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H-France Review Vol. 23 (November 2023), No. 186

Cyril Triolaire, *Trétaux dans le Massif: Circulations et mobilités professionnelles théâtrales en province des Lumières à la Belle Époque*. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2022. 422 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €20.00 (pb). ISBN 9782383770664; €13.00 (pdf). ISBN 9782383770671; €13.00 (epub). ISBN 9782383770688.

Review by Rebecca Free and Mark Ingram, Goucher College.

In *The Discovery of France*, Graham Robb cites Georges Lefebvre's study of the incredible speed of news and rumours during the "Great Fear" of the summer of 1789. "Higher ground slowed the rumours but did not stop them. The lofty Massif Central, bypassed by travelling apprentices, kings and theatre companies on tour, Napoleon Bonaparte, several epidemics and, until 1951, the Tour de France, was infiltrated from the north, the east and the west."<sup>[1]</sup> Robb underlines the extensive communicative links that were independent of known transport networks and that belie a representation of rural France during this period as isolated and unconnected to the outside world. Cyril Triolaire's *Trétaux dans le Massif* supports this larger argument even as it shows convincingly that travelling theatre troupes were far from absent in the Massif Central in the period studied here (1750-1910). To the contrary, while the book's focus is squarely on the Massif, Triolaire considers the central state's attention to theatre throughout rural France. The book recounts the local engagement with the administrative oversight of theatres pursued by Napoleon through the creation of theatre *arrondissements* and the dramatic changes heralded by the elimination of this system with the Law of 1864. Well-illustrated by maps showing the networks of circulation by troupes between theatres in towns across the Massif, the book draws primarily on archival sources from departments and municipalities. These sources are especially helpful to Triolaire in his focus on a host of intermediaries between theatre companies and their audiences.

In its emphasis on mobilities, this book contributes to the current of scholarship greatly influenced by Daniel Roche and devoted to the social impact--well beyond the leisured classes--of patterns of circulation and exchange.<sup>[2]</sup> This approach offers a distinctive perspective on social change including in--perhaps especially in--rural areas often represented as isolated, immobile, and resistant to innovation. Triolaire's book might further be productively read alongside Lauren Clay's insightful and detailed body of work on theatre as a commercial venture and the networks of activity that this attention brings to light, including inter- and intra-regional activity well outside of Paris.<sup>[3]</sup> Clay's work has focused especially on the eighteenth century, and Triolaire draws on her ideas while moving into the nineteenth century. His study complements research examining the singular role of the French theatre in the nineteenth century with respect to cultural and intellectual life, whether viewed within a French or

European frame primarily (Charle) or as a key influence in the evolution of a “globalized” culture (Yon).<sup>[4]</sup> In his study of the emergence between 1860 and 1914 of a *société du spectacle* (in which theatre played a key role in society and the arts), Christophe Charle focuses on the theatres of Paris, Berlin, London, and Vienna. He argues that “les théâtres des capitales, les plus confrontés à tous ces changements, constituent-ils des sismographes particulièrement sensibles de ces transformations sociales et culturelles des populations des grandes villes de l’époque.”<sup>[5]</sup> Similarly, but in an entirely different provincial context, Triolaire here examines theatre touring in the Massif Central in the context of social and cultural change in France as a whole throughout the long nineteenth century.

An appendix offers a schematic reference to an important layer of the study’s content: a “recensement chronologique” showing “Lieux et salles de spectacles du Massif central des Lumières à la Belle Époque.” It lists an impressive 118 theatre spaces considered in the study that were established and used in the region between 1749 and 1911 (with some of them continuing in use over time and indeed some to the present day). It is somewhat ironic that physical and immobile places provide a key axis for a study that focuses on circulations and mobilities, but this anchoring makes sense in two ways. For one thing, the circulation of artists from one place to another relied on having places to circulate between. For another, as Triolaire highlights throughout, the theatre spaces themselves were never static. As an example, spaces that had served as churches were converted to theatrical purposes, and then sometimes were converted back to churches. Beyond that, the author mentions how the physical plant itself was always dynamic. New, purpose-built theatres were constructed, and this took time. *Salles* for theatre performances were built within existing structures, whether church-owned or others (such as *hôtels de ville*). Furthermore, once built, any space and the furnishings within it were subject to degradation, a process that in turn sometimes led to efforts at fundraising and repair, and attendant mobilizations of human and material resources. In sum, all of the key theatre spaces served as intersections or hubs for circulation and mobility.

The study frames all this dynamism at the macro level through a broadly chronological structure, the body of the book being divided into three parts, each covering about fifty years. Part one, “Les mutations théâtrales du Massif central au temps des Lumières,” goes from approximately 1750 to 1815. Part two, “Le Massif à l’heure du privilège théâtral,” then moves onward through the mid-nineteenth century. Part three, “Dérégulation et Nouvelles dynamiques théâtrales à travers le Massif central,” begins in the mid-1860s and ends in the early years of the twentieth century.

Part one is subdivided into three sections reflecting smaller time periods as delineated by regime change: the (limited documentable) theatrical activities in the Massif Central area during the Ancien Régime, including consideration of state regulation of theatre activity and of travel; the Revolutionary era, which ushered in loosened regulation and an increasing variety and number of and places for theatre activity; and the Consulate and First Empire, witnessing a vigorous return of regulation by the central state, including the ambitious division of the provinces into theatrical *arrondissements* distributed within each of which was to be a certain number of certified theatre institutions.

Part two follows this latter development past 1815, as people involved in producing theatre implemented and/or were impacted by the original Napoleonic-era mandates. Part two’s organization shifts from a mainly chronological focus to a thematic one. The principal theme is

the challenge that theatre producers had at the ground level, in addressing changes mandated from above. The three sub-thematic sections address the challenges posed in the mandated regions by practices (such as travel routes) that had previously been in place and were hard to change; the places for doing theatre, and how they were created and maintained; and the struggles theatre artists had as they tried to operate within a difficult physical geography and a changing cultural geography. Of particular note in this section is the visibility that the book gives to intermediary agents—such as sub-prefects, mayors, municipal civil servants, and local manufacturers and other private business owners—in implementing and, often, negotiating exceptions to, state regulations so that theatres could be built or renovated and theatre artists could circulate.

Part three begins with a moment of decisive change in national policy: the 1864 deregulation of theatres and the end of the Imperial mandates. The importance of networks of intermediaries continues to serve as a prominent motif in this section, with increased focus on private enterprise (whether local entrepreneurs or national/ international impresarios) and continued attention to municipal administrators and their powers to restrict, permit, and sometimes fund theatrical activity. Part three gives considerable importance to deep infrastructure changes (e.g. the growth of railways); and the increasing use of thermal springs to attract consumers (whether seeking cures or recreation), resulting in new centres of activity and circulation routes reflecting the growth of a constellation of leisure-focused industries. The book examines these developments through two subsections, focusing on building for theatre, including work on old theatre structures, new monumental ones, and physical structures created to accommodate the plethora of new entertainment offerings; and on new patterns of circulation and scheduling, which were intended to accommodate factors such as the new seasonality that revolved around resort towns and the increasing offerings of nationally prominent “star” actors who came through the region on tours.

In the broadest sense, Triolaire’s aim is to “interroger la territorialisation de l’activité théâtrale” in the Massif Central (p. 34). Triolaire notes that in the early part of the nineteenth century, “le théâtre se greffe largement sur le commerce” and the book shows how theatres helped small towns compete with others (p. 25). Long before Philippe Urfalino used the term “la municipalisation de la culture” to describe an evolution in cultural policy between 1960 and 1980, Triolaire describes municipal support for culture centered on attracting touring theatre companies.<sup>[6]</sup> The book itself is part of a broader project celebrating the heritage and identity of the Massif Central, including Clermont-Ferrand’s bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2028 (entitled “Clermont-Ferrand Massif Central”). While the book highlights the local factors supporting theatre companies, it would help to know more about the interesting cases of opposition to theatres that Triolaire cites. He describes, for example, the rejection of funding for a theatre façade because it would distract visually from the nearby church and another instance in which municipal authorities contested the legitimacy of public support for what was, it was argued, just another business in town. These conflicts provide a fuller picture of the social, political, and economic factors shaping circulation among these theatres.

Triolaire’s focus on the period between 1750 and 1910 allows him to track the changing relationship between state oversight of theatre and the variable ways state directives were enacted locally (and he shows clearly how practice in the Massif Central did not correspond to the intent behind the Napoleonic laws). Triolaire gives less attention to the earliest period of royal governance, prioritizing three key moments: the change from the relative freedom of the

Revolutionary period to the stricter oversight by Napoleon I; the passage of the Law of June 6, 1864 that did away with the system of *arrondissements* and *privileges*; and, finally, the growing importance of the “société du spectacle” that Triolaire argues was largely the product of the liberalization of touring introduced by the 1864 law. This return to a freedom of circulation led to “de nouvelles dynamiques théâtrales” (p. 271).

While Triolaire is attentive to how the touring in the Massif was “au goût des changements” and reflected broader social and aesthetic currents, his study also suggests ways in which the Massif was a “protagoniste” (p. 28). Particularly interesting is his discussion of the relationship between thermal tourism and theatre. Drawing on Jean-Claude Yon’s work emphasizing theatre’s role in the development of a new *culture de masse*, he shows, for example, how the boundaries between theatre and other leisure activities became blurred, with theatre becoming part of a larger *écosystème des spectacles* including casinos, cafés-concerts (with entertainers such as hypnotists) and, of course, the thermal springs. [7] Triolaire highlights the circulations of audiences and the development of new poles of entertainment, “rendant en partie obsolète la lecture d'une consommation des plaisirs qui opposerait spectacles populaires d'une part et ceux réservés à une élite bourgeoise d'autre part” (p. 314). Describing the blurring of boundaries between the arts and spectators, Triolaire describes new lighting techniques that served both the aesthetic ends of performers onstage and the appearance of theatre-goers in lobbies. Thermal tourism also contributed to the increasing circulation of performers, including internationally, which in turn shaped theatre programming in the Massif Central. Triolaire also notes the reaction against the commercial aspects of these new forms of entertainment as a motivating factor for aesthetic and socio-political movements such as Maurice Pottecher’s *Théâtre du Peuple*. Similarly, “au coeur du Massif, plusieurs se lancent dans de nouvelles aventures appelées à renouveler le rapport de la République à son théâtre et à jeter les bases d'un nouveau théâtre public contemporain, à Saint-Étienne ou à Limoges” (p. 316).

In his conclusion, Triolaire calls for a new history of the “espaces vécus du théâtre” (p. 359) and for a historical geography of theatre circulations in the provinces. In its dual focus on the singular social role of theatres as sites of relational networks, and the powerful impact of these over time in the Massif Central, this book is also a model and comparative case study for research elsewhere. As Pascale Goetschel has shown, there was strong local support for the provincial *Centres Dramatiques Nationaux* and other decentralizing theatre initiatives in the period immediately following World War II. Triolaire’s book helps us understand the historical antecedents of what Goetschel describes as “une certaine idée du théâtre et du territoire” in France. [8] He does so by going beyond the physical theatres built during this period to centre on the network of intermediaries and performers constituting ongoing networks linking the towns of the Massif Central to the broader changes in arts consumption and creation throughout France in the long nineteenth century.

## NOTES

[1] Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France. A Historical Geography from the Revolution to the First World War* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), pp. 142-143.

[2] Daniel Roche, *Humeurs vagabondes. De la circulation des hommes et de l'utilité des voyages* (Paris: Fayard, 2003); and Roche, *Les circulations dans l'Europe moderne* (Paris: Pluriel, 2010).

[3] See, for example, Lauren R. Clay, *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and Its Colonies* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[4] See, respectively, Christophe Charle, *Théâtres en capitales. Naissance de la société du spectacle à Paris, Berlin, Londres et Vienne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008); and Jean-Claude Yon, "The French Theatre Abroad in the Nineteenth Century: The First Signs of a Globalised Culture," in Márcia Abreu and Cláudia Suriani da Silva, *The Cultural Revolution of the Nineteenth Century: Theatre, the Book Trade, and Reading in the Transatlantic World* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), pp. 219-233.

[5] Christophe Charle, *Théâtres en capitales. Naissance de la société du spectacle à Paris, Berlin, Londres et Vienne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008).

[6] Philippe Urfalino, "La municipalisation de la culture," *Pratiques Culturelles et Politiques de la Culture, Textes réunis par F. Chazel* (Pessac: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1987), pp. 53-74.

[7] Jean-Claude Yon, *Histoire culturelle de la France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), p. 247.

[8] Pascale Goetschel, *Renouveau et décentralisation du théâtre, 1945-1981* (Paris: PUF, 2004).

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ISSN 1553-9172