The Sophisticate and the Ingénue: Two Visions of la Parisienne in
Jacques Deray’s La Piscine.

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On a balmy summer evening, guests are arriving at a remote villa on the Mediterranean for a night of drinking and dancing. On the terrace the sound of crickets fills the night air. Marianne (Romy Schneider) appears in an iridescent sequined dress, featuring a kaleidoscope of dusty pink, silver blue, bronze and gold. The shimmering v-neck sleeveless dress displays her curvaceous figure and reveals her bronzed arms, shoulders and décolletage. With her hair meticulously coiffed and wearing heavy eyeliner, she is the picture of glamorous and sophisticated eroticism. She places her arms around her former lover Harry (Maurice Ronet), slow dances with half-closed eyes and an irrepressible smile, her hair moving lightly in the gentle breeze. Across the terrace, beside the still water of the swimming pool, Harry’s eighteen-year-old daughter Penelope (Jane Birkin) rests her head tentatively on the shoulder of Marianne’s lover, Jean-Paul (Alain Delon). Dressed in high-waisted flared denim jeans and a white crew-neck t-shirt, her long hair worn out and undressed, Penelope epitomises the bohemian ingénue. Jacques Deray’s La Piscine (1969) offers two contrasting versions of la Parisienne: the sophisticate and the ingénue.

La Piscine has been described alternately as “a glossy Cote d’Azur thriller”¹, an “icily elegant pas de quatre,”² a polar with “an Americanized look,”³ and “an icily erotic 1969 melodrama.”⁴ The film is set in a grand villa
in the sun-drenched verdant hills overlooking the azure waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Former journalist Marianne and her lover Jean-Paul, a failed writer and rehabilitated alcoholic, are wiling away the long, hot summer days on vacation, lounging by the eponymous swimming pool. Their idle seclusion is interrupted however when Marianne invites Harry and Penelope to stay. Marianne’s decision sets in motion a slow-burning ménage à quatre. Penelope and Marianne are each, in their different ways, seductive Parisiennes who ignite the rivalry between Jean-Paul and Harry. Costume, hair, and make-up, play a significant role in the construction of these two Parisienne identities, and reflect the respective star personae of Romy Schneider and Jane Birkin. This article explores the relationship between la Parisienne, fashion and film stars in Deray’s film.

In *Fashioning Film Stars* (2005), Rachel Moseley remarks that considering the central role clothes or costume plays in our everyday understanding of film stars, little academic scholarship has been dedicated to the significance of the connection between stars and their costuming or how fashion and dress shape their star personae. In her article “Secrets of French Style” for *Harper’s Bazaar*, Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni remarks that it may be argued chic Frenchwomen “who possess such enviable style are divided into two camps—the sophisticates and the bohemians.” In Deray’s film, Marianne and Penelope’s Parisienne personae are intimately linked to how they are dressed. Their costumes connote different aspects of Parisian femininity: Marianne’s wardrobe carries a very relaxed glamour quality, connoting her self-confidence and womanhood, while Penelope’s suggests the *femme-enfant* or woman-child. Sarah Street remarks that an analysis of film costume “should always reference the use of accessories and include a discussion of the overall setting.” In the 1960s Saint-Tropez was a fashionable and expensive holiday destination for Parisians. That Deray places his actresses in a relaxed, sun-drenched, glamorous setting reinforces the chic Riviera style of the film’s characters. The summer, sunshine, the outdoors and the seaside, as well as the luxurious villa and swimming pool accentuate the relaxed resort style chic and summer ease of the women’s clothes. The setting enhances the chic of the costumes, while the latter enhance the overall look and visual style of the film.

Marianne’s classic swimwear, including a black halter-neck bikini, a white one-piece bathing suit with thin straps and a deep back, and a black one-piece swimsuit, is feminine and seductive, displaying a curvaceous womanly figure. In contrast, Penelope wears a more demure white crocheted tunic over her white bikini, which draws attention to her long limbs and androgynous figure. Marianne’s relaxed and sophisticated daytime “look” consists of pale collared shirts, sleeves casually rolled up,
worn over her bathing suit or with cotton trousers, simple shift dresses, and a silk apricot polo shirt with white trousers. The predominance of a neutral colour palette in Marianne’s daytime wardrobe suggests an elegant ease and an understated chic. In contrast her evening wear displays an extravagant fashionability with its more vibrant and spectacular hues. In the evening, she pointedly changes into glamorous dresses in luxurious fluid and iridescent fabrics, accessorised with diamond earrings and her hair meticulously swept back either off her face or in a chignon. Marianne’s coordination of her wardrobe to daily rituals—breakfast, leisure, shopping in the village, and “after five” or evening—suggests the feminine bourgeois sophisticate who follows dress codes and takes every opportunity to display herself in new attire. Through her costuming Marianne is coded as sophisticated, well-groomed, stylish and seductive.

In contrast, Penelope eschews traditional codes and wears the same clothes both day and night. Her overall look consists of short tunics and mini-dresses or else a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Penelope wears her hair out and unadorned, with the blunt fringe which became one of Birkin’s trademark features, and her makeup is barely perceptible. Her miniskirts highlight her androgynous and childlike figure, which also distinguishes her from the more curvaceous and womanly Marianne. In one scene, Jean-Paul watches Penelope from a distance as she frolics childlike through a grove, the gaucheness of her gestures mirroring her simple gingham “baby doll” dress with a drop-waist and short hemline which accentuates her long legs. The fabric of Penelope’s tunic is in stark contrast to the more luxurious fabrics Marianne wears, and at the time of the film’s production, gingham was a fabric very much associated with another famous gamine of French cinema, Brigitte Bardot. Ten years earlier, Bardot wore a pink and white gingham wedding dress for her second marriage to Jacques Charrier, which according to Ginette Vincendeau, became one of the most “iconic French post-war garments” and established gingham as Bardot’s “signature fabric.”8 A 2003 article in The Times prescribed gingham mini-dresses for those wanting to imitate the Bardot look.9 Penelope’s mini-dresses connote the ingénue, while her casual jeans and t-shirt ensemble worn with little makeup or embellishment such as jewellery suggests androgyny and a bohemian eschewal of fashion, something Birkin’s character also shared with Bardot. Indeed, Valerie Steele writes that “when Chanel offered to dress Bardot, the film star scornfully replied that ‘Couture is for grannies.’”10

Leila Wimmer argues that during the mid-1960s “the cult of youth brought a change of fashion ideal, moving from the very curvaceous feminine ideal of the 1950s (c. 1947-1964), to the physically desexualized, pubescent body (c. 1965-1978).”11 The result was a new ideal in fashion:
the slender “little-girl” type perfectly embodied by Penelope. In *La Piscine*, costuming also serves to emphasise this “generation gap” between the two women: Marianne’s dresses and ensembles are classically feminine, while Penelope’s jeans and t-shirt look emphasises a tomboyish, *garçonne* style. However, if Penelope’s androgynous body is physically desexualised, it still carries a highly erotic charge. This is depicted in the film by Jean-Paul’s captivation with her as she alternately frolics and lounges by the pool.

**Courrèges**

Generally speaking, the aim of costume design is to serve, aid, and/or demonstrate the development of character and the plot and thus remain in the background. Street argues, however, that film costumes “conform to notions of realism but also need to employ notions of cinematic spectacle.”¹² In any given Parisienne film, there are three possibilities for costuming *la Parisienne*, and each will largely determine the way the characters are perceived: a costume designer will create the costumes for the actress; a couturier will either especially design costumes for the actress or provide clothing from his or her collection; or the actress will wear her own clothing for the role. A further layer of significance to the distinctly Parisian chic “look” of Marianne and Penelope is added by the fact that French couturier André Courrèges was the costume designer for *La Piscine*. Courrèges also designed costumes for Claude Sautet’s *Les Choses de la vie* (1969), which also starred Romy Schneider.¹³ Indeed, in the 1950s and 1960s several Parisian couturiers designed or provided costumes for Parisienne films, including Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Cardin, Coco Chanel, and Hubert de Givenchy.

In *Undressing Cinema*, Stella Bruzzi highlights a general distinction between the approach of the costume designer and the couturier to fashion in film:

> While the couturier might be more expressive and daring when designing for the screen, costume designers opted for safer styles that remained secondary to character and narrative and never, as the Hollywood director George Cukor commented “knocked your eye out.”¹⁴

Further commenting on this distinction Bruzzi writes: “the creation of clothes as spectacle is the prerogative of the couturier; the overriding ethos of the costume designer is conversely to fabricate clothes which serve the purposes of the narrative.”¹⁵ Another key difference between the costume designer and the couturier is that while the couturier tends to be a very
public figure with a distinct “brand” or style, the costume designer does not have a high public profile. Bruzzi argues that couturier designs for a film often disrupt the narrative “to be admired or acknowledged in spite of the general trajectory of the film.” Courrèges’ costume design for *La Piscine* generally conforms to notions of realism and is not overtly spectacular. There is, however, a scene in which one of Marianne’s more ostentatious evening dresses becomes the focus of overt attention, both for the spectator and Harry.

In the fading light of dusk, Marianne emerges from the villa in a resplendent floor-length sleeveless evening gown cut of a fluid silk chiffon fabric featuring psychedelic swirls of chartreuse, emerald, aqua blue and lime green. Captured in a long shot, the vivid and offbeat tones seem to pierce the atmosphere in which they appear. The framing and camera angles draw attention to the dress. Moreover, Harry’s admiring reaction registers the spectacular effect of Marianne’s appearance. Courrèges’ gown creates a visual diversion in contrast to conventional conceptions of film costume which, according to Bruzzi, require them to be subservient to narrative and avoid being overly spectacular. However, even if the dress does appear as an “interjection,” it nonetheless both aids character development by confirming Marianne’s identity as a fashionable Parisienne, and narrative trajectory insofar as Harry’s reaction confirms the seductive power Marianne wields over him. The very structure of the dress too drives the film’s action, and features a large opening in the back into which Harry impulsively slips his hand, driving the *ménage à quatre* narrative forward.

Courrèges opened his first couture house in 1961, and is probably best remembered for his “Space Ageism” style. The term itself comes from Courrèges’ iconic 1964 “Space Age” collection that featured “minimal styles, white fabrics and shiny or reflective modern synthetic materials,” design details evident in his work on *La Piscine*. Mairi Mackenzie writes that Courrèges’ 1964 collection “revolutionised women’s fashion with trouser suits, and skirts several centimetres above the knee.” This collection also included “strong clean shapes . . . based on simple trapeze lines for dresses and coats made up in white fabric” as well as tunic dresses and slim hipster trousers, while later collections “introduced see-through and cut-out dresses.” Paula Reed remarks that Courrèges “made trousers acceptable daywear for fashionable women, and to this day he vies with [British designer] Mary Quant for the credit of being the inventor of the miniskirt.” Courrèges’ designs for *La Piscine* have had a lasting impact on fashion. Most recently New York-based Parisian designer Sophie Thaellet’s Spring/Summer 2012 ready-to-wear collection drew inspiration
from the film, while the Spring/Summer 2014 collection of American designer Tory Burch channelled the “young, buoyant chic” of Courrèges’ designs for La Piscine.\textsuperscript{22}

While space ageism is not overt in La Piscine, other signature Courrèges design details are perceptible, most notably the miniskirt, mini-dresses and tunic dress worn by Penelope, as well as the simple white shift dress, featuring a strong clean shape, that Marianne wears to the airport toward the end of the film. Both the sequinned dress Marianne wears to the house party and the white trapeze dress with contrasting red trim she wears to Harry’s funeral, recall a 1965 Courrèges evening dress, the former in terms of fabric, the latter in terms of silhouette.\textsuperscript{23} While Marianne and Penelope wear dresses throughout the film, Courrèges also costumed his leading ladies in trousers. When Marianne decides to do some shopping in the village at Saint-Tropez she exudes relaxed elegance in a fashionable ensemble consisting of navy flat front trousers, with a tucked-in pale blue button-down shirt with turned up collar and navy espadrilles, accessorised with a woven tote and tortoise-shell sunglasses. Similarly, toward the end of the film Penelope wears a fashionable outfit consisting of slim hipster trousers and a washed-out floral button down shirt.

In her mini-dresses and mini-skirts, Penelope represents the minette, a type which, according to Sabine Denuelle, was popularised in the mid to late 1960s following the introduction of shortened hemlines by Courrèges.\textsuperscript{24} Penelope’s mid-thigh hemlines contrast with Marianne’s floor-length evening gowns and the more modest above-the-knee hemlines of her day dresses. Marianne’s pointedly longer hemlines connote a mature sophistication in comparison to the youthful gamine hemlines of Penelope’s skirts.

Courrèges’ costumes for La Piscine help establish both Marianne and Penelope as fashionable Parisiennes. Emmanuelle Rétaillaud-Bajac remarks that in post-war France Courrèges, alongside Hubert de Givenchy, Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Cardin, preserved “the status of Paris as the capital of elegance, and the status of the Parisiennes as queens of fashion.”\textsuperscript{25}

**Fashionable Parisiennes**

As fashionable and stylish Parisiennes, Penelope and Marianne belong to a wider cultural tradition and iconography of la Parisienne which predates the advent of cinema.\textsuperscript{26} In her discussion of la Parisienne in the context of fin de siècle Paris mass culture, Elizabeth K. Menon remarks: “The Parisienne was intricately linked to fashion and to many concepts that
applied equally to certain types of clothing and to women: desire, temptation, seduction, vanity, luxury, elegance, and “chic-ness.” ²⁷ La Parisienne also functions as a symbol for Paris, the world capital of fashion.²⁸ The process by which Paris established and maintained its position as a fashion capital needs to be understood, according to David Gilbert, in terms of the many intersecting cultural and economic developments tied up with the transformation of the French capital into a modern city:

The “Haussmanization” of Paris changed more than its street pattern and its architecture; it also altered the imagined geography of the city, locking together a strong visual trope of the material city with ideas about its cultural life, in which the consumption and public display of high fashion were key elements.²⁹

This redevelopment of Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century was concomitant with the development of both prêt-a-porter and haute couture, and in promoting both high and ready-to-wear fashion the image of la Parisienne was frequently used. Indeed, fashion plates, like those found in La Mode Illustré and La Gazette des Dames, played a significant role in the development of la Parisienne as a type.

Nineteenth century visual arts contributed to the construction of la Parisienne as both elegant and fashionable. Portraits of the generic type la Parisienne were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, and in each of these portraits the fashionable clothing of the subject is highlighted.³⁰ The fashionable Parisienne was also sketched in the works of nineteenth century writers. In Lost Illusions, for example, Honoré de Balzac writes that in the company of “several beautiful Parisian women, so elegantly and daintily attired,” Lucien de Rubempré became aware that his provincial mistress Madame de Bargeton’s ensemble was “behind the times.”³¹ Théodore de Banville describes the Parisiennes of Paris as supremely elegant.³² Arsène Houssaye in his study Les Parisiennes (1869) remarks: “The Parisienne is not in fashion, she is fashion.”³³ In more recent times the Parisienne type has appeared in fashion, advertising, and style guides.³⁴ Writing on the representation of la Parisienne in Vogue Paris in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Agnès Rocamora remarks: “La Parisienne is perceived as the ultimate fashionable woman.”³⁵

In the latter half of the nineteenth century “the chic Parisienne embodied French taste and fashionability as national traits.”³⁶ Yet, if la Parisienne is the embodiment of French fashionability, she is also distinct from the French woman. Throughout the nineteenth century, the superiority of la Parisienne in matters of taste, fashion and dress was frequently
established by comparison with the French provincial woman. Taxile Delord remarks: “Provincials put on clothes, la Parisienne dresses.” Despite being an icon of French elegance and fashionability, la Parisienne was less a national or French figure than a universal or cosmopolitan one.

**Cosmopolitanism**

Both the setting of *La Piscine* and its lead actresses emphasise the cosmopolitanism of the Parisienne type. Richard Bernstein writes that to be a Parisian suggests the possession of “an identity that transcends social class, economic distinction; it is to belong to a world apart, to an intellectual and moral category, not of class, race and gender, but from a qualitative difference from the rest, an essential worldliness.”

As part of the mythology of la Parisienne, cosmopolitanism has the sense of “anyone” and “anywhere.” Louis Octave Uzanne remarks that few Parisiennes are Parisienne “by right of birth,” and a woman “may be Parisian by taste and instinct anywhere on French soil, and indeed in any town or country in the world.” The discourse of the cosmopolitan Parisienne continues into the twenty-first century. The November 1996 issue of *Paris Vogue* declared that one can be “Parisian by birth or at heart.” That French fashion house Yves Saint Laurent chose British model Kate Moss to be the face of its perfume “Parisienne,” launched worldwide in 2009, testifies to the cosmopolitanism of la Parisienne in the twenty-first century. The product description on YSL’s American website reads: “The new fragrance by Yves Saint Laurent is a sensuous bouquet to the woman whose heart belongs to Paris . . . even if home is elsewhere.” Claire Humphrey argues that the use of Moss in the advertising campaign demonstrates that “the identity of la Parisienne can extend internationally.”

On the French Riviera, Marianne and Penelope are Parisienne by both taste and instinct outside of Paris. The fact that they are played by foreign actresses, Austrian-born Schneider, and English-born Birkin, further underscores the cosmopolitanism of their characters. Schneider and Birkin also form part of a larger cohort of foreign actresses who have personified la Parisienne in French and Hollywood cinema, including Jean Seberg, Ingrid Bergman, Anna Karina, and Audrey Hepburn.

For the nineteenth century physiologist, the potential for any woman anywhere to become la Parisienne is not, however, absolute. Writing in 1897, Georges Montorgueil remarks: “The Parisienne is from everywhere but she only becomes the Parisienne in Paris.” The star personae and Parisienne profile of both Schneider and Birkin are structured around a
narrative of transformation which took place in Paris. Jane Birkin’s star persona is bound up with her relocation to Paris to audition for Pierre Grimblat’s Slogan (1969). It was on the set of the film she first met Serge Gainsbourg who played a significant role in the creation of the “Jane B.” myth. Annette and Luc Vezin characterise Birkin as Gainsbourg’s muse and refer to Gainsbourg as the “inventor of the erotic ingénue Jane B.” In a similar vein, Leila Wimmer remarks: “The Birkin-Gainsbourg axis was part of the configuration of her legend, a public image defined by its fashionable eroticism through its notorious duet ‘Je t’aime, moi non plus.’” In an interview in 1994, Birkin speaks of the Pygmalion-esque relationship she had with Gainsbourg, remarking: “I really wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Serge. I owe everything to him.” Similarly, it was Romy Schneider’s relocation to Paris and her subsequent meeting with Coco Chanel that transformed the actress from a “plumpish Austrian beauty into a sleek Parisienne.” In French Elegance in the Cinema, Dominique Lebrun notes that Chanel gave Schneider “lessons in comportment and elegance,” while Schneider herself remarked: “Coco Chanel . . . taught me dietary discipline: from an overfed little German girl, I became a Parisian.”

**Stardom**

Sarah Street argues that studying film costume “enhances an appreciation of cinema which is primarily visual. It also draws attention to complex and often contradictory narrative structures; questions of stardom . . .; and to representations of gender on screen.” In La Piscine the difference between the two women, and their star personae, is announced in their respective first appearances on screen. Marianne appears scantily clad in a black bikini her fleshy, bronzed body overtly on display. She plunges into the pool disturbing the calm and idle sunbathing of Jean-Paul. She moves confidently and sensually, aggressively pursuing Jean-Paul. Her sexuality is overt and confident, and her presence dominates the screen. Marianne and Jean-Paul’s sexually-charged embrace evokes Schneider and Delon’s off-screen romance and David Melville remarks that “on one level, the film is an unapologetic star vehicle for Delon and Schneider, his former girlfriend in his off-screen life.” Just as Marianne and Jean-Paul’s embrace recalls Romy Schneider and Alain Delon’s romance, Penelope’s wicker basket evokes Jane Birkin who carries the same wicker basket in the film Slogan and is seen carrying it in several photographs of the era.

In contrast to Marianne’s active presence, Penelope’s first appearance on screen is passive and subdued. She sits calmly in the passenger seat of her father’s sports car largely unnoticed during the initial exchange
between Marianne and Harry. When she does emerge from the car she is dressed like an unassuming schoolgirl in a long-sleeved white collared shirt tucked into an a-line black and white gingham mini-skirt, sensible low-heeled shoes, and carrying a wicker basket. She is softly spoken, shy and reserved, her long-legged, gamine appearance contrasts with Marianne. The difference in their personae is probably best emphasised with reference to the swimming pool itself. Whereas Marianne plunges unhesitatingly in the opening sequence of the film, Penelope declines an invitation to swim on the first day. On the following day we see her beside the pool tentatively dipping her toes in the water: “The improbably wide-eyed Birkin,” remarks David Melville, “as the one character with a few remnants of innocence, refuses to bathe in the pool but says she loves to swim in the sea.” Preference for the sea over the swimming pool aligns Birkin with “unadorned nature,” as opposed to Schneider’s “culture.” At the time of making La Piscine Birkin was not a fully fledged star but rather an emerging actress with her star persona still in the process of being formed. In contrast to the more or less unknown Birkin, Romy Schneider, alongside her co-stars Delon and Ronet, was a major film star in France.

In the star theory of Edgar Morin a distinction is made between star and actor: while a star is always an actor, an actor is not necessarily always a star. For Morin, the star is “more than an actor incarnating characters; he incarnates himself in them, and they become incarnate in him.” Morin also makes a distinction between who can be considered a “star” and who an “actor.” According to Morin, in order to be a star, an actor must in some way, play him or herself. “The star cannot appear when the reciprocal interpenetration of actor and hero fails to occur.” For Morin, stars impose “a unifying personality” upon their various roles.

For Vincendeau, the star is not merely the actor incarnating particular roles, and she uses the term “persona” to indicate this difference. Vincendeau defines a star’s persona with reference to three materials: performance; trade promotion and publicity; and commentaries and criticisms. The films, however, are always central. Vincendeau is less interested in the “true’ person behind the star” than she is in “how the perceived authentic individual informs the star’s image.” Similarly, the private lives of the stars are relevant only in so far as they contribute to their persona. Vincendeau defines “stars” as “celebrated film performers who develop a ‘persona’ or ‘myth’, composed of an amalgam of their screen image and private identities, which the audience recognizes and expects from film to film, and which in turn determines the parts they play.”

As part of their star personae, Schneider and Birkin also possess a
Parisienne iconographical profile, derived from their film roles, and supported by extra-cinematic media like fashion journals, interviews, press releases, and red carpet events. Primarily, however, an iconographical profile is the result of the cinematic image and its repetition within a particular cycle of films. The term iconographical profile is derived from Lawrence Alloway’s 1963 essay on the “Iconography of the Movies.” Alloway argues that the primary subject matter of iconography in its initial stage is the photographed world; that is, the physical world as it appears on film. This world includes the actor or star:

The star whose personality and status are created as a product, is, when photographed, continually present in a more powerful form than the individual roles he or she may be playing . . . Thus, even the “primary or natural subject matter” is not without its iconographical potential.  

Alloway introduced the concept of an iconographical profile with reference to a cycle of films starring Frank Sinatra in which Sinatra’s star power overwhelms the characters he plays. For Alloway the presence of an iconographical profile also demonstrates the “necessity for considering movies in groups not necessarily dependent upon directors.”

Schneider’s star persona comes to the fore in the overt and sophisticated eroticism of Marianne/Schneider, communicated primarily through her costuming, hair and makeup, and which is in contrast to the veiled eroticism of the bohemian ingénue Penelope/Birkin. What the costumes highlight is not only the difference between the characters but the different Parisienne iconographical profiles of the two stars.

**Romy Schneider**

The character of Marianne, her chic, well-groomed, mature sophisticated Parisian persona, is linked to how she is dressed as well as to Romy Schneider’s star persona. Schneider was one of France’s top female stars but also one of the country’s “best loved stars” of the 1960s and 1970s. A film actress in Vienna, Schneider met Delon on the set of Pierre Gaspard-Huit’s *Christine* (1958) and followed him to Paris. Vincendeau characterises Schneider’s star persona as possessing a “glamorous eroticism,” a “luminous beauty,” a “bewitching” attraction and a “moving fragility and beauty.” In particular, Vincendeau highlights the importance of Schneider’s “striking green eyes” as forming a key component of the “bewitching aspects of her attraction.” These aspects of her persona are brought into play in *La Piscine* in which Schneider is cast as the glamorous
and luminous beauty. Marianne’s spectacular floor-length backless evening gowns, in alternately shimmering, satin and flowing fabrics, epitomise Schneider’s glamorous eroticism. Her hair is either worn out and swept back from her face or tied back in a classic chignon or French twist, drawing attention to the face. Particular focus is given to her “bewitching” eyes, which are often accentuated with heavy eyeliner. Schneider’s dresses too suggest Courrèges’ desire to draw attention to her eyes, and include a vibrant green evening gown and a vivid lime green tunic.

According to Vincendeau, Schneider’s “modern beauty was seemingly made for 1960s fashion—and for lounging by the pool in a bikini.” During the 1970s, however, Schneider’s star persona attained a “more mature” and “vulnerable” quality, following a series of films by Claude Sautet. In films like Les choses de la vie (1970), Max et les ferrailleurs (1971), and César et Rosalie (1972), Schneider’s characters were “poised between the emancipated woman and the seductress shackled by beauty and tragic romance.” These aspects are already latent in La Piscine: the film’s ending has her “shackled” to Jean-Paul through their tragic romance, bound together ultimately by Harry’s murder. In the final shot of the film, Deray shoots Marianne and Jean-Paul from outside the villa they are standing in, the window frame serving the symbolic function of representing their shared imprisonment. This expressive combination of framing and compositional strategies emphasises the psychological or emotional focus of the scene. It is a complex framing device typical of film noir of which La Piscine is a postmodern descendent. For Kehr the final image “leaves the characters condemned to a life of repression and guilt.” The shot recalls, or perhaps even references, another doomed romantic couple, Jean (Jean Gabin) and Nelly (Michèle Morgan) from Marcel Carné’s Le Quai des brumes (1938), similarly shot through a window frame.

Jane Birkin

Jane Birkin’s offscreen persona forms a significant intertext for both narrative and costuming in La Piscine. Despite being English, Birkin has, primarily through her association with Gainsbourg, become “a national institution in the French cultural landscape.” She has been described as a “Gallic institution,” and a “French fashion icon.” Fraser-Cavassoni remarks that Birkin “has practically been adopted by the French as their own.”

Birkin first attracted the attention of photographer David Bailey, and was subsequently cast in Richard Lester’s The Knack (1965), Joe Massot’s Wonderwall (1968) and Michelangelo Antonioni’s Blow-up (1967), all of
which linked her image with that of 1960s Swinging London. The image of Birkin as “doe-eyed, mini-skirted, [and] colt-like,” was transposed to Paris when she relocated to France to star in Grimblat’s Slogan. Once in Paris, this image was further transformed into that of the Lolita-esque bohemian ingénue through her association with co-star Gainsbourg: their collaborations, in both film and music, earned Birkin “a rabid following in France, where she was dubbed L’Anglaise and widely adored for her gap-tooth grin and androgynous looks.” It was her meeting and subsequent love affair with Gainsbourg which really established the Birkin persona: “In Gainsbourg’s hands, Birkin became the muse of his songs and la petite anglaise with the vulnerable, slightly awkward sex-appeal and fractured French.” Birkin’s bad French became part of her star persona, and linked her to another cosmopolitan Parisienne, Anna Karina, whose accent was put to use by Godard in the construction of her star persona. Leila Wimmer remarks that Birkin’s foreign accent, along with her boyish appearance “gave all of her sentences the awkwardness of a child learning to speak and a resulting sense of fragility were accentuated in most of her films and records of the 1960s and 1970s.”

During the 1960s and 1970s, Birkin’s star persona was characterised as a mix of Lolita and femme fatale, the ingénue, the bohemian, and the androgynous femme-enfant. She has been described as an “ingénue sex-symbol,” an “erotic ingénue” and “insouciant Lolita,” “the perennial ingénue,” a “fashionable bohemian,” and a “perverse ingénue.” According to Leila Wimmer, however, the most prominent feature of Birkin’s star persona is her immature or childlike persona, which can be categorised as “shy, awkward, and slightly dumb, at times projecting a hint of perversity . . ., unthreatening to the male gaze.” For Jean-Paul, this is in contrast to the more mature, confident, sharp-witted, and often acerbic Marianne, for whom he himself is little more than a plaything.

In La Piscine, Penelope’s clothing, hair and make-up mirror closely the off-screen look of Birkin in the 1960s. Photographs of Birkin from the period depict her in mini-dresses, with long hair and a straight-cut fringe and carrying a wicker basket. Birkin has a similar bohemian femme-enfant “look” in Slogan, consisting of miniskirts and mini-dresses, jeans and white t-shirts and the trademark wicker basket. She represents, according to Wimmer, “the incarnation of a new kind of beauty.” Wimmer also notes how several of Birkin’s film roles during the 1960s and 1970s, including La Piscine, draw on Birkin’s star persona as the “fragile, provocative and rebellious adolescent.” This rebellion is expressed, in part, through Birkin’s costuming in La Piscine, and depicted most pointedly in the scene in which she eschews dressing in glamorous evening attire, choosing
instead jeans and a plain white t-shirt, with no attention to hair and make up. In the 1950s and into the 1960s, denim was the symbolic fabric of rebellious youth, and in *La Piscine* it is worn by both Birkin and Delon. In a key scene in the film, denim becomes a further symbol of their sexual indiscretion: when Penelope and Jean-Paul return from the beach, Penelope is shown wearing Jean-Paul’s denim jacket.

On the surface at least, *La Piscine* does not appear to constitute a Parisienne film. Deray’s film is not set in Paris nor are the lead actresses Parisian or French by birth. Yet it is precisely the fact that the film takes place outside Paris and the two lead female protagonists are played by foreign actresses that makes this a Parisienne film, cosmopolitanism being one of the key motifs in Parisienne iconography. Moreover, Courrèges’ costume design for the film imbues the characters of Marianne and Penelope with a distinctly Parisian chic. *La Piscine* exhibits a close attention to sartorial detail in its demarcation of characters. The way in which Penelope and Marianne’s costumes link the characters to the star personae of Birkin and Schneider, and to the wider cultural tradition and iconography of the chic and fashionable cosmopolitan Parisienne, demonstrates the way in which an intertextual approach can be useful in analysing film costume.

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NOTES


5 Rachel Moseley, *Fashioning Film Stars: Dress, Culture, Identity* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 1.


7 Sarah Street, *Costume and Cinema: Dress Codes in Popular Film* (London:
Wallflower Press, 2001), 53.


9 Ibid., 134.


12 Street, Costume and Cinema, 9.


15 Ibid., 3.

16 Ibid., 34.

17 Ibid., 17.


19 Ibid., 96.

20 Ibid., 96.

21 Paula Reed, Fifty Fashion Looks that Changed the 1960s (London: Conran Octopus, 2012), 40.


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30 Examples include: Felicien Rops’s Type Parisien (1867); Alfred Stevens’s La Parisienne (1880); Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s La Parisienne (1874); Edouard Manet’s La Parisienne (c.1875); Albert Besnard’s La Parisienne (1885); Henri Boutet’s Parisienne (c.1885); Rodolphe Piquet’s La Parisienne (1885); and Paul-César Helleu’s La Parisienne (c.1900).


36 Iskin, Modern Women, 185.


40 Cited in Rocamora, “Paris Capitale de la mode”, 49.


43 Georges Montorgueil, La Parisienne (Paris: Librairie L. Conquet, 1897), 1.


49 Ibid., 114.
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50 Street, *Costume and Cinema*, 11-12.

51 Melville, “Writing on Water”, 1.

52 Ibid., 2.


54 Ibid., 38.

55 Ibid., 38.


57 Ibid., viii.


59 Ibid., 17.


61 Ibid., 25.

62 Ibid., 25.

63 Ibid., 25.

64 Ibid., 25.

65 Ibid., 25.

66 Kehr, “Critic’s Choice”, 2.


68 Bremner, “La Petite Française”.


72 Ibid., 52.


74 Bremner, “La Petite Française”.


76 Bremner, “La Petite Française”.


79 Reed, *Fifty Fashion Looks*, 96.


Ibid., 226.

Ibid., 226.