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The Vaseline Mafia
Rolf de Maré and a Certain Monsieur

THE CITY OF LIGHTS suggests many things to many people. Historically it has stood as the beacon of modernity, so much so, that Walter Benjamin proclaimed it to be the 'capital of the nineteenth century'. Since the eighteenth century, however, Paris also managed, through industry, publicity and sheer spectacular opulence, to boast itself as *the* uncontested capital of fashion, a preeminent position that has come, only in the past few decades, to be challenged with success. If Paris was at once capital of both the nineteenth century and of fashion, the city was also personified and emblematised in the figure of its idealized and highly publicized *Parisienne*. Paris as exclusive centre for all things female, feminine and fashionable reached dizzying heights in the 1920s, following a period of deprivation and conservatism. The modern metropolis, fashion and gender became so inextricably linked that by the time of the much celebrated 1925 Exhibition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, it was concluded that: 'Whereas men go to London for suits & shirts, women all dream of being dressed in Paris'.¹ Indeed while 'all' women might have dreamt of running off to Paris to purchase the latest, fabulous couture gown, Paris also provided an alternative venue for men, also of a more, 'fashionable' sense and sensibility.

The burgeoning high gloss magazine culture that emerged following World War I became a vital component in the expanding global perspective of Paris as the capital of fashion. The magazine *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode*, founded in 1920, was to promote all industries novel and artistic, and operated as the voice of propaganda for haute couture houses, whose numbers had increased in the first half of the decade from around twenty-five to well over seventy-five. In addition to *Vogue*, *La Gazette du Bon Ton* and *L'Officiel*, numerous were the magazines whose mandate was exclusively that of fashion or in the least covered the collections season after season. While the impact of women's *couture* between the wars cannot be underestimated in terms of reception, perception and reality,² occluded in discussions of the period are sartorial representations and experiences of the well-heeled Parisian man. The lacuna of research into the area of men's fashions from the 1920s at once serves to reify the success of marketing Paris as the epicentre of fashionable femininity, but it also at once reaffirms the gender divide and denies sexual alterity, and as such services to entrench the normalising discourses of the industry itself.

In the same year that *L'Officiel* appeared, another magazine, *Monsieur*, which has gone completely unnoticed, also made its debut. As the world's first men's fashion magazine, it also provocatively professed a decidedly queer mandate, aesthetic and preferred reader. *Monsieur* was one of a number of magazines created and financed by the Swedish impresario Rolf de Maré, which, along with *La Danse*, *Théâtre et Comoedia Illustré* and *Paris-Journal*, unabashedly operated to promote his best and latest interests and those of his select homosexual male coterie. In particular these magazines publicised and promoted his other cultural passion, dance, specifically his newly inaugurated Ballets Suédois (BS), whose principal male dancer and

choreographer was his lover Jean Börlin. De Maré appointed another homosexual, Jacques Hébertot, a journalist and theatrical producer, as administrative director of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (which housed the BS), as well as managing editor of *Monsieur*.

Like many men's fashion magazines, *Monsieur* included more than just fashion, but all things of interest to the modern man of style and substance. This essay seeks to first explore the visual and material culture de Maré facilitated through his various financially sponsored artistic enterprises. He and his intimates along with his various cultural endeavours suffered from continued vitriolic attacks by the Swedish press, attacks which expose how homophobia and anti-modernism became symbiotically merged in Sweden, making *gai Paris* an ideal venue for a queer expression of modernism. I wish to suggest that as a result of various forces at work in the period, what emerged was, as it was described at the time, an all-male 'Vaseline mafia' whose material and visual articulations of modernity have been silenced for decades. Second, by perusing *Monsieur's* contents for the first five years before de Maré sold it, I turn specifically to the magazine's systematic attempt to construct a visual and material culture centred expressly on the (iconic, yet slightly refashioned) figure of the New Dandy, a queer protean embodiment of at once modernity and civilisation.

The Vaseline Mafia: Erotic Triangulation and the Development of Queer Culture

De Maré (1888–1964) began his foray into cultural patronage and collecting in 1911–12, when he undertook an initial whirlwind world tour, amassing at this early stage an enviable collection of African and Asian artefacts. While he may have acquired the taste for collect-

ing from his formidable grandmother (the Countess Wilhelmina von Hallwyl), it was in 1912 when de Maré's collecting practices took on a decidedly focused and new trajectory, however. It was likely in that year that the Swede met a young man who would change the direction of his sexual and cultural life, the painter Nils Dardel. The artist was among a number of other Swedish fauvist painters who were completely disregarded in Sweden and were perceived as expressing anti-nationalist sentiment. Dardel had already moved to Paris in 1910 where he remained until the late 1930s, but made regular and frequent trips to Stockholm. De Maré soon became Dardel's lover and patron, sitting for what has become one of Sweden's most significant portraits of the twentieth century. Under his new lover's guidance, de Maré became an avid collector of modern art, particularly of avant-garde French modernist work. According to him, a collector 'must choose what is nearest to his heart, in the end this will mean just a few artists and a strictly limited artistic direction'.³ However, his collection, like most of his financial and cultural patronage, was the result of a number of amorous relationships, themselves a part of a queer network centred primarily on the Paris art scene; it was precisely through what became a queer mafia that homosexuality and modernism were collapsed.⁴

Through Dardel, de Maré met another equally important figure, that of ballet dancer Jean Börlin, then a struggling yet highly talented dancer in the Stockholm Royal Opera. In October 1920 de Maré initiated the BS as a creative outlet and platform for Börlin, specifically for his choreographic talents. The ballet was fundamentally an extension of picture collecting for de Maré. Painterly in tenor, a number of the painters he had collected and built important relationships with would eventually design stages for the non-tradition, modernist BS, including for example Giorgio de Chirico and

Fernand Léger. On the heels of Sergei Diaghilev's highly successful and much celebrated introduction of the Ballets Russes into Paris, de Maré's installation of the troupe in that city made sound financial and cultural sense. The wealthy Swede was keenly aware that such an avant-garde, modernist enterprise would prove disastrous in his native country. According to dance curator Erik Näslund, who has written the only biography on the Swedish impresario, de Maré's gender and sexual identity was at best confused, ambivalently straddling socially prescribed male and female roles. For the curator de Maré's masculinity was assured as a collector, however as a ballet producer and collector of radical, avant-garde art (rather than traditional and safe Old Masters), de Maré assumed a more feminine identity.⁵

De Maré never really stopped collecting art. However, his primary passion after meeting Börlin was ballet, and the majority of his resources (financial, cultural and emotional) went into this. Ballet was not perceived as a distinct art form, but given the roster of influential visual artists who participated in the BS's productions de Maré successfully helped to translate pictorial, two-dimensional art into three-dimensional moving forms. With many of the BS's dancers plucked from The Royal Swedish Ballet, Börlin's choreographic debut significantly occurred not on Swedish soil, but rather in Paris, away from the growing controversy surrounding the new troupe and a city which celebrated modernity and modernist diversity.⁶ In Paris the BS offices were draped with Sweden's national colours, and de Maré in his press dealings spoke of his love for Sweden, despite the press's continued attacks. De Maré considered his role as more than impresario to a number of talented intimates, but was also deeply committed to promoting Sweden and its cultural production using *Monsieur* magazine, for example, as a perfect vehicle to promote

both his native country and the BS [Figure 1]. In a promotional page in the September 1920 issue featuring principal dancers of the BS, the dancers pose in their rehearsal costumes and are clearly well groomed and physically fit, keeping with the ethos of the magazine. The magazine comments that the premier of the BS is among the most significant in the cultural calendar of the Parisian season. Throughout the 1920s de Maré promoted cultural links between France and Sweden, a role which hinted at his liminal position between his adopted city and his native country. And, although, he would eventually need to move away from Sweden, he would never really leave it behind completely.

On 8 September 1920, *Fäderneslandet* (*The Fatherland*) published a scurrilous and gossipy article, 'En celeber omyndighetshistoria' ('A distinguished story of incapacity') in which the anonymous writer outed de Maré, Dardel and Börlin.⁷ Ashamed and angered, the heir's wealthy grandparents were said, erroneously, to have attempted to pay off Börlin and Dardel with large sums of money and declared their grandson incapacitated of managing his life and his estate Hildesborg. Here, in this southern Swedish estate, it was said that the patron was engaged in a 'ménage à trois' with Dardel and Börlin, who were said to be 'plucking the golden goose', using him simply to continue their degenerate lifestyle and produce their 'perverse art' which already filled the walls of Hildesborg. The idea of the BS was borne out of a collusion between Börlin, Dardel and an equally degeneration sort, Hébertot, a man 'of the same creed as these other two'. Although anonymous, the article was likely to have been written by David Sprengel, a man who was denied the role Hébertot was to assume for the BS as well as for *Monsieur*. Sprengel was a journalist, critic, artist and friend of Dardel and very much straight. Sprengel also warned de Maré that, should he continue to be open about his sexuality

Les Ballets Suédois, dont la première représentation compte parmi les grands instants de l'art chorégraphique sont le grand événement de la saison parisienne. Voici quelques-uns des principaux danseurs de cette troupe, dans leurs costumes de répétitions.

M. KAJ SMITH

M. PAUL ELTORP

M. AXEL WISANSKY

M. HOLGER MEHNERT

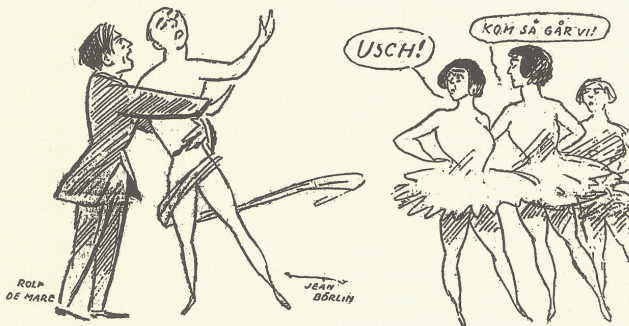
**BALLETS
SUÉDOIS**

Figure 1. *Monsieur*, September 1920. Private Collection.



Så mycket bättre...

Trots försök till dementier står det fast att de makabra loderna av den s. k. Svenska Balletten, herrar Jean de Maré och Rolf Börlin — nej; Rolf de Maré och Jean Börlin äro översjötta av de flotta bland sina baletlöser, vilka liksom på sin tid Jenny Hasselqvist lärt nog av den från loderna utgående vasselin-odören.



Rolf (omfamnar tröstande Jean och skriker till rymlingarna): Usch ja, gå ni bara, dumma löser, — det går mycket bättre med pojkar!

Figure 2. Fäderneslandet. Cover for November 7 1923. (After Söderström)

and private affairs, his reputation would only be further called into question. What he needed, as a result, was 'a counterbalance to Hébertot, a well-known and distinguished woman's man like' himself, offering up his services as a normalising and reputable force, that is, a closet.⁸ *Fäderneslandet* was an ideal venue for Sprengel to publish such a scathing article. The twice weekly journal (1852–1927) was known for its highly polemical, radical and scandalous journalism. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, it held anti-bureaucratic and anti-capitalist opinions with upwards of 15 000 copies in circulation by the 1870s. Toward the end of its history, the majority of the journal's material focused on scandals and gossip, compelling its distributors to boycott, which led to its eventual demise.

Despite *Fäderneslandet*'s dubious, at best, reputation, it was certainly not alone in its attacks of de Maré. *Gnistan* (*The Spark*), for example, described Börlin as a 'disgusting creature ... with his feminine affectations and his Vaseline-plastique'. The comments were a direct allusion to the dancer's performance in *L'Homme et son désir* (*Man and his Desire*) in which he was reported to have appeared half naked and covered in Vaseline; in fact, it was yellow paint (5 August 1923). However, *Fäderneslandet* was relentless and soon claimed that Jenny Hasselquist, a female lead in the BS, left the troupe because she had enough of the constant smell of Vaseline from the management's office [Figure 2]. The idea of a queer network or in the words of contemporary detractors, 'Vaseline mafia', formed the continued homophobic attacks and panic in the ongoing witch hunt levelled at de Maré, Börlin and the BS. According to a report from *Fäderneslandet*, Hasselquist tendered her resignation because she no longer wanted to 'dirty [herself] through an association with perverted quasi-aristocrats and their Vaseline-anointed catamites' (1 February 1922).

The BS produced the first modern European all-male ballet.⁹ Although most of the ballets focused on male lead characters, after all, it was a showcase for Börlin, there were nonetheless important performances which featured ballerinas prominently. In *Jeux à ballet* from 1920, Carina Aria and Jenney Hasselquist (the two female leads) wore clothes designed by *couturière* Jeanne Lanvin. *Jeux* had not been choreographed by Börlin, though he danced the male lead, but by Nijinsky seven years earlier. Ironically, *Jeux*'s central theme, which formed the core of the attacks levelled at the three men, was that of three tennis players locked in an 'eternal triangle'. It is important to note that Russia and Denmark were the only two countries which maintained the supremacy of male dancers in their traditions, while other countries, namely France, ushered in a distinctly female and feminine character to ballet. Throughout the nineteenth century ballerinas not only served as dancers, but also serviced as mistresses to upper-class and bourgeois men, who waited and watched in the side wings, gazing at their choices as seen represented in numerous paintings by the French painter Edgar Degas. It was not until the Ballet Russes's decidedly queer impresario Diaghilev that men, and in particular homosexuals, found a positive and enriching homosociality and public venue for pleasure and desire.

As stated at the outset of this essay, *Monsieur* was created, at least in part, to promote men's fashion, but also fronted as promotion and publicity for the BS. According to the popular *Le Figaro*, de Maré's monthly magazine possessed an 'over-effeminate line'.¹⁰ The magazine unabashedly catered to the aesthete or dandy, providing him with advice on elegant fashions and good manners, and perhaps more importantly, at least within the context of the BS a venue for the initiation of the young catamite into the 'cult of Vaseline'. As part of their cultural education, de Maré treated both Dardel and Börlin,

separately to trips around the world. At this juncture I wish to make a claim for the importance of queer pedagogy in the elucidation of male homosexual communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This education, an initiation into the world of culture, art and fashion, albeit stereotypical for today's reader, was important to the maintenance and heritage of queer life in continued periods of homophobia and/or relative acceptance. At the heart of this visual and material culture was and remains the male body, for as art historian Michael Hatt contends, 'the stability of masculinity depends upon the visibility of the male body – to be learnt or consolidated, masculinity requires a visual exchange between men'.¹¹ More often than not, however, the ideals of masculinity are understood in terms of its preferred expression, performance and corporeal contours. Often the representations of masculinity and the male body obliquely expose the homoerotic (or that which cannot be uttered) which exists at the border between absence/presence, homosocial/homosexual, bonding/fetishization.¹² As feminist and queer scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cogently claims: 'To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire', of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted'.¹³

Since the nineteenth century homosexual men have turned to Ancient Athenian and Doric cultures as sources of inspiration toward fashioning a modern political economy of codes, culture and common interest. In Athens the *ephebia* referred to those youth, 'at the threshold of life' and required to be taken care of by a master or senior male citizen. What it instilled was a sort of chivalric code, an ideal lifestyle to be propagated from generation to generation of free citizens. The *ephebia* had a future (manly) role to perform in civic life. As a result,

it required both mental preparation and physical training. As the term *ephebia* implies, the young man, usually between the ages of eighteen and twenty, existed at the edge of society, at the threshold of his new, pubic and adult role.¹⁴ What it engendered was a distinct and powerful homosocial community, outside of regular society, devoid of women and where the pederastic relationship between master and pupil assumed the most vital and critical role in the life of the young man. This relationship, devoid of any feminine or female qualities, was taken up at the end of the nineteenth century by numerous homogenic writers and activists both in France and Britain.¹⁵ In his much-cited and influential essay, 'The new chivalry' from 1884, one short year before Oscar Wilde's infamous demise, art critic and queer apologist Charles Kains-Jackson extolled the virtues of the pederastic union. He politicised the figure of the neo-Hellenic ideal male to place him outside of war or military aggression. Rather, he advocated an eroticised union between master and pupil within the new, modern economy of homosociality:

tenderness of elder for younger, of one who has endured for him that has yet to endure, of the strong for the weak, the developed for the developing, is retained in all fullness, while these other things are added, is perhaps not that which gives its highest value to the New Chivalry.¹⁶

In his appropriation and elucidation of 'boy-love' devoid of any penetration, there remained an integral and vital equality between the two, rooted in a 'sameness of rank and status, sameness of sentiment, sameness of identity'.¹⁷ What this implies is a homosex community, aristocratic in nature with a new *civilized* code of chivalric conduct. This chivalric code was tacit in de Maré's relationships to both Dardel and Börlin, and the men who would follow.

Monsieur's 'over-effeminate' and 'homosexual' readership to

which *Le Figaro* referred, also, if only in part, formed another source of the attacks by the conservative Swedish press. Börlin's active, dancing body serviced as an unabashed object for the (homo- and even heterosexual) male gaze, both at the ballet as well as within the magazine. Here, the BS and its leaders took Diaghlev's new male culture one step forward by deploying *Monsieur* as a parallel and implicated venue for this blatantly queer homosociability and homoeroticism to flourish. On the cover of the October 1920 issue, two men, smartly attired in formal evening wear, stand in the wings gazing at Börlin's defying and dizzying performance in *Dervishes* [Figure 3]. It was likely in Algeria, on his grand tour with de Maré, that Börlin learned the art of the dervishes. Dance scholar Ramsay Burt has posited that '*Dervishes* takes its place alongside other avant-garde and modernist works (both earlier and later) that explore ritual, autohypnotic movement'.¹⁸ The modernism and primitivism which infused de Maré's private collection of Modern Art and foreign artefacts was here displayed publically through the movement of his then lover's body. The magazine's cover suggests a queer appropriation of a commonly known visual trope made famous by artists like Degas who showed off his ballerinas on stage set against a backdrop of eager male bourgeois patrons assessing their prizes and desires for the night.

Despite his derisive tone, according to contemporary André Loruot in his *Véritable éducation* from 1926, men choose homosexuality because 'they are snobs, are vain, because they want to seem stylish, or to attract attention'.¹⁹ The erotic triangulation implied in the cover image from 1920 is premised, as is always the case, on a knowing gaze, one which reproduces desire and knowledge through queer codes of performing and looking. This knowing gaze (and suggestive glance) is the foundation of queer culture, a triangulation in which

desire and edification is tantamount to the networks, codes and creation of an aristocratic (read queer) community of culture; a knowledge and desire proudly passed down from generation to generation. Burt suggests that 'Börlin, while the object of these two men's desiring gazes, is clearly signifying a more refined gay identity than the younger spectator. It is this refinement that the older man is drawing to the attention of his companion so that the latter can learn from it'.²⁰ Although I would agree with Burt's suggestion here, there is no visual evidence to suggest the difference in age, and as such it, like the claims made of Dardel, de Maré and Börlin, operates as a *ménage à trois*, made possible through the gaze, a shared cultural refinement and desire of the male body offered up as commodity for both desire and cultural capital. Turning to the homosocial-homoerotic continuum obliquely revealed in nineteenth-century literature, Sedgwick has provocatively exposed how 'in erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of "rivalry" and "love", differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent'.²¹ However, in this picture of Börlin as the hypnotic and hence somewhat vulnerable dervish, the bond is not one of rivalry but of queer mutuality, it is not one of opaque denial but of open dialogue, as desire and culture are not closeted here but provocatively and unabashedly celebrated through fashionable representation. In addition, the one man's hand resting on his companion's shoulder, almost as if holding him somewhat back, implies an added degree of intimacy between the two spectators, reinforcing the queer mutuality implied in the picture.²² According to the contemporary medico-juridical establishment, this queer pedagogy was also the leading cause of eroding class distinctions with 'educated' upper-class homosexuals cavorting with 'sordid

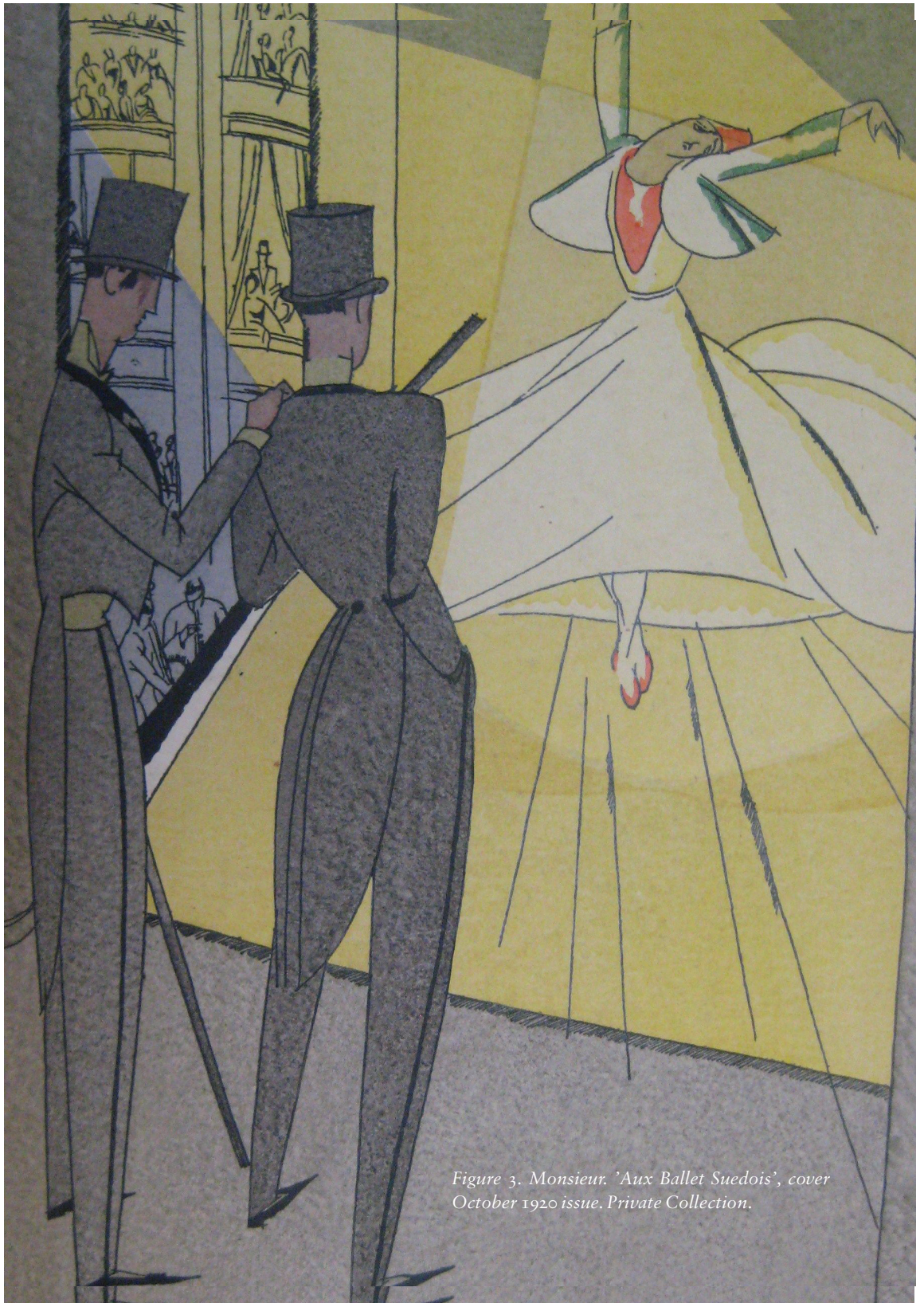


Figure 3. Monsieur. 'Aux Ballet Suedois', cover
October 1920 issue. Private Collection.

street urchins'.²³ Slumming across class borders and defying homo-social bonding rituals provided the male readers of *Monsieur*, for example, an alternative mode and cultural context for the modern experiences of sexual identity and the fashions of masculinity.

Monsieur: The New Dandy

Since France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the ideal of a strong and virile male body and its future health circulated widely as a serious concern, and by WWI with over 1 310 000 men dead and another 1 100 000 suffering permanent disabilities, the concern for the male body had grown into a national obsession. Physical culture (or physique culture) was meant to respond to national and social fears by turning to Ancient Greek exemplars as emblematic of republicanism and the ideal male citizen physically endowed with both healthful muscularity and civic virtue. According to the leading proponents of physique culture, the exacerbating conditions of modernity made men a pale comparison of their Greek precedents emblematised in ideal plastic form in antique sculptures. In France it was believed that modern man lacked the essential ingredient of true and honourable manhood, vigour.²⁴ In both France and Britain at the end of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, aesthetics and athletics were pitted against each other and were deemed antagonistic expressions of masculinity. Men affected (or perhaps more appropriately afflicted) by aesthetic inclinations threatened the health of the nation and were weak progeny of urban environment. Muscle men like Eugene Sandow and Bernarr Adolphus Macfadden unabashedly toured around Britain and Europe, showing off their hard trained, ideal muscular bodies, at once exposing themselves to emulative and homoerotic gazes. Both Sandow and Macfadden posed for numer-

ous photo shoots to be reproduced widely in manuals, newspapers, periodicals and art postcards.²⁵ Within the pages of *Monsieur* ideal physicality of the modern man was suffused with discussions of the latest men's fashion. In a brief article 'La Culture Physique' ('Physical Culture'), in the February 1920 issue, Georges Lerousseau argues that one must cultivate one's body like one enriches the spirit (p. 63). The 'admirable human specimen' is one which is 'at once intelligent and muscular, a superior being, situated equally between these two poles of animality' (p. 63). For according to Lerousseau, 'physical culture is interested in elegance and good clothes (*bonne tenue*). To be well dressed, one must possess shoulders, the essential basis of all vestimentary architecture. One must be lacking a belly' (p. 63–64). The young dandies of the day, he remarks, do not understand the merits of doing sit-ups, placing their feet under armoires, especially given that the artifice of the suit gives them large shoulders and a pigeon chest.

It was not until magazines like *Monsieur* which directly and audaciously flirted with the erotics of the well-toned, muscular male body that this same-sex desire was given a public and importantly a fashionable, stylish forum. It was also the right period in which to do so. After all, the 1920s witnessed the emergence of the cult of the body beautiful for men, which advocated tanning, spas, diet and overall physical beauty, elements tantamount to the presentation of the self for the man of cultivation and good breeding. Within the discursive and visual economy of the ideal, virile male body following WWI, *Monsieur* deployed the normalising discourse toward its own alternative end. Although same-sex desire has historically often focused on the physically idealised male form, within the pages of *Monsieur* the ideal was not simply an object of desire, but one to internalise, emulate and achieve through both physical exercise

and commodity culture. As seen on the August 1923 cover, a well tanned, tanned bather appears as though a superman, set in relief to the fey and haughty indifference of his fully and stylishly clothed cohort [Figure 4]. While there is nothing marking the image of a man fully clothed surrounded by bather(s) as unique, the pale man sits, however, reading the latest issue of *La Danse* and *Monsieur*. The image acts at once as publicity for de Maré's stable of publications as well as a clear and unabashed coding for the characters' sexual identities within modern commodity culture. The indifference exhibited by the seated companion, I posit, is not antagonistic or even indifferent toward his companion's body as might have been the case in the 1870s and 1880s. Traditionally athletics and aesthetics have been pitted against each other, antagonistic, suspicious and antithetical identities. Rather, the image suggests a new corporeal economy in which desire and capitalist modernity provide for a rapprochement between aesthetics and athletics in the form of the protean, post-war male body.²⁶

In the October 1920 issue featuring Börlin reaching his balletic refined heights as a dervish on the cover, author Fernand Gregh wrote a compelling feature article, 'Élégance et civilisation' ('Elegance and civilisation'), in which he states that '[t]he big problem, the singular problem of our era, the one to which all other questions come back to, is the defence of civilisation against barbarism'. Referring back to WWI, elegance, according to Gregh, is one means by which to stave off a return to the primitive animal. Elegance in its own way is a culture, that is to say, it is *the cultural*. 'An elegant man, a French man "comme il faut", an English "gentleman" are exemplary results of the species'(p. 231). This is critical as the gentleman, the clearly upper-class man to which Gregh refers, is an aristocrat by nature, lost in the late nineteenth-century gender and sexual identity wars



Figure 4. Monsieur. Cover for August 1923 issue. Private Collection.

that dismissed him as effeminate. Maurizia Boscagli elucidates the importance of the 'New Man' that emerged in Britain and Continental Europe in the early decades of the twentieth century and marked a significant shift in the definition of masculinity and its coeval in the contours of the male body. According to Boscagli this masculinity was a direct moral and social challenge to the aesthete and decadent effeminate masculinity which emerged in the closing decades of the previous century. She argues that

[a]t the historical moment in which the 'grotesque' corporeality of dissident social groups (women, homosexuals, 'other' identified as a danger to the bourgeois polity) was being shrilly presented by eugenicists and imperialists as a metaphor of subversion capable of compromising a whole culture, power had to argue in favour of the body in order to make it its prop.²⁷

This redefinition was a result of the 'crisis' in 'bourgeois models of masculine subjectivity and male authority'. The new protean male body was now based on a superman ideal and, ironically, focused ocular attention on that body, now to be at once emulated and consumed (legitimised through physique culture). This purportedly new virility was also a means to ward off fears of supposed social decay and racial degeneration and produced a mythology of the new virile, strong, athletic male aggressively and communally engaged in 'mass sports, personal hygiene and practices that could fortify the body of the nation'.²⁸

Monsieur's monthly lead off feature article invariably contained a moralist tone in which class, good breeding and/or fashion serviced the new ideal. Through the unabashed celebration of male consumer culture the magazine continuously equated a man's elegance and sartorial *savoir-faire* with civilisation and his moral character.

In the Easter 1920 issue for instance, Michel Corday in 'L'Influence morale de la tenue' ('The moral influence of a man's behaviour') argues that a man's physicality and his moral rectitude are fused to the point that they are blurred. He also insists that a man's toilette must be considered, the way he carries himself, his clothes, as these make who he is and demonstrate his moral character (p. 65–66). The figure of the dandy stood foreshadowed as the embodiment of the magazine's ideal *monsieur*. On the cover of the July 1920 issue two well-dressed tennis players are not activate physically, but actively enthralled in each other, illustrated to exhibit a seeming ignorance of any potential onlookers or gazes [Figure 5]. What makes the magazine unique and historically significant, as the first men's fashion monthly, is that this dandy was not that of the vilified effete aesthete from the nineteenth century, but rather was now, importantly, single-handedly, embodied in the ideal marriage between fashion and fitness. In 'Le sport a transformé le Dandysme' ('Sports has transformed the Dandy') from November 1920, the writer reminds his reader that the iconic historical personage of George Bryan (Beau) Brummell never liked to engage in an sort of vigorous or violent, quick actions, which might have deshelled the hair, make him hot or forced him to assume ridiculous postures. According to the article's author, André de Fouquieres, 'sports have transformed the dandy, has released its troubled aspect, from its obligatory dullness, from its insolate phlegm. Our fashion is appropriate to the life of action' (p. 63–65). On year later, in the March 1921 issue, in an article simply yet tellingly entitled, 'L'Homme complet' ('The complete man'), 'the modern man has located the body he once lost'. However, importantly he has also kept his mental capacities which have helped to cultivate his soul over the centuries. The 'complete man' is an aesthetic aristocrat who has become sporty. The body's movement, contrary to what the much

celebrated nineteenth-century poet, critic and self-professed dandy Charles Baudelaire advocates, did not destroy a man's line (or silhouette), but rather it was physical movement, 'which gives it its magical powers, which transforms the human body, which spiritualises it' ('Le sport a transformé le dandysme' p. 64). The author cites the choreography of Börlin amongst others as exemplary of this new spirit. Between athlete and spectator there is an important link, one that is at once both social and national, and yet has the potential to become international, given that the gestures of the body exist beyond the idiomatic realities of any given spoken language (p. 65).

The figure of the dandy, however, had its numerous detractors, particularly in Sweden, where, its nineteenth-century prototype was conjured in the press toward the continued vilification of de Maré and the magazine. *Dagens Nyheter* (*The Daily News*) reported that seven years after the death of Wilde, a school of dandies had developed in Sweden. The implications were tacit and problematic, that homosexuality was implicit in this degenerate character.²⁹ As both Alan Sinfield and Ed Cohen have argued, homosexuality and the dandy were indelibly linked in the wake of the Wilde trials of 1895.³⁰ Although de Maré was not himself a dandy, he surrounded himself with men and ideals considered decadent, namely and importantly artists like Dardel and magazines like *Monsieur*.

In her analysis of the dandy, Elisa Glick contends that the 'logic of the dandy is the logic of the commodity'.³¹ She demonstrates that authors have either viewed the dandy as vacuous and only invested in surface and artifice or as a politically motivated act of subversion against bourgeois normativity. Ellen Moers has also shown that it was not until the end of the nineteenth century when the dandy became intellectual and antibourgeois. For Baudelaire, the dandy is 'cult of the self', an ideally rich figure whose 'solitary profession is

elegance'. Later he writes that '[d]andyism does not even consist, as many thoughtless people seem to believe, in an immoderate taste for the toilet and material elegance. For the perfect dandy these things are no more than symbols of his aristocratic superiority of mind'.³² The superficiality often grafted onto the surface of the figure's metaphorical body, belied the moral tenor of the dandy's true exclusive identity. The ideal dandy was one whose work of art was himself.³³

Baudelaire argues that that dandy appeared 'when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is just beginning to fall'.³⁴ The New Dandy, as I wish to label the ideal figure personified within the covers of *Monsieur*, emerged in the glory days of the 1920s, when consumer culture reached, by that point, its most complete state. The period has been characterised as a clear moment when, unlike in the nineteenth century, modernity was no longer simply a projected ideal or vision of the avant-garde, but had already 'arrived' and was a conceptual framework affecting the lives of the population at large. In her seminal book *The gender of modernity*, Rita Felski contends that 'a view of modernity as driven by the logic of productive forces gives way to a recognition that consumer demand is not simply passive reflections of economic interests, but shaped by a variety of relatively independent cultural and ideological factors, of which gender is one of the most significant'.³⁵ While Felski does include sexual identity, her discussion is limited to women and does not address men, like the New Dandy, as consumer or object within this ever-expanding political economy of consumption. Modernity, through the effective auspices of commodity culture, had been turned into a complete lifestyle on all fronts. Like the period of transition which ushered in Baudelaire's prototypical figure, the New Dandy advocated by *Monsieur*, was itself too, a liminal, hybrid character bracketed by two world wars, blatant homophobia and



Figure 5. *Monsieur*. Cover for July 1920 issue. Private Collection.

the queer life Paris offered its French and diasporic *litterati* and importantly located somewhere between mind and body, fashion and fitness. From 1922 until 1925 numerous were the feature articles on historical figures identified as emblematic of the lifestyle of the dandy. These included such luminary figures as Beau Brummell (the first true if not controversial dandy), Napoleon, Lord Byron and Edward VII. Even contemporary figures like Le Comte Boni de Castellane, whose domestic interiors were featured, were included to conjure an idea of the complete lifestyle of the New Dandy. The magazine not only attempted to forge a modern aristocracy through the queer figure of the New Dandy, but it did so by engendering a lineage of respected historical luminaries.

Compelled by financial troubles, de Maré could no longer sustain both the BS and the moral beacon and commodity guide post of the New Dandy in the form of *Monsieur*. In 1925 the BS danced its last ballet and de Maré sold off the magazine. As early as May 1925 photographs were being introduced as replacements for illustrated cover images, editorials on women's fashions and advertisements for women's shoes followed in the subsequent issues, and it was clear that the New Dandy had been displaced with the simple yet revealing title change: *Monsieur: La Mode et les Sports, La Revue des Élégances Masculines Paris*. The glory days of the New Dandy seemed lost following the sale of the magazine and the replacement of Jacques Hébertot in September 1925 by André Filleul. Art features which reported on the Salon d'Automne now no longer focused on the fashion in the portraits of male sitters, but on straight forward descriptions of the pictures themselves. The tacit and celebrated homoeroticism was replaced by heteronormative cross-sex imagery, and the queer reader was seemingly forced, once again back into the closet. Without de Maré's cultural patronage, Paris suddenly seemed less *gai*.

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Notes

¹ Quoted in Tag Gronberg: *Designs on modernity: exhibiting the city in 1920s Paris*. Manchester and New York: MUP, 1998.

² For a thorough look at women, haute couture and fashion magazine in the interwar period see Mary Lynn Stewart: *Dressing modern Frenchwomen: marketing haute couture, 1919–1939*. Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 2008.

³ De Maré in Erik Näslund: 'Animating a vision: Rolf de Maré, Jean Börlin, and the founding of the Ballets Suédois', in *Paris modern: the Swedish Ballet 1920–1925*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995:42.

⁴ For example, Dardel guided de Maré, who was himself guided by Wilhelm Uhde, the art dealer who was desperately in love with the young, attractive painter.

⁵ Erik Näslund: *Rolf de Maré: art collector, ballet director, museum creator*. Exh. Cat. Stockholm: Dance Books, 2009:73.

⁶ In the short span of the five years of the BS's history, Börlin had created twenty-three works and danced in almost all these productions; after nearly 2 768 performances Börlin flirted with complete exhaustion and burn out, at which point he moved to New York where he died in 1930 at the tender age of thirty-seven.

⁷ Göran Söderström: 'Homoerotiken i konsten – konst och konstnärer' in Göran Söderström (ed.) *Sympatiens hemlighetsfulla makt*. Stockholm: Stockholmia förlag 1999:290–292.

⁸ Näslund: 'Animating a vision', 1995:47.

⁹ Ramsay Burt: 'Interpreting Jean Börlin's "Dervishes": masculine subjectivity and the queer male dancing body'. *Dance Chronicle* vol. 22, no. 2 (1999):224.

¹⁰ Quoted in Näslund: *Rolf de Maré*, 2009:235.

¹¹ Michael Hatt: 'Muscle, morals, mind: the male body in Thomas Eakins' *Salutat*', in Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (eds.). *The body imaged*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993:63.

¹² See John Potvin: *Material and visual cultures beyond male bonding, 1870–1914: Bodies, Boundaries and Intimacy*. Aldershot, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008.

¹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: *Between men: english literature and male homosocial desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985:2.

¹⁴ See Pierre Vidal-Naquet: *The black hunter: forms of thought and forms of society in the Greek world*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981:6.

¹⁵ This neologism was a term used in tandem with and in distinction to homosexual by a number of leading queer writers and activists at the end of the nineteenth century, among them Edward Carpenter. It is in this instance the most appropriate term to use in this context.

- ¹⁶ Charles Kains-Jackson: 'New chivalry'. *Artist* (2 April 1894):104.
- ¹⁷ David Halperin: *How to do the history of homosexuality*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002:121.
- ¹⁸ Burt: 'Interpreting Jean Börlin's "Dervishes"', 1999:223.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Näslund: *Rolf de Maré*, 2009:158–59.
- ²⁰ Burt: 'Interpreting Jean Börlin's "Dervishes"', 1999:226.
- ²¹ Sedgwick: *Between men*, 1985:21.
- ²² For more on intimacy, the male body and visual and material cultures see Potvin: *Material and visual cultures beyond male bonding*, 1870–1914.
- ²³ Burt: 'Interpreting Jean Börlin's "Dervishes"', 1999:226.
- ²⁴ See Tamar Garb: 'Modelling the male body: physical culture, photography and the classical ideal', in *Bodies of modernity: figure and flesh in Fin-de-Siècle*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1998: 56.
- ²⁵ For more of a complete discussion of Physique Culture, masculinity, homosociality and visual culture in England see Potvin: *Material and visual cultures beyond male bonding*, 1870–1914:18–30. For France see Garb: 'Modelling the male body: physical culture, photography and the classical ideal', 1998.
- ²⁶ While from a different time and place, the *Monsieur* cover is very reminiscent of scenes from Thomas Mann's 1912 novella *Death in Venice*, in which the main character, Gustav von Aschenbach (a man in his late 50s), sits on the beaches of Venice and stares longingly at youthful, well toned, nubile men.
- ²⁷ Maurizia Boscagli: *Eye on the flesh: fashions of masculinity in the early twentieth century*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996:5.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.* 1–2.
- ²⁹ Näslund: *Rolf de Maré*, 2009:75.
- ³⁰ See Alan Sinfield: *The Wilde century: effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the queer moment*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994; Ed Cohen: *Talk on the Wilde side: toward a genealogy of a discourse on male sexualities*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- ³¹ Elisa Glick: 'The dialectics of dandyism: gay identity and its secret'. *Cultural*

Critique 48 (Spring 2001):134.

³² Charles Baudelaire: *The painter of modern life and other essays*. 2nd Ed. Trans. Jonathan Mayne. 1895. Reprint, London: Phaidon, 1995:27.

³³ See Ellen Moers: *The dandy*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1960:280–282. For Baudelaire this profession of artifice and elegance was decidedly male and masculine, and he posited that women were the opposite of the dandy because they were both natural and vulgar.

³⁴ Baudelaire, *The painter of modern life and other essays* 1995:84.

³⁵ Rita Felski: *The gender of modernity*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1995:60.

ABSTRACT

Vaselinmaffian: Rolf de Maré och en viss Monsieur

Den spirande kultur av exklusiva tidningar som uppstod efter första världskriget kom att bli en väsentlig komponent i den växande, världsomspännande synen på Paris som modets huvudstad. Tidningen *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode*, grundad 1920, skulle främja alla nymodiga och artistiska näringar, och fungerade som haute couture-husens propagandaröst. Förutom *Vogue*, *La Gazette de Bon Ton* och *L'Officiel*, fanns ett stort antal tidningar vars mandat uteslutande gällde dammode eller som åtminstone bevakade kollektionerna säsong efter säsong. Medan det inflytande som couture för kvinnor hade inte kan undervärderas, saknas i diskussionerna om perioden den bemedlade parisiske mannens klärelaterade representationer och erfarenheter. Bristen på forskning om 1920-talets herrmode konkretiserar framgången som marknadsförandet av Paris som den fashionabla femininitetens absoluta epicentrum haft, men även att på nytt bekräfta den genusmässiga skiljelinjen och förneka sexuella annanhet, och som sådan hjälper den till att befästa industrins egna normaliserande diskurser.

Samma år som *L'Officiel* startades, gjorde också en annan tidning som har lämnats helt obeaktad, *Monsieur*, sin debut. Som världens första herrmodetidning

erbjöd den också provokativt ett avgjort queert mandat, queer estetik och queera tänkta läsare. *Monsieur* var en av ett antal tidningar som grundades och finansierades av den svenska impressarion Rolf de Maré (1888–1964). De verkade ogenerat för att främja hans, och hans utvalda homosexuella manliga koteris, främsta och senaste intressen. I likhet med många herrmodetidningar innehöll *Monsieur* inte bara mode, utan även allt som kunde intressera den moderne mannen med stil och förmögenhet. Denna essä undersöker den visuella och materiella kultur de Maré gynnade genom sina olika, ekonomiskt sponsrade, artistiska företag. Han och hans förtrogna liksom hans många olika kulturella satsningar utsattes oupphörligen för hätska attacker i den svenska pressen, attacker som visar hur homofobi och antimodernism sammansmälte symbiotiskt i Sverige, vilket gjorde *gai Paris* till en idealisk plats för ett queert uttryckande av modernism. I essän hävdar författaren att som ett resultat av många olika krafter som var i rörelse under perioden uppstod en, med tidens beskrivning, helmanlig ”vaselinmaffia” vars materiella och visuella artikuleringar av modernitet har tystats i decennier. Genom att granska innehållet i *Monsieur* under de fem första åren innan de Maré sålde den, studerar författaren särskilt tidningens systematiska försök att konstruera en visuell och materiell kultur uttalat koncentrerad på den (ikoniska, om än något omgestaltade) figuren den Nye Dandyn, ett queert föränderligt förkroppsligande av modernitet och civilisation samtidigt.

Det var inte förrän med tidskrifter som *Monsieur*, som direkt och djärvt flirtade med den spänstiga, muskulösa, manliga kroppens erotik, som detta likakönade begär gavs ett offentligt och, inte minst viktigt, fashionabelt, stilfullt forum. Det var också rätt tid att göra detta. 1920-talet bevittnade uppkomsten av kulturen av den manliga vackra kroppen, som rekommenderade solbränna, spas, diet och fysisk skönhet i allmänhet taget, element som var viktiga för den kultiverade och väluppfostrade mannens självpresentation. Inom den diskursiva och visuella strukturen för den ideala, virila manliga kroppen efter första världskriget, utnyttjade *Monsieur* den normaliserande diskursen för sitt eget alternativa ändamål. Även om likakönat begär historiskt sett ofta riktats mot den fysiskt idealiserade manliga kroppsformen, var på tidskriftssidorna i *Monsieur* idealet inte bara ett begärsobjekt, utan också något att internalisera, efter-

likna och uppnå genom både fysisk träning och varukultur.

Den Nye Dandyn, som Potvin kallar den idealgestalt som personifierades inom *Monsieurs* omslag, uppträdde under 1920-talets glanstid, när konsumtionskulturen den gången nådde sin mest kompletta form. Mellankrigstiden har betecknats såsom en tydlig period då moderniteten, till skillnad från på artonhundratalet, inte längre bara var ett projicerat ideal eller vision hos avantgardet, utan redan fanns där och var en begreppsmässig struktur som påverkade livet för befolkningen i stort. Den Nye Dandyn som *Monsieur* ivrade för var en tröskel- och hybridgestalt, omgiven av två världskrig, uppenbar homofobi och det queera liv som Paris erbjöd sina franska och utländska literati i förskingringen, samt, inte minst viktigt, lokaliserad någonstans mellan sinne och kropp, mode och kondition. Från 1922 till 1925 publicerades ett stort antal specialartiklar om historiska personer, uppfattade som sinnebilder av dandyns livsstil. De omfattade sådana celebra personer som Beau Brummell (den förste äkta, om än inte kontroversielle, dandyn), Napoleon, Lord Byron och Edward VII. Tidningen försökte inte bara skapa en modern aristokrati med hjälp av den queera figuren den Nya Dandyn, den gjorde detta genom att frambringa en härstamning av respekterade historiska celebriteter.