

The Parisian popular as reactionary modernisation
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There is nothing new in noting that the Parisian popular was central to the classic French cinema of the 1930s and beyond. What may be new is to suggest that despite its tight association with village-like, rooted urban communities and disappearing forms of entertainment, it was, in its own falsely innocent way, a regressive and often reactionary way to deal with the modern and the transnational. What follows will attempt to support this claim, initially by turning to some recent analyses of national cinema in general and French cinema and culture in particular, and then through reference to some well-known films which enact this national popular. Several of the films chosen are located in a colonial space that helps the analyst strip the cosy community of its apparent innocence. I will show how representations of the colonial are used to sift out the national from the cosmopolitan and to engage with a chaotic and threatening modern while serving as convenient dumping grounds for negative images of urban space or of the common people previously associated with Paris itself. The dystopian, cosmopolitan modern and the utopian, nostalgic national are two sides of the same coin.

One of the dominant modes of analysis in cinema studies in recent years has been an analysis of film's relationship with the national. In a stimulating recent piece, Andrew Higson suggests that we need to move away from overarching visions of national cinema and focus on how, in a given historical context, certain strands or traditions circulating within a particular nation-state are granted the legitimising label of national. In other words, he is asking us to examine how cultural resources available at a given moment are mobilised to create boundaries and communities, how what in modern times is inevitably transnational, is arranged through exclusion and inclusion to buoy up the national.¹ Higson points out that, despite their claims to the contrary, national communities are inevitably diasporic due to their dependence on cultural circulation for their 'imagination' by geographically dispersed groups. They cannot exist without the very disembedding that they seek to deny. Higson comments: 'The public sphere of the nation and the discourses of patriotism are thus bound up in a constant struggle to transform the facts of dispersal, variegation and homelessness into the experience of rooted community' (Higson, 2000, 65). It might be argued of course that Higson is writing in the era of 'globalisation' and that his comments do not necessarily apply to the 1930s. However, acquaintance with the cultural forms circulating within and beyond French boundaries at the time will quickly convince us of the contrary.

Charles Rearick has provided a wide-reaching survey of French popular culture in the era of the two world wars that demonstrates how French 'popular' culture was traversed by

¹ . At a more general level, Jonathan Friedmann has warned against the facile celebration of the hybrid due to its reinforcement of the idea of a pure original. Friedmann points out that all modern cultures are inevitably hybrid, and that what needs to take place is an examination of how cultural resources are mobilised in different contexts, by different groups and under different constraints to produce and maintain group identities (Friedmann, 1999).

tensions between the international and the apparently national. He describes how the music hall, with its brilliant costumes, the latest songs, and its cosmopolitan performers and audience became the show piece of Parisian life, one that celebrated the modern face of Paris but also the global modern, so that archotypically Parisian performers such as Mistinguett or Maurice Chevalier had to carefully negotiate a blend of the Parisian and of the cosmopolitan modern, blending sophisticated elegance with the authenticating popular. Rearick also charts the existence of more humble and less cosmopolitan popular forms which survived in the more modest café-concerts and in street song and which also reached out from Paris to touch the national public through cinema, radio, press and song sheets. These forms drew on a recycled repertoire of familiar types - Parisian shop girls, manual workers, pimps, prostitutes and petty criminals. To the degree that it ever might have existed (and it is a very big might), the reassuringly stable and familiar world thus evoked was one that was disappearing in post-1920s France due to rapid economic growth, internal migration and immigration. Nonetheless, this backward-looking Parisian popular became a shared image of national community through its dissemination to a national (and international) public (Rearick, 1997, 94-125).²

Despite its nostalgic cosiness, the nationalised Parisian popular was far from innocent. As Rearick notes, performers' nostalgia tinged celebration of a rooted popular culture could easily feed into xenophobic attacks on the cosmopolitan (119)³. Faced with foreign competition from within and without, the French cultural industry and French performers were increasingly tempted to play the nationalist card, especially in the 1930s, a time of economic slump, increasing racism and mounting international tension.

Focusing on the narrower arena of cinema, but still with impressively broad coverage, Ginette Vincendeau has described how the Parisian popular was enacted in French films of the 1930s as a shared national identity. She shows that the cinema of the period obsessively depicted group leisure activities and on-screen entertainments with diegetic audiences to construct positive images of community. While the focus in some films was on the up-market 'cosmopolitan' music-halls, night clubs and casinos, others were located in popular locales such as the café and focused on traditional forms like street-singing and the café-concert. Many films brought the two into collision, with the homely, rooted local winning out over the negatively connoted (dangerous, decadent) cosmopolitan modern. Vincendeau concludes by noting that by bringing together the luxurious and the humble, French cinema was able to reach out for a diverse audience, thus maintaining its broad popular appeal. One could also conclude by suggesting that images of the rootless, cosmopolitan modern and the rooted Parisian traditional were interlinked responses to the apparent threat of the new. Together they mobilised the transnational cultural resources in circulation at a specific moment to generate a

² . Along the same lines, Alastair Phillips writes, 'By the time sound cinema in the 1930s was actually able to insert a diegetic audience into the 'live' performance of music-hall entertainers ... 'Paris' - and particularly popular Paris - had by then come to connote France, embodying the myth of a deeply-rooted community of origins' (Phillips, 1999, 264).

³ . see also Schor (1985) both for an overview of racism and xenophobia in interwar France and for details of hostility directed towards foreign performers. Schor describes, 'conspicuous initiatives taken by French musicians who, in groups of several hundreds, disrupted the performances of foreign orchestras in establishments on the *grands boulevards* at the end of 1931' (561, my translation).

regressive and exclusionary response to the experience of modernity, with the cosmopolitan bearing the negative weight of the new while the nostalgic popular offered *apparent* flight from it. Apparent flight because, although it seemed to provide continuity with the past through its evocation of disappearing cultural forms and long-established modes of sociability, the popular's production and dissemination as image of nation within and beyond France's borders and its self-definition against the cosmopolitan showed its absolute dependency on the uprooted cultural modernity that it sought to deny.⁴

The Parisian popular and the rootless modern

I will now consider specific examples in order to illustrate what has been said so far, focusing specifically on the Parisian popular's disavowed role as a discourse of modernisation. Where better to begin than René Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930), an internationally successful enactment of Paris as urban village that focuses obsessively on street-level interaction, traditional sociabilities and participatory entertainment. The film's central character is a street singer who peddles songs in sheet form even as he teaches them to the audience he gathers around himself. The film inadvertently enacts the contradiction at the heart of the Parisian popular by showing a capital that at once seems to have a spontaneously shared folk culture rooted in traditional forms of street level sociability and one that can only knit together by acquiring a common culture from an embryonic commercial producer. The communal popular thus inevitably summons its own counter-image into existence by evoking a city of potentially isolated individuals and anonymous masses. The moment that best encapsulates this is when a man and a woman, living one over the other, in anonymous proximity, are drawn together because the singing of one traverses the floor and draws the other into a duo.⁵ The song that has been given to them to form the core of their shared community simultaneously highlights their preceding separation. The other key song from the film, 'C'est pas comme ça', can be read in a very similar way. Praising love (a key Parisian and national value as well as an exemplary mode of human connectedness), it begins by evoking the solitude of the isolated (loveless) individual.

The film also features a foreign woman who is invited by the hero to join the singing and thus become part of the long-standing (but still emergent) cultural community of the capital, on condition of course that she sing the song in which the local people seem to recognize themselves. Her presence in the film is crucial. An isolated and vulnerable individual as the film begins, she becomes the bearer of the rootlessness that hangs over

⁴ . My argument here is prefigured to an extent by a piece Elizabeth Ezra wrote on *Zouzou*, a Josephine Baker vehicle. Drawing on the work of Tony Bennett, Ezra suggests that film took over from exhibitions, museums and arcades the function of making the world visible while simultaneously making the spectating crowd visible to itself. She suggests that, 'whereas other entertainment forms had fashioned communities based on distinctions within French society, film shifted the terms of differentiation to an international level.' (Ezra, 1996, 155)

⁵ . At a more general level, Comolli suggests that by enacting our desire to see our narrative surrogates enter into contact with the urban other, cinema inevitably produces an image of anonymity, summoning up the surfeit of others with whom our surrogate cannot enter into contact. The city of (festive) community that we desire to see is thus always accompanied by its opposite, the city of the soulless mass (Comolli, 1994, 24-27)

the others while confirming their shared identity.⁶ She also gives the film its (inter)national dimension, thus smoothing over the double-jump it needs to make to transfer street community to the city and then to the nation. The first leap is produced by shots which move from the singing street to the city's rooftops, thus constituting the capital as a mass-produced agglomeration of folk communities. The shots' crucial work is reinforced at the beginning and end of the film by the title song which continues smoothly even as the spatial parameters shift dramatically and which thus makes its own key contribution to the dissemination to all the roofs of the capital of the artisanal work done at street level.⁷ The singer himself is a key figure in the film's alchemy, its transformation of mass-produced, industrial base metal into communal gold. His spatial and social proximity to the common people helps elide the difference between a genuine folk culture and an ersatz one, while the people's dual role as performer and audience moves them almost imperceptibly from cultural production to consumption.

Sous les toits de Paris was reproached for its anachronistic representation of an old and vanishing Paris (Rearick, 123). What I have tried to show is that behind its apparent nostalgia lies a discourse of modernisation. The co-presence of culturally homogenous village-like national community and displacement, diversity and urban anonymity show that the film is in fact responding to the new by massifying, nationalising and thus modernising the idealised old. But it does so in a way that means that the new can only ever be perceived as threat and loss, as destruction of the same identity that is generated in response to it. Its disavowed modernisation is thus largely regressive. It would set a pattern that would continue with variation throughout the decade.

However, one could also argue that it helped to position the common people as cultural actors and central figures in the national community, and thus constituted a considerable advance on their habitual depiction as marginal, dangerous or exotic elements. The film seems to make this point itself, firstly by involving the hero with some petty criminals before affirming his role at the heart of the community, and secondly by inviting the popular characters to laugh at the bourgeois who had come to look voyeuristically upon them, thus inviting them to look back at those who had defined them and to engage with their own reflection in the other's eyes.

But the Parisian popular could be enacted very differently, and in a way that revealed, perhaps unwittingly, its ersatz nature and more sinister side. Renoir's film *la Nuit du carrefour* (1932), the first adaptation of a Simenon novel, turned its back on Clair's stagy evocation of an apparently stable popular to show a distinctly modern vision of a France where motor transport and communications have created a rootless and opaque world which slices through traces of a more traditional and stable rural past without providing any bridge to it. The film's prime location is at a kind of 'non-place' (to borrow Marc

⁶ . It is worth reminding ourselves that at the time when the film was made, one in two Parisians had been born outside a capital whose contours and composition shifted substantially between the wars (see Cohen, 1999, 87-88)

⁷ . Comolli suggests that the pan constitutes the city as a unity by implying continuity between what we have seen and what we are yet to see. He notes how discontinuity at the level of the sound track can disrupt the visual uniformity of the pan and can thus rescue the city's invisible diversity. Clair's film uses horizontal and vertical pans in conjunction with sound to generate uniformity (1994, 37-38).

Augé's term (see Augé, 1992)) of an earlier modernity, a crossroads about 30 kilometres from Paris and not far from a village which the film refrains from showing. Two irreconcilable spatio-temporalities are juxtaposed by a foreground of railway, highway, motor vehicles and telephone cables and a background of plodding horses, carts and agriculture. The former connects to the rapid flux of the modern, the latter to the predictable local. Around the crossroads live three groups: firstly, a garage owner, his wife and their mechanics; secondly, a travelling insurance agent and his wife; lastly, a Danish couple, who present themselves as brother and sister. The groups are all associated with movement in a national or transnational frame. Each has something to hide and their theatrical deceptions add to the sense of unreality created by the rain swept and often nocturnal location shooting to give an unsettling mobility to the décor itself. This is a world that has lost its solidity.

Following the discovery of the body of another foreigner, a Dutch jewel dealer, Maigret is called in. The French characters all seek to blame the foreigners, with the manual workers of the garage and the apparently respectable bourgeois insurance agent forming a cross-class, national alliance against the cosmopolitan Danish aristocrat, who is in fact the only honest character at the crossroads. What is of particular interest from our point of view is how the garage owner performs a sentimentalised Parisian Frenchness as a way of deflecting suspicion away from himself. Admitting childhood peccadilloes, he vaunts his status as self-made *petit patron*, offers Maigret an *apéritif*, plays an accordion, goes to dine in Paris with his companions and talks nostalgically of his youth, thus evoking exactly the kind of traditional sociabilities and cultural nostalgia that Vincendeau locates at the heart of the Parisian popular. But here the popular is unmasked as a knowing cultural performance in the service of criminal activities that feed off the disembedded modern by using the garage as a distribution centre for goods stolen elsewhere. As if to confirm the point, the garage owner's last appearance is in a car speeding away from Paris with guns blazing, somewhere in a transnational space between the *apache* and the gangster.

One particular feature of the film is worth dwelling on, its use of music and, in particular, one tune that recurs repeatedly. The tune is claimed by the garage owner as a link to his youth. It is also mobilised in a rather more sophisticated, orchestral version by Else, the Danish woman, to create a sentimental link to her childhood. This double use both highlights and makes impossible the use of cultural forms to establish rooted national origins. Despite appearances to the contrary, the tune is part of the transnational flux of the present, one more mobile element in a world where goods, people and meanings circulate, and where the original is an effect of the performance of a copy. Cultural mobility is also emphasised by the modernist artwork done by the expatriate Dane for Paris fashion houses. His work (the product of a decidedly international artistic movement) undermines the national purity of one of France's most celebrated industries. The film pointedly refuses the populist move of opposing the internationalism of the elite to the more 'genuine' rootedness of the popular.⁸

⁸ . In a fascinating piece of close formal analysis, Emmanuelle André suggests that *La Nuit du Carrefour* uses the Dane's three sketches to signal a set of key, recurrent visual motifs that combine with the repeated tune - a tango, another migrant form - to organise the film 'musically' (André, 2000). If we accept this

La Nuit du carrefour enters into dialogue with the populist strain in French culture, deliberately playing with and in the process destabilising some of the expectations it had helped create. This should not be read to imply that it breaks with all convention in its embrace of the poetry of the rootless modern. It turns the foreign jewel dealer (whose name, Goldberg, implies that he is Jewish) into a thief and centres the enigma stereotypically on the exotic woman of dubious morality. By seeing the prostitute from Hamburg and Copenhagen beneath her veneer of respectability, Maigret unlocks the mystery and begins to pin down the international coordinates of the story space. He himself provides a way to reconcile the exhilaration of the new and the safety of the familiar. His solid slowness and still observation are combined with the tools of the new (the fast car, telephone and telegraph) to capture the gang and to bring fixity to the evanescent world of the film.⁹

Somewhere between the cosmopolitan and the traditional; the colonial

As I suggested in the introduction to this piece, the colonial space so favoured by the French cinema of the 1930s can be fruitfully considered as a key site in which the tensions between the traditional and the new, the rootless and the rooted and the cosmopolitan and the national could be worked out, in a way that engaged with key experiences of the modern while strongly reaffirming cultural boundaries between the national and the foreign.

I will begin by commenting upon Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937), one of the great classics of French populism and of colonial cinema. A gallic gangster film that fed off the Hollywood vogue of the early 1930s and inspired its own dream factory remakes, it was tightly implicated in the flow of cultural forms that it would simultaneously showcase and disavow through its dystopian portrayal of a cosmopolitan Algiers and its idealisation of an ethnically purified Parisian popular. In other words, it is a prime example of the organisation of the transnational to reassert the exclusionary national. It foregrounds Jean Gabin, the archetypal common Frenchman of the 1930s, casting him as Pépé, a notorious but charismatic gangster who dominates the Casbah.

The Casbah is a catch-all space. In some key ways, it is a throwback to a lost Paris. Its tight network of concentric alleys and its communal solidarity suggest the pre-Haussmanian city and serve as a protective fortress for the popular French in exile. Its depiction of the Casbah as dirty, over-crowded, ill-lit and vermin and vice ridden recall the classic negative stereotypes of popular Paris from the nineteenth century novel. The excursion by Gaby, the Parisian tourist, into the lower depths in the company of a policeman is a classic narrative ploy in the fiction of the city (Schlör, 1998, 124). But at the same time, the Casbah is used to provide an image of distinctly modern transnational flows and cultural mixity. The wealthy French tourists, unsure whether they are in North Africa or Asia, seem to have lost their moorings. The Casbah itself brings together Arabs, Africans, Asians and displaced Europeans in a mix that the film presents with distinctly

reading, we would conclude that, at the level of form and style, the film operates its own decidedly modernist and transnational fusion of popular and élite forms.

⁹. For a more developed analysis of this film, see O'Shaughnessy (2000, 84-86)

sinister overtones. Cut adrift from its roots, the Parisian popular is adrift in a sea of threatening otherness, one more uprooted element amongst many.

Yet paradoxically, it is through this enactment of dystopian cultural displacement that the film produces a purified and rooted vision of the popular. Recreated at a distance, as flight from an oppressive present, old Paris takes on the rosy glow of nostalgia. Dumping its baggage of negative stereotypes and its cosmopolitan elements in colonial space, it is reinvented as cosy, festive community, notably in Fréhel's famous rendition of 'Où est-il donc?' a hit song from 1925 (Rearick, 1997, 101 and Vincendeau, 1998, 22-25). Fréhel's performance is worth looking at in detail to tease out the complex cultural work it undertakes. The singer, with her ravaged face, places herself beside a poster of her younger self at the *Scala* music hall in Paris, while playing a record of her own earlier performance for Pépé as they both ponder separation from their home city. She soon joins in, adding a live performance to the recording and cranking up the pathos of an already mournful piece. In some ways what she does might remind us of the street singer's bridging role in *Sous les toits de Paris* as she enacts sound cinema's apparent power to combine the intimacy of the communal popular with the reproducibility of the industrial (the record and the photograph), while hiding the latter behind the former. Like in the earlier film (although without its 'generous' assimilationism), the presence of the foreign is enough to (inter)nationalise the rooted Parisian popular and to constitute the French as tightly bounded national community in a space of transnational flows and threatening urban diversity. These flows are doubly essential to Fréhel's performance of rooted Frenchness - only because recordings, images and people travel can she mount her touching performance in fictional exile and only because of the co-presence of the ethnic other can the performance be nationalised through the mass production of the communal. Despite its saturating nostalgia, Fréhel's performance is a knowing intervention in the modern. Through its tying of an earlier hit song into the personal dramas of the characters, it teaches the French to organise collectivised intimate memory around commercial culture while embedding their role as consumers deep in their collective identity.¹⁰

Gaby and the other wealthy tourists are already accomplished consumers. Gaby herself with her silk clothes and expensive jewels is an incarnation of luxurious elegance. Her companions - one of whom is a champagne magnate - embody frivolous decadence. Pépé's relationship with Gaby and her own popular roots fleetingly seem to promise a utopian fusion of cosmopolitan extravagance and rooted, popular community. Yet the two are mutually exclusive as is proven when Gaby departs on a liner leaving the arrested Pépé on the quayside. The film's preferences for the more 'genuine' pleasures of the humble popular are made abundantly clear, yet it also offers a popular audience vicarious consumption of unattainable wealth and exotic spectacle, even while reassuring them of their own superiority.

¹⁰ . Donald and Donald emphasise the importance of shared spectatorship in the emergence of a public from a mass. They write, 'The mass becomes a public partly through the experience of producing memory for its own consumption' (2000, 126)

Pépé le Moko ultimately proposes two ways to live the disembedded modern, tourism and exile, overwriting the frivolous pleasure of the first with the tragic angst of the second, while profiting from the appeal of both. It is easy to be seduced by its sentimentality and apparently harmless nostalgia for lost popular community. It is perhaps as well to remember the rage shown by the archetypal common Frenchman, Gabin, when Arab music is played, a rage that reprises a similar outburst in his earlier vehicle, *La Bandera* (1935), in which a group of singing Italians were the target of his wrath and in which an idealised lost Paris was played off against a dystopian Barcelona and alienating exile with the Spanish foreign legion in Morocco. That film, like *Pépé*, tied an earlier hit (the pre-war 'Sous les ponts de Paris' (see Rearick, 1997, 112-113)) into a story of loss and exile, mirroring the later film's embedding of commercial culture into an exclusionary collective memory and identity. Both film recognise that the past is shut off, but both use an image of it as present ethnic memory to carve a deeply regressive national community out of cosmopolitan mixity.

I would like to complete this section by considering another film which approaches the cosmopolitan modern through a story of exile, Feyder's classic, *Le Grand jeu*, a film from 1933. The film is of particular interest because, while it partly fits the populist mould, it also problematizes some of its key moves. Not initially centred on the popular, it is the story of a privileged but decadent young man whose embezzlement obliges him to join the foreign legion, giving up his modernist house (whose empty spaces suggest isolation), his fast car (associated with reckless excitement) and his companion (whose egotism points up the moral emptiness of what they share). The modernity of what he abandons suggests his flight might be temporal as well as spatial, an attempt to flee from the broken promises of the wealthy new into the social solidarity of an earlier order and a different social group. In the Arab town where his unit is based, he meets a singer-prostitute who exactly resembles the other woman. Unlike her sophisticated and fashionable predecessor, this common Frenchwoman is loyal and suitably subservient. Although these 'positive' qualities suggest the superiority of the popular over the elite, her amnesia prevents her voicing the memories of Paris that he craves and underscores both traumatic separation from the past and the impossibility of uniting around shared loss to constitute the national community of memory so prominent in the previous films considered.

The other Europeans in the film are brought together in an exile that paradoxically separates them, each being fixated on a different place. The Germans sing of *heimat* while the Russian carries a bag of Russian soil and other fragments from his homeland. The cosmopolitan space that they share is figured consequently as both uprooting exile and as emergent transnational community, with the former outweighing the potential positivity of the latter. But, unlike in *Pépé* and *La Bandera*, the European cosmopolitan is granted positive connotations and is not used as a pure negative to confirm the positivity of the national popular.

The film's main action centres on an Arab town that is a parody of a France that is simultaneously absent and present. Its two main locations, typically places of popular French sociability, are a dowdy bar and a seedy café concert, named respectively 'La

Normandie' and 'Les Folies Parisiennes,' suggesting a lost rural Frenchness and Parisian gaiety, but both are characterised by cosmopolitan mixing while the latter significantly has a foreign owner. Even though a certain cross-class French community emerges in each under the impetus of popular sociability and informality, neither excludes other Europeans. Although cultural forms and national communities have become detached from bounded spaces, the French popular seems to retain some of its capacity for community formation. But this is signalled as an ersatz popular, not the purified, remembered popular of other films considered. It floats alongside the frivolous modern as another cultural possibility in the swirling chaos of the present, a chaos which is associated (notably in the bravura title sequence) with the noisy, multi-directional flow of the colonised who are resolutely excluded from the European community of exile. Although its community is more open than that of *Pépé* it still lapses into the same colonial racism, clinging on to one rigid boundary even as it acknowledges the porosity of others.

As the film draws to a close, an inheritance seems to offer an escape, a way to combine new and old, popular and privileged. The hero dresses his dowdy companion in luxurious clothes, and buys them tickets on a liner returning to France. But, before departure, he meets his old companion again, now in the company of a wealthy Arab prince, and part of an uprooted class for whom the world is essentially a tourist space. This encounter will seal his fate as he will return to die heroically as the cards of *le grand jeu* had predicted. It also brings together again the two versions of modern cultural displacement that circulate over the films considered, exile and tourism, the former lived tragically as uprooting and loss, the latter in a comfortable but decadent manner. The films' preference for the popular means that exile is privileged over tourism with the consequence that displacement and loss again outweigh the vicarious consumption of the exotic and the luxurious. The virtue of *Le Grand jeu* is that it refuses to construct an ethnic community of purified memory, acknowledging through the trope of the main female character's amnesia, that the two leads cannot share in a national popular that is lost to the woman and inaccessible to the man because he is from another class.

Conclusion

1937, the year when *Pépé* hit the screens, was also the year of one of the great exhibitions that Paris had been hosting periodically since the previous century. This one was the site for a confrontation not only between rival nationalisms (the USSR and Nazi Germany most famously) but also, as Cohen notes (1999, 186-193), between different ways to reconcile the old and the new and to preserve the roots of national identity while simultaneously modernising it. The official line of the organisers was to promote the regional. The 17 regional pavilions allowed architects to draw on traditional regional elements (architecture, folklore, food), reworking the old to produce the new. Le Corbusier's *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux* took a less conciliatory line, proposing a radical restructuring of the capital, while the city's authorities adopted a distinctly conservative position by promoting the capital's artisan tradition and taking a clear anti-machinist line (Cohen, 186). In an overview of different works on modernity and French national identity, Herrick Chapman provides a summary of what Shanny Peer has written on the same exhibition. Peer notes the novelty of the efforts made at this exhibition to

highlight a traditional France alongside the new, a feature which could be seen to confirm the kind of regressive search for a 'true' France that Lebovics (1992) identifies at this time across the political spectrum. But Peer also notes how the regional pavilions attempted to open the regions onto the modern and to integrate their products and folklore into a national and international consumer economy. They could thus be seen as part of an attempt to find a specifically French form of modernisation (Chapman, 1999, 294-297). Modernity was not, however, easily constrained by the national. Writing in *L'Architecture aujourd'hui* in 1937, Maurice Barret suggested that universal exhibitions had become an anachronism due to the opening of world markets. He explained:

The department stores and well-stocked bazaars are so many daily exhibitions. The press with its countless newspapers, magazines and journals, the radio and the cinema are powerful and instantaneous means of disseminating every novelty and invention to the four corners of the earth. Besides, existence has become so complex that it is no longer possible to try to represent the universality of human activity (cited in Cohen, 1999, 163 (my translation)).

Throughout the decade, French cinema also participated in its way in the debate over how to reconcile the old and the new within a national frame. In some ways it can be seen to have effected a move similar to that which Peer associates with the regional pavilions. Promoting a stable, village-like Paris and traditional entertainments and sociabilities, it seemed to offer a reassuring continuity with the past which could appeal to rural and urban alike and disguised the work of cultural modernisation that was under way. Mobilising its then unique power to mass-produce intimacy cinema effected a standardisation and dissemination of the cosy popular as national identity. Legitimising the incorporation of previously excluded social groups into cultural consumption, confirming their place at the heart of the national community (but not, of course, on their terms), offering them a certain reflexivity (a sense of looking at their own image and of embedding their experience in shared cultural memory) it could be seen to be pursuing a process of democratization, as described by Miriam Hansen. Hansen suggests that cinema created the possibility of, in Kracauer's words, 'the self-representation of the masses subject to the process of mechanization'. It created this possibility, she says, not only because it attracted and 'made visible to itself' an emergent, heterogeneous and previously despised mass public, but also because it provided an 'aesthetic horizon for the experience of industrial mass society' (Hansen, 2000, 342). What I hope I have shown through the examples I have chosen (and through my readings of more wide-reaching research by Rearick and Vincendeau) is that the populist mode that dominated French cinema in the 1930s likewise provided an imaginary space for the encounter with the industrial and mobile modern, as repeatedly enacted in cultural consumption, displacement (lived as exile or tourism) and cosmopolitan mixity. But what I have also tried to show is that this same disavowed modernisation was also deeply regressive. The reflexivity it granted was counterweighted by its idealisation of rooted community and folkloric cultural forms in a way that could only view the cosmopolitan new as threat and loss and which immobilised the popular even as it partially undid its exclusion.

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