Paris in the Dark

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In the ninth arrondissement in Paris, for the week of October 13, 1933, a film enthusiast might walk into the Paramount cinema on 2 boulevard des Capucines for a 9:30 a.m. show of *Un soir de réveillon* (1933), end the day down the block with a 3:00 a.m. screening of *Tire au flanc* (1933) at the Olympia at 28 boulevard des Capucines, and watch two or three movies in between at cinemas just a few steps away. In fact throughout the city that week, filmgoers could watch Fritz Lang’s *Le Testament du Dr. Mabuse* (*Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse*; 1933), Max Ophüls’s *Liebelei* (1933), Josef von Sternberg’s *L’Ange bleu* (*Der blau Engel*; 1930), and Frank Capra’s *Forbidden* (1932), as well as *Je suis un évadé* (*I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*; 1932), *King Kong* (1933), and Jacques Tourneur’s *Toto* (1933). They might see Eddie Cantor in *Le Kid d’Espagne* (*The Kid from Spain*; 1932) and Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein* (1931), and also go to any number of films that have long been forgotten: *La Voie sans disque* (1933), for instance, or *Madame ne veut pas d’enfants* (1933), or *Rumba* (possibly *The Cuban Love Song*, from 1931).1

This brief but formidable list of viewing possibilities comes from “Voici les films qui passent à Paris”—the films showing in the two hundred or so cinemas in Paris—a section in that week’s issue of the movie tabloid *Pour Vous*. The information here indicates that most of the large, first-run cinémas d’exclusivité were clustered in the more well-heeled neighborhoods, in the second arrondissement on the boulevard des Italiens (at 5, 6, 15, 27, and 29) and the boulevard Poissonnière (at 1, 7, and 27), and in the eighth, on or near the avenue des Champs-Élysées, although there were others in neighboring areas such as the sixth and seventh.2 The number of cinemas in the arrondissements varied, from only two in the fourth to eighteen in the ninth, which included
the area around the rue Pigalle, and nineteen in the eighteenth arrondissement, around Montmartre, one of the more peripheral neighborhoods of the city. These numbers were tied to population density, but not strictly. The eighteenth arrondissement was, throughout the 1930s, the most highly populated area in Paris, while the first typically had the fewest residents. The ninth arrondissement, however, with its eighteen cinemas in 1933, as well as the second, sixth, and seventh, were on the low end of the Parisian population scale. The cinémas d’exclusivité in those areas almost certainly had more seats than the average cinema in the eighteenth, and so it becomes difficult to determine exactly the link between cinema space—in the broad sense of number of cinemas and number of seats—and the population of a particular arrondissement.3

Most of the cinemas ran their programs from noon or 2:00 p.m. until 8:30 or 9:00 p.m., typically every day, although in some cases only on two days a week, usually Thursday and Sunday. A few cinemas opened as early as 9:00 a.m., and some had their last screenings at midnight or even as late as three in the morning. Just as in the United States, more and more French cinemas showed double (and sometimes triple) bills throughout the 1930s, with
many exhibitors responding to the Pathé cinema chain's aggressive July 1933 commitment to programs of multiple films. In Paris during that week in October, the major first-run cinemas still only showed single films, but in the neighborhoods with mostly subsequent-run exhibition sites, the cinémas des quartiers, audiences could easily see two films for the price of one. In the third arrondissement, three of the five cinemas showed two films and usually maintained that practice from week to week. On the boulevard Saint-Martin in the third, the Kinérama paired two reissues of Hollywood films from 1932—Ernst Lubitsch's World War I melodrama L'Homme j'ai tué (The Man I Killed; 1932) with the Harold Lloyd comedy Silence! On tourne (Movie Crazy; 1932)—after having shown Marlene Dietrich in Shanghai Express (1932) the previous week, along with Idylle au Caire, the 1933 French version of a film from UFA, the German studio. In the ninth arrondissement, five of nine cinemas showed double bills, while five of twelve cinemas reporting programs that week from the fourteenth, near the southern edge of Paris, presented two films each.

By 1933 almost all of the cinemas in the city showed, if not exclusively current films, then films that had been released before in Paris in 1931 or 1932. At least one cinema, however, still seemed to show silent films exclusively, and another specialized in them. In the tenth, the Bouvvardia treated Greta Garbo fans to Terre de volupté (Wild Orchids; 1929) and then changed the program the following week to Douglas Fairbanks in Le Voleur de Bagdad (The Thief of Bagdad; 1924). At the same time, the other Parisian cinema that typically treated fans to silent movies, the Corso-Opéra on the boulevard des Italiens in the second arrondissement, presented a reprise of one of the greatest hits of the last few years, L’Ange bleu, the film that made Marlene Dietrich an international star. The Corso, one of the oddest cinemas in a city full of them, hardly seemed like a cinema at all. The American trade paper Variety called it a “350-seat barn” with small stands at its entrance selling men’s and women’s clothing, and it was only the large film posters outside that indicated movies were shown there at all. In keeping with the typical practice at the Corso, and as I will describe later, that print of L’Ange bleu may well have been the mostly silent version with French intertitles and all of Dietrich’s songs in the original German that had played before in Paris, rather than the German-language subtitled copy of the film that also had been shown in the city.

The Conversion to Sound

In fact, at least until 1931 or 1932, silent cinema persisted in Paris, and certainly not because new silent movies were being produced. A few years after the 1929 Paris premiere of Le Chanteur de jazz (The Jazz Singer; 1927), audiences
could see silent films everywhere in Paris because of the exigencies of film exhibition—many cinemas in the city installed the necessary equipment for screening sound films only very slowly. We know this because every week in its film listings by arrondissement, Pour Vous indicated exhibition technology, whether or not a cinema was equipped to show films “sonore et parlant,” with recorded sound and also speech. In January 1931, Pour Vous showed almost seventy cinemas that had yet to be wired for talking films, with that number declining to sixty by April and to fewer than forty at the end of the year. By 1933 Pour Vous had stopped the practice altogether of labeling cinemas as either silent or sound, which probably indicates that the conversion in exhibition technology had been completed.

Those exhibition sites controlled by the two major chains in Paris, Pathé and Gaumont, adapted to the new technology more quickly than others. The Pathé-Bagnolet was one of the very few in the first chain to be showing silent films in 1931; in early April, that cinema featured Greta Garbo in *La Belle Ténébreuse* (*The Mysterious Lady;* 1928), but this was a site on the Parisian periphery, in the working-class twentieth arrondissement, and so was probably not as important to Pathé’s dominance of exhibition in the city as those cinemas more centrally located. Neither location nor class counted for everything, however. In the wealthy and well-situated seventh arrondissement,

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![Figure 1.1 The movie listings in Pour Vous from October 13, 1933.](image-url)
of the seven cinemas—the Pagode and the Récamier—had yet to be wired for sound by early April 1931, and in the sixteenth, on the western edge of the city and always one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in Paris, five of the nine still showed silent films exclusively.\textsuperscript{11}

For many cinemas, especially those not belonging to an exhibition chain, the decision to delay conversion was almost certainly based on the expense of the new technology. The twentieth arrondissement seemed to have the slowest rate of change, with seven out of nineteen cinemas still not wired for sound in January 1931, and that number hadn’t changed by the end of the year. Most of those seem to have been independent cinemas, and one of them served as a sort of all-purpose cultural center. The Bellevilloise, on the rue Boyer at the corner of the boulevard de Ménilmontant, was founded as a workers’ cooperative in 1877, just a few years after the Paris Commune.\textsuperscript{12} The building would be an educational site and also a cultural one, and showed films only erratically throughout the early 1930s. Because cinema was only one of the activities at the Bellevilloise, and far from the central one, it probably made little sense to install sound technology there, and this cooperative enterprise certainly would have had trouble coming up with the money to do so.

The last great silent film event in Paris during the early 1930s was the opening of Chaplin’s \textit{Les Lumières de la ville} in April 1931 at the prestigious Théâtre Marigny in the eighth arrondissement.\textsuperscript{13} Anticipating that film, \textit{Pour Vous} called it the first silent film made in the United States in eighteen months, since Garbo’s \textit{Le Baiser} (\textit{The Kiss}; 1929).\textsuperscript{14} This seemed to make silent film—or, at least, silent film production—fully a phenomenon of the past, to be brought back only by those artists, like Chaplin, working on their own. But if we shift our sense of history just a few degrees and concentrate on film exhibition, it becomes apparent that silent cinema had a significant place in Parisian film culture for far longer than we might have thought.

For this transitional period, however, we cannot just consider the binary opposition of silent and sound films, and the various means of exhibiting movies from the late 1920s until around 1933 tell us a great deal about the complexities of this era and the different opportunities for Parisians to hear sounds and voices at the movies. Film companies often made different versions of their films for different viewing—and hearing—constituencies. In the United States, when audiences watched All Quiet on the Western Front, they also heard the voices of the actors. German audiences seem to have seen and heard the German-language version (at least until the film was banned in Germany, shortly after its premiere), perhaps with German actors in some of the roles, or dubbing them, or a combination of both.\textsuperscript{15} But Universal also
made a nontalking film of Erich Maria Remarque’s novel, with a musical score and sound effects. That film, now called *À l’Ouest rien de nouveau*, was the one French audiences apparently saw (the studio seems not to have made a French-language version); the advertisements in French magazines and newspapers announced that the film playing for month after month at the Ermitage cinema on the Champs-Élysées would be shown “sonore”—with sound effects—rather than “parlant.”

At about the same time, the French film *La Fin du monde* (1931), directed by Abel Gance, opened in Paris, naturally enough, “sonore et parlé,” indicating music, effects, and synchronized speech. The same was true with *L’Énigmatique Mr. Parkes* (1930), an American film made in French, by Paramount, with French-speaking actors Claudette Colbert and Adolphe Menjou. An American film, *No, No, Nanette* (1930), was exhibited “sonore et chantant,” which probably meant a silent version except when characters sang, in English, and the same seems to have been true with *Le Chant de bandit* (*The Rogue Song*; 1930), directed by Lionel Barrymore and featuring American baritone Lawrence Tibbett, with French audiences hearing the Metropolitan Opera star sing but not speak. The Panthéon cinema in the fifth arrondissement specialized in films “entièrement parlant anglais,” and so showed the “version intégrale Américaine” of *The Love Parade* (1929), with Maurice Chevalier speaking and singing in English. This version of Chevalier’s film almost certainly had French subtitles, and the *sous-titré* movie in general held a privileged place in French cinema, at least in the early years of the conversion to sound.

**Reading Subtitles**

“The film is in German, but the subtitles by Colette make it easy to follow the action, which is already so involving.” That’s how the French film weekly *Hebdo* ended its June 1932 review of *Jeunes filles en uniforme* (*Mädchen in Uniform*; 1931), with Leontine Sagan’s classic already in the midst of a successful run in Paris at the exclusive Marigny cinema just off the Champs-Élysées, where *Les Lumières de la ville* had played. Certainly it was a mark of the prestige of the film that a writer as famous as Colette would compose the subtitles, and it made sense that the press would comment on her authorship. That same issue of *Hebdo*, however, also reviewed another German film playing just a few blocks away from *Jeunes filles* at the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées, *Quatre dans le tempête* (*Ein Mädel von der Reeperbahn*; 1930). The magazine mentioned yet again the author of the French subtitles, Jean Vincent-Bréchignac, a journalist and writer who was barely known at the time (and still remains little known).
The subtitled film in France, it would seem, at least during the early sound period, might sometimes count as a significant literary event, with authorship duly noted and credited as much to the translator of the dialogue as to the original director or scenarist. But during this transition to recorded sound, as we have seen, there were other ways for audiences to view foreign films. In that same issue of *Hebdo*, the lead review was for *Frankenstein*, and the opening line alerted potential viewers that this was a “film spoken in French by ‘dubbing.’” That dubbed version was a big hit in Paris, playing for several months during the summer of 1932 at the Apollo cinema in the ninth arrondissement and then moving to another exclusive engagement in the same neighborhood, at the elegant Roxy.

Sometimes any effort to translate a foreign film would meet with resistance. At the end of April 1932, *Shanghai Express*, another Dietrich film directed by
Josef von Sternberg, opened at the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées. Quite simply, in the wake of *L’Ange bleu*, any film by Sternberg and especially any film with Dietrich was a very big deal in Paris at the time (their previous film together, the 1931 *X-27* [*Dishonored*], was playing at nine cinemas that same week). Ribadeau Dumas wrote the review of *Shanghai Express* for *La Semaine à Paris*, a weekly listing and review of cultural events in Paris, and he extolled the artistry of the film, its technique, its editing, its cinematography. And then, as if any attempt by someone other than Sternberg to present the story to Parisian audiences was doomed to fail, the dependably snobbish Ribadeau Dumas emphasized the tedium of watching such a film translated with subtitles for the sake of those who could not understand English.  

The American Press, Alcohol, and Air-Conditioning

Complementing the statistical and qualitative information about exhibition in *Pour Vous* and other sources, about dates, times, and technologies, newspapers from the United States provide us with significant empirical data about Parisian cinemas and the movies they showed. The American press gives us, as well, ample anecdotes and impressions that also typically correspond to the conventions of American nonfiction from the period for reporting on Europe. Many of these entries on filmgoing in Paris repeat one of the clichés of much American travel literature, of a sort of unfathomable Frenchness and the complete difference of the French from the Americans.

Examples from the weekly magazine *Literary Digest* typify this balance of information and incredulity. The *Digest* compiled the best of middle- and high-brow journalism from a number of sources, and in 1929 ran an article titled “Why Paris Goes to the Movies,” which acquainted readers with reporter Quinn Martin’s recent “European Tour of Movie Houses.” One of the ongoing problems in film studies is that of determining precisely what people did at the movies. We know that they watched films and that they ate food, but we do not know much else; how intently they watched, how much they talked, what other activities took place at cinemas, and how that activity might be connected to first-run or subsequent-run cinemas, or to seats in the balcony or orchestra sections, or to time of day. From Martin, though, we get the amateur anthropologist’s view of the bizarre practices of the natives, as he noted, first, that “the French go to the movies to rest.” When Martin dropped into a cinema to see a reissue of the British film *The White Shadows* (1924), which was “preceded by a number of talking short subjects,” the cinema was only one-quarter full, and the audience “sat there reading newspapers and eating sandwiches.” Apparently the lights remained on during the movies.
there, at least brightly enough to let viewers read, but at another cinema on Martin’s tour, the enormous Gaumont-Palace, the ambience may have been much darker, as “half the audience appeared to be drowsing,” and the “other half was making love.”

Two years later, in April 1931, the *Digest* provided more information about when and how those Paris viewers used cinemas to make love and to rest, although here the source is perhaps no better than Martin, the amused tourist. In this case, the *Digest* cited a longstanding French satirical magazine, *Le Crapouillot*, and a special issue on “Pictures of Paris.” The view from *Le Crapouillot*, then, was probably both distanced and ironized, as the magazine complained about the “continuous performance” in cinemas, “which open at nine in the morning and grind off reel after reel until two the next morning.” *Le Crapouillot* then gave the sense of filmgoers less concerned about showtimes than with dipping into a cinema when it most conveniently them, as “Spectators are just as likely to enter the cinema at the middle or end of a picture as at the beginning.” This casual viewer, though, had strong feelings about the movies being shown, and especially about film product from Hollywood. The critic in *Le Crapouillot* wrote that “I have . . . had the satisfaction of seeing honest folk leave a boulevard cinema at midnight, and stop to dissuade, in loud and unmistakable terms, those in the waiting line that they would lose both their time and money seeing and listening to an imbecility” from the United States.

Thus in one essay we have the mythic binary of the French filmgoer, the flâneurs who go to the cinema when they feel like it, at the beginning, middle, or end of a program, and the dedicated cinéphiles who engage strangers in debate about movies. *Le Crapouillot* may not have been the most reliable source for information about film in Paris, given its emphasis on humor and satire, but there were other, perhaps more sober, sources that help us understand the film culture of Paris during this period, with the *New York Times* standing out for both data and opinion about cinema in the French capital.

As part of the paper’s extensive international reporting, and particularly from urban centers around the world, the *Times* had a correspondent in Paris, Herbert L. Matthews, who wrote regularly on the films there, the audiences that watched movies, and the cinemas where they saw them. A quarter century later, Matthews’s liberal cosmopolitanism would lead him to Cuba and to an infatuation with the revolution led by Fidel Castro, which he chronicled for an American audience. In the 1930s, though, he was less the political leftist and much more the cultivated flâneur, reporting on the arts scene and taking the movies very seriously.
Matthews, as well as some of his colleagues at the Times, took a special interest in the city’s cinemas. Reporting during the late summer of 1932, Matthews lamented that few new films were showing and audiences were dwindling, in part because “Parisian theatres do not employ the water-cooling system which entices so many sweltering New Yorkers off the streets and into the gigantic ice-boxes of Broadway.” Of course, air-conditioning was one of the important advances of movie theatres in the United States in the 1920s, one that has not been given the attention of other technological innovations, such as the conversion to sound later in the decade, but that nevertheless marked a major difference between cinemas in the United States and those in France. In spite of this American advantage, Matthews took pains to point out that “there are many cinemas here as modern, as large and as attractive as those along Broadway.” He then mentioned the Paramount, in the ninth arrondissement, and approvingly wrote that it was “not nearly so pretentious as its namesake in New York” (both of which were owned by the American film company Paramount Pictures Corporation). Matthews also wrote about the Gaumont-Palace in the eighteenth, “which was recently done over in modernistic style,” a reference to the renovation that I mentioned earlier. Moreover, “there are film houses along the Champs-Élysées of a smaller, more intimate sort which yield to none, anywhere, in attractiveness and comfort.”

So Matthews provides us with the range of cinemas in the more elegant neighborhoods, and approves of a more modest style than one might find in cinema architecture in New York. In next giving us some particular details of Parisian film culture, at least in the chic quarters, he more fully rounds out his comparison with the United States, and finds American movie houses wanting. Matthews reports that cinemas in Paris have a fifteen-minute intermission between feature films on a double bill, or between shorts and the main feature, or the stage show and the film. Parisians apparently put that intermission to good use, as did Matthews, the Prohibition-era journalist happily working in Europe. “There is one great convenience which Paris houses have, and the best of them in New York do not have,” Matthews wrote, “and that is a bar—a real, old-fashioned bar where . . . the audience can go for refreshments that are indeed refreshments.” Thus, in weighing the comforts of cool air and those of a cool drink, Matthews preferred the latter, and therefore the French film exhibition model.

About six months later, in January 1933, Matthews began a report by writing about “an almost feverish activity in getting cinema theatres built,” noting that “three were completed and opened within the last month, and several others are nearly ready for use.” The buildings that marked this boom were “as
fine as anything of the kind to be seen in New York,” and then Matthews went on to tell his readers something of the style of the new Parisian spaces. For the most part, and quite unlike many of the downtown urban cinemas in the United States, the style in Paris was “toward small, exclusive, intimate edifices, with either no balconies or just a tiny one far in the back.” Cinema architects in Paris emphasized “comfort and roominess, with splendid bars for the intermission,” and their style was markedly “modernist . . . even to the extent of being slightly freakish about it.”

The Raspail 216, named for its address in the fourteenth arrondissement, was one of those new cinemas in Matthews’s article, and it opened with Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer’s famous 1932 horror film, Vampyr. Dreyer’s movie has come down to us as an art film, more suited to the university or the museum, but this German French coproduction originally was released commercially. Matthews provides us with an eyewitness account of the audience response to the film, a response that seems in keeping with the somewhat obscure narrative of Vampyr. Those viewers, sitting in the Raspail’s “seats of white leather,” were “either held . . . spellbound as in a long nightmare or else moved . . . to hysterical laughter.”

Other new cinemas played more conventional films. Shortly after the Rex opened in 1932 on the boulevard Poissonière in the second arrondissement, it had a great success with “that veteran comedian of the French state, Max Dearly.” The film was L’Amour et la veine (1932), and it had been produced by the same man who built the Rex, the great film impresario Jacques Haïk. Matthews showed much more interest in the cinema than in the film, and he gave readers a sense of the Rex’s appeal. “Outwardly it is a simple building in white stone,” Matthews wrote, and then added that “it is the inside that is unique.” The cinema seated close to three thousand “in an orchestra and two wide, sweeping balconies,” and while this might compare to the largest, downtown cinemas in the United States, the Rex catered specifically to continental sensibilities. “What Europeans consider to be more suitable to their tastes,” Matthews said, “the carpets, decorations, stairways, doors and the like, are not striking or rich or colorful, but simple and comfortable, and even elegant.” The ceiling was especially so, as it was “made into a representation of the heavens at night—a summer’s night on the Riviera.” All of this fell under the authority of an American manager, Francis Mangan, apparently brought in from the United States to add some New York–style showmanship to Haïk’s palace. The “36 Rex Mangan Stars” performed there as part of the stage show, as did sixteen rhythm dancers “doing their mechanically perfect cavorting.”
The Rex, just a few blocks away from the Corso on the boulevard Poissonnière, stood as one of the grandest cinemas in Paris. The French press also took notice, with *La Semaine à Paris*, which usually only duly noted new locations for seeing movies, extolling the florid extravagance of this “cinéma atmosphérique,” with its “starred ceiling . . . giving us the illusion of an oriental night” (although the reporter complained that too much exotic atmosphere made it a little hard to breathe in the place).\(^{33}\) Despite its incredible ambience, the Rex, at least in the early 1930s, typically played new releases for only a week before they disappeared for just a little while and then fanned out to other cinemas in the city. This made the Rex a version of what, in the United States, would be a less important first-run house, a notch below the “run-of-the-picture” cinemas where a film might play for weeks on end. In the Rex’s neighborhood, the second arrondissement, it would be the Marivaux-Pathé that would show some of the most important movies for weeks or months at a time, for instance in 1937 when the great Jean Gabin film *Pépé le Moko* opened there.\(^{34}\)

From all of these sources, and especially from Matthews and other *Times* reporters from the early 1930s, we learn, then, about an expansion in cinema construction in Paris during the period that marked the conversion to sound. Paris entrepreneurs emphasized small cinemas, perhaps out of economic necessity or perhaps because of the city’s spatial constraints, but the occasional new film palace still appeared on the grand boulevards. We can learn just how big these palaces were (not only the Rex but also
the 2,500-seat Marignan, which opened on the Champs-Élysées in 1933). According to the *Times*, this boom in building cinemas brought twenty-three new movie houses to Paris between 1930 and 1932, and seven to the suburbs just outside the city.

Matthews also recorded responses to films, although here his remarks may be compromised by his continuing insistence on fully nationalist film preferences, with French—and primarily Parisian—audiences always looking for the “truly French” motion picture. In spite of this, Matthews noted that Parisians particularly liked many early 1930s Hollywood films, all dubbed into French (with Matthews keeping their titles in English), such as *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932), *The Crowd Roars* (1932) with James Cagney, as well as Lubitsch’s *The Man I Killed*, Capra’s aviation epic *Dirigible*, Greta Garbo in *Mata Hari* (1931), and three Marlene Dietrich films directed by Josef von Sternberg, *Shanghai Express*, *Dishonored*, and *Morocco* (1930). Among subtitled films, two gangster movies—*Scarface* (1932) and another Cagney film, *Public Enemy* (1931)—as well as the Eddie Cantor movie *Palmy Days* (1931), Harold Lloyd’s *Movie Crazy*, and two literary adaptations, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932) and John Ford’s *Arrowsmith* (1931), were particularly successful.

Cross-cultural incomprehension, however, seemed to make a Hollywood adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham’s *Rain* (1932), with the typically popular Joan Crawford, a failure among Parisian fans, who were also left cold by Mae West’s films. These same moviegoers loved the latest film with French star Georges Milton, *Nu comme un ver* (1933), even though it would be safe to assume that “no American would enjoy” this French picture.

*Milton’s movie brings us back to our filmgoer in the ninth arrondissement, on the boulevard des Capucines. *Nu comme un ver* had opened at the Olympia cinema at 28 boulevard des Capucines in early May 1933. By the end of May the film had moved to another exclusive run at the Gaumont-Palace in the eighteenth arrondissement, and then, within a week or two, disappeared from Paris cinemas. By the beginning of September the film had returned for yet another exclusive showing at the Rex, the cinema that Matthews had so detailed, just a few blocks away from the Olympia. By the week of October 6, *Nu comme un ver* had moved to cinemas across the city, in fashionable areas and also farther out toward the periphery, in the sixth, eleventh, fifteenth, and seventeenth arrondissements, and was also showing in four theatres in the twentieth. One week later, the run had contracted, and the film showed...*
only in the fourteenth, seventeenth (in a different cinema from the week before), and eighteenth, and by October 20 the film once again had fallen out of circulation.\textsuperscript{42}

Matthews’s assertion of the “Frenchness” of Milton’s film perhaps seems sensible, but also makes us ask about the relationship of a film like \textit{Nu comme un ver} to the other movies in a city known for its international film culture. During the week in October that began this chapter, the films listed in \textit{Pour Vous} numbered about 150. The movies were mostly feature length, but there were also shorts and documentaries, and six of the cinemas showed only newsreels.\textsuperscript{43} I have been able to identify about 110 of the films playing that week, with forty-eight of them coming from French film companies. Hollywood accounted for thirty-four of the films, while at least nine were produced in French, and either in France or in Hollywood, by American film studios (Paramount mostly, but also Warner Bros. and Universal).

Assigning national origins at all to films from the period can be challenging, given the practice at the time of companies from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States to produce occasional multiple-language versions of movies or original films in French, and also the possibility of multinational productions. \textit{La Vie privée de Henry VIII} (\textit{The Private Life of Henry VIII}; 1933), a prominent British film, was playing in Paris then, but there were also three British films that had been produced in French and with French actors. Audiences had the chance to see at least one Italian French coproduction, a Spanish French film, and a French Belgian coproduction.\textsuperscript{44} There were three German films in Paris that week, although there were a number of films that were either German films made in French for a French audience, or Franco-German coproductions. Showing that week in Paris, \textit{L’Étoile de Valencia} (1933) typified this blending of national styles, workers, and economies. Directed by French filmmaker Serge de Poligny, \textit{L’Étoile de Valencia} starred French leading man Jean Gabin and German actress Brigitte Helm (famous for her appearance as Maria in \textit{Metropolis} [1927]), and was produced by UFA, the German studio.\textsuperscript{45}

If we concentrate on just the week of October 13, we get no sense of the movement of films across Paris, and of the various patterns of film distribution and exhibition in the city. Examining the week before and the week after helps show those patterns, and the varying possibilities for audiences to attend movies at cinémas d’exclusivité and in the neighborhoods. In the grand cinemas in the second arrondissement, each new film played for at least a week. At the Rex on the boulevard Poissonnière, audiences could see the just-opened American film \textit{Révolte au zoo} (\textit{Zoo in Budapest}; 1933) the week of October 6,
and then new French films, *Les Ailes brisées* (1933) the following week and *L’Abbé Constantin* (1933) the week after that. At the Cinéac, nearby on the boulevard des Italiens, Jean Benoît-Lévy and Marie Epstein’s *La Maternelle* (1933) drew large crowds continually, and showed there for all three weeks and more.

The same pattern persisted in other major venues. In the eighth arrondissement, Capra’s *Platinum Blonde* (1931), as well as another American film, *Jennie Gerhardt* (1933), showed at the same cinemas for the same three-week period. But also in the eighth, the Pépenière, which seems to have shown subsequent-run as well as first-run films, switched from *Conduisez-moi, Madame*, from 1932, to *Les Deux “Monsieur” de Madame*, a 1933 French film, to *Le Testament de Dr. Mabuse*. So far, then, the system in France seems fully as rational as that in the United States, which has been examined so extensively during the last quarter century. The most important cinemas showed films, typically but not always in their first run, for one week. Those cinemas that, unlike the Rex, were contractually cleared for longer runs, held options for subsequent weeks if audience interest remained high.

As I mentioned earlier, the French cinema, like the American, followed a model of runs, zones, and clearances in order to produce efficient systems of where films might play, for how long, and the specific intervals during which they disappeared from exhibition altogether. A closer look shows that these systems, at least in Paris, were never quite so scientifically precise, or, at least, seem much more random than the practices in major American cities. *La Maternelle*, as well as showing in the second, also played for that three-week period in cinemas in the sixth and ninth arrondissements, in the latter case in two cinemas just a healthy but not uncomfortable walk away from each other, up the avenue de l’Opéra to the rue d’Athènes. A Jean Epstein film in wide release, *L’Homme à l’Hispano* (1933), played at two cinemas each in the fifth and thirteenth arrondissements during the week of October 13, as well as at other cinemas throughout the city. In fact it was not uncommon for two cinemas in the same neighborhood to play the same film; in just one other example, on October 6 three cinemas in the eleventh arrondissement exhibited the American film *Je suis un évadé*, which seems to have been extremely popular in Paris. From week to week films might also move from one cinema to another within a neighborhood. In the thirteenth arrondissement, *Moi et l’impératrice*, a 1933 film produced in French by UFA and starring Charles Boyer, moved from the Bosquets cinema, where it played on October 13, to the Édens des Gobelins for the week of October 20, while during the same period *Rumba* shifted from
the Casino de Grenelle to the Splendide cinema just a few blocks away in the fifteenth arrondissement.

**King Kong in Paris**

Two films with overlapping play dates in Paris demonstrate the extremes of film exhibition there. The Marivaux-Pathé in the second arrondissement hosted the Paris opening of *King Kong* in early September 1933. When the film first appeared, in a dubbed version, *Pour Vous* gave it only a lukewarm review, calling it more of a “photographic curiosity,” because of its famous stop-motion animation, than a film that might inspire “fear” or any other emotion.48 But the film was a popular one in Paris and stayed exclusively at the Marivaux for almost two months. This alone did not constitute an extraordinary first run at the cinema. *King Kong* had replaced *Théodore et Cie* (1933), a film much less well known to us now than *Kong* but that starred the great French comic actor Raimu and played exclusively at the cinema for about three months.49 After leaving the Marivaux in early November, *King Kong* did not appear on any Parisian screen at least until the beginning of 1934 (by which time the film had also made its way to French colonial Algeria, where it was playing in Algiers and Oran). This kind of first run indicates that films might indeed have a significant clearance period in Paris before playing in the neighborhoods, with the comings and goings of *King Kong* almost certainly coordinated by RKO, the film’s American production and distribution company.50

Another film, without the cachet of *King Kong* but significant nonetheless, presents a different model. *Toto* premiered in Paris at the same time as *King Kong*, at the Moulin Rouge cinema in the eighteenth arrondissement.51 Jacques Tourneur had directed *Toto*, and although this was an early motion picture for him, and well before the distinguished films noirs and horror movies he made in Hollywood, Tourneur certainly would have been known at the time as the son of one of Europe’s more distinguished filmmakers; Maurice Tourneur had been directing movies in France and the United States since before World War I. The star of *Toto*, Albert Préjean, began acting in films in the early 1920s, and was well known for his roles in such René Clair films as *Paris qui dort* (1925) and *Un chapeau de paille d’Italie* (1928). Pathé-Natan, one of France’s leading film studios, had produced *Toto*, and so this was, indeed, an important film for French audiences, if not a release on the same level as *King Kong* or such other films as *L’Ange bleu* and *La Maternelle*.

*Toto* had an opening engagement of just a few weeks and left the Moulin Rouge by the end of September. Almost immediately, by the first week of October, the film had fanned out to three cinemas in the neighborhoods and
away from the grand movie palaces; near the southwestern border of the city in the sixteenth arrondissement and in two cinemas on the northeastern edge of the seventeenth, both of which paired Toto with a short subject by Maurice Tourneur, *Lidoire* (1933), another Pathé movie, as if trying to capitalize on the familial connection between the filmmakers. The film lasted only one week in those cinemas, but on October 13 *Toto* opened in fourteen others. Ten of those venues were bunched very close together around the Montmartre and Pigalle sections of the city, more or less outlying areas in the hierarchy of Parisian cinemas despite the densely packed number of exhibition sites. *Toto* continued moving throughout the city the following week. The film still played at fourteen cinemas, but all of them different, and by this time *Toto* had made it to the interior of the city, in cinemas in the third and fifth arrondissements, although it remained, typically, on the geographical edges of Paris.

The system that brought *King Kong* to Parisian audiences looks familiar to anyone with a knowledge of the fully rationalized Hollywood model of distribution and exhibition from the period. The options for seeing *Toto*, however—almost three dozen different venues in a two-month period—look random and ill advised. In fact, seeing how *Toto* moved through the city, and noting the differences between that film and *King Kong*, the temptation is to assume that, regardless of any system that motion picture companies attempted to impose to regularize exhibition, Parisian practices simply exemplified the legendary chaos and economic instability of the French film industry of the 1930s.52

But there also may be some other possibilities. In just one practical example, and as Matthews noted in one of his *New York Times* dispatches cited above, Parisian cinemas seem generally to have been smaller than their American counterparts, and if this was the case, then it probably made sense to show a film in more than one cinema in the same or neighboring arrondissement in order to attract a wide audience. Other ways of understanding Parisian exhibition bring up significant historiographic issues, however, and make us reconsider our understanding of the relationships between film culture and the nation on the one hand, and the neighborhood on the other.

Cities and other locations produced multiple film cultures. In Paris, this meant not only the possibility of different audiences for commercial and avant-garde films, but also varied expectations, desires, and pleasures from neighborhood to neighborhood. Exhibition patterns in Paris, as in any city, indicate different ways of viewing films within the city itself, from the extravagant floorshows at some of the first-run cinemas to the more intimate pleasures of neighborhood venues. Rather than signifying the instability of
the French film industry, the seemingly random exhibition of *Toto* in 1933, concentrated week after week in different cinemas around Montmartre and Pigalle, may indicate that film preferences can be isolated down to neighborhoods rather than broad metropolitan areas, and so might demonstrate the geometric precision of film distribution throughout the city, taking into consideration, as it did, microlevels of audience desire.

If this was the case, if we return to our filmgoer on the boulevard des Capucines, it becomes possible that this movie enthusiast would have stayed right there, in that neighborhood on the southern edge of the ninth arrondissement, rather than venturing to see a movie like *Toto* playing just due north in the eighteenth. Leaving the neighborhoods and moving to issues that are more regional and global, the example of Paris and the possibilities for seeing films there provide new options for considering national cinema. In the manner of Ruth Vasey, Andrew Higson, and others, we of course need to think of the nation in internationalist terms. As just one example, the French cinema of the period had significant impact in all of the country’s colonies, while also reaching areas of less influence, such as the United States. Audiences may have experienced that cinema in particular ways depending upon location, and movie fans seem to have understood audiences even in nearby cities and towns as quite different from each other.

*Pour Vous* highlights these issues. The tabloid had a national circulation and perhaps even beyond, to other French-speaking countries and regions, and typically emphasized French films and film culture. But with its concentration on Paris, *Pour Vous* announced that French and Parisian film cultures were identical. In extending the reach of that culture to other parts of France, Europe, and the world, the periodical showed as well just how differently French cinema might be understood, and French film culture experienced, in different places.

That section in so many of the issues, “What’s Going on in the Four Corners of France,” asserted the reach of a French national film culture even to the colonies (and those colonies themselves constituting some of the “corners of France”). The column indicated the differences in available films, or cinema architecture, or the perceptions of varied audience desires and preferences from region to region. Readers learned, for example, that viewers in Mostaganem, in Algeria, were particularly taken by the American film about Africa, *Trader Horn* (1931), because they so enjoyed movies about “mysterious voyages”; that audiences in Nîmes, in France, should not be “underestimated,” presumably by Parisians, and that they would indeed fully appreciate the great German film *Jeunes filles en uniforme*; that film fans in Le Mans were staying
away from cinemas, probably because exhibitors there depended too much on programs put together by the large movie firms. This section also provided information about international distribution practices, as readers learned that Renoir’s *La Chienne* was only just appearing in Morocco in July 1932, after having opened in France the year before.\(^{54}\)

Thus France’s control of cinema in the colonies did not necessarily mean that colonials experienced French films and French film culture in the same manner as Parisians. Even in terms of France alone, we need to analyze much more fully the idea of local film cultures rather than national ones, with such an analysis providing a different understanding of the place of the city in film history. With some of the notable exceptions mentioned earlier—the work of Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, for instance, and Gregory Waller—film historiography, as practiced in the United States and Great Britain, and at least since the early 1990s, has concentrated on the links between cinema and cities and, in the words of Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, has viewed late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century “metropolitan urban culture [as] leading to new forms of entertainment and leisure activity.”\(^{55}\) The cinema has emerged as the form par excellence of these activities, with Paris serving as one of the models of this new urban experience, which itself led to new forms of national culture. A study of cinema in Paris and other cities in France during the early 1930s shows the need to reconfigure this assessment. As we can see from some of the discussions in *Pour Vous* of Paris, Nîmes, and Le Mans, or Marseille and Lille and Cherbourg as well as other locations, there were marked differences, both real and imagined, between metropolitan areas that at first glance seem unproblematically French, and that make the idea of a cohesive French cinema from the period difficult to maintain.

We can only make these assessments of the international, the national, and the local if we shift our methodological focus. We need to move away from the films themselves and consider other materials. In the case of Paris, the French film journalism from the 1930s provides us with invaluable data about filmgoing there: the locations of cinemas, the times of shows, and the flow of movies across the city. The scope of film-related journalism in France at the time, so often centering on Paris, informs us of the ways in which Parisians’ understanding of movies, movie stars, and gossip, for instance, came to be mediated by the periodicals that they read. *Pour Vous* along with other newspapers and magazines, specialty or otherwise, gave audiences the information they needed for seeing films and also many of the terms for understanding and enjoying them.

These materials make the exhibition site, and the progress of movies through the city, central to any consideration of the period’s film history. Our film
enthusiast in the ninth arrondissement might plan a day or week or month around the movies and their movement from cinema to cinema, choosing whether to stay in a familiar neighborhood or venture out, to see King Kong now or much later, to watch L’Ange bleu for the third or fourth time, or to enjoy or avoid the more fleeting and very local pleasures of Toto. The listings of the cinemas and their programs in Pour Vous and other sources give us the beginnings of both a geography and sociology of film viewing in Paris, allowing us to analyze the varied relations of spectators to the movies they saw, the conditions in which they saw them, and when and where they were able to watch films. “Voici les films qui passent,” the title of the weekly listings, itself evokes movement and flow, from the verb passer (to pass), and the name of the tabloid made this movement of films specifically “for you,” the film viewer. For the modern film scholar, Pour Vous and the rest of the archive of primary materials considered here lets us chart some of the relations of the city to the nation and to the world, and to determine the multiple film cultures that produced the Parisian cinema of the 1930s.