



FILM  
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

**FILM ARCHITECTURE  
AND THE TRANSNATIONAL  
IMAGINATION**

SET DESIGN IN 1930s  
EUROPEAN CINEMA

TIM BERGFELDER  
SUE HARRIS  
SARAH STREET

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

## Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination



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*Tim Bergfelder*

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# Introduction: Understanding and Interpreting Set Design in Cinema

## The Invisible Set

When one thinks of crucial contributors to the filmmaking process, the first professions to come to mind are usually the director, who is seen in overall control of the production; the actors, who embody and animate the fictional characters with which audiences will identify; the scriptwriter, who creates the story and establishes narrative situations; and the cinematographer, who is in charge of visually capturing the narrative and the actors' performance. Audiences are of course mostly aware that in any production, a myriad of other personnel contribute to a successful production, even if the scope and nature of their work is often barely understood (notice film audiences' continuous bafflement at reading professional designations such as 'gaffer' and 'best boy' in the rolling end credits). One figure, however, who could be seen as one of the more crucial creative forces in a film, yet is someone who is regularly forgotten or neglected, is the person in charge of the sets, who is billed under various names including those of set or production designer, art director, or film architect.

At a very basic level, sets provide a film with its inimitable look, its geographical, historical, social, and cultural contexts and associated material details, and the physical framework within which a film's narrative is to proceed. Beyond these qualities, sets aid in identifying characters, fleshing out and concretising their psychology; and, often in conjunction with other contributing elements such as music and lighting, they help in creating a sense of place in terms of 'mood' or 'atmosphere', and thus evoke emotions and desires that complement or run counter to the narrative. In these latter respects, sets are also crucial in determining a film's genre, and they play a defining role in popular formats as varied as historical drama, science fiction, horror, melodrama, and the musical. Accordingly, set design is one of the central aspects of *mise-en-scène*, whether using (and then frequently enhancing) real locations or creating entirely artificial, and in recent years increasingly virtual, spaces for the screen.

As credit listings confirm, in a big-budget production in Hollywood and elsewhere, production design can constitute a quite sizeable subsection of the film crew. The associated workforce can include stagehands, craftsmen such as plasterers, painters, and sketch artists and architecturally trained supervising de-

signers. Of course, set design has always been at its most pronounced and dominant in productions that were made in the confines of a studio, in other words where set designers have been given the opportunity to create an entire world from scratch. Indeed, the rise of the set designer or art director as an important contributor to the production process is inextricably linked in the history of film to the expansion and increasing technological sophistication of studios in Hollywood and elsewhere from the 1910s to the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the 1930s, when the professional title 'production designer' emerged to describe a supervisory figure overseeing a large workforce and exerting a considerable influence over the production process, studio design had become key to the prevailing mode of production, both in Hollywood and in Europe – exemplified by practitioners such as Cedric Gibbons and William Cameron Menzies in the US (the latter was the first to be credited as a production designer on *GONE WITH THE WIND*, 1939) and Alfred Junge in Britain.

The preference for outdoor and location shooting in European cinema (and later elsewhere) developed out of the documentary tradition of the inter-war years, and was particularly fostered through post-World War II movements such as Italian neorealism. It was partly an economic necessity in the face of war-torn societies and destroyed studio facilities, and to some extent a deliberate attempt to dislodge the importance of set design and the creation of artificial worlds in studios. Studio-based design by this time, particularly in the European context, had become associated with and tainted by the lavish but often ideologically reprehensible productions by the Nazi film industry and by Fascist cinema in Italy. Some historians of cinematic design also believe that the studio system had proved a dead end for the profession itself: 'The studio system led to stagnation – it rapidly developed a technical expertise characterised by efficiency, speed and craftsmanship, but it lacked creativity and artistic freedom'.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the exact reasons, the move out of the studios after World War II had a profound effect on the nature and extent of the European art directors' work. In recent years the advancements of CGI and digital media have resulted in a similarly significant overhaul to the profession, replacing more artisanal approaches to the creation of filmic space with digital tools.<sup>3</sup>

Although they constitute such a concrete and material element of the filmic image, as far as the majority of film audiences are concerned sets are often taken for granted as unconsciously registered background. Indeed, within the filmmaking community itself, and especially in production contexts where the emphasis is on the primacy of storytelling rather than on visual effect, sets are prized precisely where they are not noticed and where they blend in to the requirements of the film narrative. Set designers themselves have often interiorised this ethos, for example the Austrian-born art director Oscar Werndorff,

who worked in the British film industry from the late 1920s to the late 1930s, declared in 1933 in an article on his profession that

good art direction must give you the atmosphere of the picture without being too noticeable. The best 'sets' in my experience are those which you forget as soon as the film is over and the lights go up again in the theatre. The first essential in the film is the action of the characters. The art director's job is to provide them with a background – and a background it should remain at all costs.<sup>4</sup>

Given the invisibility to which set design often aspires in the production process, it is unsurprising to discover that even the most renowned set designers remain unknown to general audiences. Even more knowledgeable observers have difficulties in naming more than a handful of prominent art directors, perhaps including figures such as Ken Adam, famous for his work on the James Bond films, and one of the few art directors whose work has been brought closer to audiences through exhibitions and publications.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to other professional roles such as that of the director or the cinematographer, the contribution of the art director has been a relatively under-researched subject in film studies over the years. In terms of publications, there are a plethora of introductions to the professional tasks of a production designer,<sup>6</sup> as well as comprehensive directories.<sup>7</sup> In terms of detailed historical analysis of set design and art direction in the cinema, the field is on the other hand rather narrow.

Following early studies by authors including the practitioners Robert Mallet-Stevens and Edward Carrick,<sup>8</sup> the acknowledged classic within the literature, Léon Barsacq's *Caligari's Cabinet and other Grand Illusions* (first published in French in 1970 as *Le décor de film*) was among the first texts to construct a comprehensive genealogy of cinematic design across different cultural contexts and historical periods, going back to the pioneering efforts of the Lumières and Méliès at the turn of the 20th century and tracing the development of the field through Italian monumentalism of the 1910s, German expressionism of the 1920s, French impressionism of the 1930s, and the studio practices of classical Hollywood from the 1920s to the 1950s. The expressed intention of Barsacq who, like his predecessors Mallet-Stevens and Carrick, was an acclaimed art director in his own right, was to explore 'the contribution of set design as a dramatic element, a character, and its decisive role in the creation of ambiance, or atmosphere'.<sup>9</sup> Important subsequent studies include Juan Antonio Ramirez' *Architecture for the Screen* (first published in Spanish in 1986 under the title *La arquitectura en el cine: Hollywood, la edad de oro*), Donald Albrecht's *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies*, Charles and Mirella Jona Affron's *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative*, the previously quoted Helmut Weihsmann's *Gebaute Illusionen. Architektur im Film* (literally translated 'Built

Illusions. Architecture in Cinema'), and C.S Tashiro's *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film*.<sup>10</sup>

Very few key studies have analysed how set design functions within a film narrative, and even fewer studies have been concerned with the impact sets might exert on audiences beyond their subservience to narrative, and beyond their relationship to various forms of stylistic, cultural, or historical authenticity. There are a number of possible reasons for this state of affairs. The first reason relates to the previously mentioned effacement or subordination of the visual under the principles of narrative progression, which is a hallmark of classical narrative cinema, whether – most prominently – in Hollywood, or in European commercial filmmaking traditions.<sup>11</sup> The dominance of this particular narrational mode in turn has over the last century created perceptual expectations among audiences that have helped to relegate set design into the background, and it has created modes of film critical practice that have centred primarily on narrative properties and explications.

A second reason for the scarcity of studies on set design relates to the indefinable quality and temporary nature of its subject. Although it appears to be a concrete category, seemingly as solid as its constructions, at closer inspection set design emerges as a decidedly slippery target, and the notion of solid constructions equally dissipates as soon as one considers actual working practices in the field. As several scholars have documented, film design is both 'ephemeral' and 'fragmentary'.<sup>12</sup> Long before the advent of CGI, and going back as far as the 1910s and 1920s, designers have relied on visual trickery, compression, painted backdrops, and miniature models in order to detract attention from the fact that few sets were ever more than an assemblage of carefully selected partial creations suggesting a non-existent whole. The art director needs to adapt to this composite work environment and has to master a variety of different skills, from having basic knowledge of styles and art history, to the ability to draw sketches and storyboards, working with tools for optical illusions, selecting props, to the demands of planning and preparing constructions.

Weihsmann considers the majority of filmic set design 'disposable architecture', created for an instant and for on-screen effect rather than for material solidity or longevity.<sup>13</sup> As is well known, the established practice in studios was and still is to either destroy sets upon completion of the production, or to cannibalise them for future projects where possible – the famous burning of a set from *KING KONG* (1933) during the filming of *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1939) serves as spectacular proof of this practice. In fact, so crucial is this practice that in his book on Hollywood set design Ramirez has devoted an entire chapter to the 'death and resurrection of sets'.<sup>14</sup> Ramirez is particularly interested in the 'metempsychotic' character of sets, or essentially their serial availability for different purposes:

At Paramount, for example, a single outdoor set respectively served to represent Venice, New York, Shanghai, Moscow, a part of Marseille at the time of the Crusades, a bazaar in Cairo, Madrid, Havana, Berlin, Singapore, Yokohama, and so on. This venerable and versatile structure, initially erected around 1925, was demolished without ceremony towards the end of 1937.<sup>15</sup>

For the historian and archaeologist of set design, however, this practice means that any study has to rely on on-screen realisation, and – if one is lucky enough – to refer to surviving sketches, drawings, and plans by the designer. The original set is lost in nearly all cases. Indeed it is necessary to realise that in most if not all cases an ‘original’ set that matches our perception of it on screen never existed in the first place. This is true for entirely studio-created worlds as the fairy-tale land of *THE WIZARD OF OZ* (1939), the imaginary Himalayas in films such as *LOST HORIZON* (1937) and *BLACK NARCISSUS* (1947), or the futuristic worlds of *METROPOLIS* (1927) and *BLADE RUNNER* (1981). The same principle holds true for a number of cases where a set incorporates real buildings, as anyone can vouch for who has visited the Spanish mission that features prominently in Hitchcock’s *VERTIGO* (1958), but which in reality never possessed the bell tower that is so crucial to the action of the film.

With regard to the problem of discussing set design as a separate and independent entity, this reiterates the point that sets on their own do not create space on the screen. Designed sets are realised cinematically only in conjunction with the work of the cinematographer, who through framing and lighting devices animates the fragmentary construction and imbues it with an imaginary wholeness, and the editor, who during post-production adds a temporal dimension to spatial relationships, and thereby anchors them in a constructed reality. In other words, in order to understand the filmic function of set design it is necessary to take into account its interaction with the way in which the set is cinematically processed. Similarly, it is almost impossible to disaggregate the function of the set from a number of other constitutive parts of the *mise-en-scène*, including elements such as props and accessories, costume and make-up, and not least the performance of the actors. What this means, then, is that set design is fundamentally hybrid and fluid, both as a profession and as a field of study. It blurs the distinction between the filmic and the pro-filmic, and between the domain of the image and the narrative. It is moreover a field that draws as much on the distinctive properties of the cinematic apparatus as it does on pre-filmic disciplines such as architecture, design, and painting, and on the medium and working practices of the theatre.

Classical film theory has always had something of a problem with set design’s inherent hybridity, and its somewhat promiscuous relationship with other media and art forms. Nowhere is this suspicion more pronounced than in

approaches that aim to establish film as a medium in its own right, and in models that are indebted to the principles of realism. One of the main charges articulated by this critical tradition has been that set design is essentially 'un-cinematic' when contrasted with cinematography and editing. Moreover, set design, and especially where it is allowed to dominate the narrative and become a spectacle, is seen to exert a negative influence in that it undermines film's inherent potential (and duty) for representing reality. André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, though differing in their theoretical approaches on other aspects, are both exemplary proponents of this kind of argument with respect to set design. In an influential essay on the 'screen and the realism of space', Bazin starts from his famous postulation that 'the realism of the cinema follows directly from its photographic nature' and goes on to argue that 'cinema is dedicated entirely to the representation if not of natural reality at least of a plausible reality of which the spectator admits the identity with nature as he [sic] knows it'.<sup>16</sup> Given this premise, Bazin deems expressionist experiments with space and set design, such as *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* (*THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI*, 1919) and *DIE NIBELUNGEN* (1924) as failures, not least because these films developed their aesthetics under the influence of theatre and painting, and as such contravene the intrinsic nature and purpose of the medium. The 'deformities of lighting and décor' these films employ constitute for Bazin merely a cheap and shallow effect. In contrast, Bazin approves of Murnau's *NOSFERATU* (1921), owing to its predominant use of natural settings, and of Dreyer's *LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC* (1928) for its relegation of sets and for its elevation of facial close-ups as a marker of human-centred realism. Kracauer makes a similar point in his *Theory of Film*, where he argues with reference to films including *CALIGARI* and *THE RED SHOES* (1948) that

screen fantasies which rely on staginess and at the same time claim to be valid manifestations of the medium run counter to the basic aesthetic principle; they pass over the specific potentialities of the medium for the sake of objectives which the cinema is not particularly fit to fulfil.<sup>17</sup>

Kracauer here expands on arguments made previously in his famous study of Weimar cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), which is referred to in greater detail in a later chapter of this book. Kracauer generally regards the dominance of studio-built set design over the filmmaking process as a 'retrogression', both aesthetically and ideologically.<sup>18</sup> Movement (in both the photographic sense of the reel moving within the camera and projector and the sense of the depicted movement on screen) is according to Kracauer the manifest ontology of the medium of film and contributes to the representation of reality (which in his view must be the medium's main priority), while studio sets are characterised by stasis and artifice. Yet he acknowledges that set design can productively in-

teract with other aspects of *mise-en-scène* and specifically cinematic techniques to produce what might be called a 'reality effect', as his following comments on *CALIGARI* attest:

As the protagonists of *CALIGARI*...move through expressionist settings, they continue to fuse with the motionless shadows and bizarre designs about them... What attracts us...is the miracle of movement as such. It adds a touch of cinema to them.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, while Kracauer does not totally disregard the influence of the set on the cinematic process or on spectatorial perception (more on this later), his insistence on a particular notion of realism, and his aim to radically distinguish the medium of film from preceding art forms and media, helps to suppress a more explicit analysis of the function of sets. It is significant that while *Theory of Film* explicates at length about the distinctions between the staged and the unstaged, set design does not feature as one of the named constitutive parts of the medium's aesthetics – probably in part because it undermines the perceived autonomy of the medium he sets out to prove. Kracauer and Bazin had a profound influence on film studies methodology, yet in recent years Noël Carroll has criticised their premises as essentialist and restrictive. He argues that the 'medium-specificity thesis' is flawed in that it postulates a medium's 'unique' features (when media usually comprise a range of determining components), and that it also conflates the medium itself with the stylistic uses it is put to. As an alternative approach, Carroll suggests that 'the task of the theorist of art is not to determine the unique features of the medium but to explain how and why the medium has been adapted to prevailing and emerging styles'.<sup>20</sup>

Since Kracauer and Bazin's interventions, set design has continued to sit uneasily among shifting agendas and priorities within film studies. In the 1970s and 1980s, psychoanalytic and post-structuralist approaches almost exclusively focussed on the primacy of the text as narrative, and mostly aimed to decode either dominant or aberrant ideological meanings out of narrational devices employed by a given film. What was important was how stylistic elements established meaning in relation to a (perceived or postulated) narrative objective and purpose. From the mid-1980s onwards, both the theoretical foundation of this approach and the resultant critical practice of textual analysis were being challenged by what has retrospectively been termed the 'turn to film history'. This new film history ushered in a new agenda for film research that centred less on text than on context, not on authors but on institutions, not on abstract spectators, but on actual, historically defined, audiences and their specific reading practices. The interpretation of texts did not cease to exist, but rather the text in question was often no longer just the film *per se*, but could equally encompass a myriad of ancillary texts, such as star images, press discourses, the intertextuality between film and other media, or instances of audience reception. The aim of

this new film history was no longer to explicate texts simply as decodable products of ideology, but instead to understand cultural formations and historical developments both at a national and at an international level through studying cinema as a cultural and economic institution as well as a social practice.

It is interesting to note that neither 1970s post-structuralism (with the possible exceptions of the study of *mise-en-scène* in melodrama) nor the 'new film history' have resulted in much activity concerning set design, perhaps in part because the new film history does not possess the necessary vocabulary to understand the topic's textuality, and partly because this textuality exceeds the domain of narrative that has been so central to interpretations drawing on 1970s and 1980s critical discourse.

In recent years, however, set design has re-emerged as a critical concern and become a crucial part in a process that one might see as a return of film theory to more phenomenologically oriented approaches. Several writers have been inspired by architectural theory to try to understand how design operates within the diegesis and outwards, locating the specifics of the designs themselves but also asking how viewers experience the familiar and fantastic journeys presented to them on screen. In the following sections of this introduction we summarise various recent methodological approaches to the study of set design that we build on and challenge in our comparative study of the activity, function and impact of set design across different national contexts. This will eventually lead to identifying our own method, which is to attempt to effect, through our study of set design, some sort of reconciliation in the quarrel between the respective primacy of text versus context that has underlined many of the debates and disagreements between film historians and theorists over the past decades.

## **Design, Film Narrative and Beyond**

In the mid to late 1990s two influential books raised fundamental questions about the ways in which design can be conceptualised as an aspect of narrative organisation and how in some instances it can transcend this positioning. Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron's *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (1995) was groundbreaking for its production of criteria for determining the extent to which a set engages with narrative. The Affrons are interested in examining 'the degree of design intensity applied to the decor' and in so doing propose five main analytical categories.<sup>21</sup> In the first, 'denotation', a set is a conventional, generic signpost to narrative. It is not particularly obtrusive, aiming to create a 'reality effect' in the sense that 'the familiar' is depicted 'through the verisimilitudinous', that is to say, through the deployment of objects and settings that 'seem right' because we have seen them many times before on screen. With repetition, they seem entirely appropriate for a particular

genre such as the thriller.<sup>22</sup> While we have never physically experienced the spaces presented to us on screen we feel as though we have, because they appear to be authentic, fitting for the action. The second category, 'punctuation', is a little more interventionist. In this type of set the decor 'punctuates' the narrative at key points, as in *MILDRED PIERCE* (1945), where design can be seen to accentuate important character and plot points. It does more independent work than a denotative set since it is 'intermittently opaque, it invites reading and can be perceived as an image with manifest pictorial and compositional elements rather than a representation of the real, everyday world'. Also, 'its specificity exceeds standard generic and cultural codes'.<sup>23</sup> Yet its function is still related to the narrative, working as an elaborate support – hence the word 'punctuation' – to connote emphasis.

The final three categories proposed by the Affrons are the most useful for the purposes of our study in that many of the European films we analyse in subsequent chapters deploy sets in terms of 'embellishment', 'artifice' and 'narrative'. A set that can be categorised as 'embellishment' displays even more 'design intensity' than 'denotation' or 'punctuation', since it 'calls upon powerful images that serve to organize the narrative; it exhibits an elevated level of rhetoric. Verisimilitudinous yet unfamiliar and intentionally arresting, embellishing sets insist on values that are highly determining; they oblige the spectator to read design as a specific necessity of narrative'.<sup>24</sup> Examples cited in *Sets in Motion* include some of the films we reference in our book: *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE* (1935), *REMBRANDT* (1936), and *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* (1937). The 'embellishment' level is achieved in these instances largely because of different usages by art director Lazare Meerson and his respective directors Alexander Korda and Jacques Feyder of contemporary (16th and 17th century) painting, drawing and printmaking, creating 'exceptional' aspects to their designs that are appropriate to the historical period in which each film is set.<sup>25</sup>

Progressing deeper into the interventionist paradigm, sets that connote 'artifice' can be metaphoric. The examples cited include *CALIGARI*, and two British productions, the futuristic *THINGS TO COME* (1936) and Paul Czinner's adaptation of Shakespeare's *AS YOU LIKE IT* (1936). With reference to the latter the Affrons argue that Meerson's designs are excessively illusionist, creating effects that are similar to those deployed on stage, presenting an obviously constructed universe to which it draws attention. A French castle and garden, for example, recalls

the shallow perspective and shortened dimensions of miniature structures we see in medieval manuscripts. The breath of nature never rustles through Meerson's Forest of Arden, an artfully arranged cluster of fake trees that recalls the illusionism of the stage... When art directors flaunt the artifice of the stage, they force us to pay heed to the craft of the film designer.<sup>26</sup>

What is implied here is how the obtrusiveness of the sets invites an element of self-reflexivity – this is not live theatre but a film. The camera accentuates a set's details and in so doing reveals how cinematic design can frequently evoke a period or mood far more strikingly than theatre. Also, as we explain in more detail in a subsequent chapter, Meerson's use of exaggerated perspective enhances this impression.

The final category of 'design intensity' identified by the Affrons is 'narrative', referring to films with a single or very restricted set, for example Hitchcock's *ROPE* (1948) that takes place solely in an apartment. In this category 'decor becomes the narrative's organizing image, a figure that stands for the narrative itself'.<sup>27</sup> As the Affrons argue,

where the set is narrative, decor's topography, no matter how complex, becomes utterly familiar...we know the decor well enough to describe it with accuracy, to trace and retrace our steps through it. We know it physically, materially. It has been before our eyes repeatedly, often persistently, sometimes ubiquitously. In the end, this decor takes on for the spectator a relationship to the narrative akin to that which it has for the characters.<sup>28</sup>

The taxonomy the Affrons propose in their book has obvious benefits. A key question to ask of any film is how décor relates to the narrative, and to what extent décor can act as an independent entity, causing distraction or even operating counter to the dominant narrative trajectory. However, Charles Tashiro's *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (1998) has criticised the Affrons precisely because of their primary concern to relate sets to narrative. Tashiro argues that objects can 'have meanings of their own exploited by the designer that have nothing to do with the script',<sup>29</sup> and he makes a strong case for studying design as something that exceeds the framed, narrativised image. In this conception the spectators are the focus, since they bring to the film a wealth of associations that can be related to any object/image that may not necessarily be related to the film narrative.

Like the Affrons, Tashiro introduces a taxonomy that simultaneously functions as an extremely useful tool for practical textual analysis of sets. However, whereas the Affrons' taxonomy elucidates narrative functions, Tashiro's is essentially concerned with issues of audiences' emotional engagement with and (re)cognition of spatial cues on screen. He draws on Christian Norberg-Schulz' pre-existing taxonomy that conceives of 'architecture and space as a series of ever-widening affective circles extending from the human subject'.<sup>30</sup> Adapting the nature of these circles to the medium of film, Tashiro identifies five main circles that encompass (moving outward), costume, makeup, and jewellery, objects, furniture, 'the liveable: the house/the set', 'the walkable: the street', 'landscapes' and 'cosmic space'.

Some approaches to design can encourage 'reading' more than others. There are, therefore, different levels of 'design intention' involving story and character but also, crucially, metaphor and symbolic meaning. Tashiro argues that some sets impose their presence, work against narrative flow and heighten the sense of the image. He is interested in images and frames that invite the spectator to look outwards, to suggest meaning that cannot be contained within the frame: while 'closed images' operate 'centripetally', 'open images', encouraged by camera movements such as pans or figure movement away from the centre of the frame, suggest designed space beyond the frame.<sup>31</sup> Time is also significant, since a film released with the latest 'chic' designs will subsequently appear dated, the sets drawing attention to themselves for that reason and thus inviting a different mode of 'reading'. This again places emphasis on the image's changing status/mutability of meaning, and the importance of fluctuating, historically specific understandings.<sup>32</sup> This point is particularly significant in subsequent chapters of this book since many of the sets we analyse relate to the *moderne* style of the 1930s which at the time was appreciated as state-of-the-art, even futuristic, and was related to the contemporary experience of modernity. These styles now appear 'retro' or even antique, invested with connotations of 1930s glamour and in retrospect blissfully ignorant of the destructive horrors that were to come with the Second World War. Yet their contemporary usage by designers drew on a range of more complex understandings of modernity and its consequences.

Tashiro's work is important because it extends many of the arguments proposed by the Affrons but urges us to think about how the demands of film narrative cannot always contain the effects of film design. No matter how self-effacing designers are (or proclaim to be) about the limits of their own practice it is clear that they cannot predict the impact of what they have created. Indeed, the question of the relationship between how designed spaces within films relate to audience experience, involvement and response, has become the focus of several important studies discussed below that draw upon insights available from a variety of disciplines such as sociology and architectural theory and from different historical periods, including cultural criticism from the Weimar period.

### **Journeys into the Haptic: Film and Architecture**

Giuliana Bruno, Juhani Pallasmaa and Peter Wollen<sup>33</sup> have all drawn on Walter Benjamin's seminal essay from the 1930s, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in which Benjamin proposes that the 'mechanical' work of camera and editing invite the spectator to appreciate new insights into human and physical behaviour: when watching a film we become adventurous

travellers.<sup>34</sup> Like architecture, film is an art form that can be described as ‘tactile’ or ‘haptic’ in the sense that, as Wollen explains,

both required a kind of kinaesthetic habit-formation, the acquisition of a mode of moving through space in order to understand and inhabit it unconsciously. Watching a film, Benjamin believed, was much like moving through a building of a built environment. It required a sense of direction, an attentiveness to signs, symbols and meanings, an awareness of the purposes for which a place was intended and how it could be most efficiently used.<sup>35</sup>

This echoes Tashiro’s observation that architectural theory is useful for thinking about objects as creators of meaning and it works perfectly with his taxonomy of affective circles as described above.<sup>36</sup> Benjamin suggests that film viewers experience a literally visceral sensation of embodiment, since we ‘enter’ the space created on screen. Wollen thinks of cinema as occupying a combination of ‘static’, architectural space (the set), and ‘dynamic’, narrative space (camera and editing). In a brief typology, Wollen comes up with similar observations to the Affrons about design and its relation to narrative, while also acknowledging the more independent function of décor identified by Tashiro.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Wollen comments that constructing a film narrative

involves constructing a mental map. As we watch a film we create an internal diagram of the relationships between the different places which structure its development and the different trajectories the characters follow within and between those places.<sup>38</sup>

This idea of ‘mental mapping’ is important not only for understanding the cognitive processes by which spectators make sense of spatial cues in films, but also because, as many of the examples cited in this book demonstrate, art directors are often extremely attuned to how ‘maps’ or logical spatial relationships need to be evident in their designs to inform directors, cinematographers and, ultimately, audiences. Much of the documentary material we uncover demonstrates how crucial these planning decisions can be before shooting begins.

Benjamin is not the only philosopher of the Weimar period whose theories can be used for a re-conceptualisation of spectatorial attachment and response to cinematic space. Although, as we have seen previously, Siegfried Kracauer was critical of filmmaking practices that foreground set design as artifice over and above the demands of realism, his work aids in understanding how films can unleash the viewer’s imagination and memories in such a way as to render purely cognitive approaches insufficient as a means of explaining how we make sense of both narrative and the resonating impact of the designed, screen image. As Miriam Hansen points out in her introduction to the 1997 edition of *Theory of Film*, his work is important for identifying processes of spectatorship that ren-

der more complex the illusory depth of diegetic space by making us aware of the significance of

the slippery realm of experience... It is in Kracauer's insistence on the possibility of such openings that we can hear an echo, albeit a muted one, of his earlier vision of cinema as an alternative public sphere, a sensory and collective horizon for people trying to live a life in the interstices of modernity.<sup>39</sup>

Pallasmaa's study also emphasises the link between film, mental mapping, public experience and architecture, drawing upon ideas about 'lived space' and how cinema 'constructs spaces in the mind'.<sup>40</sup> As architecture creates a sense of place and domesticates space, film's use of architecture works similarly by creating a context for a story event. In turn this activates the viewer's imagination so that images exceed their frames. As Pallasmaa suggests, 'both cinema and architecture imply a kinesthetic way of experiencing space, and images stored in our memory are embodied and haptic images as much as retinal pictures'.<sup>41</sup>

Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion* expands on the sense of film as related to the 'haptic realm' in the most extensive exploration of this approach. Bruno acknowledges that the use of the term 'haptic' for cinematic experience (in the sense that it is used above by authors such as Benjamin, Wollen, or Pallasmaa) is not uncontested, citing concerns raised in an influential article by Antonia Lant.<sup>42</sup> Lant points out that the term originates in art-historical discourse prior to the emergence of cinema, and was initially employed to characterise ancient Egyptian art, which in its refusal of depth and in its emphasis on textured surface, planarity, height and width could – almost literally – be appreciated by touch alone. This 'haptic' mode contrasts with the 'optical' mode of production and perception of the modern period (modern in the sense of post-Renaissance) that introduced depth of space as a key element. Lant cites the definition of haptic art by Alois Riegl as being 'objective, self-contained, and clearly bordered', set against the subjective, outward-looking and border-transgressing nature of modern art.<sup>43</sup> Adapting these distinctions to the development of cinema, Lant suggests that film was at its most haptic during the initial years of the medium's inception, when cinema's frontally staged tableaux and painted backdrops came closest to approximating the features of Egyptian art, and where the movements of actors helped to accentuate the surrounding flatness even further. In contrast, Lant sees the discovery of depth and space, as well as the employment of lighting techniques such as *chiaroscuro* as key elements in the medium's advancement towards a purely optical art form. She thus particularly criticises Noël Burch's use in his study *Life to those Shadows* of the term haptic for classical cinema:

For Burch the haptic is clearly tied to conviction of spatial illusion, such that a viewer believes he or she could touch the photographed objects and actors, as if they existed in real space... Burch's haptic grows from the increased use of varied shadow and the idea of an invitation into believable room, into boundless space. All of this not only runs counter to Rieg's meaning of the term, but in fact defines the optical mode.<sup>44</sup>

Lant similarly takes Benjamin's use of the term haptic to task, suggesting that Benjamin 'inverted' its original meaning. As Lant summarises Benjamin's interpretation of the term,

cinema is haptic both because of the cameraman's profilmic penetration of the world... and because of the film's physical impact on the viewer, especially through its startling juxtapositions of scale, time, and space created in rapid editing... Rieg's terms are inversely applied, now describing more the art maker and perceiver than the object.<sup>45</sup>

Whether one accepts Lant's insistence on the original meaning of the term or rather takes up Benjamin or Burch's redefinitions and repurposings (as Bruno eventually does), Lant's intervention is important in pointing out that 'haptic' can refer both to a mode of artistic production and to a mode of spectatorial experience. Moreover, Lant's description of the genealogy of the term and its gradual historical transformation in cultural theory and practice makes it clear what a crucially important role sets and art direction play in the construction of codes for spatial perception. As Lant demonstrates in her close readings of early film texts, sets in fact can materially bridge the categories of haptic and the optic, depending on their design and realisation.

Benjamin's influence is clearly evident in Bruno's use of the haptic. She writes of 'textures' of 'habitable space', of journeys via film, taking up the 'travelling' analogy suggested by Benjamin and developed by Wollen's idea of the 'mental map'. She argues that 'spectatorship is to be conceived as an embodied and kinetic affair, and that the anatomy of movement that early film engendered is particularly linked to notions of *flânerie*, and urban "streetwalking", and modern bodily architectures'.<sup>46</sup> What is so suggestive about Bruno's use of Benjamin is that it provides an effective counter-argument to what in Film Studies has traditionally been referred to as 'gaze theory', with its attendant ideological connotations, replacing it with an aesthetics based on sensual experience that extends beyond the visual, and encompasses a fluidity of identity, location, and indeed different planes of spatial experience, such as architecture, walking, and cinematic spectatorship. In this context, production designers for films act as important mediators, in that they create a sense of both cinematic and at least emotionally real geography. Bruno articulates this liminal geography and her

opposition to static models of spectatorship in characteristically evocative fashion:

The (im)mobile spectator moves across an imaginary path, traversing multiple sites and times. Her fictional navigation connects distant movements and far-apart places. Film inherits the possibility of such a spectatorial voyage from the architectural field, for the person who wanders through a building or a site also absorbs and connects visual spaces...This relation between film and the architectural ensemble involves an embodiment, for it is based on the inscription of an observer in the field. Such an observer is not a static contemplator, a fixed gaze, a disembodied eye/I. She is a physical entity, a moving spectator, a body making journeys in space.<sup>47</sup>

Echoing Benjamin and Kracauer, Bruno uses the technology of film – shots, editing, camera movements – to further the travelling analogy, for these take the viewer on a journey, a transport through space, an observation that accords with Tashiro's important point that 'static' images are never so because 'just as shots can collide or flow, pieces of a design can work in harmony or dissonance'.<sup>48</sup>

Interior sets can equally apply to this analysis, hence Bruno discusses 'various forms of travelling domestic', including 'home', using the example of *CRAIG'S WIFE* (1936), a film in which the house is the film's main protagonist.<sup>49</sup> Drawing on this film Bruno demonstrates how a house

is not a stationary tectonics. It is not a still architectural container but a site of mobile inhabitations. The house embraces the mobility of lived space. Like film, it is the site of an *emotion* and generates stories of dwelling.<sup>50</sup>

## **Travelling to/through the Cinema of the 1930s**

The different, but often complementary perspectives provided by the Affrons, Tashiro, Bruno, Wollen and Pallasmaa and their respective use of developmental psychology, Weimar criticism, and architectural theory have significantly re-energised the study of film design. They suggest new pathways for historical research, in particular how design can productively be studied in relation to broader theoretical questions. Whereas the theorists referenced above give various film examples to support their ideas, none of them consider a specific period or engage much with European cinema, let alone in a comparative context. It is here that we take our departure into new territory with this book.

Why single out the European cinema of the 1930s? In the first instance, the period from the late 1920s to the late 1930s was, as we shall argue, a moment in film history in which set design was given more prominence and attention than perhaps during any other period. It has often been remarked upon that the

1930s (for example in the case of popular Hollywood genres) created formulae and emblematic prototypes whose influence persist into the present.<sup>51</sup> In a similar vein we argue that the 1930s set standards for set design, which were to have a lasting influence on future practitioners. On a more general level, the 1930s is a decade in Europe that witnessed not only major political upheavals (the effects of which had a significant impact on the dissemination of design practices across different countries), but that also saw fundamental changes in the structure of the medium itself, in particular the epochal change from silent to sound film.

During our research for this book we became aware of the difficulties of speculating on the role of set design, in part because the source material is not easily obtainable or because it presents particular methodological problems. We have drawn upon a wide range of visual sources including designers' drawings, production stills as well as upon the films themselves. In addition, designers' personal collections and memoirs have enabled us for the first time to elucidate what they actually did and, in particular, to foreground discussion of their work by contemporary critics and practitioners. We do not intend to simply assess how a design relates to a completed film. In looking at design as a process we aim to cover broader issues that have emerged as important.

Earlier on in this introduction we suggested that our methodology would constitute an attempt to reconcile the respective primacy of text versus context within critical practice. As the above descriptions and our subsequent case studies hopefully demonstrate, we are trying to achieve this by combining in our study an analysis of historically specific production practices and contexts with a concomitant attention to questions of visual style, especially with regard to films' spatial organisation. In the process we are attempting to develop models for textual analysis that are neither purely formalistic, nor revert to the understanding of style as an encoding mechanism of a particular ideology, but instead help to historically define both professional artistic practices and affective spectatorial responses to filmic images. To this end we have identified several themes that are addressed in the following chapters in relation to the different national cinemas we have researched: studios and technology; issues of authorship/collaboration/design practices; performativity/the interaction between sets and star performers; and finally, space, place and transnational cinema.

Placed within a context of the advancement of many European studios in this period, the work of the set designer emerges as a crucial focus for understanding European cinema's ambitions to dominate domestic cinemas, as well as embarking on export strategies. Thus, we will analyse the different ways in which studios operated in terms of the technologies available to set designers and, in particular, the increasing levels of control that they were able to exercise by the end of the 1930s. While the comments about the implications of moving image

technology made by Benjamin, Kracauer, Tashiro and Bruno are insightful for their notion of the 'embodied' spectator, to assess how such an embodiment might have worked in practice it is important to document the impact of actual technological developments in the 1930s.

As we have stressed before, the advancements of set design cannot be separated from simultaneous developments in cinematography and editing. Apart from the particular challenges the transition to sound caused in the late 1920s and early 1930s, another link between cinematography and the representation of on-screen space can be seen in the increasing use of the mobile camera, which, to recall the controversy between Lant and Burch as outlined above, can be simultaneously seen to be a tool for either advancing the optical mode of film production or alternatively for increasing haptic possibilities for viewers. The stylistic preference for the mobile or (as it was initially referred to) the 'un-chained' camera can be charted from the initial showcasing in 1920s German films such as *DER LETZTE MANN* (*THE LAST LAUGH*, 1924), E.A. Dupont's *VARIÉTÉ* (*VARIETY*, 1925), or Hanns Schwarz' *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA* (*THE WONDERFUL LIE OF NINA PETROVNA*, 1929) through its introduction in British films such as Dupont's *PICCADILLY* (1928) or Asquith's *SHOOTING STARS* (1928) and French examples such as the René Clair films *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* (*UNDER THE ROOFTOPS OF PARIS*, 1930), *LE MILLION* (*THE MILLION*, 1931), and *QUATORZE JUILLET* (*BASTILLE DAY*, 1933). Our book includes a range of examples of how sets are displayed via tracking shots that promote the 'travelling' qualities noted by Benjamin, Bruno and others.

Similarly, certain genres such as the musical, the melodrama, or the historical film promoted a more obtrusive space for design that can be related to Tashiro's observations about designed space that is suggested beyond the frame. At a more practical level, however, what was possible in one studio was not necessarily possible in another, creating disparities of technological achievement or scope available to the designer. A detailed knowledge of the activities of a particular studio can reveal much about how designers had to be extremely resourceful, often producing impressive results against the odds, as well as their role in promoting technological experiment. This is particularly demonstrated by German designers such as Robert Herlth and Erich Kettelhut, or by the case of Alfred Junge's work in Britain. Appreciating the different contexts of creativity is therefore crucial for a full understanding of the impact of studios and technology on the films' abilities to present 'travelling spaces'.

Through our case studies we aim to shed considerable light on conceptualising the designer as a significant stylistic force within the collaborative context of filmmaking. This is meant to explicitly challenge *auteur* theories that over-concentrate on the creative contribution of the director at the expense of acknowledging the work of key technical collaborators. By drawing upon a wide range

of examples, this book elucidates design practices in Britain, France and Germany. We do not, however, intend to replace one theory of authorship with another, arguing that the designer was the key influence. Rather, we aim to understand the dynamic process of how a moving image is produced, locating the contribution of the designer amongst a matrix of influences that are all important in their different ways. While concentrating on the work of designers obviously highlights their often under-appreciated expertise, at the same time we propose that their craft was often about working to a specific brief for a particular studio. While we have discovered some evidence of recurrent methods and concerns amongst art directors in this period, it is not the case that in order to be considered 'the best' an art director had to demonstrate artistic consistency across films and genres in classic *auteur* fashion. On the contrary, a good reputation was earned for responding to a particular script by producing designs that were capable of being made into sets that would impress but which could be assembled quickly and were within budget.

Our 'performative' conception of set design locates it as a key register of *mise-en-scène*, occupying a unique place in establishing or in fact challenging codes of realism and of investing a 'space' with the verisimilar connotations of 'place'. The interactivity between the set and 'star' performers is one of the areas where the functionality and adaptability of sets can be studied in a particularly illuminating way. The use of stars within sets recalls Tashiro's ideas concerning the mobility of a performer within the frame, especially from the centre to the edges. This constellation, for Tashiro, invites an 'open' reading of a scene that promotes contemplation not only of designed space beyond the frame but also of the particular star's extra-textual image. In this context we will look at the strategies that designers developed when they knew that their sets would have to showcase stars who had established conventions and expectations with directors and cinematographers as to how they were shot and lit (for example, Marlene Dietrich, Jessie Matthews, Louise Brooks, Josephine Baker and Brigitte Helm).

Rather than studying individual national cinemas in isolation, our book wishes to emphasise the permeability and mutual influences in design between European film cultures. In particular we stress the close interaction between key companies and studios (Epinay in Paris, Ufa in Berlin, Denham and Shepherd's Bush in London) and the cross-national mobility of key artistic figures from the late 1920s to the outbreak of World War II. Our contention is that during this period the major European film studios functioned as artistic communities, and that their specificity (historical and aesthetic) lies in the unique professional composition of these communities. One of the most important characteristics was that they provided working opportunities for émigré artists, architects and

designers from Russia and Eastern/Central Europe, and later for Austrian and German émigrés in the British and French film industries.

Our study examines how these artists, often working in teams and mostly in a creative partnership with film directors and cinematographers, absorbed contemporary ideas and practices in the visual and decorative arts, and in architecture and urban design, and reworked and disseminated these recurring visions, themes, styles and motifs to a wider public. Seen from this perspective, cinema became a vector for the popularisation of new arts movements, especially the constructivist approach to total design. In this respect, our research provides a corollary to previous analyses by Donald Albrecht on the representation of modernist architecture on screen, and by Lucy Fischer on the cinematic uses of Art Deco.<sup>52</sup> Our main focus is on the work of those designers who achieved positions of immense influence and who often worked across different national film cultures. Thus, one focus will be the work of the Russian set designer Lazare Meerson (head of design at Epinay, 1930-36, and at Denham, 1936-38), and his assistants Alexandre Trauner and Georges Wakhévitch. Other important figures include Ufa's Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig; as well as Andrei Andreiev and Alfred Junge, whose work had a significant influence not only on the look of European films of the 1930s, but who held important positions within the production hierarchy in studios across Germany, France, and Britain.

Our book explores the genesis, *mise-en-scène* and reception of key films of the period, and provides a fresh perspective on established classics, such as G.W. Pabst's Weimar masterpieces *PANDORA'S BOX* (1929) and *THE THREEPENNY OPERA* (1932), Feyder's *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE*, Jean Renoir's perennial critics' favourite *LA GRANDE ILLUSION* (1937), and British films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH* (1934). Our book also aims to expand the canon of 1920s and 1930s cinema by focusing on lesser known films. Indeed, one of the secondary aims of our book is to question the notion of an established canon for all three national cinemas during this period. Through our focus on exiles, émigrés, professional travellers and patterns of cross-cultural exchange more generally we argue that European cinema during the 1930s is best understood as a transnational cinema instead of a loose geographical cluster of essentially autonomous national cinemas.

This approach constitutes in certain ways a challenge to previous assessments that have perceived this period to be a time where the notion of national identity and of a national film culture and industry were promoted and mobilised above anything else. A number of political and aesthetic movements certainly seem to give credence to this assessment: the documentary movement in Britain under John Grierson with its social-reformatory slant and focus on the representation of everyday life in Britain; the nationalisation, ideological radicalisation, and 'ethnic cleansing' of the German film industry under the Nazis; the cinema

of the Popular Front in France. However, as our case studies in this book suggest, these attempts and strategies of national containment and introspection provide only a partial understanding of the cinema of the 1930s, and they were not necessarily always dominant. Instead they always competed (at least until the late 1930s) with cosmopolitan practices, and these can frequently be located in popular cinema, and often in genres that emphasised spectacle through spatial cues. Bruno is very suggestive for these broader concerns of our book towards the end of *Atlas of Emotion* when she observes that conventional film histories tend to be 'time' rather than 'space'-bound:

It [film history] moves diachronically, progressing from period to period, and provides an essentially temporal history of the medium. Space emerges, for the most part, only in accounts of national cinemas, and in a reductive way that tends to confine itself within the borders of particular states. Interesting relations emerge, however, when one tries to break the teleology of time and the cartography of nationhood to organise filmic movements instead around travel through the durational layers of space and spatiotemporal fragments on dwelling. A spatial history of film could, for example, construct an inventive collage of cine cities, for cities are "made" in the cinema and recreated in different historical periods by filmmakers of different national backgrounds. Cities in films do not have strict walls or borders. However situated, they are a transcultural affair.<sup>53</sup>

Inspired by this observation, we document how various topographies were represented by designers working in different national contexts to convey places that were convincing in their verisimilitudinous address, whether as 'realistic' or 'spectacular' environments. It emerges that themes and preoccupations were not always confined to particular national cinemas and that there was a far greater degree of similarity between them than has hitherto been recognised. In a wider sense, our study of the working practices and output of the European studios, and the role of designers within them, will allow us to develop a more precise idea of the cultural influence of cinema during the period than has hitherto been offered. In this, the book aims to provide a comprehensive and comparative account of European filmmaking from the late 1920s to the late 1930s, and also engages with aspects of a history of visual art, design, and architecture. Within the context of a great degree of professional mobility within Europe in the 1930s there is indeed evidence that, to quote our book title, film architecture inspired a transnational imagination.

# European Set Design in the 1920s and 1930s: Cultural Contexts and Professional Practices

As we have indicated in the introduction, our contention in this book is to understand European cinema from the late 1920s to the late 1930s not simply in terms of separate national entities, but as a creative international network, dispersed across temporary centres of activity, which influence and cross-fertilise each other. In this chapter we chart the wider cultural parameters and the industrial contexts of production design during this period, both across European cinemas, and as regards the specificities of individual national environments, which are presented in the following subsections. What emerges from these interlocking national case studies is a truly European cinematic conception of set design with respect to industrial and artistic practices which prize first and foremost collaboration, and extend to areas such as training and the dissemination of visual styles. Although it would have been possible to discuss a wider range of international relations between different European film industries, the axis Russia-Vienna-Berlin-Paris-London constitutes a particularly dynamic force field of artistic and ideological exchanges and thus provides our main focus.

In the aftermath of the Russian revolution and World War I, Europe witnessed waves of migration that brought talented artists from Eastern Europe and the remnants of the imploded Austro-Hungarian Empire to the metropolitan centres of Berlin and Paris, followed by further migrations after Hitler's rise to power in 1933 when the balance of creativity began to shift decisively towards Paris and London. The mobility of émigré personnel and their interaction with indigenous colleagues meant with respect to trends in cinematic set design, that professional practices, aesthetic innovation, and a myriad of styles (from neo-classicism, Romanticism, and Gothic revival to Art Deco, and from expressionism, surrealism, and Russian constructivism to the functionalist aesthetic of the Bauhaus) were disseminated across European borders in ways that were productive for the development of discrete national cinema industries, as well as for European cinema more generally. In other words, wider geo-politically motivated migrations and the international circulation of aesthetic trends and idioms corresponded to developments within European film industries to consolidate either national or pan-European production activities in the face of economic competition from Hollywood.<sup>1</sup> Before we explore the design practices

and working methods at studios in Berlin, Paris, and London, it is necessary to chart the broader cultural contexts and the ways in which these have been mapped in film historical accounts.

## Germany

### The Metaphysics of Décor: Kracauer and Eisner's Legacy

No survey of classical silent and early sound cinema fails to establish the centrality of set design and décor to Weimar film aesthetics, and its perceived subsequent international impact on other European film industries and Hollywood. Indeed, one of the first films to explicitly promote and internationally draw attention to the creative use of film design was Robert Wiene's landmark *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* (*THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI*, 1920) with its innovative sets by Hermann Warm, Walter Reimann, and Walter Röhrig. Paul Rotha, an admirer of German films and someone who consistently promoted them in Britain, was among early external observers to note the 'significant part played by the architect in the development of German cinema'.<sup>2</sup> After World War II, Henri Langlois, the legendary director of the Cinémathèque Française, paid a widely quoted homage to the German art director Robert Herlth, and particularly to his contributions to the films by F.W. Murnau, suggesting that a 'metaphysics of décor' had been the 'secret of the German cinema'.<sup>3</sup>

However, two critical interventions have had a particularly prominent and lasting impact on all subsequent analyses of set design (not only) in Weimar cinema – Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947) and Lotte H. Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* (first published in 1952 in French as *L'Écran démoniaque*).<sup>4</sup> It has become something of an obligatory ritual in studies of Weimar film to cite and critique these two famous texts, and even five decades after their first publication, their approaches still dominate the debates on the subject.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Thomas Elsaesser has argued, the 'labels and their imaginaries' so substantially defined by Eisner and Kracauer's accounts 'now belong to the films, and are part of their identity for cinema history'.<sup>6</sup> Thus it is useful to briefly sketch their respective contributions and identify their relevance for our subsequent analysis.

As we discussed in our previous chapter, for Kracauer, especially in *Theory of Film* (1960), studio-bound aesthetics contravened an ideal of film centred on the primacy of representing reality, and constituted a regression in the sense of relying on techniques and a materiality not immanent in the medium itself. Such an assessment of (particularly studio-based) cinematic set design as essentially de-

rivative, non-realistic, and non-medium-specific has continued to influence evaluations to the present day.<sup>7</sup> Kracauer had already formulated a similar view in *From Caligari to Hitler*, where the aesthetic and stylistic practices of German set design in the 1920s became inextricably linked with a particular socio-political and collectively psychological trajectory. For Kracauer, 1920s German cinema's obsession with décor, and the subordination of time and narrative under the demands of space, famously symbolised a national act of regression after the trauma and defeat of the First World War:

[The] withdrawal into the studio was part of the general retreat into a shell. Once the Germans had determined to seek shelter within the soul, they could not well allow the screen to explore that very reality which they abandoned. This explains the conspicuous role of architecture after CALIGARI.<sup>8</sup>

Many subsequent studies of set design in Weimar film have followed Kracauer's lead in identifying stylistic and ideological connections between the films of the 1920s and contemporaneous social contexts, and in perceiving these films' anticipation of and influence on the fascist aesthetics of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>9</sup> However, as Sabine Hake has convincingly noted about such approaches, their 'desire for unambiguity brings them dangerously close to the formal qualities of their very subject of enquiry. As a result, the affinities between film, architecture, and ideology are duplicated in the discourses attending to them'.<sup>10</sup>

In Lotte Eisner's equally groundbreaking study, meanwhile, the emphasis in Weimar film on set design and *mise-en-scène* more generally emerged out of cinema's links with and continuities from early 20th century German theatre (notably Max Reinhardt, but also Leopold Jessner, Bertolt Brecht, and Erwin Piscator), 19th century Romantic painting (e.g. Caspar David Friedrich), and the Gothic, which Eisner locates as an important reference in the films directed by Fritz Lang, especially in *DER MÜDE TOD* (*DESTINY*, 1921) and *DIE NIBELUNGEN* (*THE NIBELUNGEN*, 1924). Her book is primarily consulted today for its discussion of expressionism in relation to German cinema and for its championing of this tradition over other cinematic tendencies. Eisner notes the crucial influence of the expressionist movement on the development of German film in the 1920s, in terms of the latter's ideological principles as much as in terms of its specific stylistic characteristics.

Nevertheless, although her overall aim may have been to construct a retrospective unity and national identity for German filmmaking practices of the 1920s, her study at the same time cannot help but demonstrate that Weimar cinema (both regarding its stylistic influences and the personnel that helped create it) was profoundly eclectic and cosmopolitan. Even ignoring Eisner's comprehensive neglect of and distaste for a whole range of traditions and production

practices, especially popular genres such as comedies (even Lubitsch is considered too vulgar), operettas and melodramas (more often than not summarily dismissed as the 'Ufa style'), the scale and diversity of influences on German film that emerges from her analysis effectively disproves the idea of either a stylistically homogeneous or indeed a particularly nationally rooted body of work. Eisner duly notes the impact of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new sobriety) movement in the latter half of the 1920s, especially on the films of G.W. Pabst and Walter Ruttmann. Acknowledging these influences, however, only underlines how much these modernist practices corresponded to artistic and political developments and movements elsewhere, most notably those in Russia.<sup>11</sup> Such transnational exchange in turn sits awkwardly alongside the more narrowly national genealogy Eisner constructs elsewhere in her book, which insists on supposedly unique German cultural sensibilities.

Kracauer and Eisner's readings have left us with two specific conceptions of the function of set design in Weimar cinema. The first centres on an intrinsic causal relationship between a collective psychological disposition (what Kracauer terms the national soul), a historically specific socio-political situation, and cinematic *mise-en-scène*. The second notion concerns the relationship between cinematic practices (mediated by genial individual artists) and a legacy of nationally discrete developments in art history. Both conceptions significantly reduce the complexity of influences that German set design imported, synthesized, and in turn exported again to other film cultures. However, if German set design during the Weimar period, and its approach to *mise-en-scène* more generally, really was as nationally introspective and exclusive as both Kracauer and Eisner (as well as numerous subsequent studies) have claimed, why was this approach then so avidly copied by filmmakers elsewhere in Europe from the mid-1920s, and why was it that precisely the professions associated with set design became the most mobile work force in the European film industry in the late 1920s and 1930s?

Assessing Eisner's approach and its value for a retrospective understanding of Weimar film, Thomas Elsaesser has suggested that

[w]hat would be needed, it seems, is to extend [Eisner's] art-historical notion of a movement or group style, to include a concept of style immanent to a given production context, understood as the material as well as discursive conditions of production *and* reception, where style intervenes in – i.e. actively translating and transforming – the relations between an industry, its products and the meanings given to these products in the act of reception or consumption.<sup>12</sup>

Taking up Elsaesser's lead, the following sections aim to map these latter relations, and in the process revisit Eisner's notion of broader artistic influences on set design practices against the background not simply of discrete develop-

ments, but more crucially in terms of industrial paradigms, economic and technological imperatives, and transnational exchanges.

### **Eclecticism and Adaptability: Professional Backgrounds and Training Patterns among German Set Designers**

In Eisner's analysis of the influences on set design in Weimar cinema the dominant ones are the links to established art movements such as expressionism and the connection to the theatre. It is with regard to the alleged presence of an expressionist ethos in Weimar cinema that Eisner has been taken to task most frequently, with by now successive generations of scholars pointing out that with the exception of *CALIGARI* and a handful of further examples in its wake, few German films of the 1920s can meaningfully be labelled 'expressionist'. This becomes even clearer when one studies the artistic and professional background of the period's main designers. Although many were competent painters (and often more than competent draughtsmen and sketch artists), few had either trained or had made their living exclusively from painting, and as such had at best tenuous links with artistic communities or movements, let alone with explicitly avant-garde circles such as the various expressionist groups. Exiled designers such as Andrei Andreiev, who in Russia had studied the theories of Constructivism and who had been associated with the theatre reformer Konstantin Stanislavski, had experienced a rather different artistic socialisation.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, a great number of German designers (including Paul Leni, Rochus Gliese, Walter Reimann, Hans Söhnle, and Hermann Warm) had learnt their profession at the Berlin *Kunstgewerbemuseum* (Museum for Applied Art) or similar colleges elsewhere (e.g. the Hamburg *Kunstgewerbeschule* in the case of Otto Hunte<sup>14</sup>), the curriculum of which was explicitly practice-oriented and designed to foster among its pupils professional flexibility and adaptability to a variety of market demands, and which prized pragmatic, reliable, and cost-effective craftsmanship over individualist visions.<sup>15</sup>

For many designers, the career path led directly from the academies to theatre agencies supplying personnel for individual stage productions, and from there to the film studios. Even though the *Kunstgewerbeschule* ethos shared a commitment to functionalism and utilitarianism with that more prominent later training centre of German design activity, the Bauhaus, its ideological and stylistic orientation was far more conservative (though not necessarily less modernist), tied to consensual rather than utopian aesthetics, and certainly had fewer if any explicit social-reformist aspirations. Relatively few film designers had direct links with the Bauhaus (César Klein, a close associate of architects Walter Gropius and Erich Mendelsohn, provides a notable exception), and equally few had

studied at university (the latter include Robert Herlth, Robert Neppach and Hans Poelzig who later run an art school in Breslau).

Multiple functions in diverse work environments characterise the careers of many famous set designers during the 1920s and 1930s. Poelzig, who anticipated some of the main principles of the Bauhaus,<sup>16</sup> combined being a renowned teacher and architect (even within this one area producing an *oeuvre* that comprised a range of conflicting influences, from neo-classicism to stark modernism) with working for the stage, creating abstract oil paintings, and designing the sets for films including *DER GOLEM* (*THE GOLEM*, 1920). Although far more respectable than many of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* trained designers, Poelzig shared with such colleagues an interest in formal experimentation and eclecticism, and a lack of interest and even distrust in social engagement.<sup>17</sup> Another 'multi-tasker', Franz Schroedter, was an architect, an interior decorator, and a set designer for film and theatre, fusing a synergy between his different careers in 1938 by building a studio for director/producer Carl Froelich.<sup>18</sup> As Johannes Kamps has noted, many designers, including Leni, Herlth, and Reimann, additionally moonlighted in the field of graphic design, creating film posters, book covers (e.g. Reimann for Thea von Harbou's novelisation of *METROPOLIS*), illustrations for magazines, and advertising campaigns for non-film-related consumer products.<sup>19</sup>

Aesthetic eclecticism based on utilitarian principles, commercial imperatives, and the desire to please thus informs not only German designers' cinematic sets and related sketches, but also their excursions into other art forms, including painting. Walter Reimann's landscape studies (often depicting rural idylls) and portraits<sup>20</sup> illustrate this tendency – at their most ambitious they approximate but never quite match impressionist and expressionist ideas (certainly to a far less radical extent than in the paintings by Poelzig<sup>21</sup>), at their worst, they come across as derivatively naturalistic, or as pseudo-mystical, nationalist *kitsch* (Reimann would in the early 1930s be one of German cinema's most prominent and vocal converts to National Socialism). Yet in 1919 that very same Reimann was, according to his colleague Hermann Warm, the main creative force in suggesting the employment of expressionist principles in the sets for *CALIGARI* and thus initiated the discourse of expressionist cinema in Germany and internationally.<sup>22</sup>

Ironically it was director Robert Wiene's follow-up to *CALIGARI*, *GENUINE* (1920), designed by 'actual' Expressionist artist César Klein that was dismissed by critics as derivative and not fulfilling *CALIGARI*'s promise of cinematic expressionism.<sup>23</sup> It is thus no surprise that one of the most persistent film historical myths concerning *CALIGARI* has been the erroneous claim that Reimann and his co-designers Warm and Röhrig had been associated with expressionist groups prior to the making of the film.<sup>24</sup> Reimann's case illustrates that despite

their adaptability, the strength of many designers may often have exhausted itself with one particular talent (and there is no doubt that Reimann's film sets constitute his most significant achievements).

### **From Wagner to Reinhardt: Staging the *Gesamtkunstwerk***

Apart from the legacy of stylistic and art historical traditions and their mediation through particular training methods, the most crucial influence to emerge from *The Haunted Screen* centres on the legendary Viennese but largely Berlin-based stage producer and sometime film director Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), an undisputed giant of the German and Austrian theatre from the 1890s until the Nazi takeover in 1933. That Reinhardt should be a central reference point for a discussion of the prominence of set design in Weimar cinema is understandable – a majority of its most prominent set designers and art directors had formative careers in the theatre, often alternating between assignments in film and on stage.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside later star directors such as Murnau and Lubitsch, several set designers had specifically worked for Reinhardt, either on his stage productions (e.g. Andreiev<sup>26</sup>, Gliese, Leni, Kurt Richter, and Ernst Stern<sup>27</sup>), or, as in the case of Poelzig,<sup>28</sup> in designing his theatres. Janet Ward has noted how Reinhardt's purpose-built venues paved the way for the movie palaces that began to be built in the 1920s and 1930s, attesting to another correspondence between Reinhardt and the cinema.<sup>29</sup> Although flagged up in the subtitle of Eisner's book, and functioning, as Thomas Elsaesser has argued, as the Godfather-Caligari figure in her narrative,<sup>30</sup> Reinhardt surprisingly – or perhaps appropriately – remains a rather shadowy figure in Eisner's text. The chapter dedicated to his impact suggests his influence through a few impressionistic comments on the use of lighting in his stage productions and how German cinematographers adopted such uses.<sup>31</sup> Both Barry Salt and Thomas Elsaesser have subsequently questioned Eisner's evidence in this respect.<sup>32</sup>

Irrespective of factual disagreements a more general problem of documenting Reinhardt's influence derives from his protean personality whose success derived precisely from his refusal to adhere to expectations. Instances of artists embellishing their biographies with references to having worked for Reinhardt (often fraudulent) became so inflationary that the supposed merit of this association and its explanatory value evaporated.<sup>33</sup> As Bernd Wilms has argued, while Reinhardt did initiate training opportunities for budding talents (e.g. by founding a *Schauspielschule*, or acting school, in 1905), unlike his Russian contemporaries Stanislavski or Vsevolod Meyerhold he did not engender a 'theory'.<sup>34</sup> Even so, Reinhardt's productions could nevertheless function in mediating the influences of Stanislavski (whom Reinhardt knew and corresponded

with) through his employment of Russian-trained personnel, which began to flood into Berlin from the late 1910s onwards, and which included such subsequently important European set designers as Andreiev and Lazare Meerson.<sup>35</sup>

Frequently transgressing the boundaries between spectacle, populist entertainment, and commercial imperatives on the one hand and high culture on the other, Reinhardt's productions have been termed proto-postmodernist in their conception.<sup>36</sup> Instead of being predominantly a stylistic innovator, recent evaluations have assessed Reinhardt's legacy in terms of his adeptness in amalgamating a range of different and even conflicting trends (including the shift between mass spectacles and the more intimate form of the *Kammerspiel* or 'chamber play', a shift Weimar cinema imitated with its move from monumentalist epics to the *Kammerspielfilm*, explicitly named after its theatrical equivalent), and in creating an international chain of theatres and events functioning as an industry comparable in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to the musical and business ventures of an Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Christopher Balme has argued that more than the individual or accumulative success or artistic merits of any of his productions, Reinhardt's greatest achievement may have been in introducing the notion of corporate branding (most notably of himself as *impresario*) into the German-language theatre scene.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that Reinhardt's influence on the cinema, and on the primacy of set design, is negligible, but that it manifested itself less in specific stylistic strategies than through his redefinition and modernisation of the theatrical experience itself. Erika Fischer-Lichte has identified as his three most significant contributions his creation of new spaces (both in terms of theatre buildings and in the architectural conception of auditoria, including the use of lighting techniques); the employment of 'atmosphere' as an aid to spectator identification and emotional-empathetic rather than intellectual-analytical immersion (in other words, a diametrically opposite approach to Brecht's theatre of distanciation); and the employment of actors as an architectural and dynamic element of stage choreography.<sup>38</sup> It is particularly in the latter strategy that analogies to film can be drawn, with the formation and placement of characters on the stage anticipating or mimicking montage principles and their attendant construction of cinematic space.

Of course, none of these strategies and techniques necessarily or exclusively originate with Reinhardt who was himself influenced by a number of domestic and international peers, including his British contemporary, producer-director Gordon Craig (1872-1966), and the latter's groundbreaking study *The Art of the Theatre* (1904), written during a period in Craig's life when he was based and worked in Berlin. Both Craig and his Swiss contemporary Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) had in turn been influenced by Wagner's conception of an artistic unity encompassing all aspects of the stage production into a coordinated

whole and encapsulated in the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or 'total work of art'.<sup>39</sup> As we will document in more detail later in the British section of this chapter, it provides a neat historical reciprocity that Craig's son, the Germanophile art director and design historian Edward Carrick, would in the 1940s play such an important role in recognising the contributions by German-trained set designers (several of whom had worked with or had been influenced by Reinhardt) on the development of the profession in the British film industry.

Such cross-national affinities relate to another important element of Reinhardt's legacy, not least on cinematic set design, namely his cosmopolitanism. Alexander Weigel has suggested that his conception of a 'world theatre' – evidenced by the employment of international actors and by the staging of non-German authors, eclectically ranging from Shakespeare to Edgar Wallace – surely had economic motives.<sup>40</sup> However, countering assessments of Reinhardt as an apolitical populist at best or at worst as someone whose spectacles prefigure the nationalist mass choreography of the Nazis,<sup>41</sup> Weigel argues that Reinhardt's avowed internationalism stood in direct ideological opposition to the more parochial and nationalist tendencies within the Wilhelmine empire and later the Weimar Republic. In this respect, Reinhardt's conception of theatre had little in common with Wagner's more racially inflected vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and he was frequently condemned by right-wing critics for that very reason.

The influence of Max Reinhardt and a cosmopolitan as well as eclectic theatrical tradition that aimed for (international) effect instead of (national) essence, alongside the expedient employment of expressionism and a range of other styles in German films of the 1920s, confirms Thomas Elsaesser's perceptive suggestion that

Weimar cinema's underlying constructivist modernity is...paradoxically most in evidence where it mimics a gamut of styles, including the most notoriously conservative ones, thereby providing in its moments of 'inauthenticity' (measured by either the ideal of *Stilwillen*, or by the standards of a realist agenda) the surest sign of its modernist technological-commercial identity.<sup>42</sup>

Elsaesser's observation frames the relationship of German designers and the principles of modernism in a rather different way to previous assessments, especially by German scholars who have interpreted Weimar cinema's usage of 'old' styles such as the Gothic and 19th century Romanticism as essentially nostalgic and regressive. Michael Esser, for example, has argued that in contrast to designers working in 1930s Hollywood, their German counterparts remained largely unaffected by modernist principles.<sup>43</sup> Elsaesser instead proposes an understanding of Weimar cinema (and of its use of set design in particular) as intrinsically modernist, or indeed proto-postmodernist, precisely through its

use of pastiche and quotation. This proposal is seconded by Sabine Hake, who in her analysis of Fritz Lang's *NIBELUNGEN* insists on the film's (and by extension Weimar cinema's) structural eclecticism that extends across the films' diverse elements, that is in the (often deliberately incongruous or conflicting) interaction of sets, costume, performance, and narrative. For Hake, this eclecticism does not necessarily carry ideologically progressive connotations – it not only amounts to a 'gesture of "everything goes"', but also in her view serves to promote 'the dismantling of history into pleasant quotations and the transformations of the aesthetics of appropriation into the politics of spectacle'.<sup>44</sup>

### **From Metaphysics to Studio Reality: Contexts, Strategies, and Practices of Set Design in German Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s**

Elsaesser's above quoted reference to Weimar cinema's 'modernist technological-commercial identity' is directly related to its industrial infrastructure, and in order to fully grasp the principles of German set design, one has to understand the spatial and technological contexts in which it operated. Roughly one can divide the period of the 1920s and 1930s into three major technological phases, which required a substantial reorientation in terms of working practices among set designers. During the early period until after World War I films relied exclusively on diffuse sunlight and outdoor shooting. The period until the late 1920s marked the high point of the studio-based silent cinema, while the third phase encompasses the challenges that emerged from the coming of sound and an increased internationalisation associated with the practice of producing multi-language versions (MLVs) of popular films.

The Nazification of the German film industry after 1933 finally represents a fourth, albeit ideological rather than strictly technological, caesura. These professional and political changes coincide, albeit not always neatly, with successive production trends in German cinema, including the fantastic *sujets* and exotic spectacles of the late 1910s and early 1920s, the interior-based *Kammerspielfilm* and the social realism and stylisation of the *Strassenfilme* of the mid- to late 1920s, and the stylistically polished generic products and prestige literary adaptations of the late 1920s and early 1930s (with the *Bergfilme* or mountain films shot on location in the Alps from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s representing a phenomenally popular, but industrially eccentric, sideline).

In terms of German studios of the 1910s and 1920s, Kracauer's famous account in *From Caligari to Hitler* may suggest dark, cavernous and subterranean spaces, analogous to the murky, introspective mentality of the workforce that inhabited them (and supposedly of the national audience that consumed the products that came out of these studios). However, the reality was somewhat

different. Until the early 1920s, German films were either shot on outdoor locations and stages, or in 'glasshouses', that is studios with glass roofs that allowed diffuse sunlight to naturally illuminate the sets (which in the early years were almost exclusively painted backdrops). It was indeed in a glasshouse, the Lixie studio in the Berlin suburb of Weissensee, that *CALIGARI* was shot. Although Lothar Schwab has pointed to the experimental use of carbon-arc lamp floodlights by German film pioneer Oskar Messter as early as 1896/97,<sup>45</sup> these were meant to simply complement natural light sources, not to replace them. Frances Guerin suggests that 'around 1907, when the majority of American studios on the East Coast relied solely on electrical light, in Germany alternatives were still being sought owing to the unreliability and prohibitively high cost of electricity'.<sup>46</sup> In other words, contrary to the image one might derive from Kracauer, it was American studios that went 'dark' long before their European counterparts, as the prevalence of glass-roofed or -walled studios applied to most European countries, not just Germany.

A survey of the approximately twenty-five main studio complexes founded between the late 1890s and the late 1930s in Berlin (the centre of production activity in Germany alongside smaller concentrations of studios in Munich, Hamburg, and other parts of the country) reveals that many glasshouses were used well into the 1920s and beyond, either with no or only minor structural alterations.<sup>47</sup> Often these spaces had started out as independent production ventures, but were later acquired by Ufa to be used either as subsidiary studio space alongside its flagship studios at Babelsberg, or to be rented out to other companies. The Babelsberg terrain, located in the south-west of Berlin, had first been acquired in 1911 by Deutsche Bioscop, building the first glasshouse there in 1912 (among the first films to be shot at the site were star vehicles for the Danish diva Asta Nielsen). By the mid-1920s, following the successive mergers of Deutsche Bioscop and Deutsche Éclair (Decla), and then Decla-Bioscop with Ufa, the studio complex (acquiring quasi-city status reflected in the emerging epithet Neubabelsberg for the site) comprised several buildings, back-lots for outdoor shooting, processing labs, storage facilities, and property stores.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the various glasshouse set-ups scattered across Berlin and its suburbs, were a range of outdoor sites, where famously monumental fantasy cities were built. Among these were the former sand quarries called 'Rauhe Berge' in the suburb of Steglitz, where Ernst Stern, Kurt Richter, and Ernö Metzner recreated ancient Egypt for Lubitsch's *DAS WEIB DES PHARAO* (*THE LOVES OF PHARAOH*, 1921). As Kristin Thompson has pointed out, 'the site was surrounded by modern buildings, and the sets had to be tall enough to block the view of these'.<sup>49</sup> Other outdoor locations included those in the suburb of Woltersdorf, where the team comprising Otto Hunte, Karl Vollbrecht, and Erich Kettelhut constructed the exotic cities for Joe May's spectacles *DIE HERRIN DER*

WELT (MISTRESS OF THE WORLD, 1919) and DAS INDISCHE GRABMAL (THE INDIAN TOMB, 1921).

Thompson documents how the persistent use in European films until the early 1920s of outdoor shooting even of interior sets, the use of diffuse or undiffused natural lighting for studio set-ups, and the absence of what in classical Hollywood cinema would be referred to as the three-point lighting system (relying entirely on artificial illumination and combining key, fill, and back lights), had an impact on the type of sets required by this mode of production:

The lighting layout for most shots was arranged so as simply to make everything visible. Walls, actors, furniture, props, all received an overall, diffuse light, usually coming from the front and top. The notion of creating atmosphere, depth, modelling, and other effects through lighting was distinctly secondary.<sup>50</sup>

The effect of this practice on the set and its design can be documented in three significant ways. Firstly, the lighting assigned equal importance to all elements of the image, with the resultant refusal to privilege the actors against their background, heightening the presence and significance of the set. Secondly, what Thompson refers to as the set's 'conspicuous visibility'<sup>51</sup> required designers to construct backgrounds in a fairly naturalistic style, or rely totally on painted backdrops. Thirdly, atmosphere, depth, modelling and the other effects that Thompson is alluding to above had to be articulated through spatial patterns or cues alone, hence the prevalence of sets that Thompson characterises as displaying extreme depth, and having 'cluttered', 'busy', and over-elaborately patterned set dressings.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to differences in stylistic paradigms, Thompson also notes the different working methods in German and American studios. As she elaborates, by the mid-1910s Hollywood had developed a highly hierarchical assembly-line approach to the organisation of labour, 'dividing production tasks among [a] greater number of specialists than their German counterparts'.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, 'a set of guidelines was evolving' that 'would help make sets less obtrusive by largely subordinating their function to the narrative action'.<sup>54</sup> The German (or perhaps more accurately, European) approach to set design, by contrast, emphasised the close collaboration of, relative equality among, and creative exchange between the main personnel (director, scriptwriter, cinematographer, and set designer) beginning in the early planning stages of a film, and aiming for overall stylistic unity (thus echoing the aspirations towards the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in other art forms and media). Obviously, this working practice was most in evidence among prestige productions, and it is evident that less care was spent on the production of cheaply made genre pictures.

Artistic collaboration frequently extended beyond the production of a single film, resulting in established creative teams working on successive productions.

Not infrequently set designers with complementary backgrounds, abilities, or aesthetic principles formed partnerships that in some cases lasted for decades. Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig constitute one such successful pairing, with the former undertaking the majority of the preliminary design process, including the drawing, whereas the latter played a greater part in the execution of the designs.<sup>55</sup> Similar patterns can be observed in the collaboration between Otto Hunte and his frequent partners Erich Kettelhut and Karl Vollbrecht.<sup>56</sup>

As Guntram Geser has suggested, it was often the set designers rather than the cinematographers who determined the overall 'look' of a given director's *oeuvre*. For example, while the cameramen on Fritz Lang's Ufa productions of the 1920s changed continuously, the design team (Hunte/Vollbrecht/Kettelhut) remained constant.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Murnau relied repeatedly on the efforts by Herlth and Röhrig during his time at Ufa, and they were instrumental – in collaboration with Murnau and cinematographer Karl Freund – in devising new techniques that created synergies between cinematography and the filmed space, as in the case of the 'unshackled camera' (*entfesselte Kamera*) in *DER LETZTE MANN* (*THE LAST LAUGH*, 1924).<sup>58</sup> Instead of the streamlined Fordism of the Hollywood system, German filmmakers valued this more artisanal approach, based on familiarity, experimentation, dialogue, flexibility, and cooperation, exemplified by Robert Herlth's retrospective analogy between a German production team and a medieval workshop (*Bauhütte*).<sup>59</sup>

### **Conceptions of Space and Narrative in Hollywood and Germany**

For Thompson, the overall consequence of the German approach to set design in the late 1910s and early 1920s is that of a visual style and a mode of organisation which, when set against contemporaneous developments in Hollywood, comes across as 'old-fashioned' and which was frequently perceived as such by American observers at the time. Thompson's study of the mutual influences between Hollywood and German cinema ultimately posits not only a technological superiority of the former (with respect to studio practices and equipment), but also a superiority of Hollywood's style of narration, which she argues German filmmakers eventually emulated by the end of the decade. Having comprehensively mapped patterns of set design, lighting, and editing in both American and German films of the 1920s, Thompson suggests:

No doubt Germany developed some important and distinctive techniques during the 1920s, and no doubt these influenced Hollywood. The introduction of these techniques, however, took place during the period when German films were, on the whole, being Americanized.<sup>60</sup>

This teleology from an 'old-fashioned' way of doing things towards a more modern one is based on two assumptions; firstly, that the advancement towards the kind of protagonist-driven narrative integration and compositional principles that classical Hollywood represents necessarily constitutes a natural progression of film aesthetics *per se*, secondly, that a turn towards narrative-centred cinema automatically equals Americanization. While there is some truth in both observations, they do need some qualification for the German context.

It is true that film practitioners in Germany were aware of the style of Hollywood films at the time, and their published comments during the 1920s and in subsequent decades reveal an acute understanding of the professional implications of their approach and potential future stylistic direction. This also marked the beginning of a period of active exchange of studio personnel, both within Europe, and, often in the form of a creative drain, across the Atlantic. Among the set designers to either temporarily or permanently leave Germany, many years prior to Hitler's rise to power, were Hans Dreier who left Ufa for Paramount in 1923. In 1926, Paul Leni followed suit. Rochus Gliese was brought to the United States by Murnau to build the sets for *SUNRISE* (1927), but subsequently returned. Another temporary visitor to Hollywood was Walter Reimann who worked on Lubitsch's *ETERNAL LOVE* in 1929, and then went to Britain for F.W. Kramer and Milton Rosmer's *DREYFUS* (1931). Hermann Warm, meanwhile, made a big impact in France, collaborating with Carl Theodor Dreyer on *LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC* (1928) and *VAMPYR* (1932), and also worked on a number of Anglo-German co-productions such as *A KNIGHT IN LONDON* (1928) and *THE RUNAWAY PRINCESS* (1929). Also during the late 1920s, Alfred Junge, a former assistant to Leni at Ufa and a prolific set designer in his own right, made his debut in British films, as did the Viennese-born Oscar Werndorff. Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig designed the sets for the Anglo-German co-production *THE INFORMER* (1929), although the realisation of the sets (and credit) went to the Britons J. Elder Willis and Norman Arnold. Franz Schroedter collaborated with director Hans Steinhoff on two Anglo-German co-productions, *ANGST* (*FEAR*, 1928), and *THE ALLEY CAT* (*NACHTGESTALTEN*, 1929), while Emil Hasler created the Ruritanian sets for another Anglo-German venture, *THE GALLANT HUSSAR/DER FESCHE HUSAR* (1928), starring Ivor Novello. After 1933, the Nazis' policies forced a number of talented designers to emigrate, including Eugen Schüfftan who went to France. It is often these later émigrés who found it particularly difficult to integrate into the film industry of their host country, as the disappointing or perfunctory careers of Ernst Stern and Ernö Metzner in Britain, or Ernst Fegte and Leo Kerz in Hollywood, illustrate. All of these exchanges however prove that, individual circumstances and difficulties notwithstanding, German-trained set designers had something to offer that could fit industrial practices in Europe as well as Hollywood.

Already in 1923, Kurt Richter, one of Lubitsch's favourite designers, appeared to welcome the developments that were taking place in Hollywood and saw them as a model which German productions should emulate. He argued for a style and practice of set design that was responsive to economic demands, and he perceptively acknowledged the principles underlying the Hollywood system when many German critics at the time saw 'American' influences in film merely as a synonym for megalomania or ostentatiousness.<sup>61</sup> Implicitly taking to task directors such as Joe May and Fritz Lang, Richter noted:

Anyone who believes that their imitation of Indian architecture would launch a new era, or who thinks that their exhibition of drawings and models is aiding the advancement of film, does not understand the audience. It wants above all to see people in films, and for them it would trade the most beautiful landscapes.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast, Robert Herlth asked as late as 1951 whether a style of composition that predominantly used *plan américain* framings, and shot/counter-shot editing patterns focussed on the action of two protagonists (i.e., typical elements of Hollywood's spatial organisation, but also increasingly common in post-war European cinema) necessarily needed to constitute the filmic norm. In antagonism to the kind of opinion expressed by Richter several decades previously, Herlth lamented the passing of a cherished expertise:

The knowledge gained through much effort by the pioneers of the period 1918-1930 has been forgotten... It is said that the audience only wants narrative and action, and that one does not need the dream sets or the magic of yesterday. In my opinion this view is mistaken, and is itself the reason why the audience has more recently abandoned the cinema.<sup>63</sup>

Herlth's comments are interesting not only for their artistic self-confidence and for the consistency they document of artistic principles held across several decades. They are also revealing coming from a practitioner whose approach, far from representing the conservative end of the profession, ranks among the most modernist in Weimar cinema. Herlth's work provides a useful example to discuss the perceived Americanization of German studio practices in the 1920s, as his assignments include both Murnau's *FAUST*, which for Thompson constitutes 'one of the last gasps of the Expressionist movement',<sup>64</sup> and the designs for *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA* (*THE WONDERFUL LIE OF NINA PETROVNA*, 1929) which according to Thompson resembles 'the star vehicles then being made with Greta Garbo at M-G-M'.<sup>65</sup>

## Approaches to Set Design in Weimar Film: Painting versus Architecture

In order to more accurately locate Herlth's position, one needs to sidestep the differences between American and German modes of set design for a moment, and enter into a parallel if somewhat connected debate that was taking place domestically among practitioners in Germany during the 1920s, and which concerned the distinction between 'painterly' versus 'architectural' approaches to set design. This dichotomy meant in the first instance to distinguish between more 'filmic' approaches and those that were seen to adhere to the principles of pre-existing media and art forms, especially architecture and stagecraft. For Thompson, on the other hand, the painter/architect debate primarily charts the differences between an artisanal tradition (the painterly faction) whose ethos of cooperation and extensive preplanning conformed to a pre-industrial, 'artistic' mode, and the architects' technological approach and commitment to a division of labour, which resembles the more 'efficient' *modus operandi* in Hollywood.<sup>66</sup> This evaluation somewhat simplifies the two positions.

One of the most vociferous champions of the 'painterly' creed was Walter Reimann, airing his views during the 1920s in a number of essays. Rejecting the affinities between an architect and a set designer for the cinema, and thus also the professional designations 'film architect' and 'film architecture' coined during the 1920s, Reimann throughout his career referred to himself as either *Film-maler* – film painter – or *Filmbildner* – a film image creator.<sup>67</sup> Noting the primacy in cinematic representation of the *Licht-Bild* (the light-image, the term covering an untranslatable double meaning of a common expression in German for a motion picture and the essence of the filmic image as being constructed by light), Reimann emphasised the dynamic properties of the cinematic construction of space, and the key terms to emerge from his aesthetic conception are the focus on composition (and especially the place and function of the human body within that) and atmosphere.<sup>68</sup>

Although Reimann remained ultimately committed to the use of painted sets that had brought him fame in *CALIGARI* (a position that by the mid-1920s was definitely not gaining many followers, either in Germany or elsewhere), his published comments reveal that he did conceptualise the notion of a film painter in broader terms that considered set design in its interactions with lighting and editing. Herlth echoes Reimann's approach when he recalls his experiences with Murnau:

I had always designed the sets first and drawn in the figures afterwards. But under the influence of Murnau I now began to sketch the people first; that is to say, I would begin by drawing what happened in the scene, and then the appropriate space seemed to grow out of it. Murnau used to encourage me in this method. In this way

the interiors became more and more simple and more and more empty. It was the actor who had to fill them. We thus came, by our third film, *FAUST*, to adapt the space to the actor... The hall in *TARTUFFE* consisted merely of a wall: its dimensions were suggested by the shape of Jannings walking up and down with his breviary in his hand – all that was needed was an effect of relief. Depth of field, which all the specialists made such a fuss about at that time, was to us, in this particular case, immaterial.<sup>69</sup>

What is significant about Herlth's comments here is that on the one hand they suggest a gradual approximation towards those principles that Thompson identifies as being characteristic of Hollywood set design practices (uncluttered sets the main functionality of which is to emphasise the action of the main protagonists), yet at the same time the underlying motivation for Herlth and Murnau's stylistic strategy remains focussed on visual and performative effect rather than on narrative progression or signposting. Indeed, a contemporary reviewer in the 1920s hailed Herlth and Röhrig's work precisely for their transformation of 'emotional experience into motion and pure visuality'.<sup>70</sup>

As Thompson's study of the mutual influences between Hollywood and German cinema in the 1920s acknowledges, Herlth and Röhrig's rise to prominence among German set designers notably coincided with, and was at least indirectly aided by, significant technological changes in the set-up of German studios. In this respect, then, the 'painterly' tradition was the avant-garde in set design of its time, and it constituted the faction that gained most from the adoption of studio practices which up to that time were primarily associated with Hollywood.

As argued earlier, until the early 1920s, the majority of German production venues had been glasshouses. This dominance had begun to wane by the middle of the decade. Ufa commissioned new studio facilities at Babelsberg that allowed for full electrical lighting in the wake of similar studios being erected by competitors, as in the case of the American-financed EFA studio (opened in 1925). Similarly, the practice of building spectacular but also often wasteful sets at outdoor sites such as Steglitz and Woltersdorf was gradually being replaced by using gigantic indoor studios including two repurposed airport buildings, the Jofa-Atelier at Johannisthal (founded in 1920), and the former Zeppelin hangar at Staaken airport, which opened its doors for film productions in 1923 and which would be used to stage spectacular mass scenes in Lang's *METROPOLIS* (1927) and Joe May's *ASPHALT* (1928).<sup>71</sup>

The main stage at Staaken was perfectly equipped to convey the illusion of depth in the representation of landscape and skies by a fixed arched horizon spanning sixty metres across and twenty-six metres in height.<sup>72</sup> These new indoor spaces created new possibilities for set design, and facilitated a turn away

from décor realism towards the kind of suggestive, impressionistic sets that would become the hallmark of Herlth and Röhrig's work. Discussing their extant sketches for Murnau's *FAUST* (1926), Michael Esser argues that

Herlth and Röhrig create less an architectural space, they construct an image. Their drawings barely intimate the materiality of the studio sets, despite having to serve as the basis for their construction. In their dissolution of fixed contours and emphasis on gradients of *chiaroscuro*, the drawings capture the dream-like atmosphere that is so typical of Murnau's films.<sup>73</sup>

Reminiscing decades later on the working practices at Ufa in the 1920s, Herlth insisted on the creative freedom of the set designer over and above narrative logic.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, he did acknowledge the designer as a mediator between the frequently unfeasible demands of the director and the economic restrictions imposed by the producer, instilling in the designer the values of restraint and inventiveness with regard to the available resources. In their emphasis on creative primacy and improvisation Herlth and Röhrig represent the most prominent proponents of the 'painterly' tradition of set design in 1920s cinema.

The team of Hunte, Kettelhut and Vollbrecht, and in particular their work for Joe May and Fritz Lang on films such as *HERRIN DER WELT*, *DAS INDISCHE GRABMAL*, *DIE NIBELUNGEN*, *METROPOLIS*, *SPIONE* (*SPIES*, 1928), and *FRAU IM MOND* (*WOMAN IN THE MOON*, 1929) stand more clearly for the 'architectural' variant, even though in their actual professional background and training, their career paths were not as divergent from Reimann or Herlth as one might imagine. Alfons Arns has referred to the distinction between the two approaches as 'visionary dynamism' versus 'static monumentalism'.<sup>75</sup> The difference between the two styles is evident not simply when one compares the sets designed by the two respective factions, it can also be detected in extant sketches.

Two contrasting images for Joe May's *ASPHALT* give an indication of the respective approaches. Initially, Herlth and Röhrig had been assigned to the production, but they fell out with May, and were replaced by Kettelhut, as the latter recalls in his unpublished memoirs.<sup>76</sup> In an extant crayon sketch drawn by Herlth, the emphasis is less on artistic precision and detail (indeed the execution of the sketch is fairly rough), but on conveying the impression of speed, mobility, and the anonymity of the metropolis. Passing cars blur into each other in a technique reminiscent of time-lapse photography; isolated figures remain faceless and become chiffres of alienation and loneliness. The façades of the buildings are uncompromisingly modernist, minimalist and stark, avoiding detail and ornamentation; the lighting is diffuse, reflected by the wet streets. The image condenses an idea of the metropolis rather than an actually existing space, conveying mood more than geography. In its use of sharp corners and diagonal



Image 01 – *Asphalt*

lines to create an oblique vanishing point, the image limits a full comprehension of spatial dimensions, concentrating instead on a more claustrophobic snapshot of city life (image 01).

Kettelhut's conception is radically different (image 02). His richly detailed sketch (to the point of feeling cluttered) offers comprehensive visual access to the space depicted. While the Herlth image draws the observer into its space and into a feeling of disorientation, Kettelhut's maintains an omniscient distance, partly through the slightly elevated perspective, and partly through frontal framing. Kettelhut's space is also more evenly lit, and avoids the blurred outlines that in Herlth's drawing denote speed. Whereas Herlth's drawing suggests connections to what lies beyond the frame, Kettelhut's conception neatly contains all the visual information that is required, almost like being designed for a theatre set. While his image does condense the notion of the big city as much as Herlth, it is a notion that is solidly rooted in real references. The city can easily be identified as being Berlin, indeed, for although it does not follow actual Berlin topography, it includes an existing building, Erich Mendelsohn's showcase modernist Universum cinema (which survives to this day as the venue of the Schaubühne theatre) which had opened its doors in 1928, the year in which *ASPHALT* was made. As Peter Lähn has observed, a glassed-in pedestrian bridge recalls similar constructions at the rail terminals at Zoo and Friedrichstrasse stations.<sup>77</sup>

Apart from these very specific references, Kettelhut generally provides more realist detail – shops, banks, street lamps, and subway stations can be distin-



Image 02 – *Asphalt*

guished, and although the figures here remain anonymous too, there is a greater emphasis on identifying male and female figures, clothes, and other accessories. Unlike in the Herlth drawing, one does not get the impression that the figures are meant to represent any existential quality. Particularly noticeable is the inclusion in Kettelhut's drawing of the commercial markers of the city – shop signs, advertising columns, and billboards feature prominently, whereas in Herlth's drawing they are almost absent. On the whole, the impression created by Kettelhut is of a stylistically eclectic, knowable and, despite all its hectic aspects (suggested by a traffic jam in the background), liveable space, contrasted with the much more austere and purist modernist vision envisaged by Herlth. Yet at the same time, it is Kettelhut's sketch more than Herlth's that illustrates the intersection of leisure, technology, advertising, and architecture so typical of Weimar modernity.

If one studies comments by, among others, Hunte and Kettelhut (and they always remain at the level of description, anecdote, and detail, unlike a number of written pronouncements by Herlth or Reimann, which aspire towards general applicability, or the theoretical), what becomes apparent is that the design process was primarily conceived of as a technical and an economic rather than as an artistic challenge.<sup>78</sup> For Hunte and Kettelhut, design meant anticipating and dealing with technical problems, whether that involved creating a mechanical dragon for *DIE NIBELUNGEN*, building the futurist sets for *METROPOLIS*, or adapting sets for the requirements of sound film technology in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>79</sup> Whereas Herlth and Röhrig may have welcomed improvisa-

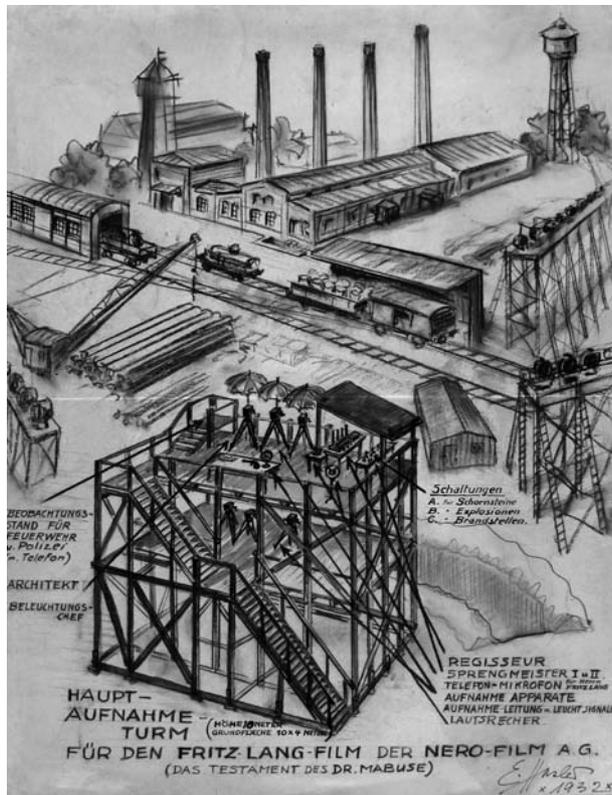


Image 03 – *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*)

tion on the set, for Hunte and Kettelhut, exact and orderly organisation was paramount. It is worth recalling in this context that designers were not only required to provide the sets in front of the camera, but that they also often coordinated the set-up behind the scenes as well, as a production drawing by film architect Emil Hasler for a scene in Fritz Lang's *DAS TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE* (*THE TESTAMENT OF DR. MABUSE*, 1933) illustrates (image 03). Kristin Thompson's previously cited claim that an architectural approach in film superseded the painterly faction as the newer and more modern (and more American) practice, however, is not quite correct. Whereas Herlth and Röhrig only fully developed their style after the emergence of the 'dark' studios in the early 1920s, the 'architectural' school was already very much in evidence in the earlier period of glasshouses and location shooting, yet it continued to adapt itself to changing technological demands.

In many respects, the film architects embodied and realised most faithfully the ethos of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* so many of them had graduated from – an

attention to technical functionality and efficiency of working practices, combined with a generally conservative, yet also populist and commercially viable artistic outlook. While this ethos may have emerged out of a culturally specific context of indigenous professional patterns and domestic training opportunities, it did obviously share many characteristics with prevalent attitudes and commercial imperatives in Hollywood, and thus facilitated the exportation of such practices across borders (both within Europe and in the exchanges between Germany and the United States).

This does not necessarily mean that the 'painterly' approach was less conducive to influence foreign practices. Among the three main techniques of silent German cinema Thompson describes as having been subsequently adopted by Hollywood practitioners are two (the 'unchained camera' and the use of forced perspectives and miniatures in sets, the latter often referred to after its creator as the 'Schüfftan effect') that are distinctly associated with Herlth and Röhrig, in particular with their work on *DER LETZTE MANN* and *FAUST*.<sup>80</sup> In contrast to such revolutionising techniques, the solutions devised by film architects such as Otto Hunte can appear in retrospect more narrowly conceived. The following extract from an article by Hunte about the challenges faced during the shooting of *DER BLAUE ENGEL* (*THE BLUE ANGEL*, 1930) gives a good indication of the kind of approach favoured by Ufa's décor realists as well the discursive style they adopted in relation to their work:

In the decors for the Erich Pommer production *DER BLAUE ENGEL* we were surprised by the good sound created by the footsteps on an iron staircase, while in a different situation footsteps on a wooden staircase elicited an unreal sound. Consequently, the sound film architect has to pay attention not simply to the creation of staircases, but also to floors, especially elevated ones including rostrums. The important thing is to establish the right acoustic balance between the sound of the footsteps and the surrounding environment... For such sets it is thus necessary to create a cavity through a false bottom, and to fill this cavity with sound-insulating material. If the sets allow for it, an easier solution involves the use of fabrics, carpets etc., which have a strongly soundproofing effect.<sup>81</sup>

Hunte's above comments coincide with a major caesura in the organisation of German studios – the changeover to sound. Few existing studios were sufficiently soundproof to be used without modification, while the recording technology itself (predominantly provided by Tobis) required additional changes in the studio set-up. By 1929 the major companies had erected the first purpose-built sound studios. These included the entirely new '*Tonkreuz*' at Babelsberg (literally 'Sound-Cross'), a building complex of four soundstages arranged in the form of a cross, containing in its courtyard-like centre the sound recording equipment.<sup>82</sup> In 1930, the previously mentioned sites at Staaken and Johan-



Image 04 – *F.P.1 antwortet nicht* (F.P.1)

nisthal were adapted for sound film production, alongside a range of other studios.<sup>83</sup> The earlier dark silent studios may not have exclusively favoured painterly approaches towards set design, but in conjunction with the collaborative ethos favoured by producers such as Pommer, they certainly allowed for a considerable amount of artistic freedom and room for stylistic innovations. The new sound studios, on the other hand, brought both economic and technical restrictions, which may have strengthened the architectural position among the studio hierarchy.

The problems of coordinating time and spatial requirements intensified in the early 1930s with the practice of multi-lingual filmmaking where films were shot in different language versions simultaneously or in succession. While actors, directors and other production crew often changed with individual versions, the sets remained in most cases the same, making the set designer one of the constant elements and a crucial mediator in the overall production process. Production notes and sketches regarding the filming of the science fiction film *F.P.1 ANTWORTET NICHT* (F.P.1, 1932) indicate the significant role played by the designer, in this case Kettelhut. In what is typical of many of Kettelhut's sketches, a drawing of the envisaged construction (image 04), the underside of a floating island, is annotated with detailed production notes, which not only specify the technical aspects of the set, their costings, and negotiations with suppliers, but also list a precise timetable for its assembly, with particular attention to the demands of the sequential filming of the German, British, and French language versions, which starred respectively Hans Albers, Conrad Veidt, and Charles



Image 05 – *F.P.1 antwortet nicht* (F.P.1)

Boyer. The still from the actual film (image 05) shows how closely the actual sets corresponded to Kettelhut's sketch.

On the whole, as Sabine Hake has argued, the film architects as represented by Hunte and Kettelhut 'remained true to their background in the theatre and constructed stunning landscapes and cityscapes without ever challenging the static order of the proscenium arch'.<sup>84</sup> It is primarily this theatrical-architectural tradition of set design in Weimar cinema that, beginning with Kracauer, has attracted ideological criticism for showing the strongest affinity with the later architectural principles of the Nazis. The filmic example most often cited in this context is Lang's *NIBELUNGEN* with its funereal and starkly geometrical sets; and the comparison of stills from the film with pictures of later Nazi memorials and other buildings does indeed offer striking similarities.<sup>85</sup> This argument is usually assigned further credence by references to the biographies of Hunte, Kettelhut, and Vollbrecht and their work during the 1930s and 1940s, which comprises notorious Nazi propaganda pieces such as *JUD SÜSS* (*JEW SUESS*, 1940) and *ANSCHLAG AUF BAKU* (*ATTACK ON BAKU*, 1942).

The conflation of artists' biographies with stylistic approaches and their supposed ideological legacy, however, lose credibility when it emerges that the main 'painterly' set designers, Reimann, Herlth and Röhrig, also continued their career during the 'Third Reich'. Herlth allegedly distanced himself somewhat from the regime he served, and according to Lotte Eisner ideological differences contributed to the break-up of his partnership with the more fervent Nazi supporter Röhrig.<sup>86</sup> He left Ufa in 1936 and subsequently worked mostly on politically innocuous operettas and other light entertainment fare for Tobis. More problematically, he also acted as an advisor on Leni Riefenstahl's *OLYMPIA*

(1938). As stated previously, Walter Reimann on the other hand, established his National Socialist credentials early, and although, as previously noted, he had worked in Hollywood and Britain in the late 1920s and early 1930s, his subsequent assessment of foreign methods and styles became increasingly shrill and bitter; and his personal frustrations (which may have contributed to his premature death in 1936) were not helped by a perceived lack of appreciation he received from the new regime.<sup>87</sup>

Reimann's political and professional trajectory thus contrasts sharply with that of the largely apolitical Hunte and Kettelhut who have to be termed fellow travellers, yet whose careers thrived during the 1930s and 1940s. Conversely, among those designers who had to go into exile, we find proponents of both traditions, with Alfred Junge creating a décor-realist school in Britain that looks as much towards the Hollywood model as to the architectural tradition in Weimar cinema, versus someone like Ernö Metzner whose work for G.W. Pabst and assignments in exile (for example on such British films as *CHU CHIN CHOW*, 1934, or *THE ROBBER SYMPHONY*, 1936) seem more akin to the visionary dynamism of the painterly tradition – something that might well have contributed to his disastrous career in Britain and later Hollywood.

To confuse the ideological distinction between 1920s and Nazi-era set design further, Dieter Bartetzko extends his ideological critique of Weimar set design equally to the 'painterly' tradition, citing as 'proof' Robert Herlth's demand that film architecture should be guided not by static, but by purely visual criteria (in other words, the opposite approach to the static monumentalism that informs *NIBELUNGEN* and subsequent Nazi styles). Yet for Bartetzko this creates a link in that Nazi architecture too is guided solely by visual effect.<sup>88</sup> This kind of analogy, however, becomes so general and unspecific that it only serves its own self-fulfilling causality, and it undermines its own project of charting ideological continuities.

Ultimately, it might be futile to assign progressive or reactionary tendencies to stylistic approaches in set design according to the political trajectory of their creators, or even to supposedly immanent ideological principles in design. Nevertheless it is evident that in German cinema after 1933, the kind of impressionistic set design associated with the 'painterly' tradition fell out of favour with the Nazi regime. Sabine Hake locates the important change in a reprioritisation of the designer's role. She argues that

sometime during the early 1930s, film credits exchanged the term 'film architect' (*Filmarchitekt*) for that of 'set design' (*Ausstattung*). Far from being a minor terminological change, the implicit return to theatrical traditions announced a major shift from the highly symbolic functions of public spaces to the largely decorative function of private space as an extension of the individual.<sup>89</sup>

Hake's observation attests to an increasing commodification of design in German cinema, creating analogies between cinema, architecture, design, and consumerism. This commodification, of course, is not simply or even primarily a consequence of the Nazi takeover. In fact, it continues a trajectory that Kristin Thompson, as we have seen earlier, associates with a process of Americanisation, but which also relates to the ethos and training of the design profession in Weimar Germany more generally. In this sense, a more complex form of influence in international terms of German set design (in both its 'painterly' and 'architectural' traditions) can be assessed by these practitioners' function as what Thomas Elsaesser has called an 'ensemblier',

someone who can take the phenomenal realm, separate it into discrete visual components, and from these re-assemble a 'world', able to make each element count at the same time as he imbues it with sign value, adding attraction to the film-as-artefact, while giving the film-as-experience, i.e. going to the movies, a quality of objecthood, with its own fascination and appeal, its own tactility and presence. In this sense, what in the 1930s became Hollywood's 'modelling for glamour' might be one route by which 1920s German lighting styles of psychological mystery found their way into mainstream practice...<sup>90</sup>

In the remainder of this chapter, we will witness how many of the debates, professional practices, and stylistic agendas that had characterised set design in Weimar cinema, resurfaced and were reinterpreted in France and Britain during the 1920s and 1930s.

## France

### New Agendas in French Design in the 1920s

The design achievement of *DAS CABINET DES DR CALIGARI* (*THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI*, 1920) released in Paris in February 1922 after being championed by Louis Delluc established, according to Donald Albrecht 'a Berlin-Paris cinematic axis that would persist throughout the decade'.<sup>91</sup> It is significant – and nationally characteristic – that in the decade when France underwent seismic shifts in artistic and technological practice, it should have looked inwards to European sources rather than across the Atlantic to Hollywood for inspiration. In part, this would have been a consequence of the 'shock of the new': *CALIGARI* was the first German film to be released in France in the post-war years,<sup>92</sup> and to a French industry that has been described as still 'tied to *trompe-l'œil* painting and the conventions of *fin de siècle* theatre'<sup>93</sup> and 'prisoner of habits that date from

the time when French production was the most significant in the world',<sup>94</sup> the artistic ambition of the Ufa studios, founded in 1917, was a revelation.

The synthesis of elements characteristic of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was new to French viewers and filmmakers alike, and the work of set designers such as Warm, Reimann, Herlth and Röhrig was commented on at length in the trade press. Although critics were divided as to the value of the new decorative agenda, suggesting in some cases that expressionism was a regressive showcase for theatrical rather than cinematic art,<sup>95</sup> the consensus was that this new conception of décor was significant for the development of film practice:

The most recent German films from the new school are probably, of all films, those that have achieved the most in advancing our understanding of the conception and construction of décor. In these films, décor is the most significant of all the expressive elements, including screenplay, lighting, and acting. It deforms reality and transposes it into the realm of the director's imagination, in order to have the greatest impact on the spectator.<sup>96</sup>

Admiration for the more social realist, urban-based *Strassenfilme* of the mid-1920s – *DIE STRASSE* (THE STREET, 1923), *DER LETZTE MANN*, and *DIE FREUDLOSE GASSE* (JOYLESS STREET, 1925) – was extensive, for there was little with which these could be compared in French filmmaking. As Alastair Phillips notes: 'The urban-based films which had emanated from the Berlin studios in the 1920s were admired by the French for their technical sophistication and complex handling of visual style; but they were also seen simultaneously as harbingers of a particular response to modernity which French film culture seemed unwilling to make'.<sup>97</sup>

In the wake of 'caligarisme', critical debate by practitioners and designers about the relationship between architecture and the cinema gained momentum in France. The architect Robert Mallet-Stevens, the figurehead of the 'architectural crusade' of the *Club des Amis du Septième Art*, the world's first film art association, was something of a pioneer in establishing links between the two disciplines.<sup>98</sup> On the one hand, his high-profile intervention into the filmmaking world was evidence of a generalised concern in French artistic circles about the perceived lack of artistic direction in French studios; on the other, this spoke loudly of early attempts by a broad church of artists to formulate a distinctive, modern visual style in French cinema. Mallet-Stevens argued fiercely that new architectural practices on the screen could render French cinema more distinctive and competitive in international terms, and were essential if French cinema was to have any kind of modern visual style:

Until recently, décor wasn't designed specifically for a given film. Décor workshops would stock a whole range of eccentric interiors; the director would ask at some point for a sitting room...; from the sitting room rack all the sitting room elements would be

assembled... then, a banal, uniform set, the same from film to film, would be hastily thrown together; always the same accessories, the same dreadful rejects from the auction rooms, and we would shoot the film. How many times have we seen these hideous sitting rooms, with their pretentious furniture, a clumsy cross between one grand style and another; sitting rooms with flimsy walls covered with the daubings of some clumsy peasant sign-writer. There was no conception to the sets, and little decorative effort involved. There was no actual style, unless you deem it all to be Napoleon III, in which an excess of bad taste actually exceeds the chaos.<sup>99</sup>

Mallet-Stevens's position was unambiguous and far-sighted – the cinema was an ideal vehicle to popularise and set new agendas for developments in art and architecture:

It's obvious that if you project a setting, a piece of furniture, an object before audiences of millions, at least a few will see it, even if they don't actually look closely at it. Cinema educates and will continue to educate the mass public in artistic matters [...] Art will be communicated to all classes in society; French art will travel across borders; and décor in the cinema will become ever more ambitious.<sup>100</sup>

He may or may not have subscribed to Buñuel's 1927 post-METROPOLIS declaration that 'now and forever, the architect is going to replace the set designer'<sup>101</sup> but he, like many of his peers was alert to the opportunities cinema increasingly offered to those skilled in disciplines as varied as painting, sculpture, architecture and design, and open to new modernist practices that conceived of art and constructed objects as formally coherent. Using the visibility afforded design by the Paris 1925 *Exposition des arts industriels et décoratifs*, Mallet-Stevens and his artistic and professional peers in France were the foot soldiers of a widespread, but as yet uncharted desire to supplant the traditional painterly frame of reference in set design with a more modern, performative conception of décor.

If this manifesto had a concrete form, it was in Marcel L'Herbier's experimental film *L'INHUMAINE* (*THE INHUMAN WOMAN*, 1924) a showcase for the work of the Parisian avant-garde, which brought modernist art and values into the heart of contemporary film practice. The film, the story of singer and socialite Claire Lescot, and her pursuit by a series of men, was an extravagant collaboration between filmmakers, architects, set designers and artists, and its distinctiveness and ambition were unparalleled in French production. The vast social spaces of the film were designed by the Brazilian Alberto Cavalcanti, and the main dining room featured heavily patterned, textured walls and floors, against which were set an angular, black-lacquered table and chairs. The Art Deco visual cues – geometric flooring, lozenge patterning, symmetrical elements – are extensive, as is the play with multiple levels, water features, sculpted fabric and diffuse lighting characteristic of the 'style moderne'. Claude Autant-Lara's almost naïve



Image 06 – Rue Mallet-Stevens, Paris

indoor garden brings a hyper-stylisation to nature, using light and shape in ways that privilege abstract form over visual authenticity. The shapes are recognisable as plants and flowers, but they are exaggerated in ways that emphasise the angles and curves of the forms, flouting any romantic associations in favour of technological extravagance. The cubist painter Fernand Léger designed the futuristic laboratory that is the centrepiece of the film, and in which the METROPOLIS-like scientific reincarnation of Claire Lescot is enacted. Léger's determinedly cubist exploration of three-dimensional mechanised space is a compelling screen design that expresses the ambition and magical qualities of the scientific miracles that take place therein; the urgency of the editing adds to the visual charge of this set. Finally, Mallet-Stevens himself designed the film's geometric exteriors; given his skill as an architectural engineer and his admiration for the work of the contemporary Bauhaus movement, the volumes, plain surfaces and clean lines of his screen facades are wholly reminiscent of his celebrated designs for Parisian buildings in the 16th arrondissement (image 06).



Image 07 – *Monte Cristo*

The distinctiveness of the visual style of *L'INHUMAINE* conferred emblematic status on it, while highlighting the paucity of design creativity elsewhere in the French industry. Nevertheless, there were some exceptions, the most significant being the Albatros film company, an émigré group run by Russian exile Alexander Kamenka, based in the tiny Montreuil studios in the north of Paris. The leading designers at Albatros in the heyday of the early to mid-1920s were Alexandre Lochakoff and Boris Bilinsky; both were émigrés, trained in the pre-revolutionary Russian realist traditions of Stanislavski, and had worked in the Berlin studios in the early 1920s before arriving in France. Indeed, Berthomé speculates that the young Lazare Meerson met and was mentored by Bilinsky in Berlin during the early part of the 1920s.<sup>102</sup> In the context of a French industry still wedded to painted canvas, these designers had an exceptional prior experience of design materials and the principles of constructed scenery, including the use of scale models to create effects of perspective.

The experiments with perspective conducted by this company were to have an impact on design practice throughout the French industry: the limited dimensions of the Montreuil studio (one shooting stage of twenty-four by twelve metres)<sup>103</sup> were a springboard to experimentation, and were proven to be no barrier to the evocation of scale. Earlier than their French counterparts, the Albatros designers experimented with, adopted and in some cases patented a number of techniques that were to become central to filmmaking in France in the 1930s: they were the French pioneers of the 'Schüfftan process', a magnification procedure extensively used at Ufa (to stunning effect in *METROPOLIS*), based on the use of mirrors, and developed by the German cameraman Eugen

Image 08 – *Monte Cristo*

Schüfftan (who would later emigrate to France). Henri Fescourt's *MONTE CRISTO*, filmed at Albatros in 1927, shows the company working with the reduced scale model patented by Minine and Wilcke, a technique used to suggest the existence of non-constructed high elements in a set (images 07 & 08); this technique would remain widely used in France until the 1950s.

The use of multiple cameras, which was a feature of Hollywood silent cinema, but did not become common in France until the 1930s, was also used at Albatros in the course of the 1920s. Finally, the company's early preference for panchromatic film stock over orthochromatic was evidence of a highly developed understanding of the implications of lighting, colour and texture of sets for celluloid. The small-scale experiments with multi-dimensional space at Albatros were enabled by an unusual level of technical competence garnered through the experience and cultural exchanges of what was a very dense émigré network. Influenced by the staged exoticism and pictorial traditions of the *Ballets Russes*, the Albatros designers, working in the smallest of the Parisian studios, brought a more spectacular, monumental dimension to cinema décor than was common in France at the time. As early as 1924, the French press was acknowledging the originality and import of the decorative experiments underway: 'Décor seems to be the priority of the Albatros filmmakers who are renovating and renewing French practice magnificently'.<sup>104</sup>

## Enter Lazare Meerson

For Lazare Meerson, one of the key designers of the era, and a figure central to the concerns of this book, the moment of his arrival in the French studios was fortuitous, providing him with a window of opportunity to rise to an unprecedented position of influence. Meerson's itinerary as an émigré was both typical in its geographical and artistic trajectory, and exceptional in terms of the celebrity and degree of professional influence he gained in both France and Britain. He was born in Russian-administrated Warsaw on 8 July 1897. The few studies of Meerson that are available suggest that he was trained as an architect,<sup>105</sup> although the earliest available records of his life and work in the Parisian BiFi archive confirm only that he was registered as an art student at the *Akademische Hochschule für die bildenden Künste* in Berlin in September 1919.<sup>106</sup> The producer Vladimir Zederbaum, writing in *Cinématographie française* in 1938, suggests that Meerson was a *prisonnier civil* or internee in Germany during the war, having arrived there as early as 1917.<sup>107</sup> In Berlin, Meerson was only one among numerous Russian émigrés who would eventually find work in the film industry.<sup>108</sup>

Although he reportedly gained experience in the Berlin film studios (no verifiable data concerning actual films can be found), it appears that Meerson also designed sets for the German stage before leaving for Paris in 1923.<sup>109</sup> Once there, he gravitated, like many of his compatriots, to the Albatros studios where he worked from 1924 to 1926, gaining experience as a scene painter and later as assistant to a series of experienced designers; most notably, Meerson worked with Bilinsky on Epstein's *L'AFFICHE* (*THE POSTER*, 1924), Alberto Cavalcanti on Marcel L'Herbier's *FEU MATHIAS PASCAL* (*THE LATE MATHIAS PASCAL*, 1924), and Pierre Kéfer on Epstein's *LE DOUBLE AMOUR* (*DOUBLE LOVE*, 1925). As he became more established Meerson assumed more creative responsibility, and by 1926 had been appointed head of design at the company. His promotion, which followed Lochakoff's decision to leave Albatros, coincided with a shift in policy at the studio: from 1926, French directors, as opposed to foreigners, were actively promoted by the company, and thus one of the first films in which he took the lead was Jacques Feyder's prestigious *GRIBICHE* (*MOTHER OF MINE*, 1925).<sup>110</sup>

As head of design at Albatros, Meerson was responsible for the art direction of ten films in only three years; in particular he continued to develop a professional association with Feyder through their work on *CARMEN* (1926) and *LES NOUVEAUX MESSIEURS* (*THE NEW GENTLEMEN*, 1928) and worked with René Clair (who joined Albatros in 1926) on the silent films *LA PROIE DU VENT* (*THE PREY OF THE WIND*, 1926), *UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE* (*AN ITALIAN STRAW HAT*, 1927) and *LES DEUX TIMIDES* (*TWO TIMID SOULS*, 1928). Many of these films

were in fact filmed on shooting stages rented from neighbouring Parisian studios when Albatros proved too small for what were increasingly more ambitious design projects. Towards the end of the decade Meerson worked on two further classics of the late silent era: L'Herbier's L'ARGENT (1928) and CAGLIOSTRO (1929, an Albatros-Wengeroff co-production, directed by the German Richard Oswald), by which time his credentials as one of Europe's most ambitious and imaginative leading young designers were firmly established. He was appointed *chef-décorateur* (head of design) at Films Sonores Tobis, based at Epinay, in March 1929.<sup>111</sup>

During the Epinay years, Meerson was, like his peers in the German industry, an acknowledged 'multi-tasker', taking on external design commissions alongside his film work. The most significant of these was the interior refurbishment of Jacques Feyder and Françoise Rosay's Parisian home, on which he worked in collaboration with the French architect Pierre Caro.<sup>112</sup> Meerson also designed his own Parisian apartment in the Rue Gazan in the fashionable art deco style; Trauner remembers that it was 'a very nice studio, somewhat modern in style with a loft, and it was completely decorated in white: white leather, white fabric. It was just sumptuous'.<sup>113</sup> Trauner recalls how Meerson's training as a painter remained to the fore in his practice: 'We got on so well because we both had ambitions as to paint [...] we spoke more about painting than cinema'.<sup>114</sup> His role as a facilitator for younger and less experienced colleagues was also important, and the archives reveal that he wrote letters of recommendation for fellow émigrés such as Trauner<sup>115</sup> and Roman Goul,<sup>116</sup> and directly employed many designers – French and émigré – who would go on to greater prominence, including Jean D'Eaubonne, Pierre Linzbach, Eugène Lourié, Georges Wakhévitch and Frank Wells.<sup>117</sup>

European design agendas in the era of transition to sound were definitively changed as, according to Donald Albrecht 'the responsibility for creating modern film sets shifted from the avant-garde architect to the film design specialist'.<sup>118</sup> Meerson, around whom a substantial and permanent decorative team was established at Epinay,<sup>119</sup> arguably serves as the most compelling example of how this subtle but decisive transfer in authorship operated in the French production context. The history of design development at Epinay is of particular importance because the studio was held to be a contemporary *lieu de recherche*, or research centre in the discipline,<sup>120</sup> a status conferred by its state-of-the-art facilities, and high-profile, big-budget ventures with leading directors like Feyder and Clair. As we discuss in chapter 4, Meerson's practice in the 1930s reveals him to be primarily interested in the effects of surfaces rather than structures; as in the 'painterly tradition' identified in the previous section, the representational priorities of his work show more affinities with the visionary dynamism of impressionist filmmaking than with the static monumentalism of

the *Filmarchitekt* tradition, even though he had clearly learned valuable lessons from the latter. In Meerson's work, which was highly influential for the development of the poetic realist mode that emerged in that decade, the visual authenticity of the set is tempered by equal attention to the technical imperatives of studio production and to the lyrical potential of screen space.

### The Emigré Eye on France

Dudley Andrew suggests that 'the look of French films would be altered far more from below, by the techniques of artisans, than from on high by directors [...] From wherever they came, as a group the émigrés entering the French industry raised standards and expectations'.<sup>121</sup> Alastair Philips agrees that the French film industry was shaped by foreigners who were particularly adept at adapting their vision to accommodate the aesthetic and thematic norms of their host country. On the one hand, the white Russian émigré wave of the 1920s introduced technical personnel such as Meerson and Bilinsky, whose work in sets and costumes was 'received on the export market as models of French excellence'.<sup>122</sup> A further émigré influx from Germany after 1933, which included technicians and directors such as Curt Courant, Victor Trivas and Robert Siodmak, was instrumental in creatively deploying a peculiarly nostalgic 'Parisian' aesthetic alongside an advanced technical expertise brought from their countries of origin.<sup>123</sup> As Phillips, Elsaesser, Andrew, Crisp and others have shown, many of these émigré films were praised for their Frenchness and were held up as exemplary iconic representations of Paris – and by extension France – on the screen.

In a curious aesthetic conundrum, French audiences were confronted with images of their national space authored by foreigners for whom the aesthetic challenge of verisimilitude was tempered by the appeal of the exotic discovery. These interpreters were newcomers, ethnographically curious, but culturally informed by external cultures and socio-historical influences; their vision of France was thus inflected by a transnational sensibility, founded on their status as 'other', and the émigré experience of geographical mobility. To some extent, what French cinema experienced was a stylistic paradox that was historically unique: the work of these incomers at every level of production was somehow 'unfettered by concepts of Frenchness',<sup>124</sup> yet their vision inflected the look of France for external and internal consumption in ways that were compelling and enduring. While their visions of France on the screen were to have far-reaching aesthetic consequences, opening up 'the stylistic options that would be crucial for poetic realism',<sup>125</sup> they also invested imaginatively in the depiction of non-French spaces, some of which they would have known, but others not. Once again, the perspectives they offered on foreign spaces were praised for their

originality and authenticity, and once again French audiences were confronted with screen spaces that had been mediated by a particularly rich, non-French, imagination.

The phenomenon of the émigré designer, particularly in the context of collaborations with leading French directors of the era, is central to revising evaluations of French cinema of the 1930s as a vector of national identity. They had a privileged relationship to national and international space and their images consequently represent something unique in cinematic practice: an assimilation of the codification of national ideas of space and place, but also a subtle disruption to the authorship of national images and their wider dissemination. Importantly, their skills also meant that they were able to assume a mentoring role with regard to French technicians, and thereby significantly influence the agenda for the development of decorative practice in sound studios. Although a designer like Meerson perceived his own work to be an ‘art of abnegation’,<sup>126</sup> in which authorial effacement was a key measure of success, his designs, along with those of his apprentices nevertheless offered new and distinctive images of contemporary France for 1930s audiences, and set agendas for new approaches to décor that were to be enthusiastically embraced by the generation to follow.

### **Production Contexts: The Transition to Sound in French Cinema**

The industry into which the émigrés arrived in the 1920s and 1930s was unusually volatile. On the one hand, the 1930s were a vibrant ‘golden age’ in French production, in which, according to Colin Crisp ‘the quality, quantity and diversity of the industrial output of the French industry [was] markedly superior to that of any other European film industry of the time’.<sup>127</sup> Andrew concurs: ‘in the second half of the 1930s, French films routinely won international competitions; their export sales (if one excepts Hollywood) led the market in the rest of Europe, in Japan, and in Latin America’.<sup>128</sup> American critics, particularly the National Board of Review, regularly nominated and awarded French films in their ‘Best Foreign Film’ lists. With an estimated commercial corpus of some 1,305 films – of which more than 70% have been since been lost or destroyed – the 1930s was one of the most productive decades in French cinema history, producing significantly more films than in the 1940s and 1950s when the industry was more secure in every respect.<sup>129</sup> According to Crisp, in terms of the number of films screened, American films occupied on average 50% of the exhibition market in the 1930s, while French films rarely had more than a 30% share. French films, however, attracted more spectators than American.<sup>130</sup> This achievement is particularly noteworthy given the institutional precariousness of the French industry of the era, circumstances that have been summarised as

'unruly, unregulated and utterly speculative'.<sup>131</sup> The situation was of sufficient concern in France to be the subject of fierce debate in the trade and popular press, as well as in government, and by the mid-1930s two official reports had been commissioned to assess the health and development of the French industry.<sup>132</sup>

Nevertheless, success in the face of such adversity brought its own rewards, serving as it did to reinforce appealing notions of French national identity. As Crisp explains,

downplaying the available technology became an essential element in the prevailing artistic discourse within French filmmaking circles: their films were made without visible material advantages, by sheer force of will, directly out of the stuff of the imagination ... French filmmakers were the underdogs, despised and marginalized in the twenties, apparently overwhelmed by the technological supremacy of the Americans, but fighting back against all the odds and astonishing the world by their flair and ingenuity.<sup>133</sup>

The received wisdom of the 1930s suggests that French directors, by sheer *auteurist* genius, made a stylistic virtue out of technical limitations, a view that has been convenient to director-focused analyses of the works of leading figures of the era, as well as to directors' autobiographies. However, such a reading has inevitably limited any consideration of those artists charged with the very practical task of creating the filmic worlds at the heart of the 'ingenuities' of the decade. Set designers more than any other personnel were the linchpins of the studio teams that so significantly advanced the visual, environmental and decorative agendas of the French transition to sound.

While the well-rehearsed discourse of exceptional achievement in the face of stark under-resourcing clearly serves certain national historical agendas, it also conveniently masks certain realities about the stability and industrial potential of the French industry of the era. In the 'boom years' of 1931-33, the period immediately following the introduction of sound technology to French studios, the industrial structure in France was in fact at its most rationalised for many years, and benefited from what has been described as 'a degree of vertical integration in French filmmaking that had not been seen since the years before World War I'.<sup>134</sup> While the economically depleted post-World War I French industry may have consistently lagged behind the German and American film industries in terms of dynamic internal self-development, its status at the end of the 1920s was that of a prime European commercial site, well-placed and ripe for development by foreign interests.

German and American interest in the French market was vigorous, with both nations earmarking France 'as a staging post in the struggle for control of the lucrative market of Europe and its ancillary territories'.<sup>135</sup> In a series of crucial

interventions, specific foreign interests targeted the ailing French infrastructure, bringing urgently needed new capital, plant and technology to the French studios. Rapidly, the investment of the foreign conglomerates Paramount (United States) and the Dutch-German Tobis transformed the archaic and seriously undercapitalised French studios into production sites equipped to be competitive in the rapidly changing world market. In their wake, major domestic companies such as Pathé-Natan, Gaumont and Franco-Film-Aubert consolidated their own activities, improving studio facilities in line with their competitors, and extending the circuits of distribution and exhibition accordingly. Moreover, the volume of independent domestic production companies who could benefit from the modernised studios (generally through rental agreements) remained unusually high in European terms. Finally, the number of foreign technicians employed in France continued to rise as intra-European migration gathered momentum, sowing the seeds for a dynamic and unusually cosmopolitan workforce on French soil.

The reasons for this major shift in the organisation of the French industry are complex. The principal French studios were located in Paris, and mainly dated from the early part of the century.<sup>136</sup> These studios were initially constructed either on the large 'glasshouse' model, as in Germany, or as photographic studios or film workshops, and the sites required ongoing investment, almost from the time of their construction, in order to accommodate new equipment and evolving methods. Even those built more recently<sup>137</sup> were almost immediately in need of remodelling as electrification became the industry norm. The costs of upgrading facilities yet further in line with the anticipated transition to sound was a major financial burden to the domestic companies who owned the sites, while the almost total lack of corporate connections to viable sound patents meant that the studios were vulnerable to more technologically sophisticated external interests.

The example of Paramount's acquisition of the Joinville studios is telling: instead of refurbishing the existing site as was the norm, the American conglomerate completely dismantled the existing Gaumont-owned studios, and spent \$10 million replacing them with a state-of-the-art American-style operation. This included six RCA equipped sound stages, and on-site laboratories. As Crisp notes, 'within a year of opening, the output of films exceeded the production of every other company in France'<sup>138</sup> and as the major international site in the production of the American MLV (multi-language version), Paramount went on to dominate the French market until dubbing technology rendered its operation financially unsustainable in 1934.<sup>139</sup> While the film output of the company had little impact on the style of French filmmaking *per se*, the project was significant for the way in which it opened up French cinema to the American industrial model, as well as the technical expertise of other European industries.

Alastair Phillips notes that a beneficial, if unexpected consequence of this internationalised project was

the consolidation of relations between French film professionals and their German counterparts ... As well as facilitating the number of German sound technicians who came to work in French studios, Joinville clearly led to a great deal of other contact between practitioners. What the Germans had to offer, in many cases, was the level of their technical expertise.<sup>140</sup>

The German-Dutch Tobis-Klangfilm company was the most significant European competitor to American sound systems, and its development of the Menchen-Epinay studios was strategically undertaken, as O'Brien notes, precisely in order to 'block Western Electric's potential monopoly on patents in Europe'.<sup>141</sup> Tobis was the model of a fully integrated company, incorporating production, distribution and sound recording facilities in France, and it was significant for both its international distribution potential – *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* (*UNDER THE ROOFTOPS OF PARIS*, 1930) was a hit in Germany before France – and its aesthetic qualities. Although it was a lower-profile operation than Paramount, and produced fewer films (as few as twenty films over the decade 1929-39), it lasted longer in France, and produced some of the most technically ambitious and culturally prestigious French films of the era. Its planning-intensive approach to filmmaking, with sound technology (and its attendant requirements, such as set design) as a particular priority was quite exceptional in the French market.<sup>142</sup> In particular, the new Tri-Ergon sound system was quickly adapted by an experienced personnel already familiar with the system from their work with the company in Berlin, further facilitating the adoption in France of German pre-production models. Paradoxically, where the suspicion of colonisation had attached itself to the Paramount operation, Tobis Paris quickly came to be seen as 'French film culture's best hope in stabilising a sense of nationally specific norms of sound film representation'.<sup>143</sup>

Impressive though the expansion of the studio capacity of the industry at this time may seem, Dudley Andrew suggests that the actual output was nevertheless relatively modest given the production potential that existed in France.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the exposure of French audiences to foreign cinema was routinely high, with French films occupying a modest 30% share of the total exhibition market throughout the decade,<sup>145</sup> and the remainder being dominated by American and German products.<sup>146</sup> As all historians of the period have concluded, the French production sector of the era was in the main composed of small, sporadically active companies, the majority of whom had no structural connection to the distribution or exhibition sectors, and relied on *ad hoc* funding, staffing and technical resources for individual projects.

Selective studios such as Epinay and Joinville may well have been equipped with state-of-the art facilities, and thus emerged as research laboratories for new practices fronted by well-established directors. But the French industry more generally was subject to a greater overall fragmentation of activities than its German and American counterparts, as well as comparatively higher production costs. It is worth recalling in this context that throughout the 1920s in Germany, Ufa had gradually attained a monopoly position, significantly aided by rampant inflation. The reality for French companies and personnel, on the other hand, was that it was extremely difficult for small independent companies to break even. Crisp notes the fact that 'one in three productions each year failed to cover its production costs', and that 'each individual firm risked bankruptcy with every project'.<sup>147</sup> Ginette Vincendeau confirms the volatility of the situation through the example of a two year period: in 1933, 229 new production companies were formed, while 58 went out of business; the following year 202 new companies were set up while 88 went bankrupt.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, by 1934, both Gaumont and Pathé-Nathan were discredited and bankrupt, and the other major companies had either suffered similar fates, or had been forced by the world recession to pull out of French operations.

This insecure production model – often termed 'artisanal' to distinguish it from more coherent industrial models – continued right through to the end of the decade, and had serious consequences for working conditions and the establishment of stylistic norms consistent with the expectations of a national industry. The work patterns of technical personnel in particular have been identified as chaotic, as it was rare for individuals to work in permanent teams and build up routines and repertoires. As Crisp explains, not only did the circumstances tend to inhibit large-scale undertakings, but more importantly, 'such a situation militated against achieving levels of technical confidence and technical competence such as the technicians in other countries knew, who were salaried on a continuing basis to work with the same collaborators and equipment'.<sup>149</sup> The French industry was poorly placed to make the kind of stylistic advances consistent with the material capabilities of the infrastructure. Berthomé suggests that the fragmentation of the sector, exacerbated by the dissolution of the major companies meant that individual studio styles did not develop in France as in the United States, and that this resulted in a nationally specific model of practice: that of the collaborative director/designer team as exemplified by the professional partnerships of René Clair and Lazare Meerson, Jean Renoir and Eugène Lourié and Marcel Carné and Alexandre Trauner.<sup>150</sup> However, Berthomé may overestimate the national uniqueness of this practice – in fact this kind of collaboration corresponded closely to patterns already established in the German industry in the 1920s, and it would characterise working practices in Britain in the 1930s too.

While a paucity of scholarship in the field of set design has perhaps resulted in the over-determination of the work of Alexandre Trauner in historical studies of the 1930s, his designs were indeed exceptional in scale and execution, and his collaboration with Carné has come to define the achievements of the era. Nevertheless, his practice has tended to be read without the benefit of historical context and an understanding of how a distinct array of practices developed in the early years of the decade, leading to the creation of his magisterial sets in *HÔTEL DU NORD* (1938), *LE JOUR SE LÈVE* (1938) and *LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS* (1943-5). Trauner had not yet begun his career when the imperatives of sound recording, and its attendant reliance on artificial lighting, forced filmmakers to abandon the *plein air* or outdoor practices characteristic of the 1920s in favour of sets constructed in the controlled environment of the darkened studio. While the naturalism of location filmmaking had clearly established a certain degree of realist practice in French screen aesthetics in the 1920s, the movement indoors allowed for a critical re-evaluation and unexpected testing of the realist setting.

Hyper-stylised visual forms pioneered by studio-based avant-garde filmmakers such as Epstein, Dulac, Delluc and L'Herbier were rapidly eclipsed by mimetic representations of seemingly undistinguished contemporary spaces. In many ways, this apparently conservative tendency in the early sound films was a way of accommodating the classic nature of the new dialogue-driven cinema. A command of the spoken word developed through lengthy stage training was the crux of French performance modes of the era, and the early sound directors, working with experienced stage actors from the French theatre companies and music halls strove to privilege this classic strength and national distinctiveness. Vincendeau has revealed how performance was a major consideration of how cinematography developed in France in the early years of sound cinema, arguing that 'performance determined cinematography rather than (or at least as much as) the other way round.'<sup>151</sup> Her analysis identifies the reliance upon the ensemble cast, on two and three shots rather than the shot/reverse-shot favoured by Hollywood, and longer average shot length 'developed partly in response to the theatrical musical tradition which demanded a lower rhythm and a different kind of framing in its need to respect particular traditions of performance'.<sup>152</sup>

In many films, then, the group and the environment were privileged over the close focus on individual actors, who were less frequently subjected to the apparatus of star scrutiny than might be imagined. On the other hand, pictorial and spatial authenticity were open to creative inflection by designers, who were able to 'mould' reality to accommodate the narrative and the star performer in ways that had simply not been viable on locations. Furthermore, the integration and eventual prominence of émigré designers in Parisian studios

meant that the transformations wrought on the depictions of space were the consequence of a fusion of different ideas, professional experiences and cultural influences that transcended the specificities of the national imagination.

The European collaborative model, in contrast to the American studio model in which house styles were elaborated and widely disseminated, was an ambitious and particularly rich one in terms of developments in set design practice. The independence and levels of freedom afforded to leading designers such as Meerson, Lourié, Trauner and Wakhévitch and their close proximity to leading directors, opened up the possibility of collaborative innovation and project-specific achievement in ways that were unprecedented. Charged with responsibilities as wide-ranging as the production of architectural plans, documentary research, sourcing of props and accessories, and budget, as well as the day to day supervision of an extensive team of skilled workers and workshops, the art director was a key creative figure in the decisions that led to the elaboration of a particular film's visual style, and thus a vital figure in the overall authorial process. It is the purpose of the following discussion to identify and categorise the working practices of these set designers, specifically in the French production context, and consider the nature, extent and effect of their collaboration with directors at this important moment in European cinema history.

### **Working Practices in French Studios in the 1930s**

The contribution of designers to advancing the agenda of film practice in the 1930s can be traced in a number of specific ways. On the one hand these are practical and methodological, and relate to a direct and transparent input into the conception, development and execution stages of the film project. These practices and techniques were in development from the mid-1920s onwards. On the other, these are aesthetic, whereby the possibilities afforded by artistic experimentation changed key characteristics of *mise-en-scène* and introduced new 'trademark' visual features that would come to typify the look, ambitions and successes of French cinema.

In methodological terms, the introduction in France of the pre-design process imposed by studio planning meant that the designer's role became more formalised in terms of collaboration with key personnel ranging from the director and screenwriter, to sound and lighting engineers. Given the restrictions in space and mobility that the very small early sound stages imposed, the particular success of the decorator's art depended on the ability to create sets that would accommodate and respond to the technical imperatives of the camera, lighting and audio equipment, while privileging the ensemble acting style that had emerged from the French theatrical traditions.

This range of priorities would be managed through a series of steps, broadly consequential, but that might vary from project to project. Although formal studio-based training was a rarity in the 1920s, a manual aimed at apprentice designers was written in 1930 by Robert-Jules Garnier, head of design at Gaumont studios.<sup>153</sup> This set of lessons set out the general practice relating to the decorator's involvement in a film project and outlined the responsibilities and skills that would be expected of him. The following account draws extensively on this document, as well as on designers' memoirs and letters of contract issued to Meerson by Tobis and the Société Parisienne de Production.<sup>154</sup>

The first step in the pre-design process was the establishment of a shooting script (*découpage technique*) that would determine exactly what would be shot and when, and would serve to outline the necessity and order of set construction for different parts of the film. This meeting would see the designer collaborate at an early stage with the director, the scriptwriter and the cinematographer or director of photography (*chef-opérateur*) to decide on the shape the film would take.<sup>155</sup> After a reading of the script, decisions would be taken on a range of key points: the budget would dictate both the availability and limitations of resources, and would immediately lead to a preliminary consideration of creative options.

The chronology of shooting would be established according to site access within the studio as well as the availability of actors; sets would be constructed (and dismantled for purposes of swift rotation) in a specific order, and would be designed to accommodate the movement of actors, crew and equipment. This was crucial as the need for circulation and the installation of equipment within the décor (lights, projectors, pulleys, holding areas) meant that sets had to be constructed in order to be entered and used by a maximum number of people without causing visible damage; they would also have to be constructed in such a way that a maximum number of elements could be re-used. Floor plans, elevations and technical schedules were thus established on the basis of the shooting script. While the early input of the director into the visual style of the film was not negligible (Carné notes how he would tend to draw a rough version of the sets he envisioned for Trauner to use as a basis for his work),<sup>156</sup> this initial consultative stage was important for the opportunity it presented the production designer to stamp his signature on the film text. Thus, from the earliest point in the process, the designer's task of 'rewrit[ing] the script in visuals, breaking it down in terms of spaces and an inventory of essential decorative elements and accessories' situates him as a definitive co-author of the embryonic film text.<sup>157</sup>

The research and accumulation of decorative materials would entail a period of research and documentation that could last for several months. Garnier talks of making visits to the Musée Guimet in Paris and Lyons, a museum specialising in oriental art, while preparing the décor for Debain and Iribé's production



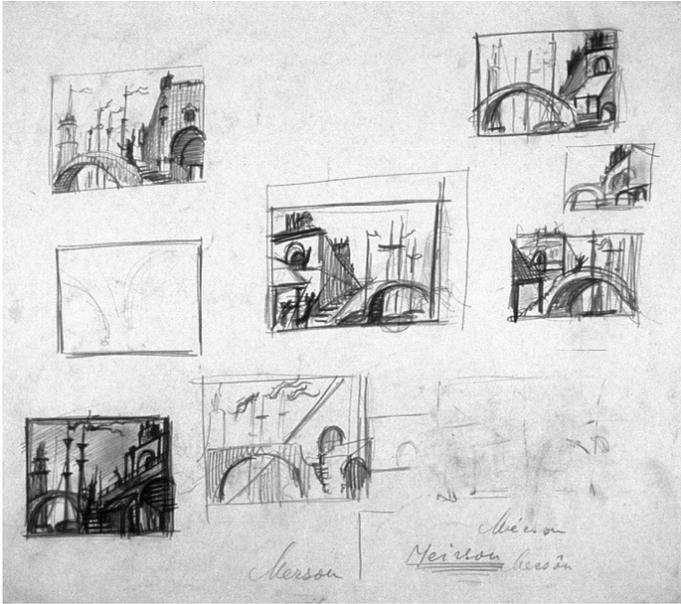
Image 09 – The Porte de Gand



Image 10 – Traditional Flemish style

Image 11 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

of *HARA-KIRI* (1928).<sup>158</sup> The Meerson archive reveals that Meerson was an avid collector of photographs, postcards and newspaper cuttings that were often mounted on card and meticulously classified and archived for future use. Similarly, he would acquire great stocks of specialist art books from shops in London, Paris and Moscow, often at great personal expense. These images would be at the heart of Meerson's search for an imagined 'ideal' form. In *LA KERMESE HÉROÏQUE*, for example, we see that Meerson's creation of the gateway to the town of Boom is an amalgam of two distinct images culled from different

Image 12 – *Carmen*

sources (images 09 & 10). The different elements – the squat towers and the pigeon-loft roof are imaginatively fused in Meerson’s set to create the imposing gateway we see in the film (image 11). This fusion of the authentic with the ideal, of the documented with the poeticised, was a constant and productive tension in the work of designers seeking a lyrical screen representation of real spaces.

Trauner’s minimalist assessment of the stages of the design process (‘documentation, dessin, execution’: ‘research, drawings, construction’)<sup>159</sup> neatly summarises the core activities of the designer. Sketching was an integral part of any film project; it would begin at an early stage while establishing the general conception of a film’s style, and would progress incrementally to full scale architectural drawings following the research stage of the process. The aim of the sketch (termed the *croquis*, usually produced in charcoal or ink) was to establish the key images and dominant visual motifs of the film, and to consider the approximate dimensions and volumes necessary for realisation. Meerson’s rough sketches for *CARMEN* (1926) show how very schematic impressions of architectural elements would precede more detailed, often highly coloured plans (*maquettes*) produced in a variety of media ranging from watercolours and pastels to oil and gouache (image 12).

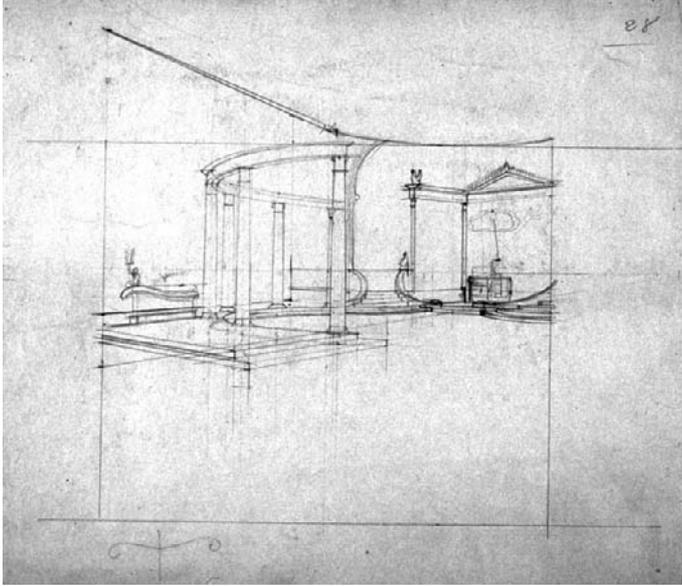


Image 13 – *Ciboulette*

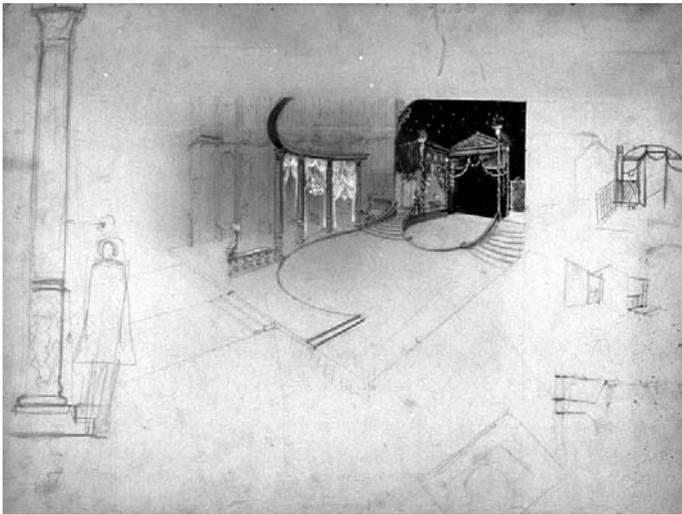


Image 14 – *Ciboulette*

Two sketches from *CIBOULETTE* (1933) demonstrate the stages of elaboration that the sketch underwent (images 13 & 14); as the illustrations show, such drawings would give preliminary indications about shape, scale, volume and

composition, before moving on to establish the existence of the set in relation to more complex elements such as lighting, the placing of characters, and the ornamental detail to be included in a shot. These images were more than simply visual prompts; they were key documents that formed the basis of the designer's interaction with the carpenters, plasterers, painters and machinists. Frequently, this stage of the process would be delegated to an assistant: as Trauner recalls of his work on *LE MILLION* (*THE MILLION*, 1931), Meerson would draw

small sketches which assistants like myself or Linzbach would enlarge. The ideas and the composition were his, but he thought the production of the finished drawing was not the work of the designer. That was left to assistants.<sup>160</sup>

The designer's collaboration with the head of production (*chef-opérateur*) chiefly concerned two particular areas of activity. On the one hand, the two would agree on the identification of available and appropriate construction sites in the studio, taking full account of the needs of projects going on simultaneously in the studio and the need to rotate sets in accordance with the shooting schedule. They would also have to have an eye to the specialist construction of unusual features of particular sets: *DRÔLE DE DRAME* (*BIZARRE, BIZARRE*, 1937) for example, required the use of the *piscine* or basin/pit area for both the conservatory scenes and to create an authentic space for the Victorian London basement kitchens as seen from the street. Floor plans of the Epinay studio show that even in a well-equipped and highly resourced studio, space was at a premium, with a maximum of two shooting stages available at any time. This led to some creative thinking at Epinay, where the back lot was imaginatively used for exterior constructions as in *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ* (*FREEDOM FOR US*, 1931) and *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE*. Studios located more centrally in Paris did not always have this option, either for reasons of site space or because of the potentially intrusive urban background. However, the ability to overcome such obstacles was a measure of the designer's skill and imagination, as in the case of Trauner and *HÔTEL DU NORD* (1938) where the local Billancourt buildings were famously incorporated into the visual field in ways that expand the space while extending the Parisian authenticity of the representation.

The second main area of collaboration deployed what Edward Carrick and Vincent Korda would, for the British context, term 'camera consciousness': that is to say consideration of the installation of equipment and the testing of the cinematographic apparatus to establish camera angles, camera mobility, lighting positions, choice of film stock and lenses, and the appropriateness of decorative materials. Using a method of graphic matching to establish at a very early stage the different calculations for shots according to the use of lenses, the designer would have the responsibility of advising the director and cinematographer accordingly. His role was thus not simply to create the pro-filmic space,

but to dictate its usage taking account of all the possibilities of the camera: what it can capture in its field, how it can move and by what means, which film stock is to be used. As Barsacq explains, the 'graphic method' on which these calculations were based was pioneered by the French designer Jean Perrier working at Gaumont in the 1920s. Perrier's experiments with camera position and lenses allowed him to

determine which plan and dimensions of a set would produce the image desired and drawn by the designer. By the same token, starting from a pre-established plan, it became possible to draw the set the way it would appear on the screen if the camera were placed in a given position and equipped with a given lens.<sup>161</sup>

Lighting and sound were priority factors that had to be taken into account at the design stage, and construction materials would be deployed, coloured or masked in anticipation of the effects of both. An article in the first issue of the *Revue du Cinéma* in 1928 notes that the necessity for the decorator to understand lighting technique was a given elsewhere in Europe, Russia and the United States, but that the French had yet to acknowledge the importance of this aspect of the process.<sup>162</sup> The 1930s was the decade in which attention was given to this element. Similarly, while the provision of materials for silent film posed few problems for designers, the situation changed dramatically with the advent of sound. Porous and insulated materials such as cork, monk cloth and celotex would be extensively used post-1930 to mask extraneous sounds,<sup>163</sup> and these had to be incorporated into the design. As Wakhévitch recalls

the sound engineers used to really annoy us in the early days. We had to soundproof ceilings, stairs, it was awful. We had to learn all about sound. If a stair echoed, for example, it had to be stuffed with material to counter that.<sup>164</sup>

Barsacq also points out that it was not simply the materials of the active set that required insulation, but also support elements such as the scaffolding, frames and walkways.<sup>165</sup>

One of the major tasks of the set designer was to oversee the construction of a range of complex décor elements such as the *découvertes* (horizon or view shots, usually looking on to exteriors such as gardens, streets or courtyards), *praticables* (active elements such as a hearth in which there would be a fire, a door that could be opened and closed), *murs volants* (moveable walls) and *maquettes construites* (constructed scale models). The creation of *découvertes* could take the form of paintings, or photographs, and could be life size or in perspective. Wakhévitch's experience working with Renoir on *MADAME BOVARY* (1933) illustrates how the practice was implemented to create an apparent location shot within the studio. Wakhévitch reveals that instead of painting a background (as was the norm) for a shot of Emma Bovary in front of the Saint-Maclou church,

he engaged a photographer to blow up an eighteen by twenty-four centimetres photo of the church to four by six metres:

It gave a completely unexpected result: in the rushes, the screened photo had a textured quality. That was the beginning of a new technique, and the beginning of the end of cinema's landscape painters. Nearly all of them were refugees from the theatre, and these chaps, well aware of what was facing them, quickly turned themselves into 'touch up specialists'. There were always shadows to be darkened, or bright shots that needed to be brighter yet. When colour film came along, they actually had to colour the photographs, as colour blow-ups were incredibly expensive.<sup>166</sup>

Location shooting was often carried out while the sets were being constructed, resulting in a further level of complication for the decorator, and often necessitating the construction of further décor elements. Although, for example, Meerson travelled to Austria to conduct research for Allégret's *LAC AUX DAMES* (*LADIES LAKE*, 1934), the designer would more generally be back at the studio during location shooting, constructing the sets for the interiors of the project. He would thus often be reliant on photographic evidence of locations to respond to problems of visual continuity on set and to devise modifications when necessary. Given the time and budgetary constraints upon studios of the era, there was very little margin of error, so the decorator's work always had an eye to the final editing stage in which problems of *raccord* (matching up) and spatial logic would become apparent. Eugène Lourié recounts of *LA GRANDE ILLUSION*, a film that made significant use of rural locations in Eastern France, that 'the work was a jigsaw puzzle. I had to view the moviola continuously to match scenes on location with what was needed to complete these scenes'.<sup>167</sup> Wakhévitch had similar experiences designing for *MADAME BOVARY*, and recalls how a velvet curtain was expediently used in the studio to make a continuity match between a travelling shot begun in Paris and completed in a hotel in Rouen.<sup>168</sup>

These technical effects were developed as a means of rendering the spatial environment of the screen more authentic. As Wakhévitch explains, these were highly skilled tasks, especially in the case of the use of scale models:

These procedures all necessitated a perfect stability between the model and the lens. The use of a model, which was economical and practical, became more common once cameras began to be fixed to rotating platforms, in which the axis of the lens was exactly matched to the axis of the pivot, permitting multi-directional panoramic shots.<sup>169</sup>

These technical practices and elements, which contributed significantly to the coherence of the spatial environment for which the decade is famed, were progressively and consistently developed throughout the 1930s. Taken as a whole,

they give us a very clear sense not just of what the decorator of the era actually did in practical terms, but also the creative and authorial effect of his input.

### **Set as Performance in French Cinema**

The new practices in design conception and construction exemplified by the experiences recounted above inevitably had an impact on film style in ways that soon became distinctive, and which have become recognisable cornerstones of the cinema of the decade. What we find in French cinema of the 1930s, as indeed elsewhere in Europe, is that *décor* is increasingly placed as a narrative and performative priority that exists as a counterpart to character and story, yet sometimes threatens to exceed both. In the early part of the decade, the sets of films like *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* and *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ* already embodied many of the qualities of the set – thematics, architectural coherence, scale, and authenticity – that would be investigated and elaborated by designers throughout the 1930s. The achievements of the era saw the making and consolidation of the reputations of designers in France, and growing critical and public interest in the nature of the craft of the designer: by 1937, a visit by the press to the illuminated set of *HÔTEL DU NORD* had become a stage in the pre-publicity of a major French film, with the set open to comment before the release of the film.<sup>170</sup> In this way, the matter of evaluating the set and assessing its contribution to the film's success became a focus of French cinematic discourse, with the most urgent criteria by which the set was judged being verisimilitude and an attendant 'visual fluency' consistent with the ambitions of poetic screen representation.

'The set is a character, a star, and it has to perform like any other artist. The quality and success of a film depends on the harmonious collaboration of all the competing elements of its construction'.<sup>171</sup> This statement by Georges Quenu, the technical director of the Pathé decoration workshops in the 1920s, speaks of the store set by *décor* as an element in French cinematic practice in the 1920s. *Décor* grew in both significance and achievement throughout the 1930s; foreign designers working in France, of whom Meerson was a transitional figure, and more crucially an energetic mentor, challenged the largely static agenda of 1920s production design, and brought practice and aesthetic innovation into line with developments elsewhere in Europe. In so doing, Meerson, his peers and his apprentices advanced the French agenda beyond all expectations, and created a body of work that would reposition French cinema as a technical and critical force in world cinema. The concentration on an aesthetic based on textured surfaces, strong geometry and clarity of lighting heralded a shift in French approaches to the patterning of screen space, and marked a significant alteration in the dominant style of European filmmaking, which till the 1930s was

heavily inflected by expressionistic abstractions and darkness on the screen. However, as the accounts in this chapter demonstrate, the style that emerged in France did not operate in isolation from stylistic developments elsewhere in Europe; indeed, the émigré technicians who worked across national boundaries, and within different national contexts, were key vehicles in the dissemination of new practices and possibilities within and across the European studios. Crucially, the work of this transnational technical community in the 1930s fed into the European visual imaginary in ways that expanded, but also transcended, questions of national cultural specificity. After Berlin and Paris, by the early 1930s, this visual imaginary had also reached the studios in London.

## Great Britain

### Looking to the Continent: Design Practices in Britain

Much as there were key developments in design practice in Germany and France, a similar situation can be observed in Britain when émigré designers in particular introduced innovative methods that revolutionised film style and confirmed the transnational nature of European filmmaking. Yet there was hardly a smooth transition from backwardness to professionalism and as in Germany and France a mixture of older and more recent styles, approaches and methods contributed to the advances made during this period. When Lazare Meerson arrived in Britain at the end of 1935, he complained to Georges Lourau who was working at the Epinay Studios in Paris, that ‘complete disorganisation reigns over the studios. In comparison, our poor Epinay looks like a lost Hollywood to me. The technical equipment is completely rudimentary’.<sup>172</sup> This picture of a somewhat chaotic economic infrastructure that was not conducive to creative or efficient art direction was also observed by Oswald Blakeston, writing for *Close-Up* in 1927, when he reported that an art director had complained to him that ‘the balance of his composition had been completely spoilt. When the carpenters came to execute his design they were compelled to cut the top off his set to make it fit into the studio’.<sup>173</sup>

Yet by the end of the 1930s things had changed considerably. That decade, especially during the second half, saw a great improvement in conditions for art directors: Denham and Pinewood studios were built with facilities that were heralded as ‘state of the art’ and Alfred Junge’s tenacious and pioneering work at the Gaumont-British Lime Grove Studios at Shepherd’s Bush enhanced the status of the art director to such an extent that he exercised unprecedented levels of creative control. Despite the financial crash that hit the British film indus-

try in 1937 it is widely acknowledged that by 1939 an infrastructure had been established that facilitated the industry's expansion and ability to survive further crises in the 1940s and beyond.<sup>174</sup>

British designer Edward Carrick wrote several studies about working practices and methods in Britain that will be drawn upon for this account of the context of set design in 1930s Britain and the reasons for the significant changes that took place.<sup>175</sup> Carrick, son of celebrated theatre designer Gordon Craig, as we have mentioned earlier, was art director for the Welsh Pearson Film Company, 1928-29; Associated Talking Pictures, 1932-35 and Criterion Films, 1935-9.<sup>176</sup> He went on to lead the art department of the Crown Film Unit and was supervising art director at Pinewood Studios in the 1940s. Like his father, Carrick was a great admirer of German theatre and film designers and their innovative techniques. In recognition of the need to develop professionalism in film design practice as in Germany, in 1937 Carrick established the first Film School in Britain, the Associated Artist Technicians Film School, that offered specialist training in art direction. In addition, he was president of the British Society of Art Directors and Designers, 1948-51.

He documented how set design progressed from being merely the job of carpenters and painters who provided a director with scenery and sets to becoming a recognised expertise by the end of the 1930s. Several factors are responsible for this turnabout: the general stylistic development of British films; changes in film studio organisation to more streamlined modes of production and, most importantly, the creative contribution of celebrated designers, many of whom were émigrés, including Andreiev, Junge, Vincent Korda, Meerson, Metzner and Oscar Werndorff, who worked in British studios. In the 1930s Junge worked on more British films than any other designer, followed by British designers James Carter, Alexander Vetchinsky, John Mead, Norman Arnold, Cedric Dawe, Paul R. Holmes and two other émigrés, Werndorff and Korda.<sup>177</sup>

Some émigré art directors were more respected than others when they moved to the UK and the reception they received varied from studio to studio. There was considerable prejudice, for example, against the employment of foreign 'ace' technicians in British studios, and the technicians' trade union, the Association of Cine Technicians, conducted a campaign against their employment in the 1930s. While he produced distinctive work, particularly in *CHU-CHIN-CHOW* (1934), *THE TUNNEL* (1935) and *THE ROBBER SYMPHONY* (1936), Ernö Metzner's experience in British studios was not as successful as that of Junge or Korda. He came to Britain with highly impressive credentials of having worked with G.W. Pabst in Germany, but for a variety of reasons he was not able to command the influential positions attained by Junge and Korda.<sup>178</sup> The émigré experience was therefore a varied one and some art directors were able to make more of an impression than others. On the whole, however, it is without doubt that the

émigré influence was decisive in advancements made in Britain during this time.

During the late silent period pan-European schemes encouraged collaboration between film companies, initiating an exchange of personnel that was crucial in establishing precedents for international co-operation that persisted into the early 1930s. German cinema in particular was much admired and, in periodicals such as *Close-Up*, it was held up as a successful artistic and commercial model from which British producers could learn. A bleak picture of English backwardness was frequently contrasted with more enlightened German studios where the designs created by Herlth and Röhrig for *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA*, for example, received effusive praise from Paul Rotha who wrote that 'art direction such as this does not come your way every day'. He went on to report that the film's British distributors, Gaumont-British, held art direction in such low esteem that they neglected to credit Röhrig and Herlth in the British release print.<sup>179</sup> Rotha and Carrick in particular were full of admiration for German methods, representing a distinctly pro-German contingent of critics in Britain which certainly assisted in the positive reception of German art directors by the critical (as opposed to the technical) establishment.

At first many of the émigrés nevertheless found working conditions in Britain difficult, especially when studios appeared to have no clear hierarchies as to working methods and procedures. When Junge first worked in British studios he compiled a long list in German of props and technical terms he had used in Germany.<sup>180</sup> This was translated so that his collaborators could work from his designs without risk of misunderstandings. Yet this situation provided émigré artists with opportunities to transfer their skills to other production contexts without necessarily having to negotiate with entrenched positions. Rather than having to conform to different methods and in spite of jingoistic opposition from the ACT, émigré technicians were encouraged to introduce new ideas to the struggling British film industry.

### **Adapting the Concept of 'Total Design' for British Cinema**

The influence of European style was noted by a contemporary critic writing in 1935 who remarked on recent British films displaying 'a greater extravagance of setting, together with extraordinary predominance in certain quarters of candlesticks and staircases [referring to films such as *THE DICTATOR*, 1935]. This ritualistic sumptuousness seems to derive more from the continental than the American schools.<sup>181</sup> As Tim Bergfelder has commented, continental artists 'reorganised the concept of *mise-en-scène* in the British film industry' by aspiring towards 'total design', a concept that emphasised pre-planning the 'look' of a film before shooting began, thus involving designers with key aspects of crea-



Image 15 – *Piccadilly*

tive control during the production process.<sup>182</sup> Designers' sketches, drawings, models and built sets provided the essential stylistic mood of a film that was further embellished in collaboration with writers, directors and cinematographers. Indeed, this is very similar to the working methods that were applied in Germany and France.

Continental-trained designers were a major source of influence on the concept of 'total design'. In the introduction to Carrick's pictorial directory of British art directors, published in 1948, he argued that the stylistic legacy of Expressionist cinema was legendary for its painterly affinities and for drawing attention to the art of screen design.<sup>183</sup> Alfred Junge, who was a prime mover in the transformation of British art direction in the 1930s, had designed many films in Germany. He collaborated with German director E.A. Dupont whom Junge accompanied to Britain in the mid-1920s to design several films for British International Pictures including *MOULIN ROUGE* (1928). The company was keen to introduce 'continental' techniques to British cinema and this film represented a truly trans-national approach with its German director, cinematographer (Werner Brandes), and designer. Junge was soon employed on a more permanent basis in Britain by Gaumont-British where he headed the production department from 1932 to 1937. One of his earliest British projects was *PICCADILLY* (1929), a film that while not well received by *Close-Up*, a journal that was generally highly critical of British films, was noted for its sets.<sup>184</sup> In particular the cabaret set (image 15) was singled out as distinctive for its success as a design



Image 16 – *Piccadilly*

built for maximum visual impact while at the same time facilitating the work of the camera:

The design is sumptuous without being gaudy, and, while the general plan is quite simple, the strong curves promise to be more satisfactory to the camera, even, than they are to the eye. As the set is completely enclosed a mobile camera will have the freest scope, and there is hardly a point from which lines and masses do not construct interesting patterns, while still remaining explanatory of the simple ground plan. This is more important than is generally realised by designers, for interesting composition is often spoiled by the bewilderment of the spectator who misses the action in trying to find out just where he is.<sup>185</sup>

All this was achieved by Junge pushing the boundaries of studio organisation at Elstree, the largest studio in Britain before Denham was built in 1936. The set described is indicative of design work that is integrated with the concept of the moving image, an essential element of preparatory drawings that always had to anticipate cinematographic fluidity as well as stasis. As Roger Manvell argued, films such as these are ‘designed and composed’ so that ‘always behind the design lies the need to make something which a mobile camera can work into’.<sup>186</sup>

Indeed, when we first see this set of the ‘Piccadilly’ club the band is enclosed in a circular structure at the top centre of the frame, surrounded by curvilinear staircases with swirling banisters. This pattern is repeated on either side of the frame by curved balconies up above. The dancing couples move in the bottom

half of the frame, creating an overall impression of fluidity. After this shot, which is held for a considerable time so that we can admire the scene closely, the camera then surveys the spaces of the set in more detail: the guests sitting at tables, up on the balconies and at the bar. This is followed by the reverse shot of the entire set, with the band this time in the foreground, opening up the frame to be dominated even more by the dancers (image 16). The cumulative impact contributes to an experience of a space that is opulent, expansive and vibrant, effects created by careful design and composition. It was Junge who later introduced further innovative techniques to Britain, including the use of scaffolding and crane technology to facilitate camera and set mobility.<sup>187</sup>

Carrick's writings drew attention to the work of the designer as a significant force in the collaborative process of filmmaking. He documented how designers were consulted during the scripting process, usually first being called in on a project at the scenario stage, before dialogue and more detailed directorial interventions were added by the writer and director. This is strikingly similar to the collaborative conventions in Germany and France. Thus the designer would create the emotional tone of a film that would feed into script development and directorial interpretation.<sup>188</sup> British designer L. P. Williams explained how this was by far the most rational and economical way of proceeding:

It has always been my experience that much money can be saved and fewer hearts broken in the long run, if the practical possibilities in reference to what can or cannot be erected within the shooting schedule, or the amount of stage space available and the financial budget, are discussed between the script writer, the Director and the Art Director before the script is finally written.<sup>189</sup>

Clearly this degree of consultation varied from production to production and one has to be careful to distinguish between designers and studios when seeking to apportion degrees of influence or control. Nevertheless the sense of heightened responsibility achieved by designers in the 1930s was a positive trajectory Carrick was keen to support in the direction of 'total design'. After publishing his books he was widely regarded as an authority on British film design and was invited by illustrious bodies such as the Royal Society of Arts to pronounce on its future. The future he envisaged was indeed one in which designers applied their skills most decisively to the formative visualisation of the scenario involving extensive pre-shooting preparations, in particular for sketches to be made of sets-ups for every scene and from many different camera positions before shooting commenced. The sketches could then be photographed, a cheap film produced that might even include dialogue and photographed figures, to serve as a detailed guide to the final filming of the picture.

Carrick's ideas were conveyed in an address to the Royal Society of Arts in 1950, at which Alfred Junge was present. In the discussion afterwards, Junge



Image 17 – *Young and Innocent*

commented that this idea was far from new; in the 1920s it had been tried in Germany where it was not entirely successful. He explained that this was largely because the ‘paper film’ (a series of drawings literally put together to make up what would have looked like a film strip) could never be strictly translated onto celluloid since ‘two artists never see the same thing the same way, and a director of strong personality would never, or seldom, be a copyist of a designer’.<sup>190</sup> Carrick accepted this observation but reiterated that the logic of his ideas was to challenge the excessive literary origin of many films, and for the replacement of word-driven, verbose scripts by a more visual conception of script development that should originate from the set designer’s drawings.

While there is little evidence that the ‘paper film’ idea was adopted in the 1930s, what were known as ‘continuity sketches’ approached the idea of the storyboard, indicating that some of the ideas that were later associated with ‘total design’ methods and what later was called ‘independent frame’ were in use during the 1930s.<sup>191</sup> In addition, techniques such as photographic backgrounds and back projection were deployed to create the illusion of space and place in a very economical manner.<sup>192</sup> As Tim Bergfelder has pointed out it was rarely possible, however, that films could be *purely* visual, since the demands of narrative cinema and the varying conditions for art directors in British studios made it difficult for designers to express a totally individualistic vision.<sup>193</sup>

Yet it is clear that the aspiration towards ‘total design’ and the careful pre-planning assumptions that lay behind it, were a key aspect of the advances in production design methods during this period. Carrick’s pictorial reference is an invaluable source of evidence for the influence of the art designer, reprodu-

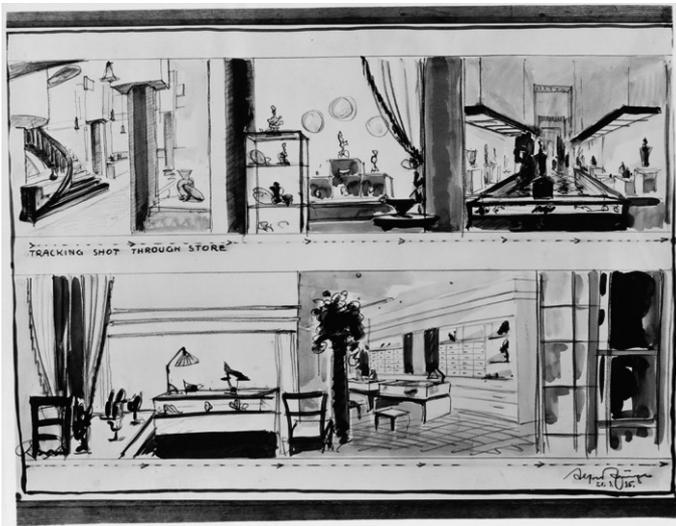
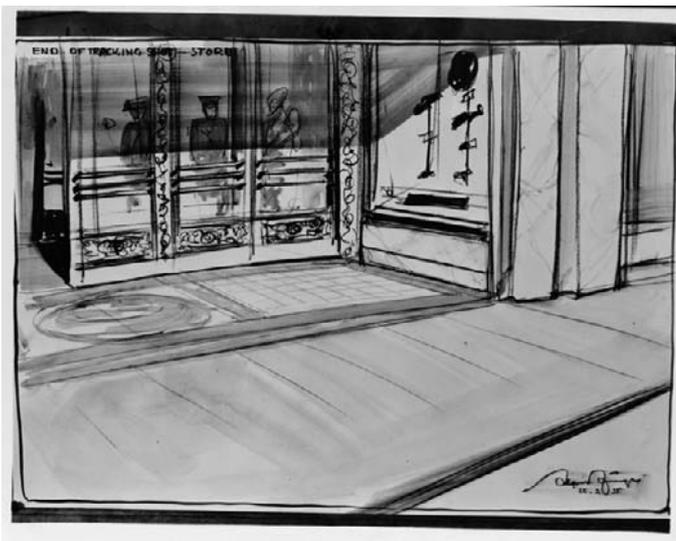


Image 18 – *Young and Innocent*

cing sketches and drawings that bear a close resemblance to the finished films. Laurence Irving's watercolour for *THE IRON MASK* (1929) is almost an exact template for the shot in the release print. Similarly, the Junge collection shows how on occasion, although not always, his drawings were followed by Hitchcock, for example the mill set in *YOUNG AND INNOCENT* (1937, images 17 & 18) and the theatre in *THE GOOD COMPANIONS* (1933).<sup>194</sup>

Carrick's own experiences in this context are interesting, conveying a long personal involvement with the quest for an ever-increasing recognition of the multifaceted yet specific role of the designer. Just before he first became involved in the film industry in 1927 he claimed to have visited Germany where he met Klaus Richter, a German artist who had designed *THE STUDENT OF PRAGUE* (1913) and worked with Lupu Pick on *SYLVESTER* (1923). Carrick describes how Richter made 'hundreds of drawings of various moments in a story. Some of them were tiny sketches of backgrounds in which a few figures were grouped, others were large close-ups of these same figures, others still were portraits displaying the personalities of again the same figures, and so on'.<sup>195</sup> The sketches would therefore play a large part in influencing the scripting of the film *before* more formal drawings were completed, from which models of sets would then be constructed. Carrick found this example exhilarating: 'Here I saw an artist planning pictures that moved'.<sup>196</sup>

Several individuals, including Junge and Meerson, can be credited with the evolution of designer-oriented, 'total concept' processes. Junge established the

Image 19 – *Car of Dreams*Image 20 – *Car of Dreams*

designer's right to fix camera positions for all set-ups.<sup>197</sup> This is a key indicator of the extent to which it gradually became recognised that designers' awareness of 'camera consciousness' was a crucial determinant of mood.<sup>198</sup> Junge's set drawings indicate that on occasion art directors planned the detail for tracking

Image 21 – *Car of Dreams*

shots, indicating a decisive input in relation to camera movement. This is illustrated by Junge's drawings for *CAR OF DREAMS* (1935, dir. Graham Cutts), in which we see the detail of a large department store set at the planning stage and then as realised in the film (images 19, 20 & 21). In addition to anticipating camera set-ups, lighting was another key area of expertise possessed by many art directors. As a contemporary design critic noted when commenting on the work of Korda and Junge, the 'perfect' sketch for a film design 'shows style and furnishing, indicates character of dressings, determines lighting'.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, celebrated cameraman Günther Krampf studied a designer's drawings before lighting a set harking back to the close cooperation between art directors and cinematographers during the heyday of Weimar cinema.<sup>200</sup> Designers frequently had knowledge of painting not possessed by cinematographers, knowledge that proved useful in advising on lighting strategies. Junge's drawings in particular indicate key sources of light (images 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 & 27) and how they influenced the finished film. Here we see how the light drawn by Junge becomes an active prop in the scene as it is manipulated by Leslie Banks to distract the villains who are about to enter the room from noticing that he is masquerading as the dentist. This expertise can be traced back to his early career in Germany when Junge recalled how he studied electric lighting and the theatres in which he worked as a designer and scenic painter were equipped with modern lighting facilities. In addition, when he was in Berlin he attended night classes on painting 'and developed a great urge to paint and draw'.<sup>201</sup>



Image 22 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*



Image 23 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*



Image 24 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*



Image 25 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*



Image 26 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*



Image 27 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

Lazare Meerson's major achievement was to introduce a range of diverse materials for sets, including iron, glass, cement, oil paint and plaster, as well as to experiment with soft greys and whites for surfaces upon which the camera could play creatively with light.<sup>202</sup> While Meerson's knowledge of painting was drawn upon in his meticulous historical researches for films, he often used it selectively. It is striking for example how Meerson used white surfaces for settings one would not expect, as in *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* (1937), set in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, in which white is the predominant tone for many sequences set in the Queen's court. In contemporary paintings Tudor England was usually represented by having dark backgrounds, but Meerson chose to convey vastness and importance with simplicity as light cascades in from above in the opening sequence that sets a tone of lightness and frivolity as Cynthia searches for a pearl that has fallen from the Queen's dress. Art history was often drawn upon irreverently, in this case in favour of a style that was suited to cinematographic reproduction and not to convey the court as oppressive. It also serves to concentrate the viewer's attention on the actors without having to film them too much in close-up, thus placing them very specifically in large interior spaces that are significant for establishing the grandeur of the court.

This production hierarchy was therefore conducive to creative collaboration, in particular with cinematographers and directors. Designers were rarely involved in the editing stage, but as far as pre-production was concerned they became increasingly important. At times, however, friction could occur and their work frustrated when, for example, a famous writer interfered with a production, as was the case when H.G. Wells adapted his novel *Things to Come* for the screen and created problems for designer Vincent Korda by insisting on advising on the design process. Producers also had the power to give responsibility and then take it away, as when Alexander Korda only used a fraction of designs produced by Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy for the 'Work' sequence of the rebuilding of Everytown in *THINGS TO COME* (1936).<sup>203</sup> At Shepherd's Bush Junge had to overcome many obstacles in the path of efficient organisation in the art department; the Lime Grove Studios were notorious for being 'crowded and complicated'.<sup>204</sup> In a letter to Maurice Ostrer, written in 1935, Junge reflected on his work for Gaumont-British since 1932. He recalled how he had aimed to 'build up an Art Department which would at least equal the American standard and which would be conducted on a sound economical basis'.<sup>205</sup> He was proud to have reduced the costs of sets and successfully argued for adequate storage space. This was very important to ensure that sets were not broken up as soon as a production was completed, as he regretted was the case with *ROME EXPRESS* (1932), destroying sets that could well have been used in other films. Storage space meant that sets could be used or adapted for several films, thus reducing costs and promoting efficiency. He also advocated that stu-

dios ought not to be built on several levels, since this escalated costs by the constant moving and rebuilding of sets.

Junge's pronouncement about looking towards an American model for efficient art direction is striking since it illustrates how by this point he was looking forwards to a more Anglophile model, rather than looking backwards to his work in Germany. In this respect he is similar to Laurence Irving, who as well as admiring German methods from the silent period, was similarly struck by the distinctive design work being completed in the US, in particular by William Cameron Menzies. Menzies directed and worked on the distinctive futuristic sets designed by Vincent Korda for *THINGS TO COME* (1936) and went on to design *GONE WITH THE WIND* (1939). His work in Hollywood studios arguably revolutionised the concept of the designer, in particular by creating cost-cutting, efficient methods of pre-production design that were akin to the 'paper film' idea referred to above and similar to 'total design' methods developed in Germany.<sup>206</sup> According to Carrick, Menzies' collaborations with Douglas Fairbanks Sr. created 'real visual atmosphere: Menzies was a true "production designer"' in the sense that design was an integral aspect of scripting and planning. In addition, 'he was the first among the Americans to design the progress of the film picture by picture, showing how form, harmony, and dramatic content could be retained throughout'.<sup>207</sup> As well as these skills, designers drew upon their professional backgrounds and training that proved to be valuable and long-lasting influences on their work.

### **Professional Backgrounds and Expertise: The Rise of the 'Architect-Designer' in Britain**

While many designers such as Vincent Korda, Alfred Junge and Laurence Irving had been painters or studied art, film work clearly required knowledge of architecture and architectural principles. This contrasts with German designers who, as we have seen, came primarily from an applied arts and theatre design tradition. Writing in 1937, art director L. P. Williams noted that British art departments were organised along the lines of an architect's office, 'numbering among its permanent staff architectural draughtsmen, quantity surveyors, sculptors and painters, and including a comprehensive reference and periodical library, an architectural model-making department and printing plant'.<sup>208</sup> He explained the advantages film work had for designers who had been trained as architects:

The young art director has more chances of doing interesting work owing to the number of designs he has the opportunity of producing during a given time, and of the fact that he should always design to extremes whether dealing with an Elizabethan manor house or the sanctum of the most ardent believer in the modern movement.

Finally, he has the unique opportunity of seeing most of his work executed within a day or two of his finishing the working drawings.<sup>209</sup>

Indeed, an analysis of the backgrounds of the designers featured in Carrick's *Art and Design in the British Film* reveals that the majority did, in fact, have some connection with architecture, although often art was studied as well. Alexander Vetchinsky, for example, was a prolific designer in the 1930s. He trained as an architect in London before working at Gainsborough Studios. Others with similar backgrounds include Ralph Brinton, Cedric Dawe, Tom Morahan, Roy Oxley, Peter Proud and David Rawnsley. Junge, Irving, and John Bryan had also designed for theatre. Addressing the Architectural Association in 1930, Irving highlighted the differences between designing 'real' buildings and film sets:

Architects must often shudder at apparent anachronisms and violations of all the principles and rules of their craft, which they so often see in moving pictures. It must be realised, however, that authenticity and accuracy must be sacrificed where the purpose of the settings is to produce an instant emotional reaction. It is imperative when designing either sets or costumes for the screen that the designs must be broad and simple. Economy of effect should be sought after in the theatre; on the screen it is an absolute necessity. The composition is continually changing, no scene is held on the screen for more than a few seconds and the impact of it on an audience is fleeting. Again, a pattern that looks bold and effective to the eye, will be reduced by the camera to a complicated mess.<sup>210</sup>

In describing the evolution of a design to its incorporation into a completed film, Irving explained how when working on *THE IRON MASK* (1929) his drawings were used as a basis for the building of sets that often required careful application of forced perspective. This achieved the illusion of depth, 'the third dimension'<sup>211</sup> so that 'the hall of a convent, by reducing the arches or groining of a ceiling in order or by making a line of windows of reducing sizes may be made to appear thirty or forty feet in length when in reality its depth is but fifteen feet'.<sup>212</sup> He went on to recount many other differences between 'real' architecture and set-building, including the impermanence of set buildings and the 'fake' materials used in their construction, such as plaster, marble effects or other early special effects including glass shots or 'realistic' backdrops created from picture postcards. For the dungeon scene in *THE IRON MASK* Irving used 'shadowgraphs' that created silhouetted figures and a torture instrument that were projected onto an unornamented surface of a flight of narrow stairs to create a suspenseful effect without using actors. This play with illusion extended to all aspects of design. While the sets were built as ephemeral structures, the intention was for their celluloid incarnation to look as permanent as buildings, structures and objects encountered in everyday life.

The work of Lazare Meerson is illuminating for evidence of what in Germany would have been termed a 'painterly' aesthetic, combined with the manipulation of architectural conventions. Throughout his career Meerson's work was distinguished by a dual concern for authenticity and impressionism. As Catherine Surowiec has suggested: 'Meerson was very keen on getting the right, telling details, which he would mix and re-interpret, placing them so that they were more suited to the actors and the camera'.<sup>213</sup> *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* demonstrates that while a considerable amount of primary research would go into planning a set design, using paintings, photographs and other evidence of period or contemporary life, artistic licence would prevail in evoking the 'essence' of a place or period. Meerson's method was one of continual development of the design concept as pre-production progressed and on into the shooting of a film.<sup>214</sup> Jill Forbes has noted how Meerson's sets were often 'generic' in that they were not concerned with creating faithful reproductions of places, but through the selective process of creating a design – from initial research through to continual embellishment and refinement, right up until shooting began – they evolved into 'idealisations'. Thus the sets he, and later his pupil Trauner, created

were intended to carry a powerful emotional charge deriving from the activation of artistic memories of places which often no longer existed. Their charm is the charm of recognition, and our pleasure as viewers derives from the fact that the physical environment is exactly as we somehow always expected it to be, that it conforms to an image or an original we carry in our mind's eye, like a recollection of childhood, enhanced or embellished by time.<sup>215</sup>

For *AS YOU LIKE IT* (1936), Meerson combined this sense of 'reality' by drawing on collective 'visual memories' constructed from paintings. He wrote that he aimed to

recreate, without any deformation of reality, the particular atmosphere which serves as the background to *AS YOU LIKE IT*, which is not situated in a precise way either in Time or Space. I have therefore chosen a style inspired from a century before the Elizabethan period, and have mingled different reminiscences from the Renaissance French, Flemish and Italian paintings.<sup>216</sup>

This pursuit of an overall mood has been emphasised by Dudley Andrew, as well as the importance of light to create a 'painterly aesthetic' as seen in the work of artists such as Degas.<sup>217</sup>

Another key element of Meerson's approach to set design was the manipulation of architectural conventions and use of 'solid' building materials such as plaster, glass, iron and cement. The effect of brickwork, tiling and stonework would be created by use of plaster mouldings; patterned floors that had the



Image 28 – The Anichkov bridge, St. Petersburg

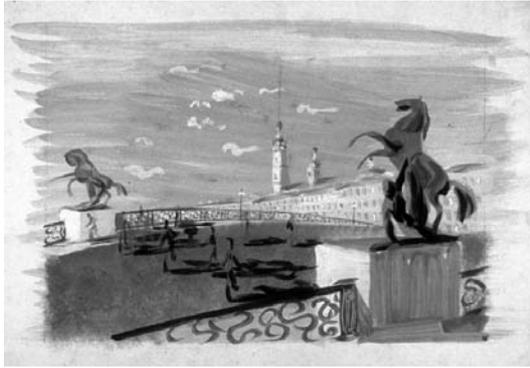


Image 29 – *Knight Without Armour*



Image 30 – *Knight Without Armour*



Image 31 – *Knight Without Armour*



Image 32 – *As You Like It*

appearance of being made of opulent marble would, in fact, be painted paper that had been laid onto the studio floor. For *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* (1937) he started to re-create St. Petersburg by making a pair of statues in plaster. These were based on the real ones on the Anichkov bridge (image 28) for a key set when an act of sabotage takes place on the eve of the Russian Revolution. The following illustrations demonstrate the drawing of the statues, their construction and their appearance in the final film (images 29, 30 & 31).

Architectural principles of shape, form and 'authenticity' were adopted, but like Irving, Meerson then adapted these to produce a variety of effects that were particularly suitable for creating maximum impact within the film frame. These included exaggerated perspective, by creating the illusion of expansive spaces

by manipulating the size of figures, objects and buildings. As he explained in a memorandum, written for Twentieth Century-Fox:

Concerning perspective, each form introduced into a set should serve, through its line and surface to establish a certain depth. It is a question of choice and elimination; choice, so as to find elements giving the greatest suggestion of depth, and elimination, so as to cut out elements extremely seductive by their beauty but which would disturb the limited space in which a picture is made.<sup>218</sup>

In *AS YOU LIKE IT* there are many examples of this, including the Forest of Arden in which the careful placement of trees creates perspective which is accentuated by figures walking into the background, as if the space were indeed expansive. This effect is very different from the stage set where the actors would be in the foreground and the forest very obviously a painted backdrop. Similarly, in the wrestling scene great depth is suggested by a bridge in the mid-ground and a tower in the far background, as well as by two small figures (that in fact have been painted on the backdrop) standing on top of the stairs (image 32). As Forbes noted, this technique had important implications for conveying a world on screen that related to codes of verisimilitude and also to iconic, collective memories or even to utopian ideals of a particular time and place:

In the same way as the selection of objects gives them disproportionate significance, so it seems to me the exaggeration of perspective heightens the utopianism of these sets, reinforcing the viewer's belief that not only is this a complete and self-sufficient world but a constructed one as well.<sup>219</sup>

Meerson's sets used objects for embellishment but in a highly selective manner. This selection of objects within the set was often motivated by the desire to implant symbolic resonances that could heighten a mood, or even suggest ironic counterpoint to the dominant narrative trajectory. C.S. Tashiro has argued that set design seldom relates solely to its immediate narrative context. Rather, objects in a set can 'have meanings of their own exploited by the designer that have nothing to do with the script'.<sup>220</sup> While Meerson's designs usually did relate to the script, they could resonate outwards in the way Tashiro implies, inviting intertextual readings that to some extent transcended the script, as with many poetic realist designs. As we shall see in examples from films designed by Meerson discussed in chapter 5, key elements were foregrounded to create maximum emotional impact and at the same time communicate symbolic 'essences' considered to be of key importance to a scene. These 'essences' were not confined to that particular frame or scene – rather they underscored themes that ran through the entire narrative and beyond. So while Forbes is right in arguing that the set communicated a self-sufficient, constructed world, it is also the case that the designs transcended the boundaries of the *framed*, narrativised image.

Junge's work was particularly distinctive for the incorporation of contemporary architectural/design movements in film sets, particularly Art Deco. As early as 1932, in *AFTER THE BALL* he was creating, as one design critic noted, 'exquisite modern settings... He has used every opportunity of expressing his belief in the beauty of plain surface and simple line, and his designs show a bold, unaffected style, a sense of proportion and an appreciation of the beauty of the material'.<sup>221</sup> As will be discussed in greater length in chapter 5, Junge chose spectacular examples of Deco as living spaces for characters in the Jessie Matthews musicals he designed for Gaumont-British. There are many examples of shots that display sets as sites of performance, including the illusion of great depth necessary to accommodate both star performer and Deco set. The sets are 'authentic' in that they are in keeping with the *moderne* style was prevalent in American musicals of the 1930s and that was being advertised to consumers as desirable for their own domestic use. Yet they are also expansive and spectacular, an effect achieved by use of white, shiny surfaces combined with a mobile camera that highlighted their modernity. Deco sets are often used by Junge to convey sites of transformation, since they provide the environment for characters who aspire to be upwardly mobile and successful, in Matthews' case usually as a singer and dancer.

In *It's LOVE AGAIN* (1936), for example, when Elaine (Jessie Matthews) sings for theatrical impresario Mr Raymond in an Art Deco apartment, we initially see the whole room from afar: she is in the distance while he is lounging on a sofa in the foreground. The effect is of an impromptu audition with objects and space appearing to collude as symbols of Elaine's aspirations. As her song begins the camera follows her and in the process objects in the room are showcased: an Art Deco lamp and a mirror we have seen Mr Raymond looking into earlier. The set therefore serves several purposes simultaneously: it provides the stage for Elaine's singing and dancing; it demonstrates the expansive, modern ethos of the *moderne* while also celebrating the ingenuity of Deco design that has been rendered obtrusive by use of heightened perspective and the camera.

The importance of objects was shared by Carrick in his concern to impress on designers how 'camera consciousness' involved anticipating the impact of a detail that on a theatre stage would go relatively unnoticed. In this he was influenced early on in his career by British director George Pearson who had lectured on design in the mid-1920s about the symbolism of a door in a film set. Carrick was much impressed by Pearson's likening of a door to an actor, thus investing a part of the set with the active agency of a performer: 'Get the mood of this door into your brain; twist it about; play with it till you begin to see what important things doors are – gateways from somewhere to somewhere else. A *closed* door is the key to mystery; you may sense what is beyond'.<sup>222</sup> Pearson's lecture also went into the physical appearance of the door, of the importance of

texture in communicating its 'backstory', in this case a weary, battered door in a slum that symbolised the landlord's equally neglectful treatment of his tenants.

An example from *THE RETURN OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* (1937), designed by Meerson, illustrates this point about the symbolic importance of doors in a different context. When we first see Robespierre as a member of the Committee for Public Safety, the position from which he instituted 'The Terror', we are introduced to him by the opening of a vast door. The camera adopts our point-of-view as the door opens and we see Robespierre, a small figure sitting at a desk at the far end of an enormous room. The door acts as our 'gateway' to witness Robespierre's occupation of spaces formerly occupied by royalty, his tiny figure in deep-focus, with exaggerated perspective showing us how dwarfed he is by the splendour of the opulent apartments. Displaying the scene for us in this way also serves to make a character point about Robespierre's illusions of grandeur. Our physical movement, as it were, through the door is a crucial entrée into the world of this scene. In examples such as this designers clearly drew on their professional training in ways that were completely suited to the film medium. Knowledge of architecture and how to display it on screen proved to be a challenge they rose to magnificently as 'the transnational imagination' was applied in a variety of contexts that will be further explored in chapter 5.

### **Working Practices in Britain: Sketches, Designs and Drawings**

As well as drawing on their own backgrounds in art history, painting and architecture, British film set designers were sometimes assisted by talented sketch artists who were often uncredited. One such artist was Ferdinand Bellan, a Viennese painter who made sketches for Andreiev and Korda and was also a scenic artist. In addition he co-designed films including *THE DRUM* (1938) and *THE FOUR FEATHERS* (1939). In some cases the designer would produce the main drawings for key sets and situations while an artist such as Bellan would work on the 'continuity sketches' required for the illustration of camera set-ups.<sup>223</sup> This approach indicates an evolving division of labour that permitted the designer to devise a stylistic thread or 'vision' that would then be worked upon further by sketch artists such as Ballen who were particularly skilled at creating precise realisations of the general ideas espoused by the designer. Junge also worked in this way, thus becoming recognised as a production designer who was the key supervisory voice in the art department.<sup>224</sup>

Often many drawings would be produced indicating the overall geography of a set so that different possibilities for the camera could be envisaged. A striking example of this is illustrated by a sketch by Junge of an overhead view of the court corridor from *YOUNG AND INNOCENT* (image 33). While this does not appear in the film, it is important in presenting the geography of the building that



Image 33 – *Young and Innocent*

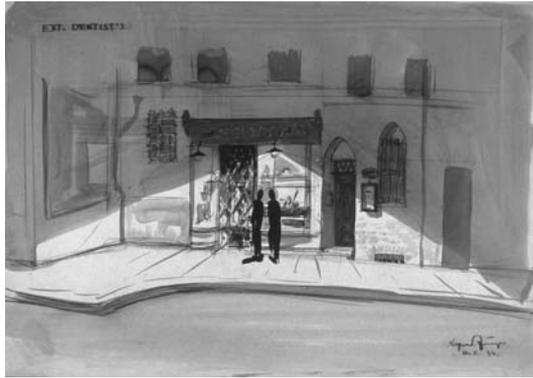


Image 34 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*



Image 35 – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

would have informed Hitchcock's approach to the use of space in the court scene. Additionally, details that can be found in drawings were often exaggerated in close-up to produce what we would probably identify as a 'Hitchcockian' motif. For example the drawing of the exterior of the dentist's surgery in Wapping from *THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH* (image 34) contains a small detail to the right of the door that we can see is a sign with some false teeth above it. In the film, Hitchcock enhances a sense of the grotesque by showing the teeth in close-up (image 35). In this way preparatory set drawings were an indispensable aid to pre-production.

Laurence Irving was credited as one of the first British designers to draw figures in sketches, another example of how 'static' drawings of sets were far from the case, since they implied a *moving* trajectory that was essentially filmic in conception.<sup>225</sup> Figures were also important in conveying the scale of a set. Junge's drawings occasionally included figures, as did those by Meerson and Ferdinand Bellan whose sketches, for example, for art director Andre Andreiev's conception for the design of *THE DICTATOR* (1935) included detailed figures.<sup>226</sup> Carrick's lecture notes stress the importance of figure-drawing since 'it is ultimately the actor who gives the drama life and figures in the sketch are the guides to that dramatic climax'.<sup>227</sup> Irving, a trained painter and illustrator who worked with Fairbanks in Hollywood on designs for *THE IRON MASK*, also worked in Britain, most notably designing sets for *PYGMALION* (1938). While Irving was clearly not the prime mover in the development of production design as a unified concept in Britain, his contribution is nevertheless significant as an early commentator on the evolution of set design as experienced by someone who worked in Hollywood and Britain, and as an artist who had what Carrick considered to be the ideal background for a film set designer: 'A student of the graphic arts with an understanding of drama'.<sup>228</sup>

Menzies wrote enthusiastically to Irving in 1940 about the enhanced status of designers and of the importance of recruiting artists with a background in graphic illustration into the profession:

I know that the job is now accepted as one of the essentials of production and puts the artist and illustrator practically in charge of picture at least as far as mood flavour etc are concerned and I know that it is of interest to you as the sort of a job you would love and could develop (*sic*) in England as I have here.<sup>229</sup>

Again, we see a dynamic fluidity of ideas being demonstrated, exchanged and absorbed as designers compared their work across national boundaries.

## Designers in the Context of the British Studio System

As demonstrated in chapter 5, Junge was able to achieve remarkable results ranging from distinctive comedies and musicals to suspense thrillers, often devised in adverse circumstances. Peggy Gick, who assisted Edward Carrick at Ealing in the 1930s remembered that many art departments were very small, often consisting of only two people.<sup>230</sup> As Junge's, Meerson's and Metzner's experiences indicate, designers were vulnerable to the vicissitudes of British production throughout the 1930s, of which patchy studio organisation was a symptom. When companies embarked on production drives there was often not enough stage space for the effective design of sets.<sup>231</sup> After the failure in the mid-1930s of Michael Balcon's 'internationalist' policy whereby the studio attempted to make bigger budget films featuring well-known British and American stars that would get booked by exhibitors in the US, Gaumont-British and its studios were absorbed by the fast consolidating Rank empire and the newly-built Pinewood Studios became their major production centre.<sup>232</sup> In 1938 Denham Studios, Alexander Korda's major achievement and where Meerson designed the majority of his British films, suffered financial difficulties and merged with Pinewood to form D. & P. Studios which became Britain's major production facility. During its supremacy, however, Denham had provided Meerson with opportunities to experiment with techniques that had not been possible on his first arrival in Britain.

When Denham opened in May 1936 it became the biggest studio in Britain. It had seven stages, totalling 110,500 square feet of stage area; four of which were air-conditioned. Each stage was well-equipped with electricians' galleries in the roof for advanced lighting set-ups and to allow cameramen to work from almost any position. These developments were of major importance to Meerson, whose designs were only fully realised when lit and shot in very precise configurations determined in collaboration with the director and cinematographer. Like Carrick, Vincent Korda emphasised the necessity for art directors to acquire a notion of 'camera consciousness', facilitated by Denham's physical organisation.<sup>233</sup> In addition, Denham had the latest sound equipment, its own water supply and the largest electric power plant used at that time by any private company. Two thousand production personnel were employed in the cutting rooms, Technicolor laboratories and numerous workshops.<sup>234</sup> While much was made of these achievements in contemporary publicity, even celebrated studios such as Denham were not as 'ideal' working environments as was promoted in contemporary publicity. A survey of British film studios conducted in 1945 argued that whereas Pinewood was 'the best planned studio in the country', Denham had shortcomings that had been avoided in the design of Pinewood. These were long distances between stores and stages, and between the plasterer's

shop and the main carpenter's shop. While the floors of stages were constructed to be easily removed, in practice this rarely happened: instead sets were constructed on two levels on rostrums.<sup>235</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, the facilities at Denham enabled Meerson to devise spectacular sets for ambitious productions such as *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR*, London Film Productions' major film of 1937. As Cavalcanti noted, however, Meerson later cooled towards the idea of working in such a big studio with its Hollywood-style methods.<sup>236</sup> Junge also considered that as the responsibilities of the art director grew in modern studios, particularly in terms of supervising technical and organisational activities, there was a danger of the art director feeling less artistically central to a film's conception: 'One tires sooner or later, I think, of being treated merely as a conjurer whose tricks had better satisfy the director. We, as artists, have been trained to think visually; and if we are good artists we cannot ever be satisfied with merely *interpreting* someone else's composition'.<sup>237</sup>

In this sense art directors such as Junge and Meerson were caught somewhat between modern, industrial filmmaking and a desire for individualism. It is also likely that Meerson missed the mutually supportive environment he had encountered at Albatros Films, Montreuil, near Paris, with its exciting interaction between émigré artists, many of whom had come from Russia. While there were other émigrés working at Denham, the milieu at Albatros was considered to be especially dynamic and creative.<sup>238</sup>

The British context of production design was therefore a volatile one in the 1930s. Nevertheless, key advances were forged by the creative energy of émigré designers and their collaborations with a range of directors and cinematographers; the expansion of studios and facilities and the general stylistic development of British films that will be further analysed in chapter 5.

## Conclusion

The broad range of styles, approaches and methods in European production design described in this chapter provide a crucial context for our understanding of the cosmopolitan, transnational nature of aesthetic, technological and studio practices during this period. While greater rationalisation of technical processes, the physical consolidation of studios and the increasingly hierarchical division of labour would appear to be progressively logical steps towards the creation of 'modern' industrial filmmaking, our analysis from the perspective of production design yields a more complex account. While it is common in evaluating historical development to question established teleological accounts that are

premised on a linear trajectory towards 'modernity', this is particularly necessary with our area of study. As we have seen, working methods and creative/practical alliances established in Germany had a lasting and profound impact on France, Britain and beyond, contributing much to the dynamism of the production design sector during this period. The low esteem experienced by many French and British designers during the 1920s was clearly challenged by the example of Germany, where the diverse and dynamic identities of Weimar cinema were largely attributed to the work of key designers.

As we have seen, commentators in France and Britain looked to Germany as the model of a successful film industry that was held in high cultural esteem. But it was not simply a case of German styles and methods being appropriated by the rest of Europe. The mobility of artistic and technical personnel that was the result of intense political turmoil, ensured that collaboration and incorporation was firmly on the agenda of film companies that wanted to take advantage of technological change and secure a prominent position in a highly competitive market. The result was a complex response to pressures for change, in which older practices and traditions co-existed with newer methods. In our stress on inter-European collaboration it is not intended that American design practices are to be seen as distinct from European. As we have seen, designers were aware of developments in the US, and William Cameron Menzies in particular was admired for advancing methods that were similar to those being developed in Europe; also it must be remembered that many of Hollywood's designers were European émigrés.

The drive towards cross-national collaboration was certainly affected by the coming of sound cinema. While silent cinema consisted of a wide variety of stylistic variants, its primary referent was visual intensity, all the more compelling for its ability to cross national boundaries. It might appear to be somewhat ironic therefore that the arrival of sound was of major importance in enhancing the role of the production designer. This jolt to the industries of Germany, France and Britain intensified competition between companies and where greater capitalisation of the film business occurred there were opportunities for set designers to create indispensable roles for themselves in studios where producers placed great emphasis on 'quality' production values as visible through design, all the more prized if this could be achieved on a reasonable budget. The creation of a set that looked expensive, or as in the poetic realist examples, created an 'authentic' vision of a place, was a valued skill that producers observed in émigré designers. Proven success elsewhere, such as Meerson's achievements in France, or Junge's and Werndorff's in Germany that advertised their skills to British producers, provided a good entrée to another country. Adaptability was key to enhancing the reputation of a set designer especially when, as we have seen, many technicians were not particularly welcoming of foreign personnel.

On the other hand, some designers in the host country, such as Carrick and Irving in the UK, were full of admiration for what émigré designers brought with them. The complexities of studio filmmaking demanded technical competence, organisational skills as well as a flexible, yet authoritative attitude towards collaboration. This was clearly possessed by the key designers referenced in this chapter who found themselves working in production contexts that were challenging largely *because* of their instability and financial insecurity. The benefits of older, 'artisanal' relations between workers were important in this context because while the drive was towards efficiency, this was tempered by experiential factors which demonstrated that the most productive collaborative relations needed to be flexible and mutually respectful. The quotation from Junge at the end of the last section indicates that by the 1950s this was far less the case as designers perceived their role to be about delivering special effects rather than occupying a key role in determining the artistic vision of a film. Emphasis on craft, technical expertise and efficiency has, however, been an important register in this chapter, revealing how even in the 1930s it was a large part of the job. Yet it was precisely because these aspects were not strictly separated from other functions, such as camera, lighting, research or sketches, that there was room for creative manoeuvre. The designer therefore emerges as a crucial determinant of style and who was appreciated for the ability to function within a complex, collaborative production context.

The neglect of set design in academic analysis has been mentioned in our introduction, but it is important to signal this again here as we have demonstrated in this chapter how the primary sources for set design analysis have much to offer in this respect. The drawings and manuals we have consulted are key evidence of the 'pre-filmic' moment, of the conception of a design that determined the mood, environment and aesthetic style of a film. The notes and manuals which demonstrate what designers actually did have revealed much about contemporary working methods, skills and practices. The stress on problem-solving, efficiency and working within a budget have emerged as key themes that were dominant in design practice in all three countries. At the same time, the quality of the sketches and drawings illustrate how they were often skilled artists whose work betrays an obvious relationship to related skills such as graphic design, watercolour painting, figure sketching and charcoal drawing as well as architectural conventions and camera movement. The gifted all-rounder, multi-tasker has been mentioned several times, and is nowhere more evident than in the detailed research and creative activity that was clearly accomplished before shooting began.

The next three chapters deal with the filmic results of these changes, exchanges and incidences of creative collaboration in Europe. The working methods and studio environments within which designers operated had a profound

impact on film style. The privileging of the director has resulted in a particular canon of films being associated with European cinema in the late 1920s and 1930s. Our focus on designers produces a somewhat different collection of films, and reveals the extent to which the mobility of personnel influenced prevalent styles, themes and genres. It also summons a comparative frame of reference between countries in which shared themes are evident, such as the 'exotic otherness' of Russia or foreign places more generally, contemporary or futuristic worlds that are expressed in modernist design, or the 'poetic' realism of space and place that is evocative of 'national' imaginaries that are not just confined to France.



## Imagining Space in Late Weimar Cinema

In this chapter we will refer to a range of key German films from the late Weimar period to the mid- to late 1930s, including acknowledged classics such as Joe May's *ASPHALT* (1928), which we have already touched upon in chapter 2 in our discussion of the differences in approach between the designers Herlth and Röhrig and Kettelhut. Other well-known films to feature include *DIE BÜCHSE DER PANDORA* (*PANDORA'S BOX*, 1929), *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* (*THE THREEPENNY OPERA*, 1932), as well as the lesser-known *ANGST* (*FEAR*, 1928), *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA* (*THE WONDERFUL LIE OF NINA PETROVNA*, 1929), and *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* (*THE MISTRESS OF ATLANTIS*, 1932).

Our discussion throughout the book is organised around five general themes or tropes, and as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, French and British cinema articulated similar issues, albeit in a different vernacular, and with occasionally different priorities among these tropes. Thematic overlaps were aided, as we suggest, not only by the international circulation of motifs drawn from popular culture, but also by the transnational exchange and movements of production personnel – in this chapter we will analyse films designed by Andrei Andreiev and Ernö Metzner who subsequently worked in the French and British industries.

The first and perhaps most obvious trope concerns the representation of urban space and the promotion of modernity as both ideology and lifestyle (the latter particularly in relation to female consumption). While *ASPHALT*, alongside other contemporary 'city-films' such as Walter Ruttmann's *BERLIN – SYMPHONIE EINER GROSSSTADT* (*BERLIN: SYMPHONY OF A BIG CITY*, 1928) and Robert Siodmak's *MENSCHEN AM SONNTAG* (*PEOPLE ON SUNDAY*, 1930) and – in a more allegorical vein – Fritz Lang's *METROPOLIS* (1928), provides a perfect case study in this respect, Hans Steinhoff's lesser-known Stefan Zweig adaptation *ANGST* articulates (sub)urban modernity in a somewhat different way. Berlin unsurprisingly emerges as the major iconic urban location in German cinema, occupying a similar position that Paris does in French films of the period (see chapter 4).

The second theme relates to the representation of foreign spaces, illustrated here through a discussion of how German cinema of the period pictured Britain. While representations of another culture always resort to some extent to cultural clichés and stereotypes, on simplifications and condensations drawn from a range of visual and literary templates, it is not the (failed) accuracy, nor the lack

of authenticity and realism, that shall concern us here, but rather the specific spatial iconography underpinning this imagination. Britain was a recurring location in German films of the late 1920s and 1930s, and although there are some examples that present a pastoral, upper class vision of England, the more common paradigm was to envisage Britain as a generically coded urban underworld, a maze-like space inhabited by classless outsiders and/or a tribally organized *lumpenproletariat*. Pabst's *BÜCHSE DER PANDORA* and *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* are analysed as typical examples of this kind of depiction.

The third trope concerns the way in which exoticist and nostalgic fantasies corresponded to the construction of specific star personae. Our case study will be Brigitte Helm, one of the most iconic stars of late Weimar cinema, and best known for her dual role in *METROPOLIS*. Instead of adding to an already extensive literature on her performance and function in the latter film, we will instead focus on Hanns Schwarz' melodrama *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA*, set in Tsarist Russia, and G.W. Pabst's hallucinatory desert adventure *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* (*THE MISTRESS OF ATLANTIS*, 1932). More so than the exceptional case of *METROPOLIS*, these two films represent attempts by the German film industry to construct a specific as well as internationally marketable star image for Helm that makes full use of her strikingly classic beauty – and in both cases the relation of performance to the respective sets is crucial to these attempts.

Apart from these three strictly spatial tropes that address specific locales, or which relate to the representation of a star image, there are two further, more temporal tropes, namely the representation of the past and future. Both of these will be more extensively covered in the later chapters on France and Britain, although different strategies of representing the past will emerge in this chapter from our discussion of *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* and *NINA PETROWNA*.

The relative underrepresentation of the historical film in this chapter is motivated by our contention in its German variant, that this genre had less to contribute overall to the transnational aesthetic we are trying to identify. The reason we are not providing a more extensive case study of the science fiction film (obviously a quite significant genre in term of production design), reflects our suggestion that, especially from the early 1930s onwards, this genre in Germany worked ideologically against a transnational ethos, despite or indeed precisely because of its globalist narratives and international production patterns.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, this chapter argues that in their interaction, alternation, and combination, certain thematic tropes and production practices helped to articulate a cosmopolitan visual aesthetic in the films of the late Weimar period. The constructions of imagined and imaginary locations allowed spectators across national borders and cultural contexts to read different meanings into these spaces and of the characters that inhabit them, and to derive a specific perspective of urban-

ity, modernity, 'otherness', and nostalgia these environments embodied. The scenic depiction of the exotic and the foreign catered to fantasies of extraterritoriality and loss of identity, and imbued these with a positive value. These representations thus need to be understood as providing a valid and coherent counter-ideology to the nationalist agendas in 1920s and 1930s Germany, the latter of which ultimately, and regrettably, prevailed.

### **Past, Future, and Present – The Changing Settings of Weimar Cinema**

As we argued previously, *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* is one of the quintessential founding icons of cinematic set design. Certainly, *CALIGARI*'s design found unprecedented international acclaim, yet to some extent its stylistic conception exhausted itself with just one film, and where its stylistic ideas were taken up subsequently, they manifested themselves as an obvious copy. This is not to say that expressionism did not have a role to play in the German cinema of the 1920s, but that it found its niche in a very specific genre of art film production, or alternatively was used as an atmospheric shorthand for tales of terror (in the same way in which it would be used later on in Hollywood, for example in Universal's horror films of the 1930s).

Far more representative and influential for the development of German set design (in terms of aesthetics, as well as craftsmanship and studio logistics) were the epic historical films by directors such as Ernst Lubitsch and Joe May, including *MADAME DUBARRY* (*PASSION*, 1919) or *ANNA BOLEYN* (1920), or exoticist melodramas such as *DAS INDISCHE GRABMAL* (*THE INDIAN TOMB*, 1921). While these were initially little more than imitations of the epics Italian and American cinema had created a few years earlier with films such as *CABIRIA* (1914) and *INTOLERANCE* (1916), the German imitations soon developed their own qualities.<sup>2</sup> First, at the level of narrative, they combined epic historical subject matter (such as the French revolution, or the Egypt of the Pharaohs) convincingly with human interest and, in Lubitsch's case, with a certain erotic raciness that distinguished them from their international competitors. Secondly, their sets achieved a remarkable degree of representational realism. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the early 1920s historical films developed a way of letting the sets and actors interact in a way that complemented and commented on the narrative itself.

Architecture entered the narrative not simply as a decorative backdrop, but as an integral element of the plot – as in *THE INDIAN TOMB*, where the construction of the eponymous monument becomes a central driving force of the narrative. Here, as in later examples, most famously Fritz Lang's *NIBELUNGEN* saga or *METROPOLIS*, architecture often assumed a malevolent presence, an oppres-

sive force that ultimately destroyed its human protagonists. This corresponded with a focus upon historical subjects during periods that were marked by social turmoil (e.g. the French revolution in *MADAME DUBARRY*, Tudor England in *ANNA BOLEYN*). The intensification of design as a narrative motor, its antropomorphisation (consider in this respect the literal metamorphosis of the steam-spewing engine in *METROPOLIS* into a human-devouring ancient god), and the transformation of architecture into (e-)motion was in part a process of effectively coordinating human movement (from choreographing masses of extras to the placement of individual performers), lighting, and décor, and partly a way of choosing décor to reflect atmosphere, mood, and interior states.

By the mid-1920s, the historical subjects of previous years gave way to more modern narratives with contemporary settings. While historical settings did not disappear altogether, they became primarily associated with two distinctive subgenres, the film operetta, and the '*Preussenfilm*' (Prussian film). The operetta allowed filmmakers and designers to employ historical vernaculars, but at the same time it did not tie them to requirements of authenticity. Although some films drew of course on the iconography of Vienna and the Habsburg Empire, for example *EIN WALZERTRAUM* (*A WALTZ DREAM*, 1925), more often narratives explored imaginary Ruritania, as in Arthur Robison's *DER LETZTE WALZER* (*THE LAST WALTZ*, 1927), or were barely tied to any specific setting at all in narratives of international travel and tourism, for example in *DIE SINGENDE STADT* (*CITY OF SONG*, 1930).

In contrast, the *Preussenfilm* was very much centred on a specific location. The subgenre, exhorting national and especially Prussian traditions and values, found its particular focus in the reign of Friedrich II ('The Great'), and had been triggered off by the phenomenal box-office success of *FRIDERICUS REX* (1923), although the formula had its roots in earlier representations from the turn of the century. Later films, invariably featuring the actor Otto Gebühr in the role of the strict, but benevolent monarch, and usually centred on his Potsdam residence of Sanssouci Palace, included *DIE MÜHLE VON SANSSOUCI* (*THE MILL AT SANSSOUCI*, 1926), the two-part *DER ALTE FRITZ* (*OLD FRITZ*, 1928), *DAS FLÖTENKONZERT VON SANSSOUCI* (*THE FLUTE CONCERT OF SANSSOUCI*, 1930, with sets by Herlth and Röhrig), and *DIE TÄNZERIN VON SANSSOUCI* (*THE DANCER OF SANSSOUCI*, 1932), and *DER CHORAL VON LEUTHEN* (*THE ANTHEM OF LEUTHEN*, 1933). A separate strand of the *Preussenfilm* focussed on Prussia's national defence during the Napoleonic Wars, and included films such as *KÖNIGIN LUISE* (*QUEEN LUISE*, 1927), *DIE LETZTE KOMPAGNIE* (*THE LAST BATTALION*, 1930) and *LUISE, KÖNIGIN VON PREUSSEN* (*LUISE, QUEEN OF PRUSSIA*, 1931). The genre, which during the Weimar period was vigorously attacked by left-wing critics, unsurprisingly continued without major changes to either style or narrative construction into the Nazi period.<sup>3</sup>

Although marked by considerable ideological as well as aesthetic differences, one can nevertheless trace similarities in function and spatial organisation across a number of national historical genres in European cinema during the 1920s and 1930s. These link the *Preussenfilm* in Germany, films from *NAPOLÉON* (1925) to *LA MARSELLAISE* (1937) in France, as well as Korda's historical films of the 1930s. As with similar genres across Germany's borders, the appeal of the *Preussenfilm* to its contemporary audiences was at least in part its claim to an accurate and authentic representation of historical reality in terms of design (the interiors at Sanssouci, uniforms, costumes, the porcelain, the furnishings etc.) – indeed even some contemporary left-wing critics had defended the genre by arguing that at its heart, the *Preussenfilm* was not so much politically motivated, but rather fulfilled the function of an animated picture book.<sup>4</sup>

Sabine Hake argues that on the whole, many films with Prussian themes 'celebrated the authoritarian, paternalistic relationship between leader and nation'.<sup>5</sup> However, quite a few of the films of the late 1920s and early 1930s aimed to feminise what in historical reality had been a strictly male, homosocial environment at Friedrich's court, by introducing – historically entirely fictional – interaction between the monarch and female characters. This not only opened up the genre to female audiences, it also allowed the design of the films to emphasise a more 'consumer-friendly' version of Prussia, in the same way as Vincent Korda would 'rebrand' Tudor England in *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* (1933) as a glossy soap opera. In this respect, the films allied themselves – despite their historical narratives – to modern concerns. At the same time the *Preussenfilm* could sugar its ideological pill, which, as Hake has suggested, 'explored other... problematic aspects of the Prussian myth, including the renunciation of personal happiness for the good of the state and the role of the military as a binding model for private and public life'.<sup>6</sup>

On the surface, science fiction as a genre pursued a more modernist, masculinist, and technocratic agenda. Its narrative conventions and visual iconography enabled set designers to incorporate both the latest advances in design and technology, and extend these advances into either utopian or dystopian visions, the most obvious European examples in the 1920s being *METROPOLIS* (1927) or Abel Gance's *LA FIN DU MONDE* (1930). The genre thus provided a perfect foil for designers such as Kettelhut, Hunte, or Karl Vollbrecht, whose predilection for grandiose, monumentalist sets fitted its requirements. As chapter 5 will demonstrate, a similarly monumental aesthetic defined British science fiction films of the late 1920s and 1930s. In Germany, however, with the exception of Lang's *DIE FRAU IM MOND* (*THE WOMAN IN THE MOON*, 1929), *METROPOLIS* did not initiate a boom in futuristic film productions, despite the considerable popularity of science fiction as a literary genre.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, science fiction in Germany, especially in its pulp novel variety, had during the 1920s become a forum where

racist, misogynist, militarist and nationalist ideologies were aired.<sup>8</sup> The use of science fiction in transporting specifically national messages, however, was not just confined to Germany, examples from elsewhere include the Soviet *AELITA*, *QUEEN OF MARS* (1924).

During the early 1930s, bridging the political caesura between Weimar Germany and the 'Third Reich', a handful of films nonetheless attempted to continue the trend that Lang had started with *METROPOLIS*. These films included *F.P.1 ANTWORTET NICHT* (*F.P.1*, 1932, designed by Kettelhut), *DER TUNNEL* (*THE TUNNEL*, 1933, designed by Vollbrecht), and *GOLD* (1934, designed by Hunte). They were high-profile, big-budget productions, made in different language versions, while *DER TUNNEL* (shot simultaneously in a French and German version) was remade three years later in Britain with a production team that included the émigrés Ernö Metzner as set designer, and screenwriter Curt Siodmak.

Superficially, the early 1930s science fiction films in Germany seemed to celebrate an internationalist and modernist agenda – the story of *F.P.1 ANTWORTET NICHT* concerns the building of an artificial island in mid-ocean to facilitate trans-Atlantic air traffic; and the creation of a subterranean trans-Atlantic tunnel, connecting Europe and the United States is the theme of *DER TUNNEL*. By the time of *GOLD*, however, any faith in either technological progress or international cooperation had evaporated. The film's national hero (Hans Albers) has to face a villainous Scottish industrialist who attempts to steal an apparatus that uses atom-splitting in the transformation of lead into gold. To prevent the invention being exploited by foreign powers, the hero in the end destroys the technology he has helped to develop.

Several scholars have suggested that already the earlier two films, *F.P.1* and *DER TUNNEL*, despite their supposed commitment to international collaboration, betray 'a new weariness of technological progress, especially in the context of globalization and its threats to the nation'.<sup>9</sup> As in *GOLD*, the films are pervaded by fear of anonymous, international (and by implication Jewish) capitalist cartels, while they celebrate a ruthlessly autocratic individualism very much in line with the emerging 'Führer' ideology of the Nazis. Lutz Koepnick concludes with regard to the German version of *DER TUNNEL* that 'the film and its rhetoric of sacrifice and mobilization extended the imperatives of crowd control to the realms of fantasy and distraction'.<sup>10</sup>

The films' problematic relationship with discourses of modernity and technology extend to their spatial organisation and approaches to set design. In *F.P.1*, designer Kettelhut alludes to the principles of functionalist architecture in his design for the exteriors of the airport terminal on the film's artificial island (images 1 & 2). Yet in the film's interior sets, he relies completely on conventional references, with the notable exception, discussed by Sabine Hake, of the

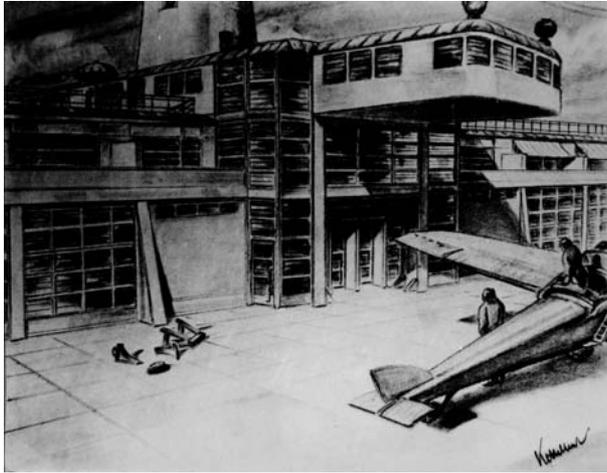


Image 01 – F.P.1 antwortet nicht (F.P.1)

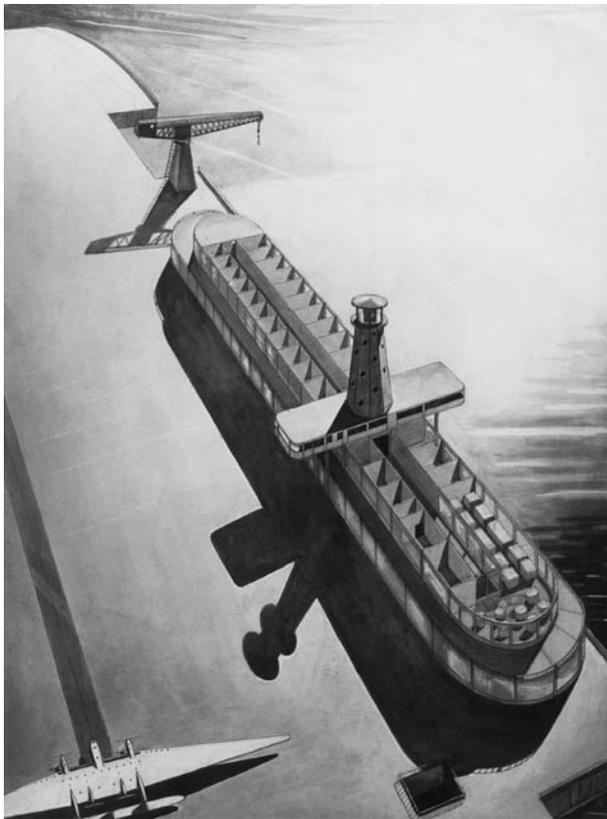


Image 02 – F.P.1 antwortet nicht (F.P.1)

inclusion of a Marcel Breuer chair, which in the course of the narrative is thrown out of a window.<sup>11</sup> Similarly in *DER TUNNEL*, which unlike its British remake is set in the present, Karl Vollbrecht's designs emphasise an almost documentary realism. With the exception of a few brief scenes, especially at the beginning of the film set in New York, the film's spatial imagination is solidly rooted in a familiar world, which markedly contrasts with the far more creative, and far more explicitly modernist décor that Metzner designed for the British remake, which also displayed a far more optimistic attitude towards technological progress. *GOLD*'s design, meanwhile, has been identified by Hake as 'largely decorative and without any narrative function'.<sup>12</sup> *GOLD*, in any case, marked not only an end to the spectacular conception of the future in Nazi cinema, it also precipitated a rejection of science fiction models as they were devised elsewhere. William Cameron Menzies' British H.G. Wells adaptation *THINGS TO COME* (1936), for example, was refused a release in Nazi Germany, owing to its 'pacifist tendencies'.<sup>13</sup>

Historical and futuristic representations apart, far more common in German cinema in the late 1920s and early 1930s were contemporary settings. Crucial in this respect is the emergence in the early 1920s of what has been referred to as the genre of the 'street film'. Regarded as a reaction against the perceived dominance of both 'expressionism' and epic monumentalism, the genre also has been perceived as providing a departure from so-called *Kammerspielfilme* (chamber films) such as Leopold Jessner's *HINTERTREPPE* (*BACKSTAIRS*, 1922) and Arthur Robison's *SCHATTEN* (*SHADOWS*, 1923) with their emphasis on psychological drama and enclosed spaces. The street film, in contrast, was seen as representing a new form of social realism and pragmatism in German cinema associated with the wider artistic and intellectual movement of 'New Sobriety' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). At closer inspection the supposed genre in fact encompasses an aesthetically as well as politically quite disparate group of productions, from the symbolist allegory of Karl Grune's *DIE STRASSE* (*THE STREET*, 1923), via F. W. Murnau's urban parable *DER LETZTE MANN* (*THE LAST LAUGH*, 1924), to the social melodrama of Pabst's *DIE FREUDLOSE GASSE* (*JOYLESS STREET*, 1924) and Bruno Rahn's *DIRNENTRAGÖDIE* (*TRAGEDY OF THE STREET*, 1927), to the proto-neorealism of films such as Gerhard Lamprecht's *DIE VERRUFENEN* (*SLUMS OF BERLIN*, 1925) and Phil Jutzi's *MUTTER KRAUSENS FAHRT INS GLÜCK* (*MOTHER KRAUSE'S JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS*, 1928), and associative documentaries or semi-documentaries such as *BERLIN – SYMPHONIE EINER GROSSSTADT* or *MENSCHEN AM SONNTAG*.<sup>14</sup> The latter two in particular, were part of a wider, pan-European trend of cinematic 'city poems', that included films such as René Clair's *PARIS QUI DORT* (1925), Albert Cavalcanti's *RIEN QUE LES HEURES* (1926), and Dziga Vertov's *THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA* (1929).<sup>15</sup>

The common denominator across all these films was a preoccupation with contemporary city life, and more generally with the material conditions and psychosocial effects of modernity, especially the speed, acceleration, and increasing anonymity of urban living. However, these concerns were equally articulated in narratives that were centred more on domestic and interior spaces. S.S. Praver has pointed out that the distinctions between the street film and the *Kammerspielfilm* were fluid insofar as the defining paradigm of the former genre was already articulated around the contrast between 'Wohnstube and Strasse, living room and street'.<sup>16</sup>

The following sections will explore these spatial divisions with respect to specific case studies. In the first instance, the 'street film' ASPHALT will be compared with Hans Steinhoff's quasi-*Kammerfilm* ANGST. This analysis will reveal affinities as well as differences between the two genres, which can be located particularly in both films' emphasis on décor.

### **The Composite City: Narrative and Set Design in ASPHALT**

In the past few years, ASPHALT has gained a considerable currency in debates on Weimar cinema, aided by its rediscovery and restoration in the mid-1990s, and a subsequent DVD edition that made the film once again accessible to a wider public, but perhaps also by the debatable claim of it being a precursor to the American film noir, both in its aesthetics and in its narrative.<sup>17</sup> Among scholars working on the period, the film's status as a 'peak of Weimar cinema',<sup>18</sup> at least in terms of visual accomplishments, has hardly ever been in doubt. For both Kracauer and Eisner the film marked an important achievement, and yet both remained ambivalent about its ultimate value. Kracauer, who had approvingly reviewed ASPHALT when it first came out,<sup>19</sup> revisited the film in *From Caligari to Hitler* by praising its 'warmth' and 'pictorial sensitivity', although – as already in his original review – he remained dubious about the film's escapist qualities and pulp fiction narrative.<sup>20</sup> Eisner too was able to acknowledge the film's visual virtuosity while dismissing its 'conventional love story' and 'insipid plot'.<sup>21</sup> This perception of a visually striking but intellectually empty and formulaic film has persisted among subsequent assessments.<sup>22</sup>

What makes ASPHALT such a useful case study in the context of our focus on design is precisely that it represents the quintessential German studio film of its time, a product of a collective system rather than an individually 'authored' vision. Alongside two melodramas directed by Hanns Schwarz, UNGARISCHE RHAPSODIE (HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY, 1928) and DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA (THE WONDERFUL LIE OF NINA PETROVNA, 1928), and another Joe May film, HEIMKEHR (HOMECOMING, 1928), ASPHALT was part of the production portfolio of Erich Pommer's newly created unit at Ufa, following his

recent intermezzo at Paramount in Hollywood.<sup>23</sup> All of these, among the last silent features to be released before the changeover to sound, were conceived as *Grossfilme* in Ufa parlance, prestige films with a considerable budget, starring established or newly discovered actors (the American Betty Amann in the case of *ASPHALT*, who Pommer had brought back with him from the United States), and an emphasis on production values, primarily on set design. *ASPHALT*'s production team comprised Ufa's elite – art director Erich Kettelhut and cinematographer Günther Rittau's previous assignments included *METROPOLIS*.

During his earlier years at Decla-Bioscop and Ufa, Pommer had promoted a nationally defined 'art cinema', firmly believing that only a nationally characteristic cinema, created by individual *auteurs*, could compete in the international marketplace. This had resulted in classics such as Wiene's *CALIGARI*, Lang's *NIBELUNGEN*, or Murnau's *FAUST*. Upon his return from Hollywood, Pommer's new strategy (obviously informed by his experience of production practices in the United States) was to create a popular, high quality, and international entertainment cinema that told universal narratives with a focus on technical brilliance and craftsmanship.<sup>24</sup> The genial personalities of directors such as Lang and Murnau were replaced by studio professionals such as May and Schwarz, who managed to adapt to a variety of different genres and who had established reputations of guiding blockbusters. May in particular was an industry veteran, having directed his first film in 1911, while fellow Viennese Schwarz had debuted in the German film industry in 1923. Pommer's concept paid off – until the Nazis forced him into exile in 1933, his productions consistently proved box-office hits, while the Ufa board of directors congratulated itself for making the best films in Europe.<sup>25</sup> In 1929, the year *ASPHALT* was released, the British trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* considered Pommer 'probably the most noteworthy of all producers the world over'.<sup>26</sup>

*ASPHALT* epitomises Pommer's production strategy. Although the film dazzles the spectator with its spectacular design, kaleidoscopic montage, double exposures, and creative lighting effects, and although it liberally quotes avant-garde examples of the street film genre (Ruttman's Berlin documentary is an obvious influence), the film works primarily on the level of melodrama, and represents a prime example of the narrative economy of popular genre cinema. The story on the whole adheres to the principle of unity of time and space – it unfolds over two consecutive days and the intervening night, a common strategy of compressing time in classical Hollywood, while spatially it focuses on a restricted number of locations. Each day is framed by the domesticity of the working-class household of the Holks, consisting of the paterfamilias (Albert Steinrück), a retired policeman, his wife (Else Heller), and their son, a young police constable (Gustav Fröhlich). The domesticity of their tenement flat is both underlined and ironically counteracted by a recurring close-up of a bird in

a cage – this image, which can evoke both homeliness and entrapment, introduces the scenes in the Holk flat on both days.

On the first day, the narrative is initiated by Mother Holk looking up from her newspaper and musing about all the events that occur during one day in the world, anticipating the melodramatic turn of events into which her son will be thrown. We then follow Holk Jr. to his workplace, the city street, where he directs the traffic at a busy junction. This scenery, as we will see in more detail below, constitutes the film's showcase set, and was created entirely in the studio. After the camera has homed in on two pickpockets who target a crowd watching a model in a shop window, we witness a separate incident where elegantly dressed Else (Betty Amann) creates a diversion in a jeweller's shop in order to steal diamonds. Caught in the act, she is arrested by Holk. Her desperate pleading persuades him to make a detour to her apartment before they continue to the police station. In the flat, Else pretends to be in turns impoverished and ill, and when these attempts at gaining Holk's sympathy fail, she seduces him, resulting in him letting her off the hook. While Holk returns home where his mother has been keeping his supper warm, Else goes out to a nightclub and we learn about her underworld connections, especially her absent gangster boyfriend (Hans Adalbert Schlettow), who is staging a clandestine bank robbery in Paris. The camera at intervals returns to a sleeping Holk, which not only emphasises his ignorance of Else's true nature, but also adds a somewhat dream-like dimension to the simultaneous nocturnal activities in Berlin and Paris, as they could almost be read as Holk's fantasy of escaping his bourgeois constraints, or as a nightmare symbolising his descent into anarchy.

The second day – a Sunday – begins with the older Holks preparing to go to church, while their son has a lie-in. A courier delivers the policeman's identity card, which he had left in Else's flat, alongside a box of cigars as a present. Offended by what he sees as a retrospective bribe, Holk confronts Else in her apartment, but once again succumbs to her charms. As the enamoured constable eventually proposes to a bemused Else, they are surprised by Else's friend who has returned from Paris, and in an ensuing fight Holk accidentally kills his rival (or *doppelgänger* if we pursue the earlier suggestion of reading part of the narrative as Holk's fantasy). Fleeing the scene of the crime and returning home, the policeman confesses his actions to his parents, whereupon his father puts on his old uniform and dutifully arrests his own son. Kracauer perceptively read ASPHALT as essentially an Oedipal parable, 'Crown Prince Frederick rebelling against, and finally submitting to, his father'.<sup>27</sup> At the police station, a chastened Else attests to Holk's acting in self-defence, and is arrested herself. Holk promises Else to wait for her. She walks down the prison corridor as Holk and his parents return home.

As is typical of classical storytelling, ASPHALT employs variations and repetitions that create symmetries along its narrative spine. These include the various comings and goings at Else's apartment and at the Holks' lodgings, played out in classic intermediate or liminal spaces such as corridors, doors, and staircases; the analogies between the successive incidents of crime (when Else is arrested, the two pickpockets we were introduced to earlier dismiss her as an amateur); the previously alluded to affinities between Holk and Else's gangster boyfriend, and finally the fluctuating power relations between Else and the infatuated policeman, which are accentuated by the latter's appearance, especially depending on whether he is in or out of uniform. As S.S. Prawer has observed,

[t]he use of uniforms and identity papers to drive home the theme of officialdom and its prescribed duties undermined by human passion, strikes at German (especially Prussian) traditions whose confirmations and underminings pervade many other films of the period, from those extolling Frederick the Great to very different treatments of the role and status conferred by uniforms in *THE CAPTAIN OF KÖPENICK* and *THE LAST LAUGH*.<sup>28</sup>

Like many melodramas, ASPHALT employs a pared down list of archetypal characters (father-mother-son-*femme fatale*-villain), and a set of fairly conservative moral parameters and hierarchies (the law before family, family before desire, crime followed by punishment, redemption through love and self-sacrifice). Most importantly, and it is here that the significance of the set design becomes apparent, the film organises these sets of oppositions alongside or rather through spatial differences and juxtapositions – close-ups of faces alternate with crowd scenes; interior space contrasts with the street; the domestic sphere of the Holk flat serves as a counterpoint to Else's apartment; from Berlin we move to Paris where the robbery takes place.

While ASPHALT, and most other films produced according to Pommer's international strategy, resemble Hollywood films in their basic narrative principles, what distinguishes them from their American cousins is their self-conscious and often almost gratuitous focus on ornamentation, both in a literal sense through the use of décor, and through stylisations in terms of editing and cinematographic effects. A prime example of such excess is ASPHALT's widely acknowledged opening sequence, modelled on influences from films by Ruttmann and Vertov. The image of faceless workers laying out the eponymous material segues first CALIGARI-like into a series of shimmering letters forming the title of the film, and then into a kaleidoscopic montage of street impressions, billboards, trams and buses, and facades of department stores. Although functioning on one level as what classical Hollywood might term establishing shots, there is a frenetic sense of visual exuberance about this opening that far exceeds any narrative function, and indeed this sequence has a completely different

rhythm and tone to that of the rest of the film. The closest Hollywood would subsequently come to such a scene is in Slavko Vorkapich's celebrated montage sequences in films such as *THE SHOPWORN ANGEL* (1938) and *MEET JOHN DOE* (1941).

Other differences between *ASPHALT* and classical Hollywood include extended takes (particularly of close-ups and shots of sets, which are held for what feels like a very long time), and the occasional narrative digression – a prime example constitutes the lengthy exposition and execution of the bank robbery in Paris. In terms of the main story this episode has hardly anything to contribute and in itself has no consequences in the plot, but it allows for some atmospheric *chiaroscuro* compositions of the gangsters burrowing a subterranean tunnel into the bank vaults. For Hermann Kappelhoff, these ruptures in the film's narrative continuity mark the director's origins in and indebtedness to earlier filmmaking paradigms as practiced during the 1910s.<sup>29</sup>

In chapter 2 we discussed two extant sketches the designers Erich Kettelhut and Robert Herlth created for *ASPHALT*, and the different conceptions of modernity and urban life these visions entailed. To a certain extent, both of these visions are present in the final film. In his memoirs, Kettelhut recalled that although Herlth and Röhrig had left the production owing to their disagreements with May, their conception of especially the interior designs was adopted with only minor modifications by him when he took over.<sup>30</sup> Kettelhut particularly remembered Herlth and Röhrig's ideas for Else's apartment – 'a very elegant room with right proportions' with two of the four walls being moveable.<sup>31</sup> Although the social distinctions between the two main interior spaces (the Holks' flat and Else's apartment) are clearly perceptible, it is not necessarily through props and accessories that such associations are invoked. What is striking about Else's apartment is that despite it giving an impression of luxury, it is very sparsely furnished, and moreover appears to lack all the accoutrements of 1920s commodity design one would expect a character like Else to have or desire, and which the film so blatantly alludes to and advertises in its exterior sets. The used furniture is both elegant and functional, but does not add up to a coherent style. Instead, and here Herlth and Röhrig's dynamic conception of design, and their tendency towards abstraction comes to the fore, the differences between the two flats are articulated primarily through depth and height, and through lighting. This approach can usefully be compared with Meerson's designs nearly a decade later for the palace in *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* (1937, discussed in chapter 5), in which interior space similarly becomes a dynamic element, within which a sparse, but significant set is displayed.

In *ASPHALT*, the apartment's spaciousness and light indicates its property value, while its more labyrinthine dimensions – an array of successive rooms connected through doors, a set of screens, duvets, and gauze curtains that alter-

nately hide and reveal aspects of the overall space, disorient Holk on his first visit, accentuate Else's duplicity, and give her a spatial advantage in the game of hide-and-seek and seduction that ensues between the two characters. The centrality of the bedroom within the overall layout of the apartment – it seems like the inner core of the place – emphasises the importance of sexuality to Else both in emotional and economic terms. The film implies that in addition to being a thief Else is, if not a prostitute, then certainly a 'kept woman' – which by the time of ASPHALT audiences would have immediately recognised as a generic cliché associated with the street film. Noteworthy too are the strategically placed mirrors in the apartment, which play a significant part in the scene of the accidental killing – in fact the gangster's death occurs merely as a reflection. The mirrors also aid in drawing attention to Else's vanity. Janet Ward sees the apartment as crucial to the female protagonist's characterisation in the film. For her, the film's heroine is

the embodiment of conspicuous consumption: it is in her that the consequence of urban commodity excess is allegorized in the film as the ultimate act of surface-cloning. Else is a jewellery thief, the epitome of all male fears concerning the New Woman, who wears her wares on the outside, for she is nothing but surface (in the Nietzschean sense of antiessence and the realm of appearances being the greater truth for modernity)... Else is shown at key points in the film ruthlessly and destructively reflecting her own 'surfaceness' to herself in the mirror.<sup>32</sup>

Ward's suggestion that Else's apartment works as an extension of her 'antiessence' is borne out by the sets – in their use of voids and maze-like structures, the sets belong, like Else herself, to the realm of pure appearance. This is further underlined by the very different conception of other interior spaces in the film. The jeweller's shop, for example, employs a fair degree of ornamentation, with a decorative door and a somewhat cluttered arrangement of wood-pannelled display cabinets and sales counters imparting a sense of bourgeois and somewhat old-fashioned solidity. The Holks' flat, on the other hand, invokes a different sense of social realism. Only ever visible as a series of fragmented units, it includes a darkened corridor, the kitchen, a small living/dining area, Holk Jr.'s bedroom, and significantly, the external staircase, often captured in *chiaroscuro*. Although the film ostensibly champions family life, the depiction of this domestic sphere is surprisingly unhomey and gloomy, which is only emphasised further by the previously mentioned birdcage image. Wolfgang Jacobsen has suggested that in such characterisations the film reveals its subversive potential. He suggests that by the end of ASPHALT

the law is undermined... the seduction of the metropolis and chaotic emotions triumph. The boudoir is more attractive than the flat facing the back courtyard. The

happy-end with its female atonement and the confirmation by the police that law and order are intact, remains [merely] a promise.<sup>33</sup>

The film's interiors are designed on one hand as pure action spaces, facilitating the narrative to unfold without major distraction. They can, as we have seen in the conception of Else's apartment and the jeweller's shop, aid in externalising and accentuating immanent social and psychological qualities pertaining to either the characters or the story. At the same time, as we have seen in the case of the Holks' flat, they may counteract or render ambiguous the film's proclaimed or implied moral message. In all these respects, then, the design of the interiors in *ASPHALT* may not adopt the same stylistic vernacular as contemporary Hollywood films and it may also be open to a greater degree to ambivalences in meaning, but, in the spirit of Pommer's idea of an international narrative cinema, it ultimately fulfils a similar function. Indeed, when the film had its trade show in Britain in the summer of 1929 (three months after its German premiere) under the title *TEMPTATION*, the press response was unanimously positive, with critics specifically citing 'the artistically devised settings in the girl's apartment' in contrast to 'the prosaic atmosphere which prevails in the young policeman's home'.<sup>34</sup>

If the interior spaces of *ASPHALT* are characterised by abstraction and minimalism, then this contrasts with the film's far more spectacular exterior sets, which were largely conceived of and realised by Kettelhut. As mentioned previously, the majority of the street scenes were shot indoors at the giant studio complex and former Zeppelin hangar at Staaken (see chapter 2), while the interiors were built at Neubabelsberg. To add to the composite nature of *ASPHALT*'s fictional space, the film also includes stock panoramas of real and recognisable Berlin locations in the opening montage, as well as a few aerial shots of the city centre (the area around Unter den Linden boulevard towards the Spree islands), which feature later on in the film as a reaction shot to the gangster's look out of the airplane window on his return trip from Paris. The latter city, in contrast, is an entirely artificial studio creation, and not represented by famous or recognisable landmarks, but by the lobby and exterior façade of the Hotel d'Opéra, and the vaults of the Banque Industrielle de Crédit. Devoid of any specific spatial aura, Paris remains, at least in this film, a transitory and anonymous space.

Although relatively brief, the documentary inserts of Berlin are important not only in authenticating the depicted city, and in providing markers of geographical location. As Michael Esser suggests, the aerial shots in *ASPHALT* function like 'street maps', yet 'they confirm that the city is ultimately unfathomable'.<sup>35</sup> The 'real' images also allow the set design in the artificially created exteriors to concentrate on more focussed and fragmented, but also more evocative, urban impressions.

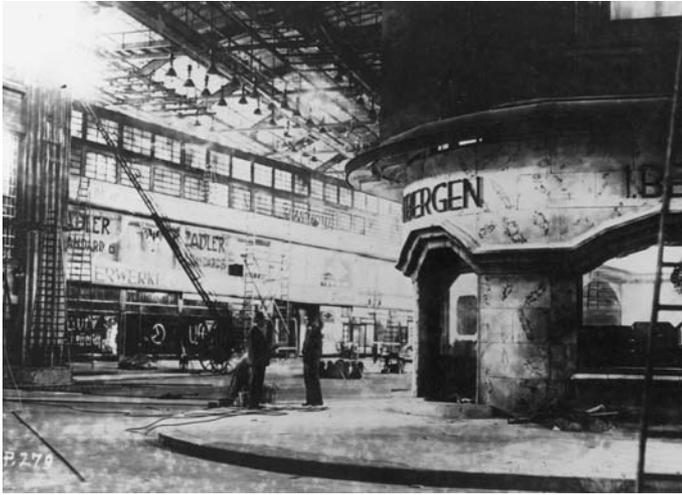


Image 03 – *Asphalt*

The interior hall at Staaken, its space extended by having six major entrance gates permanently opened, provided Kettelhut with the opportunity to create a fully operational street (lined with a thin layer of actual asphalt) of a width of 15 metres and a length of 230 metres, of which 50 metres consisted of shop (image 03). The enormity of the construction, which was widely commented upon in the press at the time, engaged an extensive team of electricians and other craftsmen and stretched the studios' capacity to its limits: 'the consumption of electricity on the asphalted street – its "sky" of two thousand lamps amounting to the daily use of a medium-sized city – brought, when in operation, the rest of the film studios and almost the entire area to a complete standstill'.<sup>36</sup>

Visually, the end result resembled the sketch we discussed in chapter 2 very closely, also including Mendelsohn's Universum cinema as a backdrop, which (a nice cinematic in-joke) is showing the film *ASPHALT*. The set reached seven metres in height, although, as Kettelhut confirmed, the upper sections were far less detailed in their construction than the lower parts.<sup>37</sup> A particular ingenious idea that added to what Anton Kaes has referred to as the 'controlled realism' of the set<sup>38</sup> was that Kettelhut, with the help of Ufa's press department, had invited local businesses and shops to provide advertising signs, neon lights, and related products for the display windows and shop façades that lined the artificial street, surely one of the earliest instances of sponsored product placement in film history.

In a trade paper article published at the time of the film's release, Kettelhut stated that his overall intention was

to build the street in the way the pedestrian eye sees it: sometimes faster, then slowly again, wandering past moving and immobile things, stopping here and there, looking ahead and sideways, lifting upwards or sweeping into the distance. The powerfully animated optical effect led me to depart from designing the set in the often customary way as a complete picture from my fixed point of view. Rather it had to be my aim to provide interesting details and views everywhere for the panning lens.<sup>39</sup>

Kettelhut's comments here indicate how closely the depiction and impression of the set was coordinated with the cinematographer Günther Rittau, and how the sets were designed for specific camera positions and considerations for editing. Michael Esser has suggested that the external space in *ASPHALT* 'appears coherent, because it does not have a vanishing point, while the assemblage of shops, display windows and leisure spaces are connected via the mobility of the camera'.<sup>40</sup> In order to allow for the greatest flexibility and the kind of fluidity as indicated by Kettelhut here, a number of technological inventions and innovations were required, including the construction of a crane that allowed horizontal and vertical tracking, and the alternation between a bird's eye perspective of the street's hustle and bustle and an eye-level immersion into the pulsating masses.<sup>41</sup> Of course fairly common from the 1930s onwards, the use of a crane in *ASPHALT* preceded the standard employment of this technology by some years.

Beyond the technological challenges the construction of the street at Staaken posed, what becomes clear from Kettelhut's comments above is that he envisages a process of cinematic perception very much along the lines of Giuliana Bruno's haptic mode of spectatorship, which we discussed in chapter 1. His statements equally echo Benjamin's notion of *flânerie* in a modern context. Kettelhut describes a dynamic perception and the sudden effect of sensational stimuli while experiencing the city/the set. Instead of prescribing a distanced position for the spectator, Kettelhut's conception of the function of his set is to draw the audience into the narrative space, encouraging it to abandon control over how to respond to the provided stimuli. In this respect, the perception of the set in *ASPHALT* and the overall ideology the film wishes to impart regarding modernity and modern urban life can become congruent, as Anton Kaes argues,

The street appears as the existential site of modernity, in which the individual is both the object of, and unwitting participant in, a series of incomprehensible and uncontrollable processes. The dynamization of the setting in the street film is only a symptom of how the urban landscape has radically reshaped the relationship of the subject to his or her surroundings.<sup>42</sup>

## ANGST: Lifestyle Design and Suburban Melodrama

Made and released a year prior to *ASPHALT*, Hans Steinhoff's *ANGST* serves to illustrate the range and diversity of production practices in the German film industry of the late 1920s and early 1930s. A recent restoration of Steinhoff's film by the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin under the coordination of Horst Claus from the University of the West of England has brought the film into the limelight again, after having languished in near-complete obscurity since its first release. None of the standard histories of German silent cinema, including Kracauer and Eisner, mention it, which is not to say that this neglect is entirely undeserved – a modern audience will in all likelihood find the film a fairly ropey yarn, presented in a rather tedious fashion. Nevertheless, as a historical document, *ANGST* is not without interest, and in terms of set design, it is a revelation. A comparison between Steinhoff's film and *ASPHALT* highlights interesting differences in approach towards space, especially concerning the conception of interiors, and their relation to character, narrative, and social milieu. In addition, the two films contrast in their take on internationalism, both in terms of production practice and in terms of tailoring filmic content towards border-crossing appeal. In terms of the latter point it is also noteworthy that although both films can be described as melodramas, their generic strategies diverge significantly.

*ASPHALT* was, as we have seen, a *Grossfilm*, a prestige production emanating from Germany's biggest and technologically most advanced studio. *ANGST*, on the other hand, was an ambitious, but nonetheless typical *Mittelfilm*, an industry category for average, 'bread-and-butter' productions, which Horst Claus has described as follows:

The term, covering all genres and in common use in the industry until World War II, derives from their limited, 'middle' budgets. Neither cheap nor extravagant, they formed the staple diet for mass audiences in the cinema of the 20s and 30s. The majority originated not from a large studio, but from small and medium-size companies. Deliberately made for provincial cinemas with a keen eye for profit, they often received their premieres outside Berlin.<sup>43</sup>

It was precisely due to its budgetary limitations and deadline pressures that the *Mittelfilm* could provide an effective training opportunity for many emerging production artists – Alfred Junge, for example, who would assume an influential role in the British film industry from the 1930s onwards, and whose work we will analyse in detail in chapter 5, worked on many *Mittelfilme* during the 1920s. However, although comprising the majority of films produced in Germany at the time, and including a number of examples which were extremely popular with domestic audiences – the military comedy *DREI TAGE MITTELARR-*

EST (THREE DAYS DETENTION, 1930) is a case in point<sup>44</sup> – few *Mittelfilme* are still in circulation, and they have been more or less completely ignored by the standard histories. Directors, producers, and actors associated with this mode of production are unknown, unless they eventually made a transition into more prestigious fare.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of *ANGST*, the small or medium-size businesses responsible were the production company Orplid, which since the early 1920s had churned out detective thrillers, white slavery melodramas, and westerns (helmed by largely forgotten directors such as Wolfgang Neff or Fred Sauer), among other genres, and the distributor Messtro. The latter firm was run by Oskar Messter, who had once been a pioneer of German filmmaking, but by the late 1920s had lost much of his former influence in the industry. Just prior to the making of Steinhoff's film, Messtro/Orplid had formed a cooperation arrangement with the London-based British & Foreign Films Ltd.<sup>46</sup> *ANGST* thus developed as an Anglo-German co-production, although artistically, the only discernible British personnel involved were the film's male lead Henry Edwards, an influential and recognisable figure in British cinema at the time,<sup>47</sup> and the supporting actress Vivian Gibson. While the film could thus be marketed in Britain around Edwards' persona, in Germany it was the film's second male lead (Gustav Fröhlich, fresh from appearing in *METROPOLIS*, and prior to *ASPHALT*) whose name attracted particularly female audiences. The rest of the production team and cast consisted entirely of personnel established in the German film industry, and more specifically in the area of the *Mittelfilm*. This includes the cinematographer Karl Puth and the designer Franz Schroedter. The latter, one of the few set designers in the German film industry who had trained and took commissions as a conventional architect, had worked for Orplid since the early 1920s, and had repeatedly collaborated with the star-director team of Henny Porten and Carl Froelich. Surviving plans, drawings, and exquisite charcoal sketches reveal Schroedter as a meticulously organised craftsman, who possessed a much greater affinity towards and understanding of commercial design and architecture than colleagues such as Herlth and Röhrig who drew their inspiration largely from classical pictorial traditions.

The subject of *ANGST* initially seems an unusual choice for a *Mittelfilm*. The film was based on a well-known novella by Austrian star author Stefan Zweig that dealt with the ennui and psychological turmoil of a bored housewife who commits adultery and is subsequently blackmailed by a mysterious woman who eventually is revealed as having been hired by her own husband.<sup>48</sup> However, Orplid/Messtro were less interested in the actual content of Zweig's original, and more in the reflected glory of a literary bestseller. As Horst Claus has demonstrated by comparing the two texts in detail, the final screenplay differs from its source quite substantially.<sup>49</sup> Indeed the film's alternative release title,

DIE SCHWACHE STUNDE EINER FRAU (A WOMAN'S WEAK MOMENT), seems to be a more apt description of its content since it is remarkably devoid of the existential anxieties the term 'Angst' might suggest.

There is no doubt that as a film *ANGST* lacks the stylistic unity and narrative continuity of *ASPHALT*. This is partly due to the fact that unlike with the latter's controlled studio realism, Steinhoff's film includes a significant element of outdoor shooting, which creates stylistic contrasts and ruptures, e.g. in terms of lighting and image texture. The interiors were filmed at the Grunewald-Atelier studio, located in the eponymous leafy, upper-class Berlin suburb famous for its elegant villas. The studio regularly advertised the proximity of its wealthy neighbourhood for external filming needs,<sup>50</sup> and *ANGST* made use of this environment in scenes where the main characters arrive at and leave their home. The film also includes scenes shot on location at Bahnhof Zoo train station, and most significantly, the film's central section is set in Cannes and its surroundings, making extensive use of the attractive, sun-drenched French coastline.

Another reason why *ANGST* feels less of a piece than *ASPHALT* is that its narrative is rather meandering. In an interview with the British trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly* Steinhoff described his 'method' as favouring 'action' and avoiding 'lengthy shots';<sup>51</sup> yet these aspirations notwithstanding, the pacing of the film is still quite slow. As we discussed previously, in Joe May's film the story was tightly compacted into two consecutive days, whereas in Steinhoff's film temporal sign-postings are more vague, and the plot extends over weeks if not months. *ANGST* tells the story of Inge (Elga Brink), wife of successful lawyer Erich Duhan (Edwards). Always busy at work in order to provide for his wife and daughter's needs, Duhan is rarely at home, while Inge feels neglected. After having promised her a second honeymoon in the South of France, work pressures force Duhan to send his wife alone to Cannes. There she attracts the attention of the young painter Francard (Fröhlich), although initially she rejects his advances. While swimming in the sea, Inge nearly drowns but is rescued by Francard, and from then on accepts his invitations to excursions. During a hiking trip in the mountains, the two are surprised by a thunderstorm, and find shelter in a hut, where Inge faints, prompting Francard to kiss her against her will. Meanwhile, Erich's work colleague, who has met Inge in Cannes, returns to Berlin and warns him that his wife has found an admirer. Innocent but guilt-ridden, Inge comes back from Cannes, and arouses suspicions. She visits Francard to tell him that she loves only her husband, but is cornered by a woman (Gibson) outside the painter's flat who demands money to keep quiet about Inge's supposed affair. It transpires that the woman is an actress hired by Erich to force his wife to admit her guilt. Inge feels increasingly desperate, and attempts to commit suicide. She is rescued, after which both husband and wife confess to each other and reconcile.

Watching the film today, it is easy to ridicule *ANGST*, in particular the incredibly forced *deus-ex-machina* plot twists (Inge's near-drowning, the fainting in the hut) designed to assure the audience that the heroine's honour remains untainted. This moral imperative appears so strong that, unusual for a melodrama, there are hardly any passions present among the main characters, the strongest emotion being a persistent sulking. As a result of remaining totally virtuous throughout, there is thus little motivation for the heroine to experience 'angst' until late on in the film – and the blackmail episode, central to Zweig's novella, comes more like an afterthought.

However, Horst Claus is quite right in stating that 'to slate *ANGST* for bowing to commercially motivated conventions instead of adhering to Zweig would be a mistake'<sup>52</sup> and that one should not ignore 'the film's production context and the audiences it wanted to address'.<sup>53</sup> Judging by its combination of middle-brow aspirations (the literary source) and more low-brow generic conventions it is easy to assume that the film's intended audience was in fact not too dissimilar from its main fictional protagonists – suburban, middle-class, and largely female. For these cinemagoers, as the contemporary box-office success of the film suggests, the film obviously held attractions beyond the somewhat perfunctory story, and we suggest that these attractions were delivered more by what the film *shows* and what its visual display means in terms of social and economic value, than by what the film *tells* in strictly narrative terms.

Franz Schroedter's approach towards interior design in *ANGST* is quite different from Herlth, Röhrig, and Kettelhut's ideas for *ASPHALT*. The latter film reduced clutter and detail in their interior spaces to a minimum, in line with what Kristin Thompson has described as the emerging principles of set design in classical filmmaking (mainly Hollywood) in the late 1910s:

The set needed to be visible, for it gave the viewer salient information about the characters. But once that information had been absorbed, there was no point in having the settings to be conspicuously visible throughout the scene. In closer shots especially, settings needed to be noticeable present, but not really noticed.<sup>54</sup>

Schroedter's designs, and the way they are captured by the camera, contravene several of these principles. First, there is a notable incongruity between the social status of some of the characters in *ANGST* and the environment in which they live. As Horst Claus has noted, particularly the interiors of the Duhan villa are 'slightly on the grand side considering Inge's thriftiness',<sup>55</sup> and this is an understatement. In other words, the set provides us with a somewhat contradictory kind of 'salient information'. Occasionally one might interpret the set as complementing information (when for example, the chairs in the Duhans' dining room loom obstructively between the couple, as if to indicate their estrange-

ment), yet such incidents are so random as to suggest that they may not have been intended to be read in this way.

A second deviation from the classical principles outlined by Thompson above is the way in which Schroedter's sets remain conspicuously visible throughout the scenes in which they appear. Thompson's description and assessment of the 1921 German film *DIE EHE DER FÜRSTIN DEMIDOFF* (*COUNTESS DEMIDOFF'S MARRIAGE*) could apply remarkably well to some of the scenes in *ANGST*:

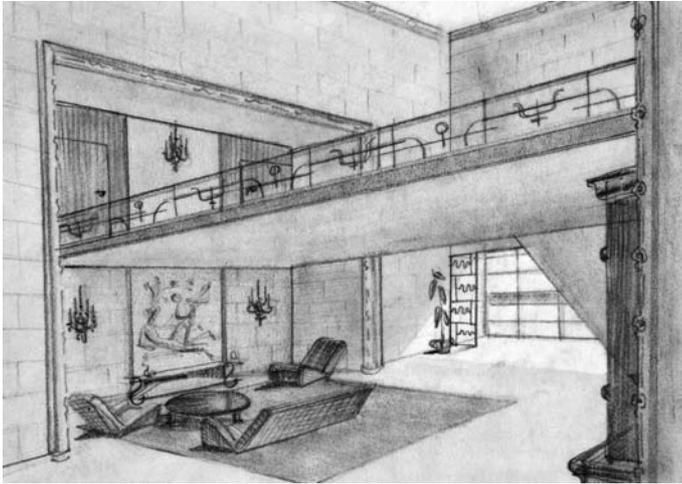
The busy wallpaper, the elaborate column, a rococo bed, the centrally placed painting, the combination of three rooms, and the prominent, striped sofa all combine to overwhelm the action.<sup>56</sup>

The impression of an overwhelming visibility of the set in *ANGST* is heightened by the tableau-like staging of the shots, another supposedly 'primitive' practice; the way in which sets provide framings within the frame; and by the general lack of dynamic editing (except for two brief montage sequences towards the end of the film, which illustrate Inge's nightmares). Puth's camerawork, on the whole, remains fairly flat – there are few expressive or sculptural lighting effects (except, again, in the brief nightmare sequences), although there is one clever sequence that once again serves to showcase the set, as Horst Claus points out:

No money was spared on the construction of a stairwell allowing the camera to capture Inge's first encounter with the blackmailer in uninterrupted vertical travelling shots past several stairs and landings.<sup>57</sup>

The question thus arises why Steinhoff and his team would persist in using techniques that even other domestic productions at the time (e.g. Pommer's films at Ufa) were abandoning. Explanations might include that in the absence of other points of appeal (for example lacking real star names), the filmmakers might have wanted to exploit the production values at their disposal to the utmost. However, we suggest that the aesthetics of display in *ANGST* also fulfilled another, more specifically modernist, function. To explore this idea further we will need to study the individual interior sets in more detail. Apart from a few secondary interior locations (cafés, hotel lobbies, offices, etc.), the three most significant interior spaces are the Duhan villa, the apartment belonging to Duhan's business partner Born and his wife, and the painter Francard's loft studio. All three spaces are conceived according to different aesthetic and stylistic principles.

The Duhan villa, as mentioned previously, already assumes a specific social connotation in the film simply by being located in the Grunewald. This district of Berlin had witnessed the emergence of many new houses since the end of World War I, especially villas built for middle and upper class clients. The re-

Image 04 – *Angst*

nowned architect and city planner Bruno Taut wrote in 1925 about the expectations regarding these new homes for the super-rich:

The wealthy house-buyer naturally wants his house to function well, however he usually does not want its appearance to mirror this function in the same way as is the case with his streamlined car. The home is supposed to rather resemble a painting in a gold frame.<sup>58</sup>

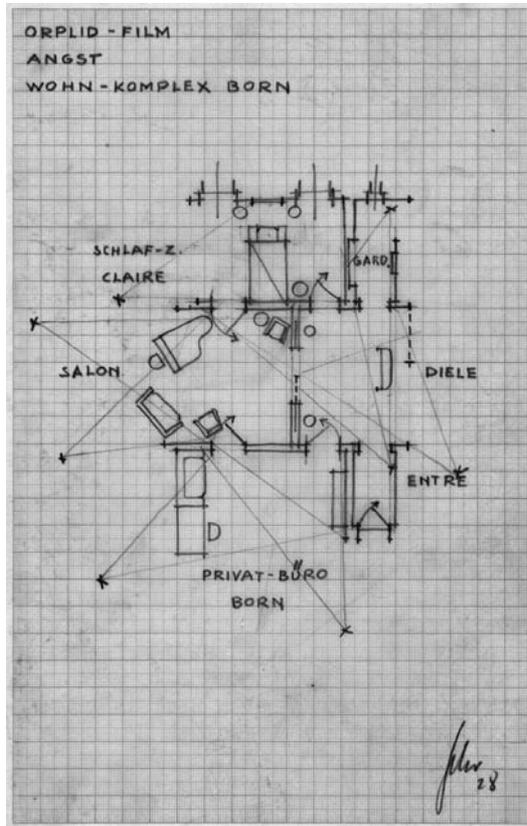
Unlike the minimalist and purely functionalist visions of the Bauhaus, but parallel to the developments of Art Deco in France (and later Britain), a new eclectic ornamentalism emerged in Germany in the 1920s, which extended across a range of areas of design and influenced decorative patterns from carpets and porcelain to the design of ocean liners and theatres.<sup>59</sup> Like Art Deco, the new German ornamentalism borrowed from and juxtaposed other styles, from modernist ideas to various historical and cultural expressions, although its 'look' was often quite different from the familiar features of Art Deco. However, like Art Deco (and also pre-empting postmodernism), the new ornamentalism in Germany helped to domesticate and commodify its influences and quotations into a timeless, cosmopolitan vernacular.

Apart from 'primitive' art (the legacy of German colonialism in Africa) and *chinoiseries*, 1920s design drew on motifs from rococo to expressionism via the legacies of the arts-and-crafts movement and the Wiener Werkstätte. One of the first showcase buildings of this new eclecticism, and the first to define what would be called a 'modern' or 'expressionist' rococo emerged in the Grunewald with Oskar Kaufmann's 'Villa Konschewski' (completed in 1923). As Catharina

Berents suggests, Kaufmann's villa fulfilled exactly the socially aspirational expectations that Taut described in 1925, presenting a historicist façade as a theatrical effect, behind which rooms were designed according to modern principles and contemporary living requirements.<sup>60</sup>

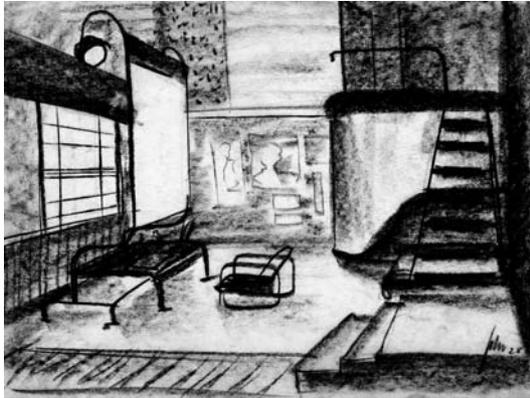
It is on the inside of the Duhan villa (of course as created in the studio) that Schroedter assembles a veritable compilation of modern ornamentation, either by integrating original objects or by creating designs according to recognisable contemporary tastes. Walls, doors, and floors are framed by and decorated with strong patterns. The metal banisters, already anticipated in one of Schroedter's sketches for the film (image 04), are another direct quote from Kaufmann, this time from a staircase the latter designed in 1925 for the Berlin Komödie theatre, while the butterfly wallpaper motifs in the daughter's bedroom references murals by contemporary artist Paul Hartmann.<sup>61</sup> Columns are adorned with stylised vine motifs; on the wall a large bas relief in the expressionist style depicting a couple directly quotes a similar work in Kaufmann's Villa Kronschwski; elsewhere fake 18th century miniature portraits dot the walls. A circular modern radio contrasts with an oversize imitation Ming vase out of which a bonsai tree grows. A porcelain table clock in the form of a Chinese pagoda is seen in close-up twice in the film. In Inge's bedroom a gigantic canopy descends from the ceiling that seemingly takes up half of the room, in another scene Inge is almost swallowed up by a triffid-like arrangement of hydrangeas 'creeping up' from behind her. A seemingly unmotivated overhead shot in the second half of the film appears to have no other function than to show off the starry inlays, consisting of different types of wood, on the parquet floors. Although the interior of the villa is laid out quite spaciouly, as partly open-plan with mezzanine-type landings, there is a curiously enveloping and cavernous quality, which the seeming lack of windows, particularly of the inner rooms, underscores. Depending on one's perspective, this quality can feel either claustrophobic, or might have been meant to intimate, as Horst Claus suggests, 'comfort and cosiness'.<sup>62</sup>

The second major interior space of the film is the apartment of Duhan's colleague Born, and his wife, Claire (Margit Manstad). As Claus has argued, within the narrative, the two constitute a comical counterpoint to the Duhans.<sup>63</sup> They are quintessential products of the jazz age, and also represent the kind of characters one encounters in 1930s screwball comedies in Hollywood, or in the British Jessie Matthews musicals we discuss in chapter 5. While Erich and Inge anguish over their relationship, the Borns lead an open marriage – he is regularly taking his female clients for romantic weekends to Paris and the Côte d'Azur; she is going out to nightclubs. It is only when Claire asks for a divorce that the two realise that they still love each other, although by the end of the film they fatalistically conclude that they had less trouble when they led their own

Image 05 – *Angst*

lives. The film never quite confirms whether the Borns live in a house or an apartment – in a floor plan sketch made for the film, Schroedter referred to the Born lodgings as a ‘*Wohn-Komplex*’ – a housing complex (image 05).

Unlike with the Duhan villa, we do not know where exactly the Borns reside, although it is likely they would prefer inner-city life to suburbia. Their complex is more compact than the Duhan villa, with a bedroom and an office, and a central lounge or ‘Salon’, which is primarily used for partying. The ornamentation at the Borns feels stylistically more unified, there is less clutter, even though the decorative patterns on the walls are if anything even more striking and busy – closely resembling the international vernacular of Art Deco, the patterns consist of sharp edges, zigzag and diamond motifs, and contrasts of black and white. The playful, *faux-naïf* wallpaper pattern closely resembles designs Georg Bresser of the Deutsche Werkstätten had exhibited at the 1925 Biennale at Monza.<sup>64</sup> Sliding doors, light-reflecting mirrors, and the use of chrome and glass (as

Image 06 – *Angst*

opposed to the predominantly wood, stone, and porcelain furnishings in the Duhan villa) create a shiny, fluid feel to the place, almost as if the Borns have incorporated their hectic nightlife into their living arrangements.

The third interior space in *ANGST*, and the one that has attracted most retrospective attention, is the painter's single-room loft studio. Within the social stratification of the film, Francard represents the bohemian artist, championing social progress, individualism, and artistic integrity. The implication is that Francard resides in the city centre, and that the area he lives in is less lugubrious than the surroundings of the Duhan and the Borns. Of the three main interiors, it is the most conventionally 'modern' in conception, and is indeed among only very few completely realised modernist interiors in German films of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Like the Duhan villa, the flat is conceived as partially open-plan, and has an elevated entrance, connected to the lounge by a metal staircase. Donald Albrecht suggests that in the conception of Francard's flat Schroedter

borrowed elements from Le Corbusier's 1922 studio house for the artist Amedée Ozenfant... Schroedter reworks Le Corbusier's structural grouping of forms,...but regrettably excludes the dramatic corner of Le Corbusier's scheme. Rectangular panels perforated with circles had been used similarly by Le Corbusier in a house he designed at Vaucresson in 1922.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike either of the other two spaces, Francard's flat is flooded by daylight, and is the only space to prominently feature a window. There is hardly any clutter or ornamentation, the walls are adorned by few abstract paintings, while the only other decorative object consists of a single vase on a table. Instead the room displays modernist furniture, most prominently Marcel Breuer's 1925 Wassily



Image 07 – *Napoleon is to blame*

lounge chair, making one of its earliest cinematic appearances here. Albrecht also points out ‘the most interesting element in ANGST’s design, and one that may in fact be an original contribution by Schroedter, ... the freestanding workstation, an asymmetrical tubular structure integrating two tables at different heights, a screen, and two lighting fixtures’.<sup>66</sup> This construction, alongside the Breuer chair, already features in a planning sketch by Schroedter (image 06).

It is apparent from these observations that Schroedter had an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of contemporary design trends, and an astute understanding of how they corresponded not necessarily to actual social status, but to social aspirations. In this respect, it does not matter that all of the characters (but particularly the Duhans) live far beyond their means. Instead, the three different spaces advertise distinctive lifestyles that not only the characters can aspire to, but the audience of the film as well.<sup>67</sup> As the stylistic differences between the Duhan villa and Francard’s studio indicate, 1920s taste was crucially defined according to gender as well as class distinctions. In this respect, ANGST can be seen to preempt what Sabine Hake has described as the gradual social instrumentalisation and commodification of modernism in Germany in the 1930s:

While modernist styles in architecture found a refuge in industrial architecture and product design, where the masculine ethos of labor and industry still ruled supreme, their filmic equivalents were banished to the feminine world of sensual and emotional excess. The resultant separation between public and private spaces, and between real and imaginary spaces, made possible the selective inclusion of what is sometimes referred to as moderate modernism (*gemäßigte Moderne*) in the nation’s new designs for living.<sup>68</sup>



Image 08 – *Napoleon is to blame*

Hake's comments here can be usefully illustrated and confirmed by plans and a still from a film that was made a decade after *ANGST*, the comedy *NAPOLEON IST AN ALLEM SCHULD* (*NAPOLEON IS TO BLAME*, 1938). The layout and furnishings of the heroine's bathroom, devised by Emil Hasler – a set designer whose previous assignments included Sternberg's *DER BLAUE ENGEL* and Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and *TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE* – perfectly matches the aesthetic of a modernism that has adapted itself fully to female domesticity (images 07 & 08).

Given the prominent display of design trends in *ANGST*, it is no surprise that most contemporary reviews recognised and acknowledged Schroedter's stylistic quotations. Ernst Jäger in *Film Kurier* wrote that Schroedter 'gives the artist his Bauhaus, while the lawyer's taste is provided for by the appropriate furnishings'.<sup>69</sup> The reviewer of the *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, meanwhile, suggested that Schroedter's interiors 'express the *zeitgeist* of the modern, urban individual'.<sup>70</sup> Significantly, in this assessment the reviewer made no distinctions between the ornamentalism of the Duhan villa and the cool functionalism of Francard's flat. All reviewers praised Schroedter's impeccable taste.

As we have seen, in many respects, *ANGST* fails or does not even aim to function as a coherent narrative, built like Hollywood around a chain of cause and effect and clearly demarcated character. In order to find out why and how contemporary audiences could have pleurably experienced the film according to

a different paradigm, it might be useful to compare the process of watching the film with reading an illustrated magazine that displays disparate visual attractions in loose succession, supported by perfunctory texts. In her pertinent study of the intertextual connections between Weimar cinema and women's magazines of the 1920s, Patrice Petro suggests with regard to the format of the photo-essay, a common journalistic format of the time:

The cinematic quality of the photoessay is perhaps most striking in the function of composition, camera angle, camera distance, and point of view in constructing the reading of the photoessay as narrative. Although in some photoessays the photographs were actually numbered in the order in which they were to be read, the majority of photoessays relied upon a degree of visual literacy or, perhaps more precisely, upon conventions already established by filmviewing.<sup>71</sup>

A film like *ANGST* suggests the reverse relation, whereby the structural organisation and reading position of the magazine inform cinematic narration and reception. Like the illustrated magazine, *ANGST* appears to be predicated on being perceived by a distracted gaze, selectively homing in on fragmented attractions. This is why, as a whole, *ANGST* fails as a classical melodrama since it does not draw the spectator into its story. Like a magazine, the film clusters its attractions episodically in thematic sections – house and furnishings, fashion, entertainment, travel – while the moralistic narrative itself fulfils the function of the serialised potboiler (indeed, Zweig's novella, had been serialised in the press prior to the film).

Again like the illustrated magazine, *ANGST* aims to sell a cosmopolitan, urban, and consumerist lifestyle, catering to social aspirations, desires, and dreams, through a discourse that Thomas Elsaesser has referred to as 'lifestyle propaganda'.<sup>72</sup> This discourse, of course, pervaded most European cultures (and cinemas) at the time, indeed its transnational dimension was one of its constituent elements. In this respect, the central section of the film in the South of France is instructive in its prioritising of tourist vistas of elegant hotels, picturesque fishing ports, isolated beaches, pine groves, mountain hikes, and sailing trips, setting out a virtual sightseeing programme and schedule for the aspiring tourist in the audience. In a similar way, viewers are given the opportunity to 'browse' Schroedter's interiors to 'tick off' desirable commodity objects, clothes, and furnishings, which in their incorporation of various influences allow the viewer/consumer to experience a virtual journey across time (from the 18th century to the present) and space (China, Africa, the South Pacific).

In conclusion, *ANGST*'s narrative and visual construction might appear somewhat anachronistic at first glance, as it does not conform fully to 'classical' conventions. However, as we have tried to argue here, this does not make the film,

and its conception of set design, any less modern. On the contrary, in its stylistic eclecticism, and its process of simultaneously distancing the viewer and appealing to their senses and their narrowly consumerist as well as wider social aspirations, the film seems very modern indeed. *ANGST* bears out Elsaesser's argument that 'in the domain of cinema, it is not always obvious that one can play off "modernism" (in the sense of an artistic avant-garde) against different forms of "modernisation" (in technology, industry and science) and "modernity" (in lifestyles, fashion, and sexual mores)'.<sup>73</sup>

### **Underworld UK: Andrei Andreiev and the Imaginary London in DIE BÜCHSE DER PANDORA and DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER**

Shortly after *ANGST*, the director/designer team of Schroedter and Steinhoff embarked on another Anglo-German co-production for the Orplid-Mestro/British & Foreign concern, *NACHTGESTALTEN/THE ALLEY CAT* (1929). This time, the cast was predominantly British, led by the popular star Mabel Poulton, and featuring the German character actor Kurt Gerron in a supporting role. As with the footage of the French Riviera in *ANGST*, the film featured location shooting, this time in London, which constituted the principal setting for the film, a fast-paced gangster thriller. As with *ANGST*, the rest of the fictional space was created by Schroedter in Berlin's Grunewald studio. However, whereas the Côte d'Azur had served as a shorthand for tourist pleasures and scenic landscapes, London became coded according to specific generic iconographies.

This specific iconography is established in the opening shot of *NACHTGESTALTEN*, which follows an image of flashing neon lights at Piccadilly with the intertitle 'London – city of work, city of wealth and poverty, of love and crime'. A few minutes later in the film, a young woman comes out of a West End revue theatre and declares excitedly that she wants to experience the nightlife in the East End, slumming it so to speak. This then paves the way for the audience to be presented with seedy dockland pubs, working-class terraced housing, and foggy streets. Although Schroedter constructed these spaces in Berlin, they conformed to an internationally circulating visual vocabulary for London – thus, the London in *NACHTGESTALTEN* looks almost identical to the one created simultaneously by Alfred Junge in British studios for E.A. Dupont's *PICCADILLY* (1929), and it is not miles away from Wilfried Arnold's sets for Alfred Hitchcock's *THE LODGER* (1927).

In German cinema, London had featured in a similar way for a long time. Already in the 1910s detective serials had established the spatial parameters, followed in the 1920s by films such as Dupont's *WHITECHAPEL* (1920), which was supposedly based on 'actual London police reports';<sup>74</sup> Friedrich Zelnik's *DAS MÄDEL VOM PICCADILLY* (*THE GIRL FROM PICCADILLY*, 1921); and Richard

Oswald's *Oliver Twist*-adaptation *DIE GEHEIMNISSE VON LONDON* (*THE SECRETS OF LONDON*, 1923). In Paul Leni's *DAS WACHSFIGURENKABINETT* (*WAXWORKS*, 1923), Werner Krauss portrayed Jack the Ripper. The sets on this film were designed by Leni, his assistant was Alfred Junge. As Tim Bergfelder has suggested elsewhere, these representations corresponded to the popularity of British crime fiction (in particular Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Wallace) in German culture more generally.<sup>75</sup>

G.W. Pabst's *DIE BÜCHSE DER PANDORA* (*PANDORA'S BOX*, 1928) and *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* (*THE THREEPENNY OPERA* 1931) are also part of this German sub-genre of London films. Of course, both films are acknowledged classics of late Weimar film, the former constituting one of the last great accomplishments of silent cinema, while the latter represents one of the earliest triumphs of sound film, and constitutes a prominent example for transnational European production strategies during this period. The films have been discussed most commonly around a number of interrelated themes. The first is the films' relation to their literary sources (Frank Wedekind's play in the case of *PANDORA*, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's stage adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in the case of *3-GROSCHENOPER*).<sup>76</sup> The second theme concerns the films' representation of sexuality – centred on the figure of Lulu and actress Louise Brooks in the first film, and on the character of Mackie Messer in the second.<sup>77</sup> Given the emphasis assigned in both films to set design, the issue of space has been addressed,<sup>78</sup> although it is notable that there seems to be the assumption that the representations of London in Pabst's films somehow stand in or work as a metaphor for either the German social context in general, or more specifically operate as a displacement for Berlin.

In the following pages we propose to read these representations literally, as imaginary and 'exotic' portraits of London, in line with the idea of extraterritoriality that has frequently been noted about Pabst's films.<sup>79</sup> As the films are well known we will refrain here from offering plot synopses as extensive as in the previous examples. *PANDORA* recounts the story of Lulu (Louise Brooks) whose child-like sexuality attracts a respected lawyer and his son that ends in the former's violent death. The heroine's own (self-)destructive trajectory ends in a foggy and dangerous East End, stalked by the figure of Jack the Ripper, who will eventually kill her. *PANDORA* seems to be set in the contemporary period (i.e. after World War I), although there are some temporal ambiguities as we will later outline. *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER*, based on and chronicling the exploits of the suave gangster Mack the Knife/Mackie Messer, is also set in a fictitious East End, ostensibly during the Victorian period.

Most studies of these two films have taken their cue from Pabst's *auteur* status. Instead we shall begin by placing the films first of all in their production context, before analysing the contributions by art director Andrei Andreiev,

and the artistic influences that shaped him. Our later analysis of Pabst's *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* will follow a similar approach. Like *ASPHALT*, the two films were prestige productions, commissioned by Nero-Film. While *PANDORA* was solely produced by Nero, *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* was a joint venture with Tobis and Warner Bros. Nero's head, Seymour Nebenzahl, was alongside Erich Pommer perhaps the most influential and celebrated industry figure of the late Weimar period, and although somewhat behind the market leader Ufa, Nero was nonetheless one of the most prolific companies of the time. Apart from producing nearly all of Pabst's films from the late 1920s and early 1930s, Nero's other releases included Fritz Lang's *M* and *DAS TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE* (*THE TESTAMENT OF DR. MABUSE*, 1933). Shortly after the Nazis' takeover, Nebenzahl fled to France, where he produced the French films of a number of his fellow émigrés, including Robert Siodmak, Anatole Litvak, Fedor Ozep, Max Nosseck, and Max Ophüls.<sup>80</sup> He later continued his career in Hollywood.

As Jeanpaul Goergen has demonstrated, in terms of Nero's overall output in the late 1920s, the production of *Mittelfilme* dominated the company's activities, while it invested at least once a season in prestige productions. It was with these latter films where Nebenzahl took risks with difficult and/or controversial topics, which other companies, for example Ufa, would never touch.<sup>81</sup> Both *PANDORA* and *3-GROSCHENOPER* were shot – like *ASPHALT* – at Staaken, with additional production activity at the EFA studio at Halensee.

From the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, Pabst collaborated with some of the best designers that were available at the time in the German film industry – Oscar Werndorff, Ernö Metzner, Otto Hunte, Emil Hasler, Karl Vollbrecht, and Franz Schroedter. This elite also included Andrei Andreiev, who designed *PANDORA* and *3-GROSCHENOPER*. Andreiev very much fits the description of the mobile artist that we have been referring to in earlier chapters. Born in St Petersburg in the late 1880s, Andreiev started his career in Russia as a painter, before becoming involved with Stanislavski's theatre in Moscow.<sup>82</sup>

Stanislavski's avowed emphasis of subordinating every other aspect of theatrical endeavour in favour of realising social and psychological verisimilitude had a profound effect on Andreiev's later work, finding its expression on the one hand in meticulous attention to naturalist detail and plasticity, and on the other hand in a tendency towards abstraction, towards condensing a design's meaning into its essentials as far as its illustrative function for the narrative is concerned. Materialism and minimalism became the two guiding principles of Andreiev's work, and this focus on the essential apparently also extended to his attitude towards the work he undertook. Edward Carrick cites the French writer Lucie Derain that Andreiev's talent did not suit 'subjects that are narrow or mediocre in conception'.<sup>83</sup>

Stranded in Prague in the early 1920s as a result of the civil war in post-revolutionary Russia, Andreiev arrived in Berlin in 1922, initially working as a designer for Russian exile stage productions, and making a name for himself with his elaborate recreations of folkloristic Russian art.<sup>84</sup> A far more modernist side to his repertoire was revealed in one of his earliest film designs in Germany, the cubist constructions for Robert Wiene's *RASKOLNIKOW* (1923), with which the director attempted to repeat the success of his earlier *CALIGARI*. Unlike the primarily painted, more fantastical and two-dimensional sets of *CALIGARI*, Andreiev's designs were both more rational, and allowed for more depth of space than Wiene's earlier film or indeed the work of some of his German contemporaries at the time.

Andreiev's designs for Wiene were influenced by the Russian constructivist movement, but also related to the principles of the Bauhaus, with which he became familiar in the following years. Other cultural figures he worked with during these years included Max Reinhardt and Bertolt Brecht. All of these formative influences and contacts mark Andreiev's approach to cinematic set design, which he himself at one stage subsumed under the term 'romantic realism'.<sup>85</sup> Andreiev was a highly prolific designer, working on approximately forty films in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s, before continuing his career in France and Britain.

Within the industry hierarchy in Germany, Andreiev was highly respected, even though he did not attain the prestige of figures such as Kettelhut, Herlth or Hunte at Ufa. Whereas the latter were assigned the prestige productions by Murnau and Lang, Andreiev on the whole worked for independent producers such as Friedrich Zelnik and companies such as Defu. While films such as *RASKOLNIKOW* provided Andreiev with the opportunity to realise most purely his artistic vision, it was with *Mittelfilm* productions that he established himself as an efficient and reliable craftsman. It has been argued before with respect to Alfred Junge and Schroedter that many designers who operated across national borders, very often, at least initially, had belonged to this middle level of the industry's hierarchy. This meant on the one hand that they were more likely to take up opportunities elsewhere, while their commitment to and expertise in commercial filmmaking gave them a greater ability to adapt to similar imperatives elsewhere. In contrast, none of the major Ufa designers ever needed to adapt their style or working practices substantially to other production contexts; indeed, as we discussed in chapter 2, figures like Herlth remained quite proudly defiant in this respect.

Andreiev's designs for *PANDORA* and *3-GROSCHENOPER* were aided by the carefully planned lighting of cinematographers Günter Krampf (in the former case) and Fritz Arno Wagner (in the latter), although it is primarily in *PANDORA* that the coordination of décor and cinematography is of crucial importance to

the final visual impact. Many critics writing about *PANDORA* have noted how space in the film becomes increasingly abstract as the story progresses.<sup>86</sup> As the film opens, Andreiev constructs a modern, complex apartment that offers niches and corners, divides different spheres for the main protagonist to operate in, and on the whole comes across as an idiosyncratically designed, but entirely believable real space. By the end of the film, in the sequence set in London, space is reduced to its bare essentials, and almost disappears altogether. The impression Andreiev's and Krampf's collaboration creates in this sequence underscores the total dissolution of the characters.

The London Act begins with Jack the Ripper (Gustav Diessl) slowly materialising out of the fog, and throughout the sequence the audience is given few clues to orient themselves – houses and street blend into amorphous grey, with occasional diffuse light in the background which however fails to illuminate. Although there are some occasional attempts to identify the place as a real London (for example through the 'Xmas' sign in English on a placard by a group of Salvation Army officers), neither Krampf nor Andreiev make any attempt to suggest that this is a real place. Through the way the sequence is set up and shot, and through its function within the narrative overall, it is clear that London serves as a metaphor for a space of danger, desire, and death, personified in the figure of Jack the Ripper, whose somewhat incongruous appearance in what is supposedly a post-World War I London adds to the distancing created by this sequence.

While the outside scenes are totally amorphous, once we enter the interior space, sharp angles predominate, especially in the attic room in which Lulu and her friends have found shelter. Although individual elements of this space on their own convey a sense of naturalism – a brick wall, washing lines, they do not cohere into a totality. Similar to the dynamic designs by Kettelhut and Herlth for *ASPHALT*, Andreiev's sets are built for narrative functionality. The spatial abstraction reaches its climax in the scene where Lulu and Jack the Ripper get together on the staircase of the boarding house, an image of pure geometric patterns. The construction of the stairs lacks any elaboration or ornamentation, with a maximum degree of functionalism. Andreiev's construction serves its narrative purpose in allowing for a clear demarcation of space, and in creating hierarchies of perception. Unlike with another staircase construction in his earlier *RASKOLNIKOW*, the staircase in this scene creates depthlessness rather than depth. This is achieved first of all by creating a horizontal line, traversing the image in the foreground. This horizontal line is being crossed by vertical and diagonal lines created by the stairs, the parallel lines created by the shadows of the stairs on the wall, and finally by the vertical dimension that is provided by the wooden pylon on the right of the image. The resultant compartmentalisation of the image is aided by Krampf's lighting of the scene, mainly

concerned with guiding the view to the essential element of the depiction, culminating in the iconic close-up of Lulu's face, and a glint effect in her eyes.

Compared with the abstraction of *PANDORA*'s representation of London, the city that Andreiev and Pabst (and cinematographer Fritz Arno Wagner) created for *3-GROSCHENOPER* is an entirely different space, imbued with a different tone and mood, and it projects a different perspective of urbanity and modernity. With the financial backing from Nero and two major international companies (Tobis and Warner Bros.), Andreiev was given the opportunity to create an expansive set that became 'one of the most elaborate studio sets that had ever been built in Germany'.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the sets had to accommodate what in fact were two separate productions, the German film and its French-language version, *L'OPÉRA DE QUAT'SOUS*, shot more or less simultaneously in the same studio with a French-speaking cast. As Philip Kemp and Charles O'Brien, among others, have argued, the two versions differed significantly in their approach to performance and sound (particularly in the use of music).<sup>88</sup> The production moreover indicated clearly different conceptions of wider social taboos in the respective cultures, as the French version encountered threats of censorship, owing to the film's alleged 'indecenty'.<sup>89</sup>

The production of MLVs (multi-language versions) in the early sound period allowed for cultural nuances and specificities to emerge through a range of cinematic means – acting and performance, editing and narrative pacing,<sup>90</sup> dialogue and characterisation, and some elements of image composition such as framing and lighting.<sup>91</sup> The sets, in contrast, which hardly changed throughout the versions (for obvious cost and logistical reasons), were required to transport a more universal meaning that could fit the respective versions equally. This responsibility made set design, even more than it already had been in the preceding years, the prime profession among filmmaking personnel to articulate a transnational visual aesthetic.

Without doubt, as in *PANDORA*, the sets in *3-GROSCHENOPER* provide a narrative space of danger and desire, but unlike the associations with death in the earlier film, danger and desire here accompany a more libidinous energy. The film is informed by a very different conception of self-reflexivity and irony, and its emphasis on social critique rather than psychosexual conflict demands a different spatial environment to articulate this emphasis. The spaces in the film are given depth and volume, and there is an attempt to create something that is both an entirely fantastical space and believable in its spatial organisation. Jan-Christopher Horak has pointed out that in its overall realistic approach, the set design in *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* differed significantly from the conception of space in Brecht's original stage production, which had been designed by Caspar Neher (who supervised the costumes on Pabst's film):

Brecht's stage only alludes to locale: a desk suggests an office; a bed, a brothel; and a street sign, an avenue. The sparseness of the set undermines the illusion of reality, producing the desired alienation effect. Pabst's realistic *mise-en-scène*...capture actors, background action, and atmospheric details in an ever-changing pattern of complex visual designs... [T]he unbroken flow of images and the realism of the set almost compel the viewers to involve themselves in the drama of the events.<sup>92</sup>

As this description indicates, Andreiev's abstractions in *PANDORA* would have been closer to Brecht's notion of stage design than what he created in *3-GROSCHENOPER*. In the latter film he resorted to the kind of *décor* realism for which in the German context architects such as Otto Hunte and Erich Kettelhut were renowned. Thus, similar to the 'real' Berlin references in Kettelhut's conception of the street in *ASPHALT*, there are 'authentic' advertisements for Bass Ale, and shop fronts fronting signs saying Milliners, while real landmarks such as Selfridges make an appearance. At the same time, the realism of the set becomes undermined through the way in which the topography of London is condensed into a compact amalgam of Soho, the East End, and the Docklands district, with maze-like streets leading off from the main square on which most of the characters converge at one or another time of the narrative. The film also employs, quite deliberately, a number of anachronisms to underline the universality of the story. This strategy confounded some contemporary observers, particularly British ones who were primarily familiar with *The Beggar's Opera*:

It was a little disconcerting to find the period shifted a hundred and fifty years in date; to hear typewriter and telephone and to see early Victorian dresses. These details jarred against the stubborn memories of childhood, for the story will be to English people always, a part of the eighteenth century.<sup>93</sup>

As in *PANDORA*, Andreiev makes much use of horizontally and vertically dividing the space into separate partitions. In the scene at the Dockland quays this is achieved through the masts of the ships in the background, as well as through cranes and buildings that border the square. In contrast with the stark geometrical impression this technique creates in *PANDORA*, though, the effect here is more subtle – the sets' here do not translate into the same purely cinematic idiom as in *PANDORA*, but retain their more material associations.

Andreiev's design is driven by spatial condensation and generic verisimilitude, in other words, a locale that acts as an action space for its characters according to the conventions of the gangster genre the film is parodying. In this, as we argued before, Andreiev could rely on his experience in a multitude of popular genre productions, and as a result, could provide even relatively simple generic situations with a high amount of variety. A particularly interesting example is the scene where Mackie's hiding place in the brothel in Turnbridge has

been revealed to the police. Exploiting the turmoil, Mackie flees the scene by misdirecting the police, and by staging what could be termed a choreography of evasion. The sets support this in providing a particularly elaborate and 'busy' environment. Andreiev deliberately clutters the space and blocks view and movement through curtains, windows, doors, glass partitions, side corridors, all of which again divide and separate different parts of the image. One could argue that Andreiev here works with the classical conception of organising space and turns it on its head, albeit only for achieving an effect that ultimately supports narrative and character continuity once again.

Thomas Elsaesser has suggested that *DIE 3-GROSCHENOPER* 'coheres around a principle of unity of style, [and] it is still very much an example of a "cinema of metaphor" in the tradition of the 1920s'.<sup>94</sup> For Elsaesser, the sets are a crucial contributing factor to the film's status as belonging to this metaphoric mode, and he specifically cites the many 'windows, trap-doors, partitions and skylights' that 'draw attention to the sets themselves'.<sup>95</sup> While this may be the case, the film equally conforms to the principle of unity of style as prescribed by the classical narrative cinema that developed throughout the 1920s, and was given particularly force by becoming the code of the Hollywood system.

In Germany, promoted by producers such as Pommer and Nebenzahl, and by designers such as Herlth, Junge, and Andreiev, a modified, 'European' rather than strictly 'German' classical narrative cinema emerged that could combine narrative continuity with a heightened presence of visual design. It is the commitment to this latter paradigm that allowed Andreiev to adapt to the French and British film industries in later years. His conception of a romantically realist approach to art direction seems to have specifically anticipated the style and mood of French poetic realism in the mid- to late 1930s, to which he would significantly contribute after he left Germany in the early 1930s.

### **Stardom, Genre, and Space: Brigitte Helm in *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA***

The previous sections have indicated that the demands of a film industry which operated increasingly according to international rather than purely national parameters, led set designers in Germany in the late 1920s to pursue spatial approaches that supported particular narrative conventions. These conventions corresponded frequently to generic categories and iconographies such as melodrama, street film, or crime fiction. Another influential factor in the construction of a popular international cinema, however, was the presence and representation of stars.

As scholars such as Joseph Garnarcz, Knut Hickethier, and Erica Carter have demonstrated, although Germany, in line with other European countries, oper-

ated a buoyant star system since the Wilhelmine period, this star system differed in some crucial aspects from the conception of stardom as it consolidated itself in Hollywood.<sup>96</sup> In Germany (as to some extent in Britain), most successful screen stars were also working on stage, or had previously developed their craft in the theatre; in other words, they balanced a multi-medial professional identity in contrast to the more purely cinematic star images that Hollywood created with – professionally speaking – ‘raw’ material.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the stage (especially the ‘legitimate’ one – as opposed to cabaret or the circus) was held in far greater cultural esteem than film in Europe. This meant that popular actors in Germany or Britain often publicly renounced film work in favour of stage appointments (indeed continue to do so to the present day), frequently refusing to partake in the kind of star marketing and commercial exploitation that Hollywood devised for its stars.

This insistence on a stage-focussed professionalism, as opposed to being reduced to a pure image creation, corresponded in German cinema, as Carter has suggested, to an emphasis on ‘character’, a notion that encompassed and discursively naturalised values and norms concerning national identity, gender, and (during the Third Reich in particular), race and ethnicity.<sup>98</sup> Character could express itself according to the vectors of the sublime (in the Kantian sense) or the beautiful, or alternatively could take the form of a populist realism. As Carter has argued,

the privileging of a realism with a human face that might overcome the ‘cult of surface phenomena’ associated with Weimar and Hollywood film, was visible not only in film-critical debates, but in film genres and star images cast in a representational mould.<sup>99</sup>

Some historians of Weimar cinema have gone as far as negating altogether that the German system produced stars. Klaus Kreimeier, for example, argues that ‘stars with an international image of the kind that Hollywood produced found no home in the Ufa studios’,<sup>100</sup> only modifying this generalisation somewhat by citing two exceptions from the early and the late Weimar period – Pola Negri and Marlene Dietrich. Both of course used German cinema as a springboard to a Hollywood career.

Brigitte Helm provides an interesting case study in this respect. She is associated with possibly the most iconic moment in Weimar cinema, *METROPOLIS*, and prominently defines the film in visual terms to this day (her face, either in the guise of the saintly Maria or as her robotic double has adorned or influenced countless posters, graphic designs, or record covers). Yet as a star and actress in her own right, Helm has been virtually obliterated by the retrospective reception of *METROPOLIS* and its director Fritz Lang. Taking two influential recent studies as examples, in Tom Gunning’s analysis of the film she is barely men-

tioned as an artistic contributor, while Thomas Elsaesser's monograph in the BFI Classics series places emphasis on Helm's 'grooming' by the director, once again rendering the latter solely responsible for her performance.<sup>101</sup>

Ironically, discourses that have centred on the representation of gender in *METROPOLIS* have also helped to reduce Helm to an externally directed being, or as simply an inanimate element of the film's overall ideological design.<sup>102</sup> As far as her wider legacy is concerned, historians have dismissed Helm as the cinematic equivalent of a 'one-hit wonder', as a stereotypical silent screen vamp blessed with beauty but cursed by limited talent, whose career ebbed out after the coming of sound. She has never received the attention given to contemporary stars such as Brooks or Dietrich, despite the fact that the career of the former was far more erratic and fleeting, while the latter's stardom career only really took off after she moved to Hollywood.

It is true that Helm's career lasted just under a decade, from *METROPOLIS* until her last film, *EIN IDEALER GATTE*, after Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, which was released in 1935 (after which she retired from the screen and indeed vanished from the public eye altogether). However, during this time she was a very popular, successful, and prolific star who appeared in over thirty films of varying genres. The majority of these were made after the coming of sound, nearly all of them prestige productions. It is worth recalling that it was only due to Helm's unavailability that Josef von Sternberg needed to search for a new female lead for *DER BLAUE ENGEL* (*THE BLUE ANGEL*, 1930) which eventually proved Dietrich's international breakthrough. In 1933, audience surveys confirmed Helm as the most popular female star (Hans Albers came top among the men).<sup>103</sup> Moreover, although Helm never went to Hollywood, her appeal was international, as the success of her films – and the recognition of her personally – in France and Britain attest to.

Apart from starring in all respective versions of various MLVs during the early sound period, Helm also worked in British and French studios at the time, appearing in films such as the Herbert Wilcox production *THE BLUE DANUBE* (1932), and prior to that, in Marcel L'Herbier's *L'ARGENT* (1928). In the latter film, designer Meerson created an apartment for her character, the Countess Sandorf, that, in its use of 'black lacquers, leathers, chrome, and animal skins'<sup>104</sup> was meant to illustrate her personality in the film, but which also provided a commentary on Helm's star image at the time. Donald Albrecht gives a telling summary of one scene in the film, which articulates the interaction of Helm's performance style with the set:

Sandorf's feline stalking...reaches a climax when, trapped, she finally throws herself on a daybed, its animal skins accentuating the iridescence of her dress, cloche, and shoes. Suddenly, she lunges into space; the moving camera, tracking her closely, captures the shift of every muscle under her silvery gown until, once again, she falls onto

a low, curving sofa...Sandorf writhes...while beyond and above...shadows...flicker on the parlour ceiling.<sup>105</sup>

It is no coincidence that Helm's career came to an end alongside a simultaneous decline in a particularly transnational period in European cinema; in fact, it had been dependent on it. Helm was in many ways untypical of the German star system, and even during the height of her stardom her image had the power to alienate and disturb. Her cosmopolitan, often icy sophistication and her strikingly mythical looks (a tall, slim body whose head, face, and posture evoked an alternately classical or pre-Raphaelite ideal of beauty) neither fitted the pragmatic, androgynous sex appeal of *Neue Sachlichkeit* flapper-dom (epitomised, for example, by Betty Amann in *ASPHALT* or Brooks in *PANDORA*, and to some extent Dietrich in *DER BLAUE ENGEL*), nor did it aspire to the homely and healthy conception of femininity nationalist gender discourses in Germany promoted from the early 1930s onwards.<sup>106</sup>

As far as her performance style was concerned, Helm did not conform to conventional silent film histrionics or expressionist acting principles. In her paradoxical combination of 'archaic-animalistic' and 'modernist-mechanical' qualities, she embodied instead the cool, edgy, and streamlined, yet also ornamental and historicist aesthetics of Art Deco. This is why she integrated so well into Kettelhut and Hunte's sets in *METROPOLIS* and Meerson's designs in *L'ARGENT*, and why she was such a photogenic icon of the period. Stressing her qualities as an image however does not imply that she was purely a passive object of the camera. Robert Müller has discussed in this respect the artful 'inner montage' of her performances, juxtaposing statuesque stillness, minimalist gestures and expressions, and extremely flexible, 'feline' body movements.<sup>107</sup>

Her specific characteristics apart, Helm had more in common with a Hollywood star. Unlike with the traditional stage education and background of other German screen actors (Dietrich included), Helm was specifically discovered for the film (she had just finished grammar school when she was cast as a 19-year-old in *METROPOLIS*), and she remained for the rest of her career more or less exclusively a screen actress. As was the practice with stars in Hollywood, Helm was tied through contractual obligations and financial dependencies to a studio (Ufa). Although she did start a lengthy – and ultimately for her very costly – legal process to achieve better working conditions (among other things she demanded a greater say in her choice of roles), she ultimately remained a studio property, whose career was mapped out by Ufa's executive board and producers.<sup>108</sup>

Helm further resembles the classical Hollywood star in the way her image and persona crossed over into other media and forms of representation, especially fashion and the illustrated press. As Müller has documented, Helm's im-

age frequently adorned the covers of women's and fashion magazines, including 'Die Dame' and the German edition of 'Vogue', while Berlin couturiers provided the star with a constantly changing wardrobe on-screen and off; Helm in turn became a walking advertisement for the fashion industry, and an image inspiration for female audiences.<sup>109</sup> A final correspondence to the Hollywood star system was that for many critics as well as for audiences, the image that Helm projected on-screen appeared to overlap with her 'real' life.

In order to get a more detailed conception of Helm's placement within generic and spatial filmic discourses, we shall look at two specific examples, *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA* (*THE WONDERFUL LIE OF NINA PETROVNA*, 1929), and, in the following section, *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS*. The former film was, as previously discussed in conjunction with *ASPHALT*, one of producer Erich Pommer's attempts to create a transnationally successful, specifically European kind of artful entertainment cinema. Of Pommer's initial silent productions produced under this scheme, *NINA PETROWNA* had the greatest international success – it appealed both to British and French audiences, more so than *ASPHALT*. In Britain, the film was explicitly marketed around Helm's star appeal, and British critics raved about her as a 'great screen artiste',<sup>110</sup> and as a 'wonderful actress, full of charm, temperament and intellectuality'.<sup>111</sup> While nearly all reviews also mentioned the film's production values, it was Paul Rotha in *Close Up* who would draw attention to the contributions by Herlth and Röhrig, using the appraisal of their work as the starting point for a polemic about the deficiencies of set design in British films.<sup>112</sup> In France, meanwhile, the film was so well remembered that in 1937 Viktor Tourjansky shot a French remake, *LE MENSonge DE NINA PETROVNA*, starring the Italian Isa Miranda and Fernand Gravey.

Part of the reason for the success of *NINA PETROVNA*, and the likely reason for its remake was that the story fitted a thematic interest in Russia that swept throughout Europe at the time. In Germany the so-called 'Russenfilme', very often with a significant artistic input from Russian émigrés such as directors Viktor Tourjansky or Alexander Volkoff, or designers such as Andreiev, constituted an important generic trend, and included films such as the Franco-German co-production *MICHEL STROGOFF/DER KURIER DES ZAREN* (1926), *DER WEISSE TEUFEL* (*THE WHITE DEVIL*, 1929) and *MANOLESCU* (1929), the latter starring Helm next to the Russian screen idol Ivan Mosjoukine.<sup>113</sup> Dudley Andrew meanwhile claims that over 35 films were made on Russian themes in France in the 1930s, often directed by Russian émigrés including Fédor Ozep and Alexis Granowsky.<sup>114</sup> The list of films includes *VOLGA EN FLAMMES* (1933), *L'ENFANT DU CARNIVAL* (1934), *PUITS EN FLAMMES* (1936), and *NOSTALGIE* (1937).<sup>115</sup> British examples will be covered in greater detail in chapter 5, while beyond Europe, Hollywood of course also contributed to the trend, for example with

the Tolstoy adaptation *LOVE* (1928), starring Greta Garbo, and its sound film remake *ANNA KARENINA* (1935).

The story of *NINA PETROWNA* resembles Tolstoy's novel fairly closely, while the narrative of the 'kept woman' might have held uncomfortable similarities for Helm with her professional situation at the time as she fought Ufa for greater freedom. Nina (Helm) is the mistress of a Cossack Colonel (Warwick Ward), in whose regiment the young cornet Michael (Franz Lederer) serves. During a night out at a restaurant, Nina claims to know the cornet from childhood, and although her lover immediately sees through her lie, he invites Michael to join them. A passionate affair ensues, and Nina leaves her patron and her elegant St Petersburg residence to live with Michael in a small flat. In order to give Nina the luxuries he thinks she is missing, Michael starts gambling and is discovered of cheating by the Colonel. Nina promises her former lover to return to him if he saves Michael's career, after which she tells Michael she is leaving him because he cannot provide for her. Back at the Colonel's residence, she makes one last attempt at visual contact with Michael who is riding past her balcony. Ignored by him, she commits suicide by taking poison.

Although the narrative of *NINA PETROWNA* has on occasions been dismissed as 'novelletish',<sup>116</sup> few have been able to fault the exquisite visual qualities of the film, or the acting by the principal actors. Herlth and Röhrig's set designs in this film are intricately coordinated with Carl Hoffmann's cinematography, René Hubert's costumes, and the performances by Helm, Ward, and Lederer. Set in pre-revolutionary Russia, presumably around the turn of the century, the film nonetheless refrains from specific historical or geographical markers, and the costumes (Helm's dresses in particular) comprise on the whole contemporary fashions of the 1920s. The exact duration of the narrative is also not quite clear, but it is likely that it spans at least a few weeks or even months, while the snow cover visible in the last scenes indicates winter. St. Petersburg as a city is simply a square in front of the heroine's palatial residence (images 09 & 10), a street, and a hazy horizon on which one can glimpse the spires of a cathedral or a palace. Indeed, it is striking that unlike in later Russian-themed films produced in Britain in the 1930s (see chapter 5), there is no attempt to contextualise Russia in *NINA PETROWNA* along explicitly political lines. The film does not refer to any form of social conflict outside the narrow individualised experiences of its main characters, which is extraordinary considering that this film is a near contemporary of Eisenstein's *BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN* (1925) and *OCTOBER* (1927).

A similar minimalism to the way in which the film maps the wider contours of the country is evident in other locations of the film – Michael's garrison is reduced to a single water pump in an empty courtyard, and later the interiors of a stable. In some cases, the sets are slightly exaggerated to transport particular impressions. This applies to the officers' mess with its obtrusive lamps,

Image 09 – *Nina Petrowna*Image 10 – *Nina Petrowna*

hanging low over the tables, and the somewhat oversized seats, that make the characters, particularly Michael, look smaller. A similar effect is created by the Colonel's office quarters and their antechambers – their depth can be compared to the extreme depth of some of the interior spaces we find more than a decade later in Orson Welles' *CITIZEN KANE* (1941). Kristin Thompson, aiming to highlight *NINA PETROWNA*'s adherence to the classical paradigm, also refers to the



Image 11 – *Nina Petrowna*

film's 'deep, clean sets'.<sup>117</sup> These clear and uncluttered aspects of spatial composition, however, frequently contrast with elaborate decoration on windows, doors, and staircases, drawing attention to their function as action spaces, but also to themselves. Among such obtrusive details, which Paul Rotha picked up already at the time, were 'the struggling cherubs on the newel post, the curtains festooned over the doorways, [and] the curving astricles of the panels on the door behind Helm's head'.<sup>118</sup>

A particularly obvious design element, which serves a notable function in the narrative, is the staircase in the Colonel's residence, which features at various points in the film, and looks different nearly every time through variations in camera perspective and lighting. In its first appearance, it is evenly lit, with a bright look, and as the Colonel is energetically ascending the stairs the camera positioned on the ground floor follows his movement upwards. The next time the staircase is seen, it is night, and Michael makes his clandestine and uncertain entrance. The camera is now positioned at the top of the stairs, and is directed down and side-wards, capturing the entering Michael partly through the metal banisters and enveloping him and the set in chiaroscuro lighting. The editing in this scene contravenes classical principles of continuity (as Rotha reprimanded the director for 'mistaking his shooting angles'<sup>119</sup>), yet one has to wonder if this apparent 'error' was not deliberate, as it does add to the scene's prevailing sense of disorientation, as experienced by Michael. Perhaps the most interesting appearance of the staircase comes when the Colonel has surprised Nina and Michael together, and as he leads the latter out of the house. As the two descend

the steps, the staircase assumes the form of a vortex with Michael at its centre, intimating the professional and emotional turmoil in which his character finds himself at this moment (image 11).

As these examples show, the sets support the narrative in significant ways. However there is also an element of excess in the representation of Helm in relation to the sets that transports a specific star discourse in addition to the information that is necessary to set up her character. Although her character does not immediately conform to the ice-queen image that we outlined earlier, and although the story is supposedly set in the past, Helm's performance nonetheless remains modernist and alludes to her more conventional star persona as a vamp at various points in the film – especially during the scenes at the restaurant where she is seen draped in jewelry and enveloped by cigarette smoke as she confidently engages in a visual flirt with Michael; in her later, and explicitly sexual, attempt at seducing Michael in her bedroom; and during her final meeting with him where she 'impersonates' the type of cold-hearted *femme fatale* that in other films she played for real. This correlation of character and star image creates some interesting ruptures of character verisimilitude in the narrative, making it occasionally difficult to distinguish its respective functions. Beyond the star discourse, there is also an element of excessive display in the interaction of the sets and the mobile camera that invites the viewer to 'browse', partake in, and journey through the depicted environment.

Both of these modes of excess, which in fact correspond to each other, are illustrated by the opening sequence of the film, which comprises a long tracking shot in the style of the *entfesselte Kamera* (unshackled camera) very much *en vogue* with German cinematographers since the mid-1920s. Although most prominently employed in the opening scenes of the film, Hoffmann uses the mobile camera at various other points in the film, most notably in the scene in the restaurant, where the camera moves outward from an aquarium to reveal a fountain, which in turn becomes the centerpiece of the scene's spatial layout and yet another of the film's obtrusive design details (image 12).

The opening sequence begins with a close-up of an ornate rococo table clock cum music box, which at its centre has a miniature dancing couple pirouetting while the clock chimes, or rather plays a tune. A further close-up of the clock's mechanics reveals its inner workings. Already this first, single shot works on a number of different levels, and constructs a complex *mise-en-abyme* within the film.

On a basic level of narrative information, the image of the clock sets the scene in defining the social contours of an interior space, by suggesting material wealth (given the preciousness of the object). Secondly, the juxtaposition of the clock with its mechanical working creates a sense of synaesthesia in the audience, where the impression of hearing sound is intimated by visual associations.



Image 12 – *Nina Petrowna*

Obviously this shot was meant to work in conjunction with an orchestral score, but to some extent it works to preclude the need of actually hearing the music. This synaesthetic approach, which cinematographers and set designers had perfected in the last years of the silent film, is evident through the rest of the opening sequence in other ways, drawing the viewer closer into the environment. Thirdly, the clock anticipates elements of the narrative still to come, and it initiates a set of affinities between objects and characters. Indeed, the clock functions like an introduction to different chapters of the film. We will later learn that the tune the clock plays (a waltz with the title 'The Hours That Never Return') is the heroine's favourite melody, and she will fall in love with the young cornet while dancing with him to this very waltz in the restaurant. They will later dance again to the tune in Nina's apartment, with Helm's edgy, abrupt movements imitating the mechanical miniature dancing couple of the clock.

As the story progresses, and as the heroine will question the value of her wealth, it will be the clock that will condense the idea of her previous luxurious lifestyle, as its ornate exterior contrasts with the simpler wooden cuckoo clock in the small flat she rents with Michael. The clock will make its final appearance towards the end of the film after Nina has returned, now a symbol of Nina's irrevocable loss. This latter meaning, on a meta-narrational level, then links the clock (underlined by the title of the tune it plays) with a discourse concerning the passing of time, a marker of nostalgia as well as melancholia that underlines the fatalism of the story, and which preempts the film's tragic ending. The significance of the clock in the film was already identified by reviewers at the time of the film's release, praising its use as a 'different and attractive treatment'.<sup>120</sup>

Back to the opening sequence, the tracking continues with the camera gliding through a bathroom, where a maid is filling an oval-shaped tub with hot water and bath salts, surrounded by a wall with shells as bas reliefs and a bath table on which there is an array of pear-shaped flasks of bath oils and perfumes, as well as a casually draped dressing gown – the steam emanating from the water is captured by the camera once again in a synaesthetic way, impressing a feeling of warmth and comfort. The dressing gown provides us with the first clue of the owner of this apartment; in fact the whole sequence works as an anticipation of her appearance, gradually revealing more details and possessions of her before we eventually encounter her in person.

The camera continues tracking through the bedroom, past an unmade bed of silky cushions and duvet covers, lingering briefly on a discarded nightgown as another clue to the apartment's owner we are yet to meet. The camera then moves past a breakfast table (an object that will again play a significant role later on in the narrative in an encounter between Nina and Michael) of half-empty coffee cups and bowls of fruit (yet another moment of synaesthesia, this time intimating smell and taste), before opening outwards to reveal the apartment in its larger dimensions, the walls draped in curtains.

It is only at this moment that the camera via a panning shot moves towards the balcony where we see Nina standing with her back to the camera, looking out and down onto the street. In terms of image composition, Helm's character provides a static contrast to the fluid way in which the apartment has been captured up to this point, and unlike the various objects that the camera has presented us with, she is unable to make an initial impression on us. This contrast between stasis and dynamic movement, played out in the interaction of set and performance, provides one of the crucial spatial paradigms throughout the film. There is, however, also another dramatic motivation for suspending the eventual revelation of the heroine's face in this way – as Robert Müller has indicated, anticipating an iconic star image creates suspense in itself.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, the camera and Helm's movements extend this play of teasing the audience and withholding her face for some time. After the initial shot showing Helm's back, she then moves her head slightly sideways so that we can see her profile, then again averting her gaze, before a cut around a 180 degree line finally provides the viewer with a frontal shot of the character. The scene can now set up the visual paradigms with which the film will continue to picture Helm's character.

Among the main principles for Nina's representation is the way in which the camera frames her in the image within a secondary frame; often she is shown standing in or against doors, lying on beds, reclining on chairs, or framed by curtains. A third degree of framing is provided by lighting – cinematographer Carl Hoffmann employs top and back lighting to create the kind of sculpting and glamourising effect that Hollywood cameramen used for lighting their

stars, and he provides Helm here with a halo that accentuates her shimmering blonde hair. The resulting integration of Helm's character within the set is heightened by the way her clothes echo and reflect patterns evident in the sets – thus in the Colonel's villa, her dresses adopt the same curves, flows, and textures that adorn the wall and the furnishings. Similarly in the later scenes at the flat she shares with Michael, the crude patterns on the flat's tatty curtains are picked up in the bland designs of Nina's apron, and of her grey dress.

It is apparent how this interaction between set, cinematography and star image and performance supports the principal themes of the narrative. Domestic space features as a place of entrapment, confining the heroine within its walls and serving as a means of representing her misery. This kind of representation is not only evident in the opening sequence. Later on, when Michael visits her, the apartment comes across as a place where rather than be carefree Nina has to be careful, lest not to arouse the Colonel's suspicions. For a brief time, however, she and Michael can enjoy a temporary, playful illusion of freedom as their mutual attraction intensifies. By the time of the film's tragic ending, the audience's first introduction to the set in the opening sequence has gained in cumulative emotional impact as the viewer can now reflect on its key role in Nina's tragedy. The apartment confines her as a possession; its doors divide the lovers and impose secrecy and guilt on them and finally, it becomes the site of Nina's ultimate heartbreak. The space itself has not changed, but the context of tragedy has intensified.

Yet despite these narrative functions, the film ultimately cannot quite shake off the initial pleasurable impact of the sets, and their invitation to the audience to both consume and partake in cinematic space. Thus, *NINA PETROWNA* leaves the audience with conflicting emotions, which however, as many scholars have argued, is essential to the appeal of melodrama as a genre, namely that the pleasures attached to the form itself and to visual style more specifically can override the narrative implications of the characters' fate.<sup>122</sup>

### **Instabilities of Genre and Space: Exotic Iconography in *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS*/*THE MISTRESS OF ATLANTIS*/*L'ATLANTIDE***

It seems appropriate to close this chapter with a discussion of G.W. Pabst's *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* (1932) since it represents in many respects the quintessential transnational film in its literary origins, production contexts, cultural references, and narrative construction. It is a decidedly strange film that perplexes, haunts, and alienates its viewer. Given its dreamlike feel, which sometimes recalls the surrealist cinema of Buñuel or Cocteau, it is no surprise that the two most extensive studies of the film have chosen psychoanalytical approaches to decipher its meaning.<sup>123</sup>

In terms of film-historical context, meanwhile, *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* marks an ending for a number of personnel involved in the film – for producer Seymour Nebenzahl, it was the penultimate Nero production in Germany (the last one was Lang's *TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE*, 1933) before he went into French exile. For Pabst, it constituted his last German film for the rest of the decade – he too would film mostly in France during the 1930s (controversially he would return to the Third Reich to direct two films in the early 1940s, *KOMÖDIANTEN*, 1941, and *PARACELTUS*, 1943). Other contributors to the film who would soon after become exiles included the set designer Ernö Metzner, alongside assistant directors Mark Sorkin and Herbert Rappaport, cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan, and editor Hans (Jean) Oser, and the Russian supporting actor Vladimir Sokoloff.

Like Andrei Andreiev, Metzner had already experienced a number of relocations in his life before he was forced to leave Germany in 1933. Born 1892 in the town of Szabadka in the Vojvodina region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (to become part of Northern Serbia after World War I), Metzner had studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Budapest and worked as a painter and graphic designer before moving to Berlin after World War I. His first significant film credits were his contributions as initially costume designer and later art director to two of Ernst Lubitsch's Orientalist spectacles, *SUMURUN (ONE ARABIAN NIGHT)*, 1920), and *DAS WEIB DES PHARAO (LOVES OF PHAROAH)*, 1922), followed by *FRIDERICUS REX* (1923), the hagiographic biopic of the 18th century Prussian monarch, and Joe May's story of Christ, *I.N.R.I.* (1923). As a freelancer not tied to a specific studio, his output was neither as prolific nor as consistent as that of his contemporaries Kettelhut, Herlth, or Hunte, while he appears to have largely avoided taking on the routine *Mittelfilm* productions that one finds in the filmographies of designers such as Junge or Schroedter.

Indeed, from his own pronouncements at the time and retrospectively it is clear that Metzner saw himself as committed to the aesthetic as well as political principles of a modernist, left-wing avant-garde, borne out further by his own attempts at directing in the late 1920s, among which were the surreal urban fable *ÜBERFALL! (ACCIDENT)*, 1928), an exuberant compendium of cinematic experimentation, as well as a number of campaign and agit-prop shorts, produced for Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD). The latter included *DEIN SCHICKSAL (YOUR FATE)*, 1928), where Metzner collaborated with the avant-garde artist Oskar Fischinger. As Laurie Ede has pointed out, the latter film's anti-Nazi message made it in 1933 doubly opportune for Metzner to leave Germany – both as a Jew and as a political antagonist of the new regime.<sup>124</sup>

It is vis-à-vis Metzner's sense of professional self-definition that one has to place, from the mid-1920s, his close artistic association with Pabst, who was establishing himself at the time as possibly late Weimar cinema's most signifi-

cant 'art film' *auteur*. Metzner created the sets for seven Pabst films in the late 1920s and early 1930s, *GEHEIMNISSE EINER SEELE* (*SECRETS OF THE SOUL*, 1926), *TAGEBUCH EINER VERLORENE* (*DIARY OF A LOST GIRL*, 1929), *DIE WEISSE HÖLLE VOM PITZ PALÜ* (*THE WHITE HELL OF PIZ PALU*, 1929, co-directed by Arnold Fanck), *WESTFRONT 1918* (1930), *KAMERADSCHAFT* (1931), *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS*, and their final collaboration in France, *DU HAUT EN BAS* (1933).

Beyond his achievements as a set (and occasionally costume) designer, Metzner also acted as a public mediator of Pabst's and, by extension, his own vision in an international context. In Britain, Pabst had become the favourite of modernist intellectuals by the end of the decade, particularly among the filmmakers, writers, and artists that formed the editorial nucleus of the art film magazine *Close Up*. As Anne Friedberg has documented, Pabst's emphasis on 'psychological realism' corresponded to the aesthetic ideals of many within the *Close Up* group, while the latter's own cinematic efforts (collectively known as the POOL films) were enthusiastically greeted by Pabst.<sup>125</sup> The latter's acclaim in *Close Up* was only rivalled by the attention accorded to Eisenstein and the Soviet montage movement – indeed the magazine printed a number of Eisenstein's theoretical and practical writings. During its brief existence between 1927 and 1933, *Close Up* thus provided a forum for intensive transnational intellectual exchanges, turning into an extended series of mutual compliments traded across the Channel, and marked by an enthusiasm for all things foreign rarely matched again in the subsequent history of British film culture and criticism. The cross-national traffic included *Close Up*'s British-based writers, such as the poet H.D. and the filmmaker Kenneth Macpherson, travelling to Berlin and meeting up with Pabst and Louise Brooks among others, while continental authors, such as Metzner, the critic and photographer Andor Kraszna-Krausz, or the Berlin-based Austrian psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs (who had acted as advisor on Pabst's *GEHEIMNISSE EINER SEELE*), contributed articles to *Close Up*.

Metzner's articles on his work in productions such as *WESTFRONT 1918*, *KAMERADSCHAFT*, and *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* retrospectively provide an invaluable insight into the specific techniques he devised and employed, especially as his contributions were usually illustrated by graphs and sketches outlining in detail studio set-ups and constructions.<sup>126</sup> What emerges from these descriptions is an attention to technical challenges, while the overall stylistic parameters emphasise realism or rather verisimilitude, achieved through condensation, detail, and abstraction. Although his writings only occasionally map a wider aesthetic agenda, they do indicate that Metzner saw himself very much as part of a team of artistic equals, rather than simply as the executor of a directorial vision. Metzner does defer to Pabst as the initiator of some of the general ideas behind the films' designs, yet like his contemporary Herlth, he promotes and defends the values of close collaboration and exchange between

director, cinematographer, and set designer, which had been the hallmark of the German studio system since the early 1920s. *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* provided in this respect one of the last 'perfect' opportunities for this mode of production, before its personnel were dispersed across Europe, a process that brought Metzner to France and Britain and ultimately to the United States. The latter context does not seem to have suited Metzner's artistic temperament. Correspondence between Metzner and the Hollywood agent Paul Kohner that spans the years 1938 to 1946 documents the former's complaints of not getting enough or only inferior assignments, while the latter's letters imply that Metzner was unable to integrate into the studio system.<sup>127</sup>

*DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* constituted one of Nero's annual prestige productions, and represented both financially and logistically a considerable endeavour, as it required location shooting in France as well as the Algerian desert, more specifically in the Hoggar mountain range in the southern centre of the Sahara, in the proximity of today's borders to Libya and Niger. In the early 1930s, getting to the Southern Sahara involved an arduous expedition, and while Pabst and part of the production crew were compiling footage in North Africa, Metzner coordinated the construction of the interior sets at the EFA studio at Berlin Halensee. Writing in *Close Up*, Metzner noted with perceptible disappointment that despite Pabst's promises, he 'never got to Africa'.<sup>128</sup> Instead he documents a planning process that involved research into the prevalent building styles of the Hoggar region, which combined elements of what Metzner described as the 'Moresque' and 'charming Sudanese architecture'. As he recalls, 'the pictures of the mud palaces of the negro princes filled us with sheer enthusiasm'.<sup>129</sup> However, Metzner was acutely aware of generic clichés associated with certain styles, which he took great efforts to avoid:

About one thing, however, there was not the slightest doubt: the sets should emphatically not be built in the Moresque style, for this style, though wonderful in itself, has been compromised during the last decade by saccharine American and other films, to such a degree that it had become the very idea of bad sets and cheap fantasy.<sup>130</sup>

The division of labour across two continents meant that Metzner had to anticipate a visual correlation between his sets and the outdoor scenery without having seen the latter. To complicate the logistics of the production further, *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* was an MLV production, shot simultaneously in German, French (*L'ATLANTIDE*), and British (*THE MISTRESS OF ATLANTIS*) language versions. The female lead was played by Brigitte Helm, on loan from Ufa, in all three films, while the male lead changed with every version (respectively Heinz Klingenberg, Pierre Blanchar, and John Stuart), as did some of the supporting cast – Sokoloff, for example, was replaced in the British version by Gibb McLaughlin, a prolific British character actor described by Brian McFarlane as

'an icon of lugubrious emaciation'.<sup>131</sup> Otherwise the production crew was identical.

The film was based on the popular adventure novel 'L'Atlantide' (1919) by French author Pierre Benoît, which had already been filmed once before in France by Jacques Feyder in 1922. The story itself shares similarities with Henry Rider Haggard's 'She' (1887); indeed Benoît had lost a libel case in which he had sued a journalist who charged him with plagiarising Haggard's bestseller. In any case the novel synthesised a number of themes and motifs that were in wide circulation throughout Europe and encompassed a variety of representations of the exotic, the Orient, and European colonialism. In Benoît's version, foreign legion officer Saint-Avit and the former trappist monk Morhange investigate the disappearance of a number of foreigners in the desert. They are captured and brought to a subterranean palace, governed by the evil queen Antinéa, a descendant of the last kings of Atlantis, who turns out to be behind the recent abductions, and it transpires that any men who falls in love with her dies in mysterious circumstances. When Morhange rejects the queen's advances, she persuades the already obsessed Saint-Avit to kill his friend, which he does. Saint-Avit eventually flees the palace with the help of one of Antinéa's slaves, and is rescued.

Ladislaus Vajda and Hermann Oberländer's screenplay for Pabst's film (adapted for the international versions by respectively Alexandre Arnoux and Miles Mander) generally follows the basics of the novel, but changes the story in some crucial aspects. Benoît's novel was told in a linear way, and its narrative was meant to be taken literally. In Pabst's film, on the other hand, the story unravels as Saint-Avit's flashback, triggered off by a lecture broadcast on the radio, which speculates on the possibility that Atlantis might have been located in the Sahara. As the broadcast ends, Saint-Avit, overlooking the desert from an outpost, confirms to a fellow soldier that the broadcaster is correct in his assumptions, and begins his tale. Throughout his flashback, we are never certain whether Saint-Avit, who is clearly traumatised from the start, can be relied upon as a narrator, whether it represents a fantasy, caused by the guilt of losing his colleague Morhange (the other officer alludes to an incident two years earlier), or whether it is merely a hallucination, caused by the heat of the desert or by the *kif* (hashish) Saint-Avit smokes to forget his obsessions. In this respect, the narration of the film has much in common with *DAS CABINET DES DR CALIGARI*, except that in Pabst's film the audience questions the story's validity from the very beginning, or alternatively is left increasingly puzzled what is going on.

Pabst's Saint-Avit does not have the inner purpose or determination of his literary model, nor does he investigate any previous incidents. Instead he and Morhange are on a secret mission to sound out the Tuaregs' political sympa-

thies. They stumble like somnambulists onto the existence of the underground palace, after escorting a female journalist through the desert. The colonial agents prove singularly ineffective in their assigned task, and indeed one can read the film as suggesting that the whole colonial enterprise is an absurd endeavour doomed to failure, which drives its defenders into madness. As for the characters' individual background, we learn nothing about Saint-Avit's relationship with Morhange (who also is not a trappist monk here), nor do we learn anything about Saint-Avit's past. After getting embroiled in hostile encounters with local tribesmen, Morhange (played by Gustav Diessl, who played Jack the Ripper in *PANDORA'S BOX*) and Saint-Avit are drugged and awake again in Antinéa's cavernous lodgings, the centre of a fragmented matriarchal society (as Morhange later tells Antinéa, 'here the women choose their men – our ideas are different').

At the palace, Morhange and Saint-Avit meet two strange characters, who are to a greater or lesser extent crazed and obsessed with Antinéa. The Scandinavian Torstensen (Mathias Wieman) is a paranoid drug-addict, while the eccentric Hetman (Sokoloff/McLaughlin), who despite his Slavic military title refers to himself as a 'real Parisian', is an alcoholic. The latter's national indeterminacy is even more pronounced in the English version of the film through McLaughlin's performance and his slightly weird, but unmistakably British accent. The local population meanwhile remains mute (except for some chanting) and looks on impassively in a mixture of melancholia, lethargy, and fatalism. Only Antinéa's near-mute slave Tanit (Tela Tschai) emerges as another recognisable character.

Although the rest of the story then follows Benoît's original fairly closely (including Morhange's murder by Saint-Avit), it deviates with respect of Antinéa's origins. Far from being the last descendant of an ancient race, a flashback within a flashback (recounted by an inebriated Hetman) reveals that she is the daughter of a French dancer who was lured to the desert by a Tuareg prince on his visit to Paris twenty years earlier. This of course undermines the original story's premise that Antinéa and her palace represent an actual remnant of the lost continent of Atlantis. In one of the ellipses typical of the film's narration, it is never resolved what happened to either the dancer or the prince, while a throw-away remark leaves it open who Antinéa's father was (possibly even the Hetman himself).

Antinéa is thus transformed from an emblem of a 'pure race' into one of (potential or actual) miscegenation. This transformation is particularly significant in light of the fact that the myth of Atlantis had been instrumentalised since the early part of the century in racist-inflected pulp fiction and crazed socio-historical theories by German authors as a mythical country of origin of the 'Aryan race'.<sup>132</sup> In this respect the role of Antinéa provides Helm with the kind of 'slip-

page across ethnic identities' or 'mobile ethnicity' that Erica Carter has observed with respect of Dietrich's screen persona, and which made both actresses suspect within the increasingly nationalist and racialist discourses concerning stardom in Nazi Germany.<sup>133</sup> The final twist of *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* (and its deviation from the novel) comes at the end after Saint-Avit has finished his flashback. The lone Tuareg who had brought Saint-Avit to Antinéa, and who helped him escape, reappears, and shortly after that Saint-Avit vanishes into the desert, his traces erased by a sandstorm.

Pabst's film provides a curious mix of genres and intertextual references. First, it can be placed within the tradition of the desert adventure, which often features stories concerning the foreign legion. The best-known story in this respect is 'Beau Geste' (1924) by British author P.C. Wren, filmed for the first time in Hollywood in 1926, but also includes Sternberg's *MOROCCO* (1930), based on a play by Franco-German author Benno Vigny. In France, the legion motif had been well established for even longer, and corresponded, as we outline in greater detail in the following chapter, to a national 'colonial unconscious', the images for which were provided not only by cinema, but also by colonial exhibitions. In this respect, it is interesting to note that *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS*, with its somewhat unclear national pedigree, could nonetheless compete in France with Jacques Feyder's *LE GRAND JEU* (1934), another foreign legion narrative, which addressed its topic in a far less oneiric manner. Indeed, as we document in chapter 4, the French version of Pabst's film was among the top box office successes of its season.

In some respects, however, *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* also feels like a late (even last) expression of Weimar's obsession with the fantastic, a final return to the haunted screen. We have already mentioned the affinity of the film's narration to *CALIGARI*, but there are other links. Saint-Avit, the Jonathan Harker figure of this narrative, does not travel to Transylvania, but Antinéa's cavernous lodgings with their arches do recall at certain moments the castle in *NOSFERATU* (1921), while as in Murnau's and countless other Weimar examples, chiaroscuro dominates the lighting patterns, even if the light in the equation this time is considerably brighter than usual. At the level of characterisation, Antinéa references not just *NOSFERATU*, but also two previous iconic Helm roles the audience at the time would have been familiar with, Maria in *METROPOLIS* and the eponymous *ALRAUNE*, the artificially created woman in a 1927 film and its sound film remake in 1930.

Murnau provides the link to yet another generic intertext that the *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* suggests, the ethnographic documentary as represented by Murnau's last film *TABU* (1930), the films by his collaborator Robert Flaherty, and numerous other examples during this period. In its outdoor footage, the cinematography maps the landscape of eroded mountain escarpments and drifting

sand dunes, before adopting an ethnographic gaze onto the Tuareg extras, huddled in front of their low-lying mud huts that blend into the desert surroundings, or traversing the sand sea on camels. Earlier on in the film Pabst introduces the female journalist (played by his wife Gertrude in a cameo role) as a kind of adventure tourist, charting the slippage from discourses of scientific and colonial exploration to those of leisure and commodification. As in Murnau's 1930 film about tribal life in the South Pacific, and in other similar documentaries of the time, *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* envisages the life of the Tuaregs as untouched and utterly distinct from modernity, yet at the same time as threatened by the latter's encroachment. One can see an illustration of this in the scene where the cowering tribesmen listen, seemingly uncomprehending of its cultural connotations, to a gramophone playing the Can-Can motif from Jacques Offenbach's operetta 'Orpheus in the Underworld' (1858). This incomprehension is meant to find its equivalent in the Western audience's reception of the more indigenous form of Tuareg music, their ritual chanting. Both modes of music in turn contrast with the generically orientalist register, used for dramatic effect in the narrative, of the diegetic ensemble of musicians who entertain Antinéa in her palace.

The reference to Offenbach's operetta can be seen, on one level, to be motivated in the narrative by the film's flashback to Paris, which also features the tune. On another level, it is part of the aural eclecticism and experimentation with sound that marks the film as a particularly interesting take on what was a brand new technology at the time. However, the Offenbach motif also links to a final chain of references that runs through the film, namely its allusions to Greek mythology. In this respect, Saint-Avit can be seen to fulfil the part of Orpheus descending into the underworld (indeed the adaptation of the Orpheus myth in Pabst's film anticipates Cocteau's similarly allegoric take on the myth in *ORPHÉE* in 1949). Karl Sierek interprets the triangle Saint-Avit/Antinéa/Morhange as enacting an Oedipal narrative, or psychoanalytically speaking, as representing the 'primal scene' of conflict between child, mother, and father.<sup>134</sup> If Antinéa does indeed function as a mother figure, it is a decidedly dangerous one, as she assumes the role of a combined Sphinx and Medusa. However, unlike the cartoon villainess of Benoît's original novel, Antinéa as portrayed by Brigitte Helm remains a largely undecipherable figure, a character who, like Louise Brooks in *PANDORA'S BOX*, cannot be grasped according to conventional moral parameters.

Hermann Kappelhoff has referred to the film's 'kaleidoscopic' narration, which moves further away from a realist perspective as the film progresses.<sup>135</sup> The narration draws attention to its own unreliability through a number of cinematic means – for example, cuts that mark temporal ellipses and progression are often motivated by and organised around scenes of characters sleeping and

awakening, often accompanied by a disorientating change of space. Another convention of creating transitions, images moving out of focus before dissolving, achieves a similar effect. In terms of spatial continuity, meanwhile, cinematography and editing frequently avoid the kind of eye-line matches through which classical Hollywood narration establishes spatial relations between characters and between characters and objects. Sierek suggests that Pabst's films of the late 1920s and early 1930s 'evidence a subtle interrogation of the cinematic apparatus and the act of seeing in film per se, an approach radically different from the conventions of the classical narrative'.<sup>136</sup>

The sets in *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* support Pabst's approach, in close conjunction with the film's cinematography and editing patterns. It is clear from Metzner's account in *Close Up* that he and Pabst explicitly worked to construct a dual, self-reflexive address for the film that would blur and ultimately dissolve the boundaries between the conventions and formulae of popular cinema and an art film narration:

Mr Pabst's fundamental idea for his production was that the film should strike the mass of naïve spectators as a description of real occurrences; the more clever ones in the audience, however, should recognize that the events only happened in the imagination of the hero suffering from tropic delirium. The sets had to support this object, on the one hand they must give the impression of complete reality, on the other hand this reality must be rendered improbable.<sup>137</sup>

To this end, Metzner's main principles in constructing the sets are once again verisimilitude and abstraction with regard to decorative detail and the appearance of the used materials. There are mainly three distinctive sets in the film. The desert garrison is partly a real exterior location, shot by Pabst's team in Africa, and partly a series of minimally sketched interiors. The second set comprises the gaudy and playful Parisian revue theatre which features in the film's brief flashback within a flashback, and which draws on patterns from Art Nouveau. The most significant location of the film, however, is Antinéa's palace. Although ornate and grandiose in some respects, it comes across as a catacomb-type space, which naturally blends into the surrounding landscape, not least by being shown to be subject to the same relentless erosion that affects the architecture above ground. Considering that outdoor and interior shooting for the film took place without the opportunity for much coordination, the shifts between the African footage and the studio scenes within the palace are remarkably imperceptible and fluid. Blocks of plaster painted in grey were prepared by Metzner's team to look like granite, which 'in the course of the centuries has obtained a greasy polish'.<sup>138</sup> Metzner strongly believed that design should avoid superfluous ornamentation and instead let 'the quality of the material speak for itself'.<sup>139</sup>

Antinéa's palace is a claustrophobic subterranean maze, which is as eclectic as the narrative that takes place in it. Low ceilings, an array of narrow, arched passageways leading nowhere, darkened alcoves, and a veritable forest of massive square pillars, interspersed with more slender columns, accentuate the oppressive feel of the place and the disorientation the protagonists experience. Apart from its claustrophobic qualities, there is also an organic, open plan feel, and fluidity about the palace, an effect achieved by the absence of doors (spaces are mostly divided by transparent gauze curtains), and by the use of spacious halls and interior windows, secured by iron bars, which connect rooms and corridors. The latter strategy can be seen to intimate the lack of privacy and a panoptic form of control and surveillance.

The palace's dark corners and recesses serve the narrative in dramatising appearances as well as absences. This is particularly obvious in the film's representation of Helm. Her first appearance in the film follows a tracking shot similar to, though not as elaborate as, the opening sequence in *NINA PETROWNA*. After having previously only heard about Antinéa and only seen her pet leopard that acts as a decorative accessory and suggests homologies to her feline and predatory nature, the camera glides through the corridors and arrives in the queen's private chambers, circling around columns before showing the actress with her back to the audience. As in *NINA PETROWNA*, this teasing anticipation of the star image is followed first by a sideways look by Helm, revealing her profile, before the camera presents us with a frontal image of her face. In a later scene, the set again anticipates Antinéa's appearance – as she gives orders, her view is hidden from the audience by a massive column and we only hear her voice before the camera slowly moves around the obstruction to reveal her in person. The oscillation between being seen and absence is furthered by Helm's gestures and posture, and by the – often abrupt – alternations between medium shots and close-ups of Antinéa.

The palace functions in some ways as an extension of Antinéa's body, or the reverse, she becomes an extension of her palace. Helm's performance style, the cinematography, editing, and the sets combine in this effect. The most obvious example of this interchangeability of character and space is the giant stone impression of her head that occupies a prominent position in the palace, and which appears at various points of the film (indeed it provides the film's final image). Underlining its quotation of the myths of Medusa and the Sphinx, this stone sculpture impassively witnesses Saint-Avit's murder of Morhange, which occurs out of view from the audience. More subtly, the correspondence between Antinéa and her palace is suggested by the way she is framed by arches, granite columns, and iron bars, set off against and reflected by mirrors, or shot in silhouette against gauze curtains. Her flowing dresses and tribal jewellery pick up motifs from the rest of her décor, while her Pre-Raphaelite hairstyle works in

conjunction with the palace's classicist columns. As particularly these latter details indicate, while the set achieves a realist effect with regard to the impression of the set in its totality, it is in the decorative detail and in the dressings that Metzner takes his design into the realm of what he above describes as the 'improbable'. Indeed, although the set does appear at a superficial glance to possess organic unity, a closer look reveals many incongruous stylistic details, which include, the architecture's classicist references apart, the Hetman's lodgings with their lavish, Empire-style furniture.

A particularly striking effect achieved by Metzner's set is the use of thousands of glass oil lamps, which adorn the walls of the palace. Contravening principles of functionality and verisimilitude considering the location of the palace, this lighting construction significantly aids the mood the film wants to achieve. Metzner recalls how the oil lamps' 'lively dancing light dissolves the shapes and transfers everything real into a definitely mystic atmosphere'.<sup>140</sup> As in the film's experimentation with sound, *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* tested innovative approaches towards cinematography and set design, as Metzner acknowledges with regard to the oil lamp set:

Only recently has been brought out a new negative sensitive to yellow and red rays, and therefore able to photograph the small dancing flames. This negative is very sensitive and enables the operator to light the actors sufficiently with little light only, thus allowing the tender lights of the oil-lamps to be visible as light sources.<sup>141</sup>

While Metzner's article in *Close Up* thus draws attention to, and insists on, the film's contribution to a modernist discourse both with regard to its content, and with regard to its technological apparatus, few contemporary intellectuals were prepared to go along with him. The love affair of *Close Up* with Pabst was beginning to cool off, in fact in the same issue as Metzner's discussion of his work on *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* the writer Bryher accused Pabst of choosing too frivolous a subject matter for the time: 'The atmosphere of the desert is absolutely authentic. But I could not read a Victorian novel at this time of crisis'.<sup>142</sup> Kracauer quotes this verdict in *From Caligari to Hitler*, and also sees the film as an 'outright retrogression from social conclusiveness into pure escapism'.<sup>143</sup>

In this chapter, we have adopted a different perspective on Pabst's film, and beyond that also regarding the previous case studies which can all be subsumed under the label 'escapism' to varying degrees. Although the films in question did not directly address the central political and social issues of the day, they nonetheless participated in modernist discourses concerning identities of nationhood, class, and gender. As we have suggested here, they articulated the pleasures of extraterritorialisation, and this articulation was substantially transported by the films' sets. However, beyond the ideological content of their narratives as well as their visual characteristics, and allowing for their individual

circumstances of production, these films must also be seen as defining a coherent strategy for a European mode of genre cinema that could provide competition to Hollywood. *DIE HERRIN VON ATLANTIS* constituted in this respect perhaps the most extreme and radical realisation of this aim, dissolving and disposing of the distinctions between art and populism, and between high and low culture, altogether. Although the film proved a cul-de-sac for political as well as for aesthetic reasons, a number of ideas that underline the film's strategy would be taken up across Europe throughout the decade.



# French Cinema in the 1930s: Space, Place, and National Identity

As with German cinema, it has been customary to view the output of French cinema of the 1930s in terms of national characteristics. The decade is frequently referenced in studies of French cinema as a 'golden age' of production,<sup>1</sup> an age in which the *auteur*-director, the star actor and the literary text emerged as touchstones of French cinematic culture. As a consequence of this, the canon of poetic realism, which is generally taken to be the most accomplished achievement of the decade in terms of production values and cultural prestige, has tended to be over-determined in studies of the era: the body of films in question amounts to fewer than eighty films, yet their status in cinema history is such that they have come to be accepted as an easy shorthand for all the aesthetic inflections and thematic priorities of the period. The political issues that had an impact on French life in the 1930s – the Depression, the election and rapid defeat of the progressive Popular Front government, the rise of fascism and shift towards war in Europe – have been persuasively argued to inform the mood of the aesthetic,<sup>2</sup> while the intrinsic Frenchness of the project has been traced through a focus on performance modes specific to French popular culture.<sup>3</sup> The aspects of French cinema that have so far received most attention – its cultural formation and historical development – have given rise to a broad consensus among scholars: that this is a cinema that is most productively read in terms of its thematic, formal and increasingly intense articulation of a discourse of 'introspection'. For French cinema scholarship to date, national identity is the common structuring concept that informs all domestic production in the 1930s, with the 'identity narrative' emerging as the key paradigm of the era. Such readings have been influential in reinforcing the perception that French cinema of the 1930s existed in some kind of aesthetic and critical isolation from the major international circuits of cinematic production. Themes and tropes articulated by design, however, provide evidence that this is an industry that is much less exceptional, and indeed much more outward-looking, than has previously been suggested.

We have established that the French industry of the era was unusually cosmopolitan, and that international influences were in dynamic circulation in the domestic cinema. Alastair Phillips's study of German émigré directors in Paris<sup>4</sup> is the most in-depth study to date of the important contribution of foreigners to

French production, suggesting how domestic practice and audience preference were respectively modified and inflected by the introduction of a Germanic perspective schooled in the urban narratives of the 1920s street film. Yet, in as much as his study focuses on the representation of the city of Paris, and demonstrates how foreign directors accommodated and extended the project that would translate into French poetic realism, once again we have an analysis that sees French cinema as fundamentally limited to questions of the nation and its native inhabitants and locales. Studies of French cinema of the 1930s, then, have effectively contained all major aspects of its production within national parameters, and thereby closed it down to the possibility that other visual and cultural agendas may have been in operation.

It is, of course, essential to understand how foreign designers engaged with and supported the identity narratives elaborated by French directors, scripted by French writers, and incarnated by French stars. Their work contributed new layers of interest and complexity to the representation of the nation and its sites, in both practical and aesthetic terms, and to that end, this chapter continues the investigation of working practices begun in chapter 2. What this will allow us to identify and assess is the extent to which non-French designers elaborated tropes about urban space, modernity, and foreign territories that offered alternatives to the hegemony of identity narratives. The attention of designers to the representation of domestic space reveals that artistically, their work positioned French cinema in conceptual terrain beyond the purely national; terrain that we more appropriately term transnational. Our analysis shows how French cinema, like its German and British counterparts, deployed design strategies that privileged the exotic, the distant and the historical, and we will suggest that such strategies enabled the possibility of imaginative escape from the standard expressions of the national psyche.

The analysis in this chapter is organised in terms of a geographical trajectory that begins with France and takes us progressively outwards to spaces that are increasingly remote and 'imagined'. We begin with a discussion of representation of Paris early in the decade, particularly in sets designed by Lazare Meerson. Paris as location is a key trope of the 1930s; as Crisp notes, 'Paris is so insistently present as almost to coincide with the notion of France itself'.<sup>5</sup> In Meerson's sets for Parisian films like *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS/UNDER THE ROOFTOPS OF PARIS* (1930), *LE MILLION/THE MILLION* (1931), *QUATORZE JUILLET/BASTILLE DAY* (1933) and *CIBOULETTE* (1933), the spatial parameters seem initially unproblematic: Paris with its cobbled streets, apartment buildings, market areas and dance halls, stands metonymically for all that is iconic about French urban space. The reduction of Paris to a few streets in *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* seems to confirm the nostalgic impulse to read France as an 'imagined community', defined by space, language and shared cultural references.<sup>6</sup> However, Meer-

son's set, specifically designed to accommodate the new mobility of the 'un-chained camera', enabled fictional characters and cinema spectators alike to journey through a three-dimensional Paris that was still unknown to French studio production, but that would later become the norm. Meerson's mapping of Paris, a mapping based on depth of field and spatial integrity as well as on authentic visual cues, transforms the journey through Paris into a haptic rather than a static, observational experience. His designs for these films actively worked against the construction of Paris as a nationally distinct space, bordered and separate from everything beyond. By allowing the possibility of mobility within the frame, and by suggesting *flânerie* in the imagined off-screen spaces, the function of the set is unexpectedly transgressive. While organising the thematics of community around which the films' narratives are structured, the set creates a space which is inhabited in tension with a further spatial counterpart – an unspecified, and emotionally compelling 'elsewhere'.

At the same time, designers routinely upset the sense of familiarity on which the viewer's appreciation of the set depends, manipulating urban domestic space in ways consistent with contemporary practice in the visual arts. On the one hand, the work of émigré photographers such as Brassai became an important frame of reference for Parisian topographies; on the other, the set created an entirely new perspective on the domestic that drew explicitly on contemporary attitudes to urban design and the decorative arts. This was a period in which the conception of urban space was being radically addressed by architects globally, and in which modernist interior design was becoming synonymous with desirable luxury lifestyles. We have seen how figures like Mallet-Stevens viewed the cinema as a vehicle for the popularisation of artistic movements, and Wakhévitch too noted that what might shock in the street could be entertaining on the screen.<sup>7</sup> The fashionable 'paquebot' or cruise liner style with its Art Deco luxury, for example, was unknown to mass audiences except through its on-screen depiction, but such depictions were common in the decade's films, normalising the space and offering it for general consumption in ways that were historically unprecedented. Similarly, construction materials such as chrome, glass and concrete, favoured by progressive architects such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe were uncommon in popular districts, yet they were routinely visible in screen representations of residences and industrial sites.

Our discussion will therefore show how films such as *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ/FREEDOM FOR US* (1931) showcase ideologies of modernism and art that were in wider circulation than the purely national sphere, without necessarily offering a faithful record of architectural practice or style associated with any one nation or movement. The alternately utopian and dystopian visions of modern space that are put before the spectator are forceful articulations of aspirations and anxieties about contemporary urban life. We shall also consider Marc Allégret's

ZOUZOU (1934) and Edmond Gréville's *PRINCESSE TAM-TAM/PRINCESS TAM-TAM* (1935), both featuring the celebrated theatrical star Josephine Baker, to show how fantasies about exoticism, otherness and performance are harnessed by the set and brought into the heart of French topographical representation. The sets, by Meerson and Trauner in these cases, do more than evoke Paris as screen spectacle and entertainment capital of France. Rather, they provide a commentary on the stardom of Josephine Baker, and the ways in which her exotic star persona exceeds the film. The mutability of meaning in design is apparent in the way in which Baker's iconicity and performance, and the threats posed by her racial otherness, are articulated by the set.

The discussion of spatial aesthetics will then move outwards from Paris to consider depictions of sites such as European resorts and exotic colonial locations, before moving on to consider the historical film set in France and elsewhere. Films such as *AMOK* (1934), *LE GRAND JEU/THE GAME OF FATE* (1934), and *LAC AUX DAMES/LADIES LAKE* (1934) show circulation, encounter, and community interaction in spaces beyond the national centre, and offer the possibility of spectatorial travel across borders and into other cultural contexts. Both the construction of exotic space, and the relationship of the individual to its 'foreignness' will be considered, in order to bring to attention the stylistic priorities that underpin this process of extra-territorial 'imagining'. The specific design criteria of the historical film will be considered in relation to *UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE /AN ITALIAN STRAW HAT* (1928), *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE/CARNIVAL IN FLANDERS* (1935), *DRÔLE DE DRAME/BIZARRE, BIZARRE* (1937), *LE GOLEM/THE GOLEM* (1936), and *MAYERLING* (1936). The historical film, in which temporal distance operates in tandem with geographical distance, afforded designers particular opportunities in terms of scale and fantasy, and allowed an often ludic aesthetic of display to come fully into play: in the French context, this is particularly effective in the comic-historic film. These films all show designers working with a rich frame of cultural reference, drawn principally from art history and architecture, and imaging space and place in ways that consciously interrogate questions of realism and screen authenticity. Again, the validation of space in these films depends on a frame of reference that exceeds the national context, and asks the audience to be attentive to the possibility of inter-cultural dialogue.

This comparison of films that span different genres and styles will offer us a new context for understanding how the work of émigré set designers in the era fed into the landscapes, emotions and thematic discourses of nationally authored films, and will permit an assessment of how their work had an impact on the cultural imagining of the nation. The purpose of this chapter is to show how an understanding of film design enables a re-evaluation of French cinema of the 1930s as a problematic vector of national identity, and to argue that a

considered reflection on the evolution of contemporary attitudes to place and space – consistent with that in operation elsewhere in Europe – is mediated in the French representation of domestic, futuristic, exotic and historic screen locations.

### **Paris and the Challenge to Popular Memory**

It has been widely suggested that one of the most urgent priorities of French cinema in the 1930s was to establish a project of cultural specificity, a screen register of 'Frenchness' for consumption by audiences both in France and abroad. Alastair Phillips argues in his study of German émigré filmmakers in France that

one of the challenges of the early sound era for French filmmaking was to manage an effective and nationally specific set of representational codes for the depiction of the national capital which could compete with the successes of its main rivals, Germany and the USA.<sup>8</sup>

The prioritising of a nationally-specific agenda is also evident in Steven Ungar's research into French colonial cinema: he reveals that out of a buoyant commercial corpus of 1,305 films over the decade, fewer than one hundred portrayed their central story as occurring outside *l'Hexagone*, or mainland France.<sup>9</sup> As we have indicated above, Paris was the hegemonic 1930s location in French films, and the view that was offered of the city tended to be consistent and even mono-dimensional in terms of its topographical frame of reference.<sup>10</sup>

The screen poet of Paris in these years was René Clair, whose interest in the city was elaborated over a series of films spanning the late silent and early sound eras. In the 1920s Clair directed four silent films: *ENTR'ACTE* (1924), *PARIS QUI DORT/THE CRAZY RAY* (1925), *LA TOUR/THE TOWER* (1928) and *UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE* (1928). The first three were shot on location in and around Paris, while the fourth features brief location shots from the city. Clair's particular strength, according to the young Marcel Carné writing in 1933, was his ability to render Paris a site of critical investigation by the camera; for Carné, it was Clair's inherent understanding of the imaginative, even ludic, potential of the screen city – filmed deserted (*PARIS QUI DORT*), or surreally (from a moving hearse in *ENTR'ACTE*) or in unusually intense proximity to its iconic structures (the Eiffel Tower in *LA TOUR*) – that creatively informed his subsequent adaptations of urban space to the controlled studio set.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the 1930s saw an intensifying of Clair's interest in the city through a trilogy of studio productions set in the popular districts or 'quartiers' of Paris: *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS*, *LE MILLION* and *QUATORZE JUILLET*. The sets for all three films were designed by Meerson whose collaboration with Clair began with *UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE*

D'ITALIE, and continued in the four Tobis-produced films that followed (including *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*). The two worked together again later in the decade when both were hired by Alexander Korda to work at London Films.<sup>12</sup> The films on which they collaborated demonstrate that Meerson deployed a wide range of architectural and decorative strategies to accommodate the twin aesthetics of poetic lyricism and realism for which Clair's work is renowned. What particularly pleased critics about these films was the perceived visual authenticity of the space, and the narrative possibilities this afforded to contemporary speech-based characters. Carné summed up this admiration as follows:

René Clair's Paris, which is so true to life, so accurate, stirring, and sensitive, in reality is a Paris of wood and stucco reconstructed at Epinay. Yet so great is René Clair's talent, so subtle are his gifts of observation, that, in a fake milieu and with characters miraculously seized from life, he can give us an interpretation of life which is more real than life itself.<sup>13</sup>

*SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* was a major hit for Tobis, although it was not initially well-received in France. It was in Berlin, where it had been distributed by its German parent company, that it first came to critical attention, and where, it is claimed, it recouped its entire production costs in one day's takings.<sup>14</sup> Alberto Cavalcanti assessed its success as follows:

Paradoxically, I would say that the film was successful abroad for precisely the same reasons that it initially failed in France. I'm certain that Meerson, as a foreigner, was able to create a vision of Paris closer to the ideas that foreigners have of the city, than of how it is in reality.<sup>15</sup>

This comment is revealing about the impact of set design on audiences, suggesting that recognition is a key factor in the appreciation of the set, but equally that this recognition is not necessarily based in topographical or architectural realities. It also begs the question of what a foreign eye and cultural sensibility bring to the known space. In this case, Cavalcanti asserts that Meerson's Paris was embraced as 'real' by a foreign audience for whom Paris was essentially an imagined space. Meanwhile French audiences initially resisted the shift it announced from location shooting, as was the norm in the silent era, to the fictional construction of the sound studio. The reason for the film's success in Germany can be attributed not only to the 'generic' appeal of Paris, but also to the fact that it could be understood or received within the generic framework of the street film, or 'city poem', popular since the 1920s (see discussion in chapter 3). Indeed, what the film's reception abroad and subsequent assessment require us to consider are the ways in which Meerson's design influenced and directed the viewing experience, while satisfying the expectations of foreign – and eventually French – spectators, both as cinemagoers, and as travellers in the realm

of the visual imaginary. What this discussion will attempt to evaluate are the new opportunities this set and others offered in terms of the cinematic experience of the modern city, and the ways in which these were enabled by innovations in *mise-en-scène*.

Meerson's Paris, and the Paris that it inspires in later films designed by Trauner, corresponds iconographically to representations of the city circulated for popular consumption in the literary apparatus of the 19th century realist novel. In the writings of novelists such as Victor Hugo and Eugène Sue, Paris emerges as a place of visual contradictions and conflicting appeals, offering the possibility of opposing experiences of the city in line with character displacement from one area to another. This mythologizing of Paris was extended in the 20th century by urban crime writers such as Eugène Dabit, Pierre MacOrlan and Francis Carco, whose novels and short stories were routinely adapted for the screen. As one critic suggests:

Like the Greek masks of comedy and tragedy, the myth of Paris contains two opposing faces. On the one hand, the bright, positive side glorifies the capital of progress, of modernity; the city of lights, magnificence and power. As the city of 1789, Paris is also the *capitale du genre humain*, the capital of the world. On the other hand, the dark, negative side represents Paris as dirty, unhealthy, gloomy and dangerous.<sup>16</sup>

Meerson's set depicts a 'quartier' or residential district in the working class north of Paris, a space beyond the touristic circuits of central Paris. The diegetic site is signalled in a series of shots of the smoking rooftops of the real city, which conclude with a diagonal travelling shot down into the streets and courtyard of the fictional space. In a reversal of the panoramic vista more generally associated with cinematic perspectives of the city, we are taken quite literally over the rooftops of Paris and into the hidden backstreets of the city, a viewpoint that emphasises the inaccessibility of the space to outsiders, and confers a degree of the exoticism of the forbidden to the site. Meerson's transformation of the panoramic 'city of light' into a series of dark alleys creates a Paris that seems to predate notions of rational order and fashionable ornamentation imposed by developers like Baron Haussmann in the mid-19th century. This is not the 'legible' city envisaged by the Second Empire's urban planners, 'a regulated space of leisure and pleasure to all its citizens',<sup>17</sup> but rather the city of the Baudelairean *flâneur* in which the city is a 'special kind of visual field, peculiarly open to the mobile gaze and unforeseen encounter'.<sup>18</sup>

Research photographs in the Meerson archive (held at the national *Bibliothèque du Film* in Paris) confirm that the designer was motivated by a desire to recreate Paris as an authentic space, mapped in terms of genuine topographies and visual cues that could be easily processed by the general viewer (images 01 & 02). The available documentation points to his almost ethnographic concern

Image 01 – *Sous les Toits de Paris*Image 02 – *Sous les Toits de Paris*

to depict Paris in this case not as ‘a place of confrontation with the shock and disturbances of modernity as in Berlin’,<sup>19</sup> but rather as a familiar space that investigates and stylises a popular French imaginary based on distinct literary sources. The many shots of doors and entrances, narrow cobbled streets and shop fronts nevertheless anticipate the emphasis Meerson’s set will place on the modern urban experience of displacement and circulation. The set initially appears to foster nostalgic observation by the appreciative tourist-viewer; however, in as much as it is conceived in terms of spaces that deliberately invite penetration by the camera, the apparently contained set already suggests the existence of an expanded, even more exotic place, outside the camera’s frame.

A similar interest in the possibilities of displacement and encounter was evident in the evocation of Paris offered by contemporary photographers. The French photographer Eugène Atget, who died in 1927, had been a pioneer of Parisian iconography, establishing views of Paris and Parisians that were exhibited and published widely.<sup>20</sup> His early 20th century collections on ‘Old Paris’ and ‘Salesmen and Traders on the Streets of Paris’ together with series depicting brothels, shops, and fairgrounds, were important historical documents that succeeded in establishing a new popular visual frame of reference for the city. This was taken up by émigrés like the Hungarians Brassai and André Kertész, whose

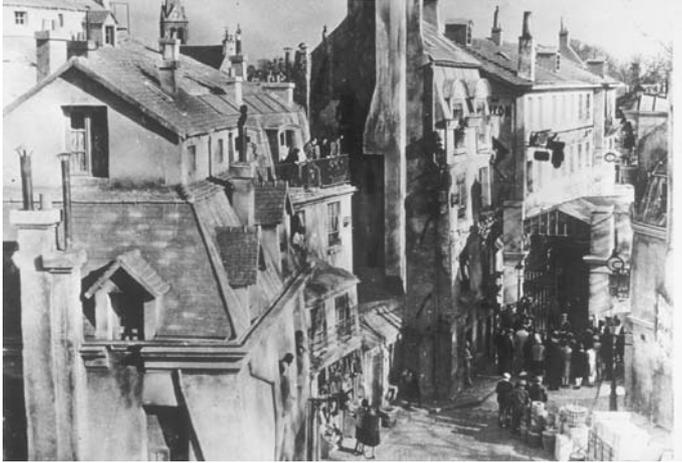


Image 03 – *Sous les Toits de Paris*

work in the 1930s was much admired for the ways in which it poeticised the ordinary places and people of Paris, rendering the Parisian underclass and its less salubrious districts exotic through an attention to composition and lighting. The anti-tourist gaze that was elaborated in visual culture at this time, and was disseminated through photo-journalism and art revues, is best exemplified by Brassai's 1932 collection *Paris de Nuit* (*Paris After Dark*), which was exhibited in Paris and London in 1933.<sup>21</sup> Brassai's nocturnal Paris of bridges, staircases, quaysides and gutters is a beautiful yet threatening urban landscape, inhabited by marginal characters such as prostitutes, shift workers and tramps. The stylisation of Paris, captured as if in a fleeting glimpse by an unseen passer-by, takes the spectator away from the picturesque central areas of Paris with their elegant monuments and open public spaces, and into an urban territory ripe with narrative possibilities. It is these possibilities that Meerson and Trauner explored in their Parisian sets.

The visual and emotional accessing of space that informed the representations of Paris in 1930s photography and popular fiction, found expression on the screen through new initiatives in *mise-en-scène*, in particular in the innovative use of the mobile or 'unchained' camera. One of the major modifications to aesthetic practice in the early years of French sound cinema was the increased attention given to establishing shots that introduced the spectator to screen locations signalled by décor, while simultaneously offering new kinds of viewing positions. In the three of Clair's films under discussion here (all with cinematography by Georges Périnal), the travelling camera is a common feature, opening the screen space up in ways that invite immediate spectatorial scrutiny. As Tashiro has indicated, 'camera movements can make us forget the boundary and encourage the

illusion of looking at real space',<sup>22</sup> and this is innovatively managed for the first time in French sound cinema in *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS* using camera and décor in combination to signal a fusion of 'real' space and 'reel' space.

The film opens with a series of shots of the rooftops of a Parisian district and then tracks across and down into the décor as the diegetic music – a popular song about the rooftops of Paris – is amplified. The smoke from a chimney announces the shift from location to set, and the camera's mobility mirrors this transition as the focus changes from a series of individual static snapshots, to a gentle downward track through the constructed set. As it descends, the point of view of the camera replicates that of the residents whom we see peering down from their wrought iron balconies and mansard roof windows into the courtyard below (image 03). The camera stops on a woman, the heroine Pola, then travels with her as she moves into the base of the set, to arrive at the central space of the action where community singing is taking place. The sequence concludes with a vertical shot of one of the apartment buildings, rising up over four open windows, and coming to rest on a further shot of smoking chimney pots. The journey is circular in terms of the camera's itinerary, and the *mise-en-scène* creates a fully integrated narrative space.

In this innovative opening sequence, we see how the facades of a set built on the backlot of the Epinay studios blend with the authentic spaces of contemporary Paris – in this case the neighbouring district of Epinay – adding a level of immediacy and realism to the viewing experience that was entirely new to French cinema. Meerson's expedient use of the horizon beyond the studio – the bell tower of the local church is visible over the rooftops in the top left-hand corner of the shot – allows him to link the existing visual field to the set, and suggest the authentic architectural existence of the latter within the former. The repeated use of rooftop shots punctuates the film, re-establishing and reinforcing the sense of geographical authenticity that is determined at the outset. Verisimilitude is enhanced by the fluid descending and rising movements of the camera past facades that are replete with detail: we see into windows on various levels, and have a sense of the simultaneity and randomness of community experience that awaits us. Furthermore, the opportunity this close movement affords us to scrutinise and assess the small detail of the décor (the stonework, the furnishings, the ironwork of the balconies) adds to the sense of realism set up in the camera's transition from existing to constructed world. The size and incline of the set are also effective: the spectator's eye roams effortlessly from an elevated position down to street-level and back without losing any sense of the coherence of the space, and thereby persuading us further of the authenticity of our experience. The narrowing of space into a closed, gated courtyard completes the narrative movement into the film, while establishing the stage-like centre of the world in which we, and the characters, will now remain, until a



Image 04 – *Le Million*

reverse sequence finally removes us from the diegetic world in the film's concluding moments.

The camera's literal 'plunge' into space establishes a travelling gaze that will characterise spectatorial positions for the rest of the film, and facilitate a privileged access into both the private and the social action spaces of the film – stairwells, bedrooms, cafés, dance halls. The sense that this community exists in a full and developed space is maintained, even when the action is rendered using a static camera, as was more characteristic of film style of the era. Techniques such as low angle shooting and strategic lighting are used, particularly in exterior street shots, in ways that enhance the illusion of expansive space. In the nocturnal street fight scene, for example, pools of light and a silhouetted backdrop in painted perspective, which begins immediately behind the actor positioned furthest back in crowd, are deployed to suggest that the space in which the brawl occurs is much larger than the shooting stage of forty metres by twenty metres on which it was actually filmed. A *tulle* curtain (fine silk netting) extends around the entire set, creating a hazy effect at the edges, while the participation of a crowd on stage masks the smallness of the space. Although the sequence is filmed using a series of largely static shots, the use of decorative elements such as fences and lampposts, both to the front and the rear of the



Image 05 – *Le Million*

frame, and the judicious use of sound to suggest the proximity of a railway line, work to convince the viewer of the film's spatial integrity. Furthermore, Meerson maximises the sense of space in the interior shots by constructing more flexible sets than had previously been common in studio practice: as Berthomé notes 'in the interiors he breaks with tradition, building integrated sets whose mobile walls allowed for filming from all possible angles'.<sup>23</sup> The construction of the set also allows cross-set filming, that is to say shots taken from windows into directly facing windows, thereby emphasising yet further the film's sense of structural coherence.

LE MILLION opens in a similar way to SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS, with the mobile camera gliding over the rooftops of Paris before entering the skylight of a dance hall where a lively party is underway. In this establishing sequence, however, Meerson adopts a different decorative strategy, using an elaborate thirty metres-long model of the Parisian skyline instead of a fully constructed set (image 04). The model, which was erected in the Epinay studio courtyard, and is filmed in extreme close up, privileges shape and angle over careful mimetic detail. While authenticity is guaranteed through a distant glimpse of a model of Notre Dame cathedral, most of the space is generic, but such close scrutiny as was permitted in SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS is here impeded by the darkness of night filming. As Trauner points out, the skill in using models was still developing in French practice, and designers had to counter the problem that 'as soon as the camera moves, you see the artifice'.<sup>24</sup> Here, we see how Meerson uses perspective to allow the camera to travel in a seemingly random manner over what appears to be a vast expanse of rooftops. The shot begins in real size, with

Image 06 – *Le Million*

actors positioned within the set; the bird's-eye view means that we see the characters only as the camera would, that is, framed in relation to their immediate space – the rooftop – regardless of the structure's actual relation to the ground. The shooting still makes clear that perspective on both the horizontal and vertical axes is entirely false, whereas the filmed sequence demonstrates how this perspective serves the flight and viewpoint of the camera. On screen, distortions such as the small-scale construction of the illuminated clock tower (which is built to one third the size of the first elements of the model), or the increasing flatness of the elements to the rear, are simply not apparent. The selective use of light, positioned to suggest randomly illuminated windows, completes the sense of architectural integrity that situates the film in a familiar Paris.

Although the opening sequence anchors the film in a realist mode consistent with the information in the credit sequence that the action of the film takes place in 1930, the film continues in a very different stylistic mode. Immediately after the arrival of the camera in the dance hall, the film's characters resolve to recount the story of their celebration, and the film slips, via a flashback, to the same location earlier in the day. The tale they tell is a farcical one about the loss and eventual recovery of a winning lottery ticket, and the search for it takes them through a series of eccentric locations including an artist's studio, a police station, a criminals' den, a junk shop and a woodland stage-set at the Opéra Lyrique theatre. The slippage in time is signalled by a transition in the decorative priorities of the film, which are reworked in ways that enhance the fantastic elements of the story. In particular, the change in ambience is suggested by the extensive use of almost transparent silk veils across all the remembered spaces



Image 07 – *Le Million*

of the film (image 05). This has a number of immediate effects. One is to create simplicity of line and uniformity of tonality consistent with the ethereal qualities of this part-real, part-imagined world. The background complicates both perspective and object significance depending on whether elements are placed in front of or behind the screen. For example, attention is drawn to the child's pram in the stairway because of its visual detachment from the action and figures front of screen. The fabric screens compromise dimensions, shortening and exaggerating the depth of field in ways that serve the narrative: the artist's studio is a vast expanse in which the characters are completely exposed, while the junkshop is a cramped, visually complex space, in which both characters and plot detail can be lost from sight (image 06). Meerson's staging of background and accessories accentuates the sense of whimsy in the film and adds to the visual possibilities of comic performance. In *LE MILLION*, the spaces of the films are stage-spaces by design, contributing signifiers to the thematic reflection on performance, theatricality and artificiality which reaches its romantic and narrative conclusions on the stage of the Opéra Lyrique (image 07).

The harmonious pairing of mobile camera and the set to achieve immediate narrative, thematic and visual impact is a technique that we see developed throughout the decade; its use reveals how designers were able to create persuasive illusions of depth, height and location using very little actual studio space. The twenty-minute opening sequence of Claude Autant-Lara's *CIBOULLETTE*, designed by Trauner in what he acknowledges to be Meerson's style,<sup>25</sup> was one of the most ambitious undertaken in the decade. As in *LE MILLION*, the camera travels once again over a model Paris, beginning at the gates on the out-

skirts of the city, and moving into the identifiable spaces of the Les Halles area: the St Eustache Church, the Fontaine des Innocents, and the Les Halles market are all recognisable landmarks in the model. Similarly, in the opening of Clair's *QUATORZE JUILLET*, the camera travels over the facades of the buildings that surround the main square, establishing the square itself as the major action space of the film. Our view is initially obscured by a paper lantern, a decorative element that functions as a vehicle of visual transition, but also signals the narrative's thematic source in notions of festivity. As the camera travels on through the set, the square with its faded signs and walls, old wood, and peeling paintwork is revealed in detail. The sense of community that the film explores is enlarged and exaggerated by the use of multiple levels, with the seemingly real stairs and houses that rise into the background painted in perspective on a backdrop beginning from the level of the third step.

In the Parisian films discussed above, the sets display the range of functions outlined by Charles and Mirella Affron in their taxonomy of set design. They are, at their most basic level, denotative, serving as descriptive indicators of place, temporality and genre. As such, the sets allow viewers to locate the narratives in Paris, in the present, in realist-inflected – but sometimes expressly theatrical – drama. They are also deliberately crafted for pictorial and compositional effect, thereby punctuating the film with moments of visual intensity and emphasising narrative correspondences between character, place and action. While the achievement of such sets is their ability to pass almost undetected as an element of *mise-en-scène*, our analysis has shown that the staging and foregrounding of the *décor* confer narrative weight upon it. Thus, *décor*, no matter the level of verisimilitude it seeks to express, is revealed as a key element of the structural organisation – and authorial signature – of a film.

### **The Set as Star: Fantasies of Place and Space**

As the previous section has demonstrated, designers in France in the early 1930s developed decorative strategies that aimed at persuading the spectator of the authenticity of both the depicted locale, and the spectator's experience of 'travelling' within it. Sets privileged topographical plausibility, with real landmarks (the Epinay church tower, Notre Dame Cathedral, Les Halles), as well as generic structures (tenement buildings, shop fronts), routinely deployed as indicators of place. This is an approach that would continue throughout the decade, and would be a key characteristic of poetic realism. However, while the primary frame of reference was realism, we have seen how designers used recurrent configurations of space drawn from a range of artistic sources, thereby avoiding what Trauner termed *réalisme au premier degré* (primary realism),<sup>26</sup> in favour of verisimilitude based on the impressionistic rather than the mimetic. As our ana-

lysis has shown, this imagining of national space was predominantly based on an astute abstraction of familiar elements culled from literature and visual culture, and reformulated to accommodate innovations in cinematic practice engendered by the transition to sound filming. The spectator's cinematic journey thus took him or her into a conceptually bordered space, exotic in its screen novelty and in its imaginative concretising of popular conceptions of place and space, but where what the Affrons term 'denotative normalcy',<sup>27</sup> remained a key factor of the design strategy.

The status of the set as an object of visual pleasure, able to compel the attention and awe of the spectator, was considerably more marked in fantasy genres such as science fiction, the musical and the historical film, in which we find more evidently artificial sets. In such genres, sets continue to serve a 'reality effect' consistent with the depiction of the 'alternative' world and the characters that inhabit it, but the designer's attention to the stylisation of the set is inevitably much more apparent to spectators. The narrative significance of the self-consciously fictional set is such that we never lose sight of its presence; it becomes a 'ubiquitous figure'<sup>28</sup> that assumes metaphorical, symbolic or even 'character-equivalent' status. What this section will demonstrate, through the example of René Clair's musical fantasy *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*, is how in such films, the set becomes a 'co-star' of the film,<sup>29</sup> significantly impacting on narrative at a level beyond the decorative and the punctuative. Later sections of the discussion will consider how musical and historical genres privilege 'embellished' set design in ways consistent with their generic distance from the contemporary realist film.

While science fiction as a genre did not hold the same interest for the French as it did for German and British filmmakers, the ambitions of directors and production companies were imaginatively showcased in fantasy narratives that drew upon the iconography and ideologies of modernism, and used these to suggest futuristic environments. The film *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*, set in a dystopian contemporary French world, was particularly striking in terms of scale and architectural substance; it was also unusually imaginative in its reflection of contemporary European architectural practice, mirroring interests in principles as varied as structure, social function, materials and furnishings. Clair's film, unlike his Parisian trilogy, rejects all notions of the domestic familiar, and instead offers an alternative contemporary France based on a range of modernist design ideas in circulation in Europe and Scandinavia in the 1920s and 1930s. While France was certainly familiar with modernist construction through the work of practitioners such as Mallet-Stevens, Le Corbusier, Michel Roux-Spitz, and Adolf Loos, innovative buildings that appeared on the French landscape in the 1920s (such as Le Corbusier's Villa Savoie, 1928) tended to be private commissions, and their cachet thus that of exclusivity rather than public access. The



Image o8 – *A Nous la Liberté*

public, however, was familiar with modern urban design through industrial architecture and public buildings. As Anthony Sutcliffe notes of construction in the interwar period:

Some industrial sectors such as aircraft, railways and motors were technically very advanced. Their architecture made widespread use of reinforced concrete on a scale not seen elsewhere in Europe. Steel and glass, including transparent bricks, though by no means unique in Europe, were also used freely. ... commercial buildings in Paris generally made use of concrete frames and extensive glazing, though the building regulations of 1902 restricted the freedom of architects in terms of height and frontage treatment.<sup>30</sup>

Auguste Perret's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, with its concrete neo-classical façade was a feature in Parisian life from 1913, while Le Corbusier's ocean-liner inspired Cité de Refuge, commissioned by the Salvation Army, opened in Paris in 1933. The social agenda was a priority for many architects: Le Corbusier's futuristic Plan Voisin of 1925 envisaged central Paris as a city of skyscrapers, permeated by sunlight (because of the height) and surrounded by greenery (because of the freed up space below). His *unité d'habitation* (living unit) realised in Marseilles in the late 1940s, proposed what seemed like futuristic modes of effi-



Image 09 – *A Nous la Liberté*

cient urban living, centred on massive complexes that incorporated apartments, and communal and commercial facilities. The spaces of urban living were to be a *machine à habiter*: a machine for living.

Meerson's sets in *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ* take their cues from the notions of efficiency, regularity, order and community cohesion implicit in the modernist construction ethos. The action begins in a prison, a space defined by uniform starkness, linearity and geometric angles; the regimentation of the inmates is a narrative extension of the space, in which form is inextricably linked to function. Louis, one of the inmates (played by Clair favourite Raymond Cordy) escapes from the prison, and his rapid rise from convict to capitalist entrepreneur is traced in his movement through a series of parallel spaces, each more modern than the last: an old-fashioned, cluttered junkshop, a basic market stall, a smart record shop, a massive, ultra-chic department store specialising in sales of gramophones (image 08). As Louis travels through spaces that chart his progress in the modern, consumerist, technological world, the fashionable Art Deco style is increasingly present as a decorative sign of his material elevation. The itinerary of progress – individual and social – is confirmed in the final set in the series: the massive industrial complex where gramophones are manufactured (image 09), and of which Louis is the managing director.

The factory is wholly modern in visual and spatial aspects; its featureless walls, both inside and out, confirm the anonymity of mass production, while its gigantic proportions dwarf the individual. Indeed, this is a space in which people have numbers instead of names, and in which automated voices give instructions to a dehumanised workforce. Like the department store facade, the factory set dis-

Image 10 – *A Nous la Liberté*Image 11 – *A Nous la Liberté*

plays all the ostentation of the modern. Yet in its suggestion of incarceration and institutional living, it also reminds us of the prison that opened the film, thus setting out the film's thematic concerns with the oppression of the individual by new technologies and capitalist economics as well as civic authority. As Donald Albrecht notes, Meerson's set ironically connotes the very opposite of the positive values intended by modernist architects, creating possibilities for restricted movement and negative energy, rather than freedom of movement.<sup>31</sup>

Modernism is thus used against itself to express a dystopian vision of French society where, as children learn in the schoolroom, *le travail est obligatoire* – work is compulsory – and all signs of individualism are stifled. In a decorative strategy that is both expedient and satirical, Meerson interweaves the themes of loss of liberty and capitalist efficiency by creating variations on spaces that are com-

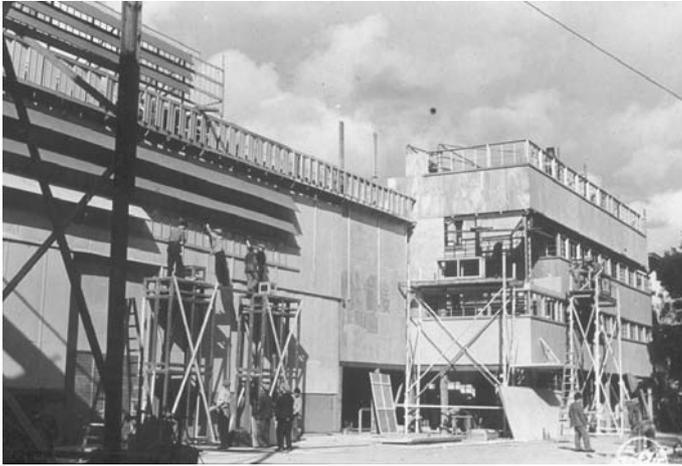


Image 12 – *A Nous la Liberté*

mon to both worlds: the same décor and composition, for example, are used to represent the prison workshop, the factory assembly line and their respective canteens (images 10 & 11). The factory is a futuristic, menacing space that stands in juxtaposition to the familiar spaces of urban France, and is all the more sinister for the diegetic suggestion that it co-exists with the familiar topos of French life: the street with its traditional shops in which Emile attempts his doomed courtship provides a visual counterpoint that stresses the sheer excess of the industrial structure. Earlier in the film, after his liberation from prison, Emile is arrested while relaxing in an open field, a natural space on which the smoke-belching industrial landscape imposes itself as an alien backdrop.

Like *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS*, the set of *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ* was constructed using the exteriors as well as the interiors of the Epinay studio. The studio courtyard and external walls were clad with a variety of materials, and a platform was built on the roof of the studio to permit an open horizon beyond the décor. The entire structure was supported by scaffolding erected in the décor workshop below (image 12). Such an undertaking represented a significant financial and practical investment for both the studio and the designer. As Barsacq has noted, such sets tended to be built from hard-wearing construction materials rather than convincing visual substitutes:

Constructing exterior sets differs from building sets in the studio. These temporary buildings, generally large, have to stand up to wind and weather, demanding a stable framework of metal or timber scaffolding with firm wind braces. Floors and roofs, if required, are calculated in terms of the weight they must carry: crowds, snowfalls, violent winds, and so on. The various levels are served by concealed stairs giving

easy access. Wall surfaces are made of resistant materials, such as plaster tiles, slabs of conglomerate, planks or wattle coated with staff or plaster that is then whitewashed. Streets are paved (preferably with real paving stones), asphalted, or cemented as required, including curbs and gutters. The painting is done with oil or acrylic paint or any other water-resistant product.<sup>32</sup>

Projects of this scale and expense were not always easy to negotiate, even with enlightened producers such as the Tobis organisation. A letter from René Clair to Dr. Henkel (the manager of the Tobis studios) in 1929 expresses his dismay at the company's reluctance to allow Meerson to create an exterior street for a forthcoming film (most likely *SOUS LES TOITS DE PARIS*, but this is not specified). While Clair acknowledges that interior construction remained feasible, the particular urgency of his letter suggests that the space limitations of the Epinay studios, together with the tight production schedule, meant that the number of scenes to be filmed continuously would exclude the possibility of any daytime construction work during the shooting period.<sup>33</sup>

In *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*, Meerson uses modernist visual indicators to create a set that is exotic in its distance from the cultural imaginary advanced elsewhere in domestic films set in the present. The architectural trademarks of modernist construction are evident throughout the film, but their function is altered by the stylistic attention given to them as narrative elements rather than as structural features. What Meerson creates is a visual impression of an authentic contemporary structure based on principles of volume, harmonised proportions, and the relationship of solid to void. Visually, the factory building replicates the structural principles and geometric lines of contemporary European structures like the Bauhaus building in Dessau (Walter Gropius, 1926), and the state of the art modernist Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam (Johannes Brinkman, 1929). The set displays the same general principles of modular design and horizontality, and incorporates these into features such as ribbon windows and structuring piles or *pilotis*. The use of reinforced concrete is suggested through the featurelessness of the facade itself and through the elimination, in both interiors and exteriors, of superfluous ornamentation. Elsewhere, the use of glass bricks, gated partitioning, and ramps provides a direct correspondence with Parisian buildings designed by Mallet-Stevens and Le Corbusier, especially the Villa Savoie and the Rue Mallet-Stevens in the 16th arrondissement.

The screen space, in both the factory and the prison, is created in ways that maximise regimented movement, while suggesting the constraints of institutionalised activity. Volume is exaggerated by the use of the double height principle, and techniques of perspective are extensively used to expand this effect and add depth to the field. This was not as straightforward as one might assume: Trauner records that Meerson used child actors in the role of prison guards at

the back of the thirty-eight metre long prison set in order to enhance the effects of perspective. He notes: 'children are great for this kind of shot, but their heads are proportionately bigger than adults' in relation to the body. So we had to make sure they stayed right at the back of the scene, in the shadows where they could be less easily seen'.<sup>34</sup> Gates and bars are used to add to the linearity and narrowness of the corridors, and shadows are used to extend the desired sense of unfamiliarity as well as of spatial confinement. Repetition of spaces through decorative variation also adds to the sense of oppression in the film: dining rooms, for example, appear in several versions (in the prison, the factory, Louis's opulent home, and Jeanne's traditional Parisian apartment), each one recalling its predecessor and thereby commenting on the function of décor for narrative meaning.

The thematic re-working of spaces we see in the dual prison workshop/factory assembly line set was not confined to the fantasy film. Although to very different effect, the same technique was used by Lourié in sets for Renoir's *LA GRANDE ILLUSION*, also filmed at Tobis. Lourié recalls:

In the first draft of the script, the German officers' cantina was placed in an abandoned chateau, the French cantina in a temporary prefab building erected on the airfield. The producer, or rather his father, who supplied the financing, objected to the use of a 'chateau' as the setting for the German cantina. In his opinion it would be too costly. In studying the research, I noticed that the Germans often used a prefab building almost identical to the French one. Using this similarity, staging both cantinas in the same prefab, could make an interesting statement on the sameness of military establishments. Jean [Renoir] adopted this solution.<sup>35</sup>

As in *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*, differences of space function are achieved through subtle modification of the elements of the décor. In Lourié's case, risqué photos of girls in swimsuits (in the French canteen) and a portrait of the Kaiser (in the German canteen) are interchangeable elements that create different ambiances and character profiles; the substitution of a soundtrack of the popular *chanson* (on the French site) for the classical waltz (on the German site) adds to this effect. In *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ*, the shift from prison to factory, and from one kind of loss of freedom to another, is similarly evoked by the replacement of the elements of the wooden toys (assembled by prisoners) by the mechanical parts of the gramophone (assembled by factory workers).

The utopian possibility implicit in the modernist ideal is advanced at the end of Clair's film through a satirical attack on the décor itself. At the very moment when men are threatened with obsolescence by a factory that can manufacture gramophones without human input, the character of the décor is transformed and redeemed by narrative events. As Louis delivers his valedictory speech in the factory yard, and cedes ownership of the factory to his workers, the wind

rises. It gains momentum, and gradually the natural elements assert their power over the constructed, destroying the temporary structures that have been erected for the ceremony. The cash assets of the factory – abandoned by a burglar in an open suitcase on the roof of the factory – are comically redistributed as the workers and the bosses have an equal chance to acquire the banknotes that fly randomly through the air. With the introduction of confusion and the disordering of the hitherto ordered set that this entails, the factory sheds its sinister aspects, becoming a playground where chase sequences are enacted and childish games are enjoyed. In the final moments of the film, the transformation of the factory is complete when it becomes a space dedicated entirely to leisure. The workers have indeed been rendered obsolete by machines, but this no longer poses a threat to their individuality, and in scenes that anticipate Duvivier's *LA BELLE ÉQUIPE/THEY WERE FIVE* (1936), their freedom is expressed by leisure activities and the natural environment: singing and dancing at the *guinguette*, and fishing on the open riverbanks. Freedom of mind and body are signalled by the momentum of the dancers, by the streamers that flutter above the open-air dance floor, and by Louis and Emile's joyful appreciation of life on the open road.

The sets in *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ* have a highly privileged relationship to narrative. In this film, modern France is rendered exotic precisely because it does not correspond to the cultural imaginary of urban space represented by the Parisian films outlined in the previous section. Here, the deployment of a contemporary frame of reference validates the realist effect, while the film's thematic and visual emphasis on mechanical motion, social regimentation and the dangers of progress are enacted within a structure that makes a playful nod to the aesthetics of function in relation to form. Although *A NOUS LA LIBERTÉ* was something of a generic and stylistic exception in French production, it demonstrates that a similar concern to depict the 'fantastic exotic' operated in France as in Germany and Britain.

### **The Set and the Star: Josephine Baker on Screen**

Musical film provided further opportunities for designers to conceive non-realist sets. Music was an important aspect of 1930s French cinema, although it developed in different ways from the Hollywood model, evolving a preference for popular traditions of song and dance rather than for lavish cinematic spectacle. Singers such as Fréhel, Damia and Piaf<sup>56</sup> were renowned for their interpretations of the *chanson réaliste*, while dance numbers, such as they were, tended to be centred around the communal rituals of the *bal musette* or *guinguette* – the dance halls frequented by the working classes on their rare days off. As Kelley Conway suggests, these spaces

embodied the opposite of the values of the *music hall à grand revue*. Here far from the fashionable music halls and the elegant dance halls, people were not yet dancing the Charleston, the blackbottom or the shimmy; they were still dancing the waltz, the polka, the *marche*, the tango, and the java.<sup>37</sup>

The songs themselves tended to be about romantic loss or the pain of separation from France, with the realist singer both representing and narrating Paris,<sup>38</sup> even when in exile far from home. Thus, wistful musical interludes were common in films such as *AMOK, PÉPÉ LE MOKO* (1937) and *LA BANDERA/ESCAPE FROM YESTERDAY* (1935), set in the colonies. As Vincendeau notes, song frequently had a thematic imperative, and was 'designed to stress the spirit of a community rather than the performance of the dance' that would often accompany it.<sup>39</sup> The singers were generally presented as hardened types, 'women perceived to have "lived"', and the bodies as well as the voices, of the realist singers often departed from the normative codes of beauty in 1930s Paris'.<sup>40</sup> Films like Richard Pottier's *LUMIÈRES DE PARIS/LIGHTS OF PARIS* (1937) that starred singer Tino Rossi, and featured the stage glamour of the Parisian troupe The Bluebell Girls, were a relative rarity in French production before the 1940s, while the bawdy and unpolished military vaudeville, the *comique troupier*, was more typical of 1930s musical fare.

When the Charleston, the blackbottom, the shimmy and other new jazz-inspired dance forms did reach France, they came first to the theatre in the form of music-hall star Josephine Baker, one of the most iconic performers in inter-war French culture, and one with transnational appeal. When Baker toured Germany and Britain she commanded similarly enthusiastic attention. An African-American dancer from St Louis, Missouri, Baker first took to the stage in Harlem and Broadway in black dance shows. When the celebrated 'Revue Nègre' came from New York to the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris in 1925, Baker's role in the *danse sauvage*, or 'savage dance', established her as a reference for 'a new visual language of primitivism'<sup>41</sup> that gave momentum to French culture's fascination with 'negrophilia'. This centred mainly on the appeal of Black American jazz culture; in the 1920s, black entertainers like the clarinettist Sidney Bechet had established themselves in the bohemian clubs of Montmartre, Montparnasse and the Latin Quarter, and by the early 1930s, figures such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington had begun to tour in France.<sup>42</sup>

Baker's provocative incarnation of the fantasy of exotic sensuality, expressed through athletic dance and 'scandalous' costume, became legendary:

Baker performed the *danse* bare-breasted in a scanty costume of feathers and beads with collars around her wrists and ankles – echoes of slavery mediated as primitive musical hall adornment. ... The highly erotic dance was a "savage" *pas de deux* offering the audience a display of modern primitivism that appealed to both the avant-

garde set in its self-consciously mediated spectacle of Otherness but also had a more popular appeal as a rehearsal of the authentic, primitive Africanness located in France's colonial territories [...] <sup>43</sup>

Her success with the 'Revue Nègre' was followed up in 'La Folie du Jour' at the 'Folies Bergère', where Baker performed her infamous banana dance – clad only in a tiny skirt of upturned bananas – and this more than anything else cemented her status as one of the era's most notorious performers. As Elizabeth Ezra notes, Baker's image from this point on was heavily marketed beyond the world of Parisian stage entertainment, conferring on her a very modern kind of media celebrity. She endorsed consumer products as diverse as shoes, cosmetics and bananas, and gave her name to 'Bakerfix' hair gel; she also inspired couturiers to design the 'Zouzou' and 'La Créole' dresses, and contributed home spun recipes for pancake syrup and corned beef hash to a celebrity cook book. Her appeal was polymorphous, extending across media and audiences. Ezra suggests that this was:

precisely because she was so hard to place; a floating signifier of cultural difference, she represented many different things to different people. ... Baker's enormous popularity owed much to her cosmopolitan identity: she could evoke Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and France, by turns or all at once as the occasion required.<sup>44</sup>

By the 1930s, Baker's assimilation into French popular culture had been completed by her association with the song 'J'ai deux amours (mon pays et Paris)' ('I have two loves, my country and Paris'). This song, which was a major hit for the star, and remains a perennial favourite in French culture,<sup>45</sup> announced Baker as having strong emotional ties to what became her adopted culture. Baker became a French citizen in 1937, and was awarded the Legion of Honour for her work in the French Resistance; she remained in France until her death in 1975.

The extension of Baker's image into screen stardom was an obvious next step, and indeed, she had already made inroads into the cinema in the silent film *LA SIRÈNE DES TROPIQUES/THE SIREN OF THE TROPICS* (1927). The film rehearses the 'primitive-to-Parisienne' narrative that would become the staple of Baker's cinema career, and exploited in particular her comic stage persona based on loose-limbed athleticism and artful clumsiness. Clearly a star of her fame, glamour and iconicity brought a raft of expectations to a screen career, and the two sound films that she went on to make in France in the 1930s (*ZOUZOU* and *PRINCESSE TAM-TAM*) were conceived, in terms of plot, style and action, in ways that accommodated and highlighted her star persona. The first, *ZOUZOU*, based on a scenario by Giuseppe 'Pepito' Abatino (Baker's manger and companion until 1936), tells the story of a Martinique-born circus performer, the orphan daughter of a Chinese woman and a 'redskin', who as child is exhibited alongside her

white 'twin' brother, billed as an exotic 'miracle of nature'. As adults, Zouzou and her brother Jean (played by Jean Gabin) move to Paris where they take jobs in a laundry and a music hall respectively. Zouzou is secretly in love with Jean, but in spite of finding success and public adulation on the music hall stage, she loses Jean to Claire (Yvette Lebon), her white French co-worker.

An early outline of the script that was sent to Baker for approval bears the following note on the top page:

For a star with Miss Josephine Baker's unique qualities, what is important is not to have a complicated, artful plot, but rather a scenario that gives scope to the star's talents.<sup>46</sup>

Thus the film's more problematic aspects, such as the threat to French society proposed by incest and *métissage* (interracial relationships), are glossed over in favour of a narrative of transformation that mirrors Baker's personal 'rags to riches' trajectory, and her associations with the lavish stage spectacle. The sets were designed by Meerson, assisted by Trauner, and range from a fairground complete with carousel (anticipating Trauner's set in *QUAI DES BRUMES/PORT OF SHADOWS*, 1938), through a series of generic spaces – provincial and Parisian family residences, the laundry, the Parisian dance hall, and the backstage areas of the theatre – before concluding in an extravagant stage set on which Zouzou and a chorus line of male and female dancers perform. The 'tropics' are briefly depicted in a short scene in which Jean, a sailor, sends a postcard home to Zouzou, but the set is very different to the more realist sets evident elsewhere in French cinema of the 1930s. Here, the brevity of its appearance gives it the status of a denotative topographical indicator that is without consequence to the development of the narrative and the characters. The set, populated by easy stereotypes, serves as a space in which the womanising habits of Jean, so crucial to the film's narrative direction, can be rapidly asserted.

The first sets in the film are small cramped spaces that express the relative poverty of Zouzou's family environment, and size (of both objects and places) remains a key motif in the narrative's construction of Baker as Zouzou. The family apartment in Toulon is a tiny space that seems too small to contain Baker's active body; as she energetically jumps onto a trapeze that incongruously hangs from the bedroom ceiling, and attempts a swing for the entertainment of a watching child, she crashes into the window, and falls to earth with a clumsy bump. Similarly, Zouzou's accommodation in Paris is a containing, restricting space for a woman of her size and vigour. Her attempt to cook dinner in the tiny kitchen serves the narrative as a comic interlude in keeping with her reputation for gestural antics; but in the way she seems to exceed the available space, it also provides a commentary on both the physicality and the magnitude of Baker, the star.

Most tellingly of all, when Zouzou accompanies Claire and Jean to the dance hall 'Chez Oscar', she does not dance, but remains at the table, closed in by the alcove around her; the task of singing and dancing is left to Gabin, who serenades Claire with an intimate rendition of the popular song 'Fifine'. Here Baker's failure to integrate fully into the ambience of a set that distils the essence of popular Frenchness, highlights the ground her particular stardom occupies in relation to French performance norms. While she is not excluded outright from the community within which she finds herself, Zouzou (with Jean and Claire) is dismissed from the bar when she rejects the advances of a drunk. In this environment, her inability to participate naturally leaves her vulnerable to unwelcome male attention, and underscores her extra-textual status as an attractive, but potentially disruptive interloper in French culture. However, in the laundry, an entirely female environment headed by the widow Vallée, Zouzou finds an attentive audience of laundresses, an informal chorus line of young women, whose uniformity, quick banter and choreographed activity – folding, ironing, sorting – suggest something of the stage. In a sequence that cuts between the laundrette and the rehearsal stage of the Folies de Paris theatre, Baker's talent as a performer is highlighted as she, not Barbara, the ostensible star of the show, gives a rousing performance of 'Il n'y a qu'un homme dans Paris' ('There's only one man in Paris') to an appreciative audience.

The set in which Zouzou inadvertently gives her first solo performance in public is a bare, darkened stage, lit by a single spotlight. Zouzou emerges from the dressing rooms, where she has been delivering laundry, wearing a tight sparkling costume that the other dancers declare was 'made for her'. Although she feigns stage fright, Jean persuades her to help him regulate the spotlight, and she playfully adopts a series of star-like poses, while the camera closes in on her perfect sculpted face in the mode of a Hollywood glamour shot. She is in every sense a natural. As the music commences, Zouzou starts to dance, enjoying the shadow that her body casts on the screen behind her, and then enjoying the 'instinctiveness' of the dance as she becomes increasingly lost in its rhythms. The simplicity of the set comes to the fore as the focus shifts from Zouzou to the shadow projected behind her, and presents her in terms of her new dual identity as diva of stage and screen. Moreover, the lines of her magnified shadow emphasise the elongation and smooth curves of Baker's body, echoing the Art Deco style that was widely used in posters and lithographs of the actress, artwork such as that seen at the end of the film when the now successful Zouzou walks past a bank of publicity posters of her face in close-up. As the curtains open to reveal her performance to the orchestra and assembled producers, the sole element on the stage is Josephine Baker, her shape and energetic persona magnified for the screen in line with the expectations of her career transition to the cinema.

The film culminates in a virtuoso stage performance that has all the elements of a big Hollywood musical number. First, the curtains open on a sumptuous bedroom filled with accessories that remind us of *Zouzou*: the birdcage she saw in the market at Toulon, a telephone that might bring her a message about Jean, the armchair in which she sprawls when no message comes, and a comb that encourages us to think about how her once unruly hair has now been tamed in a lacquered coiffure. In keeping with their status as narrative motifs, the elements of the set are gigantic, exaggerated beyond all realistic proportion, much like *Zouzou* herself in the scene described above. Indeed the bedroom-stage is distorted in every respect such that the performers appear like miniature dolls within it. The dance number that ensues is a glossy, excessive affair, whose staging, costumes, props and choreography recall any number of big-budget Hollywood musicals. There are no songs at first, only a zany narrative dance that offers spectacle for its own sake, and crucially delays the main spectacle to which the film has been building: *Zouzou*'s triumphant appearance on stage. However, when she does finally appear, the set is used to further deny our gratification as spectators: instead of the anticipated big dance number, *Zouzou* appears high up on a trapeze in the birdcage, removed from the dance action, and restricted in her potential for movement. Dressed in feathers, and singing of her desire for liberation, *Zouzou* is literally an exotic bird in a gilded cage. Her sweeping dive into the arms of the men below concludes the number and leaves us feeling cheated of the energetic spectacle the Baker stardom has led us to expect.

Satisfaction is delayed until the final number, when *Zouzou* returns to the stage after making sure Jean has been saved from prison. Once again, a chorus line of men and women in evening dress dance in anticipation of her arrival on stage, this time in a massive set representing Paris, complete with River Seine, Alexandre III Bridge and Place de la Concorde. However, the compression of topographical elements into a schematic backdrop renders Paris a doubly imagined performance fantasy, a place which *Zouzou* – a surrogate of Baker – can claim as her own. As *Zouzou* arrives on stage, and glides down the huge sweeping staircase, framed on either side by tuxedo-wearing male dancers, she both justifies the set and completes it. The overly naïve, denotative space becomes whole – embellished – when Baker steps out on the stage and takes her place as the leading lady, asserting her performative authority, and staking her legitimate claim to classic screen glamour.

*PRINCESSE TAM-TAM*, released the following year, is every bit the same kind of star vehicle for Baker in terms of themes and narrative trajectory. Once again the story is one of transformation, only this time it is a variation on the Pygmalion story, in which the film's leading man Max (Albert Préjean) sets out to 'civilize' the primitive Tunisian peasant Alwina (Baker) and pass her off in French so-



Image 13 – *Princesse Tam-Tam*

ciety as an exotic princess. His remaking of her as the royal daughter of an Indian tribal leader is motivated by a desire to render his French wife jealous. Predictably, Alwina's journey from Tunisia to Paris sees her lose the man she loves – Max is inevitably reconciled with his errant wife. As compensation, however, she experiences stage success when an improvised performance makes her the toast of the town. The majority of sets in this film were designed by Guy de Gastyne, but the *décors de fête* or party set where Alwina performs her memorable African dance was designed by Meerson, who supervised the whole production. This set in particular provides both a narrative and a stylistic link with the earlier film, and the similarities of conception and execution suggest that they were equally motivated by the desire to showcase Baker as star (image 13).

As in *ZOUZOU*, while the narrative allows Baker opportunities to perform at intervals throughout the film, it is the final big dance number that represents the pinnacle of the film's visual pleasure, both in terms of plot outcomes and star performance. Early after her arrival in Paris, Alwina, frustrated by her confinement to both beautiful space and good manners, escapes from Max's tuition and plush home and spends the evening in a down-at-heel jazz club. Unable to contain herself when she hears the African beat of the music, Alwina begins to sing and dance, performing a compelling mixture of athletic jazz moves. Crucially, the status of her dance as performance is compromised by the editing, which quickly cuts away from Baker to focus on the spectators and musicians, and on their reactions to the dance. As in *ZOUZOU*, the pleasure in seeing Baker perform is deferred until the final segment when she is appropriately costumed

for the stage, and is positioned in relation to a set that can accommodate the extravagant nature of her stardom.

Once again, the film's principal performance set allows Baker to command the stage and assert her authority as a star. The structure is tiered with three circular stages linked by curved stairs; in the background is a silhouette of Paris-by-night. The lower stage is a mirrored turntable that rotates in the course of the dance, reflecting the performers from below and extending the range and impact of the visual field. The scene begins with Alwina seated on mezzanine level, looking longingly towards the stage upon which an elegant production number, again based on a Hollywood model, begins. The female performers are dressed in monochrome patterns, and the performance moves between classic front-of-stage action and more imagined Busy Berkeley-style shooting from above. While she is following the action on stage, Alwina falls into a trap set by Max's wife, whose friend witnessed her dance in the jazz club and concluded that she was not, after all, an exotic princess. A tom-tom beat compels Alwina to move; jumping from the mezzanine to the top level of the podium, she discards her shoes and elegant gold dress as she descends through the stage. By the time she arrives at the bottom of the structure, she has made her presence felt on every level: spatial, narrative and performative. The ambience then shifts from one of careful choreography to one of frenzied improvisation, and Alwina, like Zouzou, leaves the stage in triumph.

The sets designed for *ZOUZOU* and *PRINCESSE TAM-TAM* show evidence of an expression of the 'fantastic' that was uncommon in French production of the era. Both films use the set to open narrative up to the possibility of readings that extend beyond the film, and into the extra-textual star image. In both cases, the consciously theatrical set is conceived as a utopian space where the fictional *alter-egos* of Josephine Baker are liberated, albeit temporarily, by performance.

### **Beyond France to Europe and the Colonies: Voyages of Discovery**

While the majority of French films in the 1930s took Paris and the French mainland as their setting, there was nevertheless a considerable appetite among cine-goers for films that depicted geographically remote landscapes and societies. This was not an unusual impulse among European filmmakers, as is discussed in our chapters on Germany and Britain: a desire to depict 'exotic' cultures often infected the work of filmmakers and designers in their search for audiences, and afforded extravagant imaginative opportunities to the designer and his team. While the cinematic site to which French filmmakers habitually returned was Paris, the partiality of inter-war audiences for vicarious travel in less familiar settings is borne out by a glance at the box office successes of the era: *LE GRAND JEU*, *LA BANDERA*, *AMOK*, *LAC AUX DAMES* and *PÉPÉ LE MOKO* are a representa-

tive sample of foreign-set films that were significant hits with the French public in the course of the decade.

Like their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, the French general public in the 1930s had little first hand experience of international travel. Working class audiences had yet to benefit from the compulsory introduction of paid holidays brought about under the Popular Front government in 1936,<sup>47</sup> and it would take decades before leisure travel, even within France, came within the reach and expectations of the majority. Nevertheless, the population of the 1930s was well acquainted with the idea of the exotic foreign through the apparatus of national and civil service, as well as through a range of media. As Ezra notes:

Between the two world wars, the French public was inundated with images of sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, Southeast Asia, and the West Indies in books, films, advertising and exhibitions. ... "L'idée coloniale" began to pervade French culture in ways that were not officially devoted to colonialism.<sup>48</sup>

Ezra's argument that French culture was underpinned by a 'colonial unconscious' in the inter-war period is confirmed by the extensive iconographic traces of what was known as *la plus grande France* or 'Greater France' in French mainland culture, particularly in terms of everyday consumables. As Andrew and Ungar have suggested, 'the smiling face of the Senegalese rifleman on boxes of Banania breakfast food and the turbaned male sporting a goatee on the label of Arabica coffee were so much part of the domestic sphere that they were seldom challenged'.<sup>49</sup>

Like the 1925 Decorative Arts exhibition, the 1931 Exposition Coloniale is an important reference in understanding how French cinema established visual priorities in the 1930s on the basis of paradigms and discourses already in general circulation in French culture. One in a series of major world fairs and international salons held in France through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this Expo coincided with the centenary of French colonialism in Algeria. The exhibition space was lavishly constructed in the Bois de Vincennes in Paris, an area acknowledged to be ripe for economic and structural regeneration, and the venue was open to the public from May to November of that year. The event was a triumph for the French state, attracting some eight million visitors, the majority of whom have been documented as white and French.<sup>50</sup> Although the Expo was essentially a commercial and didactic undertaking for a state eager to advertise and affirm its imperial domain, it was the extraordinarily extensive display of non-western culture – through architecture, artefacts and people themselves – that was to have lasting impact on the French cultural imaginary. Carole Sweeney observes that:

The ambitious project of the *Exposition* was conceived in large part as an effort to remedy domestic indifference to matters colonial and to inculcate in the French public

a more tangible attachment to the notion of *la plus grande France*. ... The aim was to make visitors believe that they had actually visited the colonies themselves and entered into the evolutionary time and space of the colonial other as quasi-anthropological observers hidden in the fourth wall, thereby accruing both individual and collective memories.<sup>51</sup>

Andrew and Ungar, however, have assessed the lasting effects of the Expo on visitors as being less political than aesthetic:

Most visitors to the Bois de Vincennes came away less with a respect for France's civilizing mission than with wonder at the spectacle based on the illusion of bringing the colonies to the outskirts of Paris. "Seeing" the colonies by seeing colonized peoples up close was a terminal instance linking the local peoples of France's overseas territories to an aesthetic category of the primitive whose political implications anti-colonialists would soon reveal.<sup>52</sup>

The scale of the exhibition was huge: centrepiece structures included an elaborate 'Tower of Sacrifices' in the Dahomey Pavilion 'consisting of skulls mounted on long stakes, the skulls (according to the Expo Guide) being all that remained of slaves executed by the Dahomeyan chieftain Behazin',<sup>53</sup> and a full-scale replica of the celebrated Cambodian Temple of Angkor Wat. A model of the Makhzen palace of Dar el-Beïda in Marrakesh was featured in the Moroccan pavilion, while a copy of the Sid-Abderrahmane sanctuary in Algiers, complete with cupola and minaret, formed the basis of the Algerian pavilion. The visual opportunities afforded the spectator by the exhibition were nothing short of magnificent:

Fairgoers who entered the [Angkor Wat] temple found eighty dioramas, in rooms illuminated from above by a vaulted ceiling of translucent glass blocks that formed a giant lotus blossom. Also on display were maps, small-scale models of indigenous buildings, mannequins dressed in authentic costumes, and a permanently illustrated "wall of images" consisting of nearly a thousand slides. A large upper gallery contained nearly thirty original Khmer sculptures brought back from Cambodia by members of the *Compagnie Française d'Extrême-Orient*.<sup>54</sup>

The authentic and the pastiche – the artefact and its reconstructed location – thus co-existed in French life in ways that were designed to appeal to the public's desire for spectacle rather than to any need for education or documentary evidence. Overwhelmed by an 'aesthetics of display', and lacking the knowledge and necessary experience to decode the visual composition, the French public and media were, consciously or otherwise, caught up in a broad cultural reflection on originals and copies, and the realist appeal of design practices.

The most common cinematic expression of France's colonial experience was to be found in the colonial military drama. The dramatic appeal of this specifically inter-war genre lay in its taste for heroic adventure, male camaraderie and doomed romance, and the decade saw the release of a significant corpus of films that offered imaginative variations on the basic narrative model. This popular example of the exotic foreign was complemented by a second body of films – some historical, some more contemporary – often set closer to home in the major cities and tourist destinations of France's European neighbours. In general terms, the latter featured not soldiers, but middle-and upper-class civilians adrift in a world of material opulence and desire, a world held aesthetically and socially at a distance from the constraints of bourgeois France. Frequently, the foreign site would serve as a pretext for narrative action and moral positions that would be impossible in French society: *MAYERLING*'s scandalous retelling of the Hapsburg tragedy is a case in point.

In both narrative modes, the stability and certainties of the male protagonist are disturbed by emotional and social circumstances, much as they would be in a domestic-set scenario. However, in the foreign setting, the hero's national identity – that is, his standing as a representative of French values of tolerance and inclusion – as well as his more 'primitive' emotions are brought into play. Almost inevitably, there is a frenzied quality to the emotions and behaviour of the protagonists, as they try to come to terms with their identity as 'civilised' French citizens who must negotiate their Frenchness in an unfamiliar and frequently hostile space. These foreign set films, then, provided a different kind of investigation of French identity: in their geographical distance from France and things French, the protagonists are cut loose from all that is familiar, both environmentally and socially. The significance of the décor is crucial to the structure and narrative impact of these films, and the most successful fuse some degree of authenticity with an emotional tension that expresses the compulsion of the exotic, as well as the potential menace of the alien culture.

Across the decade, foreign set films ranked highly at the French box office, beginning with Pabst's 1932 hit *L'ATLANTIDE/THE MISTRESS OF ATLANTIS* (discussed in chapter 3), which took sixth place at the box office in the 1931-2 season, and followed by Feyder's *LE GRAND JEU* (set in Morocco) which was the biggest hit of 1933-4. Allégret's *LAC AUX DAMES* (set in Austria) was sixth in 1933-34, while *LES NUITS MOSCOVITES/MOSCOW NIGHTS* (set in Russia, and starring Harry Baur) and *ZOUZOU* (partially set in the French colonies) ranked fourth and tenth respectively in the same season. Duvivier's *LA BANDERA* (set in Spain and Morocco) and *MAYERLING* (set in Austria) dominated in 1935-36, taking second and fifth places, while *PÉPÉ LE MOKO* (set in Algiers) was second in 1936-37, inspiring a Hollywood remake (*ALGIERS*, 1938, starring Charles Boyer) and prefiguring *CASABLANCA* in 1942. Other major foreign set critical hits of

these years include *L'OPÉRA DES QUAT'SOUS* (The French version of Pabst's *MLV DIE 3-GROSCHOPER*, set in London), *AMOK* (set in Malaysia), *PRINCESSE TAM-TAM* (set in Tunisia and Paris), and *MOLLENARD/HATRED* (1938, set in Shanghai).<sup>55</sup> Together, and in combination with the rest of the corpus of around eighty-five features with a central story set outside France<sup>56</sup> these films took the viewer on a visual expedition into imagined exotic worlds authored by non-French designers with an alternative cultural understanding of the original spaces.

*MARIUS* (1931), directed by Alexander Korda and designed by Alfred Junge, an émigré whose work in Britain is discussed at length in chapter 5, was one of Paramount-Paris's most successful MLVs. An adaptation of a popular stage play by Marcel Pagnol, the film provides a convenient *mise-en-abyme* of the latent attractions of travel to exotic lands. The lively port of Marseilles, in which the action is set, is presented as a shipping gateway to the world, and it is from here that Marius, the restless, provincial son of the local café owner, is tempted and ultimately lured by the appeal of travel. Throughout the film, Marius meets sailors and travellers who tell stories of adventures in the colonies and elsewhere. From the café terrace he watches products such as coffee and fruit being unloaded onto the port quayside. His bedroom is decorated with images of ships and with African masks, expressing his desire for something more exotic than the peasant simplicity of his family, his local girlfriend and a future at the homely *Bar de la Marine*. The simple lines of Korda's realist design create a tension between the seen and the unseen, between the authentic detail of meridional France and the imagined domains beyond. The non-constructed spaces of the film thus take on a visual life of their own, achieved through the expedient deployment of design suggestion rather than full-blown statement.

Elsewhere in French cinema of the era, the desire for escape from, and the impossibility of return to France is expressed through narrative and visual references to ocean liners. Ships such as the *Ile de France* (1926) and the *Normandie* (1936) were particularly famed examples of Art Deco design and international luxury (see the discussion of this in relation to the Jessie Matthews films in chapter 5), and they often featured in films purely for the purposes of artistic display. But such opulent vehicles also served as both reference and model for screen expressions of the desire for displacement or return to the homeland. The *Normandie*, for example, is the putative means of escape for Jean in *QUAI DES BRUMES*, and was used as a set in films such as Sacha Guitry's *LES PERLES DE LA COURONNE/PEARLS OF THE CROWN* (1937) and Yves Mirande's *PARIS-NEW YORK* (1940).<sup>57</sup> The modernity and implied decadence of French culture are immediately grasped by a dazzled Alwina/Princess Tam-Tam when she first sets foot in her luxury cabin *en route* for exploitation in France (image 14). *LE GRAND JEU* and *HÔTEL DU NORD* (1938) both offer examples of escape by ship, a possibility



Image 14 – *Princesse Tam-Tam*

that is denied to the doomed and suicidal Pépé in the closing moments of *PÉPÉ LE MOKO*. Restrained by the French-Algerian police, the hero watches all hope of a future disappear as the *Ville d'Oran* sets sail for France.

The foreign set displays a range of specific design criteria. The first is a localising one, and the design must be consistent with the broad expectations of national and spatial authenticity. Thus, foreign sets display a high level of attention to establishing verisimilitude. In the 1930s such designs were frequently based on the partial knowledge of a place ('an image or an original we carry in our mind's eye'<sup>58</sup>) rather than on slavish replication based on first-hand experience of the authentic place. Although designers would routinely travel within Europe – Meerson to Austria for *LAC AUX DAMES*, Trauner to London for *DRÔLE DE DRAME*, Lourié to Alsace for *LA GRANDE ILLUSION/THE GRAND ILLUSION* (1937) – travel to distant countries in the interests of research was rarer. The Meerson archive offers no evidence that Meerson actually visited Malaysia in preparation for the design of *AMOK* but it reveals that he collected a wide variety of documentation on which to base his interpretation of the tropical jungle. These included copies of encyclopaedia entries showing precise drawings of tribal huts and temples, postcards of masks, tribal headdresses and wooden carvings, photographs of structures including colonial forts and garrisons at Marudi and Claudetown.<sup>59</sup> This long-distance approach is confirmed by the writings of Robert-Jules Garnier who advised apprentice decorators to visit specialist museums and to refer to contemporary photographs of foreign locations when preparing foreign sets. In the case of *HARA-KIRI* (1928), which serves as a case study for his design manual, Garnier talks of employing a native painter to execute the posters, street signs and general ornamentation of a Japanese street

scene, because 'our film will be seen all around the world, and we don't want anyone to be able to reproach us for obvious errors.'<sup>60</sup>

Although an instant visual association with an identifiable locale is essential to the foreign set project, the function of this set is more than descriptive and imitative. Indeed, the foreign décor, by its nature, is always an exceptional space, one that privileges the pictorial and compositional qualities of the locale over well-established generic conventions. One of the essential functions of the set is to convey the unfamiliarity and strangeness of the environment to both characters and target audience. The strategic display of unusual elements, objects that stress the distance from the domestic decorative norm, is thus more of a narrative priority than documentary authenticity. In more classical and spatially familiar contexts, the set is designed to be subordinated to the character<sup>61</sup> – again and again designers state that the success of the set depends on its ability to pass unnoticed before the eyes of the spectator. In the foreign set film, however, the character's psychology and narrative trajectory are almost always a function of his containment in, and repeated attempts to negotiate, an unfamiliar place.

АМОК has been described by Dudley Andrew as 'the most excessively atmospheric film of the era',<sup>62</sup> yet it was filmed entirely in the studio at Joinville, Paris. Based on a novella by Stefan Zweig (the same author on whose work the film *ANGST*, discussed in chapter 3, was based), the film is an exceptional example of émigré achievement. Directed by the Russian Fedor Ozep, designed by Meerson, and based on the work of an Austrian writer, the film boasts contributions by other émigrés including cinematography by Curt Courant and music by Karol Rathaus. Indeed, the film bears many characteristics of non-domestic authorship: in spite of a direct-to-camera performance by music-hall star Fréhel, it is stylistically distinctive in terms of French production values, favouring a high number of one and two-shots of characters, and privileging intimate character relationships over a narrative interest in community. The film, with its 'sensational' storyline involving adultery and abortion was controversial in France, and was banned by the British Board of Film Censors.<sup>63</sup> It tells the story of Dr Holk (Jean Yonnel), a disillusioned expatriate living abroad while clearing his debts in France, who sinks deeper and deeper into alcoholism and into the world of the 'uncivilized' natives who form his medical constituency. He is approached by a local compatriot and colonial wife, Hélène Haviland (Marcelle Chantal), who asks him to perform a secret abortion on her. The child is not her husband's and she risks the loss of social status should the latter find out about her indiscretion. Holk refuses to deal with Haviland, and drives her away from his clinic. She subsequently seeks an abortion locally, subjecting herself to a dangerous procedure that ultimately costs her her life. Devastated by her death, Holk cuts her coffin loose from the ship bound for France, sparing her the hu-

Image 15 – *Amok*

miliation of a post-mortem examination that would reveal the truth to her husband. Holk himself dies while ensuring that Haviland's respectability remains unblemished in French society.

*AMOK* was a huge achievement in terms of scale, atmosphere and visual complexity. The Joinville studios offered Ozep and Meerson the best opportunities in terms of dimensions, with the possibility of combining two sound stages into an area of sixty metres by twenty-four metres. Tension is created in the film by alternating the action between private and public spaces, and by the use of punctuating shots depicting the ocean and the boat bringing Héléne's husband Henri back from France. The jungle and tropical gardens are major decorative features of the film, and are frequently in shot, while other key spaces include the doctor's rudimentary village clinic, the Villa Haviland with its airy conservatory, lush, tended gardens and classic French furnishings, the governor's residence with its spacious, mirrored ballroom, and the downtown cabaret and hotel. For a film so centred on individual psychology, the ballroom and the cabaret hall, both densely populated spaces, provide contrasting perspectives on the main characters. On the one hand, Holk's inability to master his emotions is effectively conveyed in the refined ballroom (image 15), where his awkwardness in the midst of bourgeois order (in costume, space and action) underlines the attention he draws to himself; on the other Héléne's desperation and social peril are cruelly stressed in her visit to the popular cabaret in which she is an object of intense curiosity, her dress and demeanour entirely discordant with the

Image 16 – *Amok*

basic furnishings and rough texture of the environment (image 16). In both scenes the décor is held by the camera to underline the emotions in play.

Meerson was able to establish a jungle of convincing proportions by making strategic use of netting, which he used routinely on his sets in the early years of French sound cinema. Netting had a number of visual effects within the set. First, it allowed the deployment of a diffuse rather than direct lighting on set, and we see how Courant puts this to use in *AMOK* creating spaces that are deliberately hazy in the rear of shot. Second, as shown in the drawings and stills from the film (images 17 & 18) netting was placed in relation to structural elements (in this case trees and plants) to add to the depth of field by suggesting the existence of a further, continuous space behind the visible elements. This technique of expanding space through visual suggestion rather than concrete construction is typical of Meerson's approach, and is especially effective in a set in which atmosphere is privileged over dramatic action. In the opening 'outdoor' scenes, the effect of the staging is to convince the viewer via a travelling camera of the expansiveness of the environment, while drawing the eye into a central point in the frame where character or indigenous architectural features are displayed (image 19). Our sense of the spatial plenitude and menacing oppression of nature are confirmed visually, while the exotic qualities of the architectural features and costumes are emphasised. At the same time, the absence of dialogue (the first ten minutes of the film are entirely observational) intensifies the focus on space as the primary signifier of the film. The construction of a hostile environment in which libidos, French bourgeois values and the very



Image 17 – *Amok*

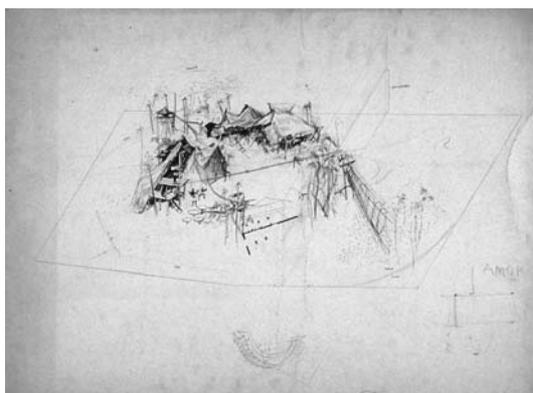


Image 18 – *Amok*



Image 19 – *Amok*



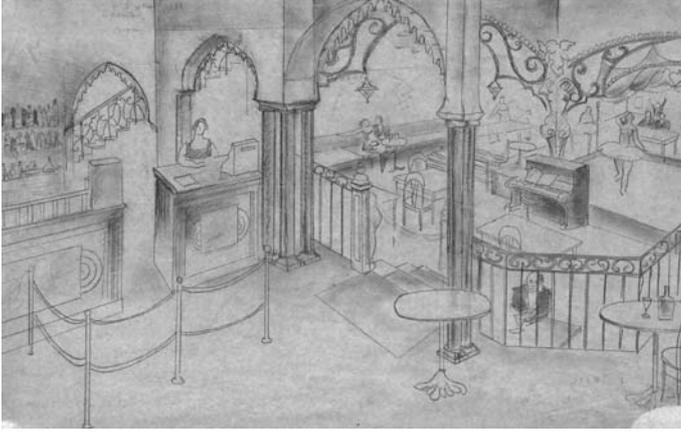
Image 20 – *Le Grand Jeu*

sanity of the protagonists are at risk, is thus efficiently executed by Meerson. Design, in this case, constitutes more than simply a backdrop to narrative events: it is, as the Affrons suggest of the embellished set, 'a specific necessity of the narrative'.<sup>64</sup>

Feyder's *LE GRAND JEU* emerges from, and is emblematic of a more established colonial narrative, that of the legionnaire in the 'virgin land where the White man with helmet and boots regenerated himself or was destroyed by alcoholism, malaria or native women';<sup>65</sup> or indeed by his own nature. The action begins in Paris where Pierre, an urban socialite and sometime playboy, lives in Art Deco splendour (image 20). His life of modern luxury includes not simply the elegant apartment, but also an exclusive Delage sports car, and a fur-clad trophy girlfriend Florence, a woman equally dedicated to a life of idle luxury. Pierre's Parisian environment, briefly glimpsed in Meerson's single French set in the film, connotes the wealth, style, modernity, and social order which are the foundation of Pierre's fortunate life. However, when the protagonist is banished by his family for bad debt, he is abandoned by Florence, and goes off to join the French foreign legion. In a reversal of the trajectory lived by Alwina (*PRINCESSE TAM-TAM*), whose social elevation takes her from rural Tunisia to the most dazzling of Parisian nightclubs, Pierre's fall from grace is traced in a series of spatial contrasts that take the lost Art Deco apartment as a reference point. The character's descent from total inclusion to social and emotional primitivism is played out in his gradual movement through the bleak recruiting room, the stark military garrison, the shabby hotel bar and Irma's cramped apartment. More ornate spaces such as the Moorish nightclub (the 'Folies Parisiennes') or the local

Image 21 – *Le Grand Jeu*Image 22 – *Le Grand Jeu*

brothel are sites of moral and sexual temptation, alluring and dangerous, in which Pierre's original loss (of social status, of wealth, of Florence) is reiterated and confirmed (images 21 & 22). The Moorish sculpting, delicate patterning, beaded curtains, drapes and mirrors all give a textured relief in an essentially featureless soldier's world, but this enticing display is inseparable from the constant threat of an intimacy at odds with Pierre's self-imposed exile from French bourgeois life. Nevertheless, Feyder's film is well served by a design that holds the potential extravagance of exotic elements in check, and channels them em-

Image 23 – *Le Grand Jeu*Image 24 – *Le Grand Jeu*

phatically into themes of emotional isolation, loss of identity, and male sexual frustration. In fact, for a colonial film, the set is unusually limited in explicit exotic cliché or tourist ornamentation; the conception of the nightclub bar, for example, is in fact fairly generic (image 23), and would not be out of place in a Parisian-based film. But a minimal tweaking of details – the shaping and ornamentation of arches and ironwork, the man’s hand laid casually on the breast of a female statue – is sufficient to convey the distinctiveness of the space, and its distance from the permissible French norm (image 24).

Closer to home, Allégret’s *LAC AUX DAMES* provides a forceful example of how set design operates and contributes to narrative meaning in a project that is essentially based around the idea of the natural setting.<sup>66</sup> The film, with dia-

Image 25 – *Lac aux Dames*

logues by French author Colette, tells the story of swimming instructor Eric Heller, and of his romantic entanglements with a series of aristocratic women summering at a stylish lakeside resort in the Austrian Tyrol. The film is conceived around two broadly opposing sectors: the mainland ‘where love is contaminated by social rules and where language, gesture and costume seem so staged’<sup>67</sup> and the natural island on which the young, romantic Puck, the daughter of the Baron de Dobbersburg, takes voluntary refuge from this society. The natural scenery of the Tyrol is a stunning visual environment into which Meerson introduces a stark geometric structure, immediately staging via décor the film’s thematic tensions between the artificial and the natural, the civilised and the untamed. The lido area with its streamlined jetty, staggered diving boards and elevated viewing platforms stands as more than simply a generic indicator of contemporary leisure space; it is a reminder of the social aspirations of this leisured community, and introduces a discordant note, consistent with their social arrogance and sense of entitlement, into the visual field of the film. The beauty of the structure itself is not in question; its imposing magnificence, however, a trope widely replicated on posters of the era and in fashionable photographic magazines such as the weekly *L’Illustration*, is absent from the image. The visual impact of an iconic signifier of the period is thus dramatically eclipsed by natural beauty of the surrounding landscape (image 25). The misplaced priorities of this society, and its attendant shallow values, are exposed in a series of decorative contrasts characteristic of Meerson’s approach. While the actors themselves embody this tension – the young Simone Simon was much admired for her ‘pure and uncluttered sensuality’<sup>68</sup> – the spaces of Puck’s island, especially her *cabane* or den, connote extreme simplicity and by extension, integrity of character. Puck’s hideaway, like Eric’s shack and the barn in which the two embrace, is a bare wooden structure. In the den, the decorative elements of the environment reflect Puck’s lack of concern for material goods: the area is



Image 26 – *Lac aux Dames*

furnished with a hammock, wooden ladders, fishing nets, wicker baskets and bamboo screens (image 26). This lack of adornment supports and extends the character of Puck in the film, and accounts visually for the motivations and actions that are developed in the narrative.

The degree of imaginative liberty available to designers working on foreign sets was arguably greater than that generally permitted in domestic representations. An unusual degree of flexibility prevailed at the conception stage, precisely because the designer could rely on the unlikelihood of an audience having first-hand knowledge of the cited location. The Hollywood studios relied to different effect on this kind of limitation in audience experience: ‘European’ sets would frequently be recycled in ways that suggested that cities like Paris, London and Berlin were indistinguishable from each other. As Corliss and Clarens note of the Hollywood studios in the 1920s:

After a few years [backlots] began to look like a surreal agglomeration of geographies and architectures. Visual motifs were concentrated: a European street could do duty for a number of foreign countries with just a few props and some retouching<sup>69</sup>

But for the émigré designer, the task of making a foreign site both persuasive and legible for an already foreign audience posed a challenge. The films cited above were enormously popular (especially in the case of *LE GRAND JEU* and *LAC AUX DAMES*) and they were thus important vehicles for mediating the idea of the ‘other’ to mass audiences. The cultural knowledge of place and person that was disseminated through these films inevitably entered into the popular

consciousness and thereby gained something akin to authoritative documentary status. This reasoning is more compelling forceful when one considers the wealth of additional location footage that was routinely included in such films. Although such films have been read as emblematic of the best of French production in the era, a consideration of design reveals that the implied national authorial sensibility was in fact tempered by, and frequently subordinate to, the subtle authority of the transnational imagination.

### **Journeys in Time: The Historic Film**

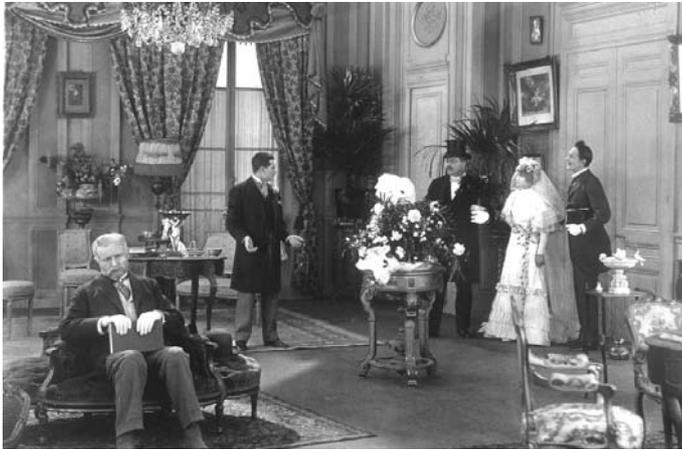
While French cinema may well have been more resistant to the emergence of genres than other European industries, the historic film was a staple of French filmmaking, and was a dominant element in national production at the end of the silent era. Abel Gance's epic *NAPOLÉON* (1927) was one of the most remarkable films of the late silent period, and historical dramas such as Raymond Bernard's equally lengthy *LES MISÉRABLES* (1934)<sup>70</sup> and Renoir's *LA MARSEILLAISE* (1938) were major successes in the following decade. Crisp asserts that, in terms of content, films that represented actual historical events or figures were exceptions to the more general historical fare on offer. In the main, he suggests, filmmakers had little concern for history as a pretext for socio-political investigation, but rather 'French history was all but suppressed, and the past became little more than a convenient setting for fantasized dramas'.<sup>71</sup> Historical dramas set across Europe were indeed plentiful in French production, and as with the foreign set film, offered great imaginative scope to the designer. With the authenticity of the depiction again beyond the assessment abilities of the majority of viewers, this genre fostered design practices based on the designer's appreciation of diverse artistic styles rather than on a rigorous attention to documented architectural form. What we find in the historical films designed by émigrés is a particularly rich range of artistic influences that extends the frame of reference of French production, and reveals an unusual level of inter-cultural curiosity and artistic confidence. The organisation of these films corresponds to Guiseppe de Santis's use of the term 'calligraphic' to describe films that are 'generally historical in subject and designed in the knowledge and imitation of history of art' and offer 'the reconstruction of an environment whose authenticity is not validated through the filmgoer's direct observation but refracted through his or her experience of art and architecture'.<sup>72</sup>

The historical films in question here can be divided into two broad categories. In the first, the setting is often a pretext for comic narrative and performance in line with specifically French theatrical traditions such as farce, mime, and the classical comedy of manners. In these films the historical environment, though substantial in every respect, is subject to an unusual lightness of touch consis-

tent with the desired tone of the film. Films in this vein include René Clair's *UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE* (designed by Meerson), Feyder's *LA KERMESE HÉROÏQUE* (designed by Meerson, assisted by Trauner and Wakhévitch) and Marcel Carné's *DRÔLE DE DRAME* (designed by Trauner). Set in *belle époque* Paris, Renaissance Flanders and Victorian London respectively, these films are playful examples of what the Affrons have termed the 'embellished' set; that is, a set that, while accurate in detail, frequently 'abolishes the insignificant and exaggerates either in the direction of simplicity or complexity' for rhetorical effect.<sup>73</sup>

The second group of films, which are more serious both in dramatic tone and narrative mood, provide a variation on this same aesthetic principle. Films like Duvivier's *LE GOLEM* (designed by Andreiev and Stepan Kopecky), set in Prague in 1610, Anatole Litvak's *MAYERLING* (designed by Andreiev and Pimenoff) set in Austria in the Hapsburg empire, and Ozep's *TARAKANOVA* (1938, designed by Andreiev) set in eighteenth century Russia, also display key features of the 'embellished' set. In these films, the temporal distance necessitated by the historical genre is particularly acute, as the set creates an expressive physical reality consistent with the essentially tragic narratives. In the case of the films cited above, stylistic consistency is traced via lead designer Andreiev, whose expressionistic vision is well suited to the sombre mood and socio-cultural oppressions that are variously evoked. His debt to art history is evident in the ways in which the sets allow for a dramatic pictorialism common to the European tradition, based on classical principles of lighting and composition. As has been suggested in chapter 3, Andreiev's designs were very much conceived in terms of the metaphoric rather than the literal space, and the abstraction of the spatial we find in his elsewhere in his work contributes here to a sense of romantic realism consistent with the status of the story as historical rather than wholly fictional.

*UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE* is Clair's adaptation of Eugène Labiche's 1851 farce of the same name. The film is an unusually ambitious cinematic project in that it substitutes silent visual humour for the verbal complexities of a stage play involving lost objects, mistaken identities and romantic misunderstandings. The action takes place in *belle époque* Paris, a site signalled by generic indicators including street signs, Lautrec-style cabaret posters on publicity columns in the street, and a wealth of ornate interior furnishings in the formal drawing rooms and bedrooms occupied by the characters (images 27 & 28). Small items such as portraits, vases, and statuettes abound, as do drapes, arm-chairs and occasional tables. The furnishings are plentiful, highly detailed and heavily patterned, and provide ample evidence of the characteristic elegance and bourgeois finery of the era. At this level, however, the function of the set is primarily denotative, 'carrying the weight of establishing time, place, and in a

Image 27 – *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie*Image 28 – *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie*

general way, mood';<sup>74</sup> *belle époque* Paris is rendered by the strategic use of elements that 'subscribe to widely accepted depictions of the familiar'.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, exteriors in this film are restrained from a structural and decorative point of view, and are visually limited in comparison with those that Meerson would go on to design for sound films. Key locations like the town hall are fully drawn in the interior scenes, but in exterior shots the building is only seen cropped. The lines of the facades of the city are uncluttered and simple, and perspectives out on to the exteriors – such as the view from the hat shop onto the street – are always partial or travelling glimpses rather than full vistas.



Image 29 – *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie*

Architecturally then, this film benefits from less large-scale architectural construction than would become the norm in the 1930s, and instead makes expedient use of framing to suggest the existence of a more extensive and fully integrated environment. The major decorative investment is in the interiors where the intimate and dynamic physical performance characteristic of farce is enabled by particular features of the set. The rooms of the de Beaupertuis' home, for example, are served by numerous doors and windows providing entrances and exits onto bedrooms, corridors and the street; curtains, pillars, chairs, and plants serve as obstacles or framing devices, and items are frequently foregrounded in ways that exaggerate their presence and size to comic effect. In shots of the wedding breakfast scene, for example, the table is so excessively laden with crockery and silverware, that the surrounding room is barely seen: the perspective is foreshortened, and the shot is cropped to suggest that the elements and people exceed the camera's point of view. The use of a dado rail accentuates the sense of compression and crowding, as does the lower wood panelling and the heavily patterned wallpaper (image 29).

The major artistic achievement of this film is its staging of the *belle époque* not simply temporally, but also culturally, by replicating the spatial look and theatrical dynamics of early silent cinema. Here, Labiche's story is transposed from the mid-19th century to 1895, the year in which the Lumière brothers first pro-

jected a film to an audience at the Grand Café in Paris. Clair's reorientation of the narrative is not accidental, as the familiarity of period upon which the film relies, presupposes a generalised familiarity with the early French cinematic style, best represented by the films of the Pathé society. Clair stresses this aesthetic association in a ludic *mise-en-abyme*, when Ferdinand, the would-be groom who spends the film in search of a replacement for the Italian straw hat eaten by a horse in the opening moments, recaps his story as a stage performance complete with painted stage backdrop. In this scene in particular, Clair offers an incisive commentary on, and affectionate homage to both the silent film aesthetic and the role played by décor in early cinema, a homage that is extended in the predisposition to 'primitive' tableau shots. He would extend both commentary and homage in his 1947 film, *LE SILENCE EST D'OR/MAN ABOUT TOWN* in which Maurice Chevalier stars as a silent film director working in close collaboration with the artisans of the décor workshop.

*LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE*, discussed at length in chapter 5, was a huge commercial success, both in France and abroad.<sup>76</sup> Boasting a budget of some four million francs, at a time when the industry average was 1.2 to 1.7 million francs,<sup>77</sup> Feyder's film gives a sense of the potential for design achievement in French cinema when matters of material resources and professional experience were not an issue. The film, designed by Meerson, who was assisted by Trauner and Wakhévitch, it was praised for its convincing architectural portrayal of Renaissance Flanders, and for the extravagance of its constructed features: the full-size canal was universally admired for its scale and daring originality (See image 11, chapter 5). Like *UN CHAPEAU DE PAILLE D'ITALIE*, however, the film's pictorial aesthetic is only superficially influenced by the precise replication of authentic and identifiable spaces. The Affrons point out, for example, that the facades of the buildings are smaller than they would have been in reality; that the interiors are out of proportion to the exteriors, and are also disproportionately large by 17th century Dutch standards.<sup>78</sup> Once again, the perceived authenticity of the décor is dependent on the viewer's familiarity with histories of art and architecture, particularly with the style of the Flemish and Dutch Renaissance schools. It is on this level that the comedy of script and performances is skillfully supported by *mise-en-scène*.

The film features a young painter by the name of Jean Breughel, clearly a comic conflation of the various members of the dynastic Breughel artistic family.<sup>79</sup> Allusions to other painters (Rubens, Van Dyck and Vermeer) and stylistic forms from the 16th and 17th centuries are implicit in many of the scenes and shot compositions: typical forms that are comically referenced in the film include portraiture (See image 19, chapter 5), still life (image 30) and community tableaux (See image 13, chapter 5). To this, Meerson adds features, textures and shapes drawn from his own research into Flemish architecture. The archives



Image 30 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

reveal that Meerson studied a wealth of visual material before beginning the construction of the town of Boom, including photographs of the Flemish town of Malines-Mechelen, images of the buildings and artefacts of the Plantin-Moretus Museum, the Porte de Gand in Bruges, the town hall in Furnes/Veurne, an architectural cross-section of Flemish houses, and a dossier of drawings of Renaissance footsoldiers holding weapons. We have already shown how features of the Porte de Gand are combined with a stylised dovecot tower in the set of the stone gateway to the town of Boom (See images 8, 9 & 10, chapter 2). Thus, again, what Meerson and his team succeed in creating is less a copy of a Flemish town than a fictional space that, in its nostalgia for other kinds of texts, corresponds to – and ultimately fulfils – the popular imaginary of such a site. Once again, decorative practice is shown to be an imaginative process of interpretation rather than an attempt at artistic replication.

DRÔLE DE DRAME (1936) was one of Trauner's first solo commissions as a designer, and marked the beginning of his celebrated long term collaboration with Marcel Carné.<sup>80</sup> The film is a comic drama of duplicity and mistaken identity, and is set in the terraced middle-class streets of Victorian London. It was shot entirely in the studio at Joinville over a period of only twenty-eight days, a schedule that necessitated a rapid turnaround of sets and materials.<sup>81</sup> The street décor, in which much of the action takes place was constructed in line with general studio practice using a false ceiling and painted perspective, but Trauner notes that the sets were 'all pretty substantial in the sense that they had to exist as spaces that you could move about in and explore from every angle'.<sup>82</sup> Trau-

ner already knew London well, and used his own photographs and knowledge of Whitechapel and the West India docks in particular as inspiration for the sets. He recalls how the specificities of English architecture, with its basement kitchens and glass conservatories, necessitated the construction of the décor alongside the *piscine* or pit area,<sup>83</sup> and that the typical London features of sash windows and white painted door surrounds meant finding a very different look from the Parisian streets so common to contemporary French filmmaking. Similarly, the English conservatory with its semi-garden function demanded a distinct structural and decorative appearance to differentiate the space from the more typical 'veranda' found in French bourgeois homes, and widely replicated in films of the time.<sup>84</sup>

Comedy is very much the dominant mood of this film, and the highly-coloured paintings produced by Trauner at the pre-production stage give a sense of the mood that was envisaged – and translated into cinematic reality – by the designer, director and scriptwriter working in close collaboration.<sup>85</sup> The very detailed painting, full of reds, purples, greens and yellows,<sup>86</sup> gives an insight into the designer's conception of how to light the set for compositional effect, even though the film was to be shot in black and white. Typical of Trauner's practice, the painted model displays an unusually close correspondence with the images produced in the film, even down to the inclusion of the hat, gloves and umbrella on the figure representing Françoise Rosay. A comparison with Alfred Junge's designs for Dupont's *PICCADILLY* (1929) or Andreiev's for Pabst's *L'OPÉRA DE QUAT'SOUS* (1931) reveals how effectively Trauner's décor eliminates the sinister, shadowy aspects already associated with cinematic London, and discussed in chapter 3, offering instead a design spectacle more appropriate to the satirical humour of a French comedy of manners. Trauner's London is not a sinister urban labyrinth, but rather a *commedia dell'arte* stage on which stock types play out their tightly scripted and physically dynamic comedy of manners.

*LE GOLEM* and *MAYERLING* both represent a shift in style within the historical genre, with both films privileging a sense of the gothic consistent with the implied intolerances and repressive politics of the societies depicted, rather than any documented historical reality. In each case, a sense of distortion and exaggeration of scale, characteristic of the work of Andreiev, informs the design. Indeed, his typically dark charcoal sketches consistently embed notions of the nocturnal, sinister and menacing in his preparatory compositions, whether or not this is actually the case for a given scene in a film. In *LE GOLEM*, a French remake of Boese and Wegener's 1920 horror classic *DER GOLEM, WIE ER IN DIE WELT KAM*, décor supports storyline in mitigating actively against the notion of Prague as the 'cultural centre of Europe', a view expressed by one of the film's travelling noblemen. Instead, the city is a place of superstition, sorcery and oc-

cult practices, in which the despotic Emperor Rodolphe presides over medieval torture chambers and mass public executions. The themes of the film are supported by a characteristic series of decorative contrasts, of which the most striking is provided by the Jewish ghetto and the Imperial Palace. While the Jewish streets, residences and synagogue are schematic in design, evoking austerity, restraint and subjugation – the coveted Golem must be concealed from the Emperor at all costs – the palace is a monument to baroque excess, in both furnishings and dimensions. The buildings of the ghetto are simple in shape and surface, with small undecorated windows set high up, casting little light and a great deal of dramatic shadow. Elsewhere, the Emperor roams around his vast palace, travelling from the highest bedrooms to the vaulted dungeons, casting Nosferatu-like shadows as he moves from one level to another. The formal symmetry of the grand hall, and the patterns of light and shadow cast by the huge windows onto the chequered floor square offer a spectacle of nuanced complexity, while the lofty ceilings and monumental scale of the rooms dwarf the emperor and trace his increasing isolation, paranoia and descent into madness.

In *MAYERLING*, also designed by Andreiev, melancholia and oppression are again embedded in a series of heavily stylised spaces such as the Viennese royal palace and the castle at Mayerling to which Rodolphe and Marie escape briefly before their deaths. The Viennese palace is an ornate and ordered centre to the film, but its mournful atmosphere is remarked on intermittently by its inhabitants: Rodolphe speaks of his ‘lugubrious bedroom’ and the Empress of her ‘sad palace’. The sombre, low-lit décor reflects the atmosphere of lethargy and impotence that encompasses the characters, and emphasises the palace’s narrative status as a locus of rules and conformity. The Mayerling castle is equally monumental in its visible dimensions, but the visual effect is very different: in this space, statues and disproportionately high doors still dwarf the doomed lovers, but the playfulness and solitude of the latter cast them almost as children, relishing the space of a fairytale world that bears no relation to their reality.

### **Build them High! The Project-Specific Set**

The monumental set, which as we have seen appeared with some frequency in the historical and more contemporary film, represented a major shift in French practice in the 1930s, and created new possibilities for the set to be inhabited by greater numbers of people and activities, as well as more complex narratives. Designers became more skilled at creating memorable project-specific sets, and increasingly these were based on greater mastery of the principles of ‘forced’ or ‘false’ perspective. As Carné notes in his memoirs *La Vie à belle dents*, ‘Trauner’s forte was the construction of sets in forced perspective’.<sup>87</sup> Examples of this technique, based around the use of a short-focus lens and an inclined or raked floor,

are to be found throughout Trauner's work, including *HÔTEL DU NORD*, *QUAI DES BRUMES*, *LE JOUR SE LÈVE/DAYBREAK* (1939), and most significantly *LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS/CHILDREN OF PARADISE* (1945). The magnifying effect of the lens worked with the inclined floor to create, sometimes in tandem with the use of fine netting, a convincing illusion of receding depth in the frame. This technique was routinely used by Meerson, as he testifies in a letter written to a British critic, Mrs Kessel; explaining his work on the elaborate palace set in *As You Like It*, Meerson reveals that:

This set represented a terrace in front of the Palace towering over an old Burgh, far away landscapes, and a bridge thrown over the precipice between the Burgh and the Palace. On top of the bridge a crowd is gathered which follows the wrestling scene. The terrace is bordered by a staircase, on top of which the Duke and his Court are standing. All these elements, which are supposed to represent an enormous surface, are built over a space of 100 ft. To make this possible all the elements of the sets (sic.) had to be built either in perspective like the staircase, or in a sloping line giving an impression of depth.<sup>88</sup>

The care needed with such precise constructions was absolute as the faked décor would often co-exist in the set with architectural elements constructed to scale; this is the case in *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE* where a full-size canal stands in the foreground of a town constructed in perspective. Moreover, the framing of such elements had to be extremely precise; as Carné explains, the canal was constructed over the entire space of the studio backlot at Epinay: 'just out of shot you could see where the set gave on to the concierge's lodge, and where it backed on to a neighbouring street'.<sup>89</sup> Elsewhere, he notes the problems that might arise once mobile elements were introduced into the environment of the set: the bus that brings the party-goers into the middle of the quayside in *HÔTEL DU NORD* posed significant problems for the technical team.<sup>90</sup> Carné recalls how the bus, rented from the Parisian transport authorities, was too large to pass under the bunting set up in the square. To the fury of the producer, Lucachevitch, four hundred extras had to wait around for two hours, on double pay, while the decorators rectified the problem. Once the shooting was underway, however, Carné soon saw that the hotel façade – which was in perfect proportion with the other constructed elements – had been constructed to such a reduced scale that the bus was implausibly on a level with the first floor windows. Given the tense circumstances, he decided to pursue the shot

and it was the right thing to do, because it gave Claude Mauriac endless opportunities to write at length, and in all seriousness, about the relative value of constructed and real sets...<sup>91</sup>

All the 'tricks' deployed by designers, and outlined in this chapter and elsewhere in this book, were more than simply demonstrations of technical virtuosity; they were attempts to find creative solutions to the search for verisimilitude, authenticity and artistic composition in the set. The examples here show how decorative practice evolved in France in early Parisian studios, but as the other chapters in this book confirm, this was a widespread undertaking in Europe. Mary Corliss and Carlos Clarens, the curators of the Museum of Modern Art's 1977 exhibition on set design, note that in the United States, authenticity was often sacrificed to the standing set.<sup>92</sup> Barsacq concurs:

The major American companies had permanent constructions on their back lots – the New York street, the western street, often the side of an ocean liner, and so on. The framework for these sets was sometimes built of reinforced concrete or metal, almost impervious to the destruction of time. It was sufficient to modify a few architectural details or to change the look of the store fronts to use the same sets for different films.<sup>93</sup>

In France, materials would certainly be recycled from film to film, but the constraints on storage meant that it was much more common to construct a set anew for each project. This created a greater freedom of vision for designers, and no doubt contributed greatly to the sense of 'iconicity' that developed in French cinema in a series of high-budget, high-profile films. Thus, in a snub to permanence and durability, the décor of *LE JOUR SE LÈVE*, was built on the site of the equally impressive, but ultimately disposable, *HÔTEL DU NORD*; the Boulevard du Crime of *LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS* stood in the footprint of the white castle of *LES VISITEURS DU SOIR/THE DEVIL'S ENVOYS* (1942) while the notorious set of the Barbès-Rochechouart metro station in *LES PORTES DE LA NUIT/THE NIGHT GATES* (1946) was constructed on the site of the fairground from *QUAI DES BRUMES*. As the decade advanced, design projects became more ambitious, and became an increasingly important factor in the publicity and promotion apparatus. Trauner recalls how the set of *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE* was visited by curious onlookers,<sup>94</sup> and how the producer Lucachevitch invited the press to visit the illuminated set of *HÔTEL DU NORD* at Billancourt before the film's release: 'The idea behind it was that the set had been expensive, but at least he would get some free publicity out of it'.<sup>95</sup> This trajectory continued in French cinema right into the 1940s, when the qualities of daring and excess that were once so admired by the critics and public – and which underpinned the popular success of *LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS* – suddenly fell out of favour. Carné and Trauner's sorry experience of *LES PORTES DE LA NUIT* marked the beginning of the end of the monumental set for French cinema. A massive set – one hundred and twenty metres long by fifty metres wide by eighteen metres high – of the Barbès metro station was constructed at Joinville; it was immediately con-

demned by the critics and shunned by the public, both of whom failed to understand the necessity for such extravagance in a time of national hardship.

## Conclusion

Dudley Andrew talks about Meerson's achievement of a 'middle zone' between realism and high stylisation or symbolism that became the model for French practice.<sup>96</sup> As Jill Forbes rightly identifies, the French design project of the 1930s was not about the triumph of realism *per se*, even though designers were extremely attentive to the demands of verisimilitude. Indeed, as we have established, the design priority was not realism in the Bazinian sense, although the spatial possibilities of perspective design opened up deep focus visuals in ways that were entirely new to French cinema. Rather, it was to create what Trauner terms an *effet de réel* – a reality effect<sup>97</sup> – in which poetic stylisation was both acknowledged and vigorously promoted as an element of *mise-en-scène*. The creative work of the designer, through his mastery of elements as diverse as construction materials, camera equipment and the rules of classic art, contributed significantly to the spatial integrity, and thus the cinematic realism, of the screen image. These professional skills were the foundation for a pictorial stylisation of metonymic spaces that would correspond to, rather than slavishly replicate, architectural reality. As in films produced in Germany and Britain, the 'realist' sets of Meerson, Trauner, Wakhévitch, Andreiev and their peers were always lyrical composites of imagined forms, creative exercises in the *suggestion* rather than the *statement* of the real.



# Set Design, Style, and Genre in 1930s British Cinema

As we have documented in chapter 2, the 1930s was a key decade in British cinema for transnational traffic, and also for art directors. The film industry attracted an unprecedented amount of capital investment and developed a studio system that provided its basic long-term economic infrastructure. While the period was characterised by the booms and slumps that have constituted a familiar pattern in British film history, on the whole it was energised, not least by advances in studio organisation and the employment of many talented émigrés from the rest of Europe. British cinema was very much a genre cinema and this chapter will focus on how different genres presented art directors with particular challenges and scope to experiment with *mise-en-scène*. Although most art directors claimed that their job was to support the narrative, it is clear that some genres invited them to display sets in such a way that they stood out, prompting analysis along the lines of Charles Tashiro's 'extending the frame' idea, outlined in chapter 1, and producing a tactile, kinetic and meandering viewing experience as described by Walter Benjamin and Giuliana Bruno, that was often the result of imaginative sets combined with the mobile camera.

## Designing the Past

Historical films provided art directors with many challenges and opportunities. The genre encouraged visual styles that emphasised different approaches to presenting 'the past', whether they were realist or spectacular, as demonstrated by examples cited in Harper's survey of the popular historical/costume film.<sup>1</sup> Genres that dealt with the past attracted imaginative designs that tested the art director's ostensible aim to produce work that did not distract from the narrative action. As Tashiro has noted, even a set premised on realism 'may well rise to visibility because of the effort involved in its creation, despite the presumed aim of a relatively neutral backdrop. Realist history's commitment to serve the story through spectacle results in a constant tension between display and effacement'.<sup>2</sup> In many instances the visual pleasure of re-creating the past was recognised as a legitimate arena for exploration, on occasion providing audiences with spectacular examples of obtrusive set design that can be related to the Afrons' categories of 'embellishment' and 'artifice'.<sup>3</sup> In publicity it was often

claimed that extensive research had been undertaken to achieve an authentic period look even though, as we shall see, designers frequently took liberties with accuracy. What was most important was achieving a verisimilar look that was convincing as appropriate for a particular period film even though latitude had been taken with historical sources. As Harper notes in relation to films that tended not to be based on actual historical events but were fictional melodramas set in the past: 'The art director of "costume melodrama" has to indicate a past which is both familiar and stimulating; the audience of a successful film must recognise familiar signs and confidently fill in the "gaps" in the discourse'.<sup>4</sup>

The resulting decors were therefore often non-realist, visually striking and reflected the different approaches of their art directors. The imperative to produce sets that were convincing in their verisimilar address allowed designers to experiment with materials and work with broad, grand canvases. This section compares films designed by Lazare Meerson and Vincent Korda that can be paired for their thematic links: Tudor England in *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* (UK, 1933, Korda) and *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* (UK, 1937, Meerson); Revolutionary France in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* (UK, 1934, Korda) and *THE RETURN OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* (UK, 1937, Meerson); 17th century Flanders in *LA KERMESSE HÉROIQUE* (Fr., 1935, Meerson) and Holland in *REMBRANDT* (UK, 1936, Korda); Russia in *THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT* (UK, 1934, Korda) and *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* (UK, 1937, Meerson). The Russian theme is extended to consider a wider range of films, designers and directors, since the 'imagining' of Russia was an extremely popular transnational genre during the interwar period.

### **Tudor England: *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* and *FIRE OVER ENGLAND***

*THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* is a useful film to analyse from the point of view of design since it represents Alexander Korda's first major success as producer and director that set the tone for many subsequent historical productions at London Films. It also allowed his brother Vincent to establish some consistent design principles and techniques. When examining *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* one has to take into account the many myths that have circulated with regard to its release. Walker, for example, makes the point that the film was made 'as cheaply as possible', although for that time the production cost of £93,710 was relatively high.<sup>5</sup> According to Surowiec, Vincent Korda built the sets extremely quickly and was resourceful in assembling the props: 'Pieces of antique furniture, borrowed from museums and private collections, and drawn from an alarmingly wide range of historical periods, were deployed artfully on

the sets, giving the impression of a well-stocked palace'. Despite the pressure for economy the sets nevertheless evoked visual splendour, assisted by Georges Périnal's lighting and cinematography, which 'gave sets and costumes a lavish, glossy look that was admired by both critics and audiences'.<sup>6</sup> Korda was a keen advocate of what he called 'camera consciousness' for art directors. By this he meant that the designer ought to collaborate very closely with the cinematographer since 'the first essentials of a film are movement, and the free action of its characters. It is the work of the art director to make that movement possible and to provide the characters with an appropriate setting – a setting which must never in itself intrude'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* many of the sets are minimal, allowing characters to move freely through the spaces. On the other hand, the sets are impressive for their intensity, for example with Vincent Korda's trademark use of geometric patterned flooring that creates a sense of space and perspective.

Many of the sets are simple and uncluttered, with interesting effects nevertheless created by low-key lighting and low camera angles. Also, several sets such as the banqueting room and the royal bedchamber are used repeatedly to punctuate important narrative moments. In the banqueting room the space in front of the long table is used on separate occasions for singing and wrestling. By providing a setting for impromptu performances the 'stage' effect enhances the formality and grandeur of the space. It also intensifies the drama, since in this case Catherine Howard's singing brings her to the notice of the king, and Henry's wrestling bout signals his pathetic attempt to convey a vigorous masculine persona in front of his court. A favoured visual strategy employed by Korda that increases the impact of the sets is the use of a frame-within-a-frame approach whereby doorways and arches serve to suggest depth and provide views of interior spaces in the background. When combined with patterned floors, the impression of depth is even more exaggerated since patterns, particularly diagonal ones, create lines that invite the eye to explore deeper into the frame. Since the film is about romantic intrigue at court, the spaces of the palace become important as providing opportunities for clandestine meetings, for example between Thomas Culpepper and Catherine Howard after she has become queen. Repeated visual strategies that enhance the drama of such situations include emphasising doors, arches and corridors to create a mood of secrecy and forbidden passion.

Korda's style of high-impact, minimal sets was enhanced by a preference for white backgrounds that conveyed expansiveness and showed off the props. A similar strategy was favoured by Meerson in *FIRE OVER ENGLAND*. This film features sets of England and Spain for a narrative about the threat and defeat of the Spanish Armada. Laurence Olivier plays Michael, a courtier who is charged by Queen Elizabeth I to infiltrate the court of King Philip of Spain. Michael is

seeking revenge for his father's execution by the Spanish Inquisition and once in Spain he impersonates Sir Hillary Vein (James Mason), an Englishman who is a spy for the Spanish. In so doing he manages to obtain the names of conspirators against Elizabeth, escapes from Philip's court and returns to England. Once exposed, the conspirators decide to be loyal to the Queen and join in the successful battle against the Spanish Armada. In several of the scenes the sets have vast, arresting architectural dimensions that enhance the grandeur of the events taking place, for example, the scene of the Spanish Ambassador's visit begins as we follow the Queen's journey from the great hall of the palace to the courtyard outside. The waiting courtiers are dwarfed by a white set that is embellished by arches and columns, which draws the eye centripetally towards the background of the frame where the light is brightest. This technique is also used for some of the interior palace scenes. When Michael and his lover Cynthia (Vivien Leigh) are re-united after his return from Spain, they embrace one another in the left foreground of the frame while the middle is dominated by a shaft of light streaming in from the tall, floor-to-ceiling window in the background. The bright shaft is divided by the shadow of the window frame, creating a similar effect to Vincent Korda's floor patterns by leading the eye into the centre of the frame towards the window, suggesting further depth with silhouettes of buildings outdoors. This example demonstrates effective collaboration between cinematographer and art director. The cinematographer on *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* was celebrated Hollywood cameraman James Wong Howe who worked briefly for Korda at Denham.

Scenes such as this appear to emphasise the decor whereas on other occasions, when action is dominant, the actors' movements are the central features, resulting in a rather different effect of enhancing continuity and creating an impression of off-screen space. As Tashiro has observed, a 'direct use of movement to efface boundary is simply to have characters move in and out of frame'.<sup>8</sup> After Queen Elizabeth (Flora Robson) refuses to help the Spanish punish English bandits she walks with the Earl of Leicester (Leslie Banks) through the palace set that emphasises arches and tall, vertical structures. In this example they walk towards the left of the frame; off-screen space is emphasised as the next shot is a wipe (a transition between shots in which the first shot appears to be pushed off the screen by the oncoming one), easing our passage as we shift to a medium close-up of them in conversation. What is striking, however, is that even in this classic example of continuity editing (wipes were popular in the 1930s), in the first shot the camera does not follow the characters on their journey towards the edge of the frame. Instead, the camera is static, the figures provide the movement in a frame that in its emphasis on height and grandeur keeps the set as a significant context for the action. Had the camera been following the characters, moving with them, the wipe would not have been necessary



Image 01 – *Fire Over England*

to ‘speed up’ the action. Since the set has not been entirely usurped by synchronous figure and camera movement, the wipe, with its impression of movement, replaces a match-on-action (a continuity cut which places two different framings of the same action together at the same moment in the gesture, making it seem to continue uninterrupted), which would have been a more common method of recording this scene. In this way the sets are important in that they frequently challenge, or introduce tension within classical technical norms.

The Escorial set in Spain is predominantly white and minimally furnished. Depth is again suggested by arches and windows that invite a centripetal perspective. The set’s purpose is to stage Michael’s impersonation of the traitor Hillary Vein, hence the overall dramatic context is subterfuge and fear of being found out. He is eventually exposed as a fraud, resulting in an action sequence with a suspenseful chase through the rooms and corridors of the palace from which he escapes. In comparison with the set of Queen Elizabeth’s court, the Escorial is even less embellished. While some of the same techniques are used to create perspective, the grandeur suggested is of a different kind, more sinister and threatening – even King Philip (Raymond Massey) complains that it is cold. Although the sets of Elizabeth’s court are not over-cluttered, the lively wall tapestries are a notable example of how the Queen’s palace appears lived-in, a venue not only for politics but also for love affairs. It is frequently occupied by more people than we see at the Escorial, as illustrated by (image 01) which

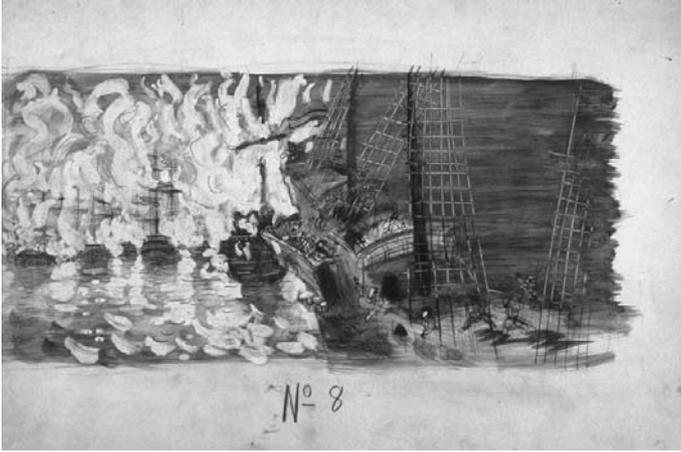


Image 02 – *Fire Over England*

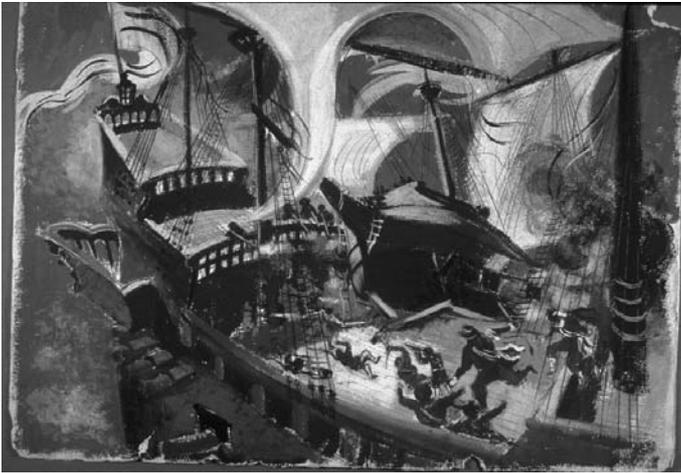


Image 03 – *Fire Over England*

shows Elizabeth surrounded by courtiers and tapestries that contemporary reviewers found particularly impressive.<sup>9</sup>

In *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* Meerson placed much emphasis on the exterior settings, to the extent of building galleons for the battle-at-sea scenes that were filmed at Denham at night.<sup>10</sup> The preparatory drawings for these events are a good example of designs that anticipated action sequences (images 02 & 03). Models were also used for the Armada scenes, devised by Ned Mann, an American special effects expert who worked for London Film Productions for four

years. In comparison with *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* the broader narrative of political intrigue and romance in *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* required a greater variety of sets. Whereas in *HENRY* almost all of the action was contained inside Henry's court, by means of the addition of some exterior crowd scenes, *FIRE OVER ENGLAND* provided its art director with the contrast between Elizabeth's court and the Escorial in Spain. Besides the exterior crowd scenes and the fighting galleons of the Armada, a stunning, portentous shot of smoke over Lisbon while Michael looks out to the horizon. In their different ways Korda and Meerson demonstrated the importance of creating sets that were appropriate for the action as well as for suggesting a particular historical context.

### **Revolutionary France in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* and *THE RETURN OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL***

Two films set in Revolutionary France based on popular historical novels by Baroness Orczy provide another focus for a comparison between the designs of Korda and Meerson. Both films were box-office successes, especially *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL*, and the sets were universally admired. It was the commercial and critical success of *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* that persuaded Korda to make a sequel, but he employed a different cast because the main actors in the first film, Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon, were not available. Korda probably did not ask his brother Vincent to design *THE RETURN* because in 1936-37 he was involved in many other prestigious productions, including *REMBRANDT* (1936) and *ELEPHANT BOY* (1937). While it is clear that Meerson was familiar with the earlier film, his designs for *THE RETURN* nevertheless emphasise his own approach to historical themes. It is noticeable that this film actually provides more opportunity for 'embellishing' sets that draw attention to themselves, on occasion in an obtrusive way, than is evident in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL*.

*THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* was directed by Harold Young, an American who had worked in Hollywood during the 1920s. In many ways it is similar to *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII* for its light touch, episodic structure, wit and bravado. It focuses on the activities of the 'Scarlet Pimpernel', a mysterious figure who rescues aristocrats from being executed by French revolutionaries. Much of the film is concerned with attempts by the French Ambassador, Chauvelin (Raymond Massey), to discover the Pimpernel's identity. The directorial style is very economical in the sense that it is quite fast-paced and tightly edited for continuity. Indeed, there is not much room for pictorial shots that display the sets: the interiors are not distracting but rather plainly decorated, while there are plenty of exterior crowd scenes with large examples of vernacular architecture in the background. The film's sense of bravado and opulence comes mainly from Leslie Howard's camp performance as Sir Percy Blakeney, as he alternately

plays an effete society gentleman and an earnest rescuer of French aristocrats who are under the threat of the guillotine. *THE RETURN OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* had a different cast (Sir Percy being played by Barry K. Barnes), but continues with this theme whereby Chauvelin (Francis Lister) tries to unmask the Scarlet Pimpernel, in this case by kidnapping Sir Percy's wife.

*THE RETURN OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* was directed by Hans Schwarz (who also directed *THE WONDERFUL LIE OF NINA PETROVNA*), who allowed the sets to be more noticeable than in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL*. As we have discussed in chapter 3, in the late 1920s Schwarz was one of those studio professionals whom Ufa producer Erich Pommer had employed to create well-made 'international' entertainment films. Ten years later Schwarz fulfilled a similar function for Korda. A comparison of two key scenes will illustrate the main differences between the two *Pimpernel* films. When the revolutionary leader Robespierre is introduced in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* we first see a close-up of a pen and paper being signed. Then we see Robespierre in a very plain room. The walls are not decorated and the picture above the fireplace has been removed, creating a sense of sparseness and utilitarianism since the space formerly occupied by aristocrats is now Robespierre's office. The furniture is functional and although we notice it, the purpose of the scene – a meeting between Robespierre and French Ambassador Chauvelin – is the major focus, the room simply giving the impression of having been adapted for purely functional purposes. In *THE RETURN* Robespierre is introduced quite differently. The strategy of using an opening door to reveal a set is used, meaning that the formal rooms are displayed for us before we see Robespierre. Robespierre's visitor has to walk (and, by implication the spectator, who has a vicarious experience of this journey) through an antechamber and archway into the large, formal room where Robespierre is working, a small figure sitting at a desk in the background. The camera displays the space for us, conveying details of the desk and furnishings that are more ornate than they were in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL*. In this way the set has been allowed to make more of an impact: Meerson's sets are distinctive as key embellishments of a very particular narrative moment.

Both films feature set pieces of important political events taking place at social gatherings, the Grenville Ball in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* and Brighton in *THE RETURN*. The display of pleasure and opulence is used as a background for intrigue involving the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel and, in the second film, for the conspiracy of his capture. At the Grenville Ball the scene is important because Marguerite (Merle Oberon), Sir Percy's wife, is being pressured by Chauvelin to spy for France by helping him to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel (image 04). She is torn because her brother has been arrested in France. Chauvelin is visiting England, so his presence at the Ball adds suspense since it is then that he forces Marguerite to recover a note he hopes will reveal



Image 04 – *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

the Pimpernel's identity. The structure of the set is crucial to creating spaces from which the camera surveys the guests and their movements. A domed, ornate, patterned ceiling looks down on a circular reception area that has stairs leading to a pillared balcony, where people mingle before going down to the ballroom that is off the reception area. The camera is positioned at balcony level, enabling us to survey the people who are circulating around it after being introduced at the top of the stairs. Suspense is created because Marguerite is intercepted by Chauvelin and given a difficult task of recovering a note that has been placed by the Pimpernel in the sleeve of a British aristocrat, Sir Andrew Foulkes. In order to do this she feigns illness and is led by Foulkes into the rooms upstairs off the balcony. This provides us with more views of the interiors and suspense is enhanced as we accompany the characters through the meandering geography of the building. While the whole area has the appearance of grandeur, it is quite simply decorated. The domed ceiling has already been mentioned, but there is also a chandelier and statues. The dominant tone is white and many of the shots are in medium close-up, preventing a more detailed examination of the area. There is no 'staged' dancing scene, we simply know that dancing takes place downstairs. The main purpose of the Grenville Ball is therefore to create suspense rather than to display the decor.

In *THE RETURN OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL* there is a scene that has a similar function in that Theresa, an actress, is to befriend the Scarlet Pimpernel's wife so that he can be caught. At a ball in Brighton the scene opens with Theresa singing 'Aupres de ma Blonde'. The camera tracks back from her to reveal a large ballroom with a geometric patterned floor that would be more typical of Korda

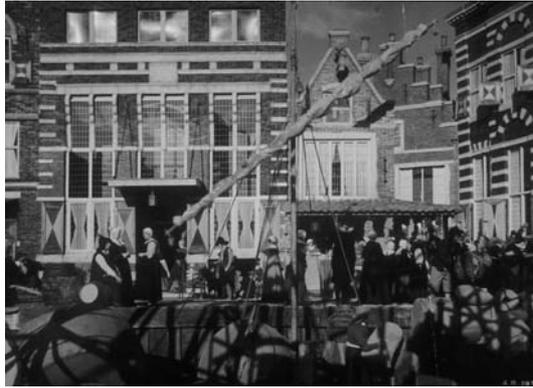


Image 05 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

than Meerson. The tracking action really works to display the whole set, with its monumental pillars, arches, chandeliers and white walls, with deep focus photography showing the guests appreciating her performance in the background. As the camera tracks further back we see that what appeared to be a ballroom is actually an area of a much larger room that contains an area demarcated for dancing by several imposing pillars. After following Sir Percy and Theresa in conversation outside the ballroom we return to the dancers, the final shot of the scene giving us the same impression of the spacious opulence of the Brighton ballroom. Unlike the Grenville Ball sequence in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL*, even though it is shorter in length, this scene has displayed the setting more extensively. The suspense elements of this scene are not as urgent as in *THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL*, allowing for the set to function as a remarkable space in its own right. While both the Grenville and Brighton ball sets were constructed as locales of display, their capacity to explore the ‘set pieces’ is circumscribed by narrative emphasis and action.

### **17th Century Flanders in *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE* and Holland in *REMBRANDT***

Comparing *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE* and *REMBRANDT*, provides another opportunity to compare Meerson and Korda’s historical designs. *LA KERMESSE* was widely praised for ‘authenticity’ and ‘impressionism’, demonstrating in particular Meerson’s manipulation of architectural conventions to convey the impression of depth of field in his meticulous creation of the town of Boom, with its

Image o6 – *La Kermesse héroïque*Image o7 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

turreted towers, Flemish buildings and canals that were all built in a studio (images 5, 6 & 7). The narrative of a small town under Spanish occupation that is subject to a visitation by the Spanish Ambassador, provides the occasion for a plethora of interior and exterior spaces for Meerson's sets, as the populace awaits their fate, many of them fearing that the Ambassador and his entourage will ransack the town and terrorise its people. Meerson's preparatory drawings show how he aimed to create an 'authentic' representation of the town with sets that were based on extensive research, which clearly had a significant impact on the eventual sets (images 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12).

The film's spirit is more comedic and carnivalesque than REMBRANDT and is dominated by the charismatic performance of Françoise Rosay as Cornelia, the Mayor's wife, who takes control of a potentially volatile situation when her husband pretends to be dead so that the Spanish will treat the town with respect.



Image 08 – *La Kermesse héroïque*



Image 09 – *La Kermesse héroïque*



Image 10 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

Image 11 – *La Kermesse héroïque*Image 12 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

Rather than exploiting the residents of Boom, the Spanish enjoy their visit when they are greeted with friendliness and hospitality: the dreaded temporary occupation does not turn out to be at all difficult but rather is a pleasure for both the Flemish and Spanish.<sup>11</sup> Designing very much in the style of Breughel, Meerson's sets are populated by scenes of communal celebration, as the town welcomes the visitors (image 13). While the Mayor is in hiding Cornelia finds herself attracted to the Spanish Ambassador who is more refined and courteous than her buffoonish husband. The visitation also allows a romance that was discouraged by her husband to flourish between her daughter Siska and painter Jean Breughel. Romance is therefore affirmed as the young lovers use the spaces of the sets to steal moments together, for example, when Siska and Jean meet



Image 13 – *La Kermesse héroïque*



Image 14 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

beside the tower staircase, its swirling pattern conveying something of the mood of a world turned-upside-down by the unusual events that are taking place (image 14). On other occasions they go up the tower to view the town and its rural surroundings from above in a way that gives the audience a sense of the town's vulnerability to invasion.

Charles and Mirella Affron note that Meerson's interior spaces provide more extensive and spacious occasion for filmic action than would have been likely in 'real' interiors from this period, as depicted in Dutch paintings.<sup>12</sup> We can see this from an illustration of Cornelia at the beginning of the film (image 15) in a shot that demonstrates the careful arrangement of a painting, a precise balance of furniture that does not clutter the frame, with a door slightly open in the background to create a sense of depth and off-screen space. While the geometric



Image 15 – *La Kermesse héroïque*



Image 16 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

patterned flooring is not as dominant as in Vincent Korda's sets discussed below, its presence nevertheless has a similar effect of extending space and depth. Exterior spaces are also impressive for their largesse. Balconies play a significant role, for example when Cornelia addresses the crowds from them on several occasions. Also, windows are significant when the people look out from above at the soldiers when they arrive in Boom (image 16). An impression of depth and width is created by the design of this shot, with its combination of horizontal and vertical lines – the women in the foreground and soldiers in the mid-ground convey a horizontal pattern, while the buildings in the background, with their striking vertical dimensions, form an impression of great height.

Image 17 – *Rembrandt*Image 18 – *Rembrandt*

REMBRANDT is an account of the painter's (Charles Laughton) rise to fame; his profound sadness after the death of his wife; his experience of poverty and loneliness after the death of his second love (Elsa Lanchester). While the exterior designs of REMBRANDT were obviously heavily influenced by LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE, as the Affrons comment, Korda's Holland was slightly different in that it seemed a little newer, cooler and less experimental with textures.<sup>13</sup> The windows were, for example, much larger than in Meerson's designs (images 17 & 18), although the same approach to combining external scenes with communal activity is evident. Painting features in both films, since in LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE Breughel paints the town dignitaries, just as Rembrandt unveils a



Image 19 – *La Kermesse héroïque*

controversial painting of the civic leaders that we recognise as *THE NIGHT WATCH*. But while the treatment of the theme in *LA KERMESE* is comedic, as the men insist on including details such as ungainly flagpoles to which Breughel objects on the grounds of composition (image 19), in *REMBRANDT* it is the cause of his falling out of favour with his patrons. In a much-discussed shot of the unveiling of the painting, Korda plays with patterning, light and shade and architectural convention to great effect. On one side of the frame the civic dignitaries gather to look at the new painting, creating a sense of density on the left-hand side of the frame that is heightened by the light coming in from the windows that shines on the painting. The geometric, diamond-patterned flooring is very clearly demarked, leading the eye to the painting, of which we can see a little as it is tilted towards the viewers. As Bennett commented, ‘The lines of the composition, particularly those of the inlaid floors, are consciously arranged to attract the eye to the painting, the centre of interest in the picture’.<sup>14</sup> Its size is monumental, and the contrast with the other side of the film frame is striking since the picture frame creates harsh vertical lines. As the Affrons have observed: ‘The geometry of the chamber floor, its soaring dimensions, the diagonals that divide and deepen the frame: these represent to us the distant, secure, and comfortable world the Flemish painters have taught us to see – in perfect contrast of light and darkness, perfectly proportioned spaces, perfect compositions, perfectly decorated, calligraphically perfect’.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the *REMBRANDT* sets convey a greater sense of precision than in *LA KERMESE*. A typical shot shows how the flooring leads the eye to the background of the frame, in a carefully constructed, sparse composition that is less

Image 20 – *Rembrandt*

action-centred than is typical of scenes in *LA KERMESSE* (image 20). In the foreground Rembrandt scrutinises the unseen painting, while in the background, a great sense of depth is conveyed by the figure standing in the doorway. Once again, the patterned flooring leads the eye to this distant perspective. In other compositions, Korda uses light coming in from a window or door to create, in homage to Vermeer, a dramatic sense of off-screen space (see image 18). In keeping with the tragedy that pervades the narrative of *REMBRANDT*, as the painter falls out of favour, his wife dies and he is getting older and more tired, Korda's sets are deliberate and precise stages for slower action than in *LA KERMESSE HÉROÏQUE*. While as far as art direction is concerned this makes for some fascinating compositions, the film has less pace and verve than *LA KERMESSE* whose sets have the appearance of being more 'lived in', habitable spaces. While Korda was clearly influenced by Meerson the different generic demands of *REMBRANDT* determined a rather different approach to designing the past, as well as advancing the 'trademark' details that Korda was developing at Denham.

### **Designing Russia in *THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT* and *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR***

*THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT* and *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* will be examined within the broader context of screen representations of Russia to illustrate the extent to which several national cinemas produced similar imagery of Russia (see also chapters 3 and 4) as 'the exotic other'. In general, and particularly in the films examined here, Russia is an exotic place with a monumental

past, particularly as represented by the old, pre-revolutionary order. While there are elements of nostalgia about the past, the films nevertheless recognise the need for change. In terms of their release in the post-revolutionary period, they therefore serve as fascinating cultural documents that reflect political ambivalence about Russia. In particular, a sense of transformative possibility can be identified that is associated with the respective lead female stars: Brigitte Helm (in *DIE WUNDERBARE LÜGE DER NINA PETROWNA*, see chapter 3), Marlene Dietrich and Elisabeth Bergner. The films' contrasting visual strategies reveal how directors, cinematographers and art directors aimed to convey 'Russia' as a complex place where oppressive regimes (in terms of gender and politics) struggle to maintain hegemonic power and to hold back change.

A focus on set design and decor serves to convey a sense of how the transnational genre created possibilities for designers working towards the 'embellishment-artifice' function of sets within film narratives. The majority of the films were historical melodramas in which the sets 'call on powerful images that serve to organize the narrative...Verisimilitudinous yet unfamiliar and intentionally arresting, embellishing sets insist on values that are highly determining; they oblige the spectator to read design as a specific necessity of narrative'.<sup>16</sup> As we shall see, they also contain scenes in which the sets are highly metaphoric and can even 'become the narrative'. In these instances, as the Afrons argue, 'Where the set is narrative, decor's topography, no matter how complex, becomes utterly familiar...we know the decor well enough to describe it with accuracy, to trace and retrace our steps through it. We know it physically, materially'.<sup>17</sup> What is striking about the examples discussed below is that while the spaces inhabited by the characters are familiar to us because of their arresting visual repetition, they are 'formal' domestic environments (expensive apartments and palaces) that never function as the safe, intimate and familiar domestic spaces we might find in other contexts. Instead, they are alien spaces that restrict and oppress the female characters who inhabit them, often against their will. Because of their positions as wives or daughters of 'great men' the domestic environment is typified by the public function of their male occupants or even, as in *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* (1934), by a hyperbolic, excessive and grotesque décor that symbolises 'Russia' and the old order.

Peter Wollen has drawn on Walter Benjamin to argue that 'spaces' become 'places' in cinema when they are concerned with identity and history. For the spectator, this encourages a dynamic interaction with cinematic 'place' that can be described as kinetic rather than contemplative.<sup>18</sup> With their particular constructions of 'place' as historic, monumental and with a verisimilar evocation of 'Russia', the films offer an interesting case of history – recent and older – encouraging designers to experiment with 'the formal domestic' in intriguing ways. This can be demonstrated by analysing examples of four usages of space

within the broader context of the Russian-themed film: The luxurious, restrictive domestic space; strategies of transforming the restrictive domestic space and the hyperbolic/ornate historical interior space. These are clearly domestic/interior spaces, whereas one might expect to find 'place' more specifically located in exteriors, in terms of architecture, statues and other iconic signifiers of 'Russia'. These are present in the films, but the focus here will be on the 'aesthetic of the domestic' as it relates to the overall construction of place. When located in a Russian context, the narratives of female entrapment gain a particular significance. As scholars who have studied screen representations of 'Paris' have pointed out, the sense of place is established by interiors as well as exteriors: they operate in a dynamic relationship to each other. As Ben McCann notes:

Carné's and Renoir's Paris is neither touristic nor monumental – there are very few shots, for instance, of the Eiffel Tower or Arc de Triomphe in their films – because both directors concentrate more intensely on the constituent action spaces which metonymise the city and explore human interaction within smaller spatial configurations... For Carné and Renoir, the café or courtyard is Paris, and by offering themselves up as the crucible for the narrative, these action spaces imply a wider significance.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly in the Russian-themed film, the interior spaces carry the dramatic focus for critique of 'the old order' in gender and politics. Rather than exploring private and public dimensions in relation to a particular city they instead conjure up notions of a country that during the 1920s and 1930s was subject to considerable international curiosity, as expressed in American comedies such as *NINOTCHKA* (US, 1939).

### **Transforming the Restrictive Domestic Space in *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR***

Jacques Feyder's *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR*, produced in the UK and designed by Lazare Meerson, resonates in terms of visual design with *NINA PETROWNA* as discussed in chapter 3.<sup>20</sup> There are similarities in the narrative; like *Nina Petrowna*, Alexandra (Marlene Dietrich), the heroine in *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR*, is entrapped in a luxurious domestic space that this time is her father's palace. Based on a novel by James Hilton, the film is a romantic drama about A. J. Fothergill, a young English press correspondent (Robert Donat) who is told to leave Russia after writing an anti-Imperial article. The only way he can stay in Russia is if he changes his identity to Peter Ouranov, and works for the Secret Service to spy on revolutionary organisations. He agrees to do this but is taken prisoner and sent to Siberia. After the Revolution he is released as a revolution-

ary hero and made an assistant commissar. One of his first jobs is to take Countess Alexandra to Petrograd after her father's palace has been ransacked and turned into a revolutionary headquarters. Fothergill and the Countess are attracted to each other and the rest of the film is concerned with how their romance is caught up in the chaos of post-Revolutionary Russia. The film was an expensive production from Korda's London Film Productions, filmed at Denham Studios and publicised for its star casting and ambitious sets. Dietrich was borrowed from Paramount for a reported salary of £100,000, a huge sum for that period.

The Russian Revolution shatters Alexandra's privileged existence which has been signalled as stifling and oppressive to her, in a similar way to how Nina Petrowna's interior domestic space is represented. What is different about the following example from *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* is that figure movement becomes the key register in the exploration of space. Unlike in the opening sequence of *NINA PETROWNA*, the actress rather than just the camera acts as our guide through the spaces of the set. This can be illustrated by an examination of the interaction between Dietrich and the set as two performative registers in the sequence when Alexandra's father's palace is ransacked, just before she meets Ouranov. This sequence opens with a long-shot of Alexandra's vast bedroom. The set is composed mostly of vertical 'architectural' lines – it looks like a museum – a de-personalised space. Its overall impression of 'whiteness' is also striking, an example of Meerson's desire to privilege white in many of his sets. As Carrick explained, Meerson 'broke away from the traditional soft grey walls and left many of his sets white and then enriched the surfaces so that the lights filled them with soft shadows'.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, in *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* there is a striking combination of vertical lines and curvilinear shapes, the latter being primarily the bed and billowing material flowing from the top of its four-poster structure. Alexandra's costume also amplifies this contrast since she is wearing a diaphanous nightgown.

Meerson's set becomes what Ben McCann calls an 'action space' when it is animated by Alexandra's movement once she has left the bed and goes in search of her maid when she gets no response after ringing the bell. 'Action spaces' are those that embody

sites of conflict, both narrative and emotional, and become an important structuring metaphor in the differentiation of people and places in the cinema. More importantly, the 'action space' becomes a stark narrative privilege. Architectural imagery and the articulation of space create the basic dramatic and choreographic rhythm of any film.<sup>22</sup>

The set thus functions as a performative arena that becomes especially obtrusive and symbolic during such an intense and suspenseful scene.

The body of the actress becomes an essential aspect of the set, as it were, drawing attention to the significance of particular elements of décor, architecture and furniture; it is as if the entire construction of this sequence has been designed to display the sets. The camera then follows Alexandra in her search, allowing the audience to see more of the palace, its rooms, furniture, staircases, windows and doors. All of the rooms are quite formal, continuing with the 'museum' quality noted earlier and symbolising the 'frozen' world of Imperial Russia. It is significant in this regard that this sequence shortly follows Fothergill's (posing as Ouranov) incarceration in Siberia in a sparse, wooden hut that creates a complete contrast with Alexandra's father's palace, thus drawing attention to its opulence. Alexandra's flowing costume, with its contrast to the hard architectural lines of the set, appears to break its ossified construction which might otherwise be totally overpowering. The interaction between Alexandra's movement and the set appears to 'extend the frame', rendering it an 'open', centrifugal image that stresses movement and change. As Tashiro has observed, movement within the frame, whether by figures and/or by the camera, has implications for the impression created by the sets in that 'movement to either edge of the picture produces an expectation of space outside the field'.<sup>23</sup> So, while Alexandra is part of the privileged world of the palace, she is also confined by its social restrictions on her wish to marry the man of her choice. The set therefore symbolises the sterility of the lives of Alexandra and her father, and shows how the space of the palace is normalised only by being occupied under a hierarchical regime. This suggests, ironically, that only the revolution can bring her happiness – in the shape of Fothergill. As Alexandra's movement within the frame indicates she must – literally and metaphorically – break out of the palace's boundaries in order to be free.

After Alexandra opens the doors to the outside there is a striking long reverse-shot of the palace from afar. As she emerges she becomes a tiny figure in the centre of the frame, dwarfed by pillars. The precise, ordered set, both interior and exterior, is transformed into another 'action space' by the appearance of the revolutionary crowds. When they confront Alexandra she is however filmed very much as Dietrich the star. She is beautifully lit, dominating the frame and accorded dignity as she meets her fate. The same spaces in the palace we have previously seen empty and 'frozen' are now overrun by raiding workers and peasants, becoming 'action spaces' in scenes that recall (in theme rather than style) the looting of the Winter Palace in *OCTOBER* (1927). The portraits in particular emphasize the 'old order', the symbols of serfdom soon to be destroyed. Without her servants Alexandra panics, the house seems empty and sterile, without function and ready to be shattered by the revolutionary crowds. Despite our sympathy for Countess Alexandra, which is reinforced by the shots and lighting set-ups which privilege Dietrich as a star, the sets, representing her

patrician habitat and all that it symbolises, are then destroyed by angry peasants. The viewer is invited to survey the sets for their monumental stature, to relish their splendour and be shocked at their demise. In this way, Meerson and Feyder are perhaps conveying something of the urgency for revolutionary action as the space becomes animated by frenzied revolt. Also it should be noted that while the looting crowds are depicted as out of control, this scene precedes one in which more sensible revolutionaries, including Ouranov (Fothergill), take charge.

This example reinforces the argument made earlier that as Bruno observes, a house is 'not a stationery tectonics. It is not a still architectural container but a site of mobile inhabitations. The house embraces the mobility of lived space. Like film, it is the site of an *emotion* and generates stories of dwelling'.<sup>24</sup> The stories that have been generated in this case are personal (Alexandra's physical and emotional entrapment) and historic (the Russian Revolution), the sets occupying a crucial role in our familiarity with, and journey through, both. Indeed, when interwoven with political history Bruno's concept of the 'travelling domestic' acquires a heightened sensibility of not only travelling through space, but also time, an effect also illustrated by *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* and *THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT*.

### **The Hyperbolic/Ornate Historical Interior Space: *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* and *THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT***

It is interesting that when Dietrich starred in *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* she had come from Hollywood where she was most famous for being in films directed by Josef von Sternberg. Many commented that the way she was filmed and lit in *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* was similar to the style she had developed with von Sternberg, including in *THE SCARLET EMPRESS*, a film that has a highly distinctive visual style. Dietrich plays Sophia, a young Prussian princess who is sent to Russia to marry Peter, a man whom she grows to despise. She rebels by taking a lover and gathering supporters who help her to overthrow the oppressive Peter; she is then made Empress Catherine of Russia. Charles Tashiro has categorised *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* as an example of 'designer history', when the design indeed becomes the most important element in a historical film, more so than replicating the illusion of fidelity to historical references.<sup>25</sup> Although this film was made in Hollywood it shares with the Russian-themed European films the fascination with Russian history, with particular emphasis on the lead female character as oppressed but representative of change. Based on Catherine the Great, *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* provides a highly stylised decor of 'old' Russia. In contrast to the previous films discussed in this chapter, the lighting is darker, more oppressive and the decor is grotesque with its enormous gar-

goyles, cluttered rooms and huge doors that give the impression of a repressive, menacing and violent social order. Sophia is called to Russia to marry Peter who will one day become emperor. Contrary to what she was told in Prussia, when she arrives he is ugly and simple-minded: she is trapped there, forced to change her name to Catherine and to marry Peter. The palace therefore becomes symbolic of all that is wrong with her marriage and with Russia.

When Catherine is introduced to the palace the sets are representative of hyper-embellishment/artifice: doors are large; the décor dominates the frame as grotesque gargoyles tower over the characters. The formal, ceremonial wedding scene is followed by a contrasting one that features the disgusting aftermath of the revels. The camera travels over the deluge of mess after the wedding banquet: we see a skeletal sculpture, the mauled remains of the feast as the camera tracks over the long table that would have been groaning with food before the wedding supper. The exaggerated post-debauchery scene symbolises the cruel fate of the heroine who has been transplanted from her home into a brutal regime. She, and others, long for change. She eventually manages to overthrow her husband and becomes the Empress Catherine. The sets have therefore performed the crucial function of conveying the full historical weight of political oppression while at the same time accumulating the momentum for change. Catherine's victimised, frustrated and finally triumphant interaction with the sets serves as a compelling dynamic in the narrative but also in reminding us how sets change their meaning according to context. Indeed, celebrated Paramount designer Hans Dreier's sets were so distinctive that it is tempting to see the film as the definitive version of Catherine's tumultuous rise to power.

Released at more or less the same time as *THE SCARLET EMPRESS*, the British film, *THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT*, tells the same story but with some key differences. In Korda's version (directed by Paul Czinner), Sophia is played by Elisabeth Bergner who gives a much softer, less wily/sexual performance as Catherine. Rather than being a half-wit, Peter (played by Douglas Fairbanks Jr.) is handsome but irrationally suspicious of her possible usurpation of his power. Another key difference is that Catherine actually loves him. Designed by Vincent Korda, the sets are very different from Dreier's in *THE SCARLET EMPRESS*. Yet they share the same concern to represent political power through an exaggerated *mise-en-scène*. Korda uses his 'trademark' techniques such as patterned flooring and the palace contains opulent details such as ornate chandeliers and large, elaborately decorated doors. 'Russianness' is signified by icons but these are not grotesque as in *THE SCARLET EMPRESS*. The spaces occupied by Catherine are 'formal domestic' in a palace that is confusing in its geography, described by Catherine as 'nothing but stairs and corridors and more stairs'. Korda uses the palace to show how spaces in such buildings are often demarked internally as differentiated spaces of power. At one point, for example, Cather-

rine is banished to particular rooms in the palace so that Peter can conduct his affairs without interference. Rather than function as her private space, her occupation of these rooms represents her exclusion from power and also her estrangement from her husband. When the Empress Elizabeth dies, we can see how Korda's sets evoke monumental opulence, as well as conveying the public/private spaces of the palace, in this case the contrast between Elizabeth's room where her last moments are shared with Catherine, while many courtiers wait outside for news. In this way Korda applied a lighter visual touch to Catherine's story yet at the same time managed to convey how it might have felt to be placed in her dilemma.

### **Conclusions on 'Designing Russia'**

The creation of 'place' in film is not necessarily confined to exterior settings: interior, domestic environments are key to a fuller understanding of how 'place' is constructed in cinema. Some consistent visual strategies emerge across films produced in different countries and by different personnel. The vastness of Russia is conveyed, for example, by interiors that dwarf characters. Just as Alexandra appears small in her father's vast palace, the figures in *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* have to reach high to open large, ornate doors. Coldness and misery are expressed through contrasting visual strategies. In *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* and *NINA PETROWNA* (see chapter 3) luxury, conveyed by whiteness or a décor of silken textures, is stifling when associated with patriarchal control. *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* features gigantic gargoyles and exaggerated décor to symbolise the excesses of the political regime that oppresses Russians and the heroine. In *THE RISE OF CATHERINE THE GREAT* it is difficult to find private refuge in a vast palace that while not as visually grotesque as in *THE SCARLET EMPRESS*, nevertheless locates power, exclusion and control in spatial terms.

The genre of melodrama/historical film is a very useful one for analysing the impact of sets that can be said to operate on the levels of 'embellishment' and 'artifice'. Within the context of the 1930s these are very interesting as examples of cultural constructions of 'Russia' as a place most viewers would not have visited, but were fast acquiring a sense of a cinematic place that produced some consistent images and impressions about the country. Unable to reflect the complexities of particularity or difference in a country as vast as Russia, these films prefer instead to locate the full dramatic force of place more metaphorically within interior settings. Films set in historical periods often reflect contemporary anxieties and preoccupations. The number of films on Russian themes produced in this period is a significant indicator of a fascination with the Soviet Union and anxieties about competitive militarism on the eve of the Second World War. As with all sets that can be described as 'excessive', they invite

mental stimulation and unleash the imagination in a way that Kracauer described as affording us 'an opportunity to meander across the screen and away from it, into the labyrinths of our own imagination, memories, and dreams'.<sup>26</sup> The essence of 'Russia' is not therefore one that accords with notions of accuracy and authenticity. Instead it relates to a trans-cultural idea that through repetition acquires verisimilitude.

Many of the personnel involved in the production of these films were émigrés (Von Sternberg = Austrian, although his family emigrated to the US when he was seven; Dietrich = German; Meerson = Russian; Feyder = Belgian; Czinner and Bergner = Austro-Hungarian; Korda = Hungarian). In all of them Russia is 'imagined' as exotic and enigmatic. These popular cinematic representations can be related to the overall complex interrelationship between Russian émigrés and Europe in the interwar period. After the Revolution many Russians emigrated to Europe and the US, resulting in many cultural 'imaginings' of the homeland expressed in literature, painting and music. As Robert Williams has observed 'many émigrés sought to recover their lost roots by imagining a Russian world gone by, through the eye of their memory or the defense of an illusion'.<sup>27</sup> As with the films, these 'imaginings' maintained a sense of optimism about the East as a land of transformative possibility despite the conflicts that had resulted from the Revolution. As we have seen, the pervasiveness of 'Russia Imagined' did not confine itself to Russian émigrés, it was clearly a fascinating subject for European émigrés working in Britain, France, Germany and the US. It was a popular, exportable theme that in its sense of dislocation from an imaginary utopian 'homeland', perhaps served as a compelling symbol of the émigré experience in general.

### **Designing the Future**

Futuristic scenarios gave art directors an opportunity to stray beyond the limits of 'authenticity', while at the same time adhering to verisimilar codes that made a science-fiction environment convincing within a particular narrative context. As Telotte has argued, the relatively small number of British science-fiction films of this period were fascinated with 'monumental' technology in a homage to the machine age that also reflected anxiety about 'our own rather uncertain ability to manipulate or control it'.<sup>28</sup> Hence the films were concerned with documenting projects that were amazing for their scope, imagination and sheer size. This fascination was a transnational one, since there were, for example, German, French and British versions of Bernhard Kellerman's *DER TUNNEL*, a novel published in 1913 about the construction of a transatlantic tunnel linking Europe and America. While mastery of technology could be achieved in a spirit of internationalism and aspirations for world peace, as in the versions of *THE*

TUNNEL (German and French, 1933; British 1935), it could also be frustrated by natural elements, human error and even sabotage. The spectacular space-gun of THINGS TO COME (1936) is threatened by crowds determined to destroy it, and the Channel Tunnel in HIGH TREASON (1929) is blown up by 'paid agitators' who want to provoke war between the 'Atlantic States' and the 'Federal States of Europe' in order to profit from armaments contracts. In F.P.1 (1932) the enormous floating platform, 'an island of steel and glass', in the middle of the Atlantic that allows aeroplanes to re-fuel, is under threat from sabotage. It is as if the ability to build monumental structures unleashes the best but also the worst in humanity. In the inter-war context these futuristic scenarios conveyed a contemporary address since they were released at a time when the horrors of modern, technologically-driven warfare were all too present in the collective memory of the First World War but also in the fear that an even more devastating conflict might soon develop.

'Monumental' design required the ingenuity of art directors to produce spectacular sets that celebrated the wonders of modern technology. It also gave them the opportunity to draw on Bauhaus, modernist and avant-garde practice for cityscapes and domestic interiors. Vincent Korda's designs for THINGS TO COME were inspired by Le Corbusier and contemporary designers such as Oliver Hill. He also collaborated on the film with William Cameron Menzies. As Ramirez notes:

The visual results – transparent furniture, curved and barren walls, huge volumic shapes with military resonances, etc. – synthesize Expressionism (à la Erich Mendelsohn), Futurism, industrial design and mass housing projects, the Maginot Line and other architectural test-cases stemming from the most radical experiments of the European avant-garde.<sup>29</sup>

For the underground piazza for 'Everytown, 2036' Korda 'combined flying walkways, lifts in transparent ducts, curved balconies, all bathed in artificial light in a grandiose fusion of Le Corbusier and American streamlining'.<sup>30</sup> The rebuilt town is a celebration of modern design featuring glass, chrome and other materials that were often used in modernist design, that is pitted at the end of the film against competing discourses (articulated by the character Theocopoulos) that warn against the unerring pursuit of technological progress. While the latter are given voice, the sets arguably present such a spectacular vision of modernism that they constitute compelling arguments of their own in support of those whose next conquest is outer space.

The British version of THE TUNNEL features bright, modern, domestic interiors whereas the German and French restrict their engagement with modernism to opening shots of New York skyscrapers, filmed in homage to METROPOLIS (1926). While the French and German versions of THE TUNNEL are set in the

present, the British is set in the future which highlights a variety of modern designs.<sup>31</sup> The plot charts the efforts of Mac (Richard Dix), the engineer in charge of constructing a transatlantic tunnel. The commitment demanded of this momentous task places a great strain on his family life, and the tunnel causes tragedy when his wife is blinded and his son killed in an explosion. He is eventually re-united with his wife and the tunnel is built, but the film has indicated the immense human cost of this achievement. This is also a theme that is an integral aspect of the design. A striking feature, for example, is the 'televisor' located within the home. The device is a screen that allows caller and recipient of a message to see each other, a sort of 'video-phone'. It is used in a very effective dramatic context when Mac is too caught up in his work to attend his son's birthday party. This classic melodramatic trope makes full use of the technology to convey the tensions between Mac and his wife Ruth. Their conversation is tense and difficult, as Ruth is visibly hurt because work on the tunnel has taken precedence over their son's birthday and, by implication, over her desire to see her husband after a long separation. The scene conveys a profound sense of irony about modern technology when the televisor, as a device designed to facilitate communication, exposes how the couple are growing further and further apart, their emotional distance created, ironically, by the tunnel that is designed to shrink physical distances.

Ernö Metzner's designs for *THE TUNNEL* therefore conveyed ambivalence about technology. The white, domestic interiors contrast with the dark, oppressive tunnel that becomes a terrifying space when it is associated with 'tunnel blindness' (eventually suffered by Ruth) and disasters (an underground volcano rupture causes a major setback and also the death of Mac's son). When the construction of the tunnel gets underway Ruth says to Mac: 'It's so big. It won't be too big for us, will it?', an apposite, poignant comment in view of the film's discourse about the inherent danger and human sacrifice involved in the development of major projects such as the tunnel.

The 'televisor' was not new to British screens since it had already appeared in *HIGH TREASON* (art director Andrew Mazzei) but in a less obtrusive manner since when not in use the screen discreetly disappeared down a mechanical slot beneath a table. *HIGH TREASON* (director Maurice Elvey) featured some very striking *moderne* sets. Mazzei, a British designer (his parents were Italian and French) who worked temporarily in America, Italy and Germany in the 1920s before being employed by British studios, most notably Gainsborough, for the rest of his career. While films such as *THINGS TO COME* are accepted as the high-point of British science-fiction film design during this period, *HIGH TREASON* is rather neglected as a much earlier experiment in modern screen design with a variety of futuristic spaces and costumes. Like the French and German versions of *THE TUNNEL* it features an opening cityscape but this time set in 1950. The

narrative involves a plot by 'paid agitators' to provoke war and frustrate the efforts of the 'World League of Peace' who are constantly vigilant in their quest to prevent war. The League's London headquarters set is inspired by Art Deco's preoccupation with geometric shapes. Rows and rows of women dressed in white sit at typewriters in a predominantly white space with doors patterned with a recurring swirly motif. One scene displays a hyper-modern bathroom, complete with chrome taps and fittings; glass decorated with a geometric leaded pattern and a 'drying machine' that dispenses with the need for towels. This celebration of the modern domestic illustrates how futuristic scenarios provided designers with an opportunity to showcase new ideas, making a connection between contemporary innovation, modernity and the future. In this case we see a woman using the bathroom, experiencing the pleasures of its opulence and efficiency, thus making a link between modern design and femininity that has been noted in other contexts.<sup>32</sup>

There are many creative touches in *HIGH TREASON* that are not strictly necessary for the plot, yet are displayed for us in a celebratory spirit for modern design. One such example is a mechanical orchestra that only needs a conductor to operate its functions. It is more exciting visually than a gramophone because the instruments are present yet appear to be played by musicians who are invisible. A light mood is however completely disrupted when the news of a train disaster and mobilisation is conveyed to the dancers via a large screen. The scene of the Channel Tunnel train disaster is notable for several reasons. At first we are encouraged to wonder at its ingenious modernity. The carriage is transformed into a diner when tables fold down mechanically, complete with plates and cutlery. The train has been designed for maximum practicality while also appearing to be modern and luxurious, a typical example of streamlined Deco design. Just when we are admiring its many impressive facilities, a bomb that has been planted by the saboteurs explodes. The wonders of technology have been defeated by insurgency, causing a major crisis for the League of Peace as mobilisation is declared and war approaches. This technique of showing a set and then destroying it is later used in *THINGS TO COME* near the beginning of the film when Everytown's cinema, that displays an obtrusive Deco typeface for the design of its large 'CINEMA' sign, is annihilated along with other features of the set when the bombing raid begins. This renders the decor spectacular, as a symbol of modernism – the Deco cinema – that was prevalent in 1930s Britain, is shown in a few minutes of screen time to be splendid yet fragile, a building of pleasure that stands no chance against the brutal technologies of war.

## Alfred Junge and Art Deco

Designing the future made more impact when it related visually to contemporary design and, by implication, to consumerism. While the future in several of the films is visually fantastic it is also one that addresses the present, in particular by displaying materials such as plastics, glass and chrome. In this way designers in the 1930s engaged with modernism within futuristic narratives. They were however able to showcase and experiment with contemporary design even more extensively in other genres such as the musical and the most celebrated art director in Britain to do this was Alfred Junge. One contemporary style that fascinated Junge was Art Deco. It was used, to a greater or lesser degree, in *EVERGREEN* (1934), *IT'S LOVE AGAIN* (1936), *GANGWAY* (1937), *HEAD OVER HEELS* (1937), *SAILING ALONG* (1938) and *CLIMBING HIGH* (1938), star vehicles for Jessie Matthews, one of Gaumont-British's top female stars in the 1930s.

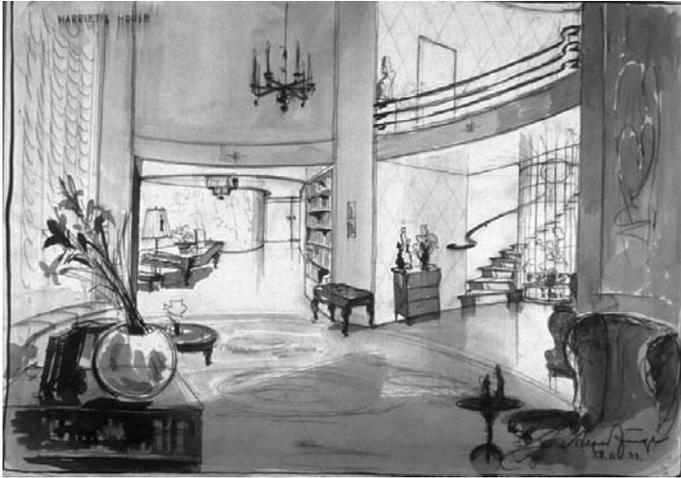
Art Deco, known at the time as 'modernism' or *le style moderne*, was important in domestic and public architecture, most spectacularly in the 'super cinemas' that were built in the 1930s film exhibition boom.<sup>33</sup> Deco had become increasingly popular and commercialised after its success in the 1925 Exposition Internationale in Paris and at the 1927 'Art in Trade' exhibition in Macy's department store, New York. By the mid-1930s the streamlined homage to the machine age was evident in a wide variety of contexts, a major showcase being the cinema. In brief, the style used geometric forms and symmetrical patterns for a wealth of designs that were often made from materials such as chrome, plastic, glass or bakelite that were in keeping with Deco's revolt against Victorian embellishment and clutter.<sup>34</sup> It provided production designers such as Van Nest Polglase, who used it for RKO's Astaire-Rogers musicals, Cedric Gibbons at M-G-M, with a range of shapes, motifs, materials and themes upon which spectacular designs were created. As Lucy Fischer has stated: 'It would not be an overstatement to suggest that from the late 1920s through the mid-1930s, every aspect of film form was affected by the 'Style Moderne'.'<sup>35</sup> Outside Hollywood, Art Deco had of course also influenced European cinema – the most notable examples being, apart from Junge's designs at Gaumont-British, Fritz Lang's *METROPOLIS* (1927) and Marcel L'Herbier's *L'ARGENT* (1928), although as the discussion in chapters 3 and 4 has demonstrated, the movement in France and Germany was more dispersed in iconographic terms (see especially the discussion in chapter 3 of *ANGST* and our comments regarding Brigitte Helm's star persona in this respect).

While many science-fiction films used *moderne* designs to express an ambivalence about 'progress' and new technology, a different slant was evident in the Jessie Matthews musicals. In these films Art Deco spaces were sites of personal

transformation, usually involving an aspiring female singer/dancer who dreams of becoming a star. The musical genre was particularly suited to Art Deco expression. As Fischer has pointed out in relation to American musicals, the aspects which created a particularly close affinity were the genre's dependence on the female figure; the focus on dance and dance costuming, as well as the display of design and architecture in spectacular production numbers.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in the British films there was a connection between Deco motifs, vernacular architecture and the movement of the female figure. Matthews's dances provided Junge with an opportunity to design sets that displayed both a performance and the *moderne* environment in symbiosis, as demonstrated by the following discussion of *EVERGREEN*.

The focus will be on a specific sequence which occurs when two characters are forced to share a house against their will, even though they are romantically attracted to one another. The situation arises from the film's basic plot-line about a young woman named Harriet Green (Jessie Matthews) who impersonates her dead mother, also called Harriet and formerly a famous music hall star. Down on her luck and desperate to sing and dance on stage, the young Harriet is persuaded by a struggling showman, Leslie Benn (Sonnie Hale) and a friend, Tommy Thompson (Barry Mackay), to undertake the stunt of impersonating her mother. She is a great success but complications ensue when Tommy must also masquerade in public as her son, particularly when her mother's former fiancé, the Marquis of Staines (Ivor Maclaren), meets her and is charmed. Although Staines has not seen her for years he asks her to marry him, but before the wedding suggests that she spends time with Tommy, her 'son', in an Art Deco house he has bought. Later in the film we discover that Staines was not fooled by Harriet's impersonation, wanted the stunt to succeed and wished to encourage the romance between Tommy and Harriet. When Tommy and Harriet occupy the house it is therefore in a spirit of forbidden desire because they cannot act on their mutual attraction as long as the deception continues. Andrew Higson has referred to this sequence in terms of its relationship to Hollywood's spontaneous musical performances which often express hitherto hidden desire: Matthews's dance is particularly erotic because it is premised on repressed feelings for her would-be lover from whom she must be distanced.<sup>37</sup>

Matthews's dance is preceded by an elaborate introduction which shows us the geography of the house and indicates the couple's strained relationship. The scenes are constructed upon the theme of presence and absence, of two people occupying the same spaces but not at the same time. Their avoidance of one another emphasises the set's sense of space while allowing the camera to explore its Art Deco milieu. Once the couple is alone in the house we see a long shot from a lowish angle which reveals the vast, predominantly white minimalist space of the living room. The house is on two levels separated by two stair-

Image 21 – *Evergreen*

cases, one of which is spiral, up to the second level which has a landing between the two bedrooms. Later Matthews utilises the various spaces of the house as part of her dance. The set has a typical Art Deco mixture of curves and vertical lines and in Tommy's room its furniture and fittings are very obviously displayed for an admiring gaze, most noticeably the stylish Art Deco standard lamp. Junge's drawing of the set shows the close relationship between the original conception and the final set (images 21 & 22). Matthews's flowing dress is a typical example of how although Deco represented a modernist shift away from Art Nouveau, it nevertheless retained some of the latter style's proclivity for curvaceous, free-flowing female expression. This is also evident in the statue up on the balcony.

In this sequence a theme of frustrated sexual longing is emphasized. This is repeated when Harriet decides to go downstairs in the night to make some tea. There follows a sequence with either Harriet or Tommy in the kitchen: as she goes out of the kitchen he comes in; when she searches for a match to light the gas he comes in and lights it, not knowing that she is in the larder. They finally meet and drink their tea together, both glum and complaining of not being able to sleep. The shots of their frustrated encounters are quite laborious but in the process various consumer items in the kitchen are displayed. In this way Deco is presented in a domestic environment, as part of its quest to introduce new, streamlined technology into people's kitchens.

Once Tommy has gone to bed Harriet sits alone at the piano and starts to play and sing. A non-diegetic orchestra can be heard and she looks towards the camera to begin her impromptu performance. The set is perfect for her dance: it is



Image 22 – *Evergreen*

vast and allows us to follow her movements very smoothly. Dressed in a diaphanous nightgown, Matthews glides over the floor, performing a dance which is quite classical and flowing in its movement, resembling the typical Art Deco feminine figure, balletic and graceful. In this way the performance appears to extend outwards from the frame, an 'open' effect created by the combination of a very precisely organised set and a free-flowing figure movement. She appears to 'extend the frame' as in this example we see her solo dance 'push outwards' from the frame, as she longs to break free from the narrative restrictions (she is occupying a space with someone for whom she has a forbidden attraction) and to interact with, and extend the Art Deco set. The hard, clean lines of the décor provide a contrast with her free-flowing movements, forcing us to notice the set as an entity in itself. With its mixture of some antique furniture (table and chairs) and contemporary items, the set replicates the dilemma faced by Matthews's character caught between the past and the present. The camera pulls back with her to reveal more of the set. Her movements work to efface the boundaries imposed by the frame, creating a sense of the world outside: an 'open' image, perhaps with utopian possibilities.<sup>38</sup> The positioning of Matthews's figure, while designed to give the impression of spontaneity, is, in fact, extremely constructed so that set and figure combine to create an overall effect of Art Deco expression. In contrast to the previous scenes when the couple's distance from each other is foregrounded by entrances and exits, in its sweeping



Image 23 – *It's Love Again*

movement Matthews's dance expresses a longing for the removal of the physical and emotional boundaries which the narrative has placed between them.

Another facet of Art Deco is employed as a setting for Matthews's musical performances in *IT'S LOVE AGAIN*, another film designed by Junge. The film displays the style's fascination with the ancient and the primitive, a theme which, as Lucy Fischer has pointed out, reveals an inherent paradox in the *moderne* movement.<sup>39</sup> While that movement celebrated the machine age it also drew inspiration from the Orient and was inspired, particularly in its statuesque representation of the feminine and in jewellery designs, by Egyptian figures and motifs. *IT'S LOVE AGAIN* also offers the spectator pleasures which are premised on an Orientalist conception of the East.<sup>40</sup> In these terms 'the Orient' is a Western, colonialist fantasy, constructed as 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences'.<sup>41</sup> Several of Jessie Matthews's costumes are sequined and tight-fitting and her head-pieces are elaborate extravaganzas which reflect Art Deco's obsession with 'the Orient'. Indeed, the character she plays is romantic, exotic and remarkable, referred to in the film as 'a white treasure'.

As with many of Matthews's films, the plot is based on a central deception. In this case she becomes embroiled in a scheme dreamed-up by two reporters, Peter (Robert Young) and Freddy (Sonnie Hale), to invent news stories about a fictitious character called Mrs Smythe-Smythe. Matthews plays Elaine, an aspiring singer and dancer who decides to impersonate Mrs Smythe-Smythe when she reads about her daring exploits in the newspaper. Mrs Smythe-Smythe is



Image 24 – *It's Love Again*

fearless, celebrated for exciting adventures in the East, shooting tigers and being courted by several maharajahs. She captures the imagination of Elaine who performs a rumba in an exotic and revealing dress in the identity of her new persona at the Imperial Palace night-club. Peter discovers her deception but manages to persuade her to continue to impersonate Mrs Smythe-Smythe so that his paper can scoop the news stories and she can perform at the Imperial Palace.

Mr Durland, Peter's boss, insists that Mrs Smythe-Smythe is the guest of honour at his wife's 'Oriental' party which takes place in their home and which has been decorated in Deco style, a mixture of the exotic and pure kitsch, including a huge model elephant which moves its head from side to side. Junge's drawings illustrate some of the key aspects of the visual design (images 23 & 24). In her revealing costume Elaine has to improvise a 'temple' dance which develops from a rather stilted imitation of Eastern dance to a jazz-inspired number. The scene encapsulates the tension between tradition and modernity and is expressive of Art Deco's selective, Orientalist borrowing from other cultures. The musicians who play the 'temple' music are forced to adapt their style to jazz and in turn Matthews's tap dance takes over the show. All participants become more relaxed with this style as Matthews enjoys displaying her dancing abilities and makes the most of her performance. As the evening progresses and after the indignity of having to demonstrate Mrs Smythe-Smythe's shooting skills, Elaine however decides that the masquerade has gone far enough. She tells Peter that she must give up playing Mrs Smythe-Smythe as they walk home, ending up in the park outside his flat. From the window above, Freddy sees the couple in the park and persuades Mr Raymond, a theatrical manager who lives in the flat

opposite, to go down to see Mrs Smythe-Smythe. Still dressed in her party costume with its flowing skirt and bejewelled head-piece, Elaine performs for him in the park as Mrs Smythe-Smythe. She sings 'Got to dance my way to heaven', dancing in flowing, classical movements at first and then progressing to a tap-dominated dance which takes her into different areas of the park. The dancing and setting are similar to those in several Astaire-Rogers musicals such as *TOP HAT* (1935) and *A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS* (1937).<sup>42</sup> A key aspect of communality emerges as on-lookers are enraptured and join in the song, turning the performance into a spontaneous communal event which results in Mrs Smythe-Smythe being hired by Mr Raymond to appear in a show entitled 'Safari'.

In this show Matthews wears a tight, sequined cat-suit and dances in an Art Deco set which features exotic trees and geometric shapes. She is accompanied by a male chorus who form themselves into burlesque geometric shapes. The camera interacts with the dance to reveal its complex components, demonstrating its staging and the interdependence of dancers and set, again using techniques which are similar to those used in American backstage musicals.<sup>43</sup> In the interval Elaine learns that her masquerade has been discovered by a rival reporter. Acting quickly, she 'scoops him' by telephoning Peter's newspaper with the story that Mrs Smythe-Smythe has walked out in the middle of a performance. Later in the empty theatre she dances alone, wearing her own clothes and without realising that Mr Raymond is watching. This dance is superimposed with shots of the previous performance, making it clear that Elaine and Mrs Smythe-Smythe are the same person. Mr Raymond is amazed and decides to hire Elaine: she has finally achieved her goal of achieving stardom under her own name. Elaine has 'danced her way to heaven' by proving that Mrs Smythe-Smythe, with all her daring, imperialist adventures is, finally, unnecessary for her career and personal development. Now Elaine's romance with Peter can flourish and she can be a star in her own right; Mrs Smythe-Smythe's antics are no longer fascinating but revealed to be ridiculous fantasies which become stale in their repetition. When Elaine and Peter walk in the park Elaine tries to banish Mrs Smythe-Smythe and all that is associated with her – the references to the East, the jungle and to tiger-hunting. Her triumph at the end of the film represents social mobility and more – the ascendancy of a new identity which critiques the Orientalist hedonism of Mrs Durland's party while at the same time projecting a utopian sensibility which is consistent with the musical genre.<sup>44</sup>

There are further examples of the ways in which Junge used Art Deco as a transformative arena that was particularly appropriate for the characters played by Jessie Matthews. In *HEAD OVER HEELS*, *GANGWAY*, *SAILING ALONG* and *CLIMBING HIGH* the Deco sets are associated with modernity and technology, respectively radio offices; newspaper offices; parts of the house of an eccentric patron who has commissioned a Deco kitchen and an advertising agency.

Radio, the press and advertising are obvious indicators of the modern, professional, technologically-based world of communication; as we shall see the kitchen is likened by one of the characters to a clinic because of its streamlined, pristine appearance. In *HEAD OVER HEELS* Matthews plays Jeanne, a singer in a Parisian café who has aspirations for stardom. Marcel, her dancing partner to whom she is engaged, gets his break when he is invited to go to Hollywood with a famous actress. As Marcel sails on the *Normandie* to America, Jeanne is suspended from her job. She then finds employment working for a radio station where Pierre, her would-be suitor and friend, works. She soon becomes a great success as 'The Lady in Blue' who advertises products by singing. Her popularity is signalled by a striking montage of *moderne* radio sets and a microphone, indicating how modern communications have disseminated her songs and contributed to her fame. The radio offices are highly Deco in their appearance: the corridor Jeanne and Pierre walk down when she first visits has a large musical note motif (typical of Deco style) on the wall, and the boss's office is a light, airy space equipped with modern Deco lights, chairs and desks. This office plays an important narrative role on two occasions: when Jeanne first gets hired and later when Pierre – the man she finally ends up with after the resolution of complications when Marcel returns – asks her to marry him. In this example modern, Deco design and communications technology have been presented as positive, resulting in a transformative experience for the 'special couple' who unite at the end of the film.

*GANGWAY* displays Deco sets most obtrusively for the *Daily Journal* offices and on a transatlantic liner. Matthews plays Pat, an assistant film critic working for the *Daily Journal* who wants to be a singer and dancer. Her job takes an unusual turn when she is assigned to recover the diary of Nedda Beaumont, a silent film actress who is suspected of being 'Miss Sparkle', a jewel thief wanted by the police. As the police and Pat follow Nedda back to the US for their different reasons, Pat gets mistaken by gangsters for 'Miss Sparkle' but ends up helping the police capture the real thief who turns out not to be Nedda at all. As a typical narrative about mistaken identity, confused love interest and characters who occupy a range of different spaces, the film provided Junge with many opportunities to design opulent, striking sets. The newspaper offices are created as a particularly stunning *homage* to Deco (image 25). When we first see Pat she is arriving at the *Daily Journal* offices: we adopt her point of view as the camera literally follows her into the space. The door opens and she walks into a foyer that is light and spacious, the mobile camera traveling into a space that bombards us with chrome, reflective surfaces, geometric shapes and the bustling activity of a modern enterprise. In this context Guiliana Bruno's observations about the cinema giving spectators a tactile experience are particularly apposite.<sup>45</sup> We experience a vicarious tour, sharing with the character Pat a sense of



Image 25 – *Gangway*



Image 26 – *Gangway*

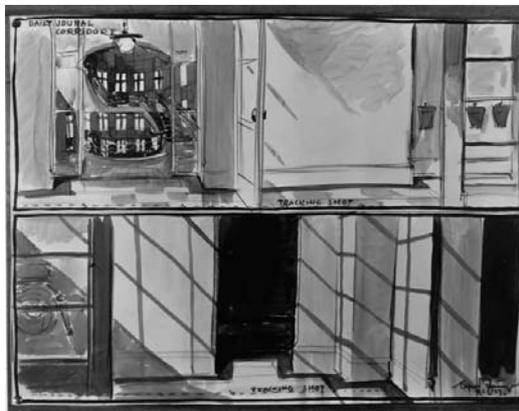


Image 27 – *Gangway*

the building's expansive layout and surface glamour. The foyer becomes the occasion for a Jessie Matthews impromptu performance when she sings and dances her way to her office. On the way we see a barrage of Deco objects including glass doors with shiny silver tubular handles across their centres, as well as a mounted bronze wall engraving with an Egyptian motif that was a common Deco fascination. Deco's emphasis on texture, smoothness and form does indeed invite a tactile response: we want to touch the perfect surfaces. The camera's mobility again serves to create a kinetic sense of progress through the corridors until we finally arrive at Pat's office. Junge drew this tracking shot (images 26 & 27), demonstrating how he was intimately involved in the early planning of the scene. It is reminiscent of the tracking shot used in *THE GOOD COMPANIONS* (1933, also designed by Junge), when the songwriter (John Gielgud) enters the *moderne* foyer and corridor of a music publishing firm. The Deco 'look' is also strikingly similar to the radio office described above in *HEAD OVER HEELS*, with black, white and silver being the dominant tones that create a heightened sense of monochrome: Pat's dress, the shiny black typewriter on the desk, the white office furniture and the chrome office chairs. Later in the film, when they are sailing to America, we are presented with another symbol of Deco design: the transatlantic liner, in this case not named, but similar to the famous *Normandie* that was referenced in *HEAD OVER HEELS*. There are several occasions when the grandeur of the liner is celebrated: palatial Deco interiors and wide shots of the deck underscore the feeling that anything is possible in this scenario of modernity, style, travel and transformation. Interestingly once the characters get to New York the hotel room set is very different, less typified by Deco and more fussy, florid and *faux* European. This highlights a general notion of ambivalence about America and Hollywood that can be found in Matthews's films. While there is much talk of ambitions to go to Hollywood the characters seldom end up there, often, as in *HEAD OVER HEELS*, by choice. Despite rumours that Matthews might go to Hollywood she, like many other British stars, never did.<sup>46</sup> Yet the desire to be transformed into a star and the fantasy of going to Hollywood served well as a utopian narrative device with which Art Deco was inextricably connected.

In *SAILING ALONG* the house owned by Gulliver (Roland Young) is the site of Art Deco display. Gulliver is a rich man who likes to nurture talent, in this case he 'discovers' Kay (Jessie Matthews) who lives on a barge and has a talent for singing and dancing. He promises to introduce her to Dicky (Jack Whiting), an American theatrical producer, and she decides to visit Gulliver at his home. Her initial step into the large hallway reveals a sparse area with white walls, high ceilings, antique furniture, a grandfather clock, grand pillars and a wide runner on the floor that extends into the room beyond which through an archway we can see in the distance. Kay is overwhelmed at the sight of such luxury ('Gosh,

isn't it lovely?' she sighs), a device that heightens our experience of the spaces since we in effect look around them incredulously with her. While the butler is fetching Gulliver she snoops around, entering a space decorated exquisitely with Victorian furniture, but not too cluttered. Everything is in its place; it looks like a stately home on show. The genteel non-diegetic music emphasises that the room is supposed to be the epitome of good taste. But when Kay walks through into the next section there is a sudden change in both the music and the visual style of decor. She is now definitely in modernist territory, with a Kandinsky painting on the wall, a Cubist sculpture, white leather wall seating and Deco lights. A feast of modernism is on display and this time her response is, 'He's crazy all right'. While the device of the camera following a character through unusual spaces was used in the *Daily Journal* offices in *GANGWAY*, this time the technique is slightly different because the character is in an unfamiliar space. The camera can, therefore, draw attention to the design in a very obtrusive way since it is an essential aspect of what the central character is experiencing. The design has become far more than a backdrop for the narrative and we are also invited to survey it with wonder. In this example the character and spectator share an experience that is akin to the travelogue so that 'the relationship between film and architectural ensemble unfolds as a practice of mobilising viewing space that invites inhabitation'.<sup>47</sup>

In a later scene the kitchen in Gulliver's house provides the set for Kay's performance of 'My Souvenir of Love' for Dicky, a performance that leads him to take her ambitions seriously. When they are out for the evening Kay and Gulliver are joined by Dickie and his press agent, Windy (Noel Madison). The four of them go back to Gulliver's house and Kay takes them to his Art Deco kitchen that we learn was designed by a friend. Having made his fortune as a soup magnate, Gulliver is typical of the 'nouveau riche' who were much despised by the upper classes and architectural establishment, but who often commissioned young, unknown architects who wanted to experiment with *moderne* design.<sup>48</sup> When Dickie enters he says it looks like a clinic (image 28). Indeed, the overall impression is of whiteness, shiny surfaces, chrome, regimented cupboards and shelves, rows of bottles that look like medicine and a shiny, pristine floor. Above the hob is a large circular structure, clearly in bronze and in contrast to the predominant white of the rest of the set, that has figures patterned on it. The silhouetted figure with an athletic, often androgynous body was a typical Deco motif. The whole space looks totally unused. Like the characters we wonder at its streamlined, symmetrical appearance; like the other Art Deco sets previously discussed it serves as a space of transformation. It also unleashes the imagination since Kay encourages them to pretend it is a night-club: the milk she gives them is passed off as white wine and the men enter into the fantasy by imagining other guests are present. Having achieved this light mood Kay starts her

Image 28 – *Sailing Along*

number and as with the example from *EVERGREEN* the dance serves to guide us through the space with the aid of the mobile camera, frequently exceeding the limits of the frame. We see more of the set as she glides across the floor, eventually to be joined by Dicky as they take us into the furthest area of the kitchen that is indeed like an operating room with rows of basins, bins and cupboards. While the set clearly has a function – it is a kitchen – its purpose in the film is completely different. In effect it is the arena for Kay's audition, much as the Deco spaces in the other films serve as occasions for her performances. Its occupation by Kay and the men humanises it: it becomes animated after having been initially presented as sterile and static.

In *CLIMBING HIGH* the set is used somewhat differently, providing an example of an unusual occurrence of modernist design presented and then destroyed. In this film Diana (Jessie Matthews) has been directed by a friend to a place where she might find employment. She does not realise that it is an advertising agency, so when she enters the building comedy is created around her apprehension and suspicion that the place might not be respectable. This serves as another example of a character being bewildered when introduced to a new space; that space can then be filmed in such a way as to draw particular attention to the set. The agency is fully equipped with cameras, areas for hairdressing, make-up and set building, much like a film studio. The Deco foyer is large, sparsely furnished and has all the typical features noted in previous examples: glass doors with chrome handles; Deco lamps and office furniture; large windows and shiny floors. The agency is presented as an efficient operation, in

keeping with the 'clinical' analogy that was applied to the kitchen in *SAILING ALONG*. The hairdressers wear white coats and the chairs that models sit on when they are being made-up look like dentist's chairs. The machinery of the beauty industry is very much on display with hairdryers and other equipment having a shiny, streamlined appearance; the heightened monochrome effect noted earlier is again very apparent. The photographer, Mr Gibson (Noel Madison), behaves like a film director, surrounding his enterprise with an aura of professionalism that becomes comedic as he searches for the perfect model for silverware.

Unwittingly, Diana becomes the model and is such a success that she is offered further work. Nicky (Michael Redgrave) is in love with her and looks for her at the agency. In order to speak to her he agrees to be a model, working on the same advertisement as Diana. This involves the use of a wind machine, causing the effect of a gentle breeze as they pose as a couple at Ascot. Nicky adjusts the machine but it gets completely out of control, causing mayhem and destroying everything. The smooth-running, mechanised and efficient photo-shoot business is totally wrecked by the excessive wind. Areas that we have previously seen in pristine order become chaotic. Products that have been advertised, such as fast-drying plaster, provide slapstick humour when it is splattered all over Mr Gibson who then acquires the appearance of a statue. Many of the staff previously glimpsed as humorless workers in an efficient, technocratic business, become like hysterical children as they collapse in laughter at the out-of-control machine. The mayhem sequence is quite long, showing the destruction but at the same time celebrating the carnivalesque mood. As Siegfried Krauer observed cinema participated in modernity but often critiqued its human impact. He identified slapstick as a form that was particularly suited to this as providing 'an anarchistic critique of, and relief from, the discipline of capitalistic rationalisation and Taylorised work processes'.<sup>49</sup> Unusually, therefore, this film is able to both showcase Art Deco design but also hint at the dangers of its excess for it is because the wind machine works so effectively when put on a 'fast' speed that such destruction is caused. This critique is however temporary since the advertising agency is soon restored to its former efficiency and in terms of the film's broader narrative concerns, it continues to function as a key locale for important events.

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how in British cinema of the 1930s several factors promoted an 'active' role for set design: genre; formal and aesthetic develop-

ments; the international market; the input of emigré professionals in key areas of creative control and the impact of stars on a film production. The genres that have been highlighted – historical, science-fiction and contemporary musical comedies – provided particular scope for excessive, spectacular and monumental sets. Narrative context was always important but never to such an extent that sets were rendered secondary or mere ‘backdrops’. As we have seen in historical films sets often combined a semblance of period detail with elements that while not particularly accurate nevertheless were ‘convincing’ in their presentation of the past. Indeed, it was in their support of narrative that sets drew attention to themselves, yet producing a complex intertextual address as they related in obvious, and sometimes less obvious ways to contemporary preoccupations and themes. While one would expect the most spectacular designs to be found in science-fiction films, it was also the case that films set in the present addressed audiences as consumers of modern design and the ideas associated with modernism. In musical comedies these were given a generally positive spin since in these modernity was associated with personal transformation, social mobility and technologies of pleasure. Junge’s designs for the Jessie Matthews films were able to celebrate how technologies of communication were transforming the world for the better. On the other hand, the stern warnings of science fiction, against failing to control the forces unleashed by the advancement of ‘monumental’ technology, invested modernity with a more cautious gloss.

The deployment of particular cinematographic strategies was also influential in according sets a more prominent place. The use of techniques such as deep-focus and tracking shots, for example, highlighted *mise-en-scène* more obtrusively than when scenes were shot close. Charles Tashiro argues that camera movements such as tracking shots work to ‘create linear, architectonic movement, since they use literal track (lines) across space’.<sup>50</sup> His concern is to analyse how movement can efface the boundaries of the frame, and he finds that figure movement, especially in and out of frame, creates this effect, whereas camera movements operate more centripetally. The examples cited in this chapter from *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* and *EVERGREEN* add weight to this argument. Yet as demonstrated by the ‘Daily Journal’ sequence from *GANGWAY*, this does not mean that sets that form the background to tracking shots are less significant. Writing with reference to a different context, Siegfried Kracauer observed how the most ‘cinematic’ moments occur when movement is contrasted with motionlessness.<sup>51</sup> As he explained in a way that is strikingly anticipatory of Bruno’s *Atlas of Emotion*: ‘These movements infallibly call forth kinesthetic spatial sensations – a “resonance effect” which causes the spectator to project the spatial sensations he experiences in its wake into his simultaneous percep-

tions'.<sup>52</sup> It is in this context that sets acquire enhanced visibility: the moving, travelling experience does not end with the shot.

Films directed by Alfred Hitchcock show that while Junge's designs were an integral aspect of pre-production (see examples cited in chapter 2), Hitchcock would often shoot scenes with a greater number of medium-close shots than is evident from the set drawings. While many of the ideas for visual set-ups originated with Junge, they were not always adhered to when the films were shot. By comparison, analysis of Junge's drawings for the Jessie Matthews musicals and a range of other films, demonstrates that the final production often bore a great resemblance to the original drawings. That does not necessarily mean that Hitchcock was a special case and *mise-en-scène* was always important in his films, but suspense-driven narratives provided less opportunity to privilege sets than genres which favoured mobile camera, longer takes and deeper focus. Low-key lighting was often used in suspense dramas, communicating a particular mood but also obscuring the precise details of *mise-en-scène* that resulted from the high-key lighting strategies adopted in musicals and melodramas that illuminated the '*style moderne*' very distinctively. The prevalence of this design in cinema architecture and on the screen created a familiar contemporary visual culture that was still a relative novelty in the 1930s. Its modernity and implied aesthetic radicalism inspired curiosity, even fear. These conditions were highly suitable for experimentation in set design, especially when in this period production designers were generally far more radical on screen than was possible in the more conservative profession of architecture. As Juan Antonio Ramirez has remarked in relation to the history of set design in Hollywood: 'Buildings and interiors and related structures seen on the silver screen constitute an autonomous body of architectural imagery'.<sup>53</sup>

The majority of British studios aspired to produce films that could be exported. The 1930s saw the biggest production drive to date, with the largest film companies, particularly Gaumont-British and London Film Productions, seeking to place their films in the American market. These ambitions had implications for set design. As budgets escalated, a film's marketable value was often judged on the intricacy, or spectacular value of its sets. Studio publicity would often detail the lengths to which a production designer had to go to achieve a certain effect. The marketing of historical films highlighted their meticulous attention to period detail in press books, detail that was in turn cited by reviewers. A review of *FIRE OVER ENGLAND*, for example, commented on the expense of the settings and of how they had cost more than all the settings for *THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HENRY VIII*.<sup>54</sup> The press book for *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* boasted that the forest set was the largest interior set of an exterior scene ever built in Europe.<sup>55</sup> Claims such as this generated a set of expectations that in this case satisfied reviewers who generally praised the film's sets, but were critical

of its lack of suspense after the romance narrative develops.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, one respondent to Mass Observation's Bolton questionnaire of 1938, a regular male cinemagoer aged seventeen, rated *KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR* as 'without doubt the best and most interesting film I have seen'.<sup>57</sup> Designing films for particular stars was also a consequence of the heightened expectations for British films: employing actresses such as Dietrich invited a similarly 'exotic' approach to production design. Jessie Matthews's own rise from a working class background to international film star provided an ideal persona to inhabit spaces inspired by Art Deco.

The push for bigger, exportable films, as well as the opportunities presented by multi-lingual versions, no doubt attracted British producers to employ professionals from all over Europe, particularly 'ace' technicians such as cameramen and art directors. The high number of émigrés in the British film industry has already been noted, and a prior reputation for excellence certainly helped those who wished to work in Britain for reasons of choice or necessity. Lazare Meerson's celebrated work with Jacques Feyder and René Clair was instrumental in his hiring by 20th-Century Fox for their UK-based production of *AS YOU LIKE IT*. In notes written by Meerson for Fox's publicity department he explained that his experience in France had given him a unique opportunity to stretch the responsibilities of the art director: 'With all the films of Jacques Feyder and René Clair he [Meerson] has had to solve specific problems of technique and direction, which is not the case with most films where the work of an art director is more or less standardised and where the maximum he has to do, is to give the picture a frame of distinction, taste and solid execution'.<sup>58</sup> Experience such as this, as well as the influence of the German Ufa style that was brought to Britain by cinematographers and art directors including Günther Krampf, Alfred Junge and Oscar Werndorff, left an undoubted mark on British cinema in terms of technique, style and studio organisation, as detailed in chapter 2. These professionals worked alongside their collaborators in British studios, maintaining a 'production by production' approach while at the same time accumulating experience on a variety of different films.

The generally internationalist culture encouraged by the high incidence of European personnel working in British studios invites a re-appraisal of British cinema during this period. It raises questions about locating British cinema in too narrow a sense because the styles that were imported, adapted and incorporated suggest a more fluid, expansive model as part of a broader network of European cinemas. The inter-connections encouraged by the conversion to sound (multi-lingual versions) and proliferation of corporate agreements between production companies for a time promoted pan-European aspirations of 'Film Europe'.<sup>59</sup> While the momentum of this movement waned as American competition intensified, a permanent legacy remained in terms of personnel

and aesthetics: the sets created by Korda, Junge, Meerson and others exceeded the boundaries of the frame in more ways than one.

# Notes

## Notes Chapter I

1. Cf. Jane Barnwell, *Production Design. Architects for the Screen* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), p. 4.
2. Helmut Weihsmann, *Gebaute Illusionen. Architektur im Film* (Vienna: Promedia, 1988), p. 22.
3. Barnwell, *Production Design*, pp. 114-116.
4. Oscar Werndorff, in Clarence Winchester, *World Film Encyclopedia* (London: Amalgamated Press, 1933), p. 445.
5. Cf. Christopher Frayling, Phillip French (eds.), *Ken Adam: Moonraker, Strangelove and Other Celluloid Dreams – The Visionary Art* (London: The Serpentine Gallery, 1999); Christopher Frayling, *Ken Adam: The Art of Production Design* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).
6. Ward Preston, *What an Art Director Does. An Introduction to Motion Picture Production Design* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1994); Beverley Heisner, *Production Design in the Contemporary American Film* (Jefferson/London: McFarland, 1997); Robert L. Olson, *Art Direction for Film and Video* (New York: Focal Press, 1998); Peter Ettetdgui, *Screencraft. Production Design and Art Direction* (Crans-près-Céligny: Roto-Vision, 1999); Vincent LoBrutto, *The Filmmaker's Guide to Production Design* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002).
7. Albert Krautz (ed.), *International Directory of Cinematographers, Set- and Costume Designers in Film*; 3 volumes (Munich/New York/London/Paris: K.G. Saur, 1981-95); David Pecchia (ed.), *Cinematographers, Production Designers, Costume Designers, and Film Editors' Guide* (Beverly Hills: Lone Eagle Press, 1991), Michael L. Stephens: *Art Directors in Cinema. A Worldwide Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson/London: McFarland, 1998).
8. Robert Mallet-Stevens: *Le Décor moderne au cinema* (Paris: Charles Massin, 1928); Edward Carrick, *Designing for Moving Pictures* (London/New York: The Studio Publications, 1941); Edward Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film: A Pictorial Directory of British Art Directors and their Work* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948)
9. Léon Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and other Grand Illusions. A History of Film Design*, (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), p. 1.
10. Juan Antonio Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen. A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC/London: McFarland & Company, 2004); Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams. Modern Architecture in the Movies* (2nd ed, Santa Monica: Hennessy and Ingalls, 2000); Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); C.S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998). Other crucial publications include Dietrich Neumann, *Filmarchitektur. Von METROPOLIS bis BLADE RUNNER* (Munich/New York: Prestel, 1996); David Clarke (ed.), *The Cinematic City* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997); François Penz, Maureen Thomas (eds.), *Cinema and Architecture*.

- Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, *Multimedia* (London: British Film Institute, 1997); Ralph Eue, Gabriele Jatho (eds.), *Production Design + Film: Schauplätze, Drehorte, Spielräume* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2005).
11. See, e.g., David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London/New York: Routledge, 1985).
  12. Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen*, p.81; Weihsmann, *Gebaute Illusionen*, pp.18-19.
  13. Weihsmann, *Gebaute Illusionen*, p. 19
  14. Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen*, pp. 97-113.
  15. Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen*, p. 107.
  16. André Bazin, 'Theatre and Cinema, Part Two', in *What is Cinema, Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 108.
  17. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 84.
  18. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 85.
  19. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 61.
  20. Noël Carroll, 'The Specificity of Media in the Arts', in Robert Stam and Toby Miller (eds.), *Film and Theory. An Anthology* (Malden/Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 51.
  21. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 36.
  22. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 38.
  23. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 51.
  24. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 82.
  25. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 90.
  26. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 135.
  27. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 158.
  28. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 177.
  29. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 6.
  30. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 18.
  31. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 45.
  32. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 56.
  33. Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of the Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Building Information, Rakennustieto Oy Helsinki, 2001); Peter Wollen, 'Architecture and Film: Places and Non-Places' in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (New York and London: Verso, 2002).
  34. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).
  35. Wollen, 'Architecture and Film', p. 201.
  36. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 18.
  37. Wollen, 'Architecture and Film', p. 203.
  38. Wollen, 'Architecture and Film', p. 212.
  39. Miriam Hansen, introduction to Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. xxxiv.
  40. Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of the Image*, p. 17.
  41. Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of the Image*, p. 18
  42. Antonia Lant, 'Haptical Cinema', in *October*, vol.74, Fall 1995, pp. 45-73.
  43. Lant, 'Haptical Cinema', p. 71.
  44. Lant, 'Haptical Cinema', p. 71.
  45. Lant, 'Haptical Cinema', p. 69.

46. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p.17.
47. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 56.
48. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 46.
49. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 89.
50. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 103.
51. Cf. Tino Balio, *Grand Design. Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993).
52. Albrecht, *Designing Dreams*; Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women. Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
53. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 361.

## Notes Chapter 2

1. Cf. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (eds.), *'Film Europe' and 'Film America': Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).
2. Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now. A Survey of The Cinema*, (London: J. Cape, 1930), p. 180.
3. The original reads: 'La métaphysique du décor est le secret du cinéma allemand'; in: Henri Langlois, 'Robert Herlth', in: Wolfgang Längsfeld (ed.), *Filmarchitektur Robert Herlth* (Munich: Deutsches Institut für Film und Fernsehen, 1965), p. 19.
4. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler. A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947); Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen. Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1994).
5. For a comprehensive analysis of the legacy and importance of both texts, see Thomas Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema? With Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner (once more) to the Movies', in *Weimar Cinema and After. Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 18-60.
6. Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema', p. 24.
7. See for example Frances Guerin's in-depth analysis of lighting in Weimar film. Justifying the specific focus of her book, she argues, 'The sets of films such as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari/The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1921 [sic]) might have been innovative for the cinema, but they are effectively static, two-dimensional images that mimic the Expressionist paintings of artists such as Erich Heckel or Lyonel Feininger. In the use of light and lighting, we consistently find new and uniquely filmic visions of the *mise-en-scène*', in: Frances Guerin, *Culture of Light. Cinema and Technology in 1920s Germany* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. xvii.
8. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, pp. 74-75.
9. See Helmut Weihsmann, *Gebaute Illusionen. Architektur im Film* (Vienna: promedia 1988), pp. 101-151; Dieter Bartetzko, *Illusionen in Stein. Stimmungsarchitektur im deutschen Faschismus. Ihre Vorgeschichte in Theater- und Filmbauten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1985), pp. 224-284.

10. Sabine Hake, 'Architectural Hi/stories: Fritz Lang and *The Nibelungs*', in *Wide Angle*, vol. 12, no. 3 (July 1990), p. 41.
11. Thomas Elsaesser points to such a transnational analogy by suggesting that 'expressionist cinema may perhaps be better understood as the German variant of Constructivism, concerned with giving technologically produced art and artifacts a wholly different space – literally and discursively – from that traditionally occupied by painting, literature and even the theatre', in 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema', p. 39.
12. Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema', p. 37.
13. Cf. Jochen Meyer-Wendt, 'Zwischen Folklore und Abstraktion: Der Filmarchitekt Andrej Andrejew', in Jörg Schöning (ed.), *Fantaisies Russes. Russische Filmmacher in Berlin und Paris 1920-1930* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1995), p. 111.
14. Alfons Arns, 'Der Architekt von Babelsberg. Otto Hunte, Film-Architekt', in Alfons Arns, Hans-Peter Reichmann (eds.), *Otto Hunte. Architekt für den Film* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1996), p. 15.
15. Johannes Kamps, 'Reimann, Walter – Kunstmaler. Freie Kunst und Gebrauchsgrafik eines Filmarchitekten', in Hans-Peter Reichmann (ed.), *Walter Reimann. Maler und Filmarchitekt* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1997), p. 12.
16. Cf. Christian Welzbacher, 'Sichtbeton, so weit das Auge blickt', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 December 2000.
17. Cf. Julius Posener, *Hans Poelzig. Sein Leben, sein Werk* (Braunschweig and Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1994).
18. Hans-Michael Bock, 'Berliner Ateliers', in Uta Berg-Ganschow, Wolfgang Jacobsen (eds.), *...Film...Stadt...Kino...Berlin* (Berlin: Argon, 1987), p. 186.
19. Kamps, 'Reimann, Walter – Kunstmaler', p. 27.
20. Kamps, 'Reimann, Walter – Kunstmaler', pp. 13-23.
21. Cf. Sabine Röder, Gerhard Storck (eds.), *Der dramatische Raum. Hans Poelzig: Malerei – Theater – Film* (Krefeld: Museum Haus Lange, 1986).
22. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, p. 19.
23. Dietrich Neumann (ed.), *Film Architecture: Set Designs from Metropolis to Blade Runner* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1996), p. 199.
24. Jürgen Kasten, *Der expressionistische Film. Abgefilmtes Theater oder avantgardistisches Erzählkino?* (Münster: MAKS, 1990), p. 43.
25. Alfons Arns, 'Der Architekt von Babelsberg. Otto Hunte, Film-Architekt', p. 10.
26. Meyer-Wendt, 'Zwischen Folklore und Abstraktion: Der Filmarchitekt Andrej Andrejew', p. 111.
27. Cf. Weihsmann, *Gebaute Illusionen*, pp. 239-269.
28. Karl Scheffler, 'Das grosse Schauspielhaus, Berlin 1919', in Röder, Storck (eds.), *Der dramatische Raum. Hans Poelzig: Malerei – Theater – Film*, pp. 35-42.
29. Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces. Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 176.
30. Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema', p. 25.
31. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, pp. 44-56.
32. Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema', p. 25. See also Barry Salt, 'From Caligari to Who?' *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1979, pp. 119-123.
33. Cf. in this respect Kristina Jaspers' cautious evaluation concerning the claims by Walter Reimann, of having worked with Reinhardt, in 'Walter Reimanns Theaterar-

- beit. Ein Recherchebericht', in Reichmann (ed.), *Walter Reimann. Maler und Filmarchitekt*, p. 35.
34. Bernd Wilms, 'So stell ich mir Max Reinhardt vor', in Roland Koberg, Bernd Stegemann, Henrike Thomsen (eds.), *Max Reinhardt und das deutsche Theater* (Berlin: Deutsches Theater/Henschel, 2005), p. 8.
  35. Cf. Günter Agde, 'Mit Blick auf die Heimat: Russische Filmkünstler im deutschen Exil', in Schöning (ed.), *Fantaisies Russes*, pp. 95-110.
  36. Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Sinne und Sensationen: Wie Max Reinhardt Theater neu erfand', in Koberg, Stegemann, Thomsen, *Max Reinhardt und das deutsche Theater*, p. 25.
  37. Christopher Balme, 'Die Marke Reinhardt: Theater als modernes Wirtschaftsunternehmen', in Koberg, Stegemann, Thomsen, *Max Reinhardt und das deutsche Theater*, pp. 41-49.
  38. Fischer-Lichte, 'Sinne und Sensationen: Wie Max Reinhardt Theater neu erfand', p. 14.
  39. For a comprehensive analysis of this genealogy of influences, see Jo Leslie Collier, *From Wagner to Murnau: Transposition of Romanticism from Stage to Screen* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1988).
  40. Alexander Weigel, 'Dem Namen einen neuen Inhalt geben: Max Reinhardt als Direktor des Deutschen Theaters', in Koberg, Stegemann, Thomsen, *Max Reinhardt und das deutsche Theater*, pp. 31-35.
  41. Cf. Bartetzko, *Illusionen in Stein*, pp. 189-206.
  42. Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema?', pp. 42-43.
  43. Michael Esser, 'Ein Phantast, kein Modernist. Otto Hunte in den zwanziger und dreissiger Jahren', in Arns, Reichmann (eds.), *Otto Hunte. Architekt für den Film*, p. 73.
  44. Hake, 'Architectural Hi/stories: Fritz Lang and *The Nibelungs*', p. 47.
  45. Lothar Schwab, 'Der wohltemperierte Sonnenaufgang' in Berg-Ganschow, Jacobsen (eds.), *...Film...Stadt...Kino...Berlin*, p. 171.
  46. Guerin, *Culture of Light. Cinema and Technology in 1920s Germany*, p. 8.
  47. Bock, 'Berliner Ateliers', pp. 177-202.
  48. Hans Michael Bock, 'Die Filmstadt. Ateliergelände Neubabelsberg', in Hans-Michael Bock and Michael Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa-Buch* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Zweitausendeins, 1992), pp. 86-89.
  49. Kristin Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood. German and American Film after World War I* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2005), p. 62.
  50. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 38.
  51. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 53.
  52. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 57.
  53. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 54.
  54. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 54.
  55. Cf. Neumann (ed.), *Film Architecture: Set Designs from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, p. 197.
  56. Arns, 'Der Architekt von Babelsberg. Otto Hunte, Film-Architekt', p. 15.
  57. Guntram Geser, *Fritz Lang. Metropolis und Die Frau im Mond. Zukunftsfilm und Zukunftstechnik in der Stabilisierungszeit der Weimarer Republik* (Meitingen: Corian, 1996), p. 21.

58. Hans-Michael Bock, 'Robert Herlth', in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (eds.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 148.
59. Robert Herlth, 'Erinnerungen (1958)', in Längsfeld (ed.), *Filmarchitektur Robert Herlth*, p. 48.
60. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 124.
61. E.g., a contemporary review assessed the merits of Joe May's monumentalist spectacle *Das indische Grabmal* as being 'American in the generosity of its sets, and German in the thoroughness of their execution', in *Film-Kurier*, no. 188 (13 August 1921).
62. Kurt Richter, 'Zeitgemässe Filmarchitektur', in *Der Kinematograf*, vol. 17, no. 872 (4 November 1923), p. 8.
63. Robert Herlth, 'Vortrag vor dem Club deutscher Filmarchitekten am 22. Februar 1951', in Längsfeld (ed.), *Filmarchitektur Robert Herlth*, p. 42.
64. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 110.
65. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 113.
66. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, pp. 115-116.
67. Cf. Walter Reimann, 'Filmarchitektur – Filmarchitekt?', in *Gebrauchsgrafik*, no. 6 (1924).
68. Walter Reimann, 'Der Maler und der Film', in Reichmann (ed.), *Walter Reimann. Maler und Filmarchitekt*, pp. 173-175.
69. Robert Herlth, 'With Murnau on the Set', in Lotte H. Eisner, *Murnau* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), p. 60.
70. 'Herlth und Röhrig. Die Dioskuren der Dekoration', in *Film-Kurier*, no.14, 16 January 1926.
71. Bock, 'Berliner Ateliers', pp. 177-202.
72. Schwab, 'Der wohltemperierte Sonnenaufgang', p. 175.
73. Michael Esser, 'Poeten der Filmarchitektur. Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig', in Bock and Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa-Buch*, p. 121.
74. Robert Herlth, 'Zur Technik der Filmarchitektur', in Längsfeld (ed.), *Filmarchitektur Robert Herlth*, p. 59.
75. Arns, 'Der Architekt von Babelsberg. Otto Hunte, Film-Architekt', p. 11.
76. Erich Kettelhut, 'Memoiren' (unpublished typescript, held by the Filmmuseum Berlin/Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek), p. 835.
77. Peter Lähn, 'Asphalt', in Neumann, *Film Architecture*, p. 108.
78. Cf, e.g., Otto Hunte, 'My Work on *Metropolis*', in Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann (eds.), *Fritz Lang's Metropolis. Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000), pp. 80-81.
79. Otto Hunte, 'Film-Architekt und Tonfilm', in Arns, Reichmann (eds.), *Otto Hunte. Architekt für den Film*, p. 76.
80. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 123.
81. Hunte, 'Film-Architekt und Tonfilm', p. 76.
82. Hans-Michael Bock, 'Keine dramatischen Maggi-Würfel. Die Einführung des Tonfilms', in Bock and Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa-Buch*, p. 258.
83. Michael Wedel, 'Klärungsprozesse. Tobis, Klangfilm und die Tonfilmumstellung 1928-32', in Jan Distelmeyer (ed.), *Tonfilmfrieden/Tonfilmkrieg. Die Geschichte der Tobis vom Technik-Syndikat zum Staatskonzern* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2003), p. 38.

84. Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 52.
85. Cf. Bartetzko, *Illusionen in Stein*, p. 243-262.
86. Lotte H. Eisner, 'Erinnerungen an Robert Herlth', in Längsfeld (ed.), *Filmarchitektur Robert Herlth*, p. 12.
87. Alfons Arns, 'Von Holstenwall nach Stedingehre. Walter Reimann, der deutsche Film, und der Nationalsozialismus', in Reichmann (ed.), *Walter Reimann. Maler und Filmarchitekt*, pp. 144-165.
88. Bartetzko, *Illusionen in Stein*, p. 227.
89. Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*, pp. 51-52.
90. Elsaesser, 'Expressionist Film or Weimar Cinema? With Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner (once more) to the Movies', p. 46.
91. Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row 1986), p. 38.
92. Kristin Thompson, 'The Rise and Fall of Film Europe' in, Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (eds.), *Film Europe' and 'Film America': Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press 1999) p. 57.
93. Leon Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions* (Boston: New York Graphic Society 1976), p.38.
94. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, *Le Décor au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2003), p. 62.
95. See for example Léon Moussinac who wrote: 'The question of cinema décor has once again incited numerous passionate discussions. The release of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* has yet further inflamed critics and filmmakers' in 'A propos du Décor au Cinéma', *Cinémagazine*, (no. 11, 17 March 1922), p. 332.
96. Juan Arroy, 'Les décors', *Cinémagazine* (no. 32, 6 August 1926), p. 245.
97. Alastair Phillips, *City of Darkness, City of Light: Emigré Filmmakers in Paris 1929-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2004), p. 171-2.
98. Mallet-Stevens designed sets for a number of films in the 1920s, including *LES TROIS MOUSQUETAIRES* (*THE THREE MUSKATEERS*; Diament-Berger, 1921), *LE MIRACLE DES LOUPS* (*MIRACLE OF THE WOLVES*; Bernard, 1924), *L'INHUMAINE* (1924) and *LE VERTIGE* (L'Herbier, 1927).
99. Robert Mallet-Stevens, *Le décor au cinéma* (Paris: Séguier, 1929), p. 13.
100. Mallet-Stevens, *Le décor au cinéma*, p. 29.
101. Neumann, *Film Architecture*, p. 7.
102. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, 'Lazare Meerson, onze ans de complicité avec René Clair', 1895, no. 25, September 1998, p. 64.
103. See the description of the studio facilities as reported by the contemporary press in François Albéra, *Albatros: Des Russes à Paris 1919-1929* (Milan: Mazzotta/La Cinémathèque française 1995), p. 95
104. Anonymous critic writing in *Cinéa-Ciné pour tous*, 15 September 1924. Cited by Albéra in *Albatros: Des Russes à Paris 1919-1929*, p. 39, note 49.
105. See for example Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) p. 180-1.
106. Meerson archive, Bibliothèque du Film, Paris: 29/1.
107. Vladimir Zederbaum: 'Lazare Meerson', *Cinématographie française*, August 1938.
108. Cf. Schöning, *Fantaisies Russes*.
109. Zederbaum, 'Lazare Meerson'

110. It should be noted that Jacques Feyder was in fact Belgian, not French. However, he had a long and starred career in French cinema, and is widely accepted as a major contributor to the French cinematic outputs of the era.
111. Meerson archive, 31/8 (22 June 1933).
112. Meerson archive, 13/7 (20 August 1937).
113. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma* (Paris: Jade/Flammarion 1988) p.16.
114. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner*, p. 16.
115. Meerson archive, Paris: 33, 34 & 35: there is an extensive amount of correspondence between Trauner and Meerson throughout the 1930s. This becomes more particularly urgent in 1936 when Trauner is without work and living in fear of his creditors in the Izère (Meerson 33/11/post mortem).
116. Meerson archive, Bibliothèque du Film, Paris: 7/28/G (July 1936): Meerson recommended the Russian Goul for work on KNIGHT WITHOUT ARMOUR. He was furious that he accepted a lower wage than the industry norm: a fee of £25 instead of £50.
117. Meerson archive, Paris: 7/28/V (13 October 1937).
118. Albrecht, *Designing Dreams: Modern Architecture in the Movies*, p.56.
119. The Meerson archives show that Meerson was in charge of five workshops (carpentry, plaster, painting, construction and textiles) comprising a team of 32 staff. Meerson 31/8 (undated). A letter from Dr Henkel, the studio director, also makes mention of a drawing workshop with an unspecified number of staff (Meerson 31/8, 2 December 1930).
120. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinema*, p. 16.
121. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 176.
122. Phillips, *City of Darkness, City of Light*, p. 40.
123. Courant worked on many major French productions of the decade including COEUR DE LILAS (Litvak 1931), CIBOULETTE (Autant-Lara, 1933), AMOK (Ozep 1934) and LE JOUR SE LÈVE (Carné, 1938). Trivas directed DANS LES RUES in 1933, while Siodmak directed French popular hits such as LA CRISE EST FINIE (1933) and LA VIE PARISIENNE (1935).
124. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 177.
125. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 176.
126. 'It's an art of abnegation. The decorator has to be discreet in a way that permits all the other aspects of the film to show through: the plot, the acting, the camerawork' in Meerson *Cinémagazine* 1927. This term is used in an article on Meerson's work in the catalogue of the exhibition 'Images de l'industrie de rêve' held at the Maison de la Culture in Epinay-sur-Seine, October 1984-January 1985.
127. Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema 1930-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 2.
128. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 89.
129. See Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, p. 6.
130. See Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-39* (Bloomington and Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 284-85.
131. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 104.
132. Parliamentary reports on the state of the industry were prepared by Maurice Petsche (1935) and Guy de Carmoy (1936). See Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, pp. 33-35 for fuller details.

133. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, pp. 92-93.
134. Charles O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the US* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 27.
135. Alastair Phillips, 'Migration and exile in the classical period' in Michael Temple and Michael Witt (eds.), *The French Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2004) p. 103.
136. Pathé Vincennes 1903, Gaumont Paris 1906, Éclair Epinay, 1907; Pathé Montreuil 1907 (Dossier technique no. 4, February 1998, Commission supérieure technique de l'image et du son).
137. Billancourt 1914-18, St Maurice 1918, Pathé Cinéromans Joinville 1926, Studios Réunis Francoeur 1926 (Dossier technique no. 4, February 1998, Commission supérieure technique de l'image et du son).
138. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, p. 23.
139. Barsacq notes that this was the only French studio built 'specifically for the production of sound film ... Even the few studios established after 1930 were set up in buildings intended for quite different purposes: coach building workshops, antique display rooms etc.' In Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet*, p. 162.
140. Alastair Phillips: 'Migration and exile in the classical period', p. 104.
141. O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound*, p. 19. See also: Distelmeyer, *Tonfilmfrieden/Tonfilmkrieg*; and Hans-Michael Bock, Wiebke Annkatrin Mosel, Ingrun Spazier (eds.), *Die Tobis 1928-1945. Eine kommentierte Filmografie* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2003).
142. O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound*, p. 80.
143. Phillips, *City of Darkness*, p. 34.
144. Dudley Andrew, 'French Cinema in the 1930s' in Elizabeth Ezra *European Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 99.
145. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, p. 12.
146. This figure of 30% represented a significant increase on the 1920s market, where the French share amounted to around 10%. Cf. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, p. 12.
147. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, pp. 20, 40.
148. Ginette Vincendeau, 'French Cinema in the 1930s: Social Text and Context of a Popular Entertainment Medium' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1985), p. 50.
149. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, pp. 41-42.
150. Berthomé, *Le Décor au cinéma*, p. 184.
151. Ginette Vincendeau: 'The Art of Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Classical French Cinema period' in Temple and Witt, *The French Cinema Book*, p. 146.
152. Vincendeau: 'The Art of Spectacle', p. 145.
153. Robert-Jules Garnier, *Cours de technique de décors appliqué au cinéma* (Paris: Ecole universelle par correspondance de Paris, 1930).
154. Letters held in the Meerson archive: Meerson 31, box 8, dated 2 December 1930 from H.Henkel, director of the Tobis studios; Meerson 29, box 1, dated 27 June 1933, from André Wisner, regarding Meerson's contract for LAC AUX DAMES.
155. See an account of this stage of the process in Feyder's practice in Victor Bachy, *Jacques Feyder: Artisan du Cinéma 1885-1948* (Louvain, Librairie Universitaire, Belgium: CETEDI, 1968), p. 173. Barsacq notes that this type of consultative practice did not endure in the French industry, and that the establishment of the shooting script as a

- result of this kind of three-way collaboration became rare. In Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet*, p. 164.
156. Marcel Carné, *La vie à belles dents* (Paris: Editions Jean Vuarnet, 1979), p. 178.
  157. Jane Barnwell, *Production Design: Architects of the Screen* (London, New York: Wallflower, 2004), p. 47.
  158. Garnier, *Cours de technique de décors appliquée au cinéma*, p. 22.
  159. Michel Ciment and Isabelle Jordan, 'Décors: Entretien avec Alexandre Trauner, *Positif* 223, October 1979, p. 17.
  160. Barsacq confirms that this is routine in the industry: 'After any modifications by the designer, the final plans for the sets are drawn up by his assistants. They base their work on the schematic plans but try to keep as close as possible to the sketches'. Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet*, pp. 165-66.
  161. Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet*, pp. 44-45.
  162. 'A decorator has to understand the possibilities offered by arc and mercury lighting if he is to have any claim to know his profession. Of course, here in France, there is a complete lack of interest in the matter, whereas in Britain, Russia, Germany and America, lighting is taken seriously both in films and more generally'. Louis Chavane, 'Le décorateur et le métier', *La Revue du Cinéma*, no. 1, December 1928, p. 21.
  163. Constant Mic, 'L'installation des studios sonores' (trans. N. Daniloff), *La Revue du Cinéma*, no. 18, January 1931, p. 22.
  164. François Cuel & Renaud Bezombes, 'Les décorateurs: Georges Wakhévitch', *Cinématographe* 76, March 1982, p. 6.
  165. Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions*, p. 173.
  166. Georges Wakhévitch, *L'envers des décors* (Paris: Laffont 1977), pp. 76-77.
  167. Eugène Lourié, *My Work in Films* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1985), p. 6.
  168. Wakhévitch, *L'envers des décors*, p. 75.
  169. Wakhévitch, *L'envers des décors*, p. 60.
  170. See Trauner's account of this in Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 42. He records how the producer Lucachevitch invited the press to visit the illuminated set of *Hôtel du Nord* at Billancourt before the film's release: 'The idea behind it was that the set had been expensive, but at least he would get some free publicity out of it'.
  171. Georges Quenu, 'L'art de la décoration au cinéma', *Cinémagazine*, 26 December 1924, p. x.
  172. Letter to Georges Lourau of Tobis at Epinay Studios, Paris, 24 Nov 1935: filed in Box 9 of the Meerson archive.
  173. Oswald Blakeston, 'Further British Problems', *Close-Up*, vol. 1, no. 5, Nov 1927, p. 51.
  174. Sarah Street, *British National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 11.
  175. Edward Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film: A Pictorial Directory of British Art Directors and their Work*, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948); Edward Carrick, *Designing for Moving Pictures* (London: Studio Publications, 1941, 1st ed., 1949, 2nd ed.); 'The influence of the Graphic Artist on Films', address to the Royal Society of Arts, 18 Jan 1950, published in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 98, no. 4817, pp. 368-84.
  176. Carrick changed his surname in order to be distinguished from his famous father, Gordon Craig.

177. List compiled from Rachael Low's film list in *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 288-413.
178. Laurie Ede, 'Lost in Siberia: Erno Metzner in Britain', unpublished paper given at 'German-speaking Emigres in British Cinema' conference, University of Southampton, 15-17 July 2005.
179. Paul Rotha, 'Plastic Design', *Close-Up*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sept 1929, p. 228.
180. Junge collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin, Film Drawer 1, box 2: 'English-German translations from Film Department', n.d.
181. A. Vasselo, 'Recent tendencies in the cinema', in *Design for Today*, May 1935, pp. 170-174.
182. Tim Bergfelder, 'Surface and Distraction: Style and Genre at Gainsborough in the late 1920s and 1930s' in Pam Cook (ed.), *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 36.
183. Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, pp. 12-14.
184. The negative review was written by Hugh Castle who described PICCADILLY as 'one of the world's worst' because of the wandering camera and frequent use of close-up. See *Close-Up*, vol. 5, no. 1, July 1929, p. 45.
185. *Close-Up* commentary on PICCADILLY set, vol. 3, no. 5, Nov 1928, p. 69. It is interesting that this observer (it is not entirely clear who wrote this commentary; the start of the relevant section, 'Comment and Review' in *Close-Up* begins with Oswald Blakeson's name and a number of other authors contributed items but the one on the PICCADILLY set has no initials after it) was edited by *praises* the way in which the set facilitates the mobile camera, while a review by Castle criticised the film precisely for having *too much* mobile camera.
186. Roger Manvell, introduction to Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, pp. 10-11.
187. Tim Bergfelder, 'The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk: German film technicians in the British Film Industry of the 1930s' in Higson, A. (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings in British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 25.
188. Carrick, *Designing for Moving Pictures*, p. 33.
189. L. P. Williams, 'The Art Director' in *The Journal of the Association of Cine-Technicians*, vol. 1, no. 3, Nov 1935, p. 45.
190. Carrick, 'The influence of the Graphic Artist on Films', response by Junge, p. 382.
191. The 'Independent Frame' was a method that exploited special effects such as front and back projection, matte shots, hanging miniatures and a detailed storyboard in order to anticipate problems as early as possible before shooting commenced, with the result of cutting production costs. See Derek Threadgall, *Shepperton Studios: An Independent View* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), p. 53. The technique was adopted for a short time by the Rank Organisation. See Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 124-131.
192. Carrick, 'Photographic Backgrounds', address to the Pictorial Group and the Kine-matograph section of the Royal Photographic Society, London, 18 Nov 1938, published in *The Photographic Journal*, July 1939, pp. 432-5.
193. Bergfelder, 'Surface and Distraction', p. 46.
194. Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, p. 71 for Irving drawing and film still; Junge collection – Bifi, Paris and Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, Aus-

- tin, Texas, and for *The Good Companions* drawing and film still see *Film Dope*, no. 28, Dec 1983, p. 37.
195. Carrick, 'The influence of the Graphic Artist on Films', p. 372.
  196. Carrick, 'The influence of the Graphic Artist on Films', p. 372.
  197. Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, p. 13.
  198. The term 'camera consciousness' is used by Carrick, *Designing for Films*, p. 24.
  199. Carina Carroll, 'Art direction for films' in *Design for Today*, Oct 1935, pp. 389-395.
  200. Carrick, *Designing for Moving Pictures*, p. 54.
  201. Alfred Junge, letter to Edward Carrick, n.d., Alfred Junge collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, file drawer 1, Junge correspondence and notes.
  202. Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, p. 14.
  203. Christopher Frayling, *Things to Come* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 73.
  204. Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, p. 131.
  205. Alfred Junge to Maurice Ostrer, 15 May 1935. Alfred Junge collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, file drawer 1, Junge correspondence and notes.
  206. For details of Menzies' approach, methods and style see Juan Antonio Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2004), pp. 34-36.
  207. Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, p. 15.
  208. Williams, 'The Art Director' in *The Journal of the Association of Cine-Technicians*, vol. 1, no. 3, Nov. 1935, p. 45.
  209. L. P. Williams in *The Architectural Association Journal*, March 1932, p. 306.
  210. Irving, unpublished lecture given to the Architectural Association, pp. 7-8.
  211. 'The third dimension' is a term used by Carrick in *Designing for Film*, p. 47.
  212. Irving, unpublished lecture given to the Architectural Association, p. 11.
  213. Catherine Surowiec, *Accent on Design* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 39.
  214. Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet*, p. 78.
  215. Jill Forbes, 'To a distant observer', unpublished paper: plenary lecture at Society for French Studies conference, 1996, p. 7.
  216. Meerson, letter to Evelyn Kassel, 16 Jan 1936, filed in box 18 of the Meerson papers, Bifi, Paris.
  217. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, pp. 181-82.
  218. Meerson, letter to Richard Fletcher, 8 Jan 1936, filed in box 18 of the Meerson papers, Bifi, Paris.
  219. Forbes, 'To a distant observer', p. 9.
  220. C. S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1998), p. 6.
  221. Carina Carroll, 'Art Direction for films' in *Design for Today*, Oct 1935, pp. 389-395.
  222. George Pearson quoted by Carrick, 'The Influence of the Graphic Artist on Films', p. 372.
  223. Carrick, *Designing for Moving Pictures*, p. 20.
  224. Bergfelder, 'The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk', p. 29.
  225. Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film*, p. 69.
  226. Carrick collection, Box 25, folder in Bellan, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin.

227. Carrick, 'lecture notes', Box 32 'teachings' in Carrick collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas, Austin.
228. Laurence Irving, unpublished lecture given to the Architectural Association, Feb. 1930 and Laurence Irving, *Designing for the Movies: The Memoirs of Laurence Irving* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005). See also Carrick, 'The influence of the Graphic Artist on Films', p. 370.
229. Menzies to Irving, 30 Sept 1940, unpublished letter in private collection of John Irving.
230. Peggy Gick, BECTU interview.
231. Peggy Gick, BECTU interview.
232. Patricia Warren, *British Studios: An Illustrated History* (London: Batsford, 1995), p. 143.
233. 'Vincent Korda' in *Film Dope*, no. 31, 1985, p. 30 (quoting Vincent Korda from *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1934).
234. Sarah Street, 'Denham Studios: The Golden Jubilee of Korda's folly' in *Sight and Sound*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1986, pp. 116-17.
235. A. Junge, *A Plan for Film Studios* (London: Focal Press, 1945), pp. 22-24.
236. Alberto Cavalcanti, 'Lazare Meerson' in *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7, no. 26, 1938, pp. 68-9.
237. Alfred Junge, typescript notes for article 'Art Direction Yesterday and Today' for *Film and TV Technician*, written in 1958. Alfred Junge collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, file drawer 1, Box 1, Junge correspondence and notes.
238. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 178 and Phillips, *City of Darkness*, pp. 39-41

### Notes Chapter 3

1. Good introductions provide Manfred Nagl, *Science Fiction in Deutschland: Untersuchungen zur Genese, Soziographie und Ideologie der phantastischen Massenkultur* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1972); Kraft Wetzel and Peter Hagemann, *Liebe, Tod und Technik. Kino des Phantastischen 1933-1945* (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1977); Guntram Geser, *Fritz Lang. Metropolis und Die Frau im Mond. Zukunftsfilm und Zukunftstechnik in der Stabilisierungszeit der Weimarer Republik* (Meitingen: Corian, 1996).
2. Cf. Helmut Weihsmann, *Gebaute Illusionen. Architektur im Film* (Vienna: Promedia, 1988), pp. 68-73.
3. Klaus Kreimeier, *Die Ufa-Story. Geschichte eines Filmkonzerns* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser, 1992), p. 110-114.
4. Kreimeier, *Die Ufa-Story*, p. 114.
5. Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 42.
6. Hake, *German National Cinema*, p. 42.
7. Geser, *Fritz Lang. Metropolis und Die Frau im Mond*, pp. 94-100.
8. Geser, *Fritz Lang. Metropolis und Die Frau im Mond*, pp. 94-95.

9. Sabine Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 54.
10. Lutz Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror. German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 70.
11. Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*, pp. 54-55.
12. Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*, p. 56.
13. Wetzel and Hagemann, *Liebe, Tod und Technik*, p. 43.
14. The literature on the 'street film' is quite extensive, if somewhat dispersed. Anton Kaes provides the best overall introduction in 'Sites of Desire: The Weimar Street Film', in Dietrich Neumann (ed.), *Film Architecture from Metropolis to Blade Runner* (Munich/New York: Prestel, 1996), pp. 26-32. Significant studies covering at least partial aspects include Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets. Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Jans P. Wager, *Dangerous Dames. Women and Representation in the Weimar Street Film and Film Noir* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); Anthony Coulson, 'Entrapment and Escape: Readings of the City in Karl Grune's *The Street* and G.W. Pabst's *The Joyless Street*' in Dietrich Scheunemann (ed.), *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives* (Rochester and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2003), pp. 187-209; and the chapter 'Reformulations of Space through Light in *Die Strasse, Jenseits der Strasse*, and *Am Rande der Welt*', in Frances Guerin, *A Culture of Light. Cinema and Technology in 1920s Germany* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 154-191.
15. Helmut Wehsmann, 'The City in Twilight: Charting the Genre of the "City Film" 1900-1930', in François Penz and Maureen Thomas (eds.), *Cinema and Architecture: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), pp. 18-22.
16. S.S. Praver, *Between Two Worlds. The Jewish Presence in German and Austrian Film, 1910-1933* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), p. 92.
17. Cf. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Caligari's Legacy. Film Noir as Film History's German Imaginary', in *Weimar Cinema and After. Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 431.
18. Hans-Michael Bock, 'Ein Instinkt- und Zahlenmensch. Joe May als Produzent und Regisseur in Deutschland', in Hans-Michael Bock, Claudia Lenssen (eds.), *Joe May. Regisseur und Produzent* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1991), p. 139.
19. Siegfried Kracauer [Raca], 'Asphalt', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 28 March 1929.
20. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler. A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 159.
21. Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen. Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 266-267.
22. Cf., e.g., Peter Lähn, 'Asphalt', in Neumann (ed.), *Film Architecture from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, pp. 108-110.
23. Ursula Hardt, *From Caligari to California. Eric Pommer's Life in the International Film Wars* (Providence/Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), pp. 112-113.
24. Hermann Kappelhoff, 'Lebendiger Rhythmus der Welt. Die Erich-Pommer-Produktion der Ufa', in Hans-Michael Bock and Michael Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa Buch* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Zweitausendeins, 1992), p. 208.
25. Klaus Kreimeier, 'David und Goliath: Joe May und die Ufa', in Bock and Lenssen, *Joe May. Regisseur und Produzent*, p. 112.
26. Lionel Collier, 'Trade Shows Surveyed', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 June 1929, p. 38.

27. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 158.
28. Prawer, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 95.
29. Hermann Kappelhoff, 'Asphalt: Kalkül im Detail', in Bock and Lenssen (eds.), *Joe May. Regisseur und Produzent*, pp. 89-90.
30. Erich Kettelhut, 'Memoiren' (unpublished typescript, held by the Filmmuseum Berlin/Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek), p. 835.
31. Ibid.
32. Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces. Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 158.
33. Wolfgang Jacobsen, 'Schimmerndes Schwarz und leuchtendes Weiss: Betty Amann in Joe Mays *Asphalt*', in Bock and Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa Buch*, p. 248.
34. 'Temptation', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 June 1929, p. 41.
35. Michael Esser, 'Die Welt ist ein Labyrinth. Anmerkungen zum Design der Stadt im deutschen Stummfilm', in *epd film*, no. 10 (1987), p. 22.
36. Ward, *Weimar Surfaces. Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany*, pp. 156-157.
37. Kettelhut, 'Memoiren', pp. 830-835.
38. Kaes, 'Sites of Desire: The Weimar Street Film', p. 30.
39. Erich Kettelhut, 'Asphalt', *Reichsfilmblatt*, 9 March 1929. Translated and reprinted in Neumann (ed.), *Film Architecture from Metropolis to Blade Runner*, p. 110.
40. Esser, 'Die Welt ist ein Labyrinth. Anmerkungen zum Design der Stadt im deutschen Stummfilm', p. 22.
41. Kreimeier, *Die Ufa-Story*, p. 167.
42. Kaes, 'Sites of Desire: The Weimar Street Film', p. 30.
43. Horst Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity: Hans Steinhoff's "Mittelfilm" Production of Stefan Zweig's *Angst* (1928)', in *German Life and Letters*, vol. 56, no. 2 (April 2003), pp. 118-119.
44. Cf. Jan Distelmeyer (ed.), *Alliierte für den Film: Arnold Pressburger, Gregor Rabino-witsch und die Cine-Allianz* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2004).
45. Cf. Joseph Garncarz, 'Warum kennen Filmhistoriker viele Weimarer Topstars nicht mehr. Überlegungen am Beispiel Claire Rommer', in *montage a/v* (6:2, 1997), pp. 64-92.
46. For a detailed analysis of the background of the production of *ANGST*, as well as for a thorough contextualization of Steinhoff's involvement, see Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity' (1928), pp. 117-131.
47. Anthony Slide, 'Henry Edwards', in Brian McFarlane (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of British Film* (London: BFI/Methuen, 2003), p. 197.
48. A more famous later adaptation of the same story is Roberto Rossellini's *LA PAURA* (1954) with Ingrid Bergman in the leading role.
49. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', pp. 123-127.
50. Hans-Michael Bock, 'Berliner Ateliers. Ein kleines Lexikon', in Uta Berg-Ganschow, Wolfgang Jacobsen (eds.), *...Film...Stadt...Kino...Berlin...* (Berlin: Argon, 1987), p. 186.
51. 'Steinhoff's Method: The Eccentricities of Genius', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 August 1928, p. 37.
52. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', p. 127.
53. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', p. 129.

54. Kristin Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood. German and American Film after World War I* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 53.
55. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', p. 127-128.
56. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 58.
57. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', p. 128.
58. Bruno Taut, 'Die Villa', in *Der Neubau*, (vol.7, 1925), p. 110.
59. Catharina Berents, *Art Déco in Deutschland. Das moderne Ornament* (Frankfurt: Anabas, 1998).
60. Berents, *Art Déco in Deutschland*, pp. 105-115.
61. Berents, *Art Déco in Deutschland*, pp. 77-80.
62. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', p. 128.
63. Claus, 'Commerce, Culture, Continuity', p. 126.
64. Berents, *Art Déco in Deutschland*, pp. 13-14.
65. Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams. Modern Architecture in the Movies* (Los Angeles: Hennessy and Ingalls, 1986), p. 67.
66. Albrecht, *Designing Dreams*, p. 67.
67. ANGST's modernist references can for example, be usefully compared to the Art Deco quotations discussed in chapter 5 in British films, which actively displayed current design trends, even, as in *SAILING ALONG*, commenting on them explicitly in dialogue.
68. Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*, pp. 47-48.
69. Ernst Jäger, 'Angst', *Film Kurier*, 23 August 1928.
70. *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 23 August 1928.
71. Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets. Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 92.
72. Elsaesser, 'Lifestyle Propaganda. Modernity and Modernisation in Early Thirties films', in *Weimar Cinema and After*, pp. 383-419.
73. Elsaesser, 'Lifestyle Propaganda', p. 390.
74. Jürgen Bretschneider (ed.), *Ewald André Dupont. Autor und Regisseur* (Munich; Edition Text und Kritik, 1992), p. 139.
75. Tim Bergfelder, 'Extraterritorial Fantasies: Edgar Wallace and the German Crime Film', in Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, Deniz Göktürk (eds.), *The German Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2002), pp. 39-41.
76. Cf., e.g. Jan-Christopher Horak, 'Three Penny Opera: Brecht vs. Pabst', in *Jump Cut*, no. 15 (1977), pp. 17, 20-21; Thomas Elsaesser, 'Transparent Duplicities: Pabst's Threepenny Opera', in *Weimar Cinema and After*, pp. 311-329.
77. Cf., e.g., Thomas Elsaesser, 'Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, G.W. Pabst, and Pandora's Box', in *Weimar Cinema and After*, pp. 259-292; Mary Ann Doane, 'The Erotic Barter: Pandora's Box', in Eric Rentschler (ed.), *The Films of G. W. Pabst. An Extraterritorial Cinema* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 62-79.
78. Cf. Hermann Kappelhoff, *Der möblierte Mensch. Georg Wilhelm Pabst und die Utopie der Sachlichkeit* (Berlin: Vorwerk, 1994).
79. Cf. Eric Rentschler, 'The Problematic Past: An Auteur Directed by History', in *The Films of G. W. Pabst*, pp. 1-23.

80. Brigitte Berg, 'Monsieur Nero: Seymour Nebenzahl in Paris', in Erika Wottrich (ed.), *M wie Nebenzahl. Nero – Filmproduktion zwischen Europa und Hollywood* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2002), pp. 54-64.
81. Jeanpaul Goergen, 'Kalkuliert verwegen: Seymour Nebenzahl und die Nero (1926-1933)', in Wottrich (ed.), *M wie Nebenzahl*, p. 22.
82. Jochen Meyer-Wendt, 'Zwischen Folklore und Abstraktion: Der Filmarchitekt Andrej Andrejew', in Jörg Schöning (ed.), *Fantaisies Russes. Russische Filmmacher in Berlin und Paris 1920-1930* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1995), p. 111-112.
83. Edward Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film: A Pictorial Directory of British Art Directors and their Work* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), p. 24.
84. Meyer-Wendt, 'Zwischen Folklore und Abstraktion: Der Filmarchitekt Andrej Andrejew', pp. 112-113.
85. Meyer-Wendt, 'Zwischen Folklore und Abstraktion: Der Filmarchitekt Andrej Andrejew', p. 126.
86. Meyer-Wendt, 'Zwischen Folklore und Abstraktion: Der Filmarchitekt Andrej Andrejew', p. 125.
87. Philip Kemp, 'Mud in Your Eye: *The Threepenny Opera* and *Kuhle Wampe*', in *Sight and Sound* (vol. 8, no. 10, 1998), p. 28.
88. Cf. Kemp, 'Mud in Your Eye', pp. 28-30; Charles O'Brien, 'Film, Grammophone, and National Cinema: *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *L'Opéra de quat'sous*', in *Cinema&Cie*, no. 7, (Fall 2005), pp. 35-47.
89. G.L. George, 'Reasons for Suppressing a Film', in *Experimental Cinema* (NY), no. 4, February 1933, p. 44.
90. Cf. Charles O'Brien, 'Multiple Language Versions and National Films, 1930-1933. Statistical Analysis', *Cinema&Cie*, no. 6, Spring 2005, pp. 55-61.
91. Cf. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Hollywood Babel', in *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 24-39.
92. Horak, 'Three Penny Opera: Brecht vs. Pabst', p. 21.
93. Bryher, 'Berlin, April 1931', *Close Up* (vol. viii, no.2), June 1931, p. 129.
94. Elsaesser, 'Transparent Duplicities: Pabst's Threepenny Opera', p. 320.
95. Elsaesser, 'Transparent Duplicities: Pabst's Threepenny Opera', p. 321.
96. Cf. Garncarz, 'Warum kennen Filmhistoriker viele Weimarer Topstars nicht mehr'; Knut Hickethier, 'Theatervirtuosinnen und Leinwandmimen: Zum Entstehen des deutschen Stars im deutschen Film', in Corinna Müller and Harro Segeberg (eds.), *Mediengeschichte des deutschen Film, Band 2: Die Modellierung des Kinofilms. Zur Geschichte des Kinoprogramms zwischen Kurz- und Langfilm 1905/06-1918* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1998), pp. 333- 360; Erica Carter, 'Stars', in Bergfelder, Carter, Gök-türk (eds.), *The German Cinema Book*, pp. 59-62; Erica Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts. The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2004).
97. Cf. Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed (London: British Film Institute, 1998).
98. Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts*, pp. 56-83.
99. Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts*, pp. 12-13.
100. Kreimeier, *Die Ufa-Story*, pp. 180.
101. Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang. Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), pp. 52-83; Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 26.

102. Cf. Andreas Huyssen, 'The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*', in *New German Critique*, vol. 24-25, Fall-Winter 1981-1982, pp. 221-237.
103. Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*, p. 77.
104. Albrecht, *Designing Dreams*, p. 52.
105. Albrecht, *Designing Dreams*, p. 52.
106. Petro, *Joyless Streets*, pp. 121-139.
107. Robert Müller, 'Die Frau aus Marmor: Brigitte Helm – Ein deutscher Vamp', in Knut Hickethier (ed.), *Schauspielen und Montage. Schauspielkunst im Film* (St. Augustin: Gardez, 1999), p. 22.
108. Michael Töteberg, 'Immer Ärger mit Brigitte. Der Fall Brigitte Helm', in Bock and Töteberg (eds.), *Das Ufa Buch*, pp. 316-318.
109. Müller, 'Die Frau aus Marmor', pp. 15-16.
110. 'The Wonderful Lie', *Pathéscope Monthly*, February 1934, p. 9.
111. 'The Wonderful Lie', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 27 June 1929, p. 41.
112. Paul Rotha, 'Plastic Design', in *Close Up* (vol. v, no. 1) September 1929, pp. 228-231.
113. Cf. Jörg Schöning (ed.), *Fantaisies Russes. Russische Filmemacher in Berlin und Paris, 1920-30* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1995).
114. Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 178.
115. Ginette Vincendeau also notes the prevalence of this popular theme. See 'French Cinema in the 1930s: Social Text and Context of a Popular Entertainment Medium', PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1985, p. 56.
116. Prawer, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 84.
117. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, p. 113.
118. Rotha, 'Plastic Design', p. 230
119. Rotha, 'Plastic Design', p. 230.
120. 'The Wonderful Lie', *Pathéscope Monthly*, February 1934, pp. 9-10.
121. Müller, 'Die Frau aus Marmor', p. 19.
122. Cf. e.g. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', *Monogram*, no. 4 (1972), pp. 2-15; Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen* (vol. 27, no. 6) November-December 1986, pp. 6-22.
123. Karl Sierek, 'The Primal Scene of the Cinema: Four Fragments from *The Mistress of Atlantis*', in Rentschler (ed.), *The Films of G.W. Pabst*, pp. 125-146; Kappelhoff, *Der möblierte Mensch*, pp. 195-224.
124. Laurie Ede, 'Lost in Siberia: Ernö Metzner in Britain', in Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli (eds.), *German-speaking Émigrés in British Cinema, 1925-1950* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, forthcoming).
125. Anne Friedberg, 'Reading *Close Up, 1927-1933*', in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (eds.), *Close Up 1927-1933. Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 19-23.
126. Ernö Metzner, 'A Mining Film', *Close Up*, vol. ix, no. 1 (March 1932), p. 2-10; 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', *Close Up*, vol. ix, no. 3 (September 1932), pp. 152-159; 'The Travelling Camera', *Close Up*, vol. x, no. 2 (June 1933), pp. 182-187.
127. Correspondence filed under Metzner's name and held at the Paul Kohner Archive at the Filmmuseum Berlin/Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
128. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 155.

129. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 153.
130. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 154.
131. McFarlane, *Encyclopedia of British Film*, p. 423.
132. Geser, *Fritz Lang. Metropolis und Die Frau im Mond*, p. 95.
133. Erica Carter, 'Marlene Dietrich – The Prodigal Daughter', in Bergfelder, Carter, Gök-türk (eds.), *The German Cinema Book*, pp. 75-76.
134. Sierek, 'The Primal Scene of the Cinema', p. 145.
135. Kappelhoff, *Der möblierte Mensch*, p. 196.
136. Sierek, 'The Primal Scene of the Cinema', p. 125.
137. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 154.
138. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 157.
139. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 155.
140. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', p. 158.
141. Metzner, 'On the Sets of the Film "Atlantis"', pp. 158-159.
142. Bryher, 'Notes on Some Films', *Close Up*, vol. ix, no.3 (September 1932), p. 199.
143. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 242.

## Notes Chapter 4

1. Note for example the title of John W. Martin's survey of the period: *The Golden Age of French Cinema 1929-1939* (London: Columbus Books: 1983).
2. See Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge Mass. and London: The Belkap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).
3. Ginette Vincendeau, 'French Cinema in the 1930s: Social Text and Context of a Popular Entertainment Medium' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1985).
4. Alastair Phillips, *City of Darkness, City of Light: Emigré filmmakers in Paris 1929-1939* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004).
5. Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-39* (Bloomington & Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002) p.58.
6. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
7. Georges Wakhévitch, *L'envers des décors* (Paris: Laffont, 1977), p. 104.
8. Phillips, *City of Darkness, City of Light*, p. 55.
9. Steven Ungar, 'Split Screens: *La Maison du Maltais* as Text and Document' in Dina Sherzer (ed.), *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 36.
10. Vincendeau observes, 'even politically progressive films such as *LE CRIME DE M. LANGE* and *LA VIE EST À NOUS* draw heavily on a nostalgic iconography of the city using for example, the picturesque old areas of Paris rather than the new working class estates in Paris or the suburbs' in Vincendeau, 'French Cinema in the 1930s', p. 402.

11. Marcel Carné, 'When will the Cinema go down the Street?' in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907-1939: A History/Anthology 1907-1939* vol. 1., (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).
12. See Chapter 5 for a full discussion of their work in London.
13. Carné, in Abel, *French Theory and Criticism* (vol. 1), p. 128.
14. Martin, *The Golden Age of French Cinema*, p. 34.
15. Alberto Cavalcanti, 'Lazare Meerson' in *Cinématographe* 76, March 1982, p. 3. An almost identical assessment, no doubt authored by Cavalcanti, appeared in an unsigned obituary of Meerson, published in *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7, no. 26, Summer 1938, p. 69.
16. Ariane Smart, 'The Darkness and Claustrophobia of the City: Victor Hugo and the Myth of Paris', *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2000), p. 326.
17. Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), p. 8.
18. Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*, p. 3.
19. Phillips, *City of Darkness, City of Light*, p. 29.
20. Atget's work was exhibited in Paris at the 'Premier Salon des independents de la photographie' in 1928, and at the 'Film und Foto' exhibition in Stuttgart in 1929. The first overview of his work *Atget, photographe de Paris* was published in Paris, Leipzig and New York in 1930. Hans Christian Adam (ed.), *Eugène Atget's Paris* (Cologne: Taschen, 2001).
21. See Jean-Claude Gautrand, *Brassaï 1899-1984: Brassaï's Universal Art* (Cologne: Taschen, 2004).
22. C.S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 42.
23. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, 'Lazare Meerson, onze ans de complicité avec René Clair, in 1895, no. 25, 1998, p. 71.
24. Jean-Pierre Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma* (Paris: Jade/Flammarion 1988), p. 22.
25. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinema*, p. 21.
26. Berthomé *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 22.
27. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 56.
28. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 176.
29. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 115.
30. Anthony Sutcliffe, 'Architecture, Planning and Design' in Nicholas Hewitt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 68-9.
31. Donald Albrecht, *Designing Dreams. Modern Architecture in the Movies* (2nd ed., Santa Monica: Hennessy and Ingalls, 2000), p. 59.
32. Léon Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and other Grand Illusions. A History of Film Design*, (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), p. 179.
33. Letter from René Clair to Henkel of Films Sonores Tobis, dated 3 December 1929. Fonds René Clair, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris.
34. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 22.
35. Eugène Lourié, *My Work in Films* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1985), p. 21.

36. Fréhel appeared as a singer in PÉPÉ LE MOKO, AMOK, COEUR DE LILAS/LILAC (1932); Damia sang in LA TÊTE D'UN HOMME/A MAN'S NECK (1933).
37. Kelley Conway, *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 107.
38. Conway, *Chanteuse in the City*, p. 176.
39. Vincendeau, 'French Cinema in the 1930s', p. 143.
40. Conway, *Chanteuse in the City*, p. 5.
41. Carole Sweeney, 'Josephine Baker', in Bill Marshall (ed.), *France and the Americas: Culture, Politics and History*, vol. 1, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), p. 112.
42. Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 448-449.
43. Sweeney in Marshall, *France and the Americas*, pp. 112-113.
44. Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 99.
45. The song features, along with others by Piaf and Chevalier, in Alain Resnais's Potter-esque homage to the French chanson ON CONNAÎT LA CHANSON/SAME OLD SONG, (1997).
46. Fonds Roche (Marc Allégret), Bibliothèque du Film, Paris. File MA116, preliminary screenplay of ZOUZOU p. 1, undated, anon. (but presumed to be Abatino). The final page of the outline reiterates that much of the film will be taken up with song and dance rather than plot detail (p. 18).
47. The Popular Front government introduced paid holidays and a reduction in working hours in 1936 following general strikes in France.
48. Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious*, p. 2.
49. Andrew & Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, p. 300.
50. Andrew & Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, pp.299-311. This point about fairgoers is made on p. 305.
51. Carole Sweeney, "'Le Tour du Monde en Quatre Jours": Empire, exhibition and the surrealist disorder of things', in *Textual Practice*, Vol.19, no. 1 (2005), p. 132.
52. Andrew & Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, p. 311.
53. Patricia Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World* (trans. Arthur Goldhammer), (Cambridge Mass. & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 368.
54. Andrew & Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, p. 307.
55. Figures taken from tables analysing the French box office season by season throughout the 1930s in Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention*, pp. 279-337.
56. Andrew & Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, p. 311. This is a more accurate assessment than that previously given by Ungar and cited above (note 9).
57. See in particular chapter 7: 'The Look of Paris in the Age of Art Deco' in Andrew & Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, pp. 228-276.
58. Jill Forbes, 'To The Distant Observer', unpublished plenary lecture given at the Annual Conference of the Society for French Studies, Birmingham, 1995. p. 7.
59. Fonds Meerson (BiFi), Box 1, file/classeur 1.
60. Robert-Jules Garnier, *Cours de technique de décors appliquée au cinéma* (Paris: École universelle par correspondance de Paris 1930) pp. 24-5.
61. The Affrons discuss David Brodwell's view that set space, in the classic tradition is 'a container for character action', and is thus subordinated to character. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 35.
62. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 166.

63. Anon. *Today's Cinema* vol. 44, no. 2970, 29 March 1935, p. 15.
64. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 38.
65. Sherzer, *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism*, p. 4.
66. Note Dudley Andrew's comments that the producer Rothschild believed that 'good cinema required a drama set in a natural environment that would allow the photography to influence human words and actions. That is one reason he agreed to back the Vicki Baum novel, since its story was set in the fresh Austrian air, far from the moral and technical clichés of the Parisian studios'. Andrew, *Mist of Regret*, p. 190.
67. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 190.
68. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 190.
69. Mary Corliss & Carlos Clarens, 'Designed for Film: The Hollywood Art Director', in *Film Comment*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1978), p. 30.
70. The film is 305 minutes long.
71. Crisp, *Genre, Myth and Convention*, p. 57.
72. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, pp. 85 & 87.
73. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 31.
74. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 46.
75. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion* p. 46.
76. The film was awarded the prestigious *Grand Prix du Cinéma français* in 1936.
77. Vincendeau, 'French Cinema in the 1930s', p. 48.
78. Affron & Affron, *Sets in Motion*, p. 90.
79. Pieter the Elder, Pieter the Younger, Jan the Elder, Jan the Younger and Abraham.
80. Trauner's collaboration with Carné, which extended over seven films, as been well documented by Berthomé, Andrew, McCann *et al.*
81. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 30.
82. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 30.
83. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 30 & 32.
84. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 32.
85. Trauner notes that he discussed the idea for the décor with Prévert even before the screenplay was finished. Berthomé *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 30.
86. See Trauner's design in Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 33.
87. Marcel Carné, *La vie à belle dents* (Paris: Éditions Jean Vuarnet, 1979), p. 102.
88. Fonds Meerson (BiFi). 18, Box 1. Letter dated 4 February 1936.
89. Carné, *La vie à belle dents*, p. 63.
90. Carné, *La vie à belle dents*, p. 132.
91. Carné, *La vie à belle dents*, p. 134.
92. See note 70 above. Corliss & Clarens, 'Designed for Film', p. 30.
93. Barsacq, *Caligari's Cabinet and other Grand Illusions*, pp. 180-1.
94. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 25.
95. Berthomé, *Alexandre Trauner: décors de cinéma*, p. 42.
96. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, p. 182.
97. Michel Ciment and Isabelle Jordan, 'Décors: Entretien avec Alexandre Trauner, *Positif* 223, October 1979, p. 17.

## Notes Chapter 5

1. Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London, British Film Institute, 1994).
2. C. S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin, Texas: University of Austin, 1998), p. 94.
3. Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron, *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
4. Sue Harper, 'Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodrama' in Marcia Landy (ed), *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Film* (London: Athlone Press, 2001).
5. Greg Walker, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (London: I.B. Tauris, British Film Guide, 2003), p. 13.
6. Catherine Surowiec, *Accent on Design* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. 28.
7. Vincent Korda, *Sight and Sound*, 1934, quoted in Surowiec, *Accent on Design*, p. 29.
8. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 43.
9. For example, the reviewer of the *Yorkshire Telegraph*, 18 Mar 1937 thought that the tapestry room was 'utterly complete – unless you looked up to the lighting galleries, you would not know that you were not in the actual palace'.
10. Surowiec, *Accent on Design*, p. 45.
11. This theme was controversial since the context of its release was in the build-up to the Second World War. In retrospect its theme of successful collaboration with a foreign invader can be seen to relate to the French experience of collaboration with the Nazis.
12. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 90.
13. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 89.
14. Frank Bennett, 'Settings by Vincent Korda, in *The Builder*, vol. CLII, March 19, 1937, p. 618.
15. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 88.
16. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 82.
17. Affrons, *Sets in Motion*, p. 177.
18. Peter Wollen, 'Architecture and Film: Places and Non-Places' in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (New York and London: Verso, 2002), p. 201.
19. Ben McCann, "'A Discreet Character'"? Action Spaces and Architectural Specificity in French Poetic Realist Cinema' in *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 375-382.
20. An extended discussion of this film has been published in Sarah Street, 'Sets of the Imagination: Lazare Meerson, Set Design and Performance in *Knight Without Armour*' in *The Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2005, pp. 18-35.
21. Edward Carrick, *Art and Design in the British Film* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948), p. 14.
22. McCann, "'A discreet character'"?, p. 376.
23. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 43.
24. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 103.
25. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 95.
26. Mirian Hansen in introd. to Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, p. xxxiv.

27. Robert C. Williams, *Russia Imagined: Art, Culture, and National Identity, 1840-1995* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 161.
28. J. P. Telotte, *A Distant Technology: Science Fiction Film and the Machine Age* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), p. 139.
29. Juan Antonio Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004), pp. 193-194.
30. Christopher Frayling, *Things to Come* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 67.
31. Sabine Hake notes how Nazi polemicists criticised these images in the German version since they were associated with 'the worst of international consumer culture addicted to pleasure and luxury' in *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 56.
32. See for example Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco and the Female Form* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2003) and Hake, *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*, pp. 46-67.
33. Sarah Street, "'Got to Dance My Way to Heaven": Jessie Matthews, Art Deco and the British musical of the 1930s' in *Studies in European Cinema*, 2:1, 2005, pp. 19-30.
34. For an excellent discussion of Art Deco and its relation to American cinema see Lucy Fischer, *Designing Women: Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form*.
35. Fischer, *Designing Women*, p. 24.
36. Fischer, *Designing Women*, p. 126.
37. Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 138-139.
38. For a discussion of 'open' and 'closed' images see Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, pp. 41-46.
39. Fischer, *Designing Women*, pp. 16-18.
40. For a discussion of Orientalism see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979); and Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (eds), *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).
41. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.
42. In *TOP HAT* the dance to 'Isn't it a lovely day to be caught in the rain?' takes place in a park when Astaire and Rogers shelter from a thunderstorm in a covered bandstand. As in *IT'S LOVE AGAIN* the dance is about flirtation, seduction and persuasion. Similarly, in the number 'Things are looking up' from *A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS* the exterior setting for the dance shows Astaire traveling from one locale to another with the supposedly 'spontaneous' dance developing in an accumulative manner. This is similar to Matthews's performance for Mr Raymond.
43. This element of self-reflexivity, with the camera approaching a theatrical performance and in so doing celebrating the superiority of cinema as a medium, has also been noticed in relation to *EVERGREEN*. See Higson, *Waving the Flag*, pp. 164-165.
44. See Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia' in *Movie*, 24, 1977, pp. 2-13.
45. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 62.
46. Robert Donat is one of the most striking cases of an actor who did not want to go to Hollywood. See Sarah Street, 'The British in Hollywood' in Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *Journeys of Desire* (London: British Film Institute, 2006), pp. 61-69.
47. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 62.
48. Anne Massey notes how modernism was associated with radical commissioning briefs that challenged the architectural establishment, *Hollywood Beyond the Screen*:

- Design and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg Press, 2000), p. 116. Christopher Frayling quotes W. Heath Robinson in 1936 as criticising modernist houses by also using the clinic analogy: 'As a result the ultra-modern living room resembles a cross between an operating-theatre, a dipsomaniac's nightmare and a new kind of knitting', *Things to Come*, p. 68.
49. Hansen's introduction to Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960; Mirian Hansen [ed], Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997 ed.), p. xxi.
  50. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 42.
  51. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 61.
  52. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 196.
  53. Ramirez, *Architecture for the Screen*, pp. 213-214.
  54. *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star*, 18 March 1937.
  55. Press book for *Knight Without Armour*, British Film Institute Library.
  56. See review in *Kinematograph Weekly*, 10 June 1937, p. 27.
  57. Quoted in Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan (eds), *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 79.
  58. Notes sent by Meerson to Richard Fletcher, 20th Century Fox, 8 Jan 1936. Meerson papers, Bibliothèque du Film, Paris, Box 18.
  59. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (eds), *'Film Europe' and 'Film America': Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1999).



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