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Eric Smoodin, *Paris in the Dark: Going to the Movies in the City of Light, 1930-1950*. Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2020. xiv + 203 pp. \$99.95 (cl). ISBN 978-1-478-00611-4; \$25.95 (pb). ISBN 978-1-478-00692-3.

Review by Steven Ungar, University of Iowa.

Eric Smoodin's *Paris in the Dark* is an archive-based account of Parisian film distribution patterns and exhibition venues between 1930 and 1950. Its scale of geographic detail is resolutely local. Which is to say that its treatment of Parisian film culture from the transition to sound through the emergence of post-World War II cinephilia prioritizes the where, when, and how of filmgoing over formal analyses that study films as texts. In so doing, Smoodin situates his project within a shift in film studies from cinematic representations of the city to the movements through urban spaces of films as objects of culture. This shift, Smoodin argues, has led to significant questions about a city and its films: "How common was it for a single film to play in more than one cinema in the same neighborhood? What, if any, were the predictable distribution and exhibition patterns across the city? What were the connections between films and the cinemas and the neighborhoods in which they played?" (p. 7). These questions generate a critical thesis to be tested throughout the book's six chapters flanked by an introduction and a conclusion. This thesis is that understanding of national cinema based at the point of production through analyses of specific films should also consider their points of reception, "the ways in which audiences participated in film culture, the opportunities they had to see films, and the broad discourses about movies from such media as print journalism" (p. 6). While this thesis has implications for the study of national cinema from the ground up, attention to specific venues and local spaces is one of *Paris in the Dark's* signature strengths.

Smoodin underscores a personal--autobiographical--dimension of the local when he writes in his book's first sentence that as a graduate student in Paris walking home from classes in 1980 and 1981, he passed a cinema along the rue du Temple that never changed its bill. (The film is Fritz Lang's 1959 *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* [*The Tiger of Eschnapur*].) He also recalls buying the hard-print pamphlet *Pariscope* every Wednesday to check its listings of the large-screen venues and showtimes of films playing in Paris and surrounding suburbs during the coming week. Both anecdotes describe minor rituals that locate filmgoing in a specific place and time. They soften an account whose grounding in quantifiable detail might otherwise produce a drier result. I am thinking here of *The Classic French Cinema, 1930-1960* by Colin Crisp, whose useful discussions of political economy, industrial structure, and audience formations display little of the attachment to its subject that Smoodin's account exudes from start to finish.[1]

A major model for Smoodin's walking tour of Parisian movie houses is Michel de Certeau's "Marches dans la ville" chapter in the first volume of *L'Invention du quotidien* [2] which starts atop one of the World Trade Center towers before proceeding to street level. De Certeau's chapter recalls the start of Guillaume Apollinaire's 1913 poem "Zone" whose narrator looks down at Paris from atop the Eiffel Tower before walking alone through the city streets below. Well before de Certeau and Apollinaire, the figure of the urban stroller (*flâneur*) in Charles Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863) remains the key antecedent in this lineage.

Smoodin's main archival source is *Pour Vous*, a sixteen-page weekly tabloid whose 603 issues between 1928 and 1940 listed films screenings in commercial, ciné-club, and art house venues. *Pour Vous's* grouping of individual sites and programs by *arrondissement* allows Smoodin to map and track the movement of films and filmgoers across Paris. When he notes (p. 8) that *Pour Vous's* founder, Léon Bailby, also served as director the right-wing daily *L'Intransigeant*, he acknowledges the ideological charge affecting interwar cultural practices during a highpoint era of illustrated print journalism. This ideological charge will grow throughout the decade and Vichy era to follow.

An opening chapter set during 1931-33 provides an overview of exhibition practices during the transition from silent film (*cinéma muet*) toward various degrees of sound and talking film (*cinéma sonore et parlant*). Crisply worded passages on subtitling, dubbed, and multiple-language releases alternate with practical information on exhibition patterns. Smoodin cites a 1932 review in the film weekly *Hebdo* of Leontine Sagan's 1931 *Jeunes filles en uniforme* (*Mädchen in Uniform*), which observes that the film "is in German, but the subtitles by Colette make it easy to follow the action, which is already so involving" (p. 26). The effect elevates Colette, on account of her efforts as translator, to the rank of co-author. Contrasting the floor shows in some first-run venues (*cinémas d'exclusivité*) to the intimacy of low-capacity neighborhood cinemas illustrates the co-existence of multiple film cultures. Another perspective of the transition to sound centers on the early sound-era celebrities Maurice Chevalier and Marlene Dietrich, whose roles in talkies enhanced a shared cosmopolitanism over and above the former's "Frenchness" and the latter's "Europeanness." For Smoodin, Chevalier's 1929 film role in *La Chanson de Paris* (*Innocents of Paris*) recast the one-time king of the music hall as the new king of talking (and singing) films.

These details advance Smoodin's exploration of commercial distribution and exhibition patterns beyond simple exposition. They also support distinctions between the spectacle-based experiences of films screened in commercial venues and the highbrow culture of the museum and concert prevalent in ciné-club settings. When Smoodin notes that ciné-clubs were less likely to screen recent commercial releases than retrospectives, silent-era, avant-garde, and censored films, the implication is that ciné-clubs reinforced director-based *auteurism* as well as emergent notions of French cinema's cultural heritage (*patrimoine*). Perhaps nowhere was this emergent sense of heritage more evident than in the Cercle du Cinéma, founded in 1934 by Henri Langlois and Georges Franju, that evolved two years later into the Cinémathèque Française (p. 42). As Smoodin concludes, ciné-clubs active between the late 1920s and the start of World War II sought "to explain, preserve, and expand an aesthetic of cinema that could contain both Hollywood commercial movies and obscure experimental ones" (p. 57).

The eclectic programming that Smoodin attributes to interwar ciné-clubs and art houses (*cinémas d'art et d'essai*) also made them vulnerable to various kinds of protest and violence. Much as the political right of the 1930s militated in support of a return to "la France aux Français," dailies

such as the neo-Royalist *L'Action française* lamented the influx of Hollywood product. Citing press coverage of a December 1929 screening of *Fox Folies* (a.k.a. *Fox Movietone Follies of 1929*) at the newly reopened Moulin Rouge movie house, Smoodin notes audience calls for French-language films produced in France (pp. 76-79). This choice of venue is all the more relevant because the Moulin Rouge cabaret founded in 1889 was the birthplace of the can-can dance revue. Smoodin concludes that a barely visible type of evidence documents the occasional yet serious danger of going to the movies in Paris. What begins with the violent 1930 protests by the rightwing Ligue des patriotes during initial screenings of Luis Buñuel's *L'Âge d'or* at the Studio 28 yields to Nazi policy a decade later to stage a seemingly benign and celebrity-based occupation of Parisian film cultures (p. 99). At the same time, German officials fooled no one when they set aside prime exhibition venues such as the Marignan on the Champs-Élysées and the Rex on the Boulevard Poissonnière as *Soldatenkinos* (soldiers' cinemas) at which attendance was reserved for members of the German military (p. 106). The point is that soft censorship and hard violence varied not only from venue to venue, but also according to the evolving interwar, wartime, and postwar models of culture.

Among French movie stars active during the 1940-44 Vichy regime, Smoodin returns to Chevalier, whose 1941 visit to Berlin to perform for French soldiers at the Alten Grabow prisoner-of-war camp (p. 111) where he had spent two years after being captured during World War I suggests the complexity of the occupation period with which purges (*épurations*) in early postwar France contended. The 1945-46 screenings of Jean Gabin's 1930s star turns in *Pépé le Moko*, *Les Bas-fonds*, and *La Bête humaine* (p. 135) attest to the actor's ongoing status as a constant of Parisian film culture. Having left for Hollywood following his lead role in Jean Grémillon's *Remorques* (1941), Gabin's return to Parisian screens amounted to a symbolic repudiation of Vichy-era programming. The same holds for Gabin's *Quai des brumes* and *Remorques* costar Michèle Morgan, whose refusal to return to France after leaving for Hollywood Smoodin describes as an act of resistance against Nazi efforts to normalize Vichy-era filmgoing.

Smoodin's chapter on the 1940-44 Occupation shifts focus somewhat from distribution patterns and exhibition venues to German efforts to normalize film culture in France by setting press coverage of French-born celebrities Danielle Darrieux and Viviane Romance alongside that of the German-born star Brigitte Horney (p. 108). To this end, Smoodin reproduces a full page from the January 1, 1941 daily *Le Matin* whose layout places a photo-portrait of Horney in an upper corner, where her image dominates those of actresses Zarah Leander, Marika Rökk, and Ilse Werner (p. 100). He also does well to mention the Nazi-run production studio, Continental Films, whose name gave no hint of its origins and mission.

Smoodin organizes his account of the 1944-54 Liberation and early postwar periods around commercial programming that flooded French screens with American product banned under Nazi occupation, alongside the emergence of state organizations such as the Centre national de la cinématographie (CNC). Finally, Smoodin explores how the evolving patterns of exhibition relied on the return of interwar celebrities as well as the emergence of statistic-driven data on the evolving marketplace of domestic and foreign films. When Smoodin notes (pp. 136-37) that press coverage linked Michèle Morgan's return to France to a new (and presumably French) hairdo, he identifies the growing presence of film celebrities in advertising and merchandising grounded in material consumption.

Smoodin usefully traces the number of movie theaters in Paris and surrounding suburbs. By the author's calculations, these start with around 200 in 1931 and 275 in October 1945, with a peak of 357 in 1954 before a steep drop to eighty-two in 2015. Despite this drop, I state for the record that a November 2017 screening I attended at L'Arlequin cinema on the rue de Rennes featured a digitally remastered version of Nicole Vedrès's 1947 documentary *Paris mil neuf cent*, as well as a lively post-screening *débat*. I also recall a 2002 Tuesday night program at the Cinéma du Panthéon on the rue Victor-Cousin where a screening of Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *Abouna* was followed by a discussion with the director. In May 2013, a late-night screening I attended at the Cinéma Hautefeuille featured a restored version of Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme's *Le Joli Mai* (1963) that played to a packed house. And let me be sure to note that the Cinémathèque française in the Bercy neighborhood still programs multiple screenings on a daily basis.

Paris in the Dark can be read as a paean for filmgoing at large-screen Parisian venues from 1930 to 1950. It is more than that. I see it instead as evoking the promise that more recent distribution and exhibition practices may hold, even if only on a reduced scale, for the future. For now, a follow-up for the period between 1955 to 1979 is in order. Did someone say sequel? In the interim, readers of *Paris in the Dark* might want to take a look at notable recent discussions by Christine Leteux [3] and Leila Wimmer.[4] More reading and more filmgoing to follow.

NOTES

[1] Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema, 1930-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[2] Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien. I. Arts de faire* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980).

[3] Christine Leteux, *Continental Films: Cinéma français sous contrôle allemand* (Grandvilliers: La Tour verte, 2017), with a foreword by Bertrand Tavernier (1941-2021).

[4] Leila Wimmer, "Parisian Cinephiles and the Mac-Mahon," pp. 113-124 in Alistair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau, eds., *Paris in the Cinema: Beyond the Flâneur: Locations, Characters, History* (London: BFI/Palgrave, 2018).

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