Freudian slip, figs. 4.30, 4.31).98 Her wild hair (in fact a wig) streaming over a torn chemise that barely covered her naked body and wreathed in chains, she clutched a terrified cockerel by the neck. Vanel hurled herself about the room, shrieking and gibbering, tore off her bonds, splashed in the pool (muddying the unfortunate guests’ expensive clothes), and landed on one of the beds. Here she gave what observers describe as a frighteningly convincing impression of a hysterical attack, arching her back in violent delirium, before leaping up and disappearing into the darkness.99 A press photograph also shows her performing incantations over the brazier in front of a group of


97 Dérèglement: derangement. A key Surrealist concept, from Artur Rimbaud’s “déreglement de tous les sens,” it was a call to liberate the imagination by reversing norms and expectations, invoked by Breton in his “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1930).

98 “‘Tornado,’” from Dalí’s description of the event, quoted in Don LaCoss, “Hysterical Freedom: Surrealist Dance & Hélène Vanel’s Faulty Functions,” Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory 15: 2 (2005): 37-61; here, 42. L’Acte manqué has been mistranslated as “the unconsummated act;” several commentators have taken it to represent a woman driven delirious by sexual frustration. For example, James Herbert, in Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1998), 144, speaks of “a lascivious act attempted if ultimately left manqué.” Vanel had planned three pieces, according to the invitation: L’Hystérie, Le Trèfle incarnat (the crimson clover), and L’Acte manqué. In the event, from the audience’s point of view these merged into one continuous performance, which became generally known by the latter title. Emerson attempts to separate them, but there seems little point, 412-15.

99 LaCoss provides a vivid and detailed, if somewhat fanciful, description of Vanel’s performance, in “Hysterical Freedom,” 42-3.
apparently mesmerized artists (fig. 4.32). According to Dalí, Vanel’s performance was “responsible for provoking the downfall of most of the frightened audience.”

After the succession of mannequins and semi-humanized objects, the shock of encountering a live woman behaving erratically in what must be described as an act of physical automatism must have seriously exacerbated the visitors’ disorientation: which was real—was the dancer an automaton? What was reality, in such an environment? Could they trust the veracity of their own perceptions? They were forced to question, too, their sense of their own bodies in relation to hers. Vanel’s dance served as the ultimate dérèglement, the climax to the Exposition’s escalating inventory of inversions of the presumed natural and aesthetic order: light/dark; wet/dry; inside/outside; order/disorder; rational/irrational; vision/obscurity; real/imaginary; human/simulacrum. In L’Acte manqué, a moving human body facilitated and completed Surrealism’s calculated overthrow of reason and the tyranny of civilized society—metaphorically, at least.

Until very recently, little was known of Hélène Vanel. An “audacious” French modern dancer, she trained with the British free dance artists Margaret Morris and Lois Hutton. With Hutton, her lover, Vanel ran a multi-disciplinary art center called Rythme et Couleur in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, and traveled and taught throughout France. She performed in Paris nightclubs and in other European capitals to some acclaim, developing “a theatrical language that was perhaps closer to mime than dance.” Vanel was friendly with several of the Surrealists, having

100 See Kachur, 86-87.


102 The recent biography by Richard Emerson rescues Vanel from her former obscurity.

103 Robinson, Modern Dance in France, 76.
met them in Saint-Paul; she already had a reputation for her “difficult and bizarre art,” and often danced naked. 104 Dali recruited her for the *Exposition*, taking Paul Eluard and possibly Breton to Vanel’s Montmartre studio to audition her. Some of her ideas appear to have been in tune with Surrealist thought. In the 1939 edition of the journal *Cahiers G.L.M.*, she wrote in part response to Breton’s inquiry of artists as to their “indispensable poetry:”

Dance must have the same mission as poetry…dance is the vertigo of matter…to communicate with life’s forces by means of gesture and movement…to rediscover the truth of being. To acquire…the sense of the invisible powers that attract us even while repelling us. Is this not a means of surpassing ourselves, a way out of the marasmus and mediocrity—a method of attaining the grandeur that we so shamefully abandoned? 105

Scholarly readings of *L’Acte manqué* are productively varied in their emphases. For Alyce Mahon, it represented “the theatrical staging of erotic desire,” designed like the rest of the *Exposition* to force the viewers to go beyond reality and discover new aspects of their inner self through the liberation of their erotic imaginations. 106 Lewis Kachur chooses to believe Surrealist Georges Hugnet that *L’Acte manqué* was “a more sincere than talented potpourri of mime and dance” and credits Dalí with having orchestrated Vanel’s piece, based on the artist’s enthusiastic account of the performance. 107 Don LaCoss is skeptical of Dalí’s claims, and (mainly correctly, according to Richard Emerson) he restores agency to Vanel as the creative force behind *L’Acte manqué*, which he characterizes as “an autonomous, automatist manifestation of the unpredictability and unreliability of the flesh activated by the unconscious.” LaCoss also

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104 *Ce soir* (May 19, 1937), 7; quoted in Emerson, 383.


elaborates on the title’s meaning: the Freudian concept of *Fehlleistung*—parapraxis, or “Freudian slip”—a psychosomatic “accident” revealing truths buried deep in the unconscious, which erupt spontaneously “from the dark side of the mind,” escaping conscious control.108 Thus, Vanel’s dance is an expression of personal and political resistance to repressive authority—a cry of revolt. Elena Filipovic discusses the *Exposition*’s cultural politics as a call to revolution via the subversion of exhibitionary form, in direct opposition to the Nazi propagandist exhibitions of 1937. She reads Vanel’s performance as an aesthetic subversion in line with this aim, “an anti-ideal, offering a body deemed degenerate, uncontrollable, and pathological as object of exhibit,” in contrast to the perfect Aryan body of Nazi ideology.109 For Emerson, it was Vanel’s revenge against the self-satisfied snobs—her patrons—at the *vernissage*; biting the hands, as it were.

Scholars have drawn particular attention to Vanel’s simulation of hysteria, and it was this crowning element in her performance that attracted most condemnation from contemporary spectators. The pathologizing of hysteria as an exclusively female disorder by nineteenth-century neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and his pupil Sigmund Freud had been largely discredited by the 1920s. Hysteria fascinated the Surrealists; it was celebrated by Breton and Aragon in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1928 as a “poetic discovery” and “a supreme mode of expression” that functioned as a critique of repressive cultural norms.110 It was thus the perfect trope for the *Exposition*’s staging of resistance through corporeal means. Vanel’s convulsive movements,


109 Filipovic; quote, 196.

110 André Breton and Louis Aragon, “La Cinquantenaire de l’hystérie,” *la Révolution surréaliste*, 11 (15 March 1928). The photographs of Charcot’s patients that accompanied the article and served as a resource for Vanel were of women who “were required to perform their own hysteria” for the camera and Charcot’s lectures. Probably unknowingly, Vanel was re-enacting their performances. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
imitated from photographs of Charcot’s patients, opposed the unruly, fragile, creative female body to the rigidly masculinized machinery of cultural authority in a supreme gesture of Surrealist defiance that could only have been accomplished by dance. Not only that, her performance of hysteria may plausibly be construed as an embodiment of Breton’s notion of convulsive beauty. L’Acte manqué was plainly intended to be seen as a display of spontaneous, automatist activity, an outburst of unconscious energy, but we might ask how authentically automatic it was. It was certainly rehearsed; extant photographs by Josef Breitenbach and newsreel footage were taken at a dress rehearsal for the press the same afternoon. I argue that this is unimportant, and that an element of automatism may have been present—the point was that it looked spontaneous. Vanels’ dance was probably at least as automatic as any of the writing and imagery produced by Surrealists under that rubric in the 1920s.

Hélène Vanel’s performance of L’Acte manqué at the 1938 Exposition has been discussed before now, but never from a dance historical perspective, one that puts it at the center of a study of the relationship between Surrealism and dance. The preceding discussion allows us to consider what conditions were in fact necessary for the existence of a Surrealist dance. First, there could be no association with any of Surrealism’s enemies, either formerly from within, or from outside the movement. A total severance from the economy of commercial theatre was essential, and no dancers or choreographers connected with the companies or institutions of the mainstream European entertainment industry would be accepted—alternative or fringe.

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111 As I discuss in the Conclusion; this idea merits further investigation.

112 No dancer is a stranger to automatic movement. Anyone who has ever done improvisational dance knows that there is a point at which something other takes over from conscious motivation, and the body follows its own impulses without apparent intentionality. This is not muscle memory, it is a deeply rooted creative impulse—art.
performers like Vanel were the only option. Furthermore, Surrealist dance demanded an entirely new performance context outside the conventional theatre or cabaret, within an environment dictated by and designed to Surrealist specifications. There could be no conventional musical accompaniment, but incongruous acoustics determined by Surrealist ideas were encouraged. There was to be no debt to any kind of tradition in terms of repertoire or dancerly technique, and no evidence of training, discipline, or skill could be displayed. Defying the notion of individual communion with art, the performance was required to produce a collective experience, in the creation of which it had to smash the borders between the artist, the artwork, and the audience. Its purpose was not mere frivolous entertainment nor the giving of aesthetic pleasure; it must possess the serious and didactic intention of “taking the viewer beyond the frontiers of reality,” and inducing shock, revelation, and transformation.\(^{113}\) Corporeal empathy was definitely not the aim: the dancer’s bodily presence must be of a brutal, uncanny, and physically confronting nature that repelled an empathetic response from spectators and instead provoked shock or disgust and defamiliarization, as did Bellmer’s violated dolls and Jacques-André Boiffard’s repugnant photographs. All this, Vanel’s performance achieved. With her, the Surrealists discovered how dance could be politicized their way, by totally subverting the conventions of dance itself, both classical and avant-garde.

Critical response was variably hostile or bemused, condemning the whole event as a failed joke, but *L’Acte manqué* was agreed to have been the high point of the *Exposition*. Vanel did not merely represent a Surrealist idea, she apparently incarnated one. More than enacting it, for the audience she *was* the uncontrolled unconscious, bursting forth from an undisciplined body in the grip of automatist furoir. Her act seemed real; it thus activated a key article of

\(^{113}\) Mahon, 277.
Surrealist belief in exposing an inner reality more intensely authentic than that of the observable, tangible world, and she did this with greater immediacy and more convincingly than painting or poetry could manage. Vanel embodied the *Exposition’s* principle of *déménagement* in the inversion of interior and exterior worlds, bringing her own inner reality vividly, terrifyingly to visible life on her physical being—or so it seemed. In fact, it was a theatrical illusion, which may have been why Breton, ever the purist, was skeptical about her involvement.

That Hélène Vanel was able to perform a dance piece as part of a Surrealist event at all was an index of how the movement had changed since 1924. In the intervening years it had become more open to varied forms of expression, more extrovert and theatrical, and less doctrinaire in some areas. Her contribution would have been unthinkable in the 1920s. If we compare these two instances of Surrealist/dance collaboration, *Romeo and Juliet* in 1926 and *L’Acte manqué* in 1938, it is evident that the commercially successful program that advertised its association with Surrealism was less surrealist than the surprise one-off marginal event—it also happened too early. Vanel’s performance was dance in the service of Surrealism, and by now Surrealism was mature enough to accommodate it; for all Vanel’s creative agency, the movement initiated it and controlled the conditions of its production, as well as its outcome, which was a pure Surrealist experience. Conversely, *Romeo and Juliet* was Surrealism in the service of dance, and its outcome was anything but pure, or revolutionary. It was an uncomfortable hybrid of discordant ideologies and aesthetics, that convinced no-one. For dance and Surrealism to work together, even in 1938, Surrealism had to dictate the terms.

After the relative success, on their terms, of the *Exposition*’s dance component, it is curious that the Surrealists never again attempted anything as original and adventurous, using professional avant-garde dance artists, in their subsequent exhibitions. In America, Dalí
continued to recycle elements of the 1938 show in several locations.\textsuperscript{114} The \textit{Dream of Venus} pavilion at the 1939 New York World’s fair offered only “Dali’s sad and sleazy sideshow” (according to Jimmy Ernst) of naked and semi-naked women performing in various mobile fantasy tableaux.\textsuperscript{115} Visitors to the \textit{vernissage} at the \textit{First Papers of Surrealism} exhibition in New York in 1942 were greeted by the comparatively tame, though distracting, spectacle of children playing ball games. Peggy Guggenheim’s Surrealist room in her \textit{Art of This Century} gallery in 1943 did not attempt any exhibits involving moving bodies. Presumably willing artists were available, so perhaps Duchamp’s and Breton’s compulsion to produce something new precluded what might have been merely a tired repetition, drained of any capacity for provocation. It is also probable that, as Breton lost patience with Dali’s increasingly self-promoting antics, he forbade any further such activity. Seemingly the moment when dance and Surrealism could productively collaborate had passed with the movement’s maturing.

In any case, the legacy of \textit{L’Acte manqué} was less dance than the performance art of subsequent decades—although there are echoes in Merce Cunningham and John Cage’s experiments with chance procedures in the relation of choreography and music at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, between 1948-53 and later elsewhere.\textsuperscript{116} As early as 1936, Dalí had been involved in two performance events in London: a lecture he gave in a diving suit; and “the Phantom of Sex Appeal,” for the opening of the \textit{London International Surrealist Exhibition}. For this the British Surrealist Sheila Legge (1911-1949) embodied a living Dalí

\textsuperscript{114} Described in Emerson, 402.
\textsuperscript{115} Ernst, 151. Jimmy Ernst saw Dali’s pavilion in New York, and thought it a poor travesty of Surrealism.
\textsuperscript{116} Markoski, 361, 363. Despite their chance elements, Cunningham and Cage’s projects were much more systematic than Vanel’s instinctive approach. See p. 183, n. 182.
artwork (fig. 4.33).\textsuperscript{117} Wearing a designer wedding gown, and with her head encased in a gigantic rose mask, she stood statue-like in Trafalgar Square and later swanned through the exhibition gallery carrying a prosthetic leg. The inclusion of Vanel in the 1938 \textit{Exposition} was an extension of this theatricalization of Surrealism—the first to feature a professional dancer—and soon other dance-based performance events were happening elsewhere. For instance, Canadian Surrealist dancer Françoise Sullivan (b. 1923) performed her piece \textit{Danse dans la neige} on a snowy Quebec hillside in 1948 (fig. 4.34), and founded the Automatist group in Montréal, “in search of the most subversive forms of free expression that would be necessary ‘to reconstruct the world.’”\textsuperscript{118} Similarly to Vanel’s display, the performance art events, Happenings and Fluxus group demonstrations of the 1950s and 60s in Europe and America activated constructed environments through the moving human body for provocative and polemical purposes, creating a collective experience that involved and challenged spectators, questioned artistic and behavioral norms, and transgressed the borders between art, artists and audience. Dance artists, notably those from Judson Dance Theater in Greenwich Village, New York City, frequently collaborated on and often initiated these projects.

Increasingly in the present day, experimental dance has found its way into museums and other spaces formerly reserved for painting and sculpture, and contemporary dance artists partner with artists in other media to make work that crosses traditional media boundaries and questions societal values. Dance, alone and in rhythm with other artforms, is now acknowledged as a potent force for cultural critique. Surrealism’s conflicted relationship with dance may have

\textsuperscript{117} Emerson reveals that Legge’s performance was not Dalí’s idea but her own, with the poet David Gascoyne, 395.

\textsuperscript{118} LaCoss, “Hysterical Freedom,” 52.
produced only a brief explosion of creative synergy in 1938, but its echoes were felt into the latter half of the twentieth century, and beyond.
Conclusion and Outlook

This study has linked Étienne de Beaumont and the Surrealists to modernist dance in 1920s and 30s Paris; they were on opposing sides of the question of dance’s importance as an art form in the avant-garde sphere, and the only time they confronted each other, face-to-face, was over a dance performance—Mercury—at Soirée de Paris, on June 15, 1924. The aftermath of that confrontation saw the gradual decline (although by no means the eclipse) of Beaumont’s promising fortunes as a Maecenas of avant-garde arts, and the rise of Surrealism from the eccentric offshoot of an even more eccentric movement, Dada, to a major intellectual and aesthetic force in twentieth-century French and international culture, with centers across the globe and a legacy that endures. Modern, postmodern, and contemporary dance and ballet continued to flourish and diversify in the last century with no direct reference to Beaumont and only some to Surrealism, yet the very different associations of each of them with the art of dance influenced its fortunes in multiple ways.

I have argued that Beaumont and the Surrealists represent two poles—the aristocratic and the revolutionary avant-garde—in Paris of the 1920s and 30s. Both regarded themselves as heirs of Apollinaire, in different ways: Beaumont sought to promote new, synthetic and uniquely French art that embodied what he understood by the poet’s notion of l’esprit nouveau; Breton and his group invested Apollinaire’s word and idea of sur-réalisme with a radical poetic dimension, appropriating it as a metaphor for their quest for the absolute and the marvelous. Although the two groups never moved in quite the same orbit, they existed within the same larger network, were seen in many of the same places (though usually for opposite reasons), and
inevitably intersected through numerous channels. So, for example, Man Ray was commissioned to take photographs at the Beaumonts’ balls, became entangled with the Count over the film *À Quoi rêvent les jeunes filles?* and later permitted (or was persuaded to allow) Beaumont to appear briefly in his film *Les Mystères du château du dé*, although he affected to despise them and their friends. Beaumont was also linked to Man Ray, and the other Surrealists more distantly, through a mutual association with Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, who were class colleagues and friendly rivals of the Beaumonts on the party scene, and important patrons of Surrealist film and painting (including *Les Mystères du château du dé*); they and the Beaumonts vied to outdo each other in exhibitions of daring modernity. In another example, Beaumont envied Diaghilev as an arts impresario; they had no personal relations aside from a mutual fixation with Léonide Massine, but shared a business association over the posthumous rights to Satie’s music. Perhaps emboldened by Diaghilev’s engagement of Miró and Ernst for *Romeo and Juliet*, Beaumont commissioned a panel from Ernst for his *Bal de mer* two years later. He was among the sponsors of the *Exposition international du surréalisme* in 1938, as were the Noailles.

Beaumont and the Surrealists were linked as well by cultural figures of that era who flirted with both camps: the writer René Crevel and the composer Georges Auric both simultaneously attended Beaumont balls and ran with the Surrealists. Crevel wrote laudatory pieces about Beaumont for various journals, and Auric participated in of the *Mercure* protest. Raymond Radiguet, the protégé of Beaumont’s sometime intimate friend Cocteau, was close enough to the elite to use Beaumont as a model for the titular character in his *roman à clef, Le bal du comte d’Orgel*. But Breton had been the young writer’s (intellectual) admirer and self-appointed “protector” before Radiguet escaped his attempted domination for Cocteau’s, to Breton’s fury. Valentine Hugo, once an essential member of the Beaumonts’ inner circle,
designed costumes for Cocteau’s Roméo et Juliette in Soirée de Paris and shone at Beaumont’s balls in her self-created outfits, until her intense love affair with Breton drew her away from the Hôtel Masseran set and into the Surrealist camp. A few were close friends of one but particular enemies of the other, notably Cocteau and Satie. Both sides courted Picasso, desiring the cachet of his friendship as well as his endorsement of their hoped-for cultural significance, and both were alternately ravished by his attention and apparent empathy, and then disappointed when he resolutely went his own way, showing allegiance to none but himself.

Such contacts were predictable, given the scale and interconnectedness of the Paris art world, and the human and institutional networks that enlaced all their participants in various ways. But real alliances between the two camps were improbable, notwithstanding floating individuals like Crevel, because of personal, political, and cultural differences that impeded the discovery of much common ground. Even so, it is only partly correct to claim that they defined themselves in opposition to each other; the fluidity of their networks meant that their relationships resist such overly simple analysis. But it is partly correct: the Surrealists constituted their movement as committed to the overthrow of the structures of reality and reason that Beaumont and his cohort upheld. Beaumont, however, was (perhaps naively) prepared to welcome Surrealists and Dadaists into his circle and even to support them as representatives of new French art (so long as they were suitably grateful), not understanding that it was his very existence, and that of everything he represented, that hindered the formation of any productive or ongoing relationship.

Beaumont’s history shows that the possession of hereditary wealth and title, an ancient name, and a high Catholic, monarchist pedigree were no impediment to a taste for avant-garde art in interwar France; indeed they could be, and were, useful in promoting it. But as advanced
taste and patronage became for many a badge of privilege and, in postwar France, of patriotism, this aristocratic avant-garde alienated a newer cohort of artists and intellectuals whose passion to remake the war-ravaged society scorned the elite, chauvinist notion of restoring France to its former glory, and sought rather to redefine the limits of reality and human freedom for the whole world. Among the numerous faces of the avant-garde in postwar France, Surrealism’s ambition reached furthest, and had least tolerance for the “snobs” they identified as the enemies of their revolution. The Surrealists’ intolerance extended to some of these snobs’ preferred cultural forms—theatre, music, and dance—exacerbating tensions between the two groups, and ensuring that no sustained creative alliance between Surrealism and modernist dance occurred. There were further intersections: not only Diaghilev’s attempted co-option of Miró and Ernst but the contribution by Miró, Dalí, and Masson of designs to ballet companies in the 1930s. But Breton’s Surrealism essentially refused to compromise. The synergy achieved between Surrealist aims and dance by Hélène Vanel’s performance at the 1938 Exposition was echoed to some extent at the time and more extensively after the Second World War, in dance theatre and performance art.

Several subjects arising from work for this dissertation offer the potential for further investigation. The first two that might be pursued involve French cinema in the 1920s, an area mostly outside the scope of this study. Picasso’s work on Mercure warrants examination in greater depth, particularly in view of his attitude to contemporary cinema, and his interest in incorporating its potential into his own practice. I also intend to pursue the matter of Beaumont’s film project, À quoi rêvent les jeunes films? as an intriguing footnote to the history of French avant-garde film, and to attempt to uncover more of the real story. Another issue of great interest
is the relationship between avant-garde dance and film; Lynne Garafola, Felicia McCarren, Juliet Bellow, Nell Andrew, and others have written on aspects of this, but more work should be done.

Little study has been devoted to the activities of other aristocratic patrons of the arts like Beaumont, and their impact on the French art scene between the wars. The Noailles and the Princesse de Polignac, for instance, were influential supporters of advanced art, film, and music. Research on the activities of the Noailles has the potential to yield insight into the economies of art patronage, production, and reception at that time. The couple are interesting too since they were high snobs, yet their support of iconoclastic Surrealism helped to establish it in the Paris art scene; this apparently counter-intuitive liaison invites closer examination. A related topic, the society costume ball in the interwar years, as pioneered by Beaumont and enthusiastically pursued by his peers, is a subject rarely if ever discussed by serious scholars, yet it offers enormous potential from a perspective of cultural history. As ephemeral but spectacular phenomena in a society on the cusp of momentous change, involving many leading figures in the arts, these balls and their deeper significance demand an informed study.

Further research could be undertaken to examine dancers who identified as Surrealist in the 1930s and performed what they called Surrealist dances, in Paris and elsewhere, including the United States. These were almost exclusively women; they operated outside the mainstream, without the blessing of official Surrealism, although often in association with members of the Surrealist group. A closer consideration of their activity has the potential to enlarge our understanding of what Surrealist dance was and what it could have been, outside the orthodoxy of Breton’s control, had the war not intervened. Recent studies such as Richard Emerson’s on Hélène Vanel and her associates (see chapter 4) are a promising beginning.
On a more theoretical level, a final question worth considering is whether Hélène Vanel’s performance of *L’Acte manqué* was consistent with Breton’s notion of “convulsive beauty,” and thus whether dance’s kinaesthetic sensibility may, after all, be found in Surrealism. He introduces the concept in *Nadja*, and elaborates it in *Amour fou*: “convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magic-circumstantial, or it will not be” (la beauté convulsive sera erotica-voilée, explosante-fixe, magique-circonstancielle, ou ne sera pas.)\(^1\) Vanel’s dance surely fulfilled all three of these conditions, which articulate the Surrealist principle of the reconciliation of opposites as explored in the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme*. Mary Ann Caws points out the connection in Surrealist thought between such reconciliations or meetings, the notion of convulsive beauty, and conventions of hysteria—which Vanel enacted.\(^2\) The term convulsive beauty suggests, at first glance, a possible association with certain types of dance, although it seems unlikely that Breton intended it to be understood thus. His examples are utilitarian but striking (a locomotive abandoned in a forest). Yet Breton chose Man Ray’s photograph of a whirling flamenco dancer to illustrate visually the concept of *explosante-fixe* in *Amour fou* (fig C.1). It is not the dance itself, but the paradox of violent motion abruptly stilled by the action of the photographer that constitutes beauty in Breton’s eyes, recalling T.S. Eliot’s poetic assertion that dance exists “at the still point of the turning world” (see p. 254, n. 36). Breton writes in *Amour fou*, “there can be no beauty at all, as far as I am concerned—convulsive beauty—except at the cost of affirming the reciprocal relations linking the object seen in its motion and in its repose.”\(^3\) Eliot finds his transcendent space where there is “…neither arrest not

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1 Breton, *Amour fou*, 19.

2 Mary Ann Caws, notes to *Amour fou*, ibid., 124, n.12.

movement.../where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards/...there is only the dance.” Both these modernist poets, of very different mentalities, find in the confrontation of motion and stasis a conduit to (convulsive) beauty, revelation, and meaning; dance performs an important role in dramatizing that confrontation. On this basis, we may well conclude that Hélène Vanel’s principal contribution to Surrealism—and perhaps to dance—was as the fleeting embodiment, as completely as was humanly possible, of one of its central ideas.

It is debatable whether or not we can call Vanel’s performance in 1938 “Surrealist dance,” even though she and most of her contemporaries did. Recent critics (notably Don LaCoss) have done so as well, without asking what this might mean. I have explored that question in this study, but it is possible that to so describe *L’Acte manqué* means retrospectively forcing an event that was unclassifiable in its time into a fixed category of cultural form that fits it imperfectly. But by 1938 the word Surrealist had already begun to infiltrate the broader lexicon of popular culture and was being used in ways its founders never intended. It is true that misunderstanding—sometimes willful misunderstanding—is capable of producing new meanings, which need closer investigation in the context of dance. We can claim *L’Acte manqué*, however, as the first and closest performance that could plausibly deserve the name, albeit that to do so may require a redrawing of the boundaries of dance. This study has mainly understood dance in a culturally and historically conventional sense—a sense which is indeed challenged by performances such as Vanel’s. But dance has caught up with Vanel and the Surrealists; her performance would not be out of place on the twenty-first century stage, although even today it would be restricted to the repertory of the more experimental contemporary dance artists.

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Dance today is being taken into new and astonishing dimensions of human experience by an alliance with new technologies. In Berlin at the time of this writing, the interactive virtual reality exhibition _Das Totale Tanz Theater_, created and presented by the group Interactive Media Foundation, invites viewers to be part of a dance experience of an unprecedented kind, while taking avant-garde visual and performance aesthetics from the 1920s as inspiration (figs. C.2, C.3). Based visually on Oskar Schlemmer’s designs for his _Triadic Ballet_ at the Bauhaus, with contemporary choreography by American Richard Siegal and music by the Berlin avant-rock band Einstürzende Neubauten, this installation immerses the viewer-participant in a simulated space inspired by Vladimir Tatlin’s _Design for a Monument to the Third International_ (1920) and Walter Gropius and Erwin Piscator’s concept of a total theater for the Bauhaus (1926-27), taking us on a multi-sensory journey that is disorienting, exhilarating and mind-expanding. A veritable _dérèglement_ of the senses, _Das Totale Tanz Theater_ breaks through the boundary between spectator and performer, fuses reality, illusion, and imagination so they become almost indistinguishable, and transports the viewer beyond existential certainty into an intensely felt new world where old spatial and corporeal rules no longer apply. Thanks to twenty-first-century digital technologies, _Das Totale Tanz Theater_ is synthetic and surreal in ways that neither Beaumont nor the Surrealists nor the avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century could have imagined, but which might have inspired them all with its transformative vision. If Surrealist dance ultimately aspires to send viewers beyond the frontiers of reality, we are in the process of achieving that desire.

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5 I experienced the installation at the PalaisPopulaire, Berlin, in December 2019.
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APPENDIX A

Beaumont’s directions for entrées at the Bal L’Antiquité sous Louis XIV, (antiquity under Louis XIV, also called the Bal Baroque), Saturday, May 26, 1923 (IMEC: SAT 24.19)

Samedi 26 mai 1923.

La fête se passe dans le monde de l’imagination, du Roman des Contes de Fées, des Allegories, au temps des XVI, XVII et XVIII èmes siècles.

L’idée est celle d’un souper servi magnifiquement de mets en carton, durant lequel les divertissements se déroulent.

Les Convives du Souper constituent la première entrée. Elles doit être traitée: pour les femmes dans les tons d’or avec perruques blanches et masques. Pour les hommes dans les tons bruns et or, avec perruques dorée et drapée sur l’habit.

Les entrées qui suivront et que les invités arrangeront à leur gré devront être colorées. Au fur et à mesure qu’elles se développeront elles viendront se grouper devant les tables et s’assoieront sur des coussins.

Un petit feu d’artifice terminera la fête avant le vrai souper.

Il est entendu que les costumes devront être traités de la manière la plus fantaisiste et dans les matières les plus simples.

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Saturday, May 26, 1923.

The party takes place in the world of the imagination, of the book of Fairy Tales, of allegories, in the time of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

The idea is that of a magnificent supper served on cardboard dishes, during which the entertainment takes place.

The supper guests are the first entrée. They should be dressed as follows: the women in gold tones with white wigs and masks. The men in brown and gold tones, with golden wigs draped over their costumes.

The entrées which will follow and which the guests will arrange as they wish should be colorful. As things progress they will all come together in front of the tables and sit on cushions.

A small fireworks display will end the party before the real supper.

It is understood that the costumes must be created in the most fanciful manner and of the simplest materials.
APPENDIX B


OF WHAT ARE THE YOUNG FILMS DREAMING?

In 1900 a Swede found a block of magnetic steel which retained the invisible vibrations of sound and retranslated them for the human ear. The steel, when demagnetized, became deaf and dumb.

If matter hears and speaks, do not objects see? Do not lines adjust themselves to one another? A process not yet accessible to the human consciousness.

Similarly, do not the vibrations of the cinema have speech, thought, will? Scientific investigators may track down the evidences of this life; Egyptian hieroglyphists may interpret its system of logic; but is not the imagination to be permitted its faith in an arrangement of living lines which, going beyond pretext and scenery, play the leading role?

Of what are the young films dreaming? This title is not a programme. I am not proposing a new art. I lay no claim to the sublime. I simply desire the satisfaction of working with these living lines which arise in such profusion from the objects about us, whether hard and sharp like crystals, reflections, prisms; or curved and liquid as in clouds, mists, smoke, the very life of form. I have enjoyed imagining things in motion; I have stirred up atoms of all kinds and compared them with forms grown human: a face, a landscape, speed, immobility, the infinite gradations of black and white.

The art of the cinema offers us a new expression of thought; it allows us to attempt the translation of our dreams.

I say “attempt,” because the eye of the camera functions differently from our own—and what a difference there is between
the thought and its realization! There is the same diversity in the way we see things. The gulf separating one mind from another is wide. Things have a different meaning for each of us. What I see, I alone see. We are always in isolation. When something enters our consciousness, it has a color and a significance peculiar to the individual. Alas! and yet fortunately, we are not made in series! Communication is only approximate, which is at once a virtue and a defect.

I am reminded of a passage in Marcel Proust, the second chapter of "Albertine Disparue": "I cannot realize that each person on opening his eyes will fail to see the images which I see, believing that the thought of the author is perceived directly by the reader, whereas it is another thought that takes shape in his mind."

All humanity joins in the attempt to provide the materials for such distortion. And it would be a great satisfaction to me should I succeed here, in this country whose cinema productions have given the whole world fresh emotional experiences to an extent which no other art has rivaled for some time.

LE COMTE ETIENNE DE BEAUMONT
PRÉFACE

Le spectacle, la suite de spectacles que nous présentons au public ce printemps est le résultat de patients efforts et de l’heureuse réunion des volontés les plus diverses. Danse, peinture, musique et poésie tendent à révéler, chacune de son côté, la nouvelle âme et le plus jeune visage de notre France. Notre but a été de faire conjuguer leur effort. Il y fallait également l’approbation escomptée de ceux qui doivent former la meilleure et la plus fidèle partie de notre public. La crainte de n’être point compris par le public entraîne d’ordinaire maintes atténuations, maintes compromissions, auxquelles nous devons ces spectacles hybrides, où souvent beaucoup d’art se glisse, mais comme honteusement et tente de se faire excuser sous des revêtements tapageurs qu’on juge propres à conquérir la faveur du grand nombre et qui déçoivent à la fois les connaisseurs et les spectateurs ordinaires. Nous avons pensé qu’en cherchant à plaire qu’aux premiers nous ne déplairions pas fortement aux autres, et que c’est une grave erreur de mésestimer son public ; il nous saura gré, espérons-nous, de ne lui offrir que du meilleur.

Nous tenons à exprimer ici notre reconnaissance pour tous les dévouements qui nous ont permis de mener à bien notre entreprise. Si nous parlons ici d’efforts et de travail, c’est avec l’espoir qu’il n’en restera plus trace, et que les spectacles que nous présentons ne respireront que l’aisance et la joie.

Le Comte Étienne de Beaumont
The show, the sequence of shows that we are presenting to the public this spring is the result of patient efforts and the happy convergence of the most varied interests. Dance, painting, music and poetry tend to reveal, each in its own way, the new soul and youngest face of our France. Our purpose has been to create a synergy of all their endeavors. Equally necessary was the approval of those who must form the best and most faithful portion of our public. The fear of not being understood by the public usually leads to many extenuations, many compromises, to which we owe those hybrid performances where much art often slips in, but as if it is ashamed, and tries to excuse itself under flashy veneers judged suitable to win favor with the masses, and that deceives both the connoisseurs and the ordinary spectators. We thought that in only seeking to please the former, we would not necessarily displease the others, and that it is a serious mistake to underestimate one’s public; they will thank us, we hope, for offering only the best.

We wish to express here our recognition of all the dedicated people who have helped us carry out our undertaking. If we speak here of exertion and of work, it is with the hope that of these there remains no trace, and that the performances we present breathe only ease and joy.
APPENDIX D

Soirée De Paris: Repertory

Choreographic and Dramatic Performances
Lighting directed by Loïe Fuller
Orchestra conducted by Roger Desormière

Ballets

Salade (Salad): Choreographic counterpoint in two acts
Music by Darius Milhaud
Libretto by Albert Flamant
Sets and costumes by Georges Braque
Choreography by Léonide Massine
Soprano: Jane Bathori
Chorus

Mercure: poses plastiques (Mercury: Plastic poses)
Music by Erik Satie
Sets and costumes by Pablo Picasso
Idea and Choreography by Léonide Massine

Le Beau Danube (The Beautiful Danube): Character ballet in two tableaux
Music by Johann Strauss, adapted and orchestrated by Roger Desormière
Set after Constantin Guys, executed by Vladimir and Elisabeth Polunin
Libretto and Choreography by Léonide Massine

Gigue (Jig): Dances on classical themes
Sets and costumes by André Derain, executed by Elisabeth and Vladimir Polunin
Choreography by Léonide Massine
Piano: Marcelle Meyer
**Les Roses: Divertissement**
Music by Henri Sauguet
Set and costumes by N….. [Marie Laurencin]
Idea and Choreography by Léonide Massine

**Vogues: Trois Pages dansées (Three danced pages)**
In collaboration with the magazine
Based on the idea and the models for sets and costumes by Valentine Hugo
Costumes by Jeanne Lanvin, Hermès, Lus et Befve
Shoes by Perugia
Choreography by Léonide Massine? and Count Etienne de Beaumont [uncredited]
1. *Les Filles Mal Gardées (The Badly Brought-up Young Girls)*
2. *Le Favori (The Favorite)*
3. *Le Bain de Minuit (The Midnight Swim)*, with a poem by Paul Morand

**Premier Amour (First Love): Mimed scene**
Music: “Les Morceaux en forme de Poires” (Pear-shaped Fragments) by Erik Satie
Choreography by Léonide Massine

**Suite de Danses: Valse, Variation, Pas de Deux, Rigaudon, Mazurka**
Costumes by Count Etienne de Beaumont [uncredited]
Choreography by Léonide Massine [uncredited]

**Dramas**

**Mouchoir de Nuages (Handkerchief of Clouds)**
Tragedy in fifteen acts by Tristan Tzara
Staged by Marcel Herrand
Costumes by Lanvin, shoes by Perugia
Projections by Loïe Fuller
Roméo et Juliette
Drama in five acts and twenty-three tableaux by William Shakespeare
Adapted and staged by Jean Cocteau
Décors and costumes by Jean-Victor Hugo [and Valentine Hugo, uncredited]

Interludes

Ballet Espagnol (Spanish Ballet)
By José-Maria Sert
Danced by Ida Rubinstein

Danses Actuelles (Contemporary dances)
By Harry Wills

This listing is based on one version of the season program and on two separate playbills for the season, all consulted in the Theatre and Performance Archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. There were probably several different versions of the printed program for different performances. The copy in the V&A contains lists of artistic personnel, including casts, for all eight ballets, as well as for Mouchoir de Nuages, but not for Roméo et Juliette. Details of the other offerings, as advertized, are taken from the playbills.
APPENDIX E

Erik Satie’s libretto for *Mercure*, typed by Beaumont, with annotations in Satie’s hand. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS 9596 (2)
After so many anodyne demonstrations in the field of art and thought that in recent years have gone so far as to lose sight of their very object and the sense of evolution which alone matters, while the public and the critics agree and encourage only mediocrity and concessions of all kinds, we wish to testify to our deep and total admiration for Picasso who, scorning consecration, has never ceased to create troubling modernity at the highest level of expression. Now with MERCURE, he again provokes general incomprehension, giving full measure of his audacity and his genius. In the light of this exceptional event, Picasso, surpassing all those around him, appears today the eternal personification of youth and the undeniable master of the situation.

APPENDIX G

Breton and Aragon’s *Protestation* against Joan Miró and Max Ernst working for Diaghilev to design the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, distributed as a leaflet at the premiere, here reprinted in slightly altered form in *LRS*, 15 June, 1926.
PROTEST

It is not admissible that thought should be at the command of money. However, not a year passes that does not bring the submission of a man who was believed to be irreducible to the powers which he had hitherto opposed. Regardless of the individuals who demean themselves to this point to conform to certain social conditions, the ideas they professed before such abdication survive beyond them. It is in this sense that the participation of the painters Max Ernst and Joan Miró in the next show by the Ballets Russes cannot implicate the Surrealist idea in their degradation. An essentially subversive idea that cannot compromise with such enterprises, of which the aim has always been to domesticate to the profit of the international aristocracy the dreams and revolts born of physical and intellectual famine.

It must have seemed to Ernst and Miró that their collaboration with Monsieur de Diaghilev, legitimated by the example of Picasso, would not result in such serious consequences. However, it places us under an obligation, we who above all are concerned to keep the advanced positions of the mind out of the reach of slave traders of all kinds, an obligation to denounce, without consideration of persons, an attitude that gives weapons of the worst kind to the partisans of moral equivocation.

It is known that our artistic affinities with this one or that one are only very relative. Do us the honor of believing that in May 1926 we are more than ever incapable of sacrificing to them our sense of revolutionary reality.

LOUIS ARAGON—ANDRÉ BRETON
Fig. 1.1  Count Étienne de Beaumont at home in the Grand Salon at Hôtel Masseran, c.1919. Photo Baron Adolph de Meyer.
Fig. 1.2 Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Count Étienne de Beaumont*, pencil. Z.5, 196., c.1920. Private collection.

Fig 1.3 Jean Cocteau, *Caricature of Count Étienne de Beaumont with Marie-Laure de Noailles*, 1931. Collection Bridgeman Images/Rue de Archives.
Fig. 1.4 Countess Edith de Beaumont. *Vogue* (Paris, March 15, 1921), frontispiece.

Fig. 1.5 Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Countess Edith de Beaumont*, pencil. Z. IV, 274, Paris, February 1921. Private collection.

Fig. 1.6 Hôtel Masseran under renovation, June 2015. Author photo.
Fig. 1.7 Hôtel Masseran, architect Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart, 1787; view from the gardens, c.1920s. Photo Josse-Lalance.

Fig. 1.8 Grand salon, Hôtel Masseran, 1920s. Photo Charles Lansiaux. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.
Fig. 1.9 A gallery of historical dandies posing, complete with obligatory hats, gloves and canes:
Top, l-r: George “Beau” Brummel, (1778-1840), lithograph by Robert Dighton, 1805; Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), 1882; Count Robert de Montesquiou (1855-1921), by Giovanni Boldoni, 1897. Musée d’Orsay.
Bottom, l-r: Count Boni de Castellane (1867-1932), 1890; Count Étienne de Beaumont (1883-1956), c. 1919; Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) c.1924.
Fig. 1.10 Some of Beaumont’s associates: l-r, top-bottom: Jean Cocteau, Marcel Proust, Pablo Picasso, Erik Satie, Léonide Massine, Valentine Hugo, Man Ray, Misia Sert, Tristan Tzara, Marie Laurencin, Lucien Daudet, Raymond Radiguet. All early 1920s, except Proust, c. 1890s.
Fig. 1.11 Profile of Eurhythmics instructor and artist Paulet Thevenaz by Marie Louise van Saanen, from *Vanity Fair* (August 1916), p. 49. Illustrated are his portraits of (clockwise from top left), the poet Countess Anna de Noailles, Igor Stravinsky, Jean Cocteau, and Countess Edith de Beaumont.

Fig. 1.12 Dalcroze Eurhythmics students from the Hellerau school at Laxenburg, near Vienna, 1925/6.
Figs. 1.13, 1.14 Left: Beaumont in the uniform of his volunteer ambulance unit, with Anna de Noailles in the Forest of Villers-Cotterêts. Photo Bernard Faÿ, c.1916. Right: Faÿ on ambulance duty near Verdun.

Fig. 1.15 James Reese Europe (left) conducts his “Harlem Hellfighters,” 369th Infantry Regiment Jazz Band, Paris, 1918.
Fig. 1.16 Georges Braque, *Bottle of Rum*, oil on canvas, 1914. Purchased by Beaumont from the sale of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler’s stock, 1921; now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Leonard Lauder Collection.

Fig. 1.17 Georges Braque, *Guitar and Still Life on a Gueridon*, oil with sand on canvas, 1922. Metropolitan Museum of Art); Gift of Louise Reinhardt Smith, in honor of William S. Lieberman, 1979. Beaumont probably purchased it from Léonce Rosenberg.
Fig. 1.18 Picasso, *Bowl of Fruit, Bottle and Violin*, oil on canvas. Z.II.2, 529, as *Compotier, Guitare, Bouteille*, 1914. National Gallery, London, since 1979; on long-term loan to Tate Modern.

Fig. 1.20  Picasso, *Man Leaning on a Table*, formerly *Man Seated in Shrubbery*, oil on canvas, 1915-16. Private collection. Z.II, ii, 550.

Fig.1.21  Max Ernst, *Tree of Life*, oil on canvas, 1927/8. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia. Originally in Beaumont’s collection, believed to have been made for the *Bal de Mer*, 1928.
Fig. 1.22. Picasso, stage curtain from *Mercure*, formerly titled *Music*, oil on canvas, 1924. Musée Pompidou, Paris.

Fig. 1.23. Picasso’s *Mercure* curtain, hanging in the salon at Hôtel Masseran. *Vogue* (1929).
Fig. 1.24 Picasso, *Guitar and Sheet Music on a Gueridon*, Juan-les-Pins, gouache; one of *Dix pochoirs*, issued by the Rosenberg Gallery, 1920. Z.IV, 93. Hung sideways at Hôtel Masseran, from *Vogue* (1929), p. 36.

Fig. 1.25 Picasso, *Guitar and Sheet Music on a Gueridon II*, gouache, one of *Dix pochoirs*, 1920. Mounted as a firescreen, Hôtel Masseran, from *Vogue* (1929), p. 38.
Fig. 1.26 Raoul Dufy, Le Boeuf sur le toit, lithograph, 1920. Depicting the scene and characters from the “pantomime-ballet” by Jean Cocteau, designed by Dufy.

Fig. 1.27 Production photograph from the Le Boeuf sur le toit, 1920. Darius Milhaud archives.
Fig. 1.28  Paul Poiret with his wife Denise at his *Thousand and One Nights* ball in 1911.

Fig. 1.29  Artists’ Ball, Maison Watteau, Montmartre, 1924.
Fig. 1.30  Beaumont at the *Bal du grand prix de l’Opéra*, “Les Visions chinoises,” July 1923. Photo Baron de Meyer.

Fig. 1.31  Beaumont and the Duchesse d’Ayen (general manager of *Vogue*) at the *Bal baroque*, May 1923.
Figs. 1.32-1.35 The Count and Countess in full battle dress. Top: Beaumont (left) and Edith (right) at the *Fête des diadèmes*, Ritz Hotel, Paris, 1926. The film *À quoi rêvent les jeunes films?* was premièred on this occasion. Bottom: Beaumont as a Manta Ray at the *Bal de mer*, 1928; Edith as a Quattrocento angel, *Bal des tableaux célèbres*, 1935.
Figs. 1.36, 1.37 Jean Hugo, sketches for costumes for his wife Valentine Hugo for the *Bal baroque*, 1923. Left: Asia; right: Europe.

Figs. 1.38-1.39 Valentine Hugo as a carousel at the *Bal des jeux*, 1922 (left) and as the four quarters of the earth at the *Bal baroque*, 1923 (right). She devised and made all her own costumes.
Fig. 1.40  Guests at the Charity Ball, May 31, 1924, during Soirées de Paris, to benefit Russian refugees, war widows and orphans. The ball’s theme was the circus, music-hall and café-concert. Picasso as a matador is third from left, back row. MOMA, Paul Rosenberg Family Archives.

Figs. 1.41, 1.42  Left: Picasso as a matador with Olga Kokhlova Picasso (on his left) and Eugenia Erazuriz (on his right) at the Charity Ball for Soirée de Paris, 1924; right: Sara and Gerald Murphy in “automotive” costumes, probably for the same ball. Photos by Man Ray.
Figs. 1.43, 1.44 Left: Lady Iya Abdy as a “Siamese dancer” (*Vogue*, 1931) at the *Bal colonial*; right: Marie-Laure de Noailles with Serge Lifar as Vestris (by Chanel) at the *Racine* ball (*Vogue*, 1939).

Fig. 1.45, 1.46 *Le Bal des matériaux*, 1929: left, Marie-Laure and Charles de Noailles in plastic; right: Valentine Hugo and Paul Morand in paper: table-napkins and book jackets (*Vogue*, 1929).
Figs. 1.47, 1.48  Left: the actor Jean Marais makes his entrée at the *Racine* ball, 1939; right: Christian Dior as a lion at the *Bal des Rois et des Reines*, 1951.

Figs. 1.49, 1.50  Left: Marchesa Luisa Casati with her snake, ball unknown; right: Edith dressed by Madeleine Vionnet, possibly at the *Bal du grand prix de l’Opéra, Les Visions chinoises*, July 1923.

Figs 1.53, 1.54  Picasso, designs for costumes for the *Bal des jeux*, 1922. These do not appear to be for any particular guests. Left: a carousel (not Valentine’s); right: a game of dominoes.
Fig. 1.55 Beaumont resplendent. The ball has not been identified, but is probably either the Charity Ball for *Soirée de Paris*, 1924, or *Les Visions chinoises*, July 1923. Photo by Man Ray.
Fig. 1.56 Beaumont’s collage memorializing the Bal Colonial, 1931.
**Fig. 1.57** Watching a film in Man Ray’s Paris studio, c. 1925. Left-right: Beaumont, an unidentified man (Henri Chomette?), Marc Allegret, and Man Ray. Photo Man Ray. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gilman Collection, Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation, 2005.

**Fig. 1.58** Stills from *À quoi rêvent les jeunes films?* 1925.
Fig. 1.59 Poster for *Fête des Diadèmes*, advertising Beaumont’s film of indefinite title, 1925. IMEC, BMT 3.7

Fig. 1.60 Still from Man Ray’s film *Les Mystères du chateau du Dé*, 1929: Beaumont holding an unidentified woman.
Figs. 1.61, 1.62  Léonide Massine and Alexandra Danilova in the ballet *Gaîté parisienne*, c.1938, for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo; Beaumont’s design for Danilova’s Can-Can costume, c. 1937-8.

Figs. 1.63, 1.64  Frederic Franklin as the Baron in *Gaîté parisienne*, c.1938, and Beaumont’s sketch for his costume. “Kositch” is the name of the original dancer in that role.
Fig. 1.65 Advertisement for Beaumont’s jewelry designs for Elsa Schiaparelli, 1939. Photo Boris Lipnitzki.

Figs. 1.66, 1.67 Valentine Hugo, program cover for concert by La Société des Instruments à Vent, April 17, 1941. Picasso, program cover for Olivier Messiaen’s Harawi, 26 June 1946. Both concerts were given by the Centre d’Échanges Artistiques et de Culture Française. IMEC, BMT 3.2.
Fig. 1.68 The bar at Le Boeuf sur le toit, photograph by Man Ray c. 1922-27. At left, Louis Moysès sits beneath Picabia’s L’Œil Cacodylate. House pianist Clément Doucet is at right. The inscription above (“Voilà notre cher boeuf”) was added by Cocteau in 1960. Collection Louis Henrion, Moysès’ nephew.

Fig. 1.69 Francis Picabia, L’Œil cacodylate, oil, enamel paint, gelatin silver prints, postcard, and cut-and-pasted printed papers on canvas, adorned with autographs of Le Boeuf sur le toit’s habitués, 1921. Musée Pompidou, Paris.
Fig. 1.70  A beach costume party at La Garoupe on the Côte d’Azur, 1923. Standing, l-r: Olga Picasso, Beaumont, unknown woman, Edith de Beaumont; seated, l-r: Doña Maria (Picasso’s mother), Picasso, two unknowns, Sara Murphy.

Fig. 1.71  Beaumont on the promenade at La Garoupe, in matching beach pyjamas and robe; undated.

Fig. 1.72  Beaumont aged 67 at one of his last parties, in a conga line in Hotel Masseran’s grand salon, 1950.
Fig. 1.73  Picasso, Portrait of Count Étienne de Beaumont, pencil, 1920. Private collection.

Fig. 1.74  Letter from Beaumont to Picasso, December 25 1943: “Dear friend—I have tried in vain to call you. I want to tell you my thoughts and hopes on this Christmas morning. [19]44 is looking hard. It is likely to be a terrible year—less for you maybe than for others. If only we could get back together—and always preserve our friendship which is so dear to me. Etienne.” Archives Musée Picasso. My translation.
Chapter 2

Fig. 2.1 Marie Laurencin, poster for Soirée de Paris, 1924.
Fig. 2.2  A part of Montmartre, with La Cigale marked below the Sacré-Coeur, on the corner of the Boulevard Rochechouart and the rue des Martyrs. From an early 20th century map.

Fig. 2.3  Map of Paris, 1900, showing Montmartre at top center.
Fig. 2.4  The Théâtre de la Cigale, 2017. Author photo.

Fig. 2.5  Interior: the stage and auditorium, 2017. Author photo.
RÉPERTOIRE

SPECTACLE CHORÉGRAPHIQUE
& DRAMATIQUE

Éclairage réglé par Mme Loïe FULLER

“Salade”
Contrepoint chorégraphique en deux actes
Musique de Darius Milhaud
Livret d’Albert Flamant
Décor et Costumes de Georges Braque
Chorégraphie de Léonide Massine

“Mercure”
Poses plastiques
Thème et Chorégraphie de Léonide Massine
Musique d’Erik Satie
Décor et costume de Pablo Picasso

“Le Beau Danube”
Ballet de caractère en deux tableaux
Musique de Johann Strauss
adaptée et orchestrée par Roger Desormière
Livret et Chorégraphie de Léonide Massine
Décors d’après Constantin Guys
par V. et E. Pulunin

“Gigue”
Danses sur des thèmes classiques
Décor et costumes d’André Derain
Chorégraphie de Léonide Massine

“Vogues”
Trois pages dansées
Illustrations de Valentine Hugo
Poème de Paul Morand
Costume de Lanvin
Souliers de Perugia

BALLETT ESPAGNON
par José Marie Sert
Dansé par Mme IDA RUBINSTEIN

DANSES ACTUELLES
par HARRY WILLS

Mouchoir de Nuages
Tragédie en quinze actes de Tristan Tzara
Mise en scène de Marcel Herrand
Costumes de Lanvin
Projétions de Loïe Fuller

Roméo et Juliette
Drame en cinq actes et vingt-trois tableaux
de W. Shakespeare
Adaptation et mise en scène de M. Jean Cocteau
Décors et Costumes de Jean-Victor Hugo

Fig. 2.6 Summary program for Soirée de Paris listing the full season.
Figs. 2.7, 2.8  Left: Guillaume Apollinaire in uniform in an Italian hospital, after head surgery, 1916. Right: his revue, *Les Soirées de Paris*, no. 1 (February 1912).

Figs. 2.9, 2.10  Left: cover of the souvenir program for *Soirée de Paris*. Right: blason of the city of Paris.
Director and Production Crew

Fig. 2.11 Beaumont directing proceedings from the wings, 1924.

Figs. 2.12, 2.13 Loïe Fuller, 1918; Marc Allégret, c.1920.
Artists

Figs. 2.14, 2.15  Picasso at the charity ball for Soirée, 1924; Marie Laurencin, 1924; both by Man Ray.

Figs. 2.16, 2.17  André Derain, 1924; Georges Braque, 1922; both by Man Ray.

Figs. 2.18, 2.19, 2.20  Jean Hugo with his designs for Roméo et Juliette, 1924, photo Maison Victor Hugo; Valentine Hugo by Man Ray, 1920s; José Maria Sert by Ramon Casas.
Musicians

Figs. 2.21, 2.22  Roger Désormière, conductor; Erik Satie, 1920s.

Figs. 2.23, 2.24  Henri Sauguet; Darius Milhaud, 1920s.

Figs. 2.25, 2.26  Marcelle Meyer, pianist; Jane Bathori, mezzo-soprano, 1920s.
Dancers

Figs. 2.27, 2.28  Léonide Massine as Mercury, 1927; Lydia Lopokova, 1922.

Figs. 2.29, 2.30, 2.31  Stanislas Idzikowski in *Petrouchka*; Ida Rubinstein, 1920s; Rupert Doone, by Nina Hamnett, 1920s.
Writers

Figs. 2.32, 2.33  Tristan Tzara and Jean Cocteau by Man Ray, 1924; Paul Morand, 1920s.

Actors

Figs. 2.34, 2.35, 2.36  Marcel Herrand; Andrée Pascal; Yvonne George.
Fig. 2.37  Louis Aragon and André Breton, by Man Ray, 1922.

Fig. 2.38  Salade, original production photograph, with Braque’s set and costumes, 1924.
Fig. 2.39  *Le Beau Danube*; London revival by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, 1935, with the Polunins’ original set after Constantin Guys.

Fig. 2.40  Scene from *Mouchoir de nuages*, 1924.
Figs. 2.41, 2.42  Jean Hugo, costumes for *Roméo et Juliette*, 1924.

Fig. 2.43  Jean and Valentine Hugo and Jean Cocteau, set for the balcony scene with actors, *Roméo et Juliette*, 1924.
Fig. 2.44 Georges Seurat, *Parade de Cirque*. Oil on canvas, 1887-88. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 2.45 Picasso, *The Three Graces*, sketch for *Mercur*, continuous line drawing from Carnet 13, 1924. Jacqueline Picasso gift. Musée Picasso.
Fig. 2.46, 2.47  Picasso, Left: *Three Women at the Spring*, oil on canvas, 1921. Museum of Modern Art; Right: *Ballet Dancers*, pencil, 1920.

Fig. 2.50  The Abduction of Proserpina, Mercure, 1924.

Fig. 2.51  Picasso, sketch for The Abduction of Proserpina, Carnet 12, 1924, Jacqueline Picasso gift. Musée Picasso.
Fig. 2.52  Picasso, the French Manager, the Horse Manager, and the American Manager from *Parade*, 1917.

Fig. 2.55  The Bath of the Three Graces, *Mercure*, 1924.

Figs. 2.56, 2.57  Picasso, sketches for the Bath of the Three Graces, Carnet 13, 1924. Jacqueline Picasso gift. Musée Picasso.
Fig. 2.58  Picasso, *Three Bathers by the Shore*, pencil, 1920. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 2.59  Stage curtain for *Le Train Bleu*, Ballets Russes, 1924, enlarged by Prince Alexander Schervashidze after Picasso’s *Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)*, 1922. Victoria & Albert Museum.
Fig. 2.60  Picasso, sketches for “Night” scene in Mercure, with stars, 1924. Carnet 12, Jacqueline Picasso gift. Musée Picasso.

Fig. 2.61  Picasso, sketch for “Night” scene, with the word “étoile” in place of stars. From the souvenir program, 1924.
**Fig. 2.62** Picasso, *Still life with Mandolin*, oil on canvas, 1924. Stedeleijk Museum.

**Figs. 2.63, 2.64** Picasso, left: dot and line drawings, 1924, reproduced in *La Révolution Surréaliste* (January 1925). Right: *Three Women at the Edge of a Beach*, 1924.
Figs. 2.65, 2.66  Picasso, left: design for *Pulcinella*, 1920. Right: design for Polichinel from *Mercure*, 1924.

Fig. 2.69  Picasso, *Au Lapin agile*, oil on canvas, 1905. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Fig. 2.70  Massine as Mercury and a later Polichinel with dancers demonstrating “poses plastiques” in the Ballets Russes’ revival of *Mercure*, London, 1927.

Fig. 2.71  “Olympic Events at La Cigale,” cartoon by Louis Touchagues, *Paris-Journal* (June 20, 1924).
Chapter 3


Figs. 3.2, 3.3 Valentine de Saint-Point in *La Metachorie*, Paris, 1913.
Fig. 3.4 Fortunato Depero, design for Mimismagia, 1916.

Fig. 3.5 Giacomo Balla, design for Feu d’artifice (Fireworks) for the Ballets Russes, Rome 1917.
Fig. 3.6, 3.7  Fortunato Depero, model and designs for *Le Chant du rossignol* (*The Song of the Nightingale*) for the Ballets Russes, Rome, 1917.

Fig. 3.8  Giacomo Balla, design for *Macchina tipografica* (*Printing Press*), 1915.
Fig. 3.9 Fortunato Depero, *I miei balli plastici*, oil on canvas, based on his *Balli plastici* (*Plastic Dances*), 1918; Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.
Figs. 3.10, 3.11  Ivo Pannaggi and Vinicio Paladino, *Ballo meccanico futurista* (*Futurist Mechanical Dance*), 1922.

Figs. 3.12, 3.13  Fortunato Depero, *Anihccam del 3000*, 1924.
Fig. 3.14  Poster for Enrico Prampolini’s Théâtre de la Pantomime Futuriste, Paris, 1927.

Figs. 3.15, 3.16  Jia Ruskaja, Futurist dancer; Giannina Censi performing the Aerodance, c. 1930.
Fig. 3.17  Fortunato Depero, *Rotazione di ballerina e pappagalli* (*Rotation of Ballerina and Parrots*), oil on canvas, 1918. Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.

Fig. 3.18  Gino Severini, *Blue Dancer*, oil on canvas with sequins, 1912. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

Fig. 3.19  Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, bronze, 1913, cast 1931; Museum of Modern Art.
Fig. 3.20  Alexander Sacharoff embodying a synesthetic experience.

Fig. 3.21  Dancers practicing at Rudolf Laban’s summer colony at Monte Verità, Ascona, Switzerland, 1917.
Fig. 3.22  Sophie Taeuber and her sculpture *Dadakopf (Dada head)*, 1920.

Fig. 3.23  Marcel Janco, *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916. A Janco mask is visible behind the performers.
Fig. 3.24 A masked Mary Wigman performing *Hexentanz* (*Witch Dance*).

Fig. 3.25 Program for the *Sturm-Soirée*, Zürich, April 14, 1917. “Danses Nègres” are listed at lower left.
Figs. 3.26, 3.27  Sophie Taeuber dancing, in a costume by herself and Jean Arp, 1917-19. Taeuber with her sister in Hopi-inspired costumes she designed, and may have worn in Dada soirées.

Fig. 3.28  Hugo Ball in his “Magical Bishop,” costume, Cabaret Voltaire, 1916.
Figs. 3.29, 3.30  Valentin Parnakh: performing an eccentric dance in *Zhirafovidniy Istukan* (*Giraffe-like Idol*) for Meyerhold’s *Give Europe!* Theatre of the Revolution, Moscow, 1924. Portrait by Picasso, 1922.

Fig. 3.31, 3.32  Lizica Codreanu: performing to Satie’s *Gymnopédies*, and posing as a sculpture in Brancusi’s studio, 1922. Brancusi created “la sorcière” (the witch) costume for her, based on Romanian folk legend.
Fig. 3.33  Scene from Tristan Tzara’s play *Le Coeur à gaz* (The Gas Heart): Jacqueline Chaumont and René Crevel, in costumes by Sonia Delaunay, Paris, 1923.

Fig. 3.34  Performing Breton and Soupault’s play *Vous m’oublierez* (You will forget me) at Salle Gaveau, May 26, 1920: l-r: Paul Eluard (in drag), Soupault, Breton (seated), and Théodore Fraenkel.
Chapter 4

Fig. 4.1 Program page from the opening of the London season of Romeo and Juliet at Her Majesty’s Theatre, June 21, 1926.
Figs. 4.2, 4.3  Joan Miró, two versions of the design for Act I of *Romeo and Juliet*, the ballet studio; gouache, black wash, crayon, pencil and collage on paper laid down on card, 1926. Private collections.
Figs. 4.4  Act I of *Romeo and Juliet* in rehearsal. Miró’s design in fig. 4.2 is visible on the backcloth.

Fig. 4.7  Joan Miró, *Dream Painting*, enlarged for the front cloth of *Romeo and Juliet*, 1925; Serge Lifar Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. This image is presumably the source of the “tiresome worm” about which the critic W.A. Propert complained.
Figs. 4.8, 4.9  Tamara Karsavina as Juliet and Serge Lifar as Romeo. Fig. 4.8 Inscribed in Russian: “Tamara Karsavina / and / Sergei Lifar / ‘Romeo and Juliet’ / London / 1926.

Fig. 4.10  Karsavina and Lifar eloping by aeroplane in the final scene. Inscribed, in Russian: “Tamara Karsavina and / Sergei Lifar / in the ballet ‘Romeo and Juliet’ / London 1926.
**Fig. 4.11** Joan Miró, costume design for practice clothes for the male dancers (“pour les hommes, costume de travail”), pencil, 1926.

**Fig. 4.12** Joan Miró, costume design for practice clothes for the female dancers, with yellow dress (“pour les femmes, costume de travail avec chemise jaune”), pencil, 1926.

**Fig. 4.13** Joan Miró, costume design for blue tutu for Alice Nikitina as Juliet (“pour Mlle. Nikitina, titi [tutu] bleu comme le tableau d’Ernst”), pencil, for *Romeo and Juliet*, 1926.
Fig. 4.14  Max Ernst, *The Night* (*La Nuit*), oil on fabric. Backcloth for the balcony scene (Act II, Scene 4) 1926.

Fig. 4.15  Max Ernst, design for a drop cloth for *The Death of Juliet* (*La Mort de Juliet*, Act V, scene 6), oil over gesso incised with graphite pencil or point on heavy brown cardboard, 1926. Serge Lifar Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

Fig. 4.16  Max Ernst, *The Sun* (*Le Soleil*), oil on panel. Listed, therefore presumably inscribed, as a design for *Romeo and Juliet*, 1926. From an unnamed auction catalogue, artnet.com.
Fig. 4.17  Max Ernst, *The Sea (La Mer)*, unused design for *Romeo and Juliet*, 1926; Serge Lifar Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

Fig. 4.18  Joan Miró, *Dream Painting*, oil on linen, 1925. Serge Lifar Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Not used for *Romeo and Juliet*, although it is inscribed “Projet de mise en scène” on the verso, and has been taken as a design for a curtain. Diaghilev bought it in 1926.
Fig. 4.19  Max Ernst, *The Wheel of the Sun (La Roue du soleil)*, oil, 1926; Kunstmuseum Basel.

Fig. 4.20  Max Ernst, *Iceflower Shawl and Gulf Stream*, frottage on paper. *Histoire naturelle*, 1926.

Fig. 4.21  Max Ernst, *The Bird Who Sits and Does Not Sing*, oil on canvas, 1926. Private collection.
Fig. 4.22  André Breton and Louis Aragon, “Protestation,” leaflet protesting against Max Ernst and Joan Miró’s involvement in the Ballet Russes’ production of Romeo and Juliet, May 18, 1926; Bryson Dance Collection, Brown University Library, Providence, RI.

Fig. 4.32  German groteske dancer Valeska Gert, 1919.
Fig. 4.25  Invitation to the vernissage of *L’Exposition internationale du surréalisme*, 1938.

Fig. 4.26  Salvador Dalí, *Taxi-pluvieux (Rainy Taxi)*, 1938. Photo Raoul Ubac.
Figs. 4.27, 4.28  Rue surréaliste (1938). Mannequins by (l-r): Sonia Mossé, Marcel Duchamp, André Masson, Oscar Dominguez, Léo Malet; Hans Bellmer photos, Marcel Jean mannequin.

Fig. 4.29  Paul and Nusch Eluard, Magritte, and Léo Malet examining artworks by flashlight. In the corner, Breton’s object-chest, sculpture by Jean Arp at right, 1938. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.
Figs. 4.30, 4.31  Left: Hélène Vanel performing *L’Acte manqué*, 1938. The brazier is beside her and Duchamp’s *100 sacs de charbon* are visible above her head. Archives Wildenstein. Right: Vanel simulating a hysterical attack, echoing the object-sculpture *Hypnose* by Marcel Jean.

Fig. 4.32  Vanel apparently entrancing a group of Surrealists, *L’Exposition international du surréalisme*, 1938.
Fig. 4.33  Sheila Legge in Trafalgar Square in “Phantom of Sex Appeal,” for the opening of the London International Surrealist Exhibition, 1936. Photograph by Claude Cahun.

Fig. 4.34  Françoise Sullivan performing Danse dans la neige. Quebec, 1948. Photo Maurice Perron. Art Gallery of Ontario.
Conclusion and Outlook

Fig. C.1. Man Ray’s image of *Explosante-fixe*, from *Amour fou* by André Breton (1937).