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| *Ballet Méchanique (1924)* |
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| *Ballet Méchanique* is a Dadaist, post-Cubist art film directed by artist Fernand Léger and shot in Paris from 1923-1924. The film was photographed by American photographer and filmmaker Dudley Murphy, with some assistance by American Modernist artist Man Ray. American composer George Antheil created a concert piece for the film prior to viewing it by combining industrial sounding instruments, including numerous pianos, sirens, airplane propellers and electric bells. The completed score was thirty minutes in length, yet since the film’s runtime was nineteen minutes, the two were often not presented simultaneously. Instead, multiple-lengthed versions of the scored film were exhibited. A silent version of *Ballet Méchanique* premiered on September 24, 1924, at the Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik (International Exposition for New Theater Technique) in Vienna.  In the film, repetitious movements of various inanimate objects, such as pots, pans, whisks and funnels seemingly become dancers in a ballet. These visuals are then combined with further imagery, such as a women climbing and re-climbing stairs. The superimposition of objects and human faces is an attempt by Léger to show his concern with modernization, and society’s evident disillusionment with the mechanical world. Multiple angular fragmentation and contrasting light and shadow along with various editing rhythms and juxtapositions express the structure and reiteration of everyday life, a distinguishing trait of modernism. *Ballet Méchanique* is considered a masterpiece in experimental filmmaking and the first completely abstract film to be photographed rather than drawn.  *File: Ballet Méchanique - paratextual 3.JPG*  *No caption provided.*  *File: Ballet Méchanique - Paratextual 4.JPG*  *No caption provided.* |
| Further reading:  Buck, R. (et al.) (1982). *Fernand Léger.* New York: Abbeville.  Chilvers, I. and Glaves J. (eds.) (2009). *Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art, Oxford*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  Curtis, D. (1971). *Experimental Cinema a Fifty-Year Evolution*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.  James, D. (2009) ‘Jazz Modernism and Film Art: Dudley Murphy and *Ballet Mécanique*’,  *Modernism/modernity* 16(1): 25-49.  Oja, C. (2000) ‘George Antheil’s *Ballet Mécanique* and Transatlantic Modernism’, *Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States,* ed. Townsend Ludington, 175-202. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. |