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| Epstein, Jean (1897-1953) |
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| Born into a Jewish Franco-Polish family in Warsaw in 1897, Jean Epstein was an early queer filmmaker, poet, and theorist. Epstein is best remembered for the innovative camerawork and editing techniques in his interpretation of Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* (*La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928). Epstein’s engagement with cinematic form ranged from rhythm-based impressionist editing in *Coeur Fidéle* (*The Faithful Heart*, 1923), to experimental sound work in *Le Tempestaire* (*The Storm Master*, 1947), and his writings on the concept of *photogénie*.Epstein’s theoretical reflections of the interwar period dovetailed with film criticism’s shift toward ontology and attention to the transformative effects of the moving image on perception and knowledge.  Epstein spent his formative years in Switzerland before moving to France in 1917 to study medicine. His interests soon turned toward cinema following contact with Louis and Auguste Lumière. Epstein made forty-four films between 1922 and 1948, all while publishing prolifically. He released three full books and founded the arts journal *Promenoir* before moving to Paris in 1922. His relocation coincided with the gathering of many impressionist filmmakers and artists in France—including the young Luis Buñuel, who apprenticed on two of Epstein’s films. The impressionist filmmakers would eventually lose public favour to the surrealist movement, but Epstein’s technical innovation and writing had immediate and long-lasting influence. Working alongside Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, and others, Epstein sparked academic debates that questioned the nature of cinema by focusing on the medium’s proximity to human perception. Much of these theoretical reflections unfolded under the rubric of *photogénie*, a term coined by Delluc and expanded extensively Epstein. *Photogénie* is cinema’s ability to convey meaning beyond the descriptive powers of language, or the new thoughts and feelings revealed by imaging and editing the material world. *Photogénie* is collaboration between filmmaker, audience, and filmed-object that allows a transcendental shift in perspective, opening up new relationships to space and time and allowing audiences to see things with new eyes. Putting theory into practice, Epstein and the Impressionists drew ties between human sensation, editing, and the rhythm and sequence of memory. These philosophical goals proved too direct for the surrealists, who found *photogénie* inspiringbut argued that art could accomplish the same things without organized intent, design, or appeal to medium specificity. |
| Born into a Jewish Franco-Polish family in Warsaw in 1897, Jean Epstein was an early queer filmmaker, poet, and theorist. Epstein is best remembered for the innovative camerawork and editing techniques in his interpretation of Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* (*La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928). Epstein’s engagement with cinematic form ranged from rhythm-based impressionist editing in *Coeur Fidéle* (*The Faithful Heart*, 1923), to experimental sound work in *Le Tempestaire* (*The Storm Master*, 1947), and his writings on the concept of *photogénie*.Epstein’s theoretical reflections of the interwar period dovetailed with film criticism’s shift toward ontology and attention to the transformative effects of the moving image on perception and knowledge.  Epstein spent his formative years in Switzerland before moving to France in 1917 to study medicine. His interests soon turned toward cinema following contact with Louis and Auguste Lumière. Epstein made forty-four films between 1922 and 1948, all while publishing prolifically. He released three full books and founded the arts journal *Promenoir* before moving to Paris in 1922. His relocation coincided with the gathering of many impressionist filmmakers and artists in France—including the young Luis Buñuel, who apprenticed on two of Epstein’s films. The impressionist filmmakers would eventually lose public favour to the surrealist movement, but Epstein’s technical innovation and writing had immediate and long-lasting influence. Working alongside Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, and others, Epstein sparked academic debates that questioned the nature of cinema by focusing on the medium’s proximity to human perception. Much of these theoretical reflections unfolded under the rubric of *photogénie*, a term coined by Delluc and expanded extensively Epstein. *Photogénie* is cinema’s ability to convey meaning beyond the descriptive powers of language, or the new thoughts and feelings revealed by imaging and editing the material world. *Photogénie* is collaboration between filmmaker, audience, and filmed-object that allows a transcendental shift in perspective, opening up new relationships to space and time and allowing audiences to see things with new eyes. Putting theory into practice, Epstein and the Impressionists drew ties between human sensation, editing, and the rhythm and sequence of memory. These philosophical goals proved too direct for the surrealists, who found *photogénie* inspiringbut argued that art could accomplish the same things without organized intent, design, or appeal to medium specificity.  While *photogénie* is a notoriously difficult term to illustrate, Epstein and Delluc both cite Abel Gance’s *La Roue* (*The Wheel*, 1923) as an example. The famous runaway train sequence discards narrative continuity editing in favour of increasingly rapid crosscuts between several concurrent actions on board the train. Engine and montage seem to fuse as both the viewer and diegetic characters come to a synchronous realization that something is wrong with the machinery: both the train and the film appear out of control. The affective power of this sequence is not a product of narrative causality, but instead an epiphany that audience, train, camera, and character have collaboratively built into a photogenic feeling of sudden terror.  [image:esptein.jpg]  Figure 1 James Epstein, Image source: Association Française de Recherche sur L’histoire du Cinéma  <http://www.afrhc.fr/2011/02/nouvel-article-2/> Moving Image Material Photogénie in The Wheel  <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwGRg4Lw8aM> |
| Further reading:  (Aumont)  (Keller and Paul)  (Turvey) |