I feel as if I’ve been working on this book for over forty years, now and then, in different places and at various jobs. When I think of the book like that, the results seem a little slim. But there you have it. This short book about Parisian film culture has had quite the durée.

With a project this long and this winding, a lot of people have been extremely important to me along the way. I started graduate school at UCLA in 1977, at a time when most of us did our scholarship on national cinemas because that’s how film studies was organized then. I took required seminars in Italian neorealism and German expressionism, and I concentrated on American and French cinema in my own research. My dissertation dealt for the most part with American films, but I formulated the idea for it while I was spending one year as a student in Paris, and getting the chance to work with Raymond Bellour, Jacques Aumont, Marc Vernet, Jorge Dana, and others who were doing pioneering work in the field.

Well before that, I think I may have seen my first French movie, at least the first in a theatre rather than on television, with my sister, Roberta Smoodin. When I was fifteen or sixteen and she was an undergrad at UCLA, she let me tag along with her to an evening screening of Jean Cocteau’s Le Sang d’un poète (1930). This was certainly the first avant-garde film I had ever seen, and I remember being completely mystified by it and sort of bored, but also feeling very grown-up. I remember Robbie’s kindness in asking her younger brother to go with her, and she remains one of my favorite filmgoing companions.

Jon Lewis and I have been close friends since we joined the UCLA doctoral program together in 1979. Jon and I have also worked together on several projects, and I can’t think of a better writing partner or pal. For a very long time, I’ve counted on his friendship and support, and also that of his wife, Martha Lewis.

I first met Ann Martin when I had the luck to work with her at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, at my first job out of grad school. She has been a great friend since then, not only in LA but also in Washington, DC, Oakland, California, and elsewhere. Her support, and that of her partner, Bob
Reynolds, has been so meaningful to me for many years, not just in my writing but in so many things.

Inderpal Grewal and Al Jessel, and their daughters Kirin and Sonal, have practically become members of the family, and they’ve also welcomed me into theirs. Carolyn Dinshaw and Marget Long have been wonderfully supportive friends for a very long time, whether they’ve lived close by or across the country. They’ve also been terrific companions to hang out with in Paris. Minoo Moallem, Shahin Bayatmakou, Arash Bayatmakou, and Brita Bayatmakou have been valued friends for a very long time. Marisol de la Cadena and Steve Boucher are wonderful colleagues at UC Davis, but much more importantly, they’re fabulous neighbors. Whether she’s lived far away or nearby, Jennifer Terry has always been ready to talk with me about movies or research or work or the World Series.

David Lash visited me when I was a graduate student in Paris in 1981. By then we had already been great friends for about twenty years, and we continue to be almost forty years later. In fact, during my year abroad in grad school, I made a number of lasting friends. I would like to thank, especially, Richard Neupert, whose own work on French cinema has been so important to my own. Richard, his wife Cathy Jones, and their daughter Sophie have always been incredibly kind and generous. There are other students from that year in Paris whom I want to thank: Emily Calmer, Karen Wilde, Marie-Hélène Duprat, Karen Payne, BZ Petroff, Sylvie Palumbo-Liu, and Fabrice Ziolkowski, along with the faculty head of the program that year, Rick Altman. Just after I got back from Paris, Mark Zakarin became a wonderful neighbor and a close friend.

When I was completing a previous project about Frank Capra, I was invited to attend a Capra centennial conference in Sicily in 1997. The people I met there, and who organized the conference, have remained friends, and in particular I want to mention Franco Marineo, Federica Timeto, and Marcello Alajmo.

Over the years, I’ve had the chance to work with a number of amazing editors who have since become my friends: Leslie Mitchner, Rebecca Barden, and Bill Germano (who in a brainstorming session a few years ago helped me come up with the title for this book). When I worked at the University of California Press, I got to learn about books from some of the best in the business. Naomi Schneider, Monica McCormick, and Anna Weidman were mentors who became valued friends. There also were others at the press who taught me so much about what a book should be, and I’ve tried to apply those lessons to this project. I’d like to thank in particular Kate Toll, Mary Francis, Deborah

When I began my job at UC Davis, I was lucky enough to join a group of scholars who soon would become my good friends. In particular, Carolyn Thomas, as well as her daughters Eva and Cat, have been encouraging and supportive, as well as great company and generous hosts. I would also like to thank my American Studies colleagues Julie Sze, Grace Wang, Ryan Cartwright, Javier Arbona, Anjali Nath, Charlotte Biltekoff, Michael Smith, Jay Mechling, Ari Kelman, Erica Kohl-Arenas, and Jemma DeCristo. My Film Studies colleague Jaimey Fisher has always been there with support, advice, and great friendship. I’d also like to thank Scott Simmon, Kris Fallon, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli, Colin Milburn, Jesse Drew, Doug Kahn, Fiamma Montezemolo, Sergio de la Mora, and Michael Neff. Kay Allen, Karen Nofziger, Naomi Ambriz, Evelyn Farias, Omar Mojaddedi, Carlos Garcia, Tina Tansey, Fatima Garcia, and Aklil Bekele have made my job much easier, and saved me from terrible administrative and technological mistakes any number of times. Mapmaker extraordinaire Michele Tobias has not only improved the look of this book, but also its usefulness. My deans during this project, Jessie Ann Owens and Susan Kaiser, provided consistent support.

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When this project was just starting to come together, one of my mentors at UCLA, Nick Browne, invited me to come back for two quarters as a visitor. I had the opportunity to teach graduate seminars, and many of the students I met there have become friends as well as scholars from whom I’ve learned a great deal. I’d like to thank in particular Steven Charbonneau, Emily Carman, Deron Overpeck, and Ross Melnick. At UC Davis I’ve been able to work with so many terrific students in our Cultural Studies Graduate Group as well as other programs and departments: Michelle Yates, Marisol Cortez, Christina Owens, Cathy Hannabach, Magali Rabasa, Tallie Ben Daniel, Eric Taggart, Sara Bernstein, Elise Chatelain, Omar Abdullah, Kelley Gove, Julia Morales, Diana Pardo, Alexis Patino-Patroni, Ben D’Harlingue, Toby Smith, Jonathan Doucette, Abbie Boggs, Liz Montegary, Andrea Miller, David Laderman, Tristan Josephson, Terry Park, Nina Cole, Toby Beauchamp, Josey Nguyen, Alex Fine, Emma Waldron, Jinni Pradhan, Danielle McManus, Chris McCoy, Xiaolong Hou, Caroline McKusick, Jamianessa Davis, Jacob Hagelberg, Beshara Kehdi, Stephanie Maroney, Laurel Recker, Amanda Modell, Martha Stromberger, Heather Nolan, and many others.

Mentioning them makes me think of the students who were in graduate school with me, and who have been friends and mentors. Janet Bergstrom was the one who most encouraged me to attend the Paris program, and Michael Friend, who was in Paris the year before me, gave me his apartment in the fourth arrondissement. I’m still amazed that I was able to take classes and talk about movies with Lea Jacobs, Steve Ricci, Giuliana Muscio, Janet Walker, Frank Tomasulo, Dan Einstein, Michelle McGlade, Margaret Horwitz, Steve Seidman, Jonathan Kuntz, Eddie Richmond, Greg Lukow, and Richard deCordova, and that those classes were taught by people like Thomas Elsaesser and Dudley Andrew.

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My family has been endlessly supportive. I would like to thank my brother-and sister-in-law, Mitchell Kaplan and Heidi Schulte-Kaplan. Henry Flax and David Norton have been incredibly generous in so many ways. My cousins Linda Benjamin-Pardee, Cathy Benjamin, Mindy Comitor, and Lynda Fisher have provided warmth and friendship. I want to give special thanks to Viviana Ramirez for helping make our family complete. My mother-in-law and father-in-law, Doris and Arthur Kaplan, both died during the last few years of this project. While I was finishing, I thought often about all of the help they gave me and the kindness they showed me for so many years and during various ups and downs in my career. I miss them both.

Writing this book about Paris, having the chance to go there as often as I have, I’m very much aware that my parents, Mildred and Solly Smoodin, never had the same kind of opportunity. My mother, a member of her high school French club, never left the country. My father did only once, for three years in the Pacific during World War II. But I’ve thought of them all the time during this project, partially because of how important movies were to all of us, but mostly because they gave me the chance to have a very different kind of life, and to pursue what I most wanted to do. I wish they were here now.

I met Caren Kaplan in 1986. Since then, she and I have been to Paris together a half dozen times, and I always have to stop and wonder at how lucky I’ve been to be able to spend my life with the perfect travel companion. She has been my primary source of emotional and intellectual support while I’ve been writing this book about a city we both love, and she has also been my role model as a scholar and as a writer. Over that first coffee in a café in Washington, DC, thirty-five years ago, Caren and I realized that one of the things we had in common was that we had both been students in the Paris program, just a couple of years apart, and that as a result we knew several of the same people, and our paths had probably nearly crossed any number of times. When I think about it now, I can’t help but feel at least a little like Vittorio De Sica in Madame de . . . (1953), when he tells Danielle Darrieux about meeting her, “C’est desti” (“It’s fate”). For Caren and me, and thankfully without any of the tragic melodrama of Madame de . . . or some other Max Ophüls film, the long tracking shot of our life together began with that blind date.

Sofia Smoodin-Kaplan entered the scene about halfway through that shot. It’s hard now to remember what life was like before her, and she has turned into a perfect pal for watching movies, or for traveling to Paris. Sofia has been there twice now, and each time she’s been a terrific sport while I’ve dragged
her off to find old cinemas that have been turned into Gap or Monoprix stores, or to look at the ones that still stand, like the spectacular Louxor in the tenth arrondissement. I can’t imagine writing this book without her help, but that’s the least of it. I’m ready for our next trip together.

Everyone here, in some way or another, has helped me with this book, even if that help came years before I began working on it. I know I’ve left people out, and I’ll think of them later. But let me end with another Max Ophüls movie, one that’s about the past and forgetting and trying to remember, _La Ronde_ (1950). The film ends with a song, and I’ll use the last lyric to conclude these acknowledgments, because the words seems so final when, really, they’re anything but. _Je ne vous en dirai pas plus_. There’s nothing else I have to tell.