

Gender, Class and Cinephilia: Parisian Cinema Cultures, 1918-1925

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the discursive strategies through which French intellectual critics exploited gender, nationalism and class as tools in the production of French highbrow and avant-garde film culture. To date, scholars have largely studied French cinema of the inter-war period through the now canonical lens of this reflexive, self-critical community of cinephiles concerned with the state of French cinema. By contrast, I draw on alternative archival sources—including letter columns in popular film weeklies, fan letters, police reports, taxation policies, municipal memos and notices in the leftist press—to reveal the socially engaged and even revolutionary film communities that formed what I call a “counterpublic.” All the dissertation chapters thus deal with key moments and sites of negotiation between, on the one hand, elitist, intellectualising and national bourgeois cinephile critics and filmmakers, and on the other hand, a heterogeneous public of ordinary filmgoers. In some of these moments the negotiation was gradual, discursive and developed through columns in newspapers and film weeklies, while in other moments it took the form of violent clashes.

In the first chapter I examine the reception of D.W. Griffith’s film *Broken Blossoms* (1919), a foundational film for cinephilia. Using fragments of materials from daily newspapers and the film press, I show how French film industry representatives instrumentalised popular

audiences' negative reactions to this film to argue for a separate exhibition network for elite publics. In the second chapter I similarly trace the reception of the anti-Bolshevik film *Red Russia*. I examine secret police reports of Parisian Communist Youth Party meetings, correspondence between these youth groups and Moscow, and notifications to Party members in the leftist press, to demonstrate how cinephile critics like Louis Delluc approached political films with a conservative disdain for non-aesthetic concerns while leftist audiences reacted by creating two alternative exhibition networks in the weeks following the films release.

In the third chapter I transition from social activism to a more intimate sphere of film engagement to show how the experience of individual cinemagoers was connected to cinema's public dimension. I place fan letters to the popular serial star Sandra Milowanoff, as well as cinema programmes and popular film weeklies, into conversation with the political notices and reports that I analyse in the previous chapter. Because most of the fan letters were written by working-class, female moviegoers, they provide insight into the motivations and individual modes of engagement with film culture for a population segment all but overlooked. At the same time, they allow me to create a spatial representation of audiences' homes and workplaces in relation to local cinemas, thus grounding my analysis of their spectatorship within the political and economic concerns of their local communities.

If *Broken Blossoms* was a central film for cinephilia, *photogénie* was its central theoretical concept. In the fourth and final chapter I show how, like the film *Broken Blossoms* and the journal *Cinéa*, the term *photogénie* was the site of a slow, discursive and gradual negotiation between highbrow and lowbrow film culture. Young female film fans seeking to become actresses wrote into film magazines with their photographs to ask if they possessed *photogénie*. While cinephiles depended on such film fans for selling their magazines, however,

the popular understanding of *photogénie* went against the grain of what they sought to accomplish in terms of creating an elite terminology for an elite art cinema. This chapter thus demonstrates how early cinephiles sought to distance themselves from popular audiences' unsophisticated understanding of *photogénie*.

This dissertation thus recovers several key points of cultural negotiation, revealing the contingency and contestability that were at play during the crucial few years when cinephilia emerged and became the dominant mode of discussing film in the French public sphere. In the process it reconstructs the lively and unruly culture that existed around Parisian working-class cinemas in the years following the Great War.

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Introduction: Cinephilia's Past and Present

This dissertation spans a period of rupture in French cinema that occurred in the years following the Great War: the collapse of the French film industry as a popular working-class entertainment and its subsequent rebirth in the shape of highbrow art cinema. In contrast to other scholarship, *Gender, Class and Cinephilia: Parisian Cinema Cultures, 1918-1925* does not seek to reconstruct the emergence of high-brow cinephilia, but to bring to light what cinephilia excluded from its quest for official and cultural recognition. The French First Wave may have eventually won its autonomy from other film art forms, but this artistic autonomy was gained only through a greater reliance on the state and through forging a new association of film production and taste with French national identity. In this dissertation I sketch out the conditions under which this logic for a new aesthetic regime emerged and was transformed in the years following the Great War. I trace the creation of a framework in which film's mass-cultural form was made distinct from its existence as a French national product and a national taste that we now recognise as cinephilia.

The idea of cinema as an enlightened artform worthy of respect and official support but threatened by the pollution of popular film culture is still salient in French cinephile circles. Recently, the voices of Louis Delluc and Ricciotto Canudo, the first cinephiles,¹ could be heard echoing from within the walls of two symbolic seats of French national cultural heritage: the Cinémathèque française and the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art (INHA). Delluc and Canudo both died in the 1920s, but in the talks and roundtables of these conferences, held in

¹ The term 'cinephile' can be traced back to the mid-1910s, when it was used in the Parisian film press to describe a lover of the cinema, the opposite of the *cinéphobe*, who felt that the relatively new medium of film was a vulgar, immoral or mindless leisure activity.

October 2011² and January 2012³ respectively, their concerns regarding the future of cinephilia as a French cultural institution were alive and well. A tangible anxiety could be felt as major academic and institutional figures of cinephilia lamented the “pollution of cinephile institutions,” the “tribalisation” of cinema publics and the impending extinction of the cinephile canon because the new generation failed to recognise the established *chefs d'oeuvres*. Cinephile purists who believe that a film can really only be experienced when sitting alone in a dark *salle* of the cinémathèque voiced their worries triggered by the democratisation of viewing practices made possible by television, the internet, the replacement of film by digital projection and the multiplicity of new screen cultures.

Although the perceived enemy is new — the internet, new screen technologies, etc. — there is actually nothing new about these fears for cinephilia’s future. We can trace the discourse of anxiety back to the years following the end of the Great War in France, when U.S. cinema inundated French theatres and a vibrant multiplicity of film cultures emerged, transforming the cultural landscape of Paris. Like today, early cinephiles saw cinema appreciation as a national culture in danger of dilution by mainstream film culture. In addition to American film imports,

² Round table discussion: “Cinémathèques et cinéphilies de demain.” (“Cinémathèques and Cinephilias of tomorrow.”) Participants: Jean-Marc Lalanne (film critic for *Inrockuptibles*), Luc Lagier (Editor of the web-magazine *Blow-Up*), Alexander Horwath (Director of the Österreichisches Filmmuseum), Gian Luca Farinelli (Director of the Cineteca de Bologna) and Jean-François Rauger (Programmer at the Cinémathèque Française). “Révolution numérique : et si le cinéma perdait la mémoire ?” International conference. 13-14 October 2011. Organised by the CNC (Centre national du cinéma et de l’image animée) and the Cinémathèque Française.

³ “Patrimoine cinématographique, éducation et construction de la cinéphilie aujourd’hui.” (“Cinematographic heritage, education and the construction of cinephilia today.”) January 17, 2012. Organised by the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP), Jean-Michel Frodon (Professor at Sciences Po and film critic for *Slate.fr*) and Marc Vernet (Advisor for Cinematographic Heritage at the INP, Professor of Cinema Studies at Paris 7). Panels included “La cinéphilie, une passion française” (“Cinephilia, a French Passion”) and “De la cinéphilie à la construction des regards cinéphiles” (“From Cinephilia to the Construction of Cinephilic Ways of Looking”). Speakers included Thierry Frémaux (Festival de Cannes delegate and director of the Lumière Institute), Alain Bergala (Professor at Paris 3 and Fémis, film critic and director), Eric Garandeau (Président of the CNC) as well as General Inspectors for the Ministry of Education, Patrick Laudet and Henri de Rohanand and General Inspector of Cultural Affairs, François Hurard.

anxieties flourished in the film press about the levelling down of French delicacy, sensibility and taste by another perceived enemy, the *film à épisodes* or *ciné-roman*. These films were said to damage young minds with “false sentimentality” and to “intoxicate” the public with “mediocre emotions” (*Le Film*, January 28, 1918). In place of such popular films, Delluc and Canudo argued that films needed to be made which would be worthy of comparison with the poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire, the paintings of Toulouse Lautrec, the drawings of André Rouveyre, and the music of Gabriel Fauré and Maurice Ravel. Activists in favour of renewing French film art who supported the *jeune école* or *novateurs*⁴ wondered how they could drag crowds away from the popular films to which they flocked like sheep. Members of *Les club des amis du septième art*⁵ (C.A.S.A.) aimed “to restore the prestige of French cinema” by going into poor neighbourhoods and “speaking about beautiful films, explaining to the crowds cinema's artistic possibilities.”⁶

There are indeed many parallels between the anxieties of the inter-war film critics and those expressed by today's representatives of cinéphilia, which include cinémathèque programmers, government ministers, academics, film critics, high school teachers and archivists. In addition to fears regarding their own future as a community of connoisseurs, today's cinephiles share with their forebears a strategy for overcoming these fears and dealing with what they perceive as threats to their coherence. Then as now, cinephiles have met the challenge of alternative viewing

⁴ Terms used for the film movement before the films were labelled as “cinéma d'avant-garde” during the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs* 1925. “Notre avant-garde aux Arts décoratifs,” *Cinéa-Ciné pour tous*, October 1, 1925.

⁵ Les club des amis du septième art (C.A.S.A.) was created by Ricciotto Canudo on 18th April 1921. C.A.S.A. members included Abel Gance, Germaine Dulac, Henri Fescourt, René Le Somptier, Marcel L'Herbier, Léon Poirier, Henri Pouctal, Henri Roussel, Max Linder, Jean Epstein, Jean Tedesco, Alberto Cavalcanti and the film critics René Jeanne and Léon Moussinac.

⁶ Speech by René Le Somptier reported in the following article. “Au C.A.S.A. La Troisième lecture cinématographique” (*Paris-Midi*, 9 May 1921).

practices and spectator cultures by regulating access to the sphere of “true” cinephile discourse. However, while singular strands in current scholarship have begun paying attention to cinephile discourse, scholars of cinephilia have mostly overlooked how the exclusivity of that discourse has shaped their own understanding of their object of study. Scholars are becoming aware of the importance of cultural anxieties and shared tastes in creating a community of cinephiles out of a diversity of elite spokespersons, but they have largely failed to acknowledge how decades of textual production by leading cinephiles has placed discursive and practical limits upon the historian’s grasp of the emergence of cinephilia itself as a culture distinct from, yet intrinsically related to, the wider landscape of cinema production and spectatorship. Little attention is paid to messy and ordinary manifestations of popular film culture such as the Mid-Lenten parade, that in 1921 Gustave Fréjaville called a “small event in Parisian history” (*L’Écran*, 2 April 1921) and which I will discuss momentarily.

The result is that while scholars have come far in analysing the construction of a cinephile canon of film appreciation, what is left out of these accounts is precisely what the early cinephiles themselves strove to exclude from shared consciousness of legitimate cinema connoisseurs: firstly, popular film culture, and secondly, their own dependence on state support. In the only scholarly study of the emergence of cinéphilia in France during the 1920s, Christophe Gauthier⁷ charts the cinephiles’ efforts to create a cinephile network of ciné-clubs and *salles spécialisées* in the period 1920-1929. Moving away from aesthetic histories of the films themselves, Gauthier traces a cultural history from sources which include lectures and texts by Léon Moussinac, film criticism by Lucien Wahl, editorials from Pierre Henry, conferences by Germaine Dulac,

⁷ Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC.

speeches given at galas and screenings, letters, exhibition catalogues, trade publications and articles in illustrated film weeklies. Through these sources, he demonstrates how cinema was discursively constructed as a legitimate and dignified art form.

At the same time, however, Gauthier's reliance on texts written by Louis Delluc, Émile Vuillermoz, Ricciotto Canudo, Jean Epstein and others in the elite group of cinephiles reveals the dominance which classical cinephilia has come to exert on historical reception studies in France. By tracing the emergence of cinephilia exclusively through cinephilic texts, Gauthier excludes diverse spectatorial experiences, fan practices and consumers of fan publications that were the necessary victims of the cinephilic crusade.

Although Gauthier's break with traditional aesthetic analysis is a step in the right direction, his reliance on cinephilic texts leads him to marginalise the social and cultural context from which cinephilia emerged. In this sense, his study resembles Antoine de Baecque's approach, which essentialises cinephilia to the narrow group of *jeunes turcs* in Paris thirty years later.⁸ In both cases cinephilia is limited by the exclusive use of a selected subset of archival sources to a group of Parisian intellectuals. We know that the emergence of avant-garde film culture was orchestrated from above by a key group of filmmaker-critics, actors, artists and writers. But these early cinephiles did not appear out of nowhere to meet the demands of a public hungry for artistic films; they constructed their public in the process of creating their own cinephilic community. Furthermore, their success in this endeavour was not the result of the selfless efforts of freethinking, independent individuals; it was ensured by the active cooperation of the French

⁸ Baecque, Antoine de. 2003. *La Cinéphilie: Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture (1944-1968)*. Paris: Fayard.

film industry and the state agents who provided them with political and financial support.

In this context, what we see as avant-garde film culture appears in the rude light of day as a symptom of a struggling industry that sought tax breaks and financial security by exploiting the widespread desire in elite circles for a restoration of national pride in the difficult post-war years. Phenomena of avant-garde film culture such as *salles spécialisées* appear as an attempt for filmmakers to rid themselves of a noxious public rather than as a positive sign of their aesthetic autonomy gained from mainstream film production.

Once we realise that the cinephile public of the late teens and twenties was a self-creating and self-organised “discourse public”⁹ then the idea of tracing their history through their own texts appears as a troubling circularity. If we consider the cinephile public as “a space of discourse, organised by discourse”¹⁰ we realise that fan communities without the same discursive power as the elite cinephiles will leave no trace in the archive for film historians. Any mode of spectatorship, public, director, and genre excluded from the cinephile’s own canon of archival cinephilic texts has thus been excluded from film history.

Just as Giuliana Bruno found herself “confronted with a ruined and fragmented map”¹¹ when researching the production history of Elvira Notari, I too was faced with archival ruins in my research of 1920s popular cinema. These ruins are the result of cinephilia’s century-long rule in the world capital of film culture. At the Cinémathèque Française my most central archival find

⁹ Warner, Michael. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York, Cambridge: MIT Press. 68.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bruno, Giuliana. 1993. *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map : Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 3.

was a collection of one hundred fan letters collected and bound together by the young actress Sandra Milowanoff in 1921 while the serial *Les Deux Gamines* (Dir. Louis Feuillade, 1921) was running in Paris cinemas. These letters do not appear in the *fonds* catalogue, the main paper archive dominated by directors, critics and production companies, but in the miscellaneous Collection Jaune. The placement of these letters in the margins of the Cinémathèque, the temple of cinephilia, is symbolic of the marginalisation of popular cinema in French film history (as opposed to avant-garde cinema). My historiographical method is a gesture at resituating women cinemagoers and their tastes at the heart of 1920s Paris cinema culture while at the same time shedding light on class concerns. Writing this dissertation with a view on marginalised historical audiences has brought me into contact with materials as diverse as police reports held at the National Archives, leftist newspapers announcements, Youth Group correspondence at the Communist Party Archives and letter columns in women's magazines and the film press.

It is through a historiographical method based on *bricolage*, that I have amassed an archive of materials they would not otherwise have found each other. From this newly-curated archive of marginalia, two events and two films rise to the surface. In contrast to cinephile historiography, the events that make up the narrative are generated upwards from the material itself, rather than being imposed upon the material by pre-existing notions of progress or taste. The two films are the celebrated *Broken Blossoms* (Dir. D.W. Griffith, 1919) and its denigrated, popular "other" *Les Deux Gamines*. The two events are marred by violence against working-class audiences, one a discursive violence of bourgeois tastemakers against female audiences with the "word-making" of *photogénie* and the other a very real violence of city policemen and bourgeois cinemagoers during screenings of the Gaumont anti-bolshevik film *La Russie Rouge* (Dir. Unknown, 1921).

The Mid-Lenten Parade: Reading Along the Archival Grain

It is worth pausing to walk alongside another major event for French film history that like the *Russie Rouge* riots is untraceable in standard film histories but which emerges from a *bricolage* of marginal sources. At 12.55 pm on March 4, 1921, on a rainy Place d'Italie, the annual Mid-Lenten Festival parade (*Cortège de la Mi-Carême*) began its 16-kilometer journey across Paris to delight the eyes and ears of thousands of Parisians. The municipal guards led the parade, and were followed by thirty *pierrots* and twenty clowns, behind which four camels trotted mounted by “hindus” in front of the first of many floats (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921). Along the boulevards, closed off to traffic, people crowded the pavement, laughing at masked figures in the crowd, while others hung from trees and looked out from balconies along the parade’s path (*La Lanterne*, March 4, 1921).¹²

The Mid-Lenten parade was a decades-long Parisian tradition in which professional associations elected a “queen” who would be celebrated for her camaraderie, loyalty to her fellow workers, youth and charm. It began as a festival of laundrywomen, *blanchisseuses*, in the early 1700s. On the third Thursday of Lent the laundrywomen organised balls and the washhouses became dance halls. By 1921, the “Queen of the Laundrywomen” (*La reine des blanchisseuses*) had become “the Queen of Queens” (*la reine des reines*) elected from among many professions, and the traditional horse-drawn carriage had become an elaborate float.¹³

¹² The crowd was such at the Place de l’Opéra that an eighteen year old woman, Miss Germaine Auvray, was thrown to the floor and very seriously injured when she was trampled by the crowd (*La Lanterne*, March 4, 1921).

¹³ *L’Écho de Versailles*, March 10, 1926. Press cutting. Actualités série 89 Carnaval Mi-Carême. 1920- Folder Carnaval de la Mi-Carême 1922-1929. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP).

The first float of the 1921 parade, “The Carnival Float,” carried the pot-bellied and rosy-cheeked Carnival figure sitting upon a golden calf, rendered skeletal by inflation. Instead of gold, it was covered in slits from which came one- and two-franc bills and fifty-centime coins. The calf was flanked on each side by a huge champagne glass, in each of which sat a woman in “seductive dress” (*La Presse*, March 3, 1921). Behind this float came fourteen young women in regional costume smiling from decorated carriages escorted by twelve trumpet-playing cavaliers. The young women had travelled from Champagne, Ardennes, Orleans, Marseille, Strasbourg, Savoie and as far as the Basque country.¹⁴ Another strange creature then appeared: a six-metre high pelican painted white, red, and green, surrounded by a jazz band of twenty men in blackface and the band leader in its beak.¹⁵ That night the pelican effigy would be burnt at the Magic City theme park where a dinner would be held for all the arrondissement queens (*La Lanterne*, February 5, 1921; March 4, 1921). Next, a group of Persian musicians led the Lucky Charm float (*char des fétiches*) full of icons representing various charms and superstitions, including a giant Buddha, a horse shoe, a Billiken, a white elephant, the number thirteen, a couple disguised as Nénette and Rintintin—string dolls representing a young Parisian couple who became a popular good luck charm after they managed to escape a German bombing raid during the Great War—and a huge plaster-cast “English baby” of the type sold by Italian plaster vendors on the central boulevards of the city (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921; *La Presse*, March 3, 1921).

After the lucky charm float an ovation swelled through the crowd as an immense Roman-style galley appeared carrying the “Queen of Queens” herself. This was the most applauded float of

¹⁴ These were a randomly selected group of contestants from *Le Journal*'s ongoing beauty contest *Queen of the Provinces* (*La Reine des Provinces*) that was taking place on the screens of Parisian cinemas the same month (*Le Journal*, March 3, 1921).

¹⁵ Jazz bands, along with modern dances like the shimmy were frowned upon by upper-class society and at the annual meeting of dance teachers held at the Dance Academy in Paris the same month, orators called the jazz-band “an American stock that must be quickly liquidated” (*Le Temps*, March 29, 1921).

the Mid-Lenten parade and sitting upon it was the twenty-one year old typist Yvonne Béclu from the thirteenth arrondissement, who had been elected winner of the annual city-wide beauty contest (*L'Écho de Paris*, February 20, 1921). Béclu wore a white gold-spangled brocade and a vast pale-blue, fur-lined velvet cloak with a rosette showing the Paris coat of arms. A brass band with thirty drummers and bugle players dressed in Greek costume announced her arrival, headed by a solemn herald. Yvonne Béclu sat high on her throne bowing to the cheering crowds while her maids of honour, those who had taken second and third place in the contest sat next to her. They were Raymonde Noyet, queen of the seventh arrondissement, an accountant and refugee from Reims (*Le Temps*, February 21, 1921) and eighteen year old Suzanne Hahn, *midinette*¹⁶ in the Opera neighborhood and queen of the twentieth arrondissement (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921). Seated in the Roman golden galley, these worker queens of Paris were pulled by eight white horses. Behind the float were twenty heralds holding one banner each for every arrondissement of the city. Along the way the brunette typist queen made a stop at the French Presidential Palace, the Élysée. Here, as had been the custom since at least 1902, she would offer a bouquet of flowers to the President's wife Madame Millerand and in turn receive a pearl brooch from a member of the President's military staff along with champagne to share with her maids of honour. At the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) the girls would be welcomed by Jean-Maurice Le Corbeiller, President of the City Council, who would offer flowers to the young women and a watch to Béclu. At 6.30pm the parade passed by the police headquarters, where a reception would be held in honour of the elected neighbourhood beauty queens. The chief of police gave a speech and asked permission to kiss each of the "ephemeral sovereigns" to the guests' amusement (*Le Matin*, March 4, 1921).

¹⁶ *Midinette* was the name given to young seamstresses because of the way in which they dashed out of their place of work and ate a simple and quick lunch during their short lunch break.

Cinema also had a presence in the parade. Behind the *Reine des Reines* float appeared the *chanson* float representing *tableaux vivants* of old popular French songs. On foot beside the float, musicians played songs such as *Le Temps des Cerises*, *Bonsoir Ninon* and *Les Blés d'or*. Seated on this float was another beauty queen, the newly crowned Muse of Montmartre Geneviève Félix, recently elected in a Paris-wide cinema beauty contest as “Prettiest Girl in the Neighbourhood” for Montmartre¹⁷ and reknowned as “the most blonde, most delicate, most smiling, most elegant, and in a word, the most Parisian of cinema artists” (*Le Film*, March 1921). Although already a familiar actress from her role in the film *La Phalène bleu* (Dir. Georges Champavert, 1917), Félix was elected winner in a very local beauty contest at the Barbès Palace along with many unknown hopefuls from Montmartre.¹⁸ In a *Le Film* article, Nyctalope wrote that Félix was “the most blonde, most delicate, most smiling, most elegant, and in a word, the most Parisian of cinema artists.” On the front of the *Chanson* float was a large sculpture of a black cat standing on the roof of a small house out of which a distressed *mère Michel* peered.¹⁹ On the *Chanson* float, Geneviève Félix was dressed as Madelon, an easygoing barmaid from the 1914 soldiers’ song *La Madelon*. The actress stood under a leafy arbour, with the King Dagobert representing the revolution-era song “Good King Dagobert”—a mainstay at Parisian carnivals since 1879 (*La Presse*, May 17, 1879)—and Maria Leca, a Sorbonne student, played La Lisette

¹⁷ There was no *reine* elected for the eighteenth arrondissement as the mayor Georges Chaligny opposed any festivities in the current economic and political climate. However after the committee reached out to the mayor of the newly created artistic communisty, the *Commune Libre de Montmartre*, Félix was chosen as “Muse of Montmartre” (*La Lanterne*, February 5, 1921).

¹⁸ The contest many, in fact, that the manager was forced to show them in three series over three weeks in January 1921 (*Le Film*, March 1921).

¹⁹ This was a reference to the song *C'est la mère Michel*, but journalists also thought it a reference to the cabaret *Le Chat noir*, since the owner of its successor *La Boîte de Fursy*, Henri Fursy, was on the Festival Committee (*La Lanterne*, February 5, 1921). Henry Fursy had bought the legendary cabaret *Le chat noir* in 1899 and renamed it after himself as the *Boîte de Fursy*. The festival committee chose five floats from ideas delivered by *École des Beaux Arts* students. Other members of the committee were Emmanuel Bourcier, an anti-immigration journalist for the radical newspaper *L'Oeuvre* and the cartoonist and Olympic runner Louis de Fleurac.

de Béranger from Frédéric Bérat's 1843 eponymous song²⁰ (*L'Étudiant français*, March 15, 1921). Leading the float were two policemen on horses from Gustave Nadaud's 1860 Alsatian song *Pandore ou les deux gendarmes*. Students from the *École des Beaux-Arts* (School of Fine Arts) dressed in their traditional berets escorted the float on foot, replacing the usual professional parade bit-players and adding a youthful, fresh tone to the festivities.

A more somber float followed representing the current housing crisis plaguing the city. Students played the roles of a homeless bourgeois family living under a bridge with props including a bed, a baby's cradle, a wardrobe and a wood-burning stove, the chimney of which doubled as a structural support for the bridge. Despite its serious message, the float was welcomed by hurls of laughter from the crowds and *Le Rappel* called it "a masterpiece in French irony" (February 5, 1921). Fifty students disguised as characters from Henri Murger's *La Vie de Bohème* followed (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921).

After a Roman armoured elephant, four white horses and Roman chariots came the last official float, that of the *forains* or fairground workers. On it was a lion's cage made from broomhandles in which the reknowned fairground liontamer Marthe la Corse²¹ performed her act with two

²⁰ Leca had been elected as Lisette at the Maison des Étudiants by her fellow students, the painter Adolphe Willette, the city councillors of the Sorbonne and St. Sulpice neighbourhoods and by representatives of the Commune Libre de Montmartre (*La Presse*, February 26, 1921).

²¹ Marthe la Corse—whose real name was Marthe Franckaert, daughter of a Flemish distiller (*Les Dimanches de la Femme*, May 1, 1932)—performed as a lion tamer act at several Parisian entertainment venues, including the Cirque de Paris, the Cirque Medrano and the Olympia music-hall. In one of her acts her husband Marcel would lead six lions and a small dog into a cage with her (*La Semaine à Paris*, December 26, 1924; *Le Gaulois*, February 5, 1927; *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, January 29, 1925).

plastercast lions. On top of the cage, between two columns representing the place du Trône,²² sat Emma Havard, the elected *reine des foraines* carrying a huge candy cane sceptre and dressed in a costume made from fairground candy.²³ On each column above her stood a huge gingerbread man (*La Lanterne*, March 4, 1921). And finally, the float wouldn't be complete without its accompanying parade of clowns, wrestlers and gymnasts on foot.

In the context of such a bizarre array of topical floats it would have come as no surprise to Parisians to see among them sixteen floats that had been sponsored and designed by major figures in the French film industry.²⁴ During the six-year interval of 1914 to 1920, when the war meant that all carnivals were suspended, the cinema's role in everyday life of Parisians had taken on such a huge role that by 1921, it had become "King of the Carnival" (*Le Film*, March 1921). One was a Charlie Chaplin-themed float with The Tramp visibly trembling in the cold March rain, a cane in his left hand and a travel bag in his right (*Le Temps*, March 12, 1921). Alongside were carnival figures representing the three main characters from *Les Deux Gamines* (1921), Chambertin and *les deux gamines* themselves, Ginette and Gaby Manin, as well as Judex from Feuillade's eponymous 1916 crime serial. The public could also see figures representing the comic actors Max Linder, Prince, Zigoto, Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Marcel Lévesque, Douglas

²² The Place du Trône was the previous name for the Place de la Nation on the border of the eleventh and twelfth arrondissements. The square was the centre of an annual Easter fair that continues today and is still named the foire du trône. In the 1960s the fair outgrew the Place de la Nation and moved to Reuilly, its current location. The fair also allowed Parisians to experience cinema as there were 28 cinema establishments at the fair in 1907. See Bosséno, Christian-Marc. 2002. "Le répertoire du grand écran, le cinéma 'par ailleurs.'" In *La culture de masse en France: de la Belle Epoque à aujourd'hui*, edited by Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli, 157–219. Paris: Fayard. 167

²³ Havard had been elected fairground queen by a highly ceremonious vote held at the Casino de la Nation in January. Her family owned a fairground shooting gallery, so her specialisation was listed as "shooting and automatic devices" (*tirs et appareils automatiques*) (*Comœdia*, January 26, 1921). She would again make front page news later that year on the occasion of her wedding to the nephew of a circus owner (*Le Petit Parisien*, October 19, 1921).

²⁴ The role of cinema in the Mid-Lenten parade only increased over the following years and in 1923 and 1925 the Gaumont Palace hosted the election of the Paris "Queen of Queens."

Fairbanks, Rio Jim and the Music-Hall star Mistinguette. Then followed disguised figures representing the casts of the popular serials *Les Misérables* (Dir. Albert Capellani, 1913), *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Dir. Albert Capellani, 1911) and *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* (Dir. Henri Pouctal, 1914) along with a horse-drawn carriage carrying *The Three Musketeers* (Dir. Henri Diamant Berger, 1921)²⁵ and forty Louis XIV-era musketeers on horseback (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921). One float advertised the recently released Italian film *Le Sac de Rome* (Dir. Enrico Guazzoni and Giulio Aristide Sartorio, 1920) and displayed the names of cinemas where it screened. The cinema industry union had paid for these lavish floats by selling tombola tickets for 1 franc in cinemas all over the capital (*Le Journal du Ciné-Club*, February 11, 1921). Vendors sought to profit from the movie-mad crowd by selling mini Charlie Chaplin canes, along with rattles and paper spirals to replace the recently banned confetti and streamers which in past years would hang from trees like brightly-coloured jungle vines²⁶ (*La Presse*, March 3, 1921).

A royal figure on top of the first cinema industry float represented the “the entertainment king” (*le roi du spectacle*). Instead of a sceptre he held a light representing cinema as the universal language that brought light to all, and a huge globe represented this universal power of cinema. Behind him stood a Pathé home cinema projector donated by Jules Demaria, President of the French Cinema Union (*Chambre Syndicale Française de la Cinématographie*) (*L'Écran*, February 19, 1921), and beside him was a figure representing Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press, symbolising that cinema was to 1920s citizens what the newspaper and book were to older publics: an instructor and a vehicle of enlightenment. Beside this float walked figures of Chaplin in all his roles (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921).

²⁵ These popular stories were serialised in the weekly newspaper *Les Meilleurs Cinémas*, so although released several years before the parade, they remained anchored in Parisian popular culture (July 25, 1919).

²⁶ Some were angered by the decision to ban “inoffensive and gracious streamers” and to permit “odious Chaplin canes” (*La Lanterne*, March 4, 1921).

Next came the film industry's satirical protest float. The centrepiece was a "Milking Cow" (*Vache à lait*) designed by the cartoonist Joë Bridge to represent the French film industry itself. This anemic cow was a sending-up of the traditional *boeuf gras* (fattened calf) paraded by butchers during the Paris Carnival. To demonstrate each of the taxes "milking" the film industry dry, signs were attached to each of the cow's udders with numbers representing the percentage of taxes paid to various state agencies: *assistance publique* 10%, state tax 10-25%, the mayor 7.5%, firemen and doctors, and so on (*La Scène*, February 25, 1921). Leading the float was an old bespectacled woman representing Anastasie the censor who carried a huge pair of scissors.²⁷ Behind her, pulling the cow by its tail, was the taxman or *M. Lebureau du fisc*. Alongside the "milking cow" float, men dressed as American cowboys walked while trying to lasso the cow as it rolled slowly along (*Scénario*, February 25, 1921). Figures from the Charles Perrin song *Les Pompiers de Nanterre* walked behind the float along with doctors and tax collectors, all figures putting financial pressure on Parisian film exhibitors. These figures were being accompanied to the cinema by grotesque versions of Fatty, Zigoto, Bill Bockey and Chalumeau (*Le Journal*, March 4, 1921).

The milking-cow float is illustrative of how leaders of the French film industry perceived their situation in a post-war society in economic and spiritual crisis. Seeking to boost tax revenues as well as public morale, the Ministry of Public Instruction had introduced a municipal tax to all *spectacles* in the summer of 1920. This was on top of the state tax introduced in 1914 that applied to all popular leisure activities such as the music-hall, fairground exhibitors and café-concert. In addition to boosting state funds, it was thought that higher taxes on popular spectacles

²⁷ For a history of this censorship figure see Christian Delporte. "'Anastasie': L'imaginaire de la censure dans le dessin satirique (xixe - xxe siècles) in Pascal Ory. 1997. *La censure en France à l'ère démocratique*. Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe. 89-99.

would encourage the public towards the more wholesome entertainment of the theatre, which accordingly was protected from tax increases.²⁸

The introduction of these taxes served as a catalyst for a self-reflexive turn of the film industry. In order to obtain the same tax breaks as the theatres, the film industry had to succeed in convincing the state that the cinema was not just a frivolous form of entertainment for workers. New questions surfaced: What is cinema's role in French national identity? What are the duties of the film industry toward its country and the French public? How will cinema fulfil its responsibility to maintain the high standards set by France's rich legacy in arts such as the theatre? To convince the state that cinema was not an industry providing immoral entertainment to workers, intellectual film critics such as Louis Delluc would have to promote the artistic potential of cinema and its importance as a uniquely French cultural product. The support of intellectuals would be key: Government leaders may have still seen cinema as little more than a fairground attraction, but the support of the intellectual elite would transform film exhibitors from fairground peddlers to refined dealers in art.

This was not an easy task. Why should the state do favours for an industry that had neglected French films as long as it was profitable and preferred to cater to a movie-mad public by filling their programmes with sure-fire American hits? The industry found no support from the French intellectual community either, since they had never supported French films as such. The link between the construction of a shared cinephile canon of films and the public-building project is

²⁸ See speech by the Minister of Public Instruction, René Viviani given on December 21, 1916 in *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, December 22, 1916, 3781). Cited in Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania.

illustrated by Armand Bour, who argues in *Le Film* (28 January 1918), that “if popular cinema continues much longer with its intoxicating sentimentality, we will surely be abandoned once and for all by the intelligent classes, which are many more than we might believe in our country.” In brief, film distributors and exhibitors were isolating themselves from their potential supporters through their emphasis on profitable Hollywood films that catered to the unwashed masses.

There is irony in the fact that the film industry chose the Mid-Lenten parade to make their case for legitimisation and recognition as a high art. After all, the parade was a working-class festival, originally a Festival of the City’s washerwomen (*fête des blanchisseuses*), working women on the lowest rung of Parisian workers. These women paid for daily use of the washhouse where they would collect, sort, wash, rinse, beat, dry and fold soiled linen and clothes from six in the morning until seven in the evening with a short break for a coffee or glass of wine in the afternoon. There was a gradual decline in this type of labour as the number of washhouses in Paris decreased from forty in 1891 to seventeen in 1922. In 1912 Octave Uzanne described the washerwomen as follows,

She dies generally at about fifty or sixty, worn out by chronic drinking, general paralysis, or acute rheumatism. [...] All she earns is spent on drink in advance. Despised by her *concierge*, hated by her neighbours, distrusted by her grocer and butcher, she is execrated on all sides. Her great strength alone (for this is a necessity to her), makes her work, with its terrible fatigue, possible. One may well say that of all the unfortunates of the social hell, she is among the most miserable.²⁹

The Mid-Lenten beauty contest offered an annual escape from this “social hell.” Each washhouse elected their own “queen” (*reine du lavoir*) who would then compete with the queens of other washhouses to become “queen of queens” (*reine des reines* or *reine des blanchisseuses*).

²⁹ Uzanne, Octave. 1912. *The Modern Parisienne*. London: William Heinemann. 71.

The washhouses decorated their own float and paraded their queen on top of it—in one Montmartre washhouse the same worker, Jeanne Sauterie, was elected each year for seventeen years and wore the same Diana the Hunter costume for seventeen parades (*Le Rappel*, November 23, 1871). By 1891 the Mid-Lenten festival was already an old tradition and had transformed into a real Parisian celebration thanks to funding from the city council. The washerwomen queens became local celebrities for a day and the illustrated newspapers printed their portraits.³⁰ In 1909 the parade was still called the washhouse parade (*cortège des lavoirs*) (*Le Dimanche Illustré*, March 21, 1909), but the sashes and pennants with the names of washhouse allegiances were no longer present when the parade was reinstated in 1920. By then the “queens” were primarily typists, shop girls and seamstresses who had been elected by their fellow workers.

Even after its transformation into the official Paris Mid-Lenten Festival, wealthy Parisians still perceived the parade as vulgar, messy and in poor taste, much as the *Punch* journalist Edward Lucas did in 1909:

The Mi-Carême Carnival in Paris, I may say at once, is not worth crossing the Channel for. It is tawdry and stupid; the life of the city is dislocated; the Grands Boulevards are quickly some inches deep in confetti, all of which have been discharged into faces and even eyes before reaching the ground; the air is full of dust; and the places of amusement are uncomfortably crowded. The Lutetian humors of the Latin Quarter students and of Montmartre are not without interest for a short time, but they become tedious with extraordinary swiftness and certainty as the morning grows grey.³¹

In 1921, the cooperation of the École des Beaux Arts students, sculptors and artists who designed and built the floats added a scholarly, artistic dimension to the parade that was absent in previous years. More than one journalist commented on this strange intrusion of artists and students into the washerwoman festival.

³⁰ Sébillot, Paul. 1895. *Légendes et curiosités des métiers*. Paris: Flammarion. 27.

³¹ Lucas, Edward Verrall. 1909 (1921, seventh edition). *A Wanderer in Paris*. London: Macmillan Co. 217-218.

This uneasy blending of the fine arts with working-class entertainment traditions was familiar ground for the struggling film industry. The increasing number of cinemas constructed after the Great War had created a multiplication of uses of cinema as a concrete space to fit community needs and as a popular activity for workers with new leisure time. To survive, it was paramount that the film industry not alienate their working-class audiences. Yet early film critics also worried that working-class unruliness in cinemas alienated the French elite. In an October 1921 issue of his film journal *Cinéa*, Louis Delluc warned industrials that intellectuals must be considered by exhibitors to improve their profits. He warned them,

Pay attention more often to the opinion of the French elite and don't make it angry. The artists, intellectuals, thinkers came with difficulty to the cinema. Their help is valuable. They direct public opinion, channel capital and carry the flag of our country” (*Cinéa*, October 21, 1921).

For Delluc, then, it seemed that the creation of French film art would solve the film industry's problems by attracting the support of the intellectual elite, who had the power to influence the senate to lower taxes through pressure groups such as the *Confédération des Travailleurs Intellectuels*.³² Transforming French film into a national artistic heritage meant that the national film industry would have stronger legs to stand on in their campaign for tax breaks and other state support.

Cinephile Historiography

Current debates on cinephilia often take as their starting point Susan Sontag's essay “The Decay

³² Created in 1920, by French senator De Jouvenel, the organisation counted 150, 000 members in its first year.

of Cinema,”³³ in which she rang the death toll for “the very specific kind of love that cinema inspired,” that of cinema as a “poetic object.” Scholars such as James Naremore³⁴ and Christian Keathley³⁵ share Sontag’s nostalgia and argue that cinephile reverence for the moving image must be reincorporated into Film Studies, which they believe has become too “secular.” In contrast, others see Sontag’s pessimism as “a conservative backlash against the democratisation of ‘film culture’.”³⁶ These counter-voices can be grouped into three broad categories.

First are scholars who call for a decentring of the concept of cinephilia in order to account for the multiple ways in which film appreciation intersects with class, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities. Thus Fabrice Montebello’s³⁷ study of working-class moviegoers in Longwy, an industrial town in North-Eastern France in the 1950s, takes a bottom-up approach to cinephilia that resists canonical definitions. Similarly, Laurent Jullier and Jean-Marc Leveratto³⁸ question the definitory hegemony of the elitist cinephilia that persisted until the digital age, when cinephile publics have diversified, a development they celebrate. Similarly, Malte Hagener and Marijke de Valck³⁹ and Jonathan Rosenbaum⁴⁰ are optimistic about the new viewing practices offered by the DVD and the Internet.

³³ Sontag, Susan. 1996. “The Decay of Cinema.” *New York Times Magazine*, February 25. 60-61

³⁴ Naremore, James. 2014. *An Invention without a Future: Essays on Cinema*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

³⁵ Keathley, Christian. 2006. *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

³⁶ Hudson, Dale, and Patricia R. Zimmermann. 2009. “Cinephilia, Technophilia and Collaborative Remix Zones.” *Screen* 50 (1): 135–46.

³⁷ Montebello, Fabrice. *Spectacle cinématographique et classe ouvrière, Longwy 1944-1960*, Doctoral thesis, Université de Lyon 2, Lyon, 1997.

³⁸ Jullier, Laurent, and Jean-Marc Leveratto. 2010. *Cinéphiles et cinéphilies: une histoire de la qualité cinématographique*. Paris: Armand Colin.

³⁹ Valck, Marijke de., and Malte Hagener. 2005. *Cinephilia: Movies, Love, and Memory*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

⁴⁰ Rosenbaum, Jonathan. 2010. *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia: Film Culture in Transition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

A second category grounded in Feminist Film Historiography opposes the rosy view of the New Wave cinephilia of the 1950s, criticising it as elitist, individualistic and masculine.⁴¹ Other feminist film historians have resuscitated the writings of female film critics, the most notable contribution being Antonia Lant's edited compendium of *Women's Writings on the First Fifty Years of Cinema*. Elsewhere Paula Amad⁴² has repositioned Ève Francis as central to the cinephile conversion of Louis Delluc and thus to the history of French 1920s film criticism, and Amelie Hastie⁴³ has foregrounded the criticism of Dorothy Richardson in the British film journal *Close-up*. With these we can also group scholars who work on other marginalised groups such as Robert Hallas,⁴⁴ who sheds light on "gay cinephilia" in the US post-war context.

A third category seeks to dislodge cinephilia from its geographical connection to the two poles of New York and Paris. In support of Annette Michelson's⁴⁵ argument that "there exists...no one such thing as cinephilia, but rather forms and periods of cinephilia," scholars have studied global cinephilias, including the "basement cinephilia" of Indian diaspora women,⁴⁶ "strategic Korean cinephilia"⁴⁷ and African cinephilias.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Sellier, Geneviève. 2008. *Masculine singular: French New Wave Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press.; Sellier, Geneviève, and Burch Noel. 2009. *Le Cinéma au prisme des rapports de sexe*. Paris: Vrin; Sellier, Geneviève. 2010. "L'expertise de la spectatrice ordinaire dans le courrier des lecteurs des magazines populaires : le cas de *l'Ecran français*." *Studies in French Cinema* 10 (3): 219–34.

⁴² Amad, Paula. 2005. "'Objects Became Witnesses': Ève Francis and the Emergence of French Cinephilia and Film Criticism." *Framework* 46 (1): 56–73.

⁴³ Hastie, Amelie. 2005. "Historical Predictions, Contemporary Predilections: Reading Feminist Theory Close Up." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 46 (1): 74–82.

⁴⁴ Hallas, Roger. 2009. *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁴⁵ Michelson, Annette. 1998. "Gnosis and Iconoclasm: A Case Study of Cinephilia." *October*, no. 83 (Winter): 3–18.

⁴⁶ Bhattacharya, Nandini. 2004. "A 'Basement' Cinephilia: Indian Diaspora Women Watch Bollywood." *South Asian Popular Culture* 2 (2): 161–83.

⁴⁷ Chung, Hye Seung. 2005. "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia." In *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, edited by Kathleen. McHugh and Nancy. Abelmann, 117–50. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

⁴⁸ Sanogo, Aboubakar. 2009. "Regarding Cinephilia and Africa." *Framework* 50 (1–2): 226–28.

I position this dissertation within the first two of these perspectives to argue that cinephilia requires strategies of exclusion both to legitimise its existence and to ensure its survival. In the context of late teens and early twenties Paris, the cinephile objective to elevate cinema as an art form worthy of intellectual attention was, I argue, indissociable from the discursive construction of a cinephile public. Entangled with cinephile efforts to promote silent film art was the campaign to create an audience that would be at the *hauteur* of the films. With their mode of discourse revolving around nostalgia for the past and anxiety towards the emergence of new spectator cultures, the recent conferences on cinephilia in Paris show that this is still the case.

In short, the discursive construction of this cinephile audience needs to be problematised so that the strategies of exclusion applied to “movie-fans” by cinephile texts are not translated into an exclusion from cultural histories of filmic reception. For this to happen, we should avoid the temptation of taking cinephile texts at face value, and try to understand the conditions under which the texts were produced: the need to win over intellectuals, the fear of silent art being polluted by popular audiences, the campaign for film art's differentiation and distinction from popular cinema. This dissertation seeks to rescue the popular film culture of the wartime years from the “enormous condescension of posterity” and to show how the seemingly frivolous entertainment of film serials served as a vehicle for the formation of a cultural and social subjectivity consciously opposed to the aesthetic criteria of the bourgeois public sphere.

Behind the formal experimentations of what Richard Abel calls “the narrative avant-garde”⁴⁹ I will argue, lay a very traditional mindset of a natural French superiority in the arts. The canon of films made by young French directors from *J'accuse* (Dir. Abel Gance, 1919) and *Rose-France* (Dir. Marcel L'Herbier, 1919) to *Feu Mathias Pascal* (Dir. Marcel L'Herbier, 1925) were meant to restore France's reputation abroad. They were to place France on the map as the country from which came Marcel Proust, Auguste Renoir and now Marcel L'Herbier and Abel Gance. If the French film industry could not contend with Hollywood in terms of quantity, it would stand out by the superior quality of its films and of the discerning audience for which they were produced. As important as the films themselves, therefore, were the journals with which Louis Delluc and likeminded cinephile critics like Jean Tedesco sought to shape a cinema public receptive to the idea of high-brow film connoisseurship. Their success in shaping such an audience had an impact far beyond the cinema culture of their own day. By establishing journals in which they could author the film criticism and polemical texts about the state of French cinema appreciation, the cinephiles also created a corpus of texts with on which later cinema historiography has been built.

Due to the reliance on these cinephile texts, historians of French cinema culture have largely overlooked the central role that cinemas played in the development of working-class consciousness during the inter-war years. Caught between bourgeois anxieties about working-class idleness and an emerging film intelligentsia that saw popular film serials as unwholesome entertainment, local neighbourhood cinemas were relegated to the interstices of French cultural historiography, and cinema attendance, one of the major preoccupations of working-class

⁴⁹ Abel, Richard. 1984. *French cinema: the first wave, 1915-1929*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton university press. 279.

Parisians, became defined as an inconsequential segment of time. Yet wartime conditions transformed popular cinemas into spaces where social groups marginalised and victimised by the war years created the conditions for their own integration into society. I draw on period newspapers, memoirs, historical maps, and public and private archives to show how cinemas functioned as a “commons” in which working-class men and women, wounded ex-servicemen, families threatened by eviction, and housewives suffering from rising food prices carved out both space and time for leisure, rest, debate, protest and collective decision-making. Popular cinemas thus became sites where weakness was turned into strength, where Parisians seeking refuge from the traumas of war, the workplace and economic difficulties blended working-class entertainment culture with social organisation in a “common-sense” way.

Wartime events made working-class cinemas into far more than movie theatres. Although popular film serials provided psychological relief for war-weary Parisians, their reception was also conditioned by social and pragmatic semantics that the spaces in which they were screened accrued through the difficult war years. On the night of 23 March 1915, for example, residents of Montmartre used cinemas as shelters when they heard firemen sound the air raid alarm. Cinemas were not only psychological refuges from the trauma of war, then, but also concrete refuges from the physical trauma of living in wartime Paris.⁵⁰

These connotations of sanctuary inevitably coloured the experience of watching films. When the journalist and writer Marguerite Bourcet looked back on the post-Armistice popularity of cinema in 1936 she described how film serials could be understood as “a symptom of the four previous years in which all events, all difficulties, all situations had been conditioned by the most brutal

⁵⁰ Darmon, Pierre. 2002. *Vivre à Paris pendant la Grande Guerre*. Paris: Fayard. 343-344.

exterior drama; all psychological and moral elements seemed to have lost all efficiency in guiding destiny, only violence seemed capable of governing” (*Études*, 20 July 1936). Similarly, the French socialist writer Eugène Dabit described how important cinemas became for the social recovery of fatigued soldiers,

Returned safe and sound from the bloodbath and after their reintegration into society, servicemen who were neither too maimed, nor too affected by the gas, were taken by an all-consuming hunger for entertainment. Cinemas, theatres and dance halls prospered.⁵¹

Cinemas were also charitable spaces for refugees from the North of France. In winter 1914, for example, Marcel Cachin, the future co-founder of the French Communist Party, helped install a soup kitchen in the Palace Torcy cinema in the eighteenth arrondissement, where local women served up 600 meals per day to hungry citizens and refugees (*L'Humanité*, 27 August; 23 November 1914). In 1915, several Parisian cinemas allowed refugees from Northern towns to enter free of charge (*Bulletin des réfugiés du département du Nord*, 8 March 1915; 27 October 1915).

Cinemas also provided social and economic refuge for disabled veterans, who were frequently offered employment in cinemas as projectionists, ushers and ticket inspectors. In 1918 over one million Frenchmen received state invalidity pensions, but these men were also encouraged to undergo professional training in order to stay active and alert. On occasion cinema managers even employed disabled soldiers to play music for their film programmes. During the Christmas festivities of 1918, for instance, a journalist reporting for the Socialist newspaper *Le Populaire* (25 December 1918) was surprised to see a group of four disabled ex-servicemen in uniform appearing to play the bugle over newsreel images screening between a serial adventure episode

⁵¹ Dabit, Eugène. 1933. *Faubourgs de Paris*. Paris: Gallimard. 179.

and a Chaplin short. Several French exhibitors went as far as to make it their policy to only employ war widows and disabled ex-servicemen. Some were themselves wounded in the fighting and so offered their venue to various leftist veteran associations. Such was the case for the Cocorico Cinema in Belleville, the manager of which was made honorary vice-president of his local veterans' association in 1923 (*Bulletin de l'Association générale des mutilés de la guerre*, January 1924).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that an explosion of cinema attendance accompanied the Great War in France. In November 1914, less than 130,000 Parisians went to the cinema, but this number rose to over a million in April 1915 and to a record 1 600 000 in October 1915.⁵² By 1918 annual profits of cinemas had skyrocketed, as had the number of cinemas. Paris had 190 cinemas in 1918, and 208 by 1922 (*L'Aurore*, March 18, 1922). But cinema owners also had organised labour to thank for this sudden increase in attendance. After the war, the major trade union confederation, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) launched a campaign to secure an eight-hour workday, and threatened to take to the streets *en masse* on May Day 1919 if their demands were not met. They were assisted in the cause by the science of “fatigue,” which had grown into a sophisticated discourse of labor optimisation during the war years.⁵³ The workers succeeded in April 1919, when mass unrest had made the government fear revolution.⁵⁴

Once a certain measure of leisure time was secured, a circular process of self-reinforcement emerged as unionists transformed cinemas into spaces not only *for* leisure but also spaces *to fight*

⁵² Darmon, Pierre. 2002. *Vivre à Paris pendant la Grande Guerre*. Paris: Fayard. 321.

⁵³ Cross, Gary S. 1989. *A Quest for Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1940*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press,. 115.

⁵⁴ Stovall, Tyler Edward. 2012. *Paris and the Spirit of 1919 : Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 161.

for leisure as well as for a range of other demands. The bourgeois classes worried that workers would spend their newfound leisure time at the wine merchant (*Revue du Christianisme Social*, May 1923), but rather than lead the workers to alcoholism, the law led them to regularly attend their local cinemas, both to watch films and to meet with their fellow union members. In direct response to this new audience, exhibitors sought to profit by building cinemas in working-class neighbourhoods of Paris where men and women could spend their “eight hours of play” (*Le Radical*, August 11, 1919).

Workers and war veterans had particular ideas of what they wished to see during their leisure time. Cinemas could not be a refuge for traumatised audiences if they were pervaded with images of violence or with the psychologically disturbing formal experimentation of the French narrative avant-garde. In contrast to the intellectual cinephiles, therefore, ordinary audiences snubbed the technical dalliances of Marcel L’Herbier as well as artistic imports from Sweden (Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller), the United States (D.W. Griffith) and Germany (Robert Weine). In reaction to the Paris release of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Dir. Robert Wiene, 1920), Georges Chennevière, the literary critic for the Socialist newspaper *L’Humanité*, encouraged his readers to protest films that polluted their leisure space in spectatorial acts inspired by the vibrant debates, speeches and voting sessions held in Parisian cinemas during periods of labour unrest.

You don’t need to go to the cinema to see madness. All you have to do is visit the [hospitals and asylums] Salpêtrière, Bicêtre or Sainte-Anne.⁵⁵ It is enough, alas, to have fought in the war. The Mort-Homme trenches inspired only horror in the fighters. Why should such films interest us? (*L’Humanité*, March 23, 1922).

⁵⁵ Indeed, cinema was even used as a treatment and leisure activity for hospitalised shell-shocked soldiers in Paris asylums. For example, this was the case at the Asile de Moisselles in the Seine-et-Oise, north of Paris into the early 1920s (*Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris*, January 20, 1920).

This dissertation re-embeds cinema culture within this simultaneously traumatised and revolutionary social fabric because it is in this context which Parisian neighbourhood cinemas emerged and gained meaning during and after the Great War.

The Chapters

Much as in the 1921 Mid-Lenten Parade the film industry's float moved through Paris in the midst of an unruly, chaotic and working-class crowd, this dissertation treats Parisian inter-war cinema as existing in a crowded cultural, economic and political landscape. Indeed, the parade itself communicates how deeply embedded cinema was within the fabric of city life, and how, for working-class audiences, film entertainment blended seamlessly with far older cultural traditions, from medieval tales and revolution-era songs to circus clowns, acrobats and gingerbread thrones. Equally important, it shows how inextricably intertwined cinemas were with political activism. When Parisian families were threatened with eviction they could draw help and solace from their local tenants' organisation, many of which convened advisory meetings for tenants in local cinemas. When Parisian housewives felt their household budgets were reduced due to inflation like the meagre golden calf, they joined their local consumer league and used cinemas as a space of organisation and decision-making. Much as Madelon, the bar maid from the eponymous wartime ditty who comforted soldiers during their time at the front, so did cinema extend provide comforting escapism in the form of Geneviève Félix on the *Chanson* float. It is this embeddedness of cinema in diverse interests of the capital in the years following the Great War that motivate each chapter of this dissertation. In this way the dissertation aims to tune into what Clifford Geertz might have called ordinary inter-war Parisians' "common sense" about cinema, an approach to culture that, unlike the high-brow

criticism of the cinephiles, is “shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc” and “comes in epigrams, proverbs, obiter dicta, jokes, anecdotes, contes morals – a clatter of gnomic utterances – not in formal doctrines, axiomized theories or architectonic dogmas.”⁵⁶

To the extent that “Gender, Class and Cinephilia” moves beyond cultural histories of the emergence of cinephilia to render Parisian historical audiences their heterogeneity vis à vis their gender, class and ethnicity during the silent period, it follows the feminist film historians Gaylyn Studlar,⁵⁷ Shelley Stamp,⁵⁸ Kathryn-Fuller Seeley,⁵⁹ Patrice Petro,⁶⁰ Jennifer Bean,⁶¹ Miriam Hansen⁶² as well as Jacqueline Stewart,⁶³ Richard Abel,⁶⁴ Kathryn H. Fuller,⁶⁵ Robert C. Allen⁶⁶ and Judith Thissen⁶⁷, whose work sheds light on audiences marginalised from previous histories due to their ethnicity, geographical location, sex or class—a tendency that Sumiko Higashi⁶⁸ has

⁵⁶ Geertz, Clifford. 1983. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books. 90.

⁵⁷ Studlar, Gaylyn. 1996. “The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women’s Commodified Culture in the 1920s.” In *Silent Film*, edited by Richard Abel, 263–97. London: The Athlone Press.

⁵⁸ Stamp, Shelley. 2000. *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

⁵⁹ Fuller-Seeley, Kathryn, ed. 2008. *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.

⁶⁰ Petro, Patrice. 2002. *Aftershocks of the New : Feminism and Film History*. New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

⁶¹ Bean, Jennifer M, and Diane Negra, eds. 2002. *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press.

⁶² Hansen, Miriam. 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press.

⁶³ Stewart, Jacqueline Najuma. 2005. *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California press.

⁶⁴ Abel, Richard. 2007. “A Patchwork Map of Weekly Movie-Going, 1911-1913.” Maltby, Richard, Melvyn Stokes, and Robert Clyde Allen, eds. *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

⁶⁵ Fuller, Kathryn H. 2001. *At the Picture Show: Small-town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*. Charlottesville (Virginia): University of Virginia Press.

⁶⁶ Allen, Robert C. “Relocating American Film History: The ‘Problem’ of the Empirical.” *Cultural Studies* 20.1 (2006): 48–88.

⁶⁷ Thissen, Judith. 1999. “Jewish Immigrant Audiences in New York City, 1905-1914” Stokes, Melvyn and Richard Maltby. *American movie audiences : from the turn of the century to the early sound era*. London : BFI Pub., 15-28.

⁶⁸ Higashi, Sumiko. “In Focus: Film History, or a Baedeker Guide to the Historical Turn.” *Cinema Journal*, 44, No. 1, Fall 2004.

called “the historical turn.” New archival methods are needed to get to this clattering of voices from historical agents who for decades have flown under the radar of French cultural historians and been scorned by intellectual cultural arbiters. My archival method is therefore in keeping with the “indeterminate trajectories”⁶⁹ of the itinerant spectators who refused to conform to the expectations of intellectual film critics and their allied exhibitors.

On the one hand this dissertation uses a key film and a key theoretical term to rehistoricise the mythical cinephilic awakening following the Great War: *Broken Blossoms* and *photogénie*. On the other hand, the dissertation takes the protests and police surveillance sparked by the release of the anti-Bolshevik documentary *La Russie rouge* and the reception among female fans of Louis Feuillade’s *Les Deux Gamines* (1921), a serial reviled by Louis Delluc and the intellectual film press.

The first film industry float in the 1921 Mid-Lenten parade illustrates the themes of the first chapter of this dissertation. Chapter One places D.W. Griffith’s film *Broken Blossoms* at the heart of the struggle between two opposing notions of cinema: the first float’s conception of cinema as an instructive, modern universal language and the second of cinema as a sorrowful victim to the whims of State censors who refuse to see it as anything other than a mindless pastime for the masses. In Chapter One I outline the importance of Griffith’s film for persuading the French government to reduce the financial burden on the French film industry by reducing State and municipal taxes. The American cowboys attempting to lasso the French cinema cow represent the threat of American imports to national cinema production. I show that *Broken Blossoms* represented a highbrow international art cinema that would allow the French film

⁶⁹ De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 34.

industry to argue that they were art dealers and instructors of the masses, not fairground peddlars. In the first chapter I thus examine how critics used the film to argue for a separate exhibition circuit for art cinema, which would indeed be created in 1924 with the emergence of *salles spécialisées* beginning with Jean Tedesco's special screenings at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier. The film also revealed the difficulties faced by French films by the censors compared to the relative ease with which American films of similar subject matter could be shown.

In the second chapter I show how the housing crisis, translated by a humorous float at the Mid-Lenten parade, was worsened by the construction of cinema palaces rather than new homes, a development that increased an already brewing tension between the working-class cinemagoers of the outer-lying neighborhoods and the bourgeois audiences of the *grands boulevards*. I thus show how audiences of peripheral neighbourhood cinemas collided violently with those of central luxurious cinema palaces in protests over an anti-Bolshevik documentary film *La Russie rouge*. In this chapter I use notifications in leftist newspapers, secret police surveillance reports held at the French national archives, correspondance from the Communist Party archives in Paris, cinema programmes as well as film criticism in illustrated film weeklies and newspapers to show how this new vision of the cinema established in Chapter One, far from being a politically neutral and purely aesthetic undertaking, actively alienated working-class audiences with leftist sympathies.

Chapter Three focuses on the eighteenth arrondissement in order to investigate the embeddness of 1920s film culture within this traditional culture of local beauty contest stardoms. I look more closely at the cinema cultures of Montmartre by using a collection of fan letters to Sandra

Milowanoff, the actress who played one of the *deux gamines* featured in the parade. I add to this material notices of political meetings in the leftist press, to reveal the spatial connections between different strands of cinema cultures which, by virtue of the spatial proximity of local workplaces, working-class homes, and cinemas in which workers could hold union meetings, were both intimate and political.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I embed the emergence of the film theoretical term *photogénie* within this vibrant beauty contest culture of everyday working girl stardom. In the cinephile jargon, *photogénie* refers to the specificity of cinema as a legitimate artform and an aesthetic transformation of objects and persons on camera. In contrast, I re-examine the term's origins in popular French film culture and the role it played among "low-brow" audiences in the years before Epstein's seminal essay "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*" (1923). I turn to popular illustrated film weeklies, letter columns, news coverage of beauty contests, and unpublished archival material to show how female fans, in particular, used *photogénie* in their discussions about cinema. While advertisements in film weeklies told women that *photogénie* was all they needed to become stars of the screen, female fans themselves entered into discussions, debating to what extent they possessed the elusive quality that characterised their favourite stars. Before Delluc and Epstein debated the term, then, *photogénie* served as a central concept around which women oriented their participation in popular film discourse. Only later did the intellectualisation of the term transform it into a discursive marker with which an elite sphere of critics could distance themselves from non-cinephile, and particularly female, working-class publics.

By examining, in turn, ordinary Parisian cinemagoers' contentious reception of the international art cinema so highly valued by the cinephiles, working-class Parisians' politically savvy and well-organised protests against anti-Bolshevik films, and the simultaneously intimate and public bases on which the immense popularity of Louis Feuillade's film serial rested, this dissertation foregrounds heterogeneous publics that stubbornly failed to conform to the standards to which Louis Delluc and like-minded critics held themselves and their interlocutors. These publics—what I here, drawing on Michael Warner,⁷⁰ call “counterpublics”—failed to conform not because they were lacking in taste or intellectual capability, but because they were part of a deeply rooted, vibrant, meaningful, political, and even critical cinema culture that predated and outnumbered the community of cinema connoisseurs that was emerging around the cinephiles. By giving back to these publics a voice that has been drowned out by decades of cinephilic cinema historiography, my hope is that this dissertation will contribute to shifting the burden of proof of legitimate and authentic film engagement away from popular, non-academic spectators, whether they frequented local cinemas in the 1920s or watch films on their iPads or iPhones today, and onto the connoisseur culture of arthouse cinema circuits, international film festivals and academic film studies.

⁷⁰ Warner, Michael. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Chapter One

Blossoms Breaking at the Dawn of Cinephilia: The Reception of D.W. Griffith in France

As the days drew shorter and the new film season approached in the autumn of 1920, not a soul in Paris could be unaware of D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*. Advertising for the film—released in France as *Le Lys brisé*—was so widespread that many French filmmakers, producers and distributors sought to profit from it by using the words “lys” or “brisé” in their own film titles. The same season the Parisian public saw *Le Lys rouge* (Dir. Charles Maudru, 1920), *Le Lys sauvage* (*Virtuous Wives*, Dir. George Loane Tucker, 1918), *Le Lys du Mont Saint Michel* (Dir. Henry Houry, 1920) and *Le Lys de la vie* (Dir. Loïe Fuller, 1920). The trade press exclaimed, “Blossoms are fashionable in the cinema” (*Scénario*, November 1, 1920) and, “All is blossoms as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic” (*Le Courrier Cinématographique*, November 6, 1920). One writer for *Le Courrier Cinématographique* even joked, “a hurricane seems to be blowing over Cinépolis, knocking over, breaking and shattering everything, if we are to believe the titles of some recent films” (November 20, 1921). In addition to *Le Lys brisé*, audiences were shown *La Mélodie brisée* (*The Broken Melody*, dir. William Earle, 1919), *L'Idole brisée* (Dir. Maurice Mariaud, 1920) and *La Montre brisée* (*Karin Daughter of Ingmar*, Dir. Victor Sjöström, 1919). There was even a *Breaker of Blossoms* (*Le Briseur de lys*, 1920) (*Ciné pour tous*, March 11, 1921).⁷¹

⁷¹ See response to M. John in the *Ciné pour tous* readers' letter column “Entre nous” (March 11, 1921). The response reads: “Indeed, several naïve producers have tried to benefit from *Broken Blossoms* advertising by sliding the word *lys* into their film titles. Another, to mix it up a little, has entitled his film *The Breaker of Blossoms!!!* [*Le briseur de lys*]. It's perfectly grotesque.” All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

While mainstream filmmakers capitalised on the publicity surrounding *Broken Blossoms*, intellectual film critics had their own reasons to rally around Griffith's masterpiece. Jean Morizot, a young critic with the *Bonsoir* newspaper, described the film as "a consecration of the glory of D.W. Griffith" and "the ninth wonder of the world" (*Bonsoir*, October 29 and 30, 1920). After this film, he wrote, people would no longer be able "to persistently stick their heads in the sand like ostriches and refuse to understand anything about the cinema" (*Bonsoir*, October 30, 1920). Indeed, *Broken Blossoms* emboldened many post-war film critics, later to be called the first *cinéphiles*, to bring their campaign for serious cinema appreciation to the highest echelons of French society. For them, the very brilliance of *Broken Blossoms* cast an unforgiving light on the undignified aura surrounding popular cinema culture, and therefore illustrated the necessity of establishing *salles spécialisées*, cinemas in which the literary, artistic and intellectual elite could watch film classics as well as contemporary avant-garde works. Thus when Jean Tedesco, editor of *Cinéa-Ciné pour tous*, organised the first art-house screenings at the left-bank Vieux-Colombier theatre in 1924, *Broken Blossoms* was one of the first films he sought out for what he called "*la maison des cinéphiles*" (*Cinéa-Ciné pour tous*, February 15, 1925).⁷² Griffith's film held pride of place on Tedesco's "repertoire," a canon he defined as "films of great value that deserve a second screening as Classics of the Cinema" (*Cinéa-Ciné pour tous*, November 1, 1921). Later, the first *salles spécialisées* would emerge, such as the Studio des Ursulines (1926) and Studio 28 (1928);⁷³ later yet, in 1936, Henri Langlois established the Cinémathèque Française to carry the cinephilic torch. Langlois and Georges Franju's pre-cinémathèque ciné-club, the Cercle du Cinéma, screened *Broken Blossoms* at the Musée de l'Homme in December

⁷² Tedesco found a copy of *Broken Blossoms* at the Puces de Clignancourt, the flea market just north of Paris. Mannoni, Laurent. 2006. *Histoire de la Cinémathèque française*. Paris: Gallimard. 20

⁷³ For a complete history of specialised cinemas and ciné-clubs see: Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC.

1938 (*Le Temps*, December 7, 1938), and Griffith has continued to occupy a central place on the screens of the Cinémathèque Française.⁷⁴ Jacques Rivette reminisced, “The Cinémathèque is both the Louvre and the Museum of Modern Art, as they should be and not as they are ... There we could see Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms* at 6.30 and Warhol’s *The Chelsea Girls* at 8.30 and that’s precisely what was so fabulous, to see Griffith and Warhol on the same night.”⁷⁵

Just as Griffith has continued to occupy a central role in cinephile institutions, the cinephile community has carried on a self-understanding as an audience uniquely positioned to appreciate him. Today, the crystallisation of cinephile film culture around the figure of D.W. Griffith can be read in translations and edited collections of criticism by Louis Delluc,⁷⁶ Léon Moussinac,⁷⁷ Jean Grémillon,⁷⁸ Germaine Dulac,⁷⁹ Émile Vuillermoz⁸⁰ and René Clair,⁸¹ whose writings set the tone for an interpretive tradition that began in the mid-1920s and continues in arthouse cinemas

⁷⁴ In April 2014, for example, the Cinémathèque held a weekend of screenings as part of the centenary celebrations of Langlois, showing the same twenty films that he had programmed for the 1973 inauguration of the Palais des Congrès, among them Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms*.

⁷⁵ Cited in the pedagogical pamphlet accompanying the 2014 Henri Langlois centenary exhibition “Le muse imaginaire d’Henri Langlois” at the Cinémathèque Française. Dominique Païni was the exhibition curator, assisted by Maroussia Dubreuil.

⁷⁶ Delluc, Louis. 1990. “Le Lys brisé,” “Après *Le Lys brisé*,” “Cinéma: *Broken Blossoms*.” In *Le cinéma au quotidien*, edited by Pierre Lherminier, 2:210, 224, 277. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l’Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma; Delluc, Louis. 1986. “Le Lys brisé.” In *Cinéma et Cie*, edited by Pierre Lherminier, 1:276–78. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l’Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma.

⁷⁷ Moussinac, Léon. 1988. “Cinéma: *Broken Blossoms* (1921).” In *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/anthology, 1907-1939. Volume 1: 1907-1929*, edited by Richard Abel, 1:229–35. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁷⁸ Jean Grémillon’s lecture on the film at the Maison des Centraux in 1926 is printed in Grémillon, Jean. 2010. *Le cinéma? plus qu’un art!...Écrits et propos. 1925-1959*. Edited by Pierre Lherminier, 197-203. Paris: L’Harmattan.

⁷⁹ Dulac, Germaine. 1994. “Chez D.W. Griffith.” In *Écrits sur le cinéma: 1919-1937*, edited by Prosper Hillairet, 22–24. Paris: Editions Paris expérimental.

⁸⁰ Émile Vuillermoz’s letter to Sacha Guitry praising *Broken Blossoms* was reprinted in the French film journal *Positif*. Émile Vuillermoz. 2004. “Correspondance: Avertissement.” *Positif*, no. 520 (June): 47–50

⁸¹ Clair, René. 1972. *Cinema Yesterday and Today*. New York: Dover Publications. 91 – 96

and cinematheques today.⁸² This interpretive tradition has cemented cinephiles' self-conception as an audience set apart from ordinary filmgoers not simply by their taste, but by their unique insight into cinematic art. From the perspective of cinephilia, therefore, the emergence of a community of film connoisseurs capable of appreciating the genius of Griffith has an air of teleological inevitability that obscures the contingencies with which they had to struggle in order to establish their hegemony. The writings of Delluc and like-minded critics shared a situational agenda and responded to a context that has now been all but forgotten, largely thanks to the success of cinephile discourse. If *novateur* film critics and directors seized on *Broken Blossoms* as a focal point in their quest for respectability, then their success in institutionalising the tradition of French cinephilia also contributed to obscuring from later historians the complex configuration of taste hierarchies, competing cultural agendas and contradictory visions of cinema within which the film was first received.

In this chapter I excavate sources that allow us to mute the choir of critical consensus and reveal a more complicated pattern of reception, marked not by unanimous praise but by diversity and contestation. The Parisian reception of *Broken Blossoms* in the autumn of 1921, I argue, marked a new stage in the conceptualisation of French cinema audiences. In contrast to the enthusiastic praise that Griffith's *chef d'oeuvre* received in the intellectual film press, many Parisians felt fooled by what they considered false advertising. Some were offended by the scenes of domestic violence or reacted with incomprehension when film exhibitors, always worried about state censorship and audience sensibilities, made arbitrary cuts that disrupted the story line. Some felt that the film breached an unwritten code that cinema was and should be targeted to a public of

⁸² For an outline of the influence of *Broken Blossoms* on the French first wave critics and filmmakers see Andrew, Dudley. 1995. *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 36-41.

families and the young; others cried out that it participated in a wider trend of films produced for “snobs” and intellectuals, thereby betraying cinema’s role as “theatre of the people” (*théâtre du peuple*).

These negative reactions were both a problem and an opportunity for the film industry and its most enthusiastic supporters among the intellectual critics. Many cinema promoters saw in Griffith’s innovative work a new dawn for a national French film industry in need of economic uplift, tax breaks, and cultural legitimacy after the Great War. Although certain portions of the audience rejected the film as alien to their cultural sensibilities, their reactions ultimately encouraged intellectual film critics to call for specialised cinemas that would cater to more sophisticated, higher-class spectators. It was thus no coincidence that *Broken Blossoms* became, as Christophe Gauthier writes, one of the “cult films” of this first generation of cinephile critics.⁸³ The film arrived at a moment when the very notion of cinema publics was undergoing a shift, from an undifferentiated mass of lower-class viewers to a stratified cultural hierarchy in which such unappreciative spectators became mere movie “fans” to be educated by an increasingly self-conscious circle of intellectual arbiters.

In addition to recovering the multifaceted audience reactions to Griffith’s “masterpiece,” this chapter highlights the role *Broken Blossoms* played in the institutionalisation of French cinephilia as a national film culture for a select few. I first describe the conditions under which the Parisian elite initially viewed the film under the tutelage of Edmond Benoît-Lévy and Louis Forest at the luxury Salle Marivaux cinema. I then turn to the reception of the film by ordinary

⁸³ Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC. 279.

filmgoers and the reasons they gave for their dislike of Griffith's film. Finally, I conclude by demonstrating how cinephile critics appropriated the public's negative reactions to *Broken Blossoms*: Rather than admit defeat, cinephiles used the complaints regarding the film as an opportunity to emphasise the public's "lack of experience," an explanation they subsequently used to campaign for establishing specialised cinemas for a public attuned to cinema art.

A Lecture in Good Taste: *Broken Blossoms* at the Salle Marivaux

The press screening of *Le Lys brisé* was held at the Salle Marivaux cinema on October 29, 1920. As the young critic Jean Morizot⁸⁴ viewed the film in the company of the other 1,200 guests he observed that "after some time of skeptical irony" many of the spectators seated around him "suddenly stopped smiling, gripped by violent and natural emotion" (*Bonsoir*, October 30, 1920). These were not just ordinary filmgoers. Morizot was witnessing first-hand the shock that Griffith's film generated for filmmakers and artists with one foot still in France's glorious pre-war past. They included the playwright Tristan Bernard and his filmmaker son Raymond Bernard, who "were trying to be witty" during the prologue, but by the middle of the film "were no longer thinking about being funny." The actor Séverin-Mars, famous for his recent collaborations with Abel Gance in *La Dixième symphonie* (1918) and *J'accuse* (1919), was reportedly in the same jovial mood as the first images flickered onto the screen. *Broken Blossoms* soon silenced these *vieille école* film personalities. Louis Delluc attended the press screening and the next day noted in his *Paris-Midi* newspaper column, "There was a lot to cry about, listening to some of the remarks made by the "old cinema" crowd mingled in with the audience. But I

⁸⁴ So vocal was the young Morizot in his admiration for American cinema that he was accused of betraying the French national industry and even of being on the payroll of Paramount and Lasky (*Bonsoir*, August 6, 1920). These accusations acquired a tragic irony the following year, when Morizot died at the age of twenty-six from injuries sustained while fighting for France in the infantry during the Great War (*Scénario*, April 1921; *Bonsoir*, May 29, 1921).

think that I cried simply because it was beautiful” (*Paris-Midi*, October 30, 1920).⁸⁵

The sixty-two year old filmmaker and theatre director André Antoine, a keen proponent of realism in the theatre, declared himself in a state of “disheartened astonishment” (*Bonsoir*, January 4, 1921). His words are indicative of the soul-searching that the press screening of *Broken Blossoms* triggered in the French film industry. For mainstream filmmakers like Antoine, the film painfully revealed just how far French film had been left behind during the Great War compared to the developments of the American film industry.⁸⁶ Even more telling was Antoine’s speech at the press preview event of his film *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* (1920), which was held a few days later to mark the reopening of the luxury Artistic cinema. Antoine stood before an audience of over one thousand colleagues, journalists, and exhibitors, and announced that he had been silenced by the greatness of *Broken Blossoms* and could not bring himself to speak of his own work on “the day of a miracle, after having seen one of the most beautiful things that one can possibly see.” “What a marvel!” he exclaimed, adding that Griffith’s “gospel” had “astounded us all!” In his words, “The genius... of Griffith, brought to bear here in all its radiance, would dishearten anyone attempting to approach such perfection!” (*Comœdia*, November 4, 1920).

For the first generation of cinephiles, on the other hand, Griffith represented the true *maître* of film art and a leading light for the *novateurs* filmmakers Marcel L’Herbier, Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc, and a few years later, Jean Grémillon and René Clair. In their eyes, *Broken*

⁸⁵ Delluc, Louis. 1990. “Le Lys brisé.” In *Le cinéma au quotidien*, edited by Pierre Lherminier, 2:210. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l’Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma.

⁸⁶ The week of the film’s release only 30% of the films released in cinemas were French (*L’Écran*, December 18, 1920), while only 23% of films shown during all of 1920 were French, a mere 3% increase compared to 1919 (*L’Écran*, January 22, 1921).

Blossoms represented more than a cinematic masterpiece; it also provided an opportunity to demonstrate that cinema could be fit for consumption by the upper crust of Parisian society. Thus Delluc praised Antoine for his “ability to pay homage to American *cinégraphie*” as well as “to the isolated efforts of a small group of French filmmakers for whom this speech is a precious cordial for the national and global future of this incredible art form” (*Paris-Midi*, November 8 1920).⁸⁷ More important than Antoine’s words, however, was the prestigious setting in which *Broken Blossoms* was presented: the Salle Marivaux. Widely known as the most select cinema in Paris, the Salle Marivaux was frequented by high society and even sovereigns and visiting statesmen such as the Prime Minister of Poland, who spent an evening there the very same month (*Comœdia*, October 12, 1920). After the success of the press screening, therefore, the Salle Marivaux was again selected for the avant-premiere of *Broken Blossoms* on December 16, the day before the film’s general release in Paris’ first-run cinemas. The venue lent an unmistakable air of high art to the screening. For the first time, the press called the pre-premiere a *répétition générale*, a term traditionally reserved for theatrical previews. In *L’Intransigeant*, the newspaper that serialised the *Broken Blossoms* story in the days leading up to the film’s release, the film critic Boisvyon noted the “innovation” of presenting a film in such a fashion, calling it “the first *répétition générale* given by the cinématographe” (*L’Intransigeant*, December 18, 1920). “This allows one to see,” Boisvyon observed, “how a theatre full of people who mostly specialise in *soirées parisiennes* react to an interesting cinematographic work.” These so-called *soirée* specialists included Benoît-Léon Deutsch, director of the Casino de Paris, the Folies-Bergères, and the Théâtre des Nouveautés (*Bonsoir*, December 18, 1920).

⁸⁷ Delluc, Louis. 1990. “Conférence de M. André Antoine.” In *Le cinéma au quotidien*, edited by Pierre Lherminier, 2:213. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l’Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma.

Daily newspapers were rife with praise: *Le Petit Parisien* called the film “a revolution of silent art” (December 7, 1920), *Le Matin* “a great event” (December 15, 1920) and *L'Écho de Paris* “a triumph without precedent” (December 17, 1920). *Le Matin* reported that “every personality of politics, arts and literature” was in attendance and that the film was “unanimously considered a work of cinematographic perfection finally achieved” (December 17, 1920). In keeping with the elegant venue, all guests wore formal attire. *Bonsoir* described “Men in frock coats like at the Théâtre des Variétés!” and “Women made-up as if they were going to the *Ballets Russes!*” The journalist continued, “It looks like a real pre-war procession making its way towards the Opera. But tonight they are all going to the cinema!” (December 18, 1920). Indeed, the list of attendees read like a *who's who* of the Parisian beau monde. A clique of well-known actresses set the tone, including Gaby Morlay (star of her own film series made by Charles Burguet), Suzanne Desprès (star of Marcel L'Herbier's recent film *Le Carnaval des vérités*), Emmy Lynn (a preferred actress of Abel Gance and Marcel L'Herbier), Noémi Scize (from Louis Delluc's *Fièvre* and *La Femme de nulle part*) and Yvette Andréyor of the Gaumont troupe. The journalist, clearly associating the audience with a pre-war decadent insouciance, commented on the excessive “natural” cleavage revealed by female guests dressed in fine lace “like the good old days at the Auteuil races.”⁸⁸ Leading critics of the theatre and cinema joined the stars, including Ricciotto Canudo, Gustave Fréjaville, and André de Reusse, directors such as Jacques de Baroncelli, the playwrights Francis de Croisset, Henri Duvernois and Max Maurey, the writer Georges de La Fouchardière, and even more colourful guests such as aviators Nathan and

⁸⁸ The Auteuil races were suspended during the Great War, between 1915 and 1918.

Maurice Chevallard and the sculptor Georges Fayard (*Bonsoir*, December 18, 1920).⁸⁹

Alongside these celebrities and artists sat several members of parliament who had been “intentionally invited” to the performance (*Cinéopse*, January 1921). Edmond Benoît-Lévy addressed these politicians in particular when he appeared on stage to present the film.

According to one journalist, Benoît-Lévy “eloquently defended the cinema, which legislators and the authorities seem to be all too unaware of” (*Cinéopse*, January 1921). After asking the guests to look around them and observe just how far cinema had come from its “humble origins in the Café de la Paix basement” to the “artistic and industrial vitality manifested this evening in the beautiful Salle Marivaux filled with a select, elegant, intellectual audience supportive of Silent Art,” Benoît-Lévy reminded them of the Bazar de la Charité fire of 1897 and how it had “put a stop to cinema’s ascension.” As a result, he argued, despite twenty-five years of work, the French film industry was still barely a few years old. He went on to delineate what he called “the four ages of cinema”: First “cinema’s childhood” from 1895 to 1905, then “the boom years,” a “time of artistic and industrial progress” from 1906 to 1913, followed by the third age dating from 1914 to 1918, “the war years during which filmmakers who weren’t mobilised worked courageously in terrible conditions.” Finally came the 1919-1920 period, which Benoît-Lévy called the “two years of reconstitution,” a period he hoped was only the beginning of the ascent of French film. Consolidating the French film industry’s “reconstitution,” however, would

⁸⁹ Although this audience was used to coming together at the chic theatres of central Paris, their behaviour was not the same in the Salle Marivaux that evening. For one, many spectators kept their hats on during the performance, causing the *L’Intransigeant* correspondent to complain that, “these messieurs with their bowler hats are becoming even more annoying than women with their cloche hats and feathered headpieces” (*Bonsoir*, December 18, 1920). On the other hand, there were fewer latecomers than there would be for a theatrical performance, and “although people still went from box to box and seat to seat, they moved with increased prudence. This is due to the awkward journey they would have to make guided by the usherette’s little star when darkness fell suddenly” (*Ibid.*). The darkness of the theatre, he mused, might explain the audience’s lack of propriety compared with their spectatorial behaviour at the theatre.

depend on two factors that required political goodwill: liberalising the censorship regime and alleviating taxes.

To fully appreciate Benoît-Lévy's message to French politicians requires some knowledge of how the tax and censorship regimes imposed on the cinema industry were intrinsically connected to its position within the cultural, political, and economic conditions of post-war Paris. With state coffers drained by the war, urban poverty and crime on the rise, and an increasingly vocal and restive working class, French state leaders were extremely sensitive to the pernicious effects that popular entertainment might have on the country's citizens.⁹⁰ The result was an unpredictable legal atmosphere for French cinemas. On July 25, 1919, a government decree had ruled that films could no longer be shown without a visa from the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts.⁹¹ The following year the government established a new censorship office, the *service de la censure cinématographique*, to provide cinema exhibitors with more predictability. However, the latter ministry only inspected screenplays, not the films themselves. If the filmmaker subsequently exaggerated or added scenes of sex, crime, or corruption, the film could still be considered a threat to the public order.⁹² In other words, even if the film was granted a visa from the *commission de contrôle*, a public complaint could compel the Minister of the Interior to surpass the censors and issue his own ban through the intermediary of the *préfecture de la police* (*L'Écran*, December 18, 1920).

⁹⁰ For an exposé of the revolutionary atmosphere in post-war Paris, see: Stovall, Tyler Edward. 2012. *Paris and the Spirit of 1919: Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁹¹ Bancal, Jean. 1934. *La censure cinématographique*. Paris: Imprimerie J.E.P. 132

⁹² LÉglise, Paul. 1969. *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français*. Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence. 63.

This was the case for two French films released in the days leading up to the *Broken Blossoms* event at the Salle Marivaux: *L'Homme du Large* (Dir. Marcel L'Herbier, 1920) and *Li-Hang le cruel* (Dir. E.E. Violet, 1920).⁹³ Because the films were banned without prior warning, many cinemas had to close their doors and thus suffered considerable losses. The day after the preview event, December 17, Camille de Morlhon publicly protested the censorship of both films at the annual meeting of the *assemblée générale des auteurs de films* (*Cinéma-Spectacles*, January 1, 1920 and *L'Écran*, December 25, 1920).⁹⁴ The Minister of the Interior, Théodore Steeg, lifted the ban on *L'Homme du large* on December 17 after L'Herbier had made the necessary cuts to an “intolerable” and “demoralising scene taking place in a brothel” (*L'Intransigeant*, December 17, 1920); on December 18 he also lifted the ban on *Li-Hang le cruel*.⁹⁵ A week later Steeg defended his actions in an interview with Paul Bersonnet, arguing, “Under the pretext of art and to give the appearance of realism, filmmakers often put onto the screen things which are intolerable. The cinema is a family entertainment. They shouldn't forget it, and when they have understood this rule, I'll no longer need to intervene” (*L'Intransigeant*, December 22, 1920). Steeg's views on cinema were by no means unique; intervention of various sorts played out in these years, such as the decision by the Conseil Municipal of Malakoff, a suburb South of Paris,

⁹³ Marcel L'Herbier's film had been banned in a circular on December 14, 1920 and E.E. Violet's film by a December 13, 1920 circular. Léglise, Paul. 1969. *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français*. Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence. 64. See also Bancal, Jean. 1934. *La censure cinématographique*. Paris: Imprimerie J.E.P. 143. In 1923, Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was also banned after being granted an exhibition visa. For a detailed analysis of *The Birth of a Nation*'s reception in France see Stokes, Melvyn. 2010. “Race, Politics, and Censorship: D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in France, 1916-1923.” *Cinema Journal* 50 (1): 19–38.

⁹⁴ Léglise, Paul. 1969. *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français*. Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence. 64.

⁹⁵ However *Li-Hang le cruel* was banned again in February 1921 after complaints by the Chinese Legation, a ban that was not lifted until March 1923. Bancal, Jean. 1934. *La censure cinématographique*. Paris: Imprimerie J.E.P. 144-145.

to ban viewers younger than seventeen years old from its cinemas (*Cinéopse*, February 1921).⁹⁶

As a lawyer, adviser to Pathé, editor of the first film trade journal, and the man who had opened the very first cinema in the city, the Omnia-Pathé in 1906, Benoît-Lévy could speak with authority against claims that cinema caused delinquency.⁹⁷ Speaking to the Salle Marivaux audience, he argued that while more care should be taken with the programming of the Thursday matinée screenings for children, film censorship went too far. “Film is accused of giving a bad example to children,” he argued, “of causing a rise in robberies, attacks and juvenile delinquency. Well, this stems from a misunderstanding: Cinema is no more a children’s entertainment than is the theatre. We should really be able to have films for young minds and others for the more mature who don’t find pleasure in the same type of entertainment” (*L’Intransigeant*, December 18, 1920). Looking around at the spectators in formal wear, he pointed out that members of “high society, who, more and more, go to cinemas in evening wear as they would to the Opera, the Opéra Comique, or lavish music-halls, should not be placed under the supervision of incoherent and petty censorship” (*Cinéopse*, January 1921).

In addition to censorship, cinema’s unwholesome reputation had led French legislators to impose more indirect means of control in the form of a heavy tax regime. Before the war, cinemas had only paid a value-added tax called the “poor law,” the *droit des pauvres*. To help repair the country’s deficit during and after the war, however, a flurry of new taxes had been levied on all

⁹⁶ A few months later the Belgian government banned minors from cinemas altogether under the law of February 18, 1921. Bancal, Jean, and Université de Paris. 1934. *La censure cinématographique*. Paris: Imprimerie J.E.P. 268.

⁹⁷ Meusy, Jean-Jacques. 1995. “Qui était Edmond Benoît-Lévy?” In *Les vingt premières années du cinéma français*, edited by Michèle Lagny, Jean Antoine Gili, Michel Marie, and Vincent Pinel, 115–43. Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle; Éditions de l’AFRHC.

public entertainment requiring an entrance ticket.⁹⁸ As the number of registered cinemas rose sharply from 37 in Paris in 1914 to 162 in 1920, they became particularly attractive sources of revenue.⁹⁹ In 1916, a state tax had been introduced, art. 13 of which stipulated that cinemas were to be taxed up to 25% of monthly profits (for 100,000 francs or over), as opposed to theatres and music-halls, which were only taxed per entrance ticket.¹⁰⁰

As with censorship, the government justified these severe tax rates in moral terms. During the war, cinema had come to be seen as a luxury and, allegedly, troops on leave from the front were dismayed at the sight of Parisians flocking into cinemas while soldiers were being killed in the trenches.¹⁰¹ Speaking as Minister of Public Instruction in 1916, René Viviani argued that the public's attention should be directed away from cinemas and towards the more edifying entertainment of the theatre. He thus perceived the increasing taxes on cinemas as an act akin to philanthropy, "encourag[ing] spectators to go and listen to certain beautiful works of art" at the theatre or opera while discouraging them from lower forms of entertainment.¹⁰² Extending this logic, an April 1920 amendment reduced taxes for theatres and music-halls to one fixed-rate tax of 6% on profits, while compensating for these reductions by increasing the tax on cinemas.¹⁰³ Finally, a law of June 25, 1920 gave municipalities permission to tax cinemas a maximum of

⁹⁸ The Poor Law tax was a 10% VAT which was added to the price of tickets. Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 24 -25

⁹⁹ This according to records of the *Assistance publique*. Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 136

¹⁰⁰ Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 32. And Léglise, Paul. 1969. *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français*. Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence. 54

¹⁰¹ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés* April 16, 1921, 1674. See also Gilles Billecocq. 1925. "Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France." 136

¹⁰² Speech by M. Viviani, Minister of Public Instruction in the sessions of December 21 and 22, 1916. *Journal officiel*, 21 December 1916, p. 3781. Cited by Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 31

¹⁰³ Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 42

50% of the *taxe d'état*, an emergency government tax.¹⁰⁴ The General Rapporteur of the Finance Committee, Charles Dumont, used the same philanthropic reasoning to explain fiscal heavy-handedness against cinema in an April 1920 parliamentary session: “It is important to make all luxury entertainment representing the happy life [*la vie heureuse*] pay. We don't want to punish those who go to this type of entertainment, far from it; but we have to make them pay their part in the emergency budget that we have to establish.”¹⁰⁵

Viviani's and Dumont's distinction between the superfluous and potentially dangerous entertainment of cinema and the artistic entertainment of theatre was not lost on the representatives of the French cinema industry, who were already concerned with government censorship.¹⁰⁶ For French cinema industry luminaries, it was vital that Viviani, Dumont and other *cinéphobe* politicians be proven wrong.¹⁰⁷ Hence the importance of inviting parliamentarians to the screening of Griffith's film in December 1920: Never mind that *Broken Blossoms* was an American film by an American director; for Benoît-Lévy, it was the perfect occasion to persuade lawmakers of the respectability of cinematic art, and was thus fully part of the “reconstitution” of the French cinema industry. Benoît-Lévy thus “made the many parliamentarians present understand that if the taxes and decrees were not amended, if the cinema, persistently considered a fairground industry, is not treated equally to the theatre, then this artistic industry on which

¹⁰⁴ The final paragraph of the June 25, 1920 law read: “communes are authorised to collect municipal taxes, the rate of which to be approved by the Prefect, on cinematographs and public establishments where music is played and where theatrical representations are given.” Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 45

¹⁰⁵ Chamber of deputies, session of April 21, 1920. *Journal officiel*, 22 avril 1920 p. 1198. Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 38-39

¹⁰⁶ Gilles Billecocq. 1925. *Le régime fiscal de l'industrie cinématographique en France*. Paris: Éditions Occitania. 39

¹⁰⁷ *Cinéphobe* was a term used to describe those opposed to cinema. For example, in February 1921, filmmaker Jean-Joseph Renaud encouraged readers not to vote for *cinéphobe* candidates in the municipal and general elections so that there might be a governmental change in attitude (*Cinémagazine*, February 11, 1921).

many livelihoods depend and which spreads *la pensée française* will be gravely harmed” (*Cinéopse*, January 1921). He went to dystopian lengths, even remarking how “sad, solemn and dark” the boulevards of Paris would be without the lights of the cinemas to brighten them.¹⁰⁸ On that note he ended his speech, ceded the stage to Louis Forest¹⁰⁹ and apologised to the audience for stalling the projection of *Broken Blossoms* for such a length of time.

It was thus no coincidence that, as Dudley Andrew notes, “The Parisian cine-clubs found in Griffith an international powerhouse director more akin to them than any French precursor.”¹¹⁰ More than Griffith’s aesthetic innovations, however, the purposively elitist context in which *Broken Blossoms* was introduced led the trade journal *Scénario* (November 15, 1920) to flag the film as sharing kinship with the French capital: “*Broken Blossoms*, this film from overseas, is today very Parisian.” The luxury preview event at the Salle Marivaux demonstrated to politicians the artistic and cultural potential of cinema to attract an elite clientele at home and bolster French national feeling abroad. By employing the term *répétition générale*, certain members of the press overtly drew a connection between theatre and the cinema. This was what cinema needed—a polite audience, free of noisy working-class spectators who read the inter-titles out loud, brought their pets and babies to the theatre and threw olive pits, orange peel and camembert crusts over

¹⁰⁸ An order by the Chief of Police on December 31, 1918 placed strict limitations on gas and electric lighting for Parisian commerce. This ruling was not enforced uniformly and the central boulevard cinemas, bars, restaurants and department stores remained heavily lit by electric lighting while many other Parisian neighbourhoods would have looked “sad, solemn and dark.” However, due to pressure from municipal councilors in peripheral arrondissements the Chief of Police lifted the limit on coal for the festive season of December 1920 through January 1921 (*Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, December 11, 1920).

¹⁰⁹ Forest was at the forefront of an ongoing debate about “educational cinema,” and had in September 1920 released the educational film *Les mystères du ciel*, for which he received the *Légion d’honneur* the following month (*Le Journal du Ciné-Club*, October 8, 1920).

¹¹⁰ Andrew, Dudley. 1995. *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 36

the rail from the balcony seats.¹¹¹ Boisyvon thus came to the conclusion that “*Broken Blossoms* is able to move everyone, even those who are not daily spectators of the screen”

(*L’Intransigeant*, December 18, 1920). Indeed, the screening was a great success and would no doubt have converted even the most *cinéphobe* of guests.

Whistling down *Broken Blossoms*

Benoît-Levy and his cinephile companions might hope to convince the attendees of the Salle Marivaux that D.W. Griffith’s film was an appropriate form of entertainment for the Parisian elite, but they would soon find that many ordinary spectators—habitual film-goers who enjoyed the cinema as an everyday form of entertainment, and who had certainly not been invited to the Salle Marivaux—shared the Minister of the Interior’s scepticism. When the film premiered in first-run cinemas the following day, many spectators reacted vehemently, responding in particular to the scenes of domestic violence by the brutal boxer Battling Burrows. Significantly, they argued that such violence was not only detrimental to public morale, but it also represented the imposition of an artificial and elitist sensibility that was foreign to true French cinema.

In the sports newspaper *L’Écho des Sports* (December 29, 1920), Jacques Franc protested the film’s representation of the boxing profession. He sarcastically remarked, “Here is ‘educational cinema’ at work. After giving lessons to children, it’s going to teach parents a thing or two. How will children be able to ask their parents for permission to take up boxing once they’ve seen the film!” He went on to describe Battling Burrows: “The principal hero (??) of the adventure is a professional boxer, represented as an out-and-out drunk, a vile scoundrel and a dreadful brute

¹¹¹ A description of filmgoers taken from a reader’s letter to *Bonsoir* (July 29, 1920).

who through his bad treatment causes the slow death of his little girl... Apparently it did not even occur to whomever came up with this pathetic story that if there existed in the world even one boxer who fit their description, he wouldn't be a boxer longer than the time it takes for a referee to count to ten over his awful head. This for many reasons, of which one will suffice: intemperance" (ibid.). Franc's damning article was republished in *L'Écran* under the title "Words of a Sportsman" after an exhibitor, one Monsieur Volunterio, sent it to Léon Brézillon, the journal's editor (*L'Écran*, January 8, 1921). Volunterio complained that far from aiding the "reconstitution" of the French film industry, the film contributed to an unhealthy anti-cinema sentiment.

For André de Reusse, editor of the trade journal *Hebdo-Film*, *Broken Blossoms* was "the occasion for a huge bluff" which "had been successful in duping even industry figures," yet he proudly observed "the French public, with their usual good sense, have resisted" (*Hebdo-Film*, January 1, 1921). De Reusse explained this "resistance" as the result of a "Latin sensibility [that] suffers to see spectacles so excessive in their cruel brutality." De Reusse wrote, "We in France, except for a few professionals and snobs, have little appreciation for the pleasures of boxing. Even among the working-classes, hardly anybody would pay one franc to go and see two guys punching each other in the face for two hours: We prefer to go and see *Les Deux Gamines* or *Petit Ange*. Deep down, it's much better that way!" (*Hebdo-Film*, January 1, 1921).

When the critic and future film historian René Jeanne heard about the negative reactions to *Broken Blossoms*, he ventured out to a working-class cinema far from the central boulevard cinema where he had first seen the film. When he discovered that spectators booed, whistled and

hissed whenever the character of Battling Burrows appeared on the screen, Jeanne confided to *Cinémagazine* readers, “I came out of there with a very clear impression. It is not the technical excess, virtuosity or sophistication that the public rears back from, rather it is only the character of the brute incarnated by Donald Crisp” (*Cinémagazine*, February 25, 1921). Clément Vautel from the daily newspaper *Le Journal* sided with the spectators on this point. He sarcastically wrote, “Well! This masterpiece of the cinema is a bad melodrama made to move the most naïve, unsophisticated and childish of publics. If I had more room here I would tell you of the dangers of circulating such cinematographic literature where anglo-saxon sensibility is mixed in with a more or less conscious eroticism. Ah! Since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, all we have are people being whipped and tortured in these tear-jerkers!” Vautel noted that “judging from the remarks heard during the screening and at the exit,” his fellow spectators shared his opinions (*Le Journal*, December 23, 1920). Like de Reusse, then, Vautel found the film’s violence to be inherently foreign (“anglo-saxon”) and thus contrary to French sensibility. Vautel’s and de Reusse’s comments were supported by Gustave Fréjaville, critic and historian of the music-hall. Fréjaville praised the film’s “technical achievement” and “noble intentions,” but was repulsed by the scenes of “wholly physical horror, presented with the most grotesque realism and a brutality that even a Grand-Guignol audience would not stand for” (*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, December 24, 1920). He rejected the bombastic reviews of his colleagues and felt it necessary “to take a stand against exaggerated enthusiasm for the film” (ibid.).

Like Vautel and de Reusse, Jehan de Vimbelle, an advocate of educational cinema throughout the 1920s and 1930s, associated the violence of *Broken Blossoms* with an artificial and non-French aesthetic. He wrote, “We urgently need scenes from our own country, in connection with

our temperament, our ideas, our race, instead of imported customs which are poorly received by our fellow citizens... Not even the most tendentious publicity will make our hardy rural population accept the roles of children in films like *Broken Blossoms*. Our country folk would never call such a film a masterpiece, but an unpleasant work: and they would be right”

(*Cinéopse*, February 1921). De Vimbelle continued, “Our cinemas shouldn’t become like some of those fairground attractions with a sign outside, placed to intrigue and attract more passers-by, that reads ‘only adult citizens are admitted by order of the police.’” As cinema was “the only entertainment able to bring the family together during hours of rest and relaxation,” de Vimbelle couldn’t possibly “see the worker and his companion going out for an evening and leaving the little ones at home because they can’t watch the films on the programme!” (*Cinéopse*, February 1921). The one advantage he saw in premiering “very beautiful films” like *Broken Blossoms* in “luxury establishments” for “luxury prices” was that it could be “a way of cushioning most of the costs” allowing the studio to “make copies at affordable prices,” which, in turn, could be shown “at the real ‘people’s theatre,’ the cinema of all and for all.”

Spectators’ resistance to this “foreign” film was not dampened by the fact that the violence in *Broken Blossoms* was left uncensored while similar violence in French films led the Minister of the Interior to ban them. Not long after the release of *Broken Blossoms*, the Minister of the Interior had censored *Une Brute* (dir. Daniel Bompard, 1920), a French film that had initially been granted an exhibition visa. This was the third French film to be banned within a short period of fifteen days, prompting Volunterio’s cry of “Oh senatorial senility!” (*L’Écran*, January 8, 1921). After hearing of the ministerial ban, Pierre Simonot wrote in the *Revue belge du cinéma*, “...anyone could have believed it was *Broken Blossoms* being targeted by the ministerial

decree and that would have delighted many. Reportedly, this is not the work of Griffith, but rather a French film, written and directed by Frenchmen, with French actors and distributed by a French company” (*Cinéopse*, February 1921).

Complaints regarding the hyperbolic violence and excessive melodramatic register *in* Griffith’s film were joined by a chorus of complaints regarding excessive advertising and rhetorical hyperbole *surrounding* the film. In an article entitled “The Error of Cinema,” Paul Colin described the exaggerated promotion of *Broken Blossoms* as problematic because it constituted both the “source” of a film’s acclaim and the “means” by which the film would win acclaim (*L’Humanité*, July 10, 1921). The reknowned poster artist explained, “They create a movement of opinion and curiosity around several American and continental films, and thus succeed in misleading the public completely... Remember the ballyhoo a few months ago over *Broken Blossoms*, *Intolerance* [Dir. D.W. Griffith, 1916] and *The Cheat* [Dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1915]. A certain number of writers and journalists sang the glories of these screenplays that are completely ridiculous” (*ibid.*). The excessive praise surrounding the film’s *répétition generale* for the Parisian high society, it would seem, had the opposite effect on ordinary spectators.

Detailed stories regarding the broader public’s sense of being deceived circulated widely. A reader of *Hebdo-Film* with the initials E.H. held the same opinion and wrote to inform the journal’s editor André de Reusse about the reception of *Broken Blossoms* at the Tivoli Cinéma, a vast first-run cinema in the tenth arrondissement. E.H. described the “special posters” outside the cinema touting Griffith’s film as a “powerful tragedy” and a “sublime masterpiece.” He added that unlike regular screenings, there were no reduced-priced tickets. In the “packed theatre,” he

observed, “the public grew impatient during the first part of the program, anxious even at the advertisement of the *chef d’œuvre*.” Griffith’s film began and though at first “disconcerted by the prologue,” “they pulled themselves together to read the text: a tale of love and lovers...a tale of tears...the East...the West...” “And after that?” wrote E.H., “time passes slowly as they wait expectantly for the high emotion, the sublime thing, and then, boredom sets in. While on the screen useless policemen dither around, in the theatre people get up one by one and leave in silence. Here and there, comments are made, rather harsh ones, by half-raised voices. Although the film they saw was good, uneasiness remains. The public feels that they have been duped” (*Hebdo-Film*, January 1, 1921). The following week, E.H. reported on the Tivoli’s programme, which featured *La Montée vers l’acropole* (Dir. René Le Somptier, 1920) and *Petit Ange*. He described,

Again a packed theatre, only this time no feeling of anguish. The programme was followed with accelerating interest and the films were a great success. But a small incident occurred at the beginning of the final segment of the program. As usual, the screen announced the films that would be appearing in coming programs and here the unexpected image came onto the screen: ‘*Broken Blossoms*, the most beautiful film of the year, will be projected next week at such and such a cinema.’ At this, there was much whistling, cruel commenting and hostile attitudes from the public.

Unlike René Jeanne, then, E.H. found that exaggerated advertising inspired the film’s poor reception. He concluded, “...here is a film that contained beautiful scenes and, if presented normally and honestly, could have been favourably received. Instead, ridiculous over-advertising has only brought the film and its author ... malevolence and resentment from a public that doesn’t mind being swindled... as long as it’s done with some decency” (ibid.).

The filmmaker André Antoine also raised the issue of over-advertising in the illustrated film weekly *Cinémagazine* several months after his bashful speech at the Artistic Cinéma.

“Advertising,” Antoine wrote, should be “organised with moderation, taste and finesse. Look what has just happened regarding Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms*. This film was an astounding success when presented before a meeting of specialists, and with good reason. But the next day advertising poured out on such an unaccustomed scale. The most excessive words were thrown around (now they are used for the very least film) and the public’s excitement reached a fever pitch. When the same public found themselves before a very beautiful film, but one that hardly differed from what they had already been shown, they couldn’t help but feel a certain amount of disillusionment. They had been told too much. Certainly the film’s great success was well-deserved, but *The Cheat*, shown unheralded, filled the whole of Paris with enthusiasm in eight days: surprise and admiration were unanimous” (*Cinémagazine*, January 21, 1921).¹¹² If we are to believe André Antoine, Parisians were so emotionally primed by the exaggerated advertising of *Broken Blossoms* that the melodrama of the film itself was anticlimactic and left them disappointed. The advertising surrounding the film heightened the excitement of spectators to a frenzy before they had even laid eyes on the brutish Battling Burrows.

From Cinematic Crisis to Cinephile Opportunity

Clearly, attempts by Benoît-Lévy and cinéphile critics to engineer a triumphant reception for *Broken Blossoms* met with significant resistance among both ordinary cinemagoers and their allied critics. Cinephile critics, however, were soon able to turn this obstacle into an opportunity

¹¹² *The Cheat* was released in Paris four years earlier on July 21, 1916 and screened its first week at the Omnia-Pathé. When Omnia changed its programme at the end of the week the Select Cinéma took the relay and showed the film the following week (*Le Figaro*, July 28, 1916). De Mille’s film had been so successful that the Select-Cinéma kept it on the programme throughout the summer and into September (*Le Figaro*, September 8, 1916). *The Cheat* was unsurprisingly a point of comparison for *Broken Blossoms*, shown as it was at the Mogador Palace in the ninth arrondissement over two weeks in spring 1920 (March 5 - 18). The Opéra-Comique staged an operatic adaptation of De Mille’s film in February 1921 (*Bonsoir*, February 12, 1921). For further details on French reception of *The Cheat* see Miyao, Daisuke. 2007. *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom*. Durham: Duke University Press. 23-26.

through subtle rhetorical means. A year after the film's release, Louis Delluc wrote an article in which he compared the traditional variety film programme to a restaurant menu in which films like *Broken Blossoms*, *The Phantom Carriage* (Dir. Victor Sjöström, 1921) and L'Herbier's *El Dorado* (1921) were exquisite dishes, too rich and delicate to be appreciated by uninitiated spectators. Elaborating his analogy, he compared ordinary filmgoers to "an awful English nurse" —notably a female and foreign member of the working class— sitting in an expensive restaurant to which she has been invited by a wealthy old gentleman. After ordering the "house sole," a particularly refined dish, the nurse, "used to eating boiled fish and unsalted pasta, looked with dread at her *sole maison*. With her sad fork she picked at the crayfish, mussels, mushrooms, quenelles and other decorations of the alcohol-rich sauce. Then after a little while, her taste buds awoke and...she ate three quarters of the dish by herself. Now, observe the attitude of the public in front of *Phantom Carriage*, *El Dorado*, *Broken Blossoms* and other *soles maisons* (*Paris-Midi*, December 3, 1921).¹¹³ Delluc's clever allegory is typical of his attempts to make a transnational canon of French, American, and Swedish art films appear as united by an essentially national film taste that should appeal to French politicians and intellectuals. Thus he compared *Broken Blossoms* with a *sole maison*, a fine dish suited to the French nation and its refined palate, which the uneducated could not be expected to appreciate, unaccustomed as they were to the finer cultural products of France.

For critics like Delluc, then, *Broken Blossoms* was a verifiably superior film, comparable to the prose of Dostoyevsky (*La Revue hebdomadaire*, January 1921) or the poems of Walt Whitman, who, according to Léon Moussinac, would have seen in *Broken Blossoms* "the sincere souls of

¹¹³ Delluc, Louis. 1990. "Menus et programmes." In *Le cinéma au quotidien*, edited by Pierre Lherminier, 2:264. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l'Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma.

some of his poems” and would have loved “this fog running along dirty walls and this grey street at dawn where the fresh breeze tosses lanterns back and forth” (*Cinémagazine*, May 13, 1921).

When Sacha Guitry left the cinema after watching *Broken Blossoms* feeling “nauseated by American pretentiousness, American stupidity and by the grandiloquence of American bad taste,” Émile Vuillermoz replied, “You will listen to me... You will go back to *Broken Blossoms*. You will go and expose yourself passively to the regenerative rays of this electric sun, allowing them to take effect, like a sick man prescribed light therapy and you will give me news of it after three weeks of therapy” (*Le Courrier de Monsieur Pic*, January 5, 1921).

If spectators were to be educated in the merits of art film, however, something had to be done about the film exhibitors. Instead of treating *Broken Blossoms* as an artwork worthy of special attention, neighbourhood exhibitors incorporated it into their pre-existing exhibition practices alongside “inferior” popular films. Cinephile critics saw this as a serious obstacle. In 1920, Parisian cinemas usually changed their programmes every Friday, and each week’s programme would typically include a documentary, then a comedy, then a feature drama, and finally an episode of a *ciné-roman* (*Cinémagazine*, April 15, 1921). Exhibitors attempted to please a heterogenous audience in their variety programmes, and provided something for all the family to enjoy. While a funeral march, a panorama of the pyramids, or a Chamonix mountain range passed on the screens, friends might chat about the evening’s feature,¹¹⁴ *Broken Blossoms*, perhaps updating a friend who hadn’t been able to read the story installments in the daily newspaper *L’Intransigeant*. Between films an acrobat, singer, clown, dancer or juggler might

¹¹⁴ “What is there to say about travelogues and documentaries, if only that despite our protests, the public doesn’t seem interested. No doubt we are poorly inspired to place them at the beginning of the programme. They always play out in an atmosphere of general inattention” (*La Scène*, April 2, 1921).

appear on stage.¹¹⁵ In the *entr'acte*, the lights would come back up and spectators might buy a programme, eat an orange or share some boiled sweets. Importantly, exhibitors at the local level made no attempt at differentiating between popular *ciné-romans* and art films like *Broken Blossoms*. Thus Marcel L'Herbier's *Don Juan et Faust* (1922), for example, was mistakenly reported as a *ciné-roman*, a film serial like those of Louis Feuillade, causing L'Herbier to protest that "the tetralogy is not a serial!" (*Cinéa*, August 12, 1921).¹¹⁶ Similarly, Griffith's film was shown alongside episodes from the Juanita Hansen adventure serial *The Lost City (La Cité perdue*, dir. E.A. Martin, 1920)¹¹⁷ and *Greased Lightning*, an adventure film featuring Charles Ray (*Courage, petit!*, dir. Jerome Storm, 1919) (*Comœdia*, December 17, 1920).

Worse yet, according to self-professed cinephiles, exhibitors often took the initiative to edit out scenes from "art" films, either to save time in the program or to avoid offending the public's tastes.¹¹⁸ Earlier in 1920, Delluc had complained of cuts made to *Sir Arne's Treasure* (Dir. Mauritz Stiller, 1919) (*Paris-Midi*, September 24, 1920) while Jean Morizot decried exhibitors who removed the pastoral dream sequence from *Sunnyside* (Dir. Charles Chaplin, 1919) because they didn't think it was funny (*Bonsoir*, July 28, 1920). There is much evidence to suggest that *Broken Blossoms* received many such cuts, despite Griffith's express wishes that the film be left intact. A month after the general release of *Broken Blossoms*, Léon Moussinac commented in

¹¹⁵ In May 1921, according to *Cinéa* programmes, thirteen out of fifty-eight listed cinemas had such attractions. Most of these cinemas were in working-class neighbourhoods, a third in the 18th arrondissement.

¹¹⁶ L'Herbier immediately wrote to the offending journalists saying, "Please reassure Monsieur Feuillade's fifty-six million admirers in France and also the three or four people interested in my work, that, as flattering as it may be for my gall, your information is completely wrong. No. I do not plan to go up against the formidable Judex...and Barrabas' laurels don't look comfortable to lean on. So, to the few amateurs who might be curious of my intentions, please remember that there can be films other than serial productions. Due to their length, these films may have to be shown over several evenings, but in any case, the tetralogy is not a serial!" (*Cinéa*, August 12, 1921).

¹¹⁷ This was the case at the first-run cinemas Cinéma Demours, Gaumont Palace and the Salle Marivaux.

¹¹⁸ See *L'Écran* August 23, 1919, "Peut-on couper un film? Quand et Comment?" ("Can One Cut a Film? When and How?")

Mercure de France, “After encouraging unanimous enthusiasm in America and England and stirring up emotions of admiration among a section of the Parisian public, there is evidence that *Broken Blossoms* by D.W. Griffith has disappointed many. This is no doubt due in part to the masses’ general lack of experience, but is also explained by a clumsy strategy of imbecile peddlers who aggravated the brutality of the bitterly painful and lengthily developed subject by carrying out excessive edits” (*Mercure de France*, February 1, 1920).

For these intellectual film connoisseurs, hacking up a cinematic work of art to please unsophisticated audiences pointed to an underlying lack of respect for cinema. The practice stemmed, according to André Antoine, from exhibitors’ attempts to please “the public in its entirety, without acknowledging that the cinema gathers together, without mixing them up, a wide variety of spectators with opposing tastes, education and mentalities” (*Cinémagazine*, March 25, 1921). For Antoine, films’ lack of “protection and security” in the hands of the exhibitor was keeping cinema in a “state of inferiority deplored by all” (ibid.). In response to Antoine’s article, Pierre de Verneuil argued in *La Scène* (April 2, 1921) that pragmatic editing by local exhibitors would always be necessary, as directors could not possibly make a film to please all audiences. De Verneuil argued that *Broken Blossoms* “would have been more successful had it not been so difficult to reduce the role of the repulsive brute who plays the lead role” (ibid.).

While cinéophile critics continued to profess hope that ordinary spectators and mainstream cinema exhibitors might be converted to highbrow cinematic art, they increasingly betrayed their exasperation by advancing an alternative solution: separate cinemas. In an article entitled “What the French Spectator Must Know” Pierre Henry rhetorically asked, “What is the principal reason

for the mediocrity of current film programmes?” He replied, “You’ll never get an Anatole France reader to finish a flight-of-fancy by Pierre Decourcelle. You’ll never get a regular at the Théâtre des Gobelins to sit through a drama by Ibsen without falling asleep. No more can you reconcile a Wagner fanatic to *Phi-Phi*.¹¹⁹ Yet this is what cinemas keep trying to do—without success I might add. He who admires *Sir Arne’s Treasure* cannot tolerate *Tue-la-mort* [Dir. René Navarre, 1920]. The *Deux Gaminés* [Dir. Louis Feuillade, 1921] follower will whistle down *Broken Blossoms*. And you will upset several types of public at the same time” (*Ciné pour tous*, January 28, 1921). Louis Delluc echoed these sentiments to a female reader in the very first issue of *Cinéa*, writing, “...the important thing is that we are not forced to see the feature-length film and the *ciné-roman* at the same time. It is vital to separate the genres and not to treat the screen—or rather the spectator’s attention—like a rubbish bin in which anything can be thrown. There are people who like listening to Georgius and Georgel, and others Chaliapine. Well, these singers don’t perform in the same establishments. And it will be the same with the cinema, one day soon, have patience” (*Cinéa*, May 6, 1921).

In March 1921, André Antoine, the man who three months earlier had been reduced to silence by *Broken Blossoms*, advanced the idea that only a *spécialisation* of cinemas would protect films from local editing practices while also assuring a programme catered to a more refined audience (*Cinémagazine*, March 25, 1921). The same month, during the first meeting of C.A.S.A. (*Club des Amis du Septième Art*), Ricciotto Canudo proposed creating a hierarchy of film theatres so that an elite, intellectual public would not have to mix with more popular, working-class cinemagoers. In his view, popular modes of spectatorship should be relegated to working-class

¹¹⁹ A popular musical burlesque comedy by Christiné shown at the Théâtre de Nouveautés and the Bouffes-Parisiens that was considered lowbrow theatre.

cinemas, *salles populaires*, allowing serious spectators to enjoy films in their own elite cinemas, *salles élités*. His aim was to “put a brake on the total invasion of degrading serial productions, and thus, to attract the countless number of intellectuals who shun cinema, refusing the levelling down of artistic emotion that they ask from a performance” (*Cinéa*, May 13, 1921).

Moussinac agreed with André Antoine that the archaic cutting of films by local exhibitors was a case of “true mutilations” and argued, “it is vital that we establish a hierarchy of cinemas ... which will mean that the boulevard cinemas will not show the same programmes as those of the *faubourgs* [outer-lying working-class districts]” (*Mercure de France*, August 1, 1921). Émile Vuillermoz similarly noted, “One shouldn’t scorn the clientele of artists, writers and delicatés interested in animated vision. The “omnibus” composition of programmes puts them off the cinema. There are many of them. They don’t ask for three hundred and twenty cinemas: they beg for just one of them to begin with! Is that too much to ask?” (*Cinémagazine*, March 11, 1921). René Jeanne joined these critics in his utopic imaginings of a day when “snobs” would discover cinema “embracing it like one of Erik Satie or Tristan Tzara’s wild imaginings, and that day the cinema crisis would be over! Ah! Yes! Roll on the day when the snobs discover cinema!” (*Scénario*, June 1921).¹²⁰

A remodelling of the Parisian cinema landscape would also mean that art films could be

¹²⁰ The failure of exhibitors to cater to highbrow film tastes had alienated intellectual and elite circles from cinemas. Attracting this public to the cinema as an art form was the objective of Jean Tedesco, who wrote “How many regulars of the théâtre du Vieux-Colombier never dare to enter a cinema out of fear that they may have to suffer through a serial? Then sometimes they learn too late that there was something beautiful on the programme among all the nonsense.” Cited in Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC. 118.

programmed over periods longer than one week.¹²¹ Pierre Henry, for example, lamented the fact that films such as *The Cheat*, *Broken Blossoms*, *Sir Arne's Treasure* and *The Outlaw and His Wife* (Dir. Victor Sjöström, 1918) were “shown for only a week on boulevard screens and then we weren't able to see them again, simply because in current cinema mores, it is agreed that one must take on new films every week, even if they're appalling” (*Ciné pour tous*, January 28, 1921). He argued that if these films were shown in just one central boulevard cinema, they would have run for several months. Instead, Parisian spectators who wanted to see *Broken Blossoms* one month after its release had to visit a provincial city where the film would likely be “projected too quickly, with insufficient light, more or less mutilated, accompanied by an orchestra without a name, preceded by *Impéria* [Dir. Jean Durand, 1920] and followed by *Rigadin*” (*Ciné pour tous*, January 28, 1921). Pierre Henry's idea echoed that of André Antoine, namely the creation of specialised cinemas in the centre of Paris for each “established visual genre” (*Ciné pour tous*, January 28, 1921). Benoît-Lévy had forwarded a similar idea in his speech before the screening of *Broken Blossoms*. For him, the Ministry of the Interior's over-sensitivity to moral issues in the cinema would suffocate the French film industry. In his words, “we can't force directors to only make moral films that can be seen by all, young and old ... such an obligation would be the death of our cinemas” (*Cinéopse*, February 1921). Instead, he had argued, cinemas could be separated to prevent children from seeing films that were meant for adults.¹²²

¹²¹ This type of specialisation would begin the following year when *The Kid* (Dir. Charles Chaplin, 1921) was shown in seven Parisian cinemas for a period of at least four weeks (*Cinéa*, November 4, 1921). Similarly *L'Atlantide* featuring Stacia Napierkowska (Dir. Jacques Feyder, 1921) stayed on at the Madeleine-Cinéma for as long as there was an audience. See *Cinémagazine* (November 25, 1921) and the letter column “Courrier des ‘Amis du Cinéma’” (*Cinémagazine*, October 28, 1921).

¹²² Benoît-Lévy proposed an educational programme of cinemas for children called *Juvenia* (*Le Film*, December 1920), that he was later forced to abandon for financial reasons. Meusy, Jean-Jacques. 1995. “Qui était Edmond Benoît-Lévy?” In *Les vingt premières années du cinéma français*, edited by Michèle Lagny, Jean Antoine Gili, Michel Marie, and Vincent Pinel, 115–43. Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, Éditions de l'AFRHC. 138–139.

Conclusion: Creating An Audience for Griffith

Specialised cinemas would provide a platform for the French *novateur* cinema of the 1920s, a movement that Richard Abel has called the Narrative Avant-Garde. This *noyau* of filmmakers, including Marcel L'Herbier, Abel Gance, Louis Delluc and Germaine Dulac, depended upon an elite, intellectual audience to watch their films in distinct exhibition venues, the *salles spécialisées*. The conflicted reception of *Broken Blossoms* in Paris was largely due to the absence of an established public for international art cinema. In 1920 the discursive categories of cinema and its publics were still unsettled, despite the many efforts of intellectual tastemakers and their film press. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* formed the focal point for a debate on film publics and exhibition sites.

If *Broken Blossoms* brought to the surface conflicting visions of what cinema's future would be in France, it also provided cinephile critics with potent arguments for treating certain forms of cinema as an artform worthy of respect and veneration. Griffith's film came at an opportune moment for a fledgling cinephile movement in search of elite supporters. Seen against the background of a popular cinema culture that was already over a decade old by the time Griffith's film appeared, the negative reactions by many filmgoers and critics to the film and its accompanying discourse appear as natural counter-reaction to the efforts of "snobs," intellectuals, and others intent on marginalising the "theatre of the people." Ultimately, however, it was precisely the elite addressees of cinéphile discourse that would shape the future canon of international art films. Cinema managers, filmmakers and cinephile critics had to promote the artistic potential of cinema and its importance as a uniquely French cultural product in order to convince the state that they were not an industry providing immoral entertainment to

workers. In the early 1920s, government leaders might have still seen cinema as little more than a fairground attraction, but the support of the intellectual elite would soon transform certain film exhibitors from fairground peddlers to refined dealers in art.

Chapter Two

“Gaumont Offers ‘La Russie Rouge’ and All Paris Takes Sides”: Working-Class Activism in Paris Cinemas, 1921-1922

In the Autumn of 1921 a film caused riots in the cinemas and streets of Paris. *La Russie rouge*, a Gaumont documentary about post-revolutionary Russia that had been manipulated in order to serve as anti-Bolshevik propaganda, ignited a fire that had been smouldering among the city’s many Communist Party members. The protests escalated when the chief of police, Robert Leullier, ordered that *La Russie rouge* was to stay on the city’s screens and sent undercover agents to supervise the screenings. In the altercations that ensued, bourgeois *boulevardiers* and plain-clothed police joined forces to clamp down on Communist activists who interrupted screenings with shouts and revolutionary songs, leading the daily Communist newspaper *L’Humanité* to accuse cinemas of “brainwashing” on behalf of the state.

Scholars have noted the joining of Communism and cinephilia in Léon Moussinac’s *Les Amis de Spartacus*, a short-lived association established in 1928 on the basis of shared admiration for Soviet cinema.¹²³ This mingling of cinephiles and leftists has often been seen as indicative of cinephilia’s innately progressive and universalist appeal. However, we would be mistaken in naturalising the mixed audience present at Moussinac’s 1928 screenings. Moussinac did not

¹²³ See Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC; Vezyroglou, Dimitri. “Le Parti communiste et le cinéma: nouveaux éléments sur l’affaire Spartacus. *Vingtième siècle, revue d’histoire* 3 (2012) 63-74; Christophe Gauthier, Tanguy Perron, Dimitri Vezyroglou. “Histoire et cinéma: 1928, année politique.” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 48. 4 (2001): 190-208; Barnard, Timothy. “From Impressionism to Communism: Léon Moussinac’s Technics of the Cinema, 1921-1933.” *Framework* 1.2 (2003): 4-13. Vignaux, Valérie. 2011. “Léon Moussinac et L’Humanité du cinéma. Cinéma militant et militantisme culturel dans l’entre-deux-guerres en France.” *Études photographiques*, no. 27 (May): 200–239.

become a film critic for *L'Humanité* until 1923;¹²⁴ in 1921, the Parisian working class had no advocate among the burgeoning group of intellectual film critics. For the same reason, it would be anachronistic to see the cooperation of the Communist Party with the likes of Germaine Dulac, Jean Renoir and Jean Epstein in the late 1920s and 1930s as illustrative of an essentially democratic and classless film culture in the years following the Great War.¹²⁵ The shared democratic horizon that enabled these screenings towards the end of the 1920s was by no means characteristic of the cinema experience of audiences at the beginning of the decade. Far from being an intrinsically inter-class movement, cinephilia was carved out of a pre-existing working-class cinema culture by a bourgeois elite of theatre critics, poets, writers and their muses who saw working-class cinema-going as more of a nuisance than as a culture in its own right. Only once they had gained official recognition for the notion that cinema was suited to the disciplined, polite, and moneyed sphere of bourgeois entertainment did cinephiles reach out to working-class audiences from a position of educated superiority.

In this chapter, I use the protests against *La Russie rouge* to show the perspective of non-elite audiences on the role of cinema in Parisian public life in the early 1920s. In urban working-class neighbourhoods, cinemas served as local community houses, and the films shown there were seamlessly integrated into a wider fabric of working-class sociability constituted by community organisation, political activism, schooling, fund-raising, and non-cinematic forms of entertainment. Drawing on newspaper accounts and archive material such as government

¹²⁴ Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Fonds Marcel Martinet. Correspondance Léon Moussinac 1923-1933. NAF 28352.

¹²⁵ According to Vignaux (2011), Germaine Dulac joined the Socialist Party in 1925 (*Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière* - SFIO). In 1932 the *Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires* (AEAR) was created with a cinema section that was named the *Alliance du Cinéma Indépendant* in 1934 and in 1936 became *Ciné-Liberté*. Jean Renoir, Germaine Dulac, Jean Painlevé, Henri Jeanson and Gaston Modot were all members of the “section cinéma” of this group (formerly the *Fédération Ciné-Photo*). Jean Epstein made the film *Les bâtisseurs* (1938) for the builders’ trade union *Fédération des travailleurs du bâtiment*.

intelligence reports, I show how working-class audiences saw the appearance of several anti-Bolshevik films in 1921 as a politically fraught intrusion into their communal spaces. Against this background, the self-consciously apolitical and formal appreciation of *La Russie rouge* by cinephile critics such as Louis Delluc would have appeared to working-class audiences as part and parcel of a systematic disciplining of proletarian publics by the official and unofficial representatives of the bourgeois public sphere. It was this perception, in turn, which in late October 1921 led to the creation of two short-lived Communist film exhibition networks, *le Bon Cinéma* and *le Cinéma du Peuple*, to combat what Communists increasingly saw as *cinémas gouvernementales* and *cinémas bourgeois*.

Paris Cinemas Between Working-Class Activism and Anti-Bolshevism

During the first week of protest against *La Russie rouge*, Bernard Lacache, the journalist who provided most of the coverage of the protests in *L'Humanité*,¹²⁶ asked: “The cinema, the people’s theatre, open to all—was it, too, going to join the capitalist offensive against Moscow?” (*L'Humanité*, October 17, 1921).

With at least eight anti-Bolshevik films screened in Paris in 1921, the answer seemed to be a resounding yes. The Russian Revolution appeared to be the theme of choice during the autumn of 1921. *Cinémagazine* (September 21, 1921) remarked on this trend at the beginning of the 1921/22 season, warning faint-hearted spectators in an article entitled “In Russia.”

Scenes of adultery and crime novels are old hat for our *scénaristes*! The Russian Revolution offers scenes

¹²⁶ *L'Humanité* was the 4th largest newspaper in France with a circulation of 200,000 in late 1921. Archives du Parti communiste français. 3 Mi 7/ 23. Fonds 533. 10, Jeunesses Socialistes - Jeunesses Communistes, 1913-1924, dossier 3183 - 3185 : Jeunesses Communistes: correspondance, rapports, 1921. Letter from Maurice Laporte dated November 2, 1921.

that translate marvelously to the screen: houses in flames, chase scenes, killings... So for this season is announced: *Dans les Ténèbres*, scenario and *mise en scène* by Théo Bergerat [...] Then there is *La Russie rouge*...and that's not all!!! Far West films will just have to hang in there. Nonetheless, we think it's wise to remind those with a heart complaint that an aneurysm can be ruptured easily.

Beginning in Spring 1921, the twelve-episode anti-Bolshevik serial *The Woman in the Web* (Dir. Paul Hurst and David Smith, 1918) was screened in Paris cinemas as *Draga, l'héroïque princesse* (Icart 1997). That summer, Roscoe Arbuckle appeared in *Shotguns that kick* (Dir. Roscoe Arbuckle, 1914) as *Fatty Bolchevik* (*Cinéa*, July 1, 1921). In September 1921, *Dans la nuit*—a film released in Belgium as *La Russie bolchevique*¹²⁷—was protested by spectators of a Malakoff cinema. This was the Norma Talmadge film *The New Moon* (Dir. Chester Withey, 1919) that had been released in ten first-run Parisian cinemas in early May 1921.¹²⁸ In the film Norma Talmadge plays the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna of Russia, a princess forced to escape from her palace after an attack by a group of anarchists, one of whom later falls in love with her and forces her to be his mistress by ordering the “nationalisation” of all women (*The Moving Picture World*, May 24, 1919). During a scene where Norma Talmadge skirts the attention of the Bolshevik Kameneff, the audience reportedly whistled at the screen and protested the negative portrayal of the revolutionaries to the point where the manager had to remove the film from his program (*L'Humanité*, September 13, 1921).

Four more anti-Bolshevik films added to the anger of leftist groups during this Autumn of Communist discontent. First, *The Uplifters* (Dir. Herbert Blaché, 1919) was released in late September as *La Nouvelle adepte* after censors disapproved of the working title *Les Gaietés du*

¹²⁷ See response to reader with pseudonym Bob in the *Ciné pour tous* letter column “Entre Nous.” *Ciné pour tous*, June 17, 1921.

¹²⁸ The hierarchy of exhibition in Paris meant that the film arrived in this small suburb to the south of Paris five months after its initial release. The film was initially banned by censors in December 1920. See *L'Écran*, December 18, 1920.

Bolchevisme.¹²⁹ Second, *The Black Monk* (Dir. Arthur Ashley, 1917) released in France under various titles—including *Raspoutine, le pope noir* (*Rasputin, the black priest*) and *La Vie de Raspoutine, le moine scélérat* (*The Life of Rasputin, the Criminal Monk*)—had a limited release in Paris in early September 1921, showing at three of the city’s cinemas and one suburban cinema. *L’Humanité* (September 26, 1921) reported on a fifteenth-arrondissement screening of the film at Splendid Cinéma Palace:

After showing the revolutionary movement under Kerensky, a man is shown, made to look like Lenin, who seizes power when bribed by Germany. At the moment when the screen announced - “At the head of a few bandits” - our comrades from the fifteenth arrondissement and the Sporting Club (*Évolution Sportive*), along with a majority of the audience, greeted this filth as it deserved. The film had to be stopped after the majority of the 3000-member audience unanimously broke into *L’Internationale*’.

A Communist delegation was sent to the cinema’s manager and was able to have the film removed from the programme. The newspaper called for readers from other arrondissements to follow the example of the fifteenth: “Wherever we or our friends are insulted and disparaged let us accept the challenge” (*ibid.*).

Dans les ténèbres (Dir. Théo Bergerat, 1921) was released on the same day as *La Russie rouge*. The film was commissioned by the government propaganda service but was initially refused a government release visa after its press screening in June 1919 (*Bonsoir*, July 17, 1920).

¹²⁹ *Cinéa*, October 14, 1921. *The Film Daily* described the film as an “amusing and timely satire on the lives of the free-thinking, little-working “Bolshevists.” May Allison played a New York stenographer who, after attending several political meetings, began to feel downtrodden by her new “capitalist” employer Saul Chilpik. She leaves her job and moves in with one of her “comrades” Harriett, who exploits her as much as her former employer by leaving her to do all the housework. She even discovers that the “Harvard tramp” she is in love with is already married. Disillusioned with the “Bull-sheviki” lifestyle she returns to her old life after being tracked down by the son of her former employer. The Uplifters, which according to *L’Humanité* (October 15, 1921) “film profiteers have thought up with very little imagination,” was placed on the newspaper’s list of “Films to be Banned.” Also see Icart, Roger. 1997. “Le bolchevisme dénoncé par le cinéma des années 20.” *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* (67-68). 35–41.

According to film historian Roger Icart¹³⁰ this was the first film released as part of a government programme called the *Service cinématographique de propagande antibolchevique* (The cinematographic service of anti-Bolshevik propaganda) directed by one Captain Gillet.

According to *L'Humanité*, Bergerat's film involved scenes of women being forced to drink and dance on the tables, and even raped by Red Army soldiers as part of the "nationalisation of women" under Bolshevik rule (*L'Humanité*, October 19, 1921). Finally, *La Tragédie russe* (of which little trace remains), a collaboration between Georges Lordier and Jean Benoît-Lévy, was also screened that autumn (*L'Humanité*, October 18, 1921). Consequently Lacache asked his readers to boycott Lordier's cinema, the *Folies Dramatiques* on Boulevard Saint-Martin in the tenth arrondissement (*L'Humanité*, October 17, 1921).

Seeing *La Russie rouge* as part of a wider anti-Bolshevik trend in the cinemas, music-halls, and theatres can help us grasp the roots of the protests by Communist and Socialist groups during the Autumn months of 1921. According to Lecache, anti-Bolshevik propaganda came "in many forms, from the most stupid to the most ignorant." He remarked, "It is currently pushed so far that it far surpasses its objective" (*L'Humanité*, September 26, 1921). This trend was not contained to cinemas. *L'Humanité* often accused music-hall singers of poking fun at well-known members of the Socialist Party (the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*) like Jean Longuet, Pierre Rénaudel and Barthélémy Mayéras (*L'Humanité*, December 29, 1919). Little direct action was taken in the offending music-halls, cabarets and café-concerts, and Communists who protested would often be thrown out of the establishment. Indeed, *L'Humanité* held the silence of activists toward anti-Bolshevik "satire" and songs partly responsible for the number of

¹³⁰ Icart, Roger. 1997. "Le bolchevisme dénoncé par le cinéma des années 20." *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque* (67-68). 38-39.

inflammatory films offered to Paris audiences in 1921. For example, the 1920 winter *revue* with Mistinguett at the Casino de Paris (*L'Humanité*, October 17, 1921) featured her famous ditty

“Paris qui jazz” which included the following stanza:

If that's life
Well, I'm telling you
Without being *sociolo* (socialist)
It's not *rigolo* (fun)
And I'm sick of it!¹³¹

Such comic reference to leftist politics could also be found in songs performed in variety film programmes. During the Christmas season of 1919 one young woman, annoyed by an anti-Bolshevik song from a stage performer at the luxury Salle Marivaux cinema, stood up and cried, “Vivent les bolcheviks!” (*L'Humanité*, December 29, 1919). In addition, theatrical performances could carry anti-Communist propaganda, as was the case with Henry Kistemaecker's play *La Passante* (1921), which opened at the Théâtre de Paris in late September 1921 (*L'Humanité*, September 26, 1921). The play's action moved between Soviet Russia and Russian aristocratic émigrés in Paris, and was praised for injecting contemporary politics into its melodrama by using revolutionary Russia as a backdrop and thus addressing an “evolving illness” and a “burning contemporary problem” (*La Petite Illustration*, October 29, 1921).

Another source of the underlying tensions which anti-Bolshevik films brought to the surface was the latent conflict between the cinema industry and leftist organisations such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the tenants' organisations and trade unions. These tensions were both class-based and spatial; when they erupted in protest, they brought the working-class periphery into the bourgeois boulevards at the center of Paris, resulting in a direct collision of two

¹³¹ “Si c'est ça la vie / Eh bien, je vous l'déclare / Sans être socialo / C'est pas rigolo / Et moi j'en ai marre!” Lyrics to “J'en ai marre” written for Mistinguett by Albert Willemetz et Maurice Yvain for the 1920 revue “Paris qui jazz.”

opposing publics: the audience of neighbourhood cinemas and that of luxurious cinema palaces.

The Capitole cinéma just off the place de la Chapelle, where protests were held on the first night under the surveillance of local police, is a case in point. This grand cinema, “built by war profiteers” (*L’Humanité*, October 15, 1921), was somewhat of an intruder in this working-class area. When war broke out in 1914 many apartment buildings were left half-finished, and in 1921 many remained empty in otherwise lively neighbourhoods while many families were homeless due to rent increases and evictions. Their plight made headlines throughout the year. In February, for example, fifty-eight families were evicted from an apartment building on boulevard de la Villette after the building was sold (*Bonsoir*, February 25, 1921). An article in *Le Peuple* addressing the construction of the new Louxor cinema the same month encapsulated local feeling: “While large families find themselves homeless, cinemas are built on the corner of the boulevard Barbès and the boulevard Magenta.”¹³² In July, the eighteenth-arrondissement Socialist Party newspaper *La Butte Rouge* (July 9, 1921) argued: “If these were cinemas being built, they would have been finished a long time ago; giving a home to films is good (at least for exhibitors), but giving a home to humans would be even better and whoever is responsible needs to resolve this half-solved problem now.”

If workers and their families saw vast cinema palaces as an affront to their community due to the serious post-war housing crisis, they continued to use the long-established neighbourhood cinemas—or the *cinéma du coin*, as *Cinéa* sarcastically called them (*Cinéa*, July 8, 1921; March 17, 1922)—as meeting places for diverse activities throughout the inter-war period. Cinemas had

¹³² Perron, Tanguy. 1995. “‘Le contrepoison est entre vos mains, camarades’ C.G.T. et cinéma au début du siècle.” *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 172 (July): 21–37. 25.

long served a practical function for working-class neighbourhoods in Paris and its suburbs. A five-minute walk across the railway lines from the opulent Capitole cinema, for example, was the modest Cinéma Stephenson in the Goutte d'Or neighborhood, built in 1910 and totalling a mere 246 square meters.¹³³ The Goutte d'Or neighborhood section of the Socialist Party, which co-organised the opening-night protest at Le Capitole, used the Cinéma Stephenson for political meetings, which sometimes included film screenings. One such event in April 1920 was presided over by Louis Sellier, the Socialist politician who would lead the Capitole cinema protest (*L'Humanité*, April 14, 1920). Despite being dwarfed by the vast Capitole, the Cinéma Stephenson provided a multi-purpose gathering site, a venue used for the general assemblies of the railway workers' trade union, for the Union of Syndicats of the Seine, for meetings of the eighteenth-arrondissement tenants' association, as a venue for Jeunesse meetings, for public debates on issues such as rising bread prices and the situation in Russia, and as a locale for May Day celebrations (e.g., *L'Humanité*, December 8, 1919, December 21, 1921, October 4 and November 10, 1922, January 21, 1925; *La Voix du peuple*, May 1919). Indeed, the Communist Party used Cinéma Stephenson for meetings and *soirées* for Jeunesse members until at least the early 1930s (*L'Humanité*, February 24, 1932). The Capitole and the Cinéma Stephenson thus represented two different conceptions of cinema during the inter-war years, one a bourgeois leisure space and the other a multi-functional venue at the service of the local community. The *Russie rouge* protests intensified this divide between neighbourhood cinema and cinema palace, and consequently between working-class and bourgeois publics. When activists shouted the opening lines of *l'Internationale* over the elite of Paris, then, it was not just a political and economic polarity being *mise en évidence*, but also opposing notions of the role of cinema as public space and medium.

¹³³ Meusy, Jean-Jacques. 2002. *Paris-Palaces, ou, le temps des cinémas (1894-1918)*. Paris: CNRS Éditions. 361.

The pragmatism evident in the *Russie rouge* protests had already been fine-tuned in general assemblies where unionists met to discuss pay rises and working hours and to choose representatives to negotiate with employers. This was an audience accustomed to coming together, taking decisions and moving into action quickly and effectively. During the 1919 industrial unrest, the bronze workers' union gathered at the Cinéma Soleil in the eleventh arrondissement, particularly during the metalworkers' strike in June, and the Cinéma des Bosquets in the thirteenth arrondissement formed a meeting place for striking workers of the Say sugar refinery in 1919, 1921 and 1922 (*L'Humanité*, June 17, 1919, October 12, 1921, July 21, 1922). In addition, meetings were held at the Cinéma des Bosquets by the railway workers' union and the thirteenth-arrondissement veterans' organisation A.R.A.C (*Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants*) which was politically close to the Communist Party (*L'Humanité*, March 6, 1921), and the same cinema functioned as a venue for fundraisers to aid victims of the Russian famine on "Russia Day" September 4, 1921 (*L'Humanité*, September 4, 1921).

The role of cinemas in industrial and political activism in Paris prior to and during the *Russie rouge* protests shaped how workers went about taking direct action to stop screenings of the film. Activists' behaviour toward cinema exhibitors during the protests were similar to their behaviour toward employers during strikes: They met at a cinema to choose representatives; representatives would then go to the exhibitor with their demands, and would return to relay the exhibitor's reply to the group and decide whether further action should be taken.

La Russie Rouge: Protest Erupts

La Russie rouge opened to paying audiences on Friday October 14, 1921 in at least thirteen Paris cinemas and three suburban cinemas (*Cinéa*, October 14, 1921). Although the film is now considered lost, newspaper reports reveal that *La Russie rouge* began with actuality scenes of the Red Army, images of the Council of People's Commissars, and the arrival of Leon Trotsky in the Russian cities of Tula and Kursk. *L'Humanité* evaluated these scenes as authentic and claimed they did not insult the Soviet regime. The "forgery," however, began with the image of a protest march introduced by the intertitle "A Counter-revolutionary Protest." *L'Humanité* identified the protest not as an anti-Soviet popular protest in Russia but as a march organised in the Ukrainian city Nikolaev, which had been taken from the Red Army by the commander of the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army General Denikin and his lieutenant Slastcheff on August 18, 1919 (Mackiewicz 2009, 63). The marchers' flags carried the White Army slogan "Tout le pouvoir à la constituante" ("All power to the constituent"), a phrase which, along with their uniforms and cockades, allowed them to be identified as Denikin's partisans. The march had been the occasion for Slastcheff to remove sixty-two Communists and Soviet civil servants from prison in order to shoot them in Cossacks' Square. The corpses of these Communist prisoners remained for six days in the square, where they were filmed and later shown to Paris audiences under the misleading title "Victims of the Cheka."

Parisian Communists had been forewarned about the film's political content. In early September 1921 Gaumont had presented *La Russie rouge* in a private screening to exhibitors. The program described the film as "a sensational document, of passionate actuality, which revealed never-before seen, real-life moments," and carried portraits of Lenin and Trotsky on the cover

(*L'Humanité*, September 7, 1921). The journalist for *L'Humanité*, Gabriel Reuillard, was present at the screening, and was angered because the order and wording of the film's intertitles—"revolutionary repression" (*La répression révolutionnaire*), "the execution room of a revolutionary tribunal" (*la salle d'exécution du tribunal révolutionnaire*), "city neighbourhoods after the passage of Bolsheviks" (*des quartiers de la ville après le passage des bolcheviks*) and "corpses" (*des cadavres*)—made the corpses on the city square appear as victims of the Red Army. His interview with a Gaumont representative was published on the front page of *L'Humanité* with the title "Brainwashing through cinema: The Value of a Counter-Revolutionary Projection":

The journalist: "Can you tell me how you can prove that these corpses which you attribute to the Bolshevik repression are not the work of those savages serving under the orders of the assassins Yudenich, Kolchak, Wrangel, Denikin and others? You claim that your film has historical documentary value. It would only be fair that you show your documents."

The Gaumont representative: "I will introduce you to the Russian who can guarantee the authenticity of this film."

The Russian: "I can maintain that these reels come from Russia."

The journalist: "I'm not disputing that. I can see that they have the local colour. At least your Russians, your Russian crowds, your Russian corpses have a local colour that can't be mistaken. But you are telling me and the rest of the public: Here is the state in which the Cheka left a village and this is the number of victims they left there. Yet, how can you prove that these deaths and devastating scenes were caused by Cheka repression and not the counter-revolutionary troops? How will you get any free-thinking person to believe that the Bolsheviks would be naïve and, let's admit it, stupid enough to entrust you bourgeois capitalists with documents which would constitute formal proof of their crimes? [...] At one moment in the film you show the copy of an alleged order for the nationalisation of Russian women. What is the authenticating nature of this document? What's stopping anyone from showing an alleged order for the nationalisation of French women, which would carry the same worth? You must think the French public very naïve. Maybe you are not so wrong on this point. But do you really think, and be honest, do you think a serious man could be convinced by this childishness?"

The unnamed Russian claimed to have stolen the reels of film from the Soviet authorities, but neither he nor the Gaumont representative could provide proof of the Bolshevik crimes

represented or the origins of the order for the “nationalisation of women.”¹³⁴

The seeds had thus been sown for major disruption once the film was released in Paris cinemas in October. Following the first public screenings, the journalist Robert Pelletier demanded that Gaumont change the intertitle to “Communists shot by the White Army” (*L’Humanité*, October 23, 1921). The intertitles for the film listed in the daily newspaper *Le Matin* (October 16, 1921) can be added to those described by the *L’Humanité* journalist. They fell in the following order: “The Executive Central Committee” (*Comité central exécutif*), “The First of May in Moscow and the workers’ parade” (*le 1er mai à Moscou et ses cortèges ouvriers*), “Lenin addresses Moscow,” (*Lénine parlant à Moscou*), “The Red Army, a division of officers,” (*l’Armée rouge, une promotion d’officiers*), and finally, the offending scenes of the six-day-old corpses labelled as “Tragic visions” (*Visions tragiques*). Here *Le Matin* reported, “...under this last title, images parade across the screen which have provoked violent scenes in certain outlying neighborhood cinemas sparked off by members of the Communist Party.” Several cinema managers replaced the problematic intertitle “Tragic visions” with “Sorrows of the Civil War,” while others simply edited out the intertitles “Torture Chamber” (*Chambre des supplices*) and “Nationalisation of Women” (*Socialisation des femmes*) (Ibid.).

Many cinemas had already edited the film when it was screened for the first time on October 14. Some exhibitors had taken the precaution of editing out the images of corpses strewn across the street. No doubt to avoid protests at his cinema, the director of the Pathé-Journal cinema called *L’Humanité* the day before he screened *La Russie Rouge* to tell them that he had made the

¹³⁴ Government programmes that declared women property of the state were widely reported in France. See for example *Lectures pour tous*, April 1, 1919; *Études*, May 5, 1919.

requested edits (*L'Humanité*, October 14, 1921). However, *L'Humanité* (October 15, 1921) found that even censored, “the film remained a vile counter-revolutionary tool,” demanded “direct action from comrades in order to neutralise the film’s propaganda” and called upon its readership to ensure that the film had been edited to their standards (*L'Humanité*, October 14, 1921). In some cinemas confusion ensued when spectators interpreted the film as pro-Bolshevik propaganda. As one exhibitor speaking to *Le Matin* (October 16, 1921) claimed,

Several spectators came and accused me of promoting Lenin and Trotsky, and showing Bolshevik propaganda by including *La Russie Rouge* in my program. Others maintained that I was serving the cause of enemies to the Russian Revolution. Who should I believe? I’m simply passing a documentary before the eyes of the public without partisanship. *Voilà tout.*

The presence of Reuillard at the private screening of *La Russie rouge* allowed Communist and Socialist Party members to make preparations to reduce the effect of the film’s propaganda. Government intelligence reports from the third arrondissement section of the Communist Party reveal the direct action taken by the group in the week leading up to the film’s release and during projections in their local cinema, the Cinéma Saint-Paul. In 1921, the third arrondissement was seen as a hotbed of anti-government intrigue. Government intelligence reports from that year describe the nearby rue des Rosiers and rue des Écouffes as “Jewish revolutionary environments” (*milieux révolutionnaires juifs*).¹³⁵ Many Russians and anti-militarist ex-soldiers under government surveillance lived in the *quartier*.

The third-arrondissement section of the Communist Party, including the youth group (*jeunesse*) and childrens group (*pupilles*), met at the *maison commune* at 49 rue de Bretagne, which shared the building with a popular local cinema, the Cinéma Béranger. It housed two separate *salles*,

¹³⁵ E.g., a September 12, 1921 surveillance report of the “Russian Jew” Dokolinsky, a regular attendee of the *maison commune* meetings. Archives nationales. Police générale. F7 13490.

one on the first floor and a smaller one on the ground floor.¹³⁶ The *maison commune* provides a good example of how cinemas served multiple roles in working-class arrondissements of the city. In this third-arrondissement community centre, politics and cinema were inseparable. In a 1921 British *Proletcult* directory the building was listed under “labour colleges” as a Marxist School (*École Marxiste*) and Propaganda School (*École de propagandistes*).¹³⁷ It was here that the Communist Party *Jeunesse* members from the third, fourth, fifth and eleventh arrondissements who comprised the “Education through Cinema Group” (*Groupe d’éducation par le cinéma*) met. The group’s inaugural event was held during the summer of 1921, presided over by the Socialist MP Ernest Lafont. All Communist Party, *Jeunesses* and Trade Union members were invited to attend. The programme consisted of a screening of a social drama, *Les Droits de l’enfant*, with “explanation and critique” by a member of the committee (*L’Humanité*, July 23, 1921; Weber 2002, 146). In October 1921, the group held their screenings at the *maison commune* as well as at the nearby *maison du peuple* on the rue Charlemagne and at the Brasserie du Tambour on the place de la Bastille. Invitation to these screenings was open to all activists and readers of *L’Humanité* (September 26, 1921). On October 1 they showed *Coeur de roc* (*My Little Boy*, dir. Elsie Jane Wilson, 1917), *Charlot apprenti* (*Work*, dir. Charles Chaplin, 1915), the documentary *l’Ascension de la grande Pyramide* (*The Ascension of the Great Pyramid*), and the cartoon *le Nain de la forêt* (*The Forest Gnome*) at the *maison du peuple*. Although advertised as “educational” (*conférences éducatives*), these evening screenings fell in a grey zone between

¹³⁶ There had been a cinema on the ground floor of the building known as the American Cinéma since 1907 (Meusy 2002, 168–9). It seated 150 spectators and was quite narrow—just over 6 metres wide and 29 metres long (Meusy 2002, 168). At the end of 1908 a Socialist cooperative (*Union des coopérateurs socialistes*) made the building along with the American Cinéma into their *maison commune* (Meusy 2002). In December 1918, the Béranger cinéma was created by a Mr. Joret, who equipped the first-floor meeting room for cinema projections (*Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris*, February 27, 1918).

¹³⁷ Paul, Cedar, and Eden Paul. 1978. “Proletcult.” In *Literary Taste, Culture and Mass Communication. Art and Social Life*, edited by Peter Davison, Rolf Meyersohn, and Edward Shils, 3:69–218. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey. 212.

private meeting of local activists and public, commercial entertainment. This ambiguity is evident in a *L'Humanité* advertisement for one such “educational” evening: “The inimitable *Charlot* figures in the programme. Enjoyed wholeheartedly by adults and children alike” (*L'Humanité*, October 6, 1921). In mid-October the group placed an advertisement in *L'Humanité* (October 13, 1921) for violinists to accompany the film programme, indicating their ambition to continue such screenings and to present the films in a professional manner.

Considering the deep-rooted traditions of film exhibition within politically active working-class communities, it is not surprising that leftists sprang into direct action to disrupt screenings of *La Russie rouge*. Due to the presence of an undercover government agent we know that during a meeting on September 3, 1921, the group debated at length whether to register their cinema association with the *Préfecture de la Police* so that they might procure films more easily. According to the anonymous agent, most members opposed the idea.¹³⁸ The same year the *Jeunesse Communiste* groups of the third, fourth, fifth and eleventh arrondissements asked the *Comité d'éducation of the Internationale des Jeunesses Communistes* for “educational and propagandistic” films, and requested that their demand be forwarded to the Communist Party’s education committee in Moscow.¹³⁹

Government surveillance reports show that fifty members of the *Jeunesse Communiste* gathered at a meeting in the *maison commune* on October 12. The first topic on the agenda was to hear from the young group of representatives who had been sent to discuss the film *La Russie rouge* with the manager of St. Paul cinema. A report sent from the unnamed agent to the Ministry of the

¹³⁸ Report dated September 7, 1921. Archives nationales. Police générale. F7 13490.

¹³⁹ Archives du Parti communiste français. 3 MI 7 / 23. Fonds 533. 10. Dossier 3183 – 3185: correspondance, rapports, 1921.

Interior's Director-General of the National Police and forwarded to the Chief of Police reads as follows:

The Party wanted to know whether the film "La Russie Rouge"—which will be projected at the Saint-Paul and Tivoli cinemas—included elements of anti-Bolshevik propaganda. The manager of "Tivoli" received a delegation of members of the *Jeunesse Communiste* on this subject. The manager assured them that the film was purely documentary. That it was even to the advantage of Lenin and Trotsky. "This appears to be true," added the speaker (a member of the third arrondissement *Jeunesse Communiste*): "the manager showed us 260 metres of film; on the screen you can see Lenin cheered by the People." "The Party doesn't want to neglect an opportunity to protest in front of the screen. An abundant group of representatives will attend the screenings at Saint-Paul. At Tivoli, the other branches will take care of the same task. There will most probably be reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries at the screenings; negative comments are likely, they must be silenced at all costs. That will be easy because this neighborhood is mostly Communist."¹⁴⁰

Accompanying the report was a letter in which the Director-General of the National Police wrote, "Today screenings of a film which interests the third section of the Communist Party are to begin at the Tivoli and St. Paul cinemas. Protests and incidents are not improbable."¹⁴¹ The "other branches" that were planning to deal with Tivoli were the tenth arrondissement Communist and Socialist Party groups. The meeting between the *Jeunesse Communiste* delegation and the Tivoli manager was relayed in *L'Humanité* (October 13, 1921), which warned its readers that the struggle was not yet over, and that they would have to defend their cause a second time if the cut images were edited back into the film. At Tivoli, *La Russie rouge* was placed at the end of a programme, which included the first episode of *Les Trois mousquetaires* (Dir. Henri Diamant-Berger, 1921) and *Peppina (Poor Little Peppina)*, dir. Sidney Olcott, 1916) starring Mary Pickford. Three thousand spectators reportedly attended the screening (*L'Humanité*, October 16, 1921).

In the eighteenth arrondissement, local sections of the Communist and Socialist Parties immediately took action to obstruct screenings. Notices appearing in *L'Humanité* inform us that

¹⁴⁰ Report dated October 14, 1921. Archives nationales. Police générale. F 713490.

¹⁴¹ Letter dated October 14, 1921. Archives nationales. Police générale. F7 13490.

Socialist Party members of La Chapelle and La Goutte d'Or were called to an emergency meeting on Wednesday October 12 at the Salle Garrigues to plan their strategy. Their convocations appeared in *L'Humanité* (October 12, 1921) under the Socialist Party notices as follows:

18e Chapelle.- rue Ordener, Salle Garrigues. Extrême urgence. Cinéma.

18e Goutte d'Or.- rue Ordener, Salle Garrigues. Extrême urgence. Cinéma.

The two groups planned to take action during a screening at the Le Capitole two nights later.

This vast first-run cinema scheduled *La Russie rouge* first in the evening's programme, the segment usually reserved for the documentary short. Other posts on the programme were the first episode of the eagerly awaited serial *L'Orpheline* (Dir. Louis Feuillade, 1921) and the equally anticipated first installment of *Les Trois mousquetaires*. Sandwiched between these two crowdpleasers was the perhaps poorly chosen war drama, *Pour l'Humanité (The Heart of Humanity)*, dir. Allen Holubar, 1919).

As soon as *La Russie rouge* began, an interruption came in the form of Charles Joly, the Socialist city councillor. He marched determinedly from his seat, climbed up onto the stage despite interventions from the police and looked out onto the "sympathetic crowd" who had fallen silent, many of them attending the screening to protest. Joly explained to them the villainous objective of the anti-Communist film where "atrocities committed by the war-mongering Wrangel's gangs are attributed to Russian revolutionaries who were the victims of them!" (*L'Humanité*, October 15, 1921). He waited for the programme interval before returning to the stage, this time joined by his colleague, Louis Sellier, one of the founders of the French Communist Party. In unison they warned the cinema manager that "if he continues to provoke the anger of the working-class population of these two neighborhoods [la Chapelle and la Goutte d'Or], it will be by force that

we will stop this scandal.” In the next day’s issue of *L’Humanité* (October 16, 1921) workers were rallied to attend the Capitole cinema again to see if their demands had been met. Returning the next evening, Communist Party members found *La Russie rouge* had been pulled from the program. Some, however, found a reason to protest all the same and shouted “Down with war!” during a battle scene in *The Heart of Humanity* (*Le Matin*, October 16, 1921).

Also on the opening night, the fourteenth-arrondissement section of the Communist Party gathered its members at the Montrouge Cinéma. The party members sat through a documentary about watersports, the fifth episode of the ciné-roman *Le sept de trèfle* (Dir. Lino Manzoni and René Navarre, 1921) and *L’Idole brisée* (Dir. Maurice Mariaud, 1920), before they were able to begin their protest of *La Russie rouge*. By that point the impatient activists did not wait to see if the exhibitor had edited out the massacre scenes. They immediately interrupted the first newsreel images of Lenin with such “passion and authority” (*L’Humanité*, October 15, 1921) that the film had to be taken off and replaced with the programme headliner, *Le Signe de Zorro* (*The Mark of Zorro*, dir. Fred Niblo, 1920), starring Douglas Fairbanks who, incidentally, had just arrived in Paris with Mary Pickford (*Cinémagazine*, October 14, 1921).

After the eventful opening night of *La Russie rouge*, the third arrondissement *Jeunesse* group met again. Thirty members were present at the meeting, presided by the seventeen-year-old Roger Gaillard, treasurer of the Comité d’entente des Jeunesses communistes de la Seine.

According to the intelligence report sent to the police chief on October 18,

The meeting was brief, as most of the attendees had to go on to different cinemas. FILM LA RUSSIE ROUGE – The screening of this film at the Cinéma Saint-Paul was strongly applauded: the *jeunesses* group can be satisfied with the manager agreeing to edit out 223 metres of the film (the segments which could have harmed anti-Bolshevik organisations in France.) Nonetheless, we will continue to send representatives

to all screenings to prevent the edited segments being screened again.¹⁴²

As the first weekend drew to a close, Socialists, Communists and cooperatives felt happy with what they had achieved. The film had been taken off programmes in most cinemas, and at the Tivoli and Saint-Paul cinemas thousands of spectators had praised Lenin and Trotsky. At the Cinéma Magique in the fifteenth arrondissement, the manager promised the inter-union committee (*Comité Intersyndical*) to delete another anti-revolutionary film from its programme (*L'Humanité*, October 17, 1921). At the Cinéma Lecourbe, the fifteenth arrondissement's Communist section forced *La Russie rouge* from the screen "in agreement with the spectators" (*Ibid.*). At Lyon Palace the audience whistled down the film on Saturday October 15, and the local councillors of the twelfth arrondissement Jean Garchery and Jean Morin managed to persuade the exhibitor to take the film off the programme (*L'Humanité*, October 16, 1921).

Policing the Bourgeois Cinema

The police were paying close attention to working-class activities in Parisian cinemas. From the perspective of the police, surveilling the boundaries of acceptable political expression in cinemas was a natural extension of their duty to prevent violations of the property and propriety of the bourgeois public sphere. In addition to the undercover agent's reports, the police files of the French National Archives contain press cuttings of every article *L'Humanité* published on *La Russie rouge*. One report dated November 3, 1921, notes that "a rapid study of the industrial areas of Paris gives the impression that all French workers are Bolsheviks. Their attitude with regards to Lenin, Soviet power and representatives of the French Communist movement is very favourable. French labour believes that Bolshevism and Soviet power are the only way out from

¹⁴² Archives nationales. Police générale. F7 13490.

France's very complicated internal and external situations."¹⁴³

Leftists and anti-militarists, on the other hand, had long been suspicious of state propaganda in cinemas. In *L'Humanité* (March 30, 1921), Marcel Martinet complained of propagandistic newsreels, and it was widely felt that cinemas were being used to "brainwash" citizens by showing images of "kings, presidents, generals and archbishops" in order to "maintain the simple admiration of the public." It had also long been obvious that the police were hostile to working-class audiences' use of cinemas for political purposes. For example, on September 3, 1921 ("Russia Day") when youth group and Party members collected money for victims of the Russian famine in Montmartre cinemas, "overzealous police" forcibly removed and arrested them despite the express permission of the exhibitors (*La Butte Rouge*, September 17, 1921).

In October 1921, the *Préfecture de la Police* had assured Louis Sellier, the Communist Party delegate, that *La Russie rouge* would no longer be shown in cinemas (*L'Humanité*, October 16, 1921). Rather than fulfilling his promise, however, the police chief reinforced police presence in cinemas (*Le Matin*, October 16, 1921). The police enforcement of the *Russie rouge* screenings made the bond between class politics and cinemas clearer than ever. Not only did police violently intervene, some in uniform and some disguised as *boulevardiers*; the bourgeois *habitués* themselves spontaneously took on the role of the police, helping to identify and expel protestors from their luxury cinema palaces. The result was that violence escalated and anger intensified.

There were riots and police violence on October 16 at the Palais des fêtes, the Montrouge Palace,

¹⁴³ Untitled and unsigned report in folder "Notes russes." Archives nationales. Police générale. F7 13490.

the Cinéma-Danton and the Olympia de Clichy. On October 17 unrest spread to the Gaumont-Théâtre on the boulevard Poissonnière, and on the following two days it affected the central cinemas Electric-Palace and Aubert-Palace on the grands boulevards. The first major altercation between police and protestors occurred at the Palais des fêtes. The disruptions were so great that the riots made headlines across the Channel. *Variety*'s (November 4, 1921) headline read: "Riots Result When Feature Pictures Red Russia's Ruin. Gaumont Offers 'La Russie Rouge' and All Paris Takes Sides."

Since the initial showing of the Gaumont feature "La Russie Rouge" (Red Russia) the whole city seemingly has taken part in a series of riots demanding its suppression or insisting on its continuance. By passing it by the censor, the government seemingly took sides in its favor and the public has not been cooled by the discovery that the scenes in it most damaging to the Lenin-Trotsky cause were faked.

According to *L'Humanité*, Communists' anger in the cinema reached a climax when the intertitle "Nationalisation of women" appeared on the screen and spectators shouted, "It's false! Vivent les Soviets! Vive Kameneff! Vive Trotsky!" The whole cinema reportedly broke out into song with the *Internationale* and *Révolution*. As singing spectators emptied out into the street, they found police waiting for them with batons raised. A fight broke out and one protestor was arrested (*L'Humanité*, October 17, 1921). As the police charged the crowd, activists were forced to take shelter in the Café des fêtes on the corner of the rue Quincampoix and the rue aux Ours. In the café the police hit two customers, one a war-wounded ex-soldier with a wooden leg named Paul Rochet and the other a lobotomised ex-soldier named Henri Lucas. *L'Humanité* (Ibid.) described police agents no. 49 and 357 of the third arrondissement as having "behaved like brutes." A delegation of protestors then went to speak with the cinema's manager and had no difficulty in persuading him to delete the offensive scenes. *L'Humanité*, however, demanded that the film be removed completely.

At the Montrouge Palace the fourteenth section of the Communist Party, accompanied by Charles Joly and Jean Morin, took action. Police arrested a prominent Communist Party member named R. Métayer, but he was immediately freed by his fellow protesters (*L'Humanité*, October 18, 1921). At the Cinéma-Danton on the Boulevard Saint-Germain a delegation persuaded the manager to make the necessary edits, while at the Olympia de Clichy, Communist Party members cheered Lenin and Trotsky and made such a commotion that the film was interrupted and the manager deleted it from the programme (Ibid.).

At the Gaumont-Théâtre discussions with members of the second section of the Communist Party led to a fight and the police charged in with force. Clément Delsol and Sorbet, secretaries of the second-arrondissement Communist Party section, were brought to the *commissariat* and beaten. Following these incidents, Marcel Cachin called the police chief and tried to persuade him to ban future screenings of the film. The latter declared himself in no position to stop the film from being screened, nor, he argued, could he pressure exhibitors to edit out the offensive scenes (Ibid.). This was a trigger for the protests to continue. The promise to Louis Sellier had not been kept.

Two of the ensuing protests on the boulevard des Italiens in the central entertainment district became particularly symbolic of the forced exclusion of working-class activists from cinemas. In addition to luxury cinema palaces, the boulevard was home to theatres such as the Opéra comique, music-halls, and banks such as the Crédit Lyonnais headquarters. Aside from the Electric-Palace (no. 5) and Aubert-Palace (no. 24), there were at least three other major cinemas on the boulevard des Italiens, including Cinéma Salon Aubert (no. 8), Pathé-Palace (no. 32) and

the Salle Marivaux (no. 13). On the nights of October 19 and October 20, activists from peripheral working-class *quartiers* went to the Aubert-Palace and the Electric-Palace to “prove to the *boulevardiers* of Paris that [they] had the courage of [their] opinions and that [they] were going to make them be respected” (*L’Humanité*, October 21, 1921).

At around 9.45 PM, around forty activists from the ninth-arrondissement Communist Party and the A.R.A.C were present at the Aubert-Palace to protest the film, which was being shown uncut. As the first images lit up the darkness, cheers hailing Lenin, Trotsky, Kameneff, the Red Army, and the workers of Moscow rang through the packed-to-capacity theatre (*L’Humanité*, October 20, 1921). One patriotic Aubert-Palace *spectatrice* shouted back to the angered leftists “Long live France” and another spectator “Down with the Soviets!” All the while scenes of Trotsky entering Tula and Kursk flickered across the screen. When the falsely labelled massacre appeared, the protests became so loud that the projectionist had to stop the film and the crowd launched into the *Internationale*. At this point policemen dressed as bourgeois spectators jumped into action and knocked over activists, arresting half a dozen of them, including the journalists René Reynaud and Guy Tourrette. *L’Humanité* added that several “strumpets” (*péripatéticiennes*) and two or three “good timers” (*noceurs*) pointed out protestors to the police. At one point, bourgeois spectators themselves joined in the brawl. Their violence even reached the columns of the conservative daily newspaper *Le Figaro* (October 20, 1921), which wrote that “...outraged spectators [...] manhandled the protestors, who were then thrown out of the cinema by police officers supervised by Mr. Marchand, the chief superintendent [*commissaire divisionnaire*].”

Outside, party members from the eighteenth arrondissement who had been refused entrance to the cinema contented themselves with cheering Lenin on the boulevard des Italiens before being charged by police lines. During the protest, the anarcho-syndicalist and general secretary of the *Comité central des Comités syndicalistes révolutionnaires* (CSR) Pierre Besnard “was dragged outside, beaten up by nameless thugs, handcuffed and brought to the police station” where he was placed in a cell by police whom *La Butte Rouge* (October 29, 1921) described as being “on edge” and “aroused by beautiful and bored demi-mondaines” from the cinema. Once all protestors had been ejected from the cinema by the “entertainment police” (*police des spectacles*), spectators returned to their seats and the programme continued (*L’Humanité*, October 20, 1921).

At the Electric-Palace the following evening, the anti-Bolshevik film was programmed between *L’Idole brisée* (Dir. Maurice Mariaud, 1920) and *Miss. Fatty au bain* (*Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers*, dir. Roscoe Arbuckle, 1915), ending with the ninth episode of the Aubert ciné-roman *Nick Winter et ses aventures* (Dir. Paul Garbagni, 1921). *L’Humanité* described the scene at the beginning of the screening: “In this luxury theater where demi-mondaines and loafers indulge their boredom on the back of the Russian Revolution, the cops had sat themselves down comfortably. They were spread out generously among the velvet seats which they lazed upon with an indecency fortunately masked by the darkness of the cinema” (*L’Humanité*, October 21, 1921). The bourgeois clientele and wealthy foreigners thus sat side by side with members of the local division of the Communist Party while policemen disguised as bourgeois *boulevardiers* sat amongst them with their truncheons hidden under their coats. Upon entering the cinema, the few dozen Communist and Socialist Party members recognised the incognito police officers who, in

turn, quickly spotted the activists in the crowd. *L'Humanité* (Ibid.) wrote,

From the beginning of the screening, Mr. Leullier's civil servants took note of those of us who cheered—and with such heart!—Lenin and Trotsky. If the truth be told, the demi-mondaines were willing to help them in their task. In such a way that, after beginning to sing out the *Internationale*, protests broke out and the virtuous police of the government didn't have to do much to find us. They knocked over some of us, hit others and threw out those remaining.

The bourgeois Electric-Palace regulars, then, just as those of the Aubert-Palace, had no qualms about joining the police in their violent removal of the men from the cinema. Despite their bruises, the activists felt that their protest was successful: *La Russie rouge* was taken off the bill that night and they had brought their protest to the top tier of Paris pleasure-seekers, “right to the heart of Paris” (Ibid.).

Cinephile Apoliticism

As the Ministry of the Interior wondered how to quell Bolshevism among French workers, film critics grappled with the problem of a working-class public, who they believed were preventing French cinema from gaining the prestige it deserved by deterring the support of the intellectual and political elite. During the years following the Great War, intellectual film critics had grown increasingly impatient with the vibrant working-class cinema culture. Working-class audiences were not only rowdy and undisciplined; they were also lamentably indifferent to young directors such as Louis Delluc and Marcel L'Herbier, and their preference for *ciné-romans* over sophisticated Swedish and US imports such as Victor Sjöström, Mauritz Stiller, and D.W. Griffith was preventing France's political and social elites from taking cinema seriously. In 1918 Louis Delluc had been optimistic in the mass public's support of French art cinema. Encouraged by the positive reception of working-class audiences to Abel Gance's *La Dixième symphonie*, he had expressed optimism about the working-class Faubourg audience, which, “despite its almost

unanimous lack of culture,” had displayed “acuteness, taste and insight” (Delluc 1998, 160). The autumn of 1921, however, were months of great disillusionment for Delluc. He was deeply disappointed at negative audience reactions to two films that in his eyes were changing the course of cinema history: *The Phantom Carriage* (Dir. Victor Sjöström, 1921) and *El Dorado* (Dir. Marcel L’Herbier, 1921) (*Cinéa*, March 3, 1922).

The film critic Lionel Landry wrote in *Cinéa* in 1921 that the difference in taste between, on the one hand, the working-class and provincial public (*le public populaire et provincial*), and on the other hand, the public of the city (*le public des villes*) was that the first “wants the film to have a moral and happy ending” while the latter “asks for something darker and complex, less conventional.” Landry noted the problem this created for intellectually ambitious filmmakers: “Since one cannot make films aimed at a minority, which would be caviar for the people, one is obliged to sacrifice a film’s profound character” (*Cinéa*, May 6, 1921). In practice, the differences in ticket prices would normally separate the elite from their working-class servants even in cinema palaces, where audience numbers could reach 3000. When this separation failed, however, exhibitors would sometimes see it as a problem. The cinema manager of the Mimosa in the seventh arrondissement, for example, wrote in a report to owner Serge Sandberg that “The population is mainly maids, small businessmen, officers and Ministry employees; I don’t think we can count on an aristocratic clientele, as the cinema is not able to cater for two distinct clienteles.”¹⁴⁴ This led Ricciotto Canudo—in the first meeting of the *Club des amis du septième art* (CASA)—to advance the idea of a cinema hierarchy (*hiérarchie des salles*) so that the elite, intellectual public would not have to mix with working-class spectators. In Canudo’s view,

¹⁴⁴ “Rapport sur le cinéma Mimosa.” Département des arts du spectacle, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Fonds Serge Sandberg. Les salles à Paris et en région parisienne 1907-1928. 4o – COL-59/313.

working-class modes of spectatorship should be relegated to working-class neighbourhood cinemas (*salles populaires*), allowing serious spectators to enjoy films in their own elite cinemas (*salles élités*) (*Cinéa*, May 13, 1921).¹⁴⁵

The riots at Palais des fêtes held particular importance as the cinema was managed by Léon Brézillon, the president of the cinema exhibitors' trade union (*la chambre syndicale des directeurs de cinématographes*). The Palais des fêtes was the city's first "multiplex" cinema with 2000 seats divided over two floors and separate programmes in each¹⁴⁶ (Meusy 2002, 305–6). In 1921, Brézillon was at the centre of a pro-French cinema campaign that argued that cinema should be given the same respect as the theatre and other highbrow art forms. Earlier that year, during a mass meeting of the *Chambre syndicale de la cinématographie française* in the presence of several parliamentary figures at the Palais de la Mutualité, Brézillon had argued that "The cinema no longer wants to be considered a fairground attraction and a dancing bear keeper. It wants to be assimilated to the theatre and benefit from all its advantages, from the freedom and consideration which is reserved for the theatre" (*Hebdo-Film*, January 29, 1921; *L'Écran*, January 22, 1921; *Le Cinéopse*, February 1921). The riots, then, struck at the heart of a French film industry eager to be accepted as a respectable bourgeois art form.

The ire of leftists would not have been softened by most film critics, who largely ignored the protests and the anti-Bolshevik content of the films. By focusing entirely on the films' formal and aesthetic qualities, they provided an intellectual, "impartial" rationale for the anti-Bolshevik front of exhibitors, bourgeois publics, and the State. When the *La Russie rouge* was shown in

¹⁴⁵ Canudo's call for a cinema hierarchy was echoed by Léon Moussinac in "Cinématographie." *Mercur de France*, August 1, 1921.

¹⁴⁶

Louis Delluc's habitual cinema Le Colisée it was advertised as "an eloquent documentary of extraordinary emotion." (*Comœdia*, October 14, 1921). One *Cinéa* journalist, Ture Dahlin, described the reception of the film there as one of "deathly silence and shivers" (*Cinéa*, November 18, 1921). During a screening in Barbès, however, the audience reacted with "howls, whistles and gun shots." Failing to mention any of the specific complaints about the film, then, we are left with the representation of an unreasonably unruly and violent working-class public. In his criticism of the film for *Paris-Midi*, at the height of the protests on October 20, 1921, Delluc (1990a, 259) similarly wrote:

This documentary... is making all of Paris run—or scream. I don't believe that it favours or disfavors any party. It evokes the Slavic tragedy powerfully and is moving on many levels. Certain images, like the repression and recognition of the corpses have an astonishing dramatic value. Among the many silhouettes, of which we would have much to say, let us signal that of the *mater dolorosa*, who, with mad gestures, flails around in horror in the terrible mass grave. We feel that the cinema doesn't use to its advantage all of these possibilities for information. With these silent, yet eloquent pages, this film has made amends for much silence.

Delluc's curtailing of political issues in his film criticism was not limited to *Russie rouge*. In his *Paris-Midi* review of the Norma Talmadge film *The New Moon* Delluc (1990b, 243) wrote,

It is enough to say [that this film] is full of qualities. There is a vast series of American films with nothing transcendental, yet rich in hundreds of details which are well-observed, ring true and are always animated by a well-paced movement... This is one of those... The Russian imitation story holds nothing of great interest. One cannot, however, not follow the story. We don't know where they want to lead us and we don't want to know – but we go anyway. It seemed to be a bloody tragedy. We don't shiver, we shout out: "It's charming!" just like we say "That was so much fun!" after a good drama. And then there is Norma Talmadge. I admired her so much last night that I thought myself able to describe her to you. But then I remember a literary portrait of her written by the very talented Louise Fazenda, the slapstick Philomena of Mack Sennett's troupe: "Norma Talmadge—Poppies in the cornfield. A candlelit dinner. Jasmine scent in the evening breeze. Martens." ..And does that not evoke the Rimbaud of *Illuminations*? But yes, but yes.

Finally, René Boisyvon, film critic for the daily newspaper *L'Intransigeant*¹⁴⁷ and advocate of the renaissance of French cinema (*Le Film*, September 1920), wrote (*L'Intransigeant*, October 19, 1921):

¹⁴⁷ His articles also appeared in *Le Film* and *Cinéa* as well the popular film weeklies *Cinémagazine* and *Ciné pour tous*. He created his own film magazine, *Ciné-coulisses*, in 1921 with F. Vareddes. He was also among the attendees of Louis Delluc's lecture on cinema as *art populaire* the same year.

We might advise protestors to be a little wiser and better-humoured. After all, a film is not something to be taken so tragically. We have other, more solid terrain, for engaging in political struggles.

The *Russie rouge* protests came just six months after Canudo's speech at CASA's first meeting, where he had argued that *salles élités* should be established so that serious film connoisseurs would not have to mingle with unruly workers. During the protests, a divide which until then had only been discursively constructed in the writings of cinephile critics like Canudo and Delluc was now brutally enforced by French police in the chic boulevard cinema palaces of central Paris. The forced removal of worker activists from luxury boulevard cinemas and police enforcement of anti-Bolshevik propaganda led leftists to name pro-government cinemas *cinéma gouvernementales* (*L'Humanité*, October 22, 1921) and *cinémas bourgeois* (*L'Humanité*, December 5, 1921). *Le Populaire* (November 5, 1921) remarked that "Pathé is no longer anything like Pathé." It only rubbed salt into the wound when Louis Aubert, who persisted in keeping the film on his screens, was promoted *Chevalier* of the Legion of Honour for his "loyal services" in October 1921 (*L'Humanité*, October 25, 1921; *Cinéa*, October 21, 1921).

"A Cinema of the People Must Arise to Oppose the Bourgeois Cinéma."¹⁴⁸

Scholarship on early 1920s French cinema culture has all but overlooked working-class audiences. What little scholarship exists has either ignored working-class spectators altogether or viewed them in light of the intermingling of cinephiles, Socialists, and Communists in *Les Amis de Spartacus* of 1928, thereby projecting backward a kind of high-brow universalism onto early 1920s audiences. Attention to the *Russie rouge* protests presents a different picture, and allows working-class spectators to emerge from obscurity as carriers of a historically and locally specific tradition of film consumption and cinema-centred sociability. From the perspective of

¹⁴⁸ "Vie Économique et Sociale: Communications: Le Bon Cinéma." *L'Humanité* December 5, 1921.

non-elite audiences, political activism in cinemas was not so much a violation of public morality as a natural extension of already existing working-class cinema culture. Their spectatorship was conditioned by the everyday use of cinemas in working-class neighbourhoods as spaces where political engagement and leisure came together.

Against this background, it becomes clearer why *La Russie rouge* provoked such anger among working-class audiences. No longer malleable spaces for entertainment and community organisation, certain cinemas, in particular the large cinema palaces, now appeared to them as tools for the bourgeoisie “to maintain its influence over the working class.”¹⁴⁹ Consequently, Communist Party members and sympathisers felt an urgent need to place their cinema culture on a more secure footing. From late October 1921, therefore, two short-lived cinema networks with close ties to the Communist Party were established. *Le Bon Cinéma* was created by the eighteenth-arrondissement Socialist Party (SFIC) newspaper *La Butte Rouge* (*La Butte Rouge*, October 29, 1921).¹⁵⁰ The feminist newspaper *La Voix des Femmes* similarly created *Le Cinéma du Peuple*,¹⁵¹ which held screenings at the Saint-Ouen community hall, la Bellevilloise in the twentieth arrondissement, and the learned society meeting hall (*Salle des Sociétés savantes*) in the sixth arrondissement (*La Voix des Femmes*, October 27, 1921 and *L’Humanité*, December 5, 1921). The police enforcement of *La Russie rouge* screenings in Paris cinemas thus directly provoked the creation of two alternative exhibition networks.

¹⁴⁹ David, Raymond. “Rapport de propagande.” Archives du Parti communiste français. 3 MI 7 / 23. Fonds 533. 10. Dossier 3183 – 3185: correspondance, rapports, 1921.

¹⁵⁰ Not to be confused with the cinema close to the Champs-Élysées named *Le Bon Cinéma* at 10 rue François 1er in the eighth arrondissement.

¹⁵¹ Not to be confused with the 1913-1914 *Cinéma du Peuple* cooperative (see Mannoni, Laurent. 1993. “28 Octobre 1913 : création de la société ‘Le cinéma du peuple’.” *1895 (Hors-Série / Special issue)*: 100–107) or the 1925 *Cinéma du Peuple* created by the Secours Ouvrier International with Léon Moussinac as artistic director (*L’Humanité*, February 27, 1925).

The *Cinéma du Peuple* had its inaugural screening at the *Bellevilloise* on October 19, 1921, in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the socialist feminist newspaper *La Voix des Femmes*. Noëlie Drous first gave a talk on the subject of educational cinema, followed by a programme that included scientific, comic and social education films (*La Butte rouge*, October 12, 1921; *La Voix des Femmes*, October 13, 1921). According to Drous, the purpose of this alternative cinema network was to elevate the public's film taste and to train them to recognise political propaganda in cinemas (*La Voix des Femmes*, October 20, 1921). She wrote, "It is with pleasure that we have seen how certain of our comrades have welcomed the tendentious film which under the title "La Russie Rouge" attempts to systematically misrepresent the experience pursued by our Russian brothers. We dare to believe that if the *Cinéma du Peuple* can live, the public, which no longer accepts political lies with such ease, will soon refuse to tolerate lies anywhere we now see them, in morals as in art. We dare to believe that in the future *Judex* or *La Main qui étreint*¹⁵² will be welcomed on the screen with the same ... enthusiasm as *la Russie rouge*." The *Cinéma du Peuple* was not mentioned again after October 1921.

The eighteenth-arrondissement newspaper *La Butte Rouge* had been extremely vocal during the *Russie rouge* protests and had expressed anger at the arrest of their comrade Besnard during the Aubert-Palace unrest. The newspaper's secretary Fernard Morelle argued that it was not enough to "continue whistling and booing *la Russie Rouge* and all future films" like it. Rather, Morelle saw it necessary to create an alternative exhibition network. The *Bon Cinema* was the idea of one Herbert, a former cinema manager, cameraman, and student of Pathé who was now the secretary of the eighteenth arrondissement tenant's organisation, and who aimed "to destroy the influence

¹⁵² The first episode of *Les Mystères de New York*, the Pathé Pearl White serial assembled from *The Exploits of Elaine* (Dir. Louis Gasnier, 1914), *The New Exploits of Elaine* (1915) and *The Romance of Elaine* (1915).

of provocative and lying cinemas” (*La Butte Rouge*, October 29, 1921). Morelle noted that, due to the lack of true “socialist films” the exhibitors would have to choose films from the *grandes maisons cinématographiques*, and aimed to prove that even in these companies there were “good films” to be found. “Against *Russie rouge*, we will match *La Dixième symphonie* or *Le Rêve*” [Dir. Jacques de Baroncelli, 1921]. To *Les Mystères de New York* and other American nonsense, we will prefer *Travail* [Dir. Henri Pouctal, 1919] and *La Terre* [Dir. André Antoine, 1921], or this marvellous film, a fierce indictment of war: *J’accuse*” [Dir. Abel Gance, 1919] (Ibid.). The creation of *le Bon Cinema* was announced in the *Internationale*, the *Journal du Peuple*, and *l’Humanité*, all of which asked readers to buy shares so that the group might be able to build cinemas in the suburbs (*La Butte Rouge*, December 24, 1921). In the group’s manifesto Morelle was optimistic that the *Bon Cinéma* could rival any Parisian cinema due to Herbert’s expertise. The group aimed to attract members of the general public as well as activists to their screenings. The profits were to be split into five parts: Three fifths would go back to the *Bon Cinéma* to pay for film and cinema rentals and two fifths would go to various activist organisations such as the tenants’ group and Communist groups (ibid.). The benefitting organisation would be in charge of selling tickets and seating spectators. The inaugural screening was held at the Saint-Ouen community hall thanks to the cooperation of the sympathetic mayor Emile Cordon who presided the screening. The overall message of Morelle was that “Shouting down provocative films in bourgeois cinemas is all well and good, but we must be able to erect against these brainwashing establishments our own healthy and honest, brain-cleansing cinemas” (*La Butte Rouge*, October 29, 1921).

The first *Bon Cinéma* screening was held on November 6 at the *salle des fêtes* in Pantin at the

close of the second day of the 4th Jeunesse Communiste Federal Congress, in order to raise money for the *Jeunesses de la Seine* (*L'Humanité*, November 1, 1921). The first week's programme included, in addition to documentaries, comedy shorts and a live singing act, *La Paix chez soi* (Dir. Robert Saindreau, 1920) and *La Double existence du Docteur Morart* (Dir. Jacques Grétilat, 1919). The second week's program included *Le Droit de tuer* (Dir. Charles Maudru, 1920) and *La Dette de Simone* (1919) with child star Simone Genevois. In the first week screenings were held at the working-class cinemas Cinémas des Acacias in Ivry and the Bellevilloise; in the second week venues also included the Saint-Ouen community hall and the Union des Syndicats. Future planned screenings were to include *La Terre, Travail, J'accuse, La Dixième symphonie* and *Les Larmes du peuple* (Dir. Mario Roncoroni, 1918) (*La Butte Rouge*, October 29, 1921).

By the end of December 1921 this alternative exhibition group had been booked by the Inter-union committee of the fifteenth arrondissement (*Comité Intersyndical du 15e*), the workers' association for the war-wounded of Boulogne (*l'Association ouvrière des mutilés de Boulogne*), the nineteenth arrondissement section of the Communist Party, the Dressmakers Union (*le Syndicat de l'Habillement*) and the Kremlin-Bicêtre *Pensée libre* group (*La Butte Rouge*, December 24, 1921). However, like the *Cinema du Peuple*, the group was short-lived. *Le Bon Cinéma*'s final appearance in *La Butte Rouge* (January 14, 1922) is in the title of an article reporting on a resolution by the Marseille Communist Party Congress in favour of using cinemas for communist propaganda. The final word came in a *L'Humanité* article cautioning readers that a man was accepting loans and subscriptions for *Le Bon Cinéma* although he, in fact, had no ties to the Communist Party (*L'Humanité*, June 10, 1922).

In attempting to evade state discipline, these two grass-root exhibition groups differed from *Les Amis de Spartacus*, which was organised by Jean Lods and Léon Moussinac in 1928. Like *Le Bon Cinéma* and *Le Cinéma du Peuple*, *Les Amis de Spartacus* aimed to teach working-class audiences to appreciate new French and Soviet film art rather than the adventure serials and melodramas so popular in bourgeois cinemas. Unlike the earlier networks, however, *Les Amis de Spartacus* enjoyed a distinctly elitist patronage, its most notable members being the Viscount of Nouailles and the Duke of Beaumont.¹⁵³ Perhaps partly for that reason, *Les Amis de Spartacus* is a well-known chapter in the history of French cinephilia.

The government protection of bourgeois viewing habits, the exclusion of leftist activist spectators from cinemas and the subsequent emergence of alternative communist exhibition networks reveal that the development of cinema publics in the early 1920s was a political issue, not just a matter of cinephile taste versus low-brow, popular taste. In 1921 use of the word “cinéphile” was not yet widespread, French intellectual film culture had not yet been institutionalised through the creation of the *Ciné-Club de France* in November 1924 and the *Studio des Ursulines*, the first of the *salles spécialisées*, in 1925. Though short-lived, both *Le Cinema du Peuple* and *Le Bon Cinema* indicate an emerging separation of film publics founded not on taste but on class politics. If the new illustrated film press was a discursive site where cinephiles such as Louis Delluc could renegotiate the status of cinema as a respectable, intellectual pursuit and a vital cultural product of inter-war France, during the *Russie rouge* protests cinemas themselves became physical sites for cultural negotiation. As opposed to the

¹⁵³ Weber, Alain. 2002. *Cinéma(s) français 1900-1939: pour un monde différent*. Seguiet Editions. 165.

columns of the film press, however, the latter sites were subject to state surveillance and to the discipline of police and bourgeois spectators.

Chapter Three

The Cinema Girl: Fandom, Serial Culture and Local Celebrity in 1920s Paris

Nevertheless certain movie theaters in the tenth arrondissement seem to me to be places particularly intended for me, as during the period when, with Jacques Vaché we would settle down to dinner in the orchestra of the former Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques, opening cans, slicing bread, uncorking bottles, and talking in ordinary tones, as if around a table, to the great amazement of the spectators, who dared not say a word. (André Breton, *Nadja*)¹⁵⁴

In writings such as “The Crowd,”¹⁵⁵ Louis Delluc conjures a vision of Paris as a city without social borders, where bourgeois film lovers such as himself could drop into run-down local movie-houses and breathe in the same air as the local workers. Similarly, from André Breton’s accounts one imagines a city in which Surrealists rambled through the night wandering from cinema to cinema in a dream-like state. As romantic as they are, however, these stories do not tell us much about the historical conditions of cinemagoing in Paris following the Great War. What about the spectators surrounding these raucous men of the Parisian art world, for whom cinemagoing was not an intellectual “provocation”¹⁵⁶ but an essential part of daily life? What about the women—the majority of cinemagoers in working-class arrondissements—whom critics such as Delluc so often disparaged in the columns of their own film journals?

It is astonishing that we know so little about what it meant to go to the cinema in 1920s Paris. After all, Paris was the centre for the ciné-club movement, the famous Spartacus group’s rebellious screenings of *Battleship Potemkin* (Dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), which scandalised the bourgeoisie and attracted working-class audiences with little previous exposure to avant-garde

¹⁵⁴ Breton, André. 1960. *Nadja*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press. 37.

¹⁵⁵ Delluc, Louis. 1998. “The Crowd” In *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History Anthology, 1907-1939*, edited by Richard Abel, I: 159-164. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

¹⁵⁶ Lefcourt, Jenny. 2004. “Aller au cinéma, aller au peuple.” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 51 (4): 98–114.

cinema. And given the immense importance of the early cinephile critics—many of whom took pride in frequenting “ordinary” working-class cinemas—for our present-day understanding of the history and theory of film, it is surprising that so few scholars have ventured beyond cinephile accounts to investigate what such “ordinary” filmgoers thought about film. Until now, class differences have been suppressed in cultural histories of Parisian cinemagoing.

If we know so little, I believe it is *because* Paris was the birthplace of cinephilia and not *despite* this fact. Because the emergence of intellectual film criticism emerged hand-in-hand with the renaissance of French cinema that we know today as the French First Wave, elitist pro-cinema propaganda sought to distance working-class audiences from French culture. In the early 1920s critics were rallying around a new French cinema that we now categorise as the French New Wave, Impressionist cinema or the “Narrative Avant-Garde.” These cinephiles may have paid close attention to the cinematic text, but they also theorised the ideal spectator of French film as essential for the elevation of cinema as a legitimate art form. They accomplished this largely by positioning themselves and their intellectual analyses in opposition to an imaginary spectator who combined several of the qualities they believed were keeping cinema from being recognised as the *septième art*. Most important among these qualities was working-class rowdiness and the immediate, unreflexive attitude of female spectators. The selective editing and translation of early film theory texts and critical writings that focus on the filmic object have erased the centrality of the audience to early discussions of cinephilia. Canudo’s and Delluc’s conservative and elitist views of the Parisian working-class audience are found in primary source materials like the illustrated film press and newspapers, and are largely absent from edited English-language volumes (although some of Delluc’s nasty characterisations of female spectators from

Paris-midi can be found in Pierre Lherminier's edited volumes of Delluc's writings).

Thus 1920s cinema spectatorship must be understood using both a historical and a theoretical lens because the working-class female spectator was crystallised into a theoretical concept as early as the mid-1910s. She became a "primitive" spectator emblematic of a prewar type of "primitive" cinema. This chapter jettisons descriptions of the working-class female movie fan by cinephile critics, and concentrates on how she saw herself. By this I do not mean to generalise a generation of young women attending the cinema in 1920s Paris. My aim is rather the opposite: Through a study of disparate, unpublished archival material, including fan letters, film programmes, and announcements in the leftist press, I attend to the social realities of a number of working-class female film fans, and, with the help of geographical data, ground their spectatorship spatially within their local communities. This micro-archival approach allows the historian of cinema spectatorship to re-imbed cinemas within their social context. Much as Robert C. Allen argues that rural moviegoing in the American south should be understood as a valid contribution to American film history, so does this dissertation respond to James Hay's call to consider,

... how social relations are spatially organized ... and how film is practiced from and across particular sites and always in relation to other sites. In this respect, cinema is not seen in a dichotomous relation with the social, but as dispersed within an environment of sites that defines (in spatial terms) the meanings, uses, and place of 'the cinematic'¹⁵⁷

Rather than produce a new theoretical category of film spectators, my approach involves a fundamental decentring of the city's film culture in a time of post-war social crisis, shifting from narrow concerns of an intellectual elite to concrete concerns, interests and pleasures of working-

¹⁵⁷ Hay, James. 1997. "Piecing Together What Remains of the Cinematic City." In *The Cinematic City*, edited by David Clarke, 209–29. London: Routledge. 210.

class women.

One spectator “type” that emerged from the discursive reshuffling of spectator categories in illustrated film weeklies of intellectual pretension was the female film fan. The constructed female film fan was typically someone who avidly followed adventure serials, admired French, American and Italian film stars, and dreamed of becoming a film star herself. On the opposite end of the spectrum was the *cinéophile*, the intellectual and typically male connoisseur of film, who occupied the highest strata in the discursive hierarchy of spectator groups. An example of this attempt to stratify audience members can be seen in this explanation by Pierre Henry, the young editor of *Ciné pour tous*:

Those who go to the cinema by chance and out of boredom, those who go first to see a certain star and then discover a love of cinema [...] finally those who, pushing further their love for the cinema begin to value purely cinematographic value rather than the type of film offered; these are the rare cinephiles” (*Ciné pour tous*, February 24, 1922)

Although these discerning cinephile spectators may have been “rare” in 1922, their critical voices have become dominant in French film history by way of such historians as Christophe Gauthier. In *La passion du cinéma* (1999), his comprehensive study of 1920s Parisian cinephile culture, Gauthier describes the formation of a definitive opposition between the cinephile and the movie-fan, with the latter most often characterised as a clueless young woman of a low social class who loved serials.¹⁵⁸ This ordinary female movie fan is interesting because she became a discursive scapegoat for critics concerned with the poor state of French cinema in the early 1920s. Critics wondered how they would ever attract an elite public to patronise cinemas when they were filled with women crying, sighing and gasping at the twists and turns in a serial

¹⁵⁸ Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC. 248.

episode. For Louis Delluc, Ricciotto Canudo and many others, the young Frenchwoman attending the cinema came to represent all that the male, discerning cinephile was not. Even Jean Epstein, who was opposed to a separation of cinemas for an elite public,¹⁵⁹ instrumentalised the female movie fan as a marker of an uncritical, emotional mode of spectatorship. An example is this anecdote, which Epstein related to *Cinéa* readers in 1921.

A young girl, in the seat next to mine, unselfconscious in the darkness, hands clasped together under her chin, participating fully in the on-screen drama. She let out surprised gasps and gestures. She herself was no more, in her place there was only the prairie, the bars, the stampedes and a naïve romance. Overcome by emotion she abruptly took off her hat and put it back on again (*Cinéa*, June 10, 1921).

Here Epstein's spectator is transformed from an empirical spectator to the concept of a spectator whom Christian Metz's describes as one who is "constantly in a sub-motor and hyperactive state, a spectator at once alienated and happy... a self filtered out into pure vision."¹⁶⁰ Critics like Epstein, Delluc and Canudo planted this concept of the female spectator or "cinema girl" – *demoiselle du cinéma* - in many of their texts. The result was that it became difficult for contemporary female spectators to escape from the negative connotations of the "cinema girl" type. Their attempts at taking part in highbrow film discourse were often rejected as inappropriate or comically amateurish and overreaching. This is most obvious in Delluc's scolding of serial-loving female readers of *Cinéa*, which I consider more closely in Chapter Four.

If the stance of leftists in the previous constitutes a refusal of bourgeois state-sponsored film culture, then the stance of "cinema girls" in this chapter constitutes a refusal to adopt bourgeois, "intellectual" film tastes ascribed to them by cinephile critics like Louis Delluc. Parisian high

¹⁵⁹ "We are wrong to speak of a cinema for the elite, of specialised theatres and art film [*film d'essai*]" (*Revue hebdomadaire*, July 1923).

¹⁶⁰ Metz, Christian. 1982. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press. 96

society and the cinephile public had in common a disdain of the *faubourg* cinemas that were attended by working-class audiences.¹⁶¹ In order to redress the resulting historiographical imbalance I turn to cinemas in one of the most ethnically diverse, working-class and vibrant communities in Paris: the eighteenth arrondissement. If the female film fan was at the bottom of the hierarchy of spectators as imagined by influential film journalists like Pierre Henry in the citation above, then the multifunctional neighbourhood cinemas at the northern edge of the city were on the lowest rung of the Parisian exhibition ladder. I structure my inquiry around a collection of one hundred fan letters¹⁶² written to serial star Sandra Milowanoff in 1921, the year of her first success in *Les Deux Gamines*. By focusing on the fan letters sent from young Montmartre women to Milowanoff and placing them in conversation with notices in the leftist press this chapter reveals heterogeneous and localised modes of film engagement in the eighteenth arrondissement. Rather than simply trace the reception of *Les Deux Gamines* through the contemporary criticism or press accounts, I seek to explain its impact on Parisian audiences by excavating the wider cinema-centred culture within which it appeared. Using Milowanoff's letters as insights into the experience of individual cinemagoers, I reconstruct their spatial and socio-cultural context in order to account for the roles cinema played in the everyday lives and aspirations of trade union members, schoolgirls, salesgirls and seamstresses.

¹⁶¹ “In fact, cinephile sociability and Parisian high society criss-cross narrowly, and one could even postulate that both set themselves apart within the geography of Parisian cinemas by separating themselves from the faubourgs.” Gauthier, Christophe. 1999. *La passion du cinéma: cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929*. Paris: AFRHC. 272.

¹⁶² Lettres d'admirateurs à Sandra Milowanoff, 1921, Collection Jaune. CJ1862-B235. Bibliothèque du Film. La Cinémathèque Française. The Collection Jaune is a collection within the Cinémathèque Française's paper archive accessible through the Bibliothèque de Film. While most of the paper archive collections are organised by institution, company or person, the Collection Jaune is a miscellaneous collection of documents without any common factor.

Narrowing our focus to Montmartre proves useful for several reasons. First, by attending to the spatial organisation of cinemas one can better understand the intersections of film culture with community activism. In other words, the barrier between work and leisure was fluid in many cinemas that were strategically used by unions and consumer leagues because of their practical proximity to the workplace or marketplace. Second, the eighteenth arrondissement had the highest concentration of cinemas in Paris¹⁶³ with their own distinct programming trends. For example, in 1921 Montmartre cinemas used live variety performances in their programmes more than anywhere else in the city.¹⁶⁴ Third, the eighteenth arrondissement was a hugely diverse area in terms of its inhabitants. According to the census of 1921, Montmartre—together with the eleventh arrondissement—had the highest number of immigrants, with 17,463 non-French inhabitants.¹⁶⁵ This was also one of the densest areas of the city, with 600 to 800 inhabitants per hectare.¹⁶⁶ Post-war inflation and widespread evictions made Montmartre extremely politically active, and the Socialist and Communist Parties made it their stronghold along with other prominent activist groups like the tenants' and consumers' associations. Factories also surrounded the area, in Batignolles to the west, outside the city limits to the north, and in La Chapelle to the east, where the gas plants stood back to back with the refineries further to the East in la Villette. Sociological maps of the city described the area as a *quartier ouvrier*, a workers' neighbourhood.¹⁶⁷ In addition, surrounding the Gare du Nord train station lived many

¹⁶³ There were 208 cinemas in Paris in 1922. The eighteenth and twentieth were the arrondissements with the most cinemas with twenty-one each. In second place was the tenth with sixteen cinemas. (*L'Aurore* -Formerly *La Butte Rouge*, March 18, 1922).

¹⁶⁴ In May 1921, according to *Cinéa* programmes, thirteen out of fifty-eight listed cinemas had such attractions and one third were in the 18th arrondissement. These included Marcadet-Cinéma-Palace, Théâtre Montmartre, Montcalm Cinéma, Barbès Palace and Le Capitole.

¹⁶⁵ Galmiche, Jules. "Les étrangers dans l'agglomération parisienne d'après le recensement de 1921." *Bulletin de la statistique générale de la France* 9, no. 3 (1922): 297–316. 306

¹⁶⁶ Jefford, Edward, and John George Bartholomew. 1919. *Paris pour tous*. Paris: J.M. Dent. One hectare is 10,000 m².

¹⁶⁷ Jefford, Edward, and John George Bartholomew. 1919. *Paris pour tous*. Paris: J.M. Dent.

public service workers in the electricity, post, gas and public transport sectors.¹⁶⁸

Despite cinephilic characterisations of the “cinema girl” as a passive uncritical spectator-consumer, this chapter reveals her fandom as an active, participatory practice. Taking this historical study to a micro-archival level in this chapter similarly repositions women as key actors in film culture, as fans but also as social activists in the same cinemas where they could follow their favourite serials. It does this by focusing on moviegoers’ interaction with a particularly popular film serial in 1921: *Les Deux Gamines*, Louis Feuillade’s twelve-episode serial starring the up-and-coming actress Sandra Milowanoff. The effacement of barriers between work and leisure in the cinema space extends logically into a rethinking of fan letter-writing as a form of production, a cultural practice that goes beyond mere passive spectatorship and blends in with other forms of collective action such as union meetings, community decision-making and voting. Letter writing signifies a resistant activity in so far as the fans use their workplace as the address for correspondence, invite the star to their place of work and in a revolutionary gesture, ask the star for advice on how to become an actress, signifying a wish for social advancement and an overturning of the roles of production and consumption. The letterwriting of fans even opens up a utopic space of exchangeability when fans send their photographs to Milowanoff in exchange for her possessing her star image. This exchanging of identities, from worker-girl to star (if only for a day), brings us back to the Mid-Lenten parade which is central to our understanding of ordinary working-girl stardom aspirations in post-war Paris.

¹⁶⁸ Prost, Antoine. “La rue de la Goutte-d’Or et la rue Polonceau entre les deux guerres.” *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 182 (January 1, 1998): 9–27. 18.

Working Queens of Paris at the Mid-Lenten Day Parade

It is only in the specifically French context of the annual working-girl beauty contest that we can understand the emergence of the figure of the modern cinema girl and the centrality of the workplace in local celebrity culture. These traditional beauty contests were a precursor to socialisation practices that crystallised around film serials such as *Les Deux Gamines*. The tradition of electing and parading working-girl beauty queens began with an annual beauty contest leading up to the annual Mid-Lenten festival – *fête de la mi-Carême*. A tradition dating back to the late eighteenth century, the Mid-Lenten festival involved the election of a working-class young woman as *la reine* or the queen of her trade. Professional identity was key, as women elected the *reine* from among her colleagues. Initially, as early as the 1790s, the contest was organised by the various washhouses (*lavoirs*) of Paris and the *reine* was a washerwoman (*blanchisseuse*). The *reine* was judged, not only on her beauty but also her good nature, scandal-free private life and work ethic. Before the Great War, the women who participated in these contests traditionally worked in *laveries* as washerwomen, and the mid-Lenten parade was seen as a washerwoman's festival day. In spring of 1920 this major pre-war *fête populaire* was re-established in Paris.

The process remained the same in the post-war era. First, professional bodies elected their “queen” from the group of workers, ideally a hard-working and morally-upright young woman. In 1920 the workers' categories included: food (*alimentation*), arts, commerce, sewing, fashion and sports. Police officers oversaw the collection of votes during a high-spirited ball and upon selection each queen then competed with other elected queens from the same *arrondissement* at the local town hall to become the reigning queen of the *arrondissement*. The democratic process for queen of the *arrondissement* involved a vote by civil servants, town clerks and local

politicians overseen by the mayor in each arrondissement's town hall. Once each arrondissement had elected a queen, all twenty would compete for the title of “queen of queens” (*reine des reines*) and thus be paraded atop a flowered throne in the March mid-Lenten parade. The girls had to abide by certain rules. In 1921 they were to be under 20 years old, still living with their family and a worker in either a workshop (*atelier*) or a store and were to “personify work and merit.”¹⁶⁹

The young women competing for the title of *reine des reines* were subjects of wide media coverage. Indeed, the press coverage of these contests generated a discourse of local celebrity which permeated every aspect of public life: from the schoolgirl reading about her local queen in the daily newspaper, to the town clerk taking part in the vote, to the war-widowed mother bringing her children to see the parade on Carnival day. This was the festival of ordinary people; in a revolutionary reversal of class-based hierarchies the seamstress, the salesgirl, the typist or the hat maker became ruling queens of Paris for the day and were applauded by thousands of their subjects as the parade wound its way across the city. But there was no illusion about the ephemerality of this stardom for the winners. Working girls enjoyed the champagne and the graces of the country's elite at the City Hall and Élysée Palace - all in the knowledge that the next day they would return to their daily strife of family responsibilities and long, hard working hours.

Daily newspapers contemplated the ephemerality of this stardom when the organisers, the City Festival Committee (*Comité des Fêtes*), reinaugurated the beauty contest in 1920 after its

¹⁶⁹ G.M. “L’élégion de la reine des reines.” *Le Temps* 27 Feb. 1922. Actualités série 89 Carnaval Mi-Carême. Folder Carnaval Mardi gras -Mi-Carême 1922-1929. Press cutting. BHVP and *Le Temps* (January 25, 1921).

wartime suspension. Parisians were curious to know what had happened to the pre-war queens, those who had reigned during the innocent years prior to 1914. Where were they now? In response, newspapers listed them off for their curious readers: Louise Picard was married to a builder and still worked in the same washhouse; Miss. Petit too still worked at the washhouse; Miss. Julian was selling fish in the same market that elected her queen; Miss. Morin was still a pork butcher (*charcutière*) and Miss. Fouillard a seamstress. More than one journalist commented, on the strange effect this sudden “rags to riches” transformation must have had on the young women involved. One imagined that after the day of the parade the beauty queen “went home filled with emotion and joy, harbouring no false illusions. On the nightstand they set down the bracelet given to them by the President of the Republic and the scarf emblazoned with the Paris coat of arms and others like Henriette Delabarre, made their queen costume their wedding dress” (*Le Temps*, February 18, 1920).¹⁷⁰

Parisians had access to all sorts of details about these everyday beauty queens in the daily press - their occupation, address, home life, place of birth, eye colour, hair colour and hobbies. These girls, although very ordinary, were local stars for many months after the competition. It was precisely their ordinariness that rendered their short-lived fame and glory accessible to all young women - provided they were working girls with a blemish-free moral life.

This ordinary stardom was a part of everyday life for working-class women like the fans of Sandra Milowanoff. After the dark times of war, the contest provided hope and excitement in the monotonous and often difficult work life. This was a contest that shone into every young

¹⁷⁰ G.M. “Mardi Gras Prépare La Mi-carême.” *Le Temps* 18 Feb. 1920. Press Cutting. Actualités série 89 Carnaval Mi-Carême. 1920- Folder Carnaval de la Mi-Carême 1920-1921. BHVP.

woman's professional life, with the promise of ephemeral stardom. Like Anne-Marie the typist, Raymonde the hairdresser, Reine the seamstress (*L'Écho de Paris*, February 6, 1921)¹⁷¹ practically any *Parisienne* could have her picture in the paper and admiration poured upon her the day of the Mid-Lenten parade.

The offshoot competitions leading up to the “Queen of Queen” served to amplify the stardom of the working-girl contestants. For example, *Comœdia* published a daily portrait of an arrondissement queen, accompanied by a short biography and a cut-out voting ballot. Readers were encouraged to cut out the bulletin and portrait daily. They then sent the portrait of their chosen winner to the newspaper accompanied by the voting ballot where they would note down how many votes they guessed the chosen queen would receive. These newspaper-based competitions allowed everyone to participate through collection and voting, democratic practices that were also central to the nationwide cinema beauty contests introduced in 1920 by Maurice de Waleffe, editor of *Le Journal* newspaper. Working girls had the opportunity to participate in this beauty contest culture either by being elected or by voting for other contestants.

Journalists were quick to notice that contrary to pre-war tendencies, not one of the queens was a washerwoman and that the queen's sceptre was passing on to new professions. During the pre-war period, salesgirls and seamstresses had gradually grown in numbers with each year's contest and this trend continued when the contest was reintroduced after the war.¹⁷² In 1922 in *Le*

¹⁷¹ “La Reine du 6ème arrondissement.” *L'Écho de Paris* (February 6, 1921. Press Cutting. Actualités série 89 Carnaval Mi-Carême. 1920- Folder Carnaval de la Mi-Carême 1920-1921. BHVP. In 1921, Anne-Marie Point, a nineteen year old typist at the Ministry of Finance, was elected queen of the sixth arrondissement and her maids of honour (the runners up) were Raymonde Boyer, a hairdresser and Reine Andrieux, a seamstress.

¹⁷² In 1922 the trend continued with twelve out of twenty queens employed as typists. Robert Destez. “La Mi-carême: La Reine des Reines est élue: C'est Mlle Buchet du douzième arrondissement.” *L'Écho de Paris*, February 27, 1922.

Gaulois newspaper, Raymond Lécuyer wonders why there are no washerwomen among the elected beauty queens of that year. Among the twenty queens elected, half were typists, seven department store salesgirls, one a hat maker, another a dress model and one a diamond cutter (*Le Gaulois*, February 22, 1922). The journalist remarks that the disappearance of the washerwoman from the contest was not completely due to the city's industrialisation as there were still 280 public washhouses and seventeen boat-washhouses on the Seine. Lécuyer concludes, "the smile of the post-war republic would be that of the typist" (Ibid).

The Cinema Girl

If by 1922 the "typist" had become the incarnation of the modern city girl through the mid-Lenten day parade beauty queens, a more general idea of a modern type of young woman had crystallised by the end of the Great War around the "cinema girl" or *demoiselle du cinéma*. In 1917 Maurice Lecaire published a popular novel of this title that the Parisian newspaper *L'Écho de Paris* printed in installments. The-rags-to-riches story featured two sisters who became star actresses overnight, one on the stage and the other on the screen. The book was published in 1921 and cost 2 fr. 50 (roughly the same price as a cinema ticket), making it widely available to the many young women aspiring to become actresses. Reviews of Vaucaire's book include a word of warning to this young public,

..the poor little girls without dowries would be wide of the mark in thinking that they, like Françoise and Germaine, could conquer in just a few hours love, fortune and happiness on the stage or in front of the camera! So we would gladly advise that this overly enticing story be reserved for sensible girls" (*Romans-Revue: guide de lectures*, April 15, 1921).

Romans-Revue clearly saw film magazines as having a primarily young, female audience and it took a similarly paternalistic tone with these film fans. In 1923 the conservative Catholic publication describes the film weekly *Mon Ciné* as catering to "uncultivated" and "scatter

brained young people” and advises that the magazine be “stridently banned from all Catholic family homes.” *Romans-Revue* also discourages its readers from buying *Cinémagazine* but concedes that although the star interviews “smack of vanity, love of pleasure [...] they remain sufficiently decent overall,” concluding that the star interviews “could intoxicate little brainless girls, but they don’t take advantage of an appetite for scandal.” (*Romans-Revue: guide de lectures*, August 15, 1923)

Indeed all of the illustrated film magazines made clear concessions to a female readership incarnated by the “cinema girl.” *Ciné-Coulisses* offered its female subscribers vouchers for silk stockings and embroidered handbags in 1921 and the first issue of *Cinémagazine* the same year featured a full-page advertisement for Activa face cream with new subscribers being offered a selection of gifts including a soap and perfume set (January 21, 1921). Similarly, winners of *Cinémagazine*’s “Favorite Star Contest” (*Le concours des étoiles préférées*) in 1921 won prizes that included perfume and soap products (*Cinémagazine*, May 6, 1921).

Despite the necessity of “the cinema girl” for increasing film magazine circulation and thus securing their financial success, intellectual film critics distanced themselves from this audience with their critical, satirical stories of aspiring actresses. In *Le Film* - the first illustrated film magazine with intellectual pretension¹⁷³ - an unnamed actress of the screen gave tongue-in-cheek advice to aspiring young actresses under the pseudonym “The Masked Star” (*Le Film*, July 18,

¹⁷³ *Le Film* had a circulation of 1000 to 1500 in 1921, much smaller than the more mainstream *Ciné pour tous* and *Cinémagazine*. See “Projet d’une bi-mensuelle de Cinématographe sur le modèle de la revue *Vogue*” BiFi, Fonds Louis Delluc, LD 71-B4. Although a venue for intellectual writings and serious criticism, *Le Film* was the first film magazine to create a letter column for readers in March 1919 (*Le Film*, March 9, 1919). In 1923 Jean Vignaud, writing on behalf of *Cinémagazine* boasted to Robert Florey that this was the most widely-circulated French film magazine with 250,000 readers. See letter from Jean Vignaud to Robert Florey dated March 23, 1923. BiFi, Fonds Louis Delluc, LD 47 (1)-B4.

1918). In *Le Journal du Ciné-Club* founded by Louis Delluc in 1920, the journalist Marcel Nadaud wrote a humorous story entitled “The Young Lady Who Wanted to Get into the Movies” (*La demoiselle qui voulait bien tourner*). In his second film magazine *Cinéa* – the successor to *Le Journal du Ciné-Club* - Delluc published a serialised satirical tale entitled “Chagrine, the photogenic young lady” (*Chagrine, Demoiselle Photogénique*).¹⁷⁴

This discursive distancing of female spectators often took the form of violent disciplining in Louis Delluc’s *Cinéa*. Fans who followed Louis Feuillade’s serial *Les Deux Gamines* were stigmatised for their lowbrow film taste when they wrote to Delluc’s magazine *Cinéa* to voice their thoughts and preferences. When a female reader wrote to *Cinéa* to say that she preferred watching *Les Deux Gamines* and *Près des Cimes* (Dir. Charles Maudru, 1921) over Swedish films, she received the following sarcastic reprimand from Delluc: “Bravo, Miss, the *barrière* public will agree with you” (*Cinéa*, May 27, 1921). The *barrière* referred to the working-class neighbourhoods bordering the city, areas marred by the wastelands that were previously the city’s fortifications. Delluc was not alone in his discursive construction of film taste along class and gender lines. In his review of the week’s press screenings in *Scénario* in late 1920, Pierre Veber writes,

We have a quantity of popular films made up of naïve emotion: *Les Deux Gamines* and *Fille du Peuple* [Dir. Camille de Morlhon, 1920]. There is a public for this type of drama, the public that used to frequent the *Boulevard du Crime*¹⁷⁵ (*Scénario*, November 15, 1920).

The editor of *Ciné pour tous*, Pierre Henry, clarifies for Milowanoff fans their unimportance and unworthiness in the public sphere of film culture when he writes,

The fact that one loves Léon Mathot or Sandra Milowanoff does not in the least mean that one loves the

¹⁷⁴ The name Chagrine is a humorous play on the verb *chagriner* meaning, to worry, grieve or bother.

¹⁷⁵ The Boulevard du Crime was the nineteenth century nickname for the Boulevard du Temple due to the theatres showing crime melodramas to raucous publics.

cinema. No more than loving cathedrals indicates a true religious belief' (*Ciné pour tous*, May 5, 1922).

In a public purging act similar to that of Louis Delluc with Feuillade fans who trespassed into his magazine's readership, Pierre Henry made clear that following Feuillade's *ciné-romans* was not behaviour he would tolerate from *Ciné pour tous* readers. His feelings about the Gaumont actress are made clear in the following jibe about Milowanoff,

Sandra Milowanoff: *Les Deux Gamines* [...] other silly *ciné-romans* are on the horizon; oh! Sorry, I didn't know you liked them... (*Ciné pour tous*, June 1921).

Thus, from the first year of her acting career, Milowanoff was placed in the category of lowbrow, non-cinephile film. Just as Feuillade was placed on the opposite spectrum of the *novateur* filmmaker Marcel L'Herbier,¹⁷⁶ so was the female Milowanoff fan placed on the opposite spectrum to the male cinephile spectator or intellectual film critic. For Pierre Henry, for example,

The true cinephile is he who, with equal cost and means of transportation, still prefers the cinema to the theatre. Many people like the cinema because it isn't expensive, because they see illustrated novels and plays that they know or simply because it is dark" (*Ciné pour tous*, May 5, 1922).

The idea of the uncritical, far from cinephile, female spectator became an increasingly prevalent discourse from the arrival of the popular film press in 1919 and by the end of the 1920s the image of the non intellectual, uncritical "cinema girl" was discursively set. In 1929, for example, the twenty-two year old future *scénariste* Roger Vailland wrote a revealing mocking homage to his *spectatrice idéale* (ideal female spectator). Vailland described how upon meeting she "wished to go to the cinema and was flicking through the programmes. I watched her do it. She

¹⁷⁶ "If *The Three Musketeers*, in France, had been made by Louis Feuillade, it is easy to guess what the cast would look like: Mme Bonacieux (S. Milowanoff), Planchet (Biscot), d'Artagnan (René Clair), Athos (F. Hermann)...If the same piece had been proposed to Marcel L'Herbier, we would have had: D'Artagnan (Jaques-Catelain), Milady (Eve Francis), Mme Bonacieux (Marcelle Pradot)" (*Ciné pour tous*, March 10, 1922).

didn't care about the nationality of a film. Even the name of the filmmaker held no interest for her. She was unable to decide between different stars." Vailland comes to the conclusion that,

The *spectatrice idéale* is exactly the opposite of the critic. The latter considers a film as an *oeuvre*, a unit. He concerns himself with the question of whether the film has a rhythm, if it expresses what it seeks to express and only what it seeks to express, if the lighting is well regulated, if there is a careful *mise en scène*, whether the photography is good. For the *spectatrice idéale*, a film is something like the optimistic dreams she has just before falling asleep at night, or when walking down the street after meeting a handsome man – only better... The *spectatrice idéale* considers the cinema as a universe. A universe next to and a little above the usual universe, peopled with the most beautiful, violent and free beings, better or meaner, and always stronger. To enter into this universe she lies down. Others place a dot of perfume under their nostril or smoke opium. In order to change the world there is always a rite to perform. To enter into the universe of the cinema she must follow the usherette's trembling lamp and sit down in the shadows, next to other unknown worshippers. What a sadness it would be to the *spectatrice idéale* if one day the lights went on inside the cinema (*L'Européen*, November 27, 1929).

Female Fans in Montmartre and their Favourite Serial Star

Yet it is difficult to reconcile this optimistic female spectator with the spectator-activist of post-war Montmartre. Rather than obediently follow the usher's light into another universe cut off from everyday realities, she would use the cinema as a space of protest and collective action.

It is worth pausing to consider one such cinema-centred protest during a summer that social historian Tyler Stovall describes as one of "widespread and dramatic working-class discontent in the capital."¹⁷⁷ On 10 August 1919, a vigilante group The Montmartre League of Consumers (*la Ligue des consommateurs de Montmartre*) organised a rally in the Cinéma Ornano after which one thousand "aggrieved housewives" carried out a mini-revolution at the Ornano market just outside the cinema. During the tactical meeting, M. Mugnier, president of the League informed the audience of housewives of the going rate for various fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy so that they could boycott shopkeepers and market sellers who raised their prices above these levels (*Le Gaulois*, August 11, 1919). At the end of the meeting the audience cast a vote in favour of the measures taken by this week-old organisation, measures that included "demanding that the

¹⁷⁷ Stovall, Tyler Edward. 2012. *Paris and the Spirit of 1919: Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. 212.

government lower the farm gate price of foods and to apply the death penalty to profiteers” (ibid). After a general call for calm and non-violence the local women left the cinema and flowed out into the boulevard Ornano and formed a pricewatch patrol (*promenade de contrôle*) began with the market that ran the whole length of the boulevard Ornano. The parade of women, each with a string bag or basket on their arm, followed the League’s inspectors, who in turn were escorted by the police. From this moment the market took on an unusual feel. They surrounded a marketwoman who was selling her cabbages for 30 centimes a piece.” After being told by the *contrôleur* that her cabbages were too expensive and that they should be no more than 4 pennies each, she didn’t protest, but simply changed the sign and said, “Go on, 4 pennies it is then! Who wants some?” At that point there was a rush on the reduced price cabbages and women jostled and pushed through to buy them. The crowd then moved onto a butcher selling over-priced rabbit. The merchant was pressured to reduce his prices by 70 centimes per pound, which provoked women in the crowd who had already bought duck at the higher price from him earlier the same morning to demand the difference reimbursed. The merchant refused and the police were forced to intervene to report the incident. After passing through the market and securing price cuts on cauliflowers, lettuces, potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, grapes and plums, the women “were unable to hide their delight.” The cinema Ornano meeting had instigated this “revolution at the Ornano market” (ibid).

When the one thousand determined activist housewives filled the 1000 seat cinema that day, they appropriated the cinema for their specific needs. As a privately-owned space, the cinema was outside of government control and its location on the same boulevard as the market allowed them to tactically position themselves collectively. Perhaps this was why the Montmartre League of

Consumers was the first and the largest in the city. Stovall indicates clearly that the food crisis of 1919, much like the tenants' activist movement, "reflected very concrete concerns yet also contributed to a sense of revolutionary crisis in the year after the Armistice. In the right circumstances aggrieved housewives could bring down a government, and some Parisians saw the potential for just such a development in 1919."¹⁷⁸

The Cinéma Ornano was thus part of the female geography of Montmartre. Similar in their self-determination to fans of Sandra Milowanoff, these women joined together in cinemas as resistive consumers. The location of the Cinéma Ornano in northern Montmartre allowed for private negotiations of consumers – what de Certeau would call "tactics"- away from the hustle and bustle of the market on the street outside. The local embeddedness of cinemas, that is, the spatial closeness of cinemas to the workplace, allowed for successful trade union action against employers in several arrondissements, but it was particularly successful in Montmartre. Activists gathered to decide upon how their behaviour could help achieve positive results, the lowering of market prices. In the same arrondissement female fans of Milowanoff took a different form of collective action by writing letters, a practice one could similarly read as a "tactic" for social mobility and a gesture toward the revolutionary yet temporary class-reversal seen in the "Queen of Queens" beauty contest.

Sandra Milowanoff fans living in Montmartre were able to follow *Les Deux Gamines* at nine different cinemas.¹⁷⁹ While much scholarly attention has been paid to Louis Feuillade's pre-war crime adventure serials *Fantômas* (1913-1914), *Les Vampires* (1915-1916) and *Judex* (1916), his

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Six cinemas began screening the serial in its first week and three cinemas in the second week.

post-war serial melodramas starring Sandra Milowanoff—*Les Deux Gamines* (1921), *L'Orpheline* (1921), *Parisette* (1922) *Le Fils du Flibustier* (1922), *Le Gamin de Paris* (1923) and *L'Orphelin de Paris* (1924)—have been left in comparative critical silence. In addition to Milowanoff, *Les Deux Gamines*, Feuillade's *grand film en série*, starred Georges Biscot, Olinda Mano and other favourites from the Gaumont troupe such as Edouard Mathé, Bout de Zan, Blanche Montel, Fernand Hermann and Gaston Michel. The twelve episodes of *Les Deux Gamines*, Milowanoff's first film, trace the story of Ginette (Milowanoff) and Gaby (Mano), daughters of actress Lisette Fleury who has the ill luck to be married to the alcoholic criminal Pierre Manin (Fernand Hermann). In the first episode we find the *divette* mother regretfully leaving her daughters in Paris under the care of their godfather Chambertin (Biscot) and taking the boat to America to tour the country. Chambertin— also a music hall performer— accompanies the daughters to a convent, where the girls test the patience of the nuns before a tragic note hits when they learn that their mother's ship has sunk and she has surely drowned. Ginette becomes the main protagonist, and the serial follows her trials and tribulations as she escapes death from a cliff fall, is reunited with her escaped convict father, tracked by the police as an accomplice, kidnapped by a criminal gang, and finally reunited with her mother and engaged to her gentleman saviour (Edouard Mathé) in the final episode.

Les Deux Gamines was the highest box office earner for Feuillade and Gaumont. It was released on Friday 28 January 1921, the same winter as the release of D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*. The first episode screened in thirty-nine Parisian cinemas; twenty-one more cinemas began showing the serial in their programs the second week and nine more in the third and fourth weeks. By the end of February 1921 the audiences of sixty-nine Parisian cinemas were following

the serial. Add to that number the seventy-four cinemas in the suburbs of the Department of the Seine showing the serial by late February and we can begin to understand the explosion of Milowanoff's popularity.

It was this popularity that secured Sandra Milowanoff a central role in Feuillade's post-war troupe. Following the *Les Deux Gamines*' success, Gaumont renewed Milowanoff's contract with Gaumont for an additional year, and she stayed in Feuillade's serial troupe until October 1922, making up to two serials per year: *L'Orpheline* (October 1921), *Parisette* (March 1922), *Le Fils du Flibustier* (October 1922) and *Gamin de Paris* (October 1923). *Mon Ciné* journalist Jean Frick describes Milowanoff's popularity in the following terms:

You have to have heard the "Ah!" sighed in unison by a whole Sunday afternoon audience in a Faubourg cinema when Sandra Milowanoff's face appears on the screen to realize the popularity of this young artist (*Mon Ciné*, April 13, 1922).

Milowanoff's popularity soared quickly. By 1922 Feuillade decided to place a portrait of the actress at the beginning of each episode of *L'Orpheline* as the backdrop to the serial's opening title so that, as Frick describes, "every spectator falls under the charm of her big melancholic eyes that would seem to sweep the room and the "Ah!" comes spontaneously" (*Mon Ciné*, 13 April 1922). Her status as domestic star was confirmed when she came first place in a 1922 competition to find France's favorite film star in the woman's magazine *Ève*.¹⁸⁰ The journalist Guillaume-Danvers confirms Milowanoff's star status in *Cinémagazine*,

The Parisian public, I can even say the French public, has adopted the charming Russian dancer as one of its favourite stars [*étoiles*] and we are certain that Sandra Milowanoff will have an even greater artistic success in her next role since she will appear as the High Priestess of Terpsichore [in *Parisette*] (*Cinémagazine*, October 21, 1921).

¹⁸⁰ Pearl White, Geneviève Felix, Musidora and Alla Nazimova followed. Léon Mathot led the way in the male competition, joined by Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin (*Cinémagazine*, November 24, 1922).

Milowanoff's huge popularity as Ginette—the surrogate mother to a young sister and a forgiving daughter to her criminal father—can be explained in part by the timing of the serial's release.

When the journalist and writer Marguerite Bourcet looked back on the post-Armistice popularity of the melodramatic adventure serial in 1936 she wrote,

It seemed that after those four awful years, people were tormented by a profound need for purity, for sentimentality, for naivety. Not only did American films send us high-quality *ingénues*, but France, too, followed the fashion. Over those long weeks, hundreds of thousands of spectators followed the adventures of *Les Deux Gamines* and *L'Orpheline* incarnated by the blonde Sandra Milowanoff. And even grown adults cried with an authentic pleasure at these stories worthy of *la Semaine de Suzette* [a magazine for young girls] (*Études*, July 20, 1936).

Reflecting on the dearth of such popular films in Robert Brassillach and Maurice Bardèche's recent publication *Histoire du cinéma* (1935), Bourcet felt that lowbrow serials should have their place in film history precisely because of their popularity with the French public, meaning “they must have possessed at least a fragment of their aspirations, their tastes and their dreams” (Ibid.).

The Cinephile Reception of *Les Deux Gamines*

Delving into alternative archival material is crucial if we are to mend this *lacuna* in French film histories like that of Brassillach and Bardèche, a *lacuna* caused by heavy criticism of Feuillade's serial by critics striving for the development of cinema as an art form and the improvement of cinema audiences. In contrast to the popular appeal of *Les Deux Gamines* during its twelve-week run, contemporaneous film critics saw little to admire in it. Louis Delluc was very vocal about his disappointment in Feuillade's career choices as a filmmaker. In 1919, two years before the release of *Les Deux Gamines* Delluc writes,

You mock him. You are wrong to. You must not laugh at Louis Feuillade. You must get angry. It won't please him. But why should we please him? Does he please us? He must be told the truth. If I were unkind, I would scream out the truth to him and he would be forced to consider my words. Sadly he would never listen to me. I can say that *Judex* [1916], *La Nouvelle mission de Judex* [1917], *Vendémiaire* [1918], *Tih-Minh* [1918] are more serious crimes than those of authors who have been condemned by the *Conseil de Guerre*. Spectators in their thousands moan with pleasure like the people of Thebus holding out their arms to Oedipus so that he might save them from the plague. Oedipus didn't hear them very well. Evidently

Feuillade has not committed the eccentric acts of the young Oedipus, nor does he deserve his punishment, and we will not gouge out his eyes. But one can still be blind without having had one's eyes gouged out (*Paris-Midi*, July 5, 1919).

The Surrealist group may have embraced Feuillade's detective serials in the late 1920s, but earlier in that decade Delluc felt "scandalised, offended, angered, irritated, saddened" by *Judex* upon its re-release in Brussels after the war (*Paris-Midi*, July 5, 1919). Although he conceded that *Judex* was "technically superior to any other French production at the time," he felt angry that despite having the "talents, means and confidence" (*Le Film*, April 29, 1918) to do "great things" (*Le Film*, August 26, 1918) Feuillade persisted with serial melodramas, which Delluc thought was "artistic suicide." This feeling caused Delluc to call Feuillade's next film, *La Nouvelle mission de Judex* "inferior to all contemporary productions" (*Le Film*, August 26, 1918). He felt that the serial format should have been a first step for Feuillade, after which he could advance to artistically superior works or at least "a more modern, spirited, sensitive form of the *ciné-roman*" (*Le Film*, April 29, 1918). The day he made *Judex*, Delluc writes with characteristic sarcasm, Feuillade had decided "that French cinema would be just as fun as cowboy movies" (*Comœdia illustré*, November 5, 1919). It wasn't just the detective serials that irked Delluc, in 1919 the critic described Feuillade's patriotic drama *Vendémiaire* as "primitive," the actors obeying a "childish rhythm" with "parodic gestures" giving the film a "heavy clumsiness" (*Paris-Midi*, January 21, 1919). And after the press screening of *Barrabas* (1919), a serial that Vicki Callahan describes as having "already slipped from the mode of the fantastic to melodrama,"¹⁸¹ Delluc criticised the "melodramatic gesticulating" (*Paris-Midi*, December 9, 1919).¹⁸² In summarising the year's films at the beginning of the new film season in 1921, Louis

¹⁸¹ Callahan, Vicki. *Zones of Anxiety: Movement, Musidora, and the Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2005. 138

¹⁸² However, upon the film's release Delluc had praised Feuillade for the film's "sobriety, vitality and good taste" (*Paris-Midi*, 20 March 1920).

Delluc writes of *Les Deux Gamines*,

Louis Feuillade takes technical care with his serials. All that is left to do now is give them more interesting characters and subjects. That will please everyone. But may the devil take me if he listens to a word I say! (*Cinéa*, September 9, 1921).

If such highbrow criticism can seem unnecessarily condescending from our vantage point, it nevertheless had a profound impact on the historiography of French cinema. First-wave critics and filmmakers such as Delluc argued that new French cinema needed psychological realism and technical experimentation to regain lost ground following the Great War. For Delluc, Feuillade's *dramas populaires* went against this artistic effort and were holding French cinema back from a brighter future, one in which it would be celebrated on the same level as the theatre by an elite Parisian public. Delluc therefore engaged in a steady current of negative criticism of Feuillade in his *Paris-Midi* columns, in *Le Film* and in *Cinéa*. If, today, little critical attention is given to Feuillade's melodrama serials between the end of the war and his death in 1924, it is due in part to our reliance on cinephile criticism, one consequence of which was that successive film critics and historians simply left popular serials out of the historical trajectory of French cinema. Thus Brassillach and Bardèche's volume, which according to David Bordwell "codifies central tendencies of the Standard Version [of stylistic history],"¹⁸³ saw the period 1919-1923 as characterised by the evolution of cinema as an art form, *la naissance du cinéma comme art*. In this evolution, the melodramatic serials that Parisian working-class audiences flocked to see week after week had no place.

Female Fans, Illustrated Film Weeklies and Letter Writing

To find fragments of Bourcet's spectatorial "aspirations, tastes and dreams," then, we have to go

¹⁸³ Bordwell, David. *On the History of Film Style*. Harvard University Press, 1997. 38.

beyond the writings of professional film critics. Whereas the cinephile criticism of the 1920s was addressed to a national, elite audience interested in aesthetic analysis and formal experimentation, ordinary filmgoers' experience of cinema was spatially close, embedded in the individual and collective concerns of the neighborhood and its culture of survival and entertainment. The "thick description"¹⁸⁴ I aim at thus differs from most cinema historiography in that it eschews formal analysis in favor of a bottom-up rendition of the local, intimate, and material dimension of cinemagoing.

The release of *Les Deux Gamines* coincided with the post-war emergence of the illustrated film weeklies, which provided the mailing addresses of stars, thus triggering a new cultural phenomenon: fan correspondence with the stars.¹⁸⁵ Discussing the personal lives of French, American and Italian actors and actresses was central to the popularity of these magazines. In the summer of 1921, film fans were for the first time given the opportunity to buy photographs of the stars rather than postcards. *Cinémagazine* boasted being the first to offer photos of the like of Tom Mix, Douglas Fairbanks, William Farnum, Fatty, Charlot and Léon Mathot for the price of 1 fr. 50. The first issue of *Cinémagazine* appeared in Paris books shops and train station newsstands just a week before spectators flocked to catch the first episode of *Les Deux Gamines* on Friday January 28, 1921. This was a happy coincidence for fans of the serial, for *Cinémagazine* readers were enraptured to find in its pages the address of Sandra Milowanoff. More importantly, they learnt that they could write to the star and expect a personal letter, or even a signed photograph in return. The first popular illustrated film weeklies catering the

¹⁸⁴ Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 3–30. New York: Basic Books.

¹⁸⁵ For a comprehensive study of readers' letter columns in the film press see Charpentier, Emilie. *Spectateurs, vous avez la parole !: le courrier des lecteurs dans Cinémagazine et Mon ciné*, MA thesis, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2003.

ordinary cinemagoers was *Ciné pour tous* in 1919, followed by *Cinémagazine*¹⁸⁶ and *Cinéa* in 1921 and *Ciné-miroir* and *Mon Ciné* in 1922. All provided a forum for readers' questions in the guise of letter columns. It was in these columns that readers would find out the addresses of stars and other practical information such as which American stars spoke French, how long it took for a letter to arrive in Los Angeles, which stars routinely sent postcards to fans and which ignored fan letters, how many stamps one should include in a letter for return correspondence. In October 1921, Guillaume Danvers, the editor of *Cinémagazine*, recalls the impact made by Milowanoff with her first film serial,

I remember the avalanche of letters that we received at the editorial board of *Cinémagazine* when *Les Deux Gamines* appeared in cinemas. What is the real name of Ginette?...How old is she?...Is this her first film?...Does she wish to be married? And all of her admirers – it's astonishing that cinegraphic artists have admirers! – learnt that the adolescent Ginette was married and..a mother!..Ginette a mother!...it could almost be the title of a film in which she could act delightfully with her baby and her young husband (*Cinémagazine*, October 21, 1921).

In order to cater to the endless curiosity of cinema fans, *Cinémagazine* sent surveys to popular actresses to glean all the information their readers might desire. The surveys asked for the star's favorite flower, color, perfume, painter and even their favorite number. They also asked for the name of the star's first film, whether they were superstitious, if they had a particular lucky charm, if they smoked and even if they were faithful (*Cinémagazine*, May 27, 1921). The magazine then published the responses to these surveys with a different star featured every week. Bound together with the rest of her fan correspondence is a survey addressed to Milowanoff from *Cinémagazine* dated 19 March 1921, when *Les Deux Gamines* was in its eighth week for first-run cinemas. The letter reads as follows,

The readers of *Cinémagazine* are extremely curious about everything concerning the private life of their favourite artists. Not a day goes by without us receiving hundreds of letters asking thousands of details concerning the great stars of the screen. That is how we came to the idea for this personal and artistic

¹⁸⁶ Editor in chief: Guy de Téraumont. Directors: Jean Pascal and Adrien Maître.

survey to which we would be very happy if you would respond.¹⁸⁷

Indeed, letter columns of the illustrated film press were ripe with readers seeking information about Milowanoff and the other cast members of *Les Deux Gamines*. *Cinémagazine* published Milowanoff's address the day the sixth episode was shown in cinemas (March 4, 1921) and *Ciné pour tous* published it the day of the second episode's release with the response, "Sandra Milovanoff [sic] is really called Mme de Meck. You can write to her at Studios Gaumont, 53, rue de la Villette, Paris" (*Ciné pour tous*, February 11, 1921). The star's address was again published again in *Ciné pour tous* in April and May of 1921. Magazine editors repeatedly reminded their readers to mention their magazine when writing to the stars – no doubt to increase their magazine's importance in the eyes of the actress.

The Importance of Fan Participation to 1920s Film Culture

Much like online forums that exist today, letter columns allowed readers to mine information about films, but also to connect with like-minded fans. This phenomenon of stranger sociability appears with the very first issues of illustrated weeklies. Young women in particular used these public forums to seek out friendships in their own neighbourhoods. For example, Miss Marguerite Cussey from the working-class Parisian suburb of Montrouge addressed a letter to the editor in order "to meet with *Cinémagazine* friends living in Montrouge (*Cinémagazine*, June 10, 1921).¹⁸⁸ Female sociability was also nurtured through similar letter forums in weekly

¹⁸⁷ Lettres d'admirateurs à Sandra Milowanoff. Collection Jaune. CJ1862-B235. Letter 66. Sandra Milowanoff was in good company: other surveys published in 1921 were from Musidora, Huguette Duflos, Régina Badet, Gaby Morlay, Marcel Levesque and Madeleine Aile.

¹⁸⁸ Mlle Marguerite Cussey's address was given as 21, rue Louis-Rolland, Montrouge. She lived less than 5 minutes walk away from the Cinéma des Familles (later called Ciné-Montrouge), 53 Avenue Léon Gambetta, Montrouge.

women's magazines such as *Les Modes de la Femme de France*,¹⁸⁹ where, the same summer one young woman with the pseudonym *Une petite fille d'il y a cent ans*¹⁹⁰ asked if any other readers attended the chic Lutetia cinema in the seventeenth arrondissement on a Friday evening (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, July 9, 1921).

Beyond simple information about stars, then, letter columns provided a forum for readers to exchange letters and correspond with one another. One reader, Mae Morlyne, wrote a letter to *Cinéa* on January 26, 1923 to let other readers know that she “desires either foreign or French correspondents living abroad in order to exchange photos of artists and cinema magazines.” She adds that she would like to correspond with a Parisian lady, married or single, between 20-25 years old in a similar situation to her own, that is to say, wealthy, distinguished, loving cinema, to become friends and so to send in their address and a few details about themselves, with a photograph and she will do the same in return (*Cinéa*, January 26, 1923).

Female fans thus made themselves visible to other fans, and this female *camaraderie* is characteristic of the burgeoning early 1920s fan culture. It is notable, however, that readers of illustrated film weeklies and women’s magazines sought out stranger sociability within their own social class. Just as Mae Morlyne sought out wealthy and distinguished friends, so to did the young reader of the quite exclusive *Les Modes de la femme de France* magazine¹⁹¹ who attended

¹⁸⁹ Or, “Fashions of the French Woman.” A high end woman's magazine with a young readership of young married and unmarried, quite wealthy young women.

¹⁹⁰ This pseudonym references the title of a popular illustrated novel by Madam Cremnitz Léonce Burret published in 1909, *Histoire d'une petite fille d'il y a cent ans*.

¹⁹¹ This magazine, launched in 1915 would change its name to *La Femme de France* in 1925. The annual subscription fee was quite expensive at 50 francs. To give an idea of what this sum meant to everyday Parisians, ice-cream sellers and ticket collectors made 25 fr. per day working at the Aubert Palace (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Arts du Spectacle, Fonds Serge Sandberg, “Correspondance, comptes relatifs au Cinéma des Nouveautés Aubert-Palace, 1919,” 4°-COL-59/357).

an equally exclusive Champs-Élysée cinema, the Lutétia.

Fan participation was central to the existence of film weeklies. At the beginning of May 1921, *Cinémagazine* claimed to have 60,000 readers, a figure that shot up to 75,000 by the end of the same month (*Cinémagazine*, May 6, 1921; May 22, 1921). Letter columns formed a major part of a magazine's attraction but there were other ways in which fans could participate. Fan competitions became central to securing reader fidelity and in many ways gave their readers a taste of the stardom enjoyed by stars like Milowanoff. For example, in the summer of 1921 *Cinémagazine* started a competition for female film fans called "Who is the most photogenic?" (*Cinémagazine*, July 15, 1921). Female readers were asked to send in a photograph of themselves with their name, height, eye color, hair color, age and address written on the back. Those selected for each weekly series had their photos printed in the magazine alongside their personal information. The magazine's readership (male and female) then voted for "the most photogenic" of these young women, who were much like themselves – ordinary filmgoing readers of *Cinémagazine*.

In practice the two forms of fan participation were interwoven. The women's magazine *Les Modes de la femme de France* had a readership of young women that overlapped with that of *Cinémagazine*. The subscribed readers all wrote under pseudonyms and called themselves *abeilles* – honeybees – hence the name of their letter forum, *la ruche*, "the beehive." "The beehive" letter column reveals young women seeking to enter into written correspondence with *Cinémagazine* beauty contestants. One reader with the pseudonym Has Tiko wrote to another named Hera Dorys, an eighteen-year-old girl from La Rochelle who appeared in the fifth series

of the *Cinémagazine* beauty contest (*Cinémagazine*, July 15, 1921), “I am voting for you in the *Cinémagazine* contest, will you write to me?” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, August 28, 1921). It is clear, then, that reader reciprocity was a central characteristic of the film culture emerging in Paris in the early 1920s. Letter writing extended to ordinary young women as well as to stars of the screen, allowing young women to come out of obscurity and communicate with strangers around a shared love of cinema.

The Sandra Milowanoff Letters

The link between fan practices of letter writing and the film press becomes clear in the letters written by fans of Sandra Milowanoff. Twelve fans describe having received her address from a film magazine. One letter that reveals the importance of the illustrated film press for spurring the participative fan practice of letter writing in early 1920s France came from the border of the tenth arrondissement and the La Chapelle *quartier* of the eighteenth arrondissement, where the busy Bouffes du Nord Music-Hall stood. The day before the ninth episode of *Les Deux Gamines* was to be screened, three young employees of the music-hall wrote the following letter to Milowanoff:

Madame,
 I read in a magazine that you take pleasure in sending your photograph to those admirers who ask you for it. Being of them, we would be keen – my friends and I – to possess it. We have the pleasure of watching you in *les deux gamines* and the souvenir of you stays etched in our memories, so with the sole object of keeping this image intact, we dare to ask you not to oppose this desire.
 With thanks in advance, yours sincerely,
 Suzanne Prévost
 Suzy Four
 Raymonde Sauzède

Please send in the same envelope addressed to:

Suzanne Prévost
 Aux Bouffes du Nord Concert
 37bis Bld de la Chapelle
 Paris 10e

Other fans who express their delight at having found Milowanoff's address in a film magazine are Myrta and Enid, teenage girls from Mostaganem in Algeria, Lucien, a young Parisian soldier based in the North of France, and Lucienne, a young woman from the Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine. All in all, eight fans describe themselves as *Cinémagazine* readers and four as *Ciné pour tous* readers. We can imagine that many more of her fans read these magazines without mentioning them in their letters.

The fan letter collection reveals that many fans addressed their letters to the fictional character of Ginette in *Les Deux Gamines* rather than to the actress, and one school boy even addresses his letter to the cinema where he saw her serial, the Gaumont Palace. Fans identified and praised the attitude of Ginette toward her family in their letters. They admired her role as forgiving daughter to a criminal father, doting older sister and grieving daughter to a mother believed dead in a shipwreck. For example, a group of four girls from the third arrondissement – Léa, Madeleine, Clara and Marie – write to Milowanoff using her character's name Ginette Manin. "We see that you have a good soul in your role as the protective sister."¹⁹² Young female fans of Milowanoff praised her for standing by her father after he broke into De Bersange's house. Gabrielle Février, a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl from the Picpus neighborhood in the twelfth arrondissement, wrote to the star because she admired her "bounteous nature toward [her] father Manin."¹⁹³ This particular fan also wanted to become an actress and added in her letter,

I have my *certificate d'études* [elementary school diploma] and apply myself as best I can at school to please my parents and so that I might later bring prosperity to our home.

Paul Thierry, a *Ciné pour tous* reader who lived in the tenth arrondissement wrote,

¹⁹² BiFi - Collection Jaune (CJ1862-B235). Letter 87. April 6, 1921.

¹⁹³ BiFi - Collection Jaune (CJ1862-B235). Letter 30. March 9, 1921.

I have shared your joys and your sorrows
And,

I swear you made me laugh in the scene where you dance the foxtrot with your classmates in the dormitory and tears came to my eyes in the scene where you learn of the your poor mother's death.¹⁹⁴

Milowanoff corresponded with nine different groups of young women in 1921, and five of these letter-writer friendship groups lived in Montmartre or just outside the limits of the eighteenth arrondissement. Milowanoff had eight letter-writing fans in Montmartre: René Sez, a railway employee, Fernande Courtois, a *midinette*, two sisters Marguerite and Lise, and a trio of salesgirls from the Magasin Dufayel department store.

In the cluster of commercial activity surrounding the eighteenth-arrondissement town hall and the area where the four *quartiers*¹⁹⁵ joined together lived several Milowanoff fans who are representative of the many young women writing to the actress. One, Fernande Courtois, wrote to Sandra Milowanoff on 8 March 1921, the week that the sixth episode was screened. Fernande was most likely following the serial at the Nouveau Cinéma Ordener, just over 100 meters from her apartment building. According to historian Jean-Jacques Meusy, this 900-seat neighbourhood cinema opened in 1911 and had a “familial public of workers and petit bourgeois.”¹⁹⁶ Like many of the girls Fernande situated herself in terms of her profession, describing herself as a *midinette*. A *midinette* was the name given to young seamstresses and in his study of Parisian working women Octave Uzanne describes them as follows,

Every morning they are to be seen streaming in from the populous and remote quarters of the city, clean, tidy and even smart. Perhaps more than one has left a mother ill in bed, a father in the hospital, brothers and

¹⁹⁴ BiFi - Collection Jaune (CJ1862-B235). Letter 6. February 11, 1921.

¹⁹⁵ The four administrative *quartiers* of the eighteenth arrondissement are: Quartier de la Chapelle; Quartier de la Goutte-d'Or; Quartier des Grandes-Carrières and Quartier de Clignancourt.

¹⁹⁶ Léonard Meillat and André Hanhart opened the cinema. See Meusy, Jean-Jacques. 2002. *Paris-Palaces, ou, le temps des cinémas* (1894-1918). Paris: CNRS Éditions: AFRHC. 361

sisters more or less badly clothed and fed. But their youth and natural gaiety of spirits are proof against these troubles, and they go to the gilded cages where they are to be imprisoned and deprived of air, light and horizon, chattering and singing like liberated birds. At midday the cage door is opened and out they fly gaily, to take their short and frugal meal in the cheapest and most promiscuous places. This sudden rush at midday has given them the name of *midinettes*.¹⁹⁷

Her letter hints at the central role cinema played in her scarce leisure time and reads as follows,

Madame,

Please forgive my audaciousness in writing you this little note. But I admire you so much every Saturday in *Les Deux Gamines* that I could no longer keep myself from letting you know my admiration. Dear Madame, I will push my audacity so far as to ask you to be kind enough to send me one of your photos that I will be very happy to hang up in my little bedroom. I end with the hope that you will not refuse this happiness to a little *midinette*.

Sincerely, your little admirer,
Fernande Courtois¹⁹⁸

In the same hub of arrondissement activity lived the sisters Marguerite and Lise Farfara, who wrote to Sandra Milowanoff on 14 May 1921. The serial had quite a presence in the neighbourhood as there were four different cinemas showing *Les Deux Gamines* within a six-minute walk from their home. Although they lived only a three-minute walk from Courtois and could have followed the series serial at the same cinema, the Nouveau Cinéma Ordener, they are more likely to have attended the Marcadet Palace located on the same block as their apartment building.

This is the letter the sisters wrote to their favorite star two weeks after the serial had ended. They asked Milowanoff for one photograph each, no doubt as a lasting memory of Ginette.

Mademoiselle,

Two Ginette admirers, having followed with interest the adventures of the “deux gamines” would be happy to each possess their own separate photograph.

Yours sincerely and with many thanks in advance,
Ps. Attached is one franc to reimburse delivery costs.

¹⁹⁷ Uzanne, Octave. 1912. *The Modern Parisienne*. London: William Heinemann. 43

¹⁹⁸ BiFi - Collection Jaune (CJ1862-B235). Letter 23. Professional identity for female fans was very important. Many fans writing into film magazines used pseudonyms relating to their jobs like *midinette*, typist (*une dactylo*), stenographer (*steno*) (*Ciné pour tous*, November 15, 1919; July 16, 1920; 13 August 1920).

Marguerite
Lise¹⁹⁹

Fans described in detail where they would like to place her photograph. Some wrote that they would place it in an album with a collection of other star photos, one framed it and another used it as a bookmark, but mostly, like Courtois, they preferred to place the photograph in their bedroom. For many fans, owning Milawonoff's photograph meant extending the pleasure of cinemagoing into their private and intimate sphere. A Miss. Delphias from Nice wrote,

I've bought several cards of this type and have put them up together in my bedroom. I have a little of everything. But it's not quite right yet and I need a signed photo of you. Ah! So when next Thursday I go to see you at the *ciné* I will be so happy to know that when I get home I'll still be able to see you in my bedroom.²⁰⁰

Further south of the eighteenth arrondissement was a separate commercial hub that revolved around the vast Magasins Dufayel department store. Here lived three fans who went much further than others and asked to meet the star in person. Here is their letter sent on 20 April 1921 two days before the serial's end.

Madame,

Please don't be indifferent toward a little trio of young girls who, being fervent admirers of their little "Ginette" would be very satisfied and happy if you could give them the great pleasure of visiting them in their workplace at the Palais de la Nouveauté, in the fashion department and where, at the same time, you will find delicious surprises!

With best wishes of friendship from three little madwomen [*trois petites folles*],

P.S. In the case that your visit is impossible, please be so kind as to write us a little note with some advice on how to get into the movies.

Finally, one way or another, don't forget three little madwomen.

Mlle Renée
Mlle Georgette
Mlle Simone

Return address:
Mlle Renée

¹⁹⁹ BiFi - Collection Jaune (CJ1862-B235). Letter 90.

²⁰⁰ BiFi - Collection Jaune (CJ1862-B235). Letter 56.

Furs section
 Palais de la nouveauté
 Magasins Dufayel
 Paris

The Magasins Dufayel, where this group of Milowanoff fans worked, differed from other department stores in the capital because they were located in a working-class neighbourhood, where commodities were more accessible for lower-income customers.²⁰¹ This department store, where Renée Crouzet, Georgette Berthin and Simone Gavily spent long working days, was the first place in the eighteenth arrondissement where locals could see a film at the Cinématographe Lumière, which opened inside the store in 1896. The use of this 250-seat cinema was suspended during the war, but began functioning again after 1918 and throughout the inter-war period as the Cinéma Dufayel.²⁰² *Les Deux Gaminés* was not programmed at this cinema, so most likely the girls took the short walk across the boulevard to catch the latest episode of the serial at the Barbès Palace, a 1200-seat first-run cinema on the boulevard Barbès.

Built in 1914, the Cinéma Barbès was central to neighbourhood life, not just as a distraction on days off, but also as a rallying place in times of need. Its location opposite the Magasins Dufayel meant that workers like Renée, Georgette and Simone could hurry across the boulevard Barbès for an evening film program. The Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* informs us that the cinema's proximity also made it the perfect gathering point for these same workers during labour disputes. In June 1919 Magasins Dufayel workers held four separate meetings in the cinema-palace. The *Chambre syndicale des employés de la région parisienne* called a meeting on 1 June following reports of general abusive behavior by store management and a specific case of unfair dismissal of a worker with 22 years of service to the store (*L'Humanité*, May 31, 1919). At this

²⁰¹ Meusy, Jean-Jacques. 2002. *Paris-Palaces, ou, le temps des cinémas (1894-1918)*. Paris: CNRS Éditions. 36.

²⁰² Meusy, Jean-Jacques. 2002. *Paris-Palaces, ou, le temps des cinémas (1894-1918)*. Paris: CNRS Éditions. 534.

meeting in the Barbès Palace, employees established a list of demands that were handed onto delegates from their union. This meeting triggered the most important strike action by the employees' union in the inter-war period.²⁰³ Two weeks later on 15 June, 1200 employees, male and female, from all departments of the Magasins Dufayel voted unanimously in favour of the list of demands (*L'Humanité*, May 31, 1919). It was decided in the cinema that this list be passed onto the management without delay by the appointed delegation of the *Chambre syndicale des employés de la région parisienne* (*L'Humanité*, June 17, 1919; *Le Populaire*, June 18, 1919).

Addressing spatiality and micro-locality thus reveals how, in the 1920s, the act of going to the cinema could assume various significations depending on whether it took place in Montmartre or on a central boulevard in the entertainment district close to the Opera. Cinemas of the central entertainment district catered to a bourgeois clientele and wealthy foreigners. These cinemas were not used for trade union meetings, fundraisers for local orphans, widows and veterans nor were they used as meeting places for Communist and Socialist Party members. Local cinemas in working-class neighborhoods had a much more socially homogenous public and were multi-functional community spaces for local people.

Beauty Contest Fan Participation

By placing cinema programs into dialogue with Communist newspaper announcements, it is possible to see that there were several types of events in which an audience seated in the cinema entered into lively discussion and participated in a vote. In February 1921, the women from the Dufayel department store would have no doubt been present in the Barbès Palace for the

²⁰³ Fourcaut, Annie. 1982. *Femmes à l'usine: ouvrières et surintendantes dans les entreprises françaises de l'entre-deux-guerres*. Paris: F. Maspero. 218.

announcement of a special event to take place. The cinema manager announced that all local girls wishing to sign up for the following week's competition should sign up at the ticket booth. This contest was called the "Prettiest Girl in Montmartre" (*Plus jolie fille de Montmartre*) and was organised as part of a Paris-wide contest "The Prettiest Girl in the Neighborhood" (*La plus jolie fille du quartier*) organized by a M.Vaël. (*Cinémagazine*, March 4, 1921).

The competitors were signed up in order so that the first eight or ten would appear on the first evening and the rest were spread throughout the week. If the Dufayel workers were present, the group of Milowanoff fans would have seen a camera facing a backdrop on the stage. They would have waited to see which local girl would walk onto the stage and take their place in front of the camera. Blinded by the powerful lights on either side, the contestant would be asked to turn slowly to the left, then to the right, then smile and leave the stage. When Renée, Georgette and Simone returned the next week they may have been handed a ballot by the ticket inspector on their way into the cinema. In the film programme they would have seen the films made the week before, featuring the moving portraits of local girls. Perhaps the trio would have discussed who they should vote for from that evening's group to go into the final round of the contest. Danvers described this local cinema beauty contest as a popular "innovation" which "pleases many young girls who dream of becoming actresses, allowing them to appear triumphantly on the screen and thus seeing their dream realised, however briefly" (*ibid.*). Danvers warns his female readers, that "In life, pretty girls of the neighborhood, remember these are the only votes that count" (*ibid.*). The Magasin Dufayel fans would have been able to correct Danvers with the assertion that trade union voting was also vital to their happiness in the workplace. What is more, the two very different types of voting would have taken place under the same roof of the Barbès

Palace.

In his article for *Cinémagazine* (March 4, 1921), Guillaume Danvers describes the atmosphere in the cinema on the first Friday of the local beauty contest as the audience stirred in anticipation,

Young people come to applaud their little sisters, dazzled by the possibility of screen success. Others have come to see who dares make a claim for the title “The Prettiest Girl in the Neighborhood.”

As we remember from the Mid-Lenten parade young Geneviève Félix won the title for the eighteenth arrondissement. She was an actress who came from the Théâtre des Variétés and had already appeared in many films, including Louis Feuillade's *L'Engrenage* in 1919.²⁰⁴ She was already a celebrity at the time of the contest, having appeared, for example, on the cover of *Le Film* on 16 February 1919. The eighteen-year old actress lived on the rue du Simplon (*Cinéa*, September 16, 1921) close to the railway lines and ten minutes walk up the boulevard Barbès from Barbès Palace. It is in this context of local stardoms that we must see the request of Renée, Simone and Georgette for Milowanoff “to write a little note with some advice on how to get into the movies.”

In 1920, the year before the release of *Les Deux Gamines*, beauty contests became a hugely popular participatory film genre, unique in its locally and nationally embedded nature. In 1920 *Le Journal* organized a contest to find “The Most Beautiful Woman of France.” The contest *La Plus Belle Femme de France* was followed in cinemas by audiences from 20 February until 15 April 1920 and in its first week was shown in at least eighty-four cinemas in Paris and the suburbs. The contest was the idea of Maurice de Waleffe, the editor of the newspaper *Le*

²⁰⁴ She appeared in many films directed by Georges Champavert including *Le Ballon Rouge* (1918), *La Phalène Bleue* (1917), *Les Deux Jarretières* (1919), *L'Oeil de St. Yves* (1919), *Le Passé Renait* (1919) and several films directed by Jean Kemm including, *Miss. Rovel* (1921), *Micheline* (1921), *La Ferme du Choquart* (1922). In the summer of 1921 she would make another film with Kemm, *La Hantise*, in which appeared fellow beauty queen star Dolly Davis. She also made *La Chimère* (1919) with the director Lucien Lehman.

Journal, a republican daily newspaper with a circulation of 1,400,000 in 1921²⁰⁵ and the film series was made by Union-Éclair.

The preparations began in 1919, when contestants were asked to send their registration forms to a M. Wall, manager of the Ciné-Éclair cinema in the second arrondissement, with a deadline of December 31, 1919 (*Le Journal*, December 18, 1919; December 20, 1919). 1600 young women entered the contest (*Le Journal*, January 21, 1920) and were asked to appear before a jury at the Théâtre Edouard VII in the ninth arrondissement close to the Opéra (*Le Journal*, January 4, 1920). There, a jury of “six writers, four cinema technicians and two elegant Parisians” selected forty-nine contestants who would appear in cinemas weekly, in groups of seven, over seven weeks (*Le Journal*, January 11, 1920).

Representatives of the French film industry in the jury included Jules Demaria, president of the *Chambre Syndicale Française de la Cinématographie* and Jourgeon and Wall, managers of the Ciné-Éclair. De Waleffe explained that since “the screen cannot show eye colour, hair colour or skin tone,” *Le Journal* would print this information for their readers alongside a photograph of each of the contestants (*Le Journal*, January 21, 1920). Next to these “physiognomical details” would be the names and biographies of each young woman, details which didn’t appear on screens since, De Waleffe stated, “discretion prevents showing such details callously in cinemas” (Ibid.). De Waleffe’s specific aim in organising this cinema contest was to “open up film careers for French women, thus proving that the American and Italian monopoly is unjustified.” He added to this that “cinema is youth, health and the eternal future of our race,” and that the French

²⁰⁵ *Annuaire général de la France et de l'étranger*. Paris: Comité du livre, 1921. 351.

race was something that needed to be “radiantly asserted after this victorious war, to prove wrong those who believe we have emerged weary.” He expected the winner to “agree to fight for the world championship next year, just like our male athlete Carpentier accepted to fight with Dempsey” (ibid.).

De Waleffe felt that each contestant would represent a type of Frenchwoman so that altogether, they formed “a bouquet with all the varieties of the French soil” (*Le Journal*, January 11, 1920), hence the flower pseudonyms used in place of their real names. A 1000-francs prize was given to the seven finalists and four thousand to the winner. De Waleffe was sure to point out that these prizes were only keepsakes for the young women, and that the “utmost purpose of this referendum” was “to assert the eternal flowering of our race against the sarcasm of those abroad who represent us as a worn-out, bloodless nation” (ibid.). Later he went as far as to state that the contestants were “holding up the legendary reputation of the race” (*Le Journal*, January 21, 1920).

To readers who angrily wrote into his newspaper and suggested that “it is not pretty women who will raise us up from the war, but wives and mothers,” he replied, “The years of blood, of mud and of poverty” make it necessary to reintroduce the pleasure of living and “a woman’s beauty has become the only ennoblement of existence.” To underline this point he added, “Ask those who spent those years in the horror of the trenches!” (*Le Journal*, January 7, 1920).

In terms of creating national female film stars, de Waleffe was largely successful. The director Maurice de Marsan immediately recruited a young Parisian contestant with the stage name Dolly

Davis who came sixth in the competition. The same year she appeared in *La Bourrasque* (Dir. Maurice de Marsan and Charles Maudru, 1920) and the following year in *La Hantise* (Dir. Jean Kemm, 1922) with another beauty queen, “the prettiest girl in Montmartre,” Geneviève Félix. Davis shot to fame when she appeared in the René Navarre self-produced serial *Vidocq* (Dir. Jean Kemm, 1923). In 1925 her path crossed that of the national avant-garde when she appeared in René Clair’s *Le Voyage imaginaire* (1925) and in the same year in *Paris en cinq jours* (Dir. Pierre Colombier and Nicolas Rimsky, 1925) (*Les Spectacles - Lille*, December 11, 1925).²⁰⁶

When Lucienne Legrand entered the competition in 1920 she had already appeared as a woman of Alsace in a 1918 propaganda film *Le perroquet perdu*. After the contest she appeared in several films under the direction of Georges Rémond (director of the *Dandy* comedy series). In 1923 she appeared in *Les hommes nouveaux* (Dir. Édouard-Émilie Violet), the adventure film *L’île de la mort*, and several literary adaptations including *La chevauchée blanche*, *La Sin-Ventura*, *Pierre et Jean* and *Nantas* (*Les Spectacles-Lille*, July 3, 1925).

However, if young working women could truly believe in miracle reversals in fortune it was thanks to Agnès Souret,²⁰⁷ winner of the 1920 contest to find *La Plus Belle Femme de France*. Souret was immediately catapulted into what must have been a terrifying new sphere of stardom and appeared on the cover of the first issue of *Cinémagazine* (January 21, 1921). After a stint at the Folies-Bergères Music-Hall, Souret appeared in her first film, *Le Lys de Mont Saint-Michel*

²⁰⁶ Dolly Davis also appeared in *L’idée de Françoise* (Dir. Robert Saindreau, 1922) with Gina Palerme, *Le roman de Monique* with Charles de Rochefort, Gaumont’s *Par dessus le mur* (Dir. Pierre Colombier, 1923), *Geneviève* (Dir. Léon Poirier, 1923), *Claudine et le Poussin* (Dir. Marcel Manchez, 1924), *Il ne faut pas jouer avec le feu* (Dir. Mario Nalpas, 1924) and *Paris* (Dir. Renée Hervil, 1924).

²⁰⁷ Agnès Souret died in 1928 at the age of 26 in Rio de Janeiro, eight years after being crowned The Most Beautiful Woman in France.

(Dir. Alexis Dal Medico, Henry Houry, J. Scheffer, 1920) an adaptation of the novel *Rêve d'amour* by T. Trilby. When photographs of Souret were handed out in cinemas before the screening of the film, *Scénario* observed the chaos that ensued as, “Everyone: men, women, children rush and struggle to possess one of these precious images.” The journalist imagined that soon “Agnès Souret, *la plus jolie des Françaises*, will be on the fireplace of everyone from the retired officer, the school kid, the actress, the courtesan, the salesman and the playwright” (*Scénario*, December 1920). The journalist thus hints at the accessibility and highly participative character of 1920s film culture in terms of star image collection.

Beauty Contests in Women’s Magazine Letter Columns

These cinema beauty contests were hotly contested among female readers of the women’s magazine, *Les Modes de la femme de France*. The readers’ discussion began in the summer of 1920, just after the competition had ended when the reader under the pseudonym *Nine et ses deux anges* wrote to her fellow readers,

Le Journal has just elected the most beautiful woman in France in an enjoyable competition (personally I find her absolutely beautiful, with admirably pure features, and I am not the only one since she held a resounding majority over her competitors). Well! As soon as the beauty queen was crowned, all our most thoughtful journalists wrote up a thousand articles about her. All of them were ironic, disdainful, and aggressive and as such risk belittling her prestige as representative of French beauty. Why try to disparage our national beauty?” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, August 1, 1920)

The following month *La Tzigane* replied to her with the comment, “Entirely of your opinion, *Nine et ses deux anges*. Why this need to criticise everything? It’s so nice to admire without taking sides or having ulterior motives!” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, September 5, 1920). *Coralyne*, however, responded to both readers the following week with: “Don’t you think, *Nine et ses deux anges*, that if we make fun of ourselves it’s because we have the feeling that there is ‘better’?” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, September 12, 1920). *Symphonie blonde*

agreed with *Nine et ses deux anges*, writing, “*Nine et ses deux anges*. Very much of your opinion. Agnès Souret is very beautiful, but alas, there she is performing at a Music-Hall. What a shame!!!” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, September 19, 1920). *Blondinette mariée* replied to *Symphonie blonde* asking, “What do the bees think after having seen Agnès Souret at the Folies-Bergères?” And quipped to another reader, “Why don’t you go and expose yourself next to her *L’innocent*, what are you waiting for?” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, September 26, 1920). *Biriatou* continued the thread with the comment, “A kiss to the prettiest girl in France, the heiress of this name, and of the countless hare feet that her father collects” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, November 21, 1920). Months later a reader reopened the Agnès Souret discussion with the question, “Is it true that Agnès Souret is getting married to an English Lord?” (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, May 8, 1921).

These readers would have even more to discuss the following year, when De Waleffe took up the national cinema beauty contest again, organizing a slightly different type of contest with *Le Journal* and the *Éclair* film production company. This time he would seek out the most beautiful woman of each French region with the goal to find “the most pure type of the French race.” He divided up the country into seven areas: the North, the East, the Southeast, the *Midi*, the Southwest, the West and the Centre. In each of these areas, a jury composed of local representatives would select “the rare pearl.” De Waleffe was clear to point out that this wouldn’t be a “contest of charm, seduction, coquetterie.” He described how each contestant when coming before the jury would ask not, “Take me, I’m the prettiest!” but rather,

I am a daughter of the countryside, of parents also born here, and I love it and I am proud of it. Tell me if I am indeed the type you seek! If I am, if you recognize in me the characteristics of your sisters, your mothers, and all of your ancestors, I consent to go on the screen, I am willing to be compared with the daughters of neighbouring provinces, not out of personal vanity, but in national pride (*La France*, July-August 1921).

De Waleffe imagined that this sense of “national pride” would encourage young people to re-adopt their traditional regional costumes. He affirmed,

Young people will go back to them when they see how girls from the towns no longer disdain them [traditional dress]. They’ll see how in this costume they are a thousand times more charming than they are wearing arbitrary “fashions” invented by department stores. They will return to local fashions and France will take back its elegant features and vibrant colours (*Scénario*, July 1920).

Just as in the 1920 competition, De Waleffe spoke of film technology as being able to “define and preserve on the screen of *Film-Éclair* the purest types of the French race” (Ibid.). Girls with parents born outside of the region were described by De Waleffe as “hybrid roses” and as such were not allowed to compete (*Ciné-Tribune*, July 15, 1920). He reminded the public,

The victor in our Paris competition of the year before Mlle Souret, was of Basque mixed with Breton blood. This time the ardent and supple race was called upon to yield its flower unhybridized. (*La France: A Magazine of French-American Activities*, July-August, 1921)

Every week appeared on the screens a different region, beginning with the North in week one and ending with Central France in week seven and each film was 200 metres in length (*Le Courrier Cinématographique*, November 27, 1920). The young female readers of *Les Modes de la femme de France* again took up discussions of the contest in their letter forum. For example, on July 31, 1921, one young female reader with the pseudonym *Chichinette* writes in to her fellow readers,

Did anyone enter or follow the contest for electing the Queen of the French Provinces? Who did you vote for? I didn't enter, but for my taste, the prettiest was without a doubt the queen of the South East (the elected of Savoie), Estelle Rudat, followed by the queen of the South West (the elected of Toulouse), Juliette de Combettes. When it comes to the others, I can't help wondering why they even entered...I could have done almost as well as them! Who can give me the official results of this contest? (*Les Modes de la Femme de France*, July 31, 1921)

Chichinette received several replies from other young readers. For example, *Coralyne* wrote, “I

take pleasure in paying homage to the *Savoyarde*...a magnificent beauty, too beautiful perhaps to incarnate the Frenchwoman, I preferred her to the *Mulhousienne*; what does the nest think?" (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, August 14, 1921). Another reader, one *Salamandre*, agreed with *Coralyne*, writing, "*Chichinette*, I voted for the *Savoyarde* and the *Toulousaine*, but I'm forever cured of these cinema contests, they're idiotic" (*Les Modes de la femme de France*, September 18, 1921). A few weeks later, a reader with the pseudonym *Ressemblant à Primerose* replies to *Chichinette*,

Chichinette, the queen of queens was Corsica (Pauline Pô)²⁰⁸ this choice has been criticised, and rightly so. I was interested in this contest, but didn't take part myself. My choice: the *Basquaise* (Yvonne Bonifait), the most beautiful in my opinion" (*Les Modes de la Femme de France*, October 2, 1921).

Like Agnès Souret before her, the sixteen-year-old Pauline Pô was catapulted into stardom after winning the contest. René Carrère hired Souret as female lead for the highly publicised film *Corsica* written by Vanina Casalonga and released in July 1923.²⁰⁹ Following the career trajectory of 1920 beauty queen finalist Dolly Davis, Pauline Pô too crossed paths with the 1920s avant-garde with her appearance in *Kean* (Dir. Alexandre Volkoff, 1924) with Ivan Mosjoukine.²¹⁰

Cinémagazine organised an offshoot competition from the Queen of the Provinces contest called "Can Our Queens Become Stars?" asking readers to pair the ten contestants in the provinces beauty contest with the ten "most famous, most indisputable" American stars including Mary

²⁰⁸ See Mattei, Jean-Pierre. "Pauline Pô." *La Corse & le cinéma: première époque, 1897-1929 : le muet*. Editions Alain Piazzola, Publication de la Cinémathèque Corse. A. Piazzola, 1996. 222–225 and *Cinéa* (December 2, 1921).

²⁰⁹ For Louis Delluc's positive review of the film see the daily newspaper *Bonsoir* (July 11, 1923).

²¹⁰ Mattei, Jean-Pierre. "Pauline Pô." *La Corse & le cinéma: première époque, 1897-1929 : le muet*. Editions Alain Piazzola, Publication de la Cinémathèque Corse. A. Piazzola, 1996. 224. According to Jean-Pierre Mattei, Abel Gance was so taken with her during his filming of *Napoléon* that he wanted her to follow the crew back to Paris, but her father refused.

Pickford, Pearl White, Constance and Norma Talmadge and Mary Miles. The idea was to match each American star with a regional contestant who – in their minds - was prettier and could be an “aesthetic rival” (*Cinémagazine*, May 6, 1921).

For Bourcet, cinema beauty contests, like *Les Deux Gamines*, defined French film culture in the early 1920s. In her review of Brasillach and Bardèche’s *Histoire du cinéma*, she revealed how her experience of cinema in the 1920s was at odds with their account. She wrote,

It was a time when spectators voted in the cinemas for “The Most Beautiful Woman in France” competition. On the screen appeared the candidates, skillfully presented in ethnographic finery. Alsace aroused waves of applause, but didn't win the prize. And, far off in the provinces, crowds of little young girls imagined that all they had to do was choose between a job at the theatre, the film studio or the music-hall. A mirage of ease. A mirage of happiness. A mirage of success. France and cinema in 1920... (*Études*, July 20, 1936).

Chapter 4

Cocaine, Anthropometrics and Avant-Garde Beauty Queens: *Photogénie* Beyond Jean Epstein

Photogénie is the mania of the day. It touches every social circle from the top to the bottom of the ladder, there is not a woman who hasn't told herself when looking in the mirror: No, really, if I wanted to, I think I could be very good in the pictures [*je ferais très bien du cinéma*]. Men, on the other hand, don't feel the call so violently, and they feel less attracted by the screen. Man, often, is less idle than woman, and in particular his imagination doesn't get as carried away because he stays closer to reality... Woman, more than man, feels an instinctive need to be seen and noticed. It is this instinct that brings her to expose herself. (*Scénario*, 15 October 1921)

In creating *photogénie*, Louis Delluc has invented not only the word but the thing itself. (Léon Moussinac, *L'Humanité*, March 24, 1924)

Introduction: In Search of a Definition

In his recent *Elegy for Theory*, D.N. Rodowick reminds us that the writers we today know as early film theorists did not see themselves as such at the time they were musing over the object of cinema and its status as an art form. He writes,

[...] the adoption of the English title *Theory of Film* in 1952 is already indicative of a reflex to superimpose retroactively a picture of theory on a complex range of conceptual activities that may not have characterized themselves as such. This picture clouds our image of what those activities meant and were supposed to accomplish both conceptually and historically.²¹¹

The term *photogénie* is now understood to be the first example of a film-theoretic concept, the cornerstone of an incipient film theory, although a less than coherent one.²¹² Jean Epstein is widely considered to be the central theorist of *photogénie*, and has consequently been the object of a recent resurgence of interest, as evidenced in the retrospective at the Cinémathèque

²¹¹ Rodowick, David Norman. 2014. *Elegy for Theory*. Cambridge (Mass.) London: Harvard University Press. 71.

²¹² See for example, Doane, Mary Ann. 2003. "The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14 (3): 89–111.

Française (April 30 - May 26, 2014), international scholarly conferences,²¹³ and an edited volume of his writings published in *Jean Epstein Critical Essays and New Translations*.²¹⁴ However, while many scholars have explored what Jean Epstein (and Louis Delluc) were attempting to accomplish conceptually with the term *photogénie*, we know little of what they were seeking to accomplish socially within the context of inter-war French entertainment culture.

Delluc and Epstein may have infused *photogénie* with new meaning, but the term had long been in use among photographers. The adjective *photogénique* was initially borrowed from the English “photogenic” in the 1850s to describe the way in which sunlight created interesting contrasts on a photograph. Under the influence of the term *photographique*, it developed into an umbrella term connoting anything to do with photography. In the late 1860s, *photogénique* moved closer to today’s meaning, “renders well photographically” (1869), a use that, with the popularity of cinema in the late 1910s, became widespread as “producing a poetic and aesthetic effect that is revealed and amplified by the image.” It was only at this time that it was used as an adjective for a person’s “quality of photographic rendering” (*qualité de rendu photographique*).²¹⁵ Historical French dictionaries use Louis Delluc’s book *Photogénie* as the first example of the noun’s usage. Perhaps unsurprisingly considering the “great mystery”²¹⁶ surrounding the term *photogénie*, its connotations were unsettled even in the years immediately

²¹³ Most recently in October 2013 the Université de Rennes 2 organised an international conference “Actualité et postérités de Jean Epstein.” In 2008 Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul organised first major conference on the director outside of France, “Jean Epstein’s Interdisciplinary Cinema and the French Avant-Garde” held at the University of Chicago in April 2008. Jacques Aumont organised the first major conference on Jean Epstein on the initiative of Dominique Païni at the Cinémathèque française in 1998.

²¹⁴ Keller, Sarah and Jason N. Paul, eds. 2012. *Jean Epstein Critical Essays and New Translations*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

²¹⁵ Rey, Alain. 1998. *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française: contenant les mots français en usage et quelques autres délaissés, avec leur origine proche et lointaine ...* Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert. 2711

²¹⁶ Epstein, Jean. 2012. “For A New Avant-Garde.” In *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, edited by Sarah. Keller and Jason N. Paul, translated by Stuart Iebman, 302–5. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 304

following its transformation by Delluc in 1920. In a reply to the reader *Odette V.* from Béziers, Jean Pascal or Adrien Lemaître, both editors of *Cinémagazine*, write,

In my opinion the word *photogénie* is not right for a person who renders well on film; *cinégénie* would be much more suitable, and if we adopted this word, it would ensue that *photogénie* is the quality of rendering well in photography and *cinégénie* is this same quality regarding the art of gestures (October 28, 1921).

When in 1925 a *Cinémagazine* reader asked, “Who made up the word *photogénie*?” R. Leonardo replied that it was not Delluc but Edmond de Goncourt who had invented the word. Indeed, de Goncourt had used *photogénie* before Delluc in his 1882 novel *Le Faustin*, in which he described a Lord Annandale as having pale English skin that was “*beau de la clarté photogénique*” or “handsome with a photogenic radiance”²¹⁷ (*Cinémagazine*, May 29, 1925). Leonardo wrote that far from an accidental appropriation, Delluc’s use of the term overlapped with De Goncourt’s as “the face’s ability to capture rays of light” (Ibid.).²¹⁸ In 1920 a journalist in *Floréal* had already joked that the word’s new meaning would annoy another de Goncourt.

If there exists an art for which the *plastique* counts, it is that of the screen. What’s more, a term has just been invented for it: *photogénique*. It’s one of these haphazardly made-up words, which would put Rémy de Goncourt in a holy fit of rage (*Floréal*, September 18, 1920).

Photogénie served the function of cutting cinema’s ties with photography by introducing the element of motion and with theatre because actors needed to be cinematic rather than theatrical. Pierre Scize writes in a *Bonsoir* review of Louis Delluc’s book *Photogénie*, “It teaches us to mark the departure from photography” (August 15, 1920). Indeed, Delluc writes in *Photogénie* that “since a film’s psychological movement depends upon *grosses têtes*, called close-ups, all trickery is impossible.”²¹⁹ Jean Epstein’s poetic ode to American close-ups at the beginning of

²¹⁷ The contemporary translation reads “the clearness of skin only found in the English.”

²¹⁸ Delluc also used *photogénique* to describe the radiant, light giving objects in music hall performances. In his review of the Casino de Paris show *La Reine de Saba* (*Cinéa*, May 6, 1921; May 20, 1921) he admired pearls with phosphorescent photogenic qualities and the shimmering stomach of Jeanne Myro in the spotlight.

²¹⁹ Delluc, Louis. 1920. *Photogénie*. Paris: Maurice de Brunoff. 51.

his essay “Magnification” is well cited²²⁰ and scholars such as Mary Ann Doane have underlined the importance of the close-up as the key experiential site of *photogénie*.²²¹

Although the technological evolution of film language spurred this early attempt at defining the experience of cinema, one should not neglect other political, social and cultural factors. It is no coincidence that *photogénie* changed meaning in the years immediately following the Great War when the French film industry was coming to terms with its losses and attempting to rebuild a French cinema in line with engrained notions of French racial delicacy, sensitivity and intelligence. Indeed, we cannot separate Epstein’s theorisation of the term *photogénie* in a post-war France in crisis from its connotations of French racial identity.²²² As I discuss in Chapter One, cinephile critics used notions of French inherent good taste to defend *Broken Blossoms* and as we saw in Chapter Two, cinephile criticism took the side of the French government when it came to the anti-Bolshevik film *La Russie Rouge*.

Nor is it a coincidence that *photogénie* was first used as a noun the same year that *cinéphilie* was.²²³ Indeed, Colin Mac Cabe, Mary Ann Doane, Sarah Keller, Malte Hagener and Paul

²²⁰ “I will never find the way to say how much I love American close-ups. Point blank. A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized.”

²²¹ Doane, Mary Ann. 2003. “The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema.” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14 (3): 89–111.

²²² Several scholars have problematised early film theorists’ use of Sessue Hayakawa as an example of *photogénie*. See for example Miyao, Daisuke. 2011. “Sessue Hayakawa : The Mirror, the Racialized Body, and Photogénie.” In *Flickers of Desire: Movie Stars of the 1910s*, edited by Jennifer M Bean. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. See also Paula Amad’s formulation of “The Colonial Close-Up” in Amad, Paula. 2010. *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn’s Archives de La Planète*. New York: Columbia University Press. 278. See also Okada, Jun. 2008. “Marcel L’Herbier’s *Forfaiture*: Photogenie, Race, and Homoerotic Homage in the French Remake of DeMille’s *The Cheat*.” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 25 (5): 368–81.

²²³ Rey, Alain. 1998. *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française: contenant les mots français en usage et quelques autres délaissés, avec leur origine proche et lointaine ...* Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert. Vol 1. 757.

Willemen all locate 1920s debates on *photogénie* as the “privileged moment” for the emergence of cinephilia. As Paul Willemen rightly argues in line with Rodowick above, for the French critics who later coalesced into a recognisable community of “cinephiles,” *photogénie* was not just a way of theorising the impact of the filmic image on spectators; it was also a mark of quality, a stamp of approval to a range of American films as well as to the films of the Impressionist filmmakers Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein and Germaine Dulac. Willemen states,

The founding aspect of cinematic quality, instead of its specificity, is located not in the recognition of an artistic sensibility or intentionality beyond the screen, as it were, but in the particular relationship supported or constituted by the spectatorial look, between projected image and viewer. As such, *photogénie* is a term mobilised to demarcate one set of viewers – those able to ‘see’ - from others. In this context it functions like a mark of distinction conferred by a special set of viewers upon film-makers, differentiating those who are qualified to make cinema and so are entitled to a position of cultural power from those who merely manufacture cinema, however professionally.²²⁴

More than twenty years prior to Rodowick’s statement, then, Willemen argued that to understand the cultural politics of the term *photogénie*, hitherto approached as a purely aesthetic-philosophical concept, it must be re-imbedded within the cultural and historical context in which it took on the connotations of intellectual film analysis. As an outright “mark of distinction,” the term *photogénie* was used by French First Wave critics to describe French First Wave cinema. This circularity—critics defining *photogénie* and then using their own works to illustrate the term’s meaning—did not go unnoticed by contemporary journalists. Lionel Landry points out this synchrony in *Le Journal* in 1924,

A lecture given by Jean Epstein has just been published: *De quelques conditions de la photogénie*. As if by chance, the lecture was given just after a screening of *Coeur fidèle* (*Le Journal*, August 29, 1924).

As I demonstrated in Chapter One, the main objective of the French film industry in 1920 was to reduce state taxes and rebuild the industry by attracting the patronage of elite Parisian audiences.

²²⁴ Willemen, Paul. 1994. “Photogénie and Epstein.” In *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, 124–38. Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, British Film Institute. 126.

Consequently, the *renaissance* in French cinema spearheaded by Marcel L'Herbier and Louis Delluc both catered to and sought to shape an elite film taste. As a term of spectatorial distinction, *photogénie* served as a buzzword around which the cultural authority of these new films could be consolidated and their target audience delimited to intellectual, upper-bourgeois and upper-class spectators. As Willemen writes, and as Chapter One has shown, *photogénie* and other cinephile concepts of taste acted “to institute demarcations between viewers by differentiating those who are ‘sensitive’ from those who are not.”²²⁵ For example, using *photogénie* as a designator of a certain type of artistic cinema, as something akin to a film genre, enabled Ricciotto Canudo to make his argument at the first meeting of C.A.S.A in 1921 that cinemas should be ordered in hierarchies, where elite cinemas could screen films containing “beautiful *photogénie*” without their lofty audiences being bothered by ordinary cinemagoers eating oranges, reading intertitles and whistling at technical effects. Gaston de Lyrot writes in 1925,

Wouldn't it be interesting, for example, to have a 'Marcel L'Herbier Cinema,'²²⁶ where we could applaud the masterpiece of *photogénie* that is *Don Juan et Faust* [1922], as well as his *El Dorado* [1921], *L'Inhumaine* [1924], etc. all of which would benefit from a prestigious presentation (*Cinémagazine*, January 9, 1925).

Photogénie was clearly used as a marketing tool for early cinephiles in their quest to promote international art cinema as well as select popular American films and their own impressionist films. Léon Moussinac peppered his review of L'Herbier's *El Dorado* with praise of its *photogénie*. Among his comments used to advertise the film in *Cinéa* he describes the death of

²²⁵ Willemen, Paul. 1994. “Photogénie and Epstein.” In *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*, 124–38. Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, British Film Institute. 127

²²⁶ Many critics complained of Marcel L'Herbier's penchant for close-ups, for example, Francis Mair wrote of Suzanne Desprès's close-ups in *Le Carnaval des Vérités* (*Ciné-Tribune*, July 8, 1920), “How can an artist like him inflict upon us the close ups of Mme Suzanne Desprès. Richard Abel notes that Jean Benoît-Lévy often wrote under the pseudonym Francis Mair. See Abel, Richard, ed. 1996. *Silent Film*. London: Athlone, 123.

Sybilla as “one of the most prodigious moments of *photogénie* that we have ever seen” and continues with equal bombast “no one has come closer to photogenic truth” (*Cinéa*, October 14, 1921). *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was for “lovers of beautiful *photogénie*” (*Cinéa*, November 18, 1921) but the term also transported popular icons like Charlie Chaplin, Rio Jim and Douglas Fairbanks into the highbrow realm of Louis Delluc’s film magazine *Cinéa*. Every prominent member of the French First Wave gave a lecture on the topic of *photogénie*. In 1924 Jean Epstein held a lecture on *photogénie* the same week as Le Corbusier lectured on modern architecture as part of the Group for Scientific and Philosophical Study (*Groupe d’études philosophiques et scientifiques*) at the Sorbonne (*Le Radical*, June 11, 1924). The same month Marcel L’Herbier gave a talk on *photogénie* at the Musée Galliera (*Le Radical*, June 6, 1924) and in July 1925 Germaine Dulac delivered a lecture on “The *photogénie* of outward appearances, movement, angles and light” (*la photogénie des aspects extérieurs, le mouvement, l’angle, la lumière*) at the Salle Comœdia (*La Lanterne*, July 24, 1925).

Given its status as a key term in the construction of cinephilia as a distinctly elite film culture in the early 1920s, it is of primary importance that we unravel the manifold ways in which the term, *photogénie*, circulated. The term was used not only in film criticism, but also in illustrated film weeklies and newspapers, in advertising, in readers’ letter columns, stories, music hall acts, beauty contests and lectures. In this chapter, I identify several ways in which the term *photogénie* – and by extension, *photogénique* - were being used in 1920s Paris and how these uses overlapped, collided with, and fed into the theoretical writings of Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein. To achieve this goal it is necessary to recuperate what Christophe Wall-Romana has called the

“trivial sense of *photogénie* in movie culture”²²⁷: the star quality of looking beautiful on film. In this chapter, therefore, I show how the cinephiles paradoxically drew on the popular “trivial” sense of the term while at the same time distancing themselves from female film fans who treasured the concept of photogenic as means of referring to the star quality necessary for screen success.

Everyday *Photogénie*

The French First Wave film critics did not and could not acquire a monopoly on the terms *photogénie* and *photogénique*, no matter how much it might have suited them. Photogenic qualities were essential discussion topics in everyday film culture. Female film fans, in particular, immediately seized on the idea *photogénie* with the emergence of popular film weeklies in 1919.²²⁸ For most, the concept conjured up a quality that was required to acquire fame and fortune as a star of the cinema. Many young women understood it simply to mean appearing beautiful on film. They were supported in their thinking by much of the press at the time, for which the quality of being photogenic, so important yet so difficult to pin down, made for many journalistic musings in the daily newspapers as well as articles in the specialised film press.

The idea of *photogénie* as a transformative rags-to-riches quality proliferated in popular stories

²²⁷ Keller, Sarah and Jason N. Paul, eds. 2012. “Epstein’s *Photogénie* as Corporeal Vision: Inner Sensation, Queer Embodiment and Ethics.” In *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, 51–71. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 53.

²²⁸ *Photogénique* was used from the advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century to describe apparatus and tools that had to do with photography. In the 1860s, the word was used to describe colors or landscapes that rendered well in photographs such as the blue of the sky (*Le Magasin pittoresque*, 1863, 343)

in illustrated leisure magazines²²⁹ such as “The Story of a Young Rich Girl: Am I Photogenic?” (*Lectures pour tous*, November 1926) and cheaply published stories like Maurice Lecaire’s *La D emoiselle Cin ematographique* (1917). In 1923 a play called “My Wife is Photogenic” was staged at the Scala theatre in Paris (*La Semaine   Paris*, August 17, 1923) and a sketch based on Vaucaire’s story was performed at the Folies Berg eres music hall in 1922 (and serialised in the newspaper *L’ cho de Paris*). *Photog nie* mania even made its way into Paris courtrooms: In a 1922 trial over child custody one lawyer defending a down-and-out mother claimed in his concluding statement, “Mme X...is able to raise her child because she is photogenic and thus, can make enough money from the cinema for her own upkeep and that of the child!” (*Le Populaire*, September 18, 1922).

The French film press and the daily press regularly informed young women that *photog nie* ranked high among the primary necessities for succeeding as an actress.²³⁰ The advice *Cin  pour tous* gives to a young reader wanting to become an actress in early 1920, for instance, stresses,

I repeat: you need to have an allowance, hobbies, be pretty, especially ‘photogenic’ [*photog nique*]. You need to be able to exteriorise diverse emotions; finally you need to have connections. You don’t need anything more than that to become a star of the cinema...(*Cin  pour tous*, January 3, 1920).

In the years that followed, readers sent their photographs into film magazines in droves. Most film magazine editors understood this practice as part and parcel of their magazine’s appeal to young women and gladly gave advice and opinions to their readers. For example, *Cin magazine* wrote to a Miss.  tincelle in 1922,

²²⁹ The February 15, 1919 issue of *Lectures pour tous* featured a short story by Ch. Torquet about Fluffy Bluebells, a young girl who goes to a film studio hoping to find work as an actress. After a rude first meeting with the director, a screen test is made and the young girl is delighted when the head of photography exclaims, “Suzanne Grandais, Mary Pickford, Bessie Love, Francesca Bertini have nothing on her!”

²³⁰ See for example response to *Gypsia* (*Cin magazine*, April 29, 1921) and to Jewel Joy (*Cin magazine*, July 8, 1921).

I'm enchanted to be your "friend"²³¹ ... I'm even happier to receive your photograph and don't think for a second that I complain about being condemned to receive photos of all my correspondents. So, you too want to be in the movies? Well, you are very photogenic, and I wouldn't be surprised if a filmmaker became interested in you (*Cinémagazine*, June 7, 1922).

When a reader with the pseudonym F.N. sent her picture to *Cinémagazine* she was told,

We have received your picture and here is our opinion: your hair seems to be a photogenic blonde, your eyes show a remarkable expressive vivacity and your facial features are very regular. Try to have a screen test made and send it in to us" (*Cinémagazine*, September 9, 1921).

For *Cinémagazine* to ask its readers to submit a screen test was quite rare. In general readers were simply told, "yes, you are photogenic," or informed that the photographic quality was too poor for the editors to be able to tell. Pierre Henry, however, advised readers of *Ciné pour tous* that only a screen test could reveal one's photogenic qualities,

To sum up, let's say that the only way to settle the question of *photogénie* is to do a screen test because you shouldn't think that the photographic camera can fulfill the same role as the film camera... The fact that you appear beautiful on a photograph does not imply that one is photogenic (*Ciné pour tous*, March 20, 1920).

On the other hand, popular film magazines routinely told readers to address their photos to French production companies whose full addresses were listed for this purpose in *Ciné pour tous*.²³² Throughout the 1920s *Cinémagazine* responded to female readers after they had enquired about their photogenic qualities and sent photos to the magazine.²³³ In most cases the editors told their readers to do a screen test.²³⁴ One reader, *Norvillé*, was told in 1924, "One judges the *photogénie* of a face not by a photograph but by the screen projection of several metres of film"

²³¹ *Amis du Cinéma* was the name of the readers' club.

²³² For example, see response to the reader *Lys Rouge* (Red Blossom) in *Ciné pour tous* July 16, 1920.

²³³ To take some examples from towards the end of the decade, one Marie Rigotti sent pictures into the magazine to ask whether the young girl photographed was photogenic (perhaps herself or a relative). Her reply was, "The photos that you've sent to me are certainly very beautiful and the young girl with her beautiful oriental features could find a job with a studio. This young girl is very photogenic, but she should not leave for America without having first tried out her qualities in a film" (*Cinémagazine*, January 4, 1929). In a March 1929 issue *Cinémagazine* told a reader, Anita W. "Judging from the photographs that you've sent me, you are photogenic" (March 15, 1929).

²³⁴ For example, see response to the reader *Petite fleur d'orage* (Little Flower of the Storm) in *Cinémagazine*, March 28, 1924 and the response to *Mag.* (*Ciné pour tous*, December 31, 1920).

(*Cinémagazine*, October 8, 1921). And another named Yvette received the following response in 1924,

Nobody can tell you whether you are or not photogenic. Even the most experienced people can't tell: the only way to find out is to do a screen test (*Cinémagazine*, April 11, 1924).

***Photogénie* Schools and Screen Tests**

So where could Parisians have a screen test made in the years following the Armistice? In the summer of 1921, *La Scène* offered its readers a screen test if they purchased an annual subscription to the magazine, shrewdly pronouncing that,

[...] many readers, young men and women want to act! Having no artistic connections, there is nobody to guide them, yet among them undoubtedly lie some who could well become true artists of the screen. It is in all of your best interests to know your photogenic value [*valeur photogénique*] (*La Scène*, July 1921).

New film companies emerged to cater to the cinema hopefuls in Paris. Nouvelles Stars Films on rue des Martyrs in Montmartre was a talent company inviting hopefuls of all ages to send them a photograph (*Ciné pour tous*, July 21, 1922). In October 1920 an advertisement in *Ciné pour tous* for a small film studio *Film pour tous* read, “Are you photogenic?” and offered readers a “Ciné-Album” - or a collection of filmed portraits - as “proof” for the price of 12 francs²³⁵ (October 8, 1921). Many small studios offered “screen tests for judging *photogénie*” (*bouts d’essai pour juger de la photogénie*) which André Reybas from the *Cinémagazine*’s readers’ club sold to hopeful actors for 50 francs (*Cinémagazine*, May 5, 1922). Cinema acting schools popped up all over the capital. At the Institut Cinégraphique at the Place de la République students did a screen test before they were given private or group lessons; the Institut advertised its services with the slogan “If you want to know if you are photogenic...” Similarly the Université

²³⁵ This was half a day’s wages for the ice cream sellers and cashiers at the Aubert Palace cinema who earned 25 francs per day in 1919 or the equivalent of three modest meals at a bistro. (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Arts du Spectacle, Fonds Serge Sandberg, 4o - COL - 59 / 357; Valdour, Jacques. 1921. *La Vie Ouvrière. Ouvriers Parisiens d’après-Guerre. Observations Vécues*. Arthur Rousseau, René Giard. Paris, Lille. 12.

Cinématographique at Place Blanche in Montmartre offered classes to *Cinémagazine* readers (*Cinémagazine*, December 30, 1921). The Cinéma-École Marquissette in the central entertainment district (*Cinémagazine*, April 29, 1921) lured in students with the promise, “Are you photogenic? We at Studio-École will show you” (*Cinémagazine*, March 25, 1921; April 29, 1921).²³⁶ Renée Carl of Louis Feuillade’s Gaumont troupe gave acting classes at her Académie du Cinéma in central Paris (*Ciné pour tous*, January 28, 1921) and Christiane Wague,²³⁷ a forgotten female film critic, directed a film school in Montmartre at 5, cité Pigalle (*Cinémagazine*, April 15, 1921).

The innocent years of *photogénie* mania soon came to a halt, however, with the horrifying revelations that one Paris film school had abused and exploited its students. In a front page story that ran with the headline “On the Danger of Being Photogenic: Robbed and Raped!,” *L’Humanité* (December 11, 1925) outlined the tale. On 77 rue d’Amsterdam,²³⁸ five minutes by foot from the imposing Gaumont Palace, Paul Dubas, Marcel Picaud (under the name Richard Will) and Pierre Levandowsky (a supposed filmmaker) set up a “cinema school” called Les Films Nouveaux (*Le Gaulois*, June 17, 1926) tempting young women to pay them 70 francs per month²³⁹ to take acting classes. They were told that when they finished their training they would be placed in the finest French film companies. More than 400 girls replied to their advertisements. The *L’Humanité* journalist described – with a lightheartedness characteristic of sex crime reporting at the time,

²³⁶ Marseille also had its “Université du Cinéma” (*Cinémagazine*, June 2, 1922) with the advertising slogan “You who love the cinema so much, make sure that you are photogenic!”

²³⁷ Christiane Wague was born Clotilde Marigaux. She was married to the famous mime Georges Wague who taught pantomime to Colette. She was also a film critic for various film magazines and trade journals and in 1920 had a film column in the magazine *La Voie sacrée*.

²³⁸ Incidentally this film studio had half a century earlier been the location of Manet’s last studio (1879-1883).

²³⁹ This was approximately half a week’s wages for a typist in 1922. A young typist in 1922 typically earned around 600 francs per month (*L’Écho de Paris*, September 11, 1922).

It appears that the studio on rue d'Amsterdam served more frequently for lessons in love rather than cinema lessons... Several girls have pressed charges against the directors for rape [*violençe spéciale*]. Furthermore, over 100,000 francs has been stolen from the pupils. The school directors have been taken to court by the examining magistrate Mr. Bacquart (*L'Humanité*, December 11, 1925).

Police issued a double arrest warrant for the two school directors Marc Picaud and Paul Dubas.

Paul Dubas was 34 years old at the time and some of the victims were under fifteen years of age (*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, December 12, 1925). Three hundred plaintiffs were heard in court and one hundred were victims of the men (*Le Gaulois*, January 17, 1926).

Lucien Doublon, secretary general of the Amis du Cinéma club and secretary general of the Exhibitor's Trade Union (*Syndicat des Directeurs*) had already warned female *Cinémagazine* readers against this – and other – schools offering false promises for a monthly fee. Doublon reported that the actor José Davert, famous for his role as the Gaston Leroux character Chéri-Bibi, had been offered a job teaching students at Picaud and Dubas' school but had refused after he saw the conditions of exploitation there (*Cinémagazine*, March 30, 1923). Already in 1921 Gabriel Reuillard²⁴⁰ in an article entitled “If You Are ‘Photogenic’” had argued for “coordinated mass action” of the proletariat as the only effective means against rogue cinema schools who exploited “young photogenic people who dream of becoming cinema stars” (*L'Humanité*, April 15, 1921). The term *photogénie* was so widespread in the 1920s, then, that anyone could exploit it for their own agendas. This led *Cinémagazine* to warn one reader Béatrice, “Never believe anyone who tells you that you are photogenic and especially never follow their advice!” (*Cinémagazine*, April 6, 1923).

Narcotics, Photogenic Fashions and Female Consumers

²⁴⁰ The *L'Humanité* journalist present at the *Russie Rouge* press screening who triggered protests against the film.

What an original compliment to give to a young woman. We no longer say: You're beautiful! You're captivating! You're spiritual! We tell her "You're photogenic!" And she is overjoyed! The miracle of cinema has even transformed gallantry! (Pierre Veber in *Scénario*, April 1920)

Everyone from filmmakers and actors to newspaper columnists and film critics had their opinion on the right make up needed for *photogénie*. When cinephile critics described photogenic fashion and make-up, their use of the term *photogénie* overlapped with popular uses of the term and appealed to female film fans. Indeed, avant-garde and popular film cultures collided when for example, Louis Delluc describes the most photogenic type of dress as "short, in the English style, in heavy black and white woolen cloth. A steel grey, pale blue, or pink silk jersey will render well" in *Photogénie*.²⁴¹ Juan Arroy cites the same line in his article "The Photogenic Dress" in *Cinémagazine* (August 21, 1925). Here Arroy observes that Louis Delluc, Marcel L'Herbier and Jean Epstein were the first in France to understand the importance of photogenic costumes in cinema. He writes,

Remember Eve Francis' long black veil in *La Femme de nulle part* [Dir. Louis Delluc, 1922] and [Natalya Lissenko's in *L'Affiche* [Dir. Jean Epstein, 1925], the understated but beautiful dresses of Marcelle Pradot in *Le Marchand des plaisirs* [Dir. Jaque Catelain, 1923], *Don Juan et Faust* [Dir. Marcel L'Herbier, 1922] and *El Dorado* [Dir. Marcel L'Herbier, 1921], Eve Francis in *La Fête Espagnol* [Dir. Germaine Dulac, 1920], *La Chemin d'Ernoa* [Dir. René Coiffard and Louis Delluc, 1921], *Fièvre* [Dir. Louis Delluc, 1921], *El Dorado* and *Le Silence* [Dir. Louis Delluc, 1920] (*Cinémagazine*, August 21, 1925).

The *photogénie* craze of the 1920s also meant that advertisers used the term to target female consumers in popular film weeklies. Female readers wrote into the film press in order to ask for more details, for example, what colours of dress were the most photogenic? *Cinémagazine* told one of its readers *Midouzia* that according to Cecil B. De Mille, a sky blue dress with white sequins was best for evening wear, while yellow or lilac dresses were suitable choices for daytime dressing (*Cinémagazine*, September 9, 1921). Advertisements targeted such readers with

²⁴¹ Delluc, Louis. 1920. *Photogénie*. Paris: Maurice de Brunoff. 68.

lines like “Paul Poiret’s Dresses Are Photogenic” (*Cinéa*, June 24, 1921) and “Madame, a dress that isn’t photogenic is not a pretty dress” (as read the advertisement for Ghislaine dresses) (*Cinéa*, June 17, 1921) and “Marie-Louis dresses are photogenic” (*Cinéa*, November 11, 1921).

Even more important than clothes was make-up. And once again avant-garde discourses melded with women’s film culture. In his article “Make-up” in 1923, Jacque Catelain, star of *El Dorado* and *L’Homme du Large* told actors that they should,

...modify their make-up during the production of the same film according to the scenes in which they appear. The manifestations of the soul will be more apparent if, in advance, the facial features are made to conform with the sentiments that the soul should express (*Cinémagazine*, June 15, 1923).

Similarly, the magazine *Cinémato* told its readers “Make-up is the basis for facial *photogénie*” (*Cinémato*, July 17, 1925). Other film magazines corrected their readers in their assumption that actresses created a *photogénie* for themselves with make-up.²⁴²

Yamile face powder was advertised with the slogan,

Am I photogenic? Anyone with the intention to dedicate themselves to the silent art asks this question. The answer is very simple: use good make-up products and know how to apply them. You will be photogenic (*Cinémagazine*, February 17, 1928).

Film magazines advertised the mascara *Velours Cillaires*, (Velvet Eyelashes) with the slogan “What is required to be photogenic? Beautifully seductive and magnetic eyes” (*Cinémagazine*, April, 6 1923). Yet the editors of *Cinémagazine* paternally warns one reader with the pseudonym *Petite Poupée* (Little Doll),

I hope you’re not going to follow this beauty advice to make yourself photogenic. Leave your eyelashes alone (*Cinémagazine*, 15 December 1922).

Delluc did not show such paternal care in response to his readers’ inquiries about their photogenic qualities. *Photogénique*, when used by or when speaking about female film fans,

²⁴² See response to *Cinéfolle* (*Cinémagazine*, February 17, 1928).

went against the grain of what early cinephiles like Louis Delluc and Marcel L'Herbier sought to accomplish in terms of creating an elite terminology for an elite art cinema. In the second issue of *Cinéa*, one reader, Suzanne B.G. dared write to Delluc to ask how she could get into the film business. As was the typical practice, she included in her letter a photo of herself. He tells her,

I've received your photo, and well, don't go into the movies. Your photo reveals your beauty and a loveable soul to match, one that doesn't have time to lose in art, work, marriage or cinema. Your city makeup is excellent. Go into a bar – any bar on the rue Caumartin – and I would be surprised if, after an hour or two, someone very nice doesn't come along to give you advice on your future. Good luck (*Cinéa*, May 13, 1921).

After Delluc's hints that she should prostitute herself in a rue Caumartin bar – a busy area of nightclubs and bars - as she doesn't have time to lose with marriage, it is no wonder that Suzanne B.G. stops writing to *Cinéa* altogether. No doubt all the young women writing to *Cinémagazine* with their photographs made up the category of “insignificant young women” he uses in the following sarcastic definition of *photogénique* for his 1919 *Cinéma et Cie*,

The greatest compliment that cinematographers can make to a thing or a person [...] In principal a photogenic face is one that will be beautiful on the screen. Usually we say it about insignificant young women [*demoiselles insignifiantes*].²⁴³

Delluc's ambivalence about the widespread use of *photogénique* to describe female beauty is illustrative of the cinephiles' quest to, on the one hand, distance themselves from non-cinephile female film fans who risked tarnishing their elite film project, while on the other hand ensuring that cinema culture was widespread and profitable, for example through sales of Louis Delluc's own magazine *Cinéa*. Women were unable to ask Louis Delluc whether they were photogenic in the pictures that they sent into his magazine—he would have nothing of it, and would instead use their questions as a pretext to ridicule them. In their first theorisations of the term, Delluc and Epstein were thus clearly writing *against* this popular understanding of the term *photogénie*. For

²⁴³ Delluc, Louis. 1986. *Cinéma et Cie*. Edited by Pierre Lherminier. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l'Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma. 21-22.

example, in July 1920 Louis Delluc authored an article for the intellectual cultural newspaper *Comœdia* entitled *Photogénie*, in which he writes,

Cinema spectators are beginning to get to know the word *photogénie*. The technical aspect of it seduces them. And as they generally use it the wrong way, they only like it more. It would really shock them to hear that *photogénie* can relate to more than just the face. It would rub them the wrong way to know that the most photogenic faces are not always the prettiest. But I don't want to be the one to take away their illusions. Let's just say that *photogénie* is a science of luminous shots for the recording cinema eye (*Comœdia illustré*, July-August, 1920).²⁴⁴

The idea of using the term *photogénie* “the wrong way” is equally communicated by Jean Epstein who described the term as being “bandied about” with the implication that it was being used in the wrong way by the wrong public.²⁴⁵ We should be clear about who Delluc and Epstein were correcting. When Delluc argued that *photogénie* did not refer to conventional beauty, and could not be applied to just any pretty woman, he did so precisely because that was the way that female film fans all over Paris employed the term.

At the same time, however, Delluc could revel in the *photogénie* of bathing suits and female nudes.²⁴⁶ With the transformation of the term *photogénie* by Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein, women became something to be fetishized and objectified by mostly male cinephiles rather than active subjects engaging with cinema on their own terms. While he often rejected female readers' requests for an evaluation of their photogenic qualities, therefore, Delluc could also, much like the popular film weeklies, give unsolicited practical advice on how to achieve *photogénie*. Among the advice he offers in his guide on the subject *Photogénie* is the following nugget of wisdom,

²⁴⁴ Delluc, Louis. 1986. *Cinéma et Cie*. Edited by Pierre Lherminier. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l'Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma. 273.

²⁴⁵ In *Bonjour Cinéma* and cited by Pierre Porte in “L'idée de Photogénie” (*Cinéa – Ciné pour tous*, July 15, 1924).

²⁴⁶ There was a Photogenic Swimsuit competition in Delluc's magazine *Cinéa* (1 September 1923), a Photogenic Dress competition and a whole article on nudes appeared in *Cinéa* (March 4, 1922) following Theda Bara's appearances in *Cleopatra* (Dir. J. Gordon Edwards, 1917). *Cinéa* printed a naked photograph of Musidora (July 8, 1921) which prompted Delluc to muse, “Musidora is photogenic from head to foot; I saw her naked in a photograph but she didn't invite me home...” (*Cinéa*, June 15, 1923).

Know that narcotics relax the facial muscles to the point of putting them to sleep. Taking cocaine creates the mask and gives the eyes a strange fixity that is welcomed in cinema. With less risk, fifty centigrammes of aspirin will serve the same purpose. But the value of these methods is paradoxical.²⁴⁷

It would appear that Louis Delluc's advice was heeded by those in the Parisian film industry, as cocaine use quadrupled over the following year.²⁴⁸ Professor Jules Amar, writing in the newspaper *L'Écho de Paris* blamed the trend on a "psychosis,"

[...] the war with its worries, the most serious difficulties of existence, cerebral fatigue born out of hardship and of the torments suffered, have all given birth to a trouble called psychosis (July 23, 1922).

Other newspapers and politicians blamed the increased use of cocaine on the film industry.²⁴⁹ In an article entitled "The Traffic of Cocaine" *Le Journal* reported (July 19, 1922) that the idea that cocaine rendered the user more photogenic had directly impacted the demand for the drug in Paris. Salagnac states,

Even professional concerns have contributed to the increase in cocaine users. So it happens that in the world of cinema use of it has become very widespread, the drug being passed of – it seems with reason - as rendering the eye brighter and more photogenic.

Wallace Reid's death in 1923, caused by "overdoing it with white *co-co* and other poisons,"²⁵⁰ served only to highlight the hidden role of cocaine in the film industry. Fans wrote in to the film press to ask whether Delluc's notion of *Impassibilité artificielle* (artificial impassivity) was true. For example, a *Cinémagazine* reader with the pseudonym *Myriam Ever* is told,

²⁴⁷ Delluc, Louis. 1920. *Photogénie*. Paris: Maurice de Brunoff. 55.

²⁴⁸ Pharmacies distributed cocaine upon proof of prescription, although many Parisian doctors could be paid off to provide false prescriptions. German factories were allegedly producing the drug, which was then smuggled into France and sold illegally in the capital.

²⁴⁹ This was at the same time that the film press printed articles entitled "The Cinema Against Cocaine" that reported on the death of Wallace Reid and Dorothy Davenport and James Kirkwood's film *The Living Dead* (*Cinémagazine*, April 20, 1923). A French film was made showing the dangers of narcotics called *Le monde des visions et de la démence* (*Cinémagazine*, October 12, 1923). Scenes showing cocaine use were cut from *Faubourg Montmartre* (Charles Burguet, 1925) (*Cinémagazine*, January 9, 1925). In 1922 the film *Cocaine* released in France as *Londres la nuit*, was banned in the United Kingdom (*Cinéa*, July 7, 1922) and released in Paris in June 1923 (*Cinémagazine*, June 1, 1923).

²⁵⁰ See letter from Robert Florey to Louis Delluc dated January 20, 1923. BiFi, Fonds Louis Delluc, LD 47 (1)-B4.

Mr. Briant and Mr. Livet who claim that artists of the cinema are all cocaine-addicts must not know a single one, or at least none deserving of that name! If cocaine contributes – it's true – to rendering the eye more sparkling, I don't see how it can improve the *photogénie* of a face because, like all narcotics, it tends to block the facial features rather than increasing their expressive qualities. I know many - almost all- of the cinema artists and without exception they are in love with their work and always make every effort to do better, but I don't know any whose love of the art would push them to kill themselves stupidly and slowly (*Cinémagazine*, April 20, 1923).

From make-up and dresses, to bathing suits and narcotics, *photogénie* seemed to be a profitable advertising slogan in early 1920s Paris with a particular address to the female consumer.²⁵¹

While Delluc reserved for himself and his fellow critics and writers the exclusive ability to recognise *photogénie* when they saw it, therefore, they were also eager to perpetuate *photogénie* mania among ordinary film fans and readers.

National *Photogénie* Contests

How did this “trivial” notion of *photogénie* overlap and interlock with elements of the early film theory and its disciples? One key trend that complicates the notion of *photogénie* as defined by Epstein and Delluc are the popular *photogénie* beauty contests beginning in 1920.²⁵² Indeed, during the summer of 1920, the word *photogénie* was on the lips of many a Parisian young woman aspiring to enter the film industry. This was not because of Louis Delluc's recent publication on the subject; rather it was because the widely-publicised national beauty contest, “The Most Beautiful Woman in France,” was in full swing. This contest was the first of many

²⁵¹ We can trace the emergence of the female consumer to the war years when government officials and other public figures in Paris began to criticise working womens' supposed spendthrift nature. An article in *L'Action Féministe* (February 1917), for example, defended the rights of women to spend their wages as they wished even if it was to buy flowers to adorn their home or to go the cinema.

²⁵² These types of contests were not by any means restricted to France. When a film journal called *Cinéma* was set up in Alexandria in 1924 it immediately organized the competition “Who is the most photogenic woman in Egypt?” (*Cinémagazine*, April 11, 1924). Similarly, in 1927 the Romanian fan magazine *Rampa* organized a “concours de photogénie” with the ten winners starring in a Franco-Romanian co-production *Drumul Iertării* (*Le Chemin de la rémission*) which the filmmaker Gabriel Rosca filmed in France with Iris Film (*Cinémagazine*, November 18, 1927). Film magazines also reported on Concours de photogénie in the United States (*Cinéa – Ciné pour tous*, July 15, 1924). French beauty contest winners like Pauline Pô were likened to their American equivalents like Eleanor Boardman, winner of the “New Faces” competition organized by Goldwyn Pictures and Virginia Brown Faire ... The magazine *Cinéa* described Samuel Goldwyn's “New Faces” contest too as a “Concours de photogénie.”

such *concours de photogénie* that characterised French film culture in the first half of the 1920s. The dominance of American films in French cinemas led those in the national industry to call for an increase in French actors and actresses for the new French cinema – where *photogénie* would be a central characteristic. Thinking through how such beauty contests were tied into discourses of *photogénie* can shed light on the underlying gendered and racialised discourses in early film theory.

The untimely deaths of several French stars in early 1920 gave urgency to the task of finding new star material. In June 1920 audiences saw newsreels of Réjane's funeral, and in August 1920 Parisians mourned the death of probably the most popular star in the country, Suzanne Grandais. The week before Grandais' death, the owner of a neighbourhood cinema in the working-class fifteenth arrondissement, held a vote to find the audience's favourite star and Grandais came first with 335 votes (*Ciné pour tous*, August 13, 1920). Gaby Deslys, who had also passed away that year, came in second place with 314 votes. The American star Mary Pickford came in third place with 143 votes, far fewer than the French actresses Grandais and Deslys.

The creation of home-grown talent for the foreign film market was a matter of pride to a French film industry where the majority of films shown in Parisian cinemas were foreign. Indeed, in 1921 French companies only produced 106 French films (*Cinémagazine*, February 17, 1922). V. Guillaume Danvers argued,

That way, foreign buyers will no longer be able to say that our stars don't stand up against stars from the other side of the Alps or from the USA. We too have sporting young women to rival Pearl White, such as Mary Massart, Gaby Morlay and Marcelle Pradot. We also have *ingénues*, such as Andrée Brabant and Geneviève Félix who both have the same malicious and innocent expressions of a Mary Miles. We too have

stars such as France Dhélia, Elmiere Vautier, Claude Mérelle, and Diane Ferval who can stand up proudly against any other foreign beauty (*Ciné-Tribune*, July 8, 1920).

It was particularly the actors and actresses of the French First Wave cinema who were praised for their “Frenchness” in the same breath as they were admired for their *photogénie*. In a 1920 *Ciné pour tous* review of *Le Carnaval des Vérités*, for example, the journalist described Diane Ferval as “photogenic, natural, elegant” and Jaque Catelain as follows, “the *photogénie* of his features and his natural elegance are a true pleasure.” The journalist concludes, “In a word, there you have a *film* this time; and a truly French one. Why must they be so rare?” (*Ciné pour tous*, June 5, 1920). The following year *Cinéa* praises Marcelle Pradot’s role in *El Dorado* as follows,

A young girl, a young French girl in a French film! How original! Because we don’t call ‘young French girls’ all these walking parodies of Mary Miles [Minter] in our films with their sensational wigs (*Cinéa*, September 16, 1921).

Similarly in September 1921, Marcel L’Herbier bemoaned the lack of true French cinema and criticised the tendency to dress up French cinema in foreign clothing so that it could be exported abroad. He writes,

French film, you will never show your profound soul, your defaults, nor your deep qualities – never the genius of the race that created you – never the grace of the soil from whence you came...French film, you will never be French (*Scénario*, September 1921).

In *Photogénie*, Delluc echoes his friend L’Herbier’s sentiments,

Our actors are not pure-bred (*racés*). I admit that it shocks me and that a country like ours could find a less clumsy reflection of its elegant qualities. In French films, as in French theatre, it is rare that a gentleman doesn’t look like a manual labourer [*chevalier d’industrie*].²⁵³

Indeed, *photogénie* contests aimed to create truly French stars of the screen many of which would go on to play roles in 1920s French avant-garde films. In many ways the trend for finding a truly French star to be the face of post-war France went hand in hand with avant-garde filmmakers’ call for a renaissance in French national cinema. In January 1919, Jaque Catelain

²⁵³ Delluc, Louis. 1920. *Photogénie*. Paris: Maurice de Brunoff. 57.

wrote an article for *Le Film* entitled “Is French cinema French?” Catelain described the situation that France found itself in in 1919 whereby,

[...] in the middle of all our country’s active production where every branch carries the characteristics of a powerfully asserted race, here it is that only film appears devoid of any sign that makes it recognisable for what it really is. And while Americans are wholly signified in their films, with their flaws and qualities, and while Italians are in theirs with pomp and repetition, until the present French minds cannot dream of recognising or finding themselves within French film production (*Le Film*, January 7, 1919).

The immense popularity of American stars like Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Ruth Roland and Pearl White caused several French national newspapers to ask: Where were the equivalent French stars? Patriotically they argued that young French men and women would and could be as successful on the screen as their American counterparts. This national pride and wish to elevate the French film industry to something like its pre-war status pushed newspaper moguls such as Maurice de Waleffe to orchestrate nation-wide searches for the next French star. Such competitions carried heavy racial overtones in their characterisations of French regional types and descriptions of the post-war French woman. Promoting his 1920 contest de Waleffe wrote,

Certainly the human race has become more and more mixed. There remain, however, original, pure, strictly native, eternal specimens which are the noble sources from where we came, progenitor goddesses whose statues like on some place de la Concorde will form an assembly of our country’s mothers. Let us look for them together (*Ciné-Tribune*, July 15, 1920).

In 1920, the year of the first French national beauty contest, the “Society for the Encouragement of Improving the Race” (*Société d’Encouragement à l’amélioration de la race*) organised another contest called “Feminine Plastic Beauty” (*Beauté plastique féminine*) (*La Presse*, May 20, 1920). Similarly, the 1921 “Queen of the Provinces” contest organised by *Le Journal* and Union-Éclair²⁵⁴ aimed not just to find the most beautiful woman in each French region, but also to find the one that “best incarnated the purity of their race” (*Cinémagazine*, March 25, 1921).

²⁵⁴ Éclair was one of the oldest French film companies “Société Industrielle Cinématographique Éclair” located at Épinay-sur-Seine. This company made the *Nick Carter*, *Protéa* and *Zigomar* serials. The directors Gérard Bourgeois and Joseph Faivre were among the directors working for them (*Le Film*, December 1918).

Fernande de Beaumont, a finalist in the 1920 “Most Beautiful Woman in France” contest, was also winner of the Paris region for the 1921 “Queen of the Provinces” contest (*Cinémagazine*, January, 27 1922). She went on to play the female lead in the Gaumont film *La Chanson des ailes* (Dir. Camille de Morlhon), then with Super-Film, *Le Témoin dans l’ombre* (Dir. Jean Hervé, 1922) and *Julie, bonne à tout faire* (with Pauley). Raphael Bernard proudly writes that the actress had refused a tempting offer from Hollywood in order to remain “one of the most devoted and loyal collaborators in French film.” He continues, “a photogenic blonde which would make envious even the more fashionable stars, Mlle Fernande de Beaumont has been called up to triumph in *ingénue* roles (Mary Pickford’s type), which suit her marvelously. She has all the required qualities to rapidly make her a great *star*” (*Cinémagazine*, January 27, 1922).

In 1922, Maurice de Waleffe, who had already organised these two national beauty contests with his newspaper *Le Journal*, began a new contest “to choose the French star of the cinema.” Twenty women from various regions took up the challenge to “incarnate their race” (*Le Journal*, July 25, 1922). The readers had to guess as best they could how the official jury would vote, with the winning response prized with 50,000 francs. *Le Journal* asked its readers to look among their friends and family for “the triple beauty that will allow French stars of the cinema to snatch back the screen monopoly from Italian and American stars who now monopolise it” (Ibid.). In sending their information on to the newspaper, they would be “collaborating in a work of national interest and feminine assistance.” Pseudo-scientific racialised terms made up the lexical field of this and de Waleffe’s two previous contests, such as “sample” (*échantillon*), “ethnic types” (*types ethniques*), “flower of their race” (*fleur de leur race*) and “pureblood” (*pur sang*).

De Waleffe wrote that following the success of Pauline Pô from Corsica in the “Queen of the Provinces” competition and Agnès Souret from the Basque country in the “Most Beautiful Woman in France” contest, “now other regions seek to proclaim the purity of their ethnic type, incarnated in their most striking female flower” (*Le Journal*, June 27, 1922). The organisation selected the towns carefully in order to “include all ethnic types” in the twenty finalists (*Le Journal*, July 7, 1922). Of the twenty, six women were chosen to appear in a short film made by Pathé Consortium. The film was shown on the screens of Parisian cinemas so that audiences and *Le Journal* readers could vote for them in three categories: “beauty of the face,” “beauty of the body” and “expressive and photogenic beauty.” On December 9, 1922 the new French star was elected in Paris at the Omnium-Cinéma-Pathé (*Le Journal*, December 10, 1922). Suzy Vernon, the candidate for the French Riviera, won the prize (*Le Journal*, December 17, 1922) and went on to play Madame Récamier in Abel Gance’s *Napoleon* (1925). Dolly Davis, too, migrated from beauty contest to avant-garde cinema as she went from being a finalist for “The Most Beautiful Woman in France” contest to appearing in René Clair’s *Le Voyage imaginaire* (1925) and *Paris en cinq jours* (Dir. Pierre Colombier and Nicolas Rimsky, 1925).

1921 was perhaps the year the *photogénie* vogue reached its zenith. *Cinémagazine* was the first film magazine to organise its own *photogénie* competition in the wake of *Le Journal*’s successful cinema beauty contests. This competition was aimed at female readers between the ages of eighteen and thirty who held subscriptions to the magazine and were members of the magazine club the “Amis du Cinéma.” Nine photographs of contestants appeared in each issue under the title “Who is the most photogenic?” Readers could participate either as contestants or by

guessing the jury's final ranking.²⁵⁵ The finalists performed in a 1200m long film directed by Maurice Challiot for Natura-Film Company based on a scenario written by the winner of the magazine's screenplay competition²⁵⁶ (*Cinémagazine*, August 12, 1921). The film, titled *Prince Charming (Le Prince Charmant)*, was distributed by Les Grandes Productions Cinématographiques and released on December 9, 1921.²⁵⁷

Readers overwhelmingly voted for one Lily Deslys as "the most photogenic of all the young girls" in the film. She received 8,627 of 11,443 votes (*Cinémagazine*, February 10, 1922). Lily Deslys whose real name was Damita del Maillou Rojo would change her name to Lili Damita a few years later.²⁵⁸ As the contest winner, Damita was chosen to star in the Gaumont film *Maman Pierre* (Dir. Maurice Challiot, 1922) based on the winning screenplay in another *Cinémagazine* reader's competition and released in Parisian cinemas in September 1922 (*Cinémagazine*, September 22, 1922). The authors were the inseparable journalists René Bizet and Jean Barreyre (*Cinémagazine*, February 17, 1922).²⁵⁹

The year after Damita's triumph in *Cinémagazine's* female *photogénie* contest, the magazine

²⁵⁵ The reader who guessed the jury's final ranking won 50 star photographs, the second prize was 30 star photographs and the third prize a one-year subscription to *Cinémagazine*.

²⁵⁶ René Jeanne, the thirty-four year old future film historian, organised the competition and asked that readers write a *comédie sentimentale* that included "as many outdoor scenes as possible, in picturesque French sites."

²⁵⁷ It was advertised as "a comedy drama played by the *Cinémagazine Photogénie* Contest winners" (*Cinémagazine*, December 2, 1921).

²⁵⁸ Lili Damita's next role was the Prince in *La Belle au bois dormant* (Dir. Stéphane Passet, 1923) and she also played alongside the "Queen of the Provinces" Pauline Pô in *Corsica* (Dir. René Carrère, 1923) produced by the Compagnie Française du Film. Her breakthrough role was in the Austrian film *Red Heels* (Dir. Michael Curtiz, 1925).²⁵⁸ She was making films in Berlin with G.W. Pabst and Robert Weine before Samuel Goldwyn brought her to Hollywood in 1928. She then starred in the MGM film *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (Dir. Charles Brabin, 1929) and Raoul Walsh's *Cock Eyed World* (1929) and her acting career ended with her marriage to Errol Flynn in 1935.

²⁵⁹ Bizet was head of the entertainment column at the *Intransigeant* newspaper and it was at this newspaper that he became a close friend and mentor to René Clair. As a journalist for *Revue de France* and then for *Pour Vous*, Bizet was well placed to promote Clair's early films. For example he described *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930) as "an epic of the people" (*épopée du peuple*) when it was released in 1930.

organised a contest called “Concours de jeunes premiers,” a male *photogénie* contest to find new leading men for the French film industry. Again the magazine asked contestants to send in their photographs with their hair colour, eye colour, height and date of birth written on the back (*Cinémagazine*, August 25, 1922). Contestants had to be between 18 and 30 years old, “sporty” and “elegant” (*Cinémagazine*, May 26, 1922). A series of photographs appeared in the magazine every week for the months of June, July, August and September, beginning on June 2, 1922 and ending on October 13, 1922. Like the *photogénie* contest the previous year, these male competitors also had to be members of the “Amis du Cinéma” club founded by *Cinémagazine* on 30 April 1921. The editors of *Cinémagazine* announced their competition with the following observation,

Directors often bitterly complain about the trouble they go through to find elegant young male leads. One can name Georges Lannes, Aimé Simon-Girard, André Rouanne, Jean Devalde, Pierre de Guingard, Jaques Catelain and some others less famous, but that is all (*Cinémagazine*, May 5, 1922).

In fact, the male *photogénie* contest was requested by the director René Hervil, a friend of the magazine, who had difficulty finding the male lead for his film *Sarati-le-Terrible* (Dir. René Hervil and Louis Mercanton, 1923). In his letter to the magazine he writes,

A leading man (*jeunes premiers*) contest would be as good as one for pretty women and *Cinémagazine* would do us a great favour by revealing good looking and talented young people. Considering the magazine’s wide circulation, I’m sure that you will get interesting results (*Cinémagazine*, May 5, 1922).

Hervil was right. Over 2,000 male readers sent in their photographs to *Cinémagazine* (September 29, 1922) and more than 20,000 readers voted for their favourite contestant for the “male lead” in the contest (*Cinémagazine*, November 17, 1922).

There was much interest in the magazine’s contest within the Paris film industry and many came forward to lend their support. Filmmakers Charles Delac and Marcel Vandal invited the ten

finalists to their Film d'Art studios in Neuilly for a screen test (*Cinémagazine*, October 27, 1922). The filmmaker Maurice de Marsan, who had just made *L'Assommoir* (1921), praised the initiative and offered to cast one of the winners in his next film (*Cinémagazine*, June 23, 1922). As well as de Marsan, the contest's jury included filmmakers Germaine Dulac,²⁶⁰ Jacques Feyder, Jacques de Baroncelli and Louis Feuillade (*Cinémagazine*, August 11, 1922). The winner of this "contest of male *photogénie*" was Ralph Royce, who went on to play in *La Dame de Monsoreau* (Dir. René Le Somptier, 1923) alongside the Montmartre beauty queen Geneviève Félix – whom we remember from the Mid-Lenten parade - and Gina Manès, the star of Epstein's *Coeur fidèle* (1923).

The interest was so strong in fact that *Cinémagazine* organised another *photogénie* contest for readers the following year in 1923. This competition, "The Photogenic Little Girl" (*La Petite Fille Photogénique*), was requested by Abel Gance himself and was announced in a letter from the administrator for Gance's film company E. de Bersaucourt,

We would like to find in France a little girl between four and six years old, able to play a leading role, and who brings together the varied qualities of intelligence, aesthetics and simplicity. We believe that the best method to discover this actress is to hold a competition addressed to people interested in cinema and what better way to reach them than with your magazine (*Cinémagazine*, March 23, 1923).

De Bersaucourt went on to explain that Gance would not necessarily choose the contest winner for his film but that the opinion of *Cinémagazine* readers, as shown by the final vote, would greatly influence his choice. Gance's film company provided 3,000 francs to fund the competition and a more personal touch appeared in the following issue with a hand-written letter by Gance read,

²⁶⁰ Germaine Dulac also filmed the contestants for the magazine's 1926 *ingénue* contest at the Studio Manuel Frères (*Cinémagazine*, November 19, 1926).

A gardener of dreams asks *Cinémagazine* to help him find a little girl between four and six who will be the most gracious, sweet and pretty that one could ever find in all the rose gardens of France (*Cinémagazine*, March 30, 1923).

Parents sent in photographs of their young daughters with the child's name, age, hair and eye colour, and the parents' address. The first series of photographs appeared in the April 20, 1923 issue. 15,000 readers then voted for the sweetest child for Gance's film (*Cinémagazine*, August 24, 1923).

In December 1922 (*Cinéa*, December 29, 1922), shortly after Jean Tedesco had taken over direction of *Cinéa* from Louis Delluc, this more intellectually inclined magazine organised its own *Concours de Photogénie* open to annual subscribers. The magazine promised that the 25 finalists would be put in the first *Cinéa* film, *La Grande Saison de Paris* written by André de Fouquières and directed by Alexandre Devarennes for the Comptoir Cinégraphique. Devarennes had recently directed *La Marine Française* (1922)²⁶¹ for the Ministry of the Navy (*Cinéa*, March 9, 1923). The director made many films for the Army Cinematographic Service (*Service Cinématographique des Armées*) including *La femme française pendant la guerre* (1917) with Suzanne Bianchetti²⁶² shown in many Parisian cinemas during the summer of 1917 and *Trois familles* (1917) filmed just a few months later with Séverin Mars and Jean Toulot which screened in Parisian cinemas in January 1919 (*Les Potins de Paris*, January 30, 1919). Jean Tedesco's choice of director for his magazine's film, then, betrays the propagandistic undertones of the *photogénie* contest.

²⁶¹ René Jeanne reviewed the film in *Cinémagazine* (1 December 1922) and described the film as ending with "a superb parade of navy riflemen"

²⁶² The legend went that Devarennes "discovered" Bianchetti at the Pathé Studios in Vincennes when she was waiting for a friend. After her friend failed to arrive at the studio for her scene in *La femme française pendant la guerre*, Devarennes persuaded Bianchetti to replace her for the scene of the husband's tragic departure for the trenches. After the war she made *Riquette se marie* and *Riquette et le Nouveau Riche* with Devarennes (*Cinémagazine*, October 20, 1922).

These overlaps show that it is impossible to make a clear distinction between this national culture of beauty contests and avant-garde or intellectual film culture. Impressionist filmmakers and theorists of *photogénie* were involved in these contests in different ways by recruiting photogenic beauty queens, serving on juries, filming the contestants and financing them.

***Photogénie* and Anthropometrics**

Even Jean Epstein, the major theoretician of *photogénie*, was tangled up in this popular film contest culture. In his essay “On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*” in *Le Cinématographe vu d’Etna*, for example, he refers to a film magazine contest in which readers had to recognise stars of the screen only from their eyes.

An eye in close-up is no longer the eye, it is AN eye: in other words, the mimetic décor in which the gaze suddenly appears as a character...I was greatly interested by a competition recently organized by one of the film magazines. The point was to identify some forty more or less famous screen actors whose portraits reproduced in the magazine had been cropped to leave only the eyes. So what one had to do was to recognize the personality in each of the forty gazes. Here we have a curious unconscious attempt to get spectators into the habit of studying and recognizing the distinctive personality to be seen in the eye alone.²⁶³

Epstein was referring to the readers’ competition “Whose eyes are these?” (*A qui sont ces yeux?*) that appeared in Louis Delluc’s magazine *Cinéa* (February 23, 1923).²⁶⁴ There were other similar contests training spectators to notice facial features or “to get spectators into the habit of studying and recognising the distinctive personality to be seen in the eye alone.” The first of many *Cinémagazine* contests in 1923 was “The Cinématographic Puzzle” (*Le Puzzle Cinématographique*) (February 2, 1923). The editor cut ten photographs of stars into small

²⁶³ Epstein, Jean. 2012. “On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*.” In *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, edited by Sarah. Keller and Jason N. Paul, translated by Tom Milne, 292–96. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 295–296.

²⁶⁴ The contest included the eyes of Stacia Napierkowska, Bébé Daniels, Mary Pickford, Mabel Normand, Nazimova, Eve Francis, Gina Palerme, Norma Talmadge, Musidora and Pearl White (*Cinéa*, February 23, 1923).

pieces and a photograph of different pieces appeared every week in the magazine. Readers were encouraged to cut out all of the pieces and at the end of ten weeks try to glue the pieces onto separate pieces of paper in order to recompose the faces (*Cinémagazine*, March 2, 1923). Each piece showed either an ear, a slice of forehead, a mouth, an eye, a hairline, a nose, an eyebrow, or locks of hair.²⁶⁵ Again, in autumn 1923, *Cinémagazine* ran a competition called “The Great Masked Star Competition” in which only the top or bottom part of the heads of stars of the screen could be seen. Like the eye competition, readers were trained to look at the defining qualities of the actor and actresses’ facial features (*Cinémagazine*, August 28, 1923).

Another more opaque connection with Jean Epstein and popular magazine contests can be found in *Cinémagazine*’s “Favorite Stars Contest” (*Le concours des étoiles préférées*) begun in March 1921. Readers were asked to name their ten favourite film stars with a short explanation for each. The winning reader’s favourite star was Sessue Hayakawa, and the reason for her choice was that Hayakawa “best incarnates my ideal of psychological *photogénie*” (*Cinémagazine*, May 13, 1921). The reader was one Mlle M. A. Epstein living at 26 rue Joséphin Solary in Lyon. There is little doubt that she was the future filmmaker Marie Epstein (born Marie-Antonine Epstein), then twenty-one years old and living with her brother Jean Epstein in Lyon. Indeed it is hard to believe that there was another Miss Epstein in Lyon capable of writing so articulately about film art and having preferences that so perfectly matched those of the French First Wave as to admire Marcelle Pradot’s “unforgettable close-up” in the “Invitation to Dance” scene from *L’Homme du large* and to cherish Jaque Catelain after his performance in *Le Carnaval des Vérités*

²⁶⁵ 1,2000 readers took part in the competition and one Mlle. Contat won the first prize of a Pathé Baby and 12 films for her handmade photo album holding the recomposed star pictures. M. Pistre won the second prize of the entire *Cinémagazine* backlog for his creativity in decorating the portraits with symbols of the films each star had played in. The third prize of fifty stars went to M. Brunet, who presented the photographs in gold frames with a purple background (*Cinémagazine*, April 13, 1923).

(*Cinémagazine*, May 6, 1921). Catelain was a rare choice for this contest: Among the 4,862 readers who voted only 115 voted for the upcoming first wave star (*Cinémagazine*, May 13, 1921).²⁶⁶ The first prize in this contest was a screen test so that readers of the magazine could test their own *photogénie* after judging that of their favourite stars of the screen. But shy readers could instead choose ten large photographs of their favourite stars (*Cinémagazine*, March 25, 1923).²⁶⁷

The first article on *Photogénie* in *Ciné pour tous* on 20 March 1920²⁶⁸ noted that “a photogenic face” was needed to become an actress. But what were the precise facial features needed for *photogénie*? Pierre Henry begins his article with the question,

What is a ‘photogenic’ face? What conditions does it absolutely need to fulfill? The first condition is that the mask (*masque*) be wide, precisely shaped with perfectly aligned features. The nose especially must be straight and the profile flawless. Furthermore, it is thought that an oval face photographs best. It can happen – but it’s quite rare – that short, fine features produce an agreeably intriguing effect on screen; but nine times out of ten it is not the case” (*Ciné pour tous*, March 20, 1920).

From its origins in film culture, and its rootedness to the facial close-up, *photogénique* was necessarily tied up with the size and shape of facial features. Henry continues with physical attributes necessary for *photogénie*:

In a photograph grey and blue eyes appear expressionless, especially if they are light and particularly when the light hits the face straight on. Hair looks black on the screen unless it is very blonde or almost white, except when given a halo from a rear light projector. Red heads become brunettes on the screen [...] It is true that blondes are more rarely photogenic than brunettes. Mary Pickford, however, constitutes an excellent example of *photogénie* because although her eyes are quite dark, her skin is light and her hair very blonde. Her features are well developed without being too pronounced (*Ciné pour tous*, March 20, 1920).

Although Jean Epstein tells *Cinéa* readers in his article “Le Cinéma Mystique” (June 10, 1921)

²⁶⁶ Marie Epstein even wrote to the Motion Picture Magazine to inform them about the competition and included a press cutting from *Cinémagazine*. Epstein writes, “You are often having popularity contests in America. Perhaps it will interest your readers to know something about a recent contest conducted in Paris – to see what stars are the most popular in this country” (*Motion Picture Magazine*, September 1921).

²⁶⁷ The second prize was six photographs, followed by a third prize of an annual subscription, fourth prize a perfume gift set and the fifth prize a six-month subscription.

²⁶⁸ Reprinted in *Ciné pour tous* (2 September 1921).

that “A face is never photogenic, but its emotion sometimes is,”²⁶⁹ countless female readers still wrote into the film press to ask exactly which physical traits were the most photogenic. For example, *Cinémagazine* replied to one reader *Berthe who appreciates the arts*, “I prefer a blonde with black eyes rather than a brunette with blue eyes” (*Cinémagazine*, March 3, 1922).

Cinémagazine tells another reader “All depends on the eye make-up. I know of blue eyes that are very photogenic” (*Cinémagazine*, September 8, 1922). One female reader with the pseudonym *Passionate About Silent Art (passionnée de l’art muet)* writes to ask which hair colour was most photogenic and receives the reply “as regards *photogénie*, bleached blonde hair renders better, in my opinion, than brown” (*Cinémagazine*, February 3, 1922). It was very common, in fact, for actresses to dye their hair blonde or wear a blonde wig as Sandra Milowanoff did for *Les Deux Gamines* (even though she had naturally blonde hair).²⁷⁰

Beyond eye and hair colour newspapers catered to the *photogénie* mania among their readers by providing strict anthropometric requirements for a photogenic face. In 1922 the daily newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* asked its readers “Do you have a photogenic face? The question is addressed especially to young girls and actresses who dream of becoming stars of the screen, and there are many of them and like everywhere few chosen ones” (*Le Petit Parisien*, February 11, 1922). The journalist goes on to explain the “strict rules” for fulfilling this photogenic condition,

If one measures the face with a ruler and a triangle, the nose musn’t end more than 19mm away from the face; the distance between the two eyes must be exactly the width of one eye, and the distance between the chin and the nose must be precisely equal to the distance between the end of the nose and the middle of the eyebrows. That’s not all; the mouth when smiling must be only one fifth wider than the mouth at rest; the two sides of the jaw must form an obtuse angle when one looks squarely at the face. Now, Mesdemoiselles,

²⁶⁹ This essay was republished as “Ciné-Mystique” in Epstein, Jean. 1921. *Bonjour Cinéma*. Paris: Éditions de la Sirène.

²⁷⁰ One such actress, forced to dye her hair blonde by her director complained to Jean Morizot, the young *Bonsoir* journalist in 1920 after he made fun of young actresses dying their hair blonde in his newspaper film column (*Bonsoir*, October 27, 1920).

to your mirrors, but this time with the ruler and compass in hand; see if you are photogenic (*Le Petit Parisien*, February 11, 1922).

The same day the daily newspaper *La Presse* printed an article entitled “The Nose in the Cinema” (February 11, 1922). In it Tristan Le Roux praised a recent article in an unnamed newspaper on “*photogénie* of the face.” He addresses his female readers,

May my correspondents take note of these lines and then, compass and ruler in hand, study and measure themselves conscientiously in front of a mirror before carrying on with their pretensions of becoming actresses.²⁷¹

The case for re-embedding *photogénie* in its historical context is all the stronger if we consider that in 1921, the same year that Jean Epstein took pen to paper to define *photogénie*, the chief of police Robert Leullier (the same who had ordered the continuation of *La Russie Rouge* on Paris screens) introduced the first photographic identity cards for all Parisians.²⁷² This card was “a complete anthropocentric record” (*La Grimace*, October 1, 1921) and contained a photograph with bare head, a finger print and a current address as well as measurements of the nose, height, and eye and hair colour (*Journal officiel de la république française*, July 8, 1920). While newspapers and the film press instructed young women on how to measure their own photogenic qualities, then, a different type of news article explained to Parisians how a person’s physical traits were deeply connected to their physical and moral identity, including criminal and racial qualities. Louis Thinet in *Le Figaro*, for example, wrote, “Identity is signaled by age, sex, bone structure, scars, tattoos, hair color, traces of profession, teeth and the degree of ossification” (September 15, 1921). The humorous newspaper *La Grimace* (October 1, 1921) noted with irony that the only difference between these new cards and the ones already in existence for criminals

²⁷¹ In fact Le Roux thought this was a ridiculous exercise and said the journalists in question were exaggerating in their indications of photogenic rules of facial features.

²⁷² From 12 September 1921, Parisians could collect their identity cards from the local police station. Before the introduction of the photographic identity card, two witnesses were needed for obtaining a passport, renewing a hunting licence and other administrative tasks (*Le Figaro*, September 8, 1921).

and vagabonds was that this one was “voluntary.” Although many Parisians felt that local authorities were forcing the choice upon them.

The connection between *photogénie* and racial anxieties of 1920s France runs much deeper than cinephile adoration of Sessue Hayakawa, then, but is exemplified by the obsession with facial features across popular film weeklies, beauty contests, identity cards and writings of French First Wave critics. The criteria for *photogénie* also excluded certain characteristics. The parallel between race and *photogénie* becomes clear when we see, for example, that in 1921 Delluc’s *Le Journal du Ciné-Club* reported on “A Contest of Black Beauty” organised by an African film magazine *Africa Orient Revue* in which the winner is described as having,

[...] a Roman nose [*nez aquilin*] like a European white woman, and if she could whiten her skin she could compete advantageously against “professional beauties” (*Le Journal du Ciné-Club*, February 11, 1921).

In Louis Delluc’s writings, *photogénie* and race go hand in hand. In his article “Masques, Photogénie, Expression” in *Le Journal du Ciné-Club* (February 27, 1920) Delluc evaluates the faces of several French and US stars including Mae Murray, Gaby Deslys, Edna Purviance, Andrée Brabant, Huguette Duflos and Norma Talmadge. This is his assessment of Mary Mac Laren,

Mary Mac Laren has a pretty little mouth and a pretty forehead. We can see her little mouth. We can’t see her forehead. That is what gives the impression that Mary Mac Laren has too small a mouth and not enough forehead. In films where her forehead is covered somehow, her face is balanced, excentuating her attractive pout and letting her forehead speak. And does that make for a diminished mask? [Franz Xaver] Winterhalter? Something like that. Her “race” is as dated as certain portraits made by Manet at the time when people loved Marie Colombier.²⁷³

The same classification of photogenic value along racial lines appears in Delluc’s review of *La*

²⁷³ Marie Colombier was an actress of the French theatre. Her career began at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 1864. She performed with Sarah Bernhardt at the Théâtre de l’Odéon and the actress took her on her tour of the US and Canada in 1880. Upon her return Colombier wrote a scandalous depiction of the trip in *Les voyages de Sarah Bernhardt en Amérique* illustrated with a portrait of Colombier by Manet.

Faute d'Odette Maréchal (Dir. Henry Roussel, 1920) in which he writes,

A bad title, but a beautiful film. When I say a beautiful film you understand what I mean: beautiful spectacle, beautiful *photogénie*, beautiful mastery of visual art. Henry Roussel skillfully handles black, white and grey tones with refined tact. He has elegance. He is *racé*²⁷⁴ (*Le Journal du Ciné-Club*, January 28, 1920).

The race connection becomes clearer still when we discover the cartoon contestants of *Cinémagazine*'s 1922 *photogénie* contest. Among these cartoons is a sketch of a black man with a minstrel caricature smile and racially stereotyped exaggerated features who is named M. Battling Batouala, an overt play on the Battling Burrows character from *Broken Blossoms*.²⁷⁵ Underneath the cartoon, a caption reads “destined for dark dramas (*dramas noirs*)” playing on the word black (*Cinémagazine*, October 27, 1922). Indeed David Henry Slavin in *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France* describes a female French journalist for *Ciné-miroir* travelling to Senegal to answer the burning question “Are Blacks Photogenic?”²⁷⁶ The journalist Clément Vautel jokes in a humouristic piece for the magazine *Je Sais Tout* that “negroes [*nègres*] are photogenic, but only on the negative” the joke being that on the film negative black skin would appear white (*Je sais tout*, Octobre 15, 1920). And the slogan advertising Léon Poirier's documentary film financed by the Citroën company reads “Negro *Photogénie* [*photogénie nègre*] in *La Croisière noire*” (*Cinéa*, May 1, 1926).²⁷⁷ The idea of *photogénie* being rooted in racial identity was present in Delluc's article “*Photogénie*” published in *Comœdia illustré* (July-

²⁷⁴ In speaking of an animal, *racé* means purebred and the same adjective applied to a person takes on the meaning of one who has race, elegance, physical and moral refinement, is distinguished and has delicacy. For example. Raymond Villette describes Suzanne Bianchetti in his film column as “the most *racée* of all our actresses, majestically plays the delicate role of Catherine II (*Le Gaulois*, September 23, 1927).

²⁷⁵ American minstrel stage traditions migrated to France at the end of the nineteenth century. For a study of the first French black stage actor Rafael Padilla see, Noiriel, Gérard. 2012. *Chocolat, clown nègre: l'histoire oubliée du premier artiste noir de la scène française*. Paris: Bayard.

²⁷⁶ Slavin, David Henry. *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919–1939: White Blind Spots, Male Fantasies, Settler Myths*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. 101-102.

²⁷⁷ For one study of French colonial cinema see: Pierre Boulanger. 1975. *Le cinéma colonial: De “l'Atlantide” à Lawrence d'Arabie*. Paris: Seghers, and also Bloom, Peter. 2008. *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism*. University of Minnesota Press.

August, 1920) Delluc describes a national photogenic quality tied to dominant ideas of French racial characteristics when he writes,

France is precisely the country where one can find humane actors, that are direct but delicate, intense but refined – and our screens always show them the exact opposite way.²⁷⁸

Cinemas provided ample opportunity for Parisian audiences to compare the *photogénie* of French colonial subjects and French actors across an evening's programme. In 1919 audiences would have seen fiction films with black actors and actresses alongside familiar French ones in *La Sultane de l'amour* (Dir. René Le Somptier and Charles Burguet, 1919)²⁷⁹ where Gaston Madot appears in blackface alongside Marcel Lévesque. The same year audiences saw Mitchell Lewis appear as a "half-breed" named Lone Deer in *The Sign Invisible (Coeur de Métis, dir. Edgar Lewis, 1918)* and Norma Talmadge play a Chinese character in *The Forbidden City (La Cité défendue, dir. Sidney Franklin, 1918)*. Audiences would have also seen travelogues from the colonies, common at the beginning of a programme. At the Aubert Palace, Grand Cinema Moncey, the Cinema Saint Paul in January 1920, audiences voted for "The Most Beautiful Woman in France" and saw the travelogue (*plein air*)²⁸⁰ *In Morocco, The Tadla Casbah (Le Journal du Ciné-Club, February 20, 1920)*. Another week the Aubert Palace, Tivoli Cinema and the Grand Cinéma Moncey all programmed the French beauties with the documentary *La vie africaine chez les Bahutos, Est africain allemand* ("African Life with the Bahuto, German East Africa") (*Le Journal du Ciné-Club, February 20, 1920*).²⁸¹ Some felt that these two distinct segments of a film programme threatened to converge as "negro" fashions became more and

²⁷⁸ Delluc, Louis. 1986. *Cinéma et Cie*. Edited by Pierre Lherminier. Paris: Cinémathèque française, Éditions de l'Étoile, Cahiers du Cinéma. 273-275. 274.

²⁷⁹ The film screened at the St. Paul cinema in January 1920.

²⁸⁰ A non-fiction film within a film programme, other documentary genres of this type were also called *voyages, documentaire* and *instructif*.

²⁸¹ In 1929 *Samba* would be the first French film using an all black cast and directed by "noirs français" (*Le Journal, December 12, 1929*) or "nègres français" (*L'Européen, March 25, 1929*).

more popular.²⁸² In the first issue of monthly art and literature journal *Athéna* Marie-France writes, “fashion catalogues boast *tête de nègre*²⁸³ fabrics, elegant ladies wear monkey hair and soon, like negroes (*nègres*), they will not wear anything at all: their dress hems rise and their neck-lines fall until they have the maximum effect for the minimum amount of fabric” (*Athéna*, January 1922). These ideas of French delicacy, sensitivity, grace and refinement in opposition to a non-photogenic “other” represented by French-African colonial subjects appeared throughout this period in French First Wave film criticism, beauty contests and popular film weeklies.

Conclusion

Epstein’s argument that *photogénie* involved an increased moral quality²⁸⁴ of the actor on the screen drew heavily on patriotic ideas of Frenchness that were prevalent in post-war France. In particular, *photogénie* asserted French sensibility and morality, promoting French culture as a ray of light shining across the world through filmed images. When Delluc published *Photogénie* in 1920 and Epstein wrote *The Idea of Photogénie* in *Cinéa* in 1924, both were writing against a populist use of the word by mostly female amateurs who failed to understand the term as an aesthetic practice to elevate French film art into the arms of an elite Parisian and international

²⁸² Many Parisians feared that these non-French subjects from the film programme would spill out onto the streets of the capital. For example, on a 3 July 1919 city council meeting the mayor of Pantin Charles Auray complained about the growing lack of safety in the streets of Pantin at night, arguing “upon night fall, a shady population of Chinese, Negroes and foreigners invades the streets” (*Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris*, September 28, 1919). Disease was also something blamed on immigrant populations during city council meetings (*Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris*, June 4, 1919). Roughly 2000 residents of Paris and the surrounding area (Département de la Seine) died per month of smallpox in the first three months of 1919 and in one case the Council heard of a Mlle. B... who had contracted the disease after serving a “negro from Gibraltar” in her mother’s restaurant by Saint-Lazare station (*Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris*, May 28, 1919; June 4, 1919).

²⁸³ This was the name given to a dark brown colour and also the name of a chocolate covered meringue. Here it applies to a style of dress very popular among upper-class Parisian women during the mid-1920s called the *robe tête de nègre*.

²⁸⁴ “I would describe as photogenic any aspect of things, beings or souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction.” From “On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie,” in Abel, Richard, ed. 1988. *French Film Theory and Criticism*. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 314-318.

public.

The notion of *photogénie*, then, was central to the emergence of intellectual cinephilia precisely because it became a site of negotiation and exchange between popular and nascent avant-garde film cultures. On the one hand, *photogénie* became the centerpiece of a mania among young women eager to participate in popular film culture by leveraging their own *photogénie*, judging that of their fellow fans or of the screen stars. On the other hand, it served as an exclusionary device against racial otherness, as evidenced in the culture of *photogénie* contests where fine French features championed over that of France's colonial and regional subjects. *Photogénie* thus provided a conceptual framework for audiences to grasp the particular aesthetic techniques adopted by Marcel L'Herbier, Louis Delluc, and Germaine Dulac, and at the same time allowed early critics like Delluc to invest cultural prestige in certain Swedish, German and American films that were considered as "film art."

Conclusion

De Certeau writes that “the ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins.”²⁸⁵ It is my hope that this dissertation has given a glimpse of a film culture that blossomed at a moment in history when cinephilia was emerging as an elite culture for a select few, in the process determining which cinemagoers would remain “below the threshold” and who would be remembered by historians.

De Certeau describes the neighbourhood as “a dynamic notion requiring a progressive apprenticeship that grows with the repetition of the dweller’s body’s engagement in public space until it exercises a sort of appropriation of this space.”²⁸⁶ For the working-class cinemagoers I have described in this dissertation, this “progressive apprenticeship” would have been structured around both filmic and non-filmic events. Serial films provided one kind of structure, but so did union meetings, which were called regularly. The cabinetmakers of the eleventh arrondissement, for example, met monthly at the Cinéma Artistic in 1921. In this sense, working-class spectators were doubly anchored to the cinema space. The cinemagoers of these chapters, those who protested *Red Russia*, supported their friends in local beauty contests, and voted for their rights as workers, had a real sense of belonging to—but also ownership of—their local cinemas. Their relationship to their cinemas was overloaded with meaning; it could not be contained by the narrow artistic concerns of the cinephiles because it was a lived relationship in which watching films intersected with many of the social, political and personal dimensions that constituted their neighbourhood as a living community.

²⁸⁵ De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 93.

²⁸⁶ De Certeau, Michel. 1998. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Vol. 2. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 10-11.

Moreover, their cinemagoing itineraries were continually shifting and contingent paths through the city, itineraries that crossed with, but were nevertheless independent from, the cultural strategies of intellectual film critics and their exhibitors. Chapter One showed how the French First Wave eventually won its autonomy from cinema as a leisure activity through a greater reliance on the state and through forging a new association of film production with French national identity. Intellectual critics like Ricciotto Canudo aimed to cleanse French national film culture through a physical separation of spectators in cinemas stratified by social class, while Louis Delluc engaged in a discursive disciplining of spectators in the letter columns of his film weekly *Cinéa*. At the same time - as Chapter Two revealed - activists close to the Communist and Socialist Party sought to create an alternative exhibition network to shelter working-class spectators from anti-Bolshevik and pro-military propaganda. Various actors, then, whether representing the film industry, the state, or the Communist and Socialist parties, put pressure on ordinary filmgoers to behave a certain way in the cinema and to like certain films and disdain others.

But ordinary cinemagoers were too independent to remain within the confines of these institutional strategies. Local Parisians were meaning-creating agents, not in the sense that they coined terms central to film culture like *photogénie*, but in that they invested the space of the cinema with their own needs, pressures, problems and desires. By rebuilding upwards from the ruins of popular film culture – a metaphor I borrow from Giuliana Bruno²⁸⁷ – I reclaim the cultural agency of working-class, ordinary Parisians for whom cinema was essential for

²⁸⁷ Bruno, Giuliana. 1993. *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map : Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

workplace gains, political dissent, community aid and leisure time. Local cinemas were nodes within a network of local, popular knowledge that included the workplace, the market, the townhall, the tramstop and the home.

This makes mapping them very difficult. To attend to the historical realities of everyday cinemagoers in 1920s Paris is to take a leap of faith. It means to divest from the Cinémathèque Française's paper archive and look for what is not there. All of the previous chapters draw in the stories of ordinary people, living and working in Paris in 1921, for whom cinema played a central role in their everyday lives. Their ordinariness means that they are difficult to document. The Communist and Socialist Party youth members are traceable because the French police infiltrated their meetings and wrote reports now held at the French National Archives. The "cinema girls" of this chapter left rather different paper traces. They wrote letters of admiration to the young Gaumont actress Sandra Milowanoff, who carefully collected their letters and bound them together.

This weaving of historical marginalia would not be possible without the digitisation efforts of the French National Library. The ability to search digitised newspapers by key word has made it possible for me to reassess the historical emergence of film theoretical terms such as *photogénie*, to rebalance the reception of films like *Les Deux gamines*, which were condemned by intellectual critics but loved by Parisians, or vice-versa, to reassess the reception of films such as *Broken Blossom* and to a lesser extent *La Russie rouge*, which were loved by cinephiles but contested by ordinary Parisians. The reconstruction of extraordinary events such as the 1921 *Red Russia* protests would not be possible without the archiving of ordinariness. If, until now, history of

French 1920s cinema has been scripted by the emerging French First Wave filmmakers and critics, the reports and letters allow the historian to go off script. In this sense my archival practices, which would not have been possible without the digitisation efforts of the National Library, mirror the “indeterminate trajectories”²⁸⁸ of the cinemagoers whose day-to-day practices they seek to capture.

A history of French cinema based upon the critical texts of Louis Delluc, Émile Vuillermoz, Jean Epstein and Ricciotto Canudo closes itself into the narrow field of French film history. By opening up the landscape of filmgoing in 1920s Paris to female geographies written on the streets of Paris by voiceless historical subjects, I also clear the path for approaches from urban history, labour history, social history, women’s history and cultural history. I call for historians to pay attention to marginal, homeless, unarchived sources, which, when examined systematically and with an eye to gender and class identities, have the potential to overcome dominant modes of film history.

By adopting a multi-archive approach that pays attention to the miscellaneous and the marginal, the film historian can discover how young women, despite being cast out of the participatory sphere of the *Cinéa* readers’ letter column by such an impatient gatekeeper to cinephile film culture as Delluc, experienced film culture. If we are to move beyond the gender and class-based hierarchies of spectatorship and critique that emerged in film criticism during the inter-war period and has continued to posit the reception of bourgeois male cinephiles as paradigmatic while ignoring the numerically superior spectator practices of female, working-class star

²⁸⁸ De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 34. De Certeau is citing Fernand Deligny’s *Les vagabonds efficaces*. Paris: Maspero, 1970.

admirers, then we must take into account the social and political context of cinema-going in working-class neighborhoods of Paris. These cinemas were embedded in the concerns, worries, aspirations and hopes of local people who participated in cinemas as spectators and star admirers, but also as spectator-activists, spectator-voters and spectator-unionists. Alternative archival sources such as readers' letter columns, the Sandra Milowanoff fan letter collection and notices in the leftist press reveal cinemas to be meeting places for diverse political, social and leisure activities, many of which were self-consciously opposed to the bourgeois nation-building project in which cinephiles were alligning themselves.

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