

Citizens of Utopia: Popular Theatre and the Republican State

Delicately etched into paper that almost crumbles into fragments is a design by Catulle Mendès for a wooden popular theatre in 1902.¹ The theatre is exuberantly neo-classical in style—ornamental flourishes dance onto the surrounding page—and would, had it secured the state funding for which it was submitted, have been capable of seating 1500 in an octagonal auditorium. It would also have been dismountable for ease of transportation around the country. This was a theatre designed to bring beauty to the masses, entertaining and elevating the citizens of the Third Republic. With a state subsidy, such a theatre could, so Mendès contended, make high culture freely available to working men and women, drawing them away from ‘the ever-increasing number of bars, cafés-concerts, and cabarets that are accessible to the less wealthy, and where the shameful nature of songs, dances, and speeches performed [...] defies the imagination’.² Mendès’s imagination was a fertile one: in 1861, he himself had been fined and imprisoned for a comic verse-drama branded an offence to public morality.³ Now he was seemingly rejecting his scandalous past—as well as his belief in art for art’s sake—in an idealistic endeavour to form the active citizens of the future.

Mendès’s delicate design encapsulates the ephemeral yet also powerfully utopian quality of the popular theatre projects associated with the republican state. This initial proposal was ultimately rejected by the government as impractical. Not only did Mendès submit a similar project to the popular theatre commission of 1905, however, but his designs were also requested by Firmin Gémier, who created a peripatetic theatre

that toured France with traction engines in 1911. Later, Gémier would become the first director of the grandiose Théâtre National Populaire, established at the Palais du Trocadéro in Paris in 1920.⁴

Most importantly, Mendès was not alone. His proposals were only two out of a multitude of now-forgotten projects for popular theatres as temples of the new republic, in which citizens would be edified, uplifted, brought into closer communion with each other and with the transcendent beauty of art. Indeed throughout the Third Republic the creation of republican popular theatre attracted the attention of parliamentary deputies, government commissions, theatre directors, journalists, and playwrights; as well as prompting fervour, idealism, shameless self-advertisement, and successive promises of substantial funding. Meanwhile, the relationship between popular—although not necessarily republican—theatre and political idealism was simultaneously seizing the imagination of literary anarchists, royalist street fighters, and regionalists from Brittany to Provence; as well as inspiring Catholics, communists, socialists, and members of right-wing associations and parties. Common to this extraordinarily varied selection of friends and enemies of the Third Republic was the conviction that art could and should serve a political function, and that popular theatre, however problematic to define and difficult to realize, held the potential to visualize—and even achieve—a utopian experience of community.

The duty of a democratic republic to make culture more accessible to the people, inspired by an ideal of the educated citizen as well as by more prosaic aims of political integration and allegiance, has been a government priority in France since the First Republic.⁵ Even today, this constitutes an important focus for the cooperation of French politicians and researchers—as evident, for example, in a recent volume by historians Laurent Martin and Philippe Poirrier explicitly promoted by the French Ministry of Culture.⁶ As Martin contends:

For generations of administrators and key figures in cultural life, the objective of disseminating the benefits of culture to the greatest possible number, and of facilitating cultural access and participation for the majority if not all of the French, has been a clear imperative; not only for the sake of enjoyment but also because the spread of Enlightenment, the acquisition of knowledge, the sharing of artistic creation and emotion, and the transmission of our heritage have been considered in this country as inseparable from the democratic and republican project.⁷

Furthermore, France remains distinctive among European countries—and in comparison with Britain and the USA—in the extent of state intervention in cultural production and legitimacy. State patronage and censorship of the arts, already strongly established under the *ancien régime* with the creation of royal *académies*, has continued, despite radical regime change, into the Fifth Republic.⁸ This has clear economic and cultural benefits, for example in the case of state subsidies to theatres such as the Théâtre Français (Comédie Française). But it also has its drawbacks, not least in the close connections between subsidy and supervision, especially censorship.⁹ Censorship of the theatre, and of the visual more generally, was particularly strict in the early Third Republic, to the extent that it was possible to watch a censored version of a play while holding the unexpurgated textual version in one's hand.¹⁰

The degree to which this cultural control is deemed desirable has been a guiding influence on previous studies of popular theatre and the state. For those confident in the duty of the Republic to subsidize and democratize elite culture for the people, the story often culminates with the post-war Théâtre National Populaire under the direction of Jean Vilar. According to this narrative, the designs and initiatives of the Third Republic, rather than being considered in their own right as part of a conversation (or argument) between friends and enemies of the regime, are necessarily overshadowed by such post-war success. The earlier initiatives may be praiseworthy: '[Firmin] Gémier laid the foundations of Jean Vilar's Théâtre National Populaire', writes Jacqueline de Jomaron, 'as well as those of theatrical decentralization and state subsidy'.¹¹ But they are also immature, even laughable: imbued with 'a romanticism on the limits of the chimerical',¹² 'old-fashioned and utopian'¹³; or close to incomprehensible in their 'exclamation-point oratory and their naïve, old-fashioned idealism'.¹⁴ In the optimistic republican narrative in which 'after the Liberation, everything once again becomes possible',¹⁵ only the victorious post-war context is deemed capable of realizing the fusion of people, culture, and citizenship that was imagined—yet only clumsily fumbled towards—during the Third Republic.

There is no doubt that the popular theatre projects of the Third Republic bordered on the utopian. The point of this chapter is to understand how—and why—this was the case, exploring them on their own terms rather than seeing these projects as merely unsatisfactory chapters in a teleological narrative towards post-war success.¹⁶ What ministers, deputies, government commissions and their would-be collaborators

understood by ‘popular theatre’, exactly how they intended culture to transform masses into citizens, and how far they can be deemed successful, represents the central focus. Here, the aim is to establish both why the connections between theatre, idealism, and community were so powerful, and also why they were so problematic in practice. Drawing on new archival and printed material, this chapter offers the first detailed analysis of state popular initiatives throughout the Third Republic, and so contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between republican culture and citizenship.

To tell this story, this chapter draws on a broad range of case studies and source material, including ministerial archives, reports, and press articles neglected in previous research.¹⁷ First, it demonstrates that popular theatre was as vital to the republican project of using culture in the creation of citizenship as the more widely studied examples of state education and popular music.¹⁸ For the politicians of the Third Republic, popular theatre promised a pathway towards what Brian Rigby has described as a ‘national popular culture’, intended to replace rival or archaic forms of popular culture with a ‘modern culture of the people, a secular, rational, and national culture, which was seen as the only possible culture that could lead France into the twentieth century.’¹⁹ In this, the interest of the French state echoed that of authorities elsewhere in Europe and equally in Russia, where popular theatre was also seen as an important means of fostering ‘a new perception of the self’, and drawing the people away from less edifying folk culture.²⁰ For the French Third Republic, in which the formal exercise of citizenship at election time was restricted to men over the age of 21 (women were enfranchised only in 1944), popular theatre also represented a form of education and involvement open to all citizens, regardless of their ability to vote.

Second, this chapter explores how the governments of the Third Republic conceived of popular theatre (and education more broadly) as a means of countering Catholic precedents, structures, and traditions with a secular space for the experience of civic communion and republican morality.²¹ Here, the case study of popular theatre offers new evidence to support, for example, Daniel Hervieu-Léger’s contention that the French republic seeks its own ‘counter-model of a “genuine civil religion”’, which includes ‘its own pantheon, martyrology, liturgy, myths, rites, altars and temples.’²² Popular theatre, discussed and supported by a Ministry responsible for education and the arts (and initially also religion), was explicitly described as a means by which a united, republican

people could be imagined, gathered, instructed, and morally elevated, as well as entertained. Yet the realization of these goals was problematic in ways that related both to the specific historical context but also to the intrinsic character of the project.

Third, therefore, this case study examines how and why these state initiatives were marked by both controversy and fragility. It highlights the persistent difficulties in imagining the ideal republican people and in finding playwrights to depict them; the practical problems of location and funding; and finally the fundamental paradox that theatre offered to the ‘people’ (even with the best of intentions) did not necessarily attract or represent its target audience.

Underlining these ambiguities, this chapter thus introduces the central themes and conflicts in the book as a whole. It illuminates the deep-rooted desire to employ theatre in the creation of ‘total communities’, and the often-authoritarian manner in which popular theatre was conceived. It suggests some of the tensions between the people as actors and the people as spectators. Equally, it explores the complex dialogues between state initiatives and those of the political and geographical peripheries, which in turn contribute to a deeper understanding of how far the Third Republic attracted—and failed to attract—its divided citizens.

1 POLITICS, CULTURE, AND THE THIRD REPUBLIC

The republican aim of creating obedient and cooperative citizens out of a diverse range of people whose primary identities may be shaped by very different political and religious communities is always a live political issue. Despite the confidence of some of its politicians, the success of the Third Republic in this area was by no means a foregone conclusion. Created after the collapse of Napoleon III’s Second Empire in 1870 and resolutely voted out of existence after France’s defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940, this was a regime whose republican character and depth of allegiance needed to be fought for. Only the votes of a few Orleanists secured the definitive republican form of the new regime in a vote of 5 February 1875,²³ while the question of whether or not this would be France’s final republic remained open. Not only was the Third Republic characterized by extreme governmental instability, but it also provoked vigorous opposition from more radical political groups and parties on both left and right, as well as from populist leaders taking advantage of

the constitutionally weak character of the regime's executive.²⁴ Time and again—during the Boulangist crisis of the late 1880s, the Dreyfus Affair, and the violent street politics of the 1930s—there were fears that the regime was in danger of imminent collapse.

Often citing Jules Michelet's earlier assertion that 'an immense popular theatre' would ensure national education and renewal,²⁵ politicians of the Third Republic were convinced that theatre would play a crucial part in this battle to create republicans. A new, edifying, popular theatre would establish the moral credentials of the nascent Republic, insisted government employee Jules Bonnassies in 1872,²⁶ while forty years later the lawyer and member of the Conseil des Beaux-Arts Joseph Paul-Boncour similarly underscored the duty of the regime to make art and (high) culture popular. Yet where—he asked—could the models for such popular art and culture be found? Ancient Greece and Rome possessed amphitheatres, the Middle Ages their cathedrals, and the Revolution its festivals. What would the Third Republic offer in its turn?²⁷

One clearly republican pathway was to pursue the rhetoric and initiatives developed by the First French Republic after the Revolution of 1789. Idealistic conceptions of popular enlightenment through the theatre could, indeed, be traced both to these revolutionaries and also to the writers whose ideas they sought to realize. Under the *ancien régime*, philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had all discussed the importance of theatre in educating the people, with Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert* (1758) the most renowned example. Here, Rousseau had expressed his wish to transform the theatre under the inspiration of its Greek origins into a more didactic tool,²⁸ issuing what Joseph Harris has recently described as 'a call to arms, a challenge to the reader to recover the self-reflexivity and self-awareness needed to combat the theatre's harmful effects.'²⁹ In 1773, Diderot had, like Rousseau, called for theatre to be inspired anew by its Greek origins in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. While Rousseau's emphasis had been on the theatre's moral importance, Diderot preferred to underline its aesthetic appeal, while emphasizing both the immediacy and distance experienced by the spectator.³⁰ In 1773 and 1778, Mercier had propounded the argument that the people deserved their own theatre, which would not only depict them with verisimilitude but also serve as a form of education.³¹

Inspired by these concerns with the didactic importance of theatre for the people, the First Republic made serious efforts to establish

a new model of republican theatre—even at the height of the Terror. In response to petitions, the Committee of Public Safety decreed on 10 March 1794 to open a new ‘Théâtre du Peuple’ at the Théâtre Français. This theatre was intended to offer three state-subsidized popular spectacles every revolutionary *décade* (ten-day week), and under the aegis of their manager Joseph Payan, republican poets began to prepare their offerings.³² Although this particular project did not come to fruition, revolutionary festivals did provide another variety of spectacle for the people, especially in the streets of Paris already so closely associated with the drama of Revolution. Under the direction of the artist Jean-Louis David, for example, the festival of the Supreme Being of 8 June 1794 moved through the capital from sunrise to sunset, culminating in a pledge on the Champ de Mars (site of the present Eiffel tower) to ‘uphold virtue and the Republic’.³³ Only a month later, however, the Thermidorean reaction was to sweep Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety from power, while the utopian projects for popular theatre were of necessity set aside.³⁴

Drawing on these ideological and revolutionary precedents, the Third Republic not only renewed state interest in popular theatre, but also sought to develop the relationship between drama, education, and citizenship through state-led festivities for the people. These festivals, so politicians hoped, would foster the ‘social joy’ described by contemporary sociological Gabriel Tarde and so overcome the notorious divisions between the French.³⁵ The most enduring example remains the national festival of 14 July, first celebrated by the Third Republicans in 1880. This was intended not so much as a commemoration of 14 July 1789 but as a homage to the Fête de la Fédération of 14 July 1790, when representatives from across the nation had gathered on the Champ de Mars for a mass celebrated by Talleyrand and an oath of allegiance to ‘the nation, the law, and the king’, as inscribed on the altar.³⁶ In 1880, the celebration of 14 July was noisily republican, not only to honour first decade of the new regime, but also to rival both royal and Catholic festivals.³⁷ It was only a pity that, unlike many of the Church’s celebrations, 14 July fell at a very busy time of the agricultural year. It therefore assumed the character of an urban celebration, which in turn was to give later critics of the Third Republic the grievance that official festivals lacked not only spontaneity but also an engagement with existing cycles of work and festivity.³⁸

2 EARLY DISCUSSIONS AND INITIATIVES, 1870–1900

Given the Third Republic's desire to use culture—especially festivals and theatre—to create active citizens, it is not surprising that popular theatre should have appealed so strongly to successive governments. As early as the mid-1870s, politicians began to redefine and reorganize the role of the arts within the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion (Ministère de l'Instruction Publique, des Beaux-Arts, et des Cultes). In May 1875, the Minister Henri Wallon (whose amendment of 30 January had famously established the regime as a republic in constitutional law) created the Conseil supérieur des Beaux-Arts. This was a separate body within the Ministry: a kind of 'artistic parliament' in which representatives—who included administrators, artists, connoisseurs, and collectors—would meet to advise the Minister, initially on a monthly basis.³⁹

Meanwhile, government officials and supporters were earnestly debating the particular role that popular theatre should play in the Republic. One of the first contributions was by Jules Bonnassies, the government employee whose *Le Théâtre et le Peuple* had appeared in 1872. Enthusiastically partisan, Bonnassies described the Republic as 'the definitive regime to which human society tends, the only regime that is logical, and that brings unmitigated progress, truth, justice, and morality.'⁴⁰ Within this definitive regime, Bonnassies portrayed the theatre—'a secular church'—as essential to popular and civic education. He further insisted that the new Republic should reject the prevalent understanding of the 'people' as only 'the inferior classes', embracing instead the idea of 'the collective assembly of citizens who are unequal as men, but equal as citizens.'⁴¹ Theatre itself could play a vital role in this enterprise: a place where citizens of all classes could assemble, and a form of communication, instruction, and morality that influenced the senses more powerfully, he believed, than either literature or the press. Indeed, Bonnassies referred admiringly to the Athenian model of theatre at the heart of the city, as to Athenian reverence for patriotism and civic virtue.⁴²

Bonnassies's vision for republican popular theatre was twofold. First, the Republic should democratize accessibility, bringing theatre beyond the bourgeoisie (and beyond the limits of the electorate) to include children and workers. Second, the drama represented should heighten the moral calibre of the French, assembling and instructing them as a nation of citizens rather than as a specific class. The first goal would require the expansion of the existing network of municipal theatres, the distribution

of tickets to pupils in schools and at adult education lessons, as well as the development of new, popular theatres. This was explicitly intended to act as a safeguard against the *café-concert*, and to counter the latter's exemption from the heavy taxes imposed on theatres.⁴³ To achieve the second goal, the nature of productions at popular theatres would need to be closely regulated by the government, and Bonnassies therefore envisaged a theatre so centralized that there would be only a limited number of touring productions at any one time. Troupes and stage properties would be transported by the ever-widening railway network, while the centralization of productions would provide an effective means of replacing indisposed actors at short notice. Given that theatre fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion, it should be recognized as a form of instruction and appropriately subsidized. In terms of plays to be performed, Bonnassies remained unspecific (a common trait of proponents of popular theatre), but he insisted that they should, mirroring the theatre of ancient Greece, include:

the solemn representation of the great events of our national history; tragedies that analyse those feelings that ennoble the soul; and comedies that are always in the public interest because they satirize the vices that harm the state, and the foolishness that corrupts the citizen.⁴⁴

Later, when the Republic was firmly established, would 'pure beauty' flourish: but in the present climate of battle, satire was an essential weapon. Thus, argued Bonnassies, would theatre become a means of regenerating the country and of heightening France's moral stature in the eyes of her European neighbours.⁴⁵

The large-scale reform of national theatre on a Greek model to encourage greater patriotism and citizenship was by no means easy to transform into practice. Indeed, several important challenges immediately presented themselves, among them problems of production, repertoire, location, funding, and publicity. Would popular theatre involve new productions of existing plays, or even new tours of existing productions, or would it require new troupes of actors, or even new drama in a new genre? (In Germany, the contemporaneous development of popular theatre was closely associated with naturalism; in France, there was never any such close association).⁴⁶ How should the moral and civic messages best be conveyed? Should popular theatre be centralized by the state, and identified with a single (new or existing) theatre in Paris,

or should it be concerned primarily with decentralization, with bringing theatre to the provinces or encouraging regional and local initiatives? Would popular theatre be different from its 'elite' counterpart in appearance or seating arrangements? How would it be funded, particularly if ticket prices were to be subsidized in order to make performances accessible to the culturally disenfranchised? By no means least, how were the people themselves to be attracted? Would the nature and economic accessibility of productions prove sufficient to convert the *habitués* of the *café-concert*?

All these—and other—challenges meant that the development of state popular theatre in practice was both complex and slow moving, especially in the early decades of the Third Republic. There was certainly no lack of government interest and activity, or of wider enthusiasm and suggestions, but the sometimes lively relationship between the two did not necessarily result in concrete developments.

As early as the 1870s, for example, the Ministry, the Prefect of the Seine, and the Municipal Council of Paris received regular letters and proposals from writers, architects, and theatre directors determined to offer their services in the name of the new ideal of republican popular theatre. In 1878, the poet, playwright, and philosopher Eugène Nus wrote to the Ministry to denounce what he described as the monarchical tradition of providing theatre only for the elite. Instead—echoing the appeals of Bonnassies—he urged the Republic to subsidize and supervise a new form of theatre for the people:

A theatre that will provide human drama that is patriotic and democratic, bringing to the stage the great figures and episodes of our history, as well as the virtues and humble devotion that make the honest man and citizen.⁴⁷

By the end of the 1870s interest in popular theatre had heightened still further, and in 1879 the government decided to subsidize one municipal theatre to become a new popular theatre for drama, complementing the creation of a popular opera.⁴⁸ In support of the government's proposal, the Municipal Council of Paris subsequently resolved at a meeting on 10 July 1879 to waive its right to the rent and utilities fees for the chosen theatre, provided that the government would promise an annual subsidy of 100,000 francs for the theatre itself.⁴⁹ This joint decision by national and Parisian authorities prompted a flurry of excited

proposals from playwrights and theatre directors, rivalling each other in fervent commitment to the moral and republican value of popular theatre—and in the hope of securing its direction and subsidy. One former director of the Théâtre de la Porte Saint Martin insisted that with twenty years' experience as a director and an equally deep-rooted wish to establish a popular theatre, he was perfectly placed to provide brilliant plays at low cost, supporting the current trend of liberal ideas and aiming above all at the 'instruction and edification of the people'.⁵⁰ Another group of artists and playwrights under the aegis of Georges Richard, playwright and former actor at the Théâtre de l'Odéon, adopted the 'democratic principle of association' with the explicit conviction that collective rather than individual direction would be more appropriate to the function of popular theatre—and they too, insisted that 'theatre can and must complement general education'.⁵¹ Their preference was for the Théâtre de la Gaîté, principally for its potential to be restyled in the form of an amphitheatre to accommodate approximately 3000 spectators.

Despite this significant concordance between government objectives and individual or group aspirations, practical collaboration tended to founder. In March 1880, a committee met at the home of the deputy Charles Lecomte to consider the relative costs of various theatres, and in June the Gaîté theatre was announced as the successful candidate for the government subsidy of 80,000 francs.⁵² But there was no immediate sign of the expansion of a new form of popular theatre that would provide education and lessons in morality. In 1883–1884, there was a short-lived attempt by Georges de Lagrenée to found a 'popular opera' at the Château d'Eau with a municipal subsidy of 300,000 francs, but this was subsequently declared bankrupt.⁵³ Similarly, when in 1895 the Théâtre des Nations (then occupied by the Opéra-Comique) was returned to municipal authorities, a government commission was created to study the possibility of a municipal popular theatre in this location. Despite the enthusiastic proposals of Vaudeville theatre director Albert Carré, however, arrangements faltered on financial and administrative practicalities: the Municipal council refused to grant the level of subsidy demanded, while the Chamber of Deputies agreed on the possibility of a subsidy but insisted that the initiative should come directly from the City of Paris.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, government authorities were keenly aware of the contrast between tentative French initiatives and the more flourishing efforts of their European neighbours, especially in Austria, Germany, and Belgium. In 1889, the Vienna Volkstheater was inaugurated with a play by

Ludwig Anzengruber, famed for his realistic depictions of peasant life. In 1894, the Schiller Theater opened in Berlin with the support of public subscription; and in 1889, Otto Brahm's Freie Bühne association was founded, in which members paid subscriptions to support regular performances—thus securing the kind of stability that French initiatives so often lacked.⁵⁵ The Maison du Peuple in Brussels had also been offering musical and literary evenings since 1892, including performances of social plays such as Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers*.⁵⁶

When in November 1899 the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*—which had a particular interest in popular theatre—published an open letter to the Minister of Public Instruction to suggest the provision of a popular theatre in Paris, the journal therefore recommended a government study of popular theatre around Europe and especially in Berlin. In response, the Minister of Education, Art, and Religion Georges Leygues appointed Adrien Bernheim—whose initiatives will also be discussed—to travel to Berlin for this purpose. Yet the Minister's concern to maintain government control over a project for which the *Revue's* writers had more radical intentions curtailed further collaboration between the two. Once again, despite good intentions and considerable willingness for cooperation between individuals, groups, and government administration, it remained difficult to translate desires for popular theatre into more practical realities.

3 WIDER INTEREST AND ENTERPRISES

These debates, however halting and circuitous in retrospect, were followed with interest, curiosity—and, of course, a certain degree of frustration—by journalists, theatre directors, playwrights, and the wider artistic and literary community. Octave Mirbeau, the well-known anarchist playwright and journalist, composed a remarkably apt satire on the process for an article in *Le Journal* on 28 January 1900 in which he imagined the trajectory of a proponent of popular theatre. First, this enthusiast would encounter directors such as M. Lemmonier of the Théâtre de la République, who would insist that they had already created popular theatre by making their performances more accessible: 'but then, the people did not come ... the people are foolish!' Next, he would take his project to the Ministry and meet with a rapturous response:

A popular theatre? But I think of nothing else [...] Ah, if only I were the minister, the humble minister who helped bring to fruition this grandiose project! What an honour! And above all, what satisfaction! To love the people! To serve the people ... instruct the people—only, of course, insofar as the state demands that the people be instructed—to give to the people, the beloved people, access to beauty ... authorized by regulations and traditions ... approved by our masters the secular bishops! What a beautiful defence of the Republic!

This minister might then direct the enthusiast towards Adrien Bernheim, who would send him on with equal enthusiasm ('this new theatre must be new, immense, and modern! Nothing can be too modern for the people, nothing too immense ...') to the Municipal Council. Surely they would be only too happy to grant one of the best locations in Paris ('I can guarantee this in advance! The Council can refuse you nothing... can refuse nothing to the people...'). Finally, the Municipal council would respond, with well-tempered enthusiasm:

Popular theatre? We've been thinking about it for thirty years. It is the dearest of our wishes! Do we share your vision? Can you even doubt it? You see, the people... the education of the people, the proletariat, the employees etc. etc. ... The only problem is, we have no location to offer you; we cannot offer you anything at all.

And the only practical consequence of such a lengthy and tortuous trajectory might be a government decision to send an elderly actor on a recital tour of the more 'popular' suburbs of the capital, such as Batignolles, Belleville, or Montmartre.⁵⁷

Mirbeau juxtaposed these governmental (and municipal) hesitations against the more dynamic initiatives of other groups of popular theatre enthusiasts. He himself was very closely linked to the Paris-based *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, whose sometime director Eugène Morel, also an author and playwright,⁵⁸ submitted the winning proposal for popular theatre to the review's competition of 1899. By the 1890s, the *Revue* was contributing to discussion of popular theatre in theory and practice, providing an important focus for a debate intensified by the profound disagreement between its editors over the relationship between popular theatre and state funding.⁵⁹ The *Revue* published articles, for example, by organizers of popular theatre in the provinces such as

Maurice Pottecher, Pierre Corneille Saint-Marc, and Charles Le Goffic (whose initiatives will be discussed in Chap. 3), and raised the possibility of organizing an international conference on popular theatre within the International Exhibition of 1900. It nourished a national interest in successful popular theatre initiatives in the provinces, while also revealing that these enterprises were both separate from and yet often partly funded by the state.

Eugène Morel's winning project—published in the *Revue* in December 1900—concluded as a letter to the Minister of Education and Art, even though his own hope had been for popular theatre to be sustained through public subscription rather than government subsidy. Subscription, he contended, would involve the people materially in the creation of their theatre, and equally encourage their perception of theatre as a weekly commitment rather than an impossible luxury. Yet the state was a nonetheless invaluable patron. With official support, and the publicity that would be assured by the education system, news of the project would be disseminated throughout the country, with potentially transformative consequences. 'We would like to cover France with theatres', he insisted. 'We dream of there being millions of theatres for the millions of French people, theatres as beautiful as those built for several thousand in ancient Greece.'⁶⁰ As for other, practical details—authors, actors, and repertoire—he remained, for the time being, vague.

While the collaboration between the *Revue d'Art Dramatique* and the Ministry led only to Bernheim's study of German popular theatre rather than to state sponsorship of a French counterpart, the *Revue* itself did support the creation of some short-lived Parisian initiatives in working-class localities. Two of these were the Théâtre Populaire de Belleville and the Théâtre du Peuple in the district of Les Batignolles: two ventures of similar conception but differing fortunes.

The creation of Émile Berny's Théâtre Populaire de Belleville in 1903 was supported not only by Eugène Morel, who delivered the opening address,⁶¹ but also by the 'committee of patronage of popular theatre' to which he belonged, and which also included the senator Élisée Deandréis and the deputy Maurice Couyba, together with authors, playwrights, and directors such as Victorien Sardou, Romain Rolland, Octave Mirbeau, André Antoine, and Maurice Pottecher. The impetus behind its foundation was a rejection of the idea of a central popular theatre, and a determination to create a new theatre in a strongly working-class area of

the capital with a repertoire of ‘historical, philosophical, moral, or social works that make one think’.⁶² Plays performed in 1903–1904 ranged from one-act comedies by Octave Mirbeau and Georges Courteline—whose brilliant satires of French bureaucracy were highly popular and much performed—to contemporary French and European drama by Romain Rolland, Émile Zola, Victorien Sardou, Eugène Brieux, Guy de Maupassant, Gerhart Hauptmann, and Henrik Ibsen, some of which had already been performed in German popular theatres. There were also a number of new plays that seem to have been specially commissioned, and the second season of 1904–1905 broadened the repertoire to include five comic operas, among them Rossini’s *Barber of Seville*. In the first season alone, 307 performances were given of 35 different productions, attended by a total of 134,500 spectators. Certainly the moderate prices made this potentially accessible to a genuinely popular audience: seats ranged from 25 centimes to one and a half francs,⁶³ with the lowest priced costing the same as attendance at a political meeting of the time. Romain Rolland wrote enthusiastically of the raw intelligence and lively involvement of the working-class spectators, who offered the potential, ‘with a few years’ experience of good theatre’, to become ‘an ideal public, witty and impassioned.’⁶⁴

The creation of Henri Beaulieu’s Théâtre du Peuple at the Théâtre Moncey—likewise supported by writers from the *Revue d’Art Dramatique* such as Morel—was shaped by similar aspirations. The theatre was situated in a working-class district in the eighteenth *arrondissement* of the capital, and Beaulieu himself, a former actor at the Théâtre Antoine, was keen and ambitious. Not only was he prepared to offer seats priced from 50 centimes to two francs, but he also promised to share his profits with the actors, and envisaged preparing exhibitions and touring productions. Like the Théâtre de Belleville, the Théâtre du Peuple offered a wide-ranging programme, including contemporary social dramas such as Hauptmann’s *Weavers* together with Romain Rolland’s *Danton* and Mirbeau’s *Les Mauvais Bergers*, as well as Courteline’s popular farces. Yet despite the parallels in programme and pricing to the Théâtre de Belleville, and what seemed to be an auspicious location, the Théâtre du Peuple soon foundered, meeting with hostility not only from the local bourgeoisie but also from the more working-class population of the area. By 1905 it had already reverted to its original programme of vaudeville and melodrama.⁶⁵ Rolland suggested an explanation:

The bourgeoisie would only come to a popular theatre if they had specially reserved seats. Those who ventured there saw the advertised prices and said, 'It must be terrible if the prices are so low!'

But the worst enemies were the people themselves. They didn't want to be 'the people'. They said to M. Beaulieu, 'People yourself! We're just as bourgeois as you are...' To attract the people, the theatre should surely have been called *The Bourgeois Theatre*.⁶⁶

4 GRANDIOSE PROJECTS (1900–1920)

Considering the development of popular theatre by the state in the first thirty years of the Third Republic, one could say that little had been produced but the very best of intentions. Mirbeau's satire nicely captured the flowery rhetoric and thinly veiled cynicism that so often attended the idea of the 'people'—worthy, sovereign, and yet somehow incapable of discerning or acting in their own best interests. It also explains the apparently paradoxical stalemate by hinting at the clash between genuine enthusiasm and an equally genuine reticence to commit to locations and funding for the realization of this republican ideal. Despite the many municipal, ministerial, and parliamentary discussions; despite the drawing up of careful proposals and detailed plans, the major popular theatre initiatives realized in the first half of the Third Republic were either in the provinces (often with state funding but with a rather ambivalent relationship to the state itself, as Chap. 3 will suggest), or on a smaller scale in Paris, without state subsidy.

It was the second half of the Third Republic that produced more concrete results, beginning with the government surveys and commissions of the earliest years of the twentieth century, and culminating in the establishment of the Théâtre National Populaire in 1920. The early surveys and commissions testify to continuing concerns to seek out and instruct the working people, to democratize elite culture, and equally to develop a specifically French form of popular theatre that would continue the classical tradition while diverging from a contemporary German model. The realization of these designs in the postwar Théâtre National Populaire demonstrates continuity not only in the ideological conception of popular theatre but also in the complex relationship between the regime and its sometimes elusive citizens.

In January 1900, Adrien Bernheim submitted his substantial report on popular theatre in contemporary Europe to the Ministry. In it, he concluded that despite successful initiatives in Germany, Austria, and Belgium, the advantage still remained with the French, and he cited as evidence the development of popular theatre in the provinces. His own recipe for (national) popular theatre was the subsidized performance of classic works through cooperation with state-funded theatres such as the Opéra, Opéra-Comique, Comédie Française, and the Odéon. These theatres could supply the lead roles, he suggested, while the popular theatre in question would maintain its own orchestra and supply the remainder of the cast.⁶⁷

Though the Minister rejected Bernheim's specific proposals on financial grounds,⁶⁸ the Ministry itself continued to prioritize both the study and the support of popular theatre—with a noticeable peak in activity in 1905. This year, which witnessed the separation of Church and state,⁶⁹ also saw a heightened government interest in creating rival spaces for assembly, education, and citizenship. Notably, it was at this point that Étienne Dujardin-Beaumetz, himself an artist who had newly become Under-Secretary of State for Art,⁷⁰ created two new committees on popular theatre. The first examined proposals for the creation of popular theatres in Paris, while the second studied popular performances in Paris and the provinces.

Proposals submitted to the government commission of 1905 were rich in idealism and ambition in their solutions to the 'problem' of popular theatre. Catulle Mendès, for example, took this opportunity to reiterate his plans for a peripatetic theatre devoted to moral uplift.⁷¹ His initial survey of the café-concert denounced these debased forms of entertainment, against which his touring theatre was intended to provide a refreshing contrast. Indeed, his fervent condemnation of the café-concert coexisted with an equally fervent faith in the power of beauty to strike 'the very sensitive, impressionable soul of the crowd'⁷²:

More certainly, more purely, more luminously than when listening to the emotive words of a speaker or the quiet, patient voices of books, the people will develop and flourish in the theatre; they will enter into communication with a higher world to which they have the right of entry.⁷³

The vision of such beauty would inculcate a desire for beauty; a desire for beauty would lead the masses to search for her constant companionship; and through beauty, he said, democracy would be enhanced, and 'the masses would learn to act nobly'. Mendès was not blind to the fact that such an outcome would not be possible without a wholesale transformation of popular habits, to which end he proposed a theatre that could be rapidly assembled either in the working-class suburbs of Paris or in the provinces. With tickets priced from 50 centimes to one and a half francs, a repertoire of established and contemporary works,⁷⁴ and actors drawn from talented first-year students at the Conservatoire (who would, moreover, participate in the cooperative owning and managing the theatre), this venture would be a focus for experimental performance and organization.⁷⁵

For Mendès, the peripatetic nature of popular theatre addressed the related problems of selecting a location and securing an audience sufficiently numerous and committed to be able to support the theatre financially. But others sought alternative solutions. The government commission also received plans from the architects Ernest Herscher and M. Feine for an amphitheatre intended for the Jardin des Tuileries, where its concave construction below ground level would ensure that the view from the Louvre to the Arc de Triomphe remained uninterrupted. This proposal was much commended to the government by the republican composer Alfred Bruneau, who liked to imagine 'colossal music' being performed there for a vast audience. Such an amphitheatre would recall 'the incomparable solemnity of the performances of ancient Greece', he argued, while the location (being the site of the Tuileries Palace that had been destroyed during the Commune of 1871) would epitomize the Republic's desire to emphasize popular sovereignty, while simultaneously providing for the people the quality of entertainment previously enjoyed by kings and emperors.⁷⁶

Choosing an amphitheatre as the most apt form for the new (national) popular theatre expressed an obvious desire to reconnect with Greco-Roman tradition. But it also revealed a determination to articulate a French relationship to the classical past and its legacy superior to that of other European countries, notably Germany. Smarting from the humiliation of defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and with anti-German sentiment a powerful mobilizing force, the French were acutely susceptible to this desire for national pre-eminence, as some of the 1905 proposals for popular theatre suggest.

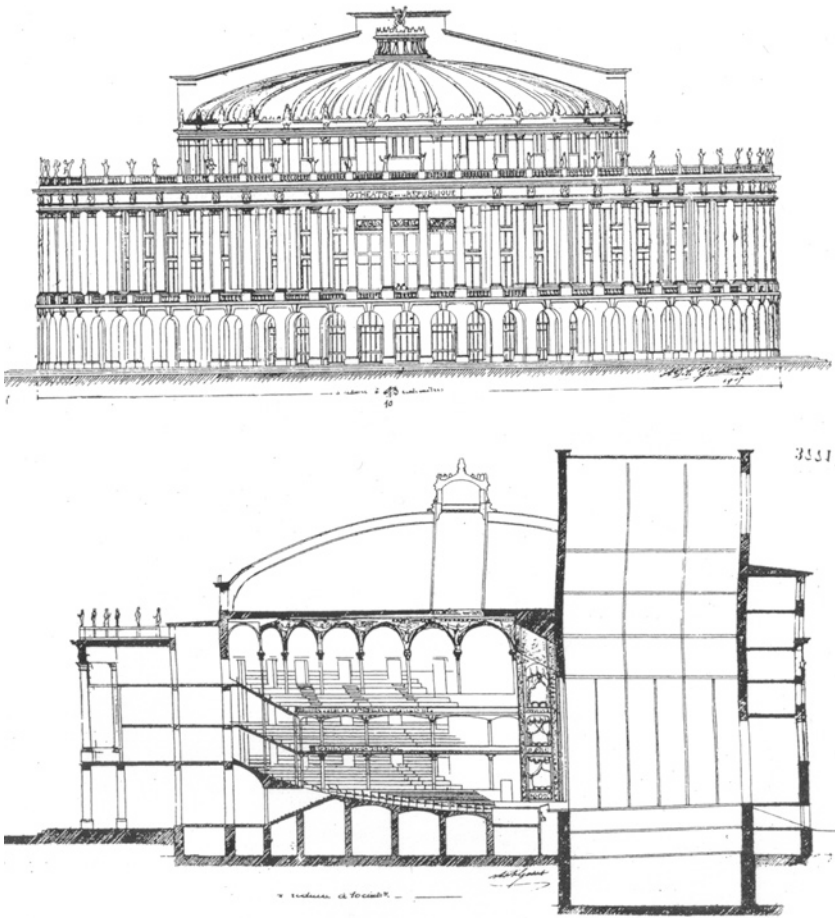


Fig. 1 Alphonse Gosset's design for Le Théâtre de la République, 1905 (Archives Nationales de France, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, AN F21 4688. Photograph courtesy of the Atelier Photographique des Archives Nationales)

Concern for a neo-classicism that would privilege France over Germany clearly inspired the project submitted by architect Alphonse Gosset, famous for his design of the theatre at Reims as well as for numerous books on the architecture of churches and theatres (see Fig. 1). Gosset's project for the 'Théâtre de la République' was intended

to recreate the popular theatre of Antiquity with the industrial techniques of the early twentieth century, so transforming popular theatres into temples of the modern world. Holding an elevated view of classical drama—no doubt he would have found the cross-dressing comedy of Aristophanes' *The Poet and the Women* better suited to the café-concert—Gosset conceived of the theatre as a focus for assembling a visible, united community in common respect for religion, the city, and the fatherland.⁷⁷ With a particular concern to rival those nations continuing 'a religious observance of their popular traditions',⁷⁸ he offered a carefully conceived contrast between the 'German auditorium' (of Bayreuth) and the 'French auditorium' of the new republican theatre. The principal difference between the two lay in the seating, triangular in format in Bayreuth, but semi-circular—as in the Chamber of Deputies—in the proposed French version. The theatre at Bayreuth had been designed not only to permit an adequate view of the stage for every spectator, but also to minimize the awareness that the spectators would have of one another. Gosset's 'Salle Française' was conceived with the opposite intention: to maximize the number of spectators while also promoting their sociability.

The form of a semi-circular amphitheatre has the advantage of grouping the spectators, bringing them close together, allowing them to see one another, to be aware of each other and thus to share in the same emotion and experience the same thrill. This is, in its sociability, *a French form of design*, for the French man also sees the theatre as a place of assembly in which the attention he devotes to the stage is inseparable from that devoted to the auditorium.⁷⁹

Both the form of the theatre and also its interior decoration were thus to privilege the 'sovereign people',⁸⁰ while the modern concern for hygienic and orderly public spaces would be satisfied by the spacious corridors, metal seating, and a plentiful circulation of air throughout the building.

The projects submitted for government consideration in 1905 encapsulate both the ideals and failings of popular theatre as a state-led enterprise. Rhetorically, they shared in government enthusiasm for popular theatre as a means of reinforcing civic engagement and republican devotion, and in the predilection for grand, hygienic, state-controlled spaces as an alternative to decadent, immoral, and less easily patrolled cafés-concerts. The new popular theatre or theatres would improve the working classes both morally and physically (some popular theatre projects even

suggested serving lemonade in the refreshment rooms, while the ‘purity’ of the refreshments was likewise an explicit government concern),⁸¹ while at the same time transforming them into active citizens. For these reasons, it was important that these theatres should be both materially and practically accessible to the working people, with cheap tickets and either a central Parisian location or a peripatetic character. There was much genuine idealism here, as well as a striking combination of rhetorical reverence for the sovereign people with an underlying cynicism about their fallible moral character and seemingly unshakeable preference for liquor over literature.

Echoing Mirbeau’s satirical predictions, however, the pre-war government commission on popular theatre achieved more in administrative efforts than in practical results. There was, as ever, no lack of enthusiasm. When on 15 February 1906 Étienne Dujardin-Beaumetz reported to the Chamber of Deputies on the work of the two committees, the result was general approval and a resolution that a law be voted on the organization of popular theatre in Paris and the provinces. In June 1906, three consultative commissions were established to continue the project: administrative, architectural, and financial. And in November the government even suggested that the most ‘social and patriotic’ means of financing popular theatre would be through the national lottery.⁸²

Yet the closest the government came in this period to realizing a Parisian popular theatre bringing classics to the masses was its subsidy of Adrien Bernheim’s *Œuvre Française et Populaire de Trente Ans de Théâtre*. Primarily a charity intended to amass funds for those who had devoted at least thirty years of their lives to the theatre, and who risked financial insecurity in retirement, the *Œuvre* organized classical performances in a variety of theatres, mainly in the Parisian suburbs, with actors from state-subsidized theatres. Bernheim himself died in 1914, but the charity continued to organize performances throughout the First World War, expanding its repertoire from classical drama to more modern pieces. In April 1916, for example, the *Œuvre* offered a mixed programme to celebrate ‘the glorious line of French genius’,⁸³ while also campaigning against the government closure of theatres in wartime, arguing that their own theatre fostered national solidarity, not frivolity.⁸⁴

The *Œuvre de Trente Ans* was highly acclaimed by the Republic, and certainly encapsulated many of the aspirations of popular theatre enthusiasts. It drew on the resources of state-subsidized theatres; it presented classics for a popular audience at accessible prices; and it

sought its audience in the Parisian suburbs rather than requiring a journey to a more central location after a long day's work.⁸⁵ The Société de l'Encouragement au Bien awarded it a gold medal; the state officially recognized it as being of public utility; and the Académie Française accorded its founder the Prix Monthyon.⁸⁶ Yet its detractors either refused to describe it as popular theatre at all, or acknowledged its charitable value while suggesting that the 'utopia' of popular theatre as communion and citizenship remained to be realized. They were disappointed, for example, that the usual gradations of seating according to price were undemocratically maintained and observed that the cheaper seats were often empty.⁸⁷ Even Jean Frollo, a theatre critic for *Le Petit Parisien* whose general approval of the project Bernheim was at pains to cite, described the Œuvre in 1903 as only 'the well-meaning promise of national popular theatre, which after thirty-three years of the Republic still remains to be founded.'⁸⁸

5 THE PEOPLE AND THE STAGE, 1920–1936

The First World War brought an abrupt end to many—although not all—popular theatre initiatives. But it also provided an impetus for the Third Republic's most successful popular theatre project, which would ironically diminish in importance just as the idea and reality of the people on stage attained particular prominence.

National sacrifice, victory, and regeneration offered a potent context in which to rethink the relationship between culture and the people, as the Radical Socialist deputy and former actor Pierre Rameil argued in parliament on 24 October 1918.⁸⁹ Given the wartime 'decimation' of the French, he urged the Chamber of Deputies to consider a reform of education—not only physical but also civic and aesthetic. 'We must', he asserted, 'create popular theatres in our cities, places where workers can receive recompense for their labours: we must provide some Sunday respite for these men who, for the last four years, have never been able to rest on the seventh day!'⁹⁰ In so doing, the French could build on the foundations already laid in the debates and initiatives of the pre-war period—a time when, as a young law student in Paris, Rameil himself had served as secretary to an amateur theatre group known as the Théâtre des Poètes.⁹¹ 'It is unimaginable', he concluded, 'that a democratic state should not have in its cities a theatre—or, to be more precise, a common house—where art, our common inheritance, should be available to all.'⁹²

The result of what became known as the ‘Rameil project’ was the designation in 1920 of the Palais du Trocadéro as the new Théâtre National Populaire, with an annual government subsidy of 100,000 francs. A vast building in exotic style that had been constructed for the International Exhibition of 1878, the Palais du Trocadéro occupied a commanding position on the summit of the hill opposite the Eiffel tower and could hold an audience of approximately 5000. Close to the grand boulevards of elite, western Paris, it was however far removed from the capital’s more popular quarters, and both heating and acoustics left much to be desired. Nonetheless, Rameil was enthusiastic about its potential as the Théâtre National Populaire, with an official status that would grant access to actors and repertoire from other state-subsidized theatres. It could also, he anticipated, host other cultural events such as concerts and educational films.⁹³ Rameil’s proposals were warmly welcomed, drawing much of the now habitual enthusiasm for ‘the popular theatre that has been demanded for more than thirty years’, a theatre ‘issuing from the spirit of the Revolution, [which] will be popular, didactic, recreational, and national.’⁹⁴

The experience of war influenced not only Rameil’s proposals for the new theatre but also the approach of its first director, Firmin Gémier (1869–1933). Gémier was a well-established figure in the theatrical world, renowned as both actor and director, and had a particular interest in popular theatre. In the 1890s he had played in Émile Veyrin’s *Pâque socialiste* (to be discussed in Chap. 5), as well as assuming the leading role in Alfred Jarry’s controversial *Ubu Roi*.⁹⁵ Shortly before the First World War he had experimented with the Théâtre National Ambulant, a peripatetic popular theatre based on the ideas of Catulle Mendès,⁹⁶ which toured France in 1911.⁹⁷ During the war itself, Gémier had pursued similar preoccupations through his work with the Théâtre des Armées, in which he faced the challenge of creating a repertoire suitable for soldiers from extremely varied social, political, and regional backgrounds. He later claimed to have found ‘only two authors capable of uniting in fraternal joy all the sons of France: Molière and Courteline.’⁹⁸

The Théâtre National Populaire was, moreover, formally inaugurated on 11 November 1920, a day of national festivity during which a lavish programme of Parisian celebrations associated military victory in the First World War with the fiftieth anniversary of the Third Republic. Exactly two years after the Armistice, the official and

unofficial commemorations of loss and victory that had marked the intervening period were brought to a symbolic conclusion on this day with the solemn interment of an unknown soldier from Verdun under the Parisian Arc de Triomphe. This was an example of a new type of ‘national funeral’ also being held elsewhere in Europe (an unknown soldier was buried in Westminster Abbey in London on the same day; similar symbolic burials took place in other capitals such as Rome, Lisbon, and Brussels in 1921).⁹⁹ Yet the Parisian festivities were also—especially for some—strikingly political. The Arc de Triomphe had been constructed to commemorate the revolutionary armies of the 1790s. To inter the unknown soldier in its shadow implicitly associated his sacrifice with the earlier defence of the Republic by those whom Georges Leygues, president of the Chamber of Deputies, described in a bitterly divisive parliamentary debate on 8 November as ‘the crowd of unknown heroes, sons of the Revolution...’¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, 11 November 1920 also witnessed the solemn transferral to the Pantheon of the heart of Léon Gambetta, republican patriot of 1870, thus associating this day of national festivity with a vision of republicanism rather than with a more widely shared experience of mourning and triumph. Despite efforts at reconciliation (the archbishop of Paris, for instance, was called upon to bless the soldier’s coffin before his burial), this moment of national commemoration proved divisive as well as unifying, with Catholics complaining of its overly secular character, and socialists of its excessive militarization.¹⁰¹

Held on a day of intense national importance, Gémier’s inaugural festival for the TNP reflected a very particular association between the people, the Republic, and military prowess. Certainly, it was attuned to the shared emotion of wartime commemoration—what Annette Becker has described as ‘a fervour born of war’¹⁰²—but it also projected its own image of ordinary French people following in the footsteps of their revolutionary ancestors. It was, as Gémier described it:

A festival in which the people play the principal part on a day when, as well as celebrating their heroes, they also celebrate themselves. Perhaps we will find in this spectacle, improvised at short notice and in spite of the present difficulties, an example of a festival that is at once collective, regional, and national: a festival of democracy; a festival of the future.¹⁰³

As a celebration of the Republic and its people, especially the heroes of the First World War, the festival was both militant and exultant in character. Presented in three parts—in tribute to the three republics—the performance took the form of a festival of republican song, and included 300 singers from choirs in both central and suburban Paris, such as La Lyre de Belleville and Le Choral Mixte de Saint-Mandé. The front cover of the programme featured a photograph of *La Marseillaise*: the haut-relief sculpture created for the Arc de Triomphe by François Rude in which a winged figure of Liberty urges the volunteers on to revolutionary war and victory in 1792. This was an image that epitomized the TNP's inaugural production: a tribute to a Republic defied, repressed, but ultimately triumphant.¹⁰⁴

The First Republic was commemorated as a time of popular victory and enlightenment. A hymn of triumph by the revolutionary army of 1794 opened the performance, while subsequent scenes moved back in time to suggest the importance of popular education, including the learning of *La Marseillaise* by a 'woman of the people' in the newly formed Paris Conservatoire. Civic and moral education were further highlighted by the performance of songs from the 'Festival of married couples' in 1798 and the 'Festival of old age' in 1799, and the first part concluded with renewed focus on popular military might: a *Chant martial* from 1796, and a *Chant de retour* from 1797.

The commemoration of the Second and Third Republics pursued the theme of popular strength. Men and women in bourgeois and working-class attire stood together to represent the Revolution of 1830; music by Béranger and Berlioz evoked the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848; and the people themselves were represented as the new conquerors, following in the footsteps of Napoleon. In striking contrast to the physical strength and visible unity of the people on stage, the Bourbon and Orleanist monarchs appeared only in two dimensions through the caricatures of Honoré Daumier. The loss of Alsace-Lorraine and the birth of the Third Republic were commemorated with a military tableau, with soldiers standing alongside Alsatians for a rendition of Gounod's *Gallia*: a powerful musical lament over the plight of the *patrie* that concludes with a plea for Jerusalem to return to her God. In a deliberate parallel, a similar tableau of soldiers and Alsatians then accompanied the musical celebration of victory in 1918, which had led to the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France. The finale was a performance of Augusta Holmès's

L'Apothéose de l'Ode triomphale,¹⁰⁵ with singers dressed as soldiers from 1793, 1870, and 1918.

The character and focus of this festival encapsulated Gémier's vision for popular theatre. First, it was an ambitious venture that made the people physically present on stage as well as in the audience by featuring amateur choirs from across Paris: very different from state-subsidized productions by professional actors for popular spectators. Second, it was a spectacle that moved beyond drama into festival, drawing on the revolutionary and republican symbolism that Gémier himself considered such a vital source of national unity. He even appealed directly to the audience through the distribution of fliers entitled *Au public!* to demand their support: 'The Théâtre National Populaire will be made by the people,' it insisted. 'It will exist only through you. Nothing is durable without the people.'¹⁰⁶ Lastly, the festival drew deliberately on existing and continuing forms of popular culture. Not only was there—in Gémier's eyes—a dearth of suitable popular drama, but popular songs from the eighteenth century onwards were numerous and in many cases still familiar to the French in both official and partisan contexts.¹⁰⁷

The lavish inauguration of the Théâtre National Populaire offered a promising beginning. Not only had Gémier and his associates apparently achieved more in a few months than the governmental debates of the preceding fifty years, but the première had also been widely acclaimed. Indeed, Gémier prided himself that despite a potentially divisive celebration of revolutions and republics, he had received words of encouragement even from some of the 'most notorious reactionaries', who had been sufficiently impressed by the production on 11 November to clamour for more.¹⁰⁸ Inspired by this success, Gémier envisaged that the Trocadéro might be placed at the service of groups or municipalities seeking a location for 'popular festivals'—and by the end of the month he had already received a number of such applications. His role, as he saw it, would be to manage and coordinate these initiatives, provided that the impetus came from the popular groups or associations in question. An executive committee including playwrights such as Romain Rolland and Saint-Georges de Bouhélier would offer advice and assistance,¹⁰⁹ while the TNP's specifications would determine the range of performances and their associated ticket prices. Indeed, article six stipulated a repertoire both classical and modern, with ballets, concerts, and films as well as plays and operas, while article seven required the director

to organize at least 100 performances a year at ‘popular’ rates, with half or more taking place in the Palais du Trocadéro.¹¹⁰

In the early years of the venture, many of Gémier’s aspirations were indeed fulfilled. A detailed report compiled for the Ministry in preparation for the budget of 1923 gives an illuminating insight not only into the range of works performed but also into their relative success at attracting audiences and financial support. In 1922, the requisite one hundred performances were given at the Trocadéro and at other venues. More than a third of the forty-four works performed were Operas, with *Tosca* (on 11 November) the most popular. Of the evening performances of dramatic works, plays by Victor Hugo (*Ruy Blas* and *Hernani*) and Corneille (*Le Cid*) attracted the largest audiences; at the Thursday ‘classical matinées’, Molière’s *Le Malade Imaginaire* proved the greatest draw—not only for spectators paying the full ticket prices, but also for teachers and pupils whose tickets were subsidized.¹¹¹ Ticket prices remained resolutely low, making it possible to attend the production of an Opera from one of the other state-subsidized theatres at only a fraction of the cost. With the more popular performances and a nearly full house, such prices allowed the Theatre to make a narrow profit margin, although this was not the case with productions that were less well attended or in suburban venues.

Gémier has been much praised by subsequent historians, both for his achievements with the TNP and equally for his vision—never fully attained—of its future development. ‘Gémier is great just as Vilar is great’, asserts Claude Mossé, while suggesting a linear path towards the final success of Vilar’s post-war TNP.¹¹² Colette Godard has been similarly enthusiastic, with Pascal Ory offering a rarer, more sceptical voice by styling the TNP as a flawed initiative, if also a valuable point of reference.¹¹³ Yet the ‘flawed’ character of Gémier’s TNP deserves closer scrutiny, for it is this that reveals the rival assumptions and practical problems to which state popular theatre continued to give rise.

In the later 1920s and 1930s, Gémier’s initiative prompted heated controversy over its purpose, usefulness, and success. Gémier himself, increasingly ailing, abandoned his direction of the Théâtre de l’Odéon to Paul Abram in 1930, and began to share the organization of the TNP with Albert Fourtier, a former editor of the *Revue d’Art Dramatique*. Following the death of Gémier on 26 November 1933, Fourtier assumed sole direction of the TNP, while confronting some of the more strident criticisms of its character. Despite Gémier’s grandiose

visions of popular festivities, educational films, and new drama, the TNP had become predominantly (and perhaps inevitably) associated with a 'democratization' of existing productions: a worthy but in many ways dissimilar project. Certainly there were endeavours to use the Trocadéro for popular festivities, but the ventures to which Gémier had been sympathetic did not always meet with the same welcome from the Ministry or Prefect of Police. One such case was Albert Doyen's *Fêtes du Peuple* (discussed in Chap. 6), which according to the Prefect of Police should not be held at the TNP, given that the association in question was of partisan and trade unionist composition.¹¹⁴ More long-running debates, however, concerned the nature of the repertoire and audience: whether the TNP was merely a poor relation to the grander state-subsidized theatres,¹¹⁵ and whether its moderately priced tickets to these same productions were attracting a working-class audience, or simply a clientele of committed bourgeois theatre-goers eager for a bargain.¹¹⁶ (Comparable criticisms were made of the German *Volksbühne*).¹¹⁷

Such debates highlighted conflicting opinions over whether popular theatre should be aimed primarily at the people as workers or the people as nation. In 1935, this particular clash resounded loudly between Gabriel Boissy, editor of the well-known dramatic review *Comœdia*, and Alfred Fourtier, director of the TNP. Boissy agreed with Gémier's original intention that the TNP should be for the people as a collective body, not as a single social class. Yet the audiences at TNP performances were becoming more class-based, and petty bourgeois rather than working-class at that.¹¹⁸ Alfred Fourtier was vehement in his response, which *Comœdia* published as an open letter. His audiences were, he insisted, 'worthy, simple, and poor folk' who often wrote to him to express their sense of comfort and ease in this popular venue, so different from the society theatres elsewhere in the capital. Of course, he admitted, there were those who could afford to see the productions elsewhere and were merely profiting from the cheap tickets: this was only to be expected. But the audience was nonetheless a truly mixed one. Nor was there any cause to suggest that the Trocadéro was poorly placed to attract the workers, given the excellent transport connections in contemporary Paris. Indeed, he could prove that audience members came not only from the twenty *arrondissements* of the capital but also from the suburbs.¹¹⁹

This debate took place a mere few months before Alfred Fourtier was obliged to leave the Trocadéro with his Théâtre National Populaire in search of temporary quarters, while the old Palais was demolished and

the new buildings prepared for the International Exhibition of 1937.¹²⁰ Although the Palais du Trocadéro had been the symbol and main focus of the TNP, performances had from the beginning also taken place elsewhere, and so Fourtier's theatre became of necessity peripatetic, following Gémier's earlier example. Continuing with a similar programme of mainly well-established repertoire, the TNP was lodged temporarily in and around Paris—in the Théâtre Antoine, for example, as well as in suburbs such as Asnières and Saint-Denis. It also travelled further afield to Versailles, Orléans, Strasbourg, and Verdun.¹²¹

The new buildings at the Trocadéro were intended to house a theatre in a luxurious, modern hall of impressive dimensions¹²²—but as a national popular theatre it was not until the 1950s that the Trocadéro assumed a position of greater stability. On 24 February 1939, the Théâtre de Chaillot was officially inaugurated at the site in the presence of the President of the Republic Albert Lebrun, together with the Minister of Education Jean Zay. And on 20 November, Paul Abram, Gémier's former associate, was nominated director of the theatre, with the brief of organizing and managing popular spectacles. But Abram—who was Jewish—was forced to leave his appointment during the war, and replaced by Pierre Aldebert, a director whose open-air staging of *Le Vray Mistère de la Passion* outside Notre-Dame in June 1935 had sparked much interest on both left and right.¹²³ Aldebert reopened the theatre with Alphonse Daudet's *L'Arlésienne* on 28 September 1941, but the building was commissioned for diverse uses during the Occupation, being requisitioned by the Germans for their spectacles, used for a retrospective homage to Gémier during the Liberation, and occupied by the United Nations from 1948. Although Aldebert remained director until 1951, his time in office is usually passed over rather swiftly in studies of popular theatre in the post-war period. There the real focus is on Jean Vilar, who assumed direction of the TNP in 1951 and began an extensive programme of cultural decentralization.

Although the destiny of Gémier's Théâtre National Populaire was becoming increasingly uncertain in the 1930s, this was nevertheless a time at which the relationship between politics, theatre, and the people was becoming ever more spectacular. Across Europe, governmental instability and the deepening crisis of the Depression brought crowds into the streets in strikes, riots, parades, and hunger marches, as well as in more established patterns of demonstration and commemoration, for which various political groups and parties in France had their own clearly defined

trajectories in major cities.¹²⁴ Increasing doubts—especially among more extreme groups on left and right—about the efficiency and even legitimacy of Parliament as a true representative of the people prompted an often dramatic descent of politics into the streets. Here, rival groups battled out their own claims to articulate the popular will through their occupation of key symbolic sites, as well as through their subsequent depiction of their own demonstrations as drawing on substantial popular support and approval. Of course, this was merely a new chapter in the long history of the crowd in French politics, and one that consciously evoked historical precedents in festivals and revolutions from the eighteenth century onwards. But it was an important one, and the debate over how and by whom the people were represented was equally of much wider European significance, as monarchies and Empires that had claimed legitimacy from tradition were tumultuously replaced by parties and leaders proclaiming their incarnation of the popular will. To make such claims convincing required bringing these people onto the public stage both physically and symbolically, as the spectacular politics of Soviet Russia, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany demonstrate all too clearly. Indeed, such politics—as Günter Berghaus has argued with particular attention to fascism—‘employed a performative language that had a captivating force unequalled by traditional means of propaganda.’¹²⁵

Could (and should) the French do likewise? This was a question much in the minds of political leaders, militants, parties, and observers—and others. Theatre and film critics, whether or not they approved of the political ideologies of their European neighbours, were nonetheless struck by the innovative (and in their view, often exciting) fusion between politics and spectacle in the creation of new regimes. Some even longed explicitly for the French to emulate their European neighbours in the creation of new relationships between the people and their leaders.¹²⁶ ‘If France does not sense this renaissance,’ warned Gabriel Boissy, ‘then we will be overtaken, submerged by these new modes of being.’¹²⁷

It was ironic that the Palais du Trocadéro should be demolished at the very time of the French Popular Front, an anti-fascist coalition that had come to birth in the streets and would come to power as government in 1936–1937 and (more briefly) in 1938. Of all the governments of the Third Republic, the first Popular Front government of 1936–1937 was the most committed—not only in theory but also in practice—to developing and supporting popular culture, whether literacy, sport, theatre, or cinema.¹²⁸ As Pascal Ory has painstakingly emphasized

in his work on cultural policy, it was the Popular Front that pioneered the shifting emphasis from Art (Beaux-Arts) to culture and leisure.¹²⁹ With their coming to power under the Socialist premier (Président du Conseil) Léon Blum in June 1936, what was once the Ministry of Public Education and Art was subdivided. The Radical deputy Jean Zay became the Minister for Education, while one of Blum's two new ministerial portfolios was that of Undersecretary of State for the Organization of Sport and Leisure, attributed to the Socialist Léo Lagrange. The youthful dynamism of these two new officials has been much emphasized; and many pioneering initiatives—from the late night opening of the Louvre to travelling libraries and improved municipal sports facilities—owed much to their efforts.¹³⁰

For popular theatre, too, the first Popular Front government held great expectations, although the emphasis was more on cultural democratization than on grander projects for new drama in new spaces. Interviewed on the Popular Front's artistic programme in November 1936, Léo Lagrange responded that there was no official artistic doctrine, and that the new government was concerned principally to facilitate contact between art and the masses, not least through the development of the theatre. 'In my view,' he confided, 'popular theatre should be first and foremost a theatre where seats are accessible to all citizens because of their reasonable price [...] It is clear that one would have to begin by performing plays that are already well known and especially classical plays, but I would hope that in the future authors might be found who would write works specially for the people, responding to their needs and ideals.'¹³¹ In short, Lagrange was restating the aspirations of Gémier for the TNP—staging Molière for the masses—but without the latter's vision for a new kind of theatre that would transform the people into actors as well as spectators.

The closest the Popular Front government came to a more utopian form of popular theatre was in its subsidy of productions that deliberately verged on the festive: Romain Rolland's *Le Quatorze Juillet*, the collectively-composed *Liberté*, and Jean-Richard Bloch's *Naissance d'une cité*.¹³² Rolland's play, initially performed in 1902 and under Gémier's direction, represented the storming of the Bastille with a particular focus on the crowd as historical actors. Rolland's intentions for popular theatre at the turn of the century (discussed in more detail in Chap. 6) had been decidedly militant: he believed that popular theatre should act as a battering ram against the state, even proclaiming, 'let popular art arise from

the ruins of the past!’¹³³ It was therefore ironic that the play should, in its 1936 performance, be accorded a quasi-official status, even if the government in question were Socialist-led. Supported by a government loan, performed on 14 July itself and broadcast on *Radio-Paris*, the play was intended to celebrate the victory of the Popular Front as a movement and now government.

It was Jacques Chabannes who, at the request of the Education Minister Jean Zay for a ‘grand popular festival’ to celebrate the Popular Front’s electoral victory, had first suggested a revival of Rolland’s play. Zay approved, Chabannes travelled to Switzerland to secure the approval of Rolland himself, and the production was prepared not only with professional actors but also with the assistance of amateur working-class troupes, who joined rehearsals after their working day was done. In the crowd scenes, Chabannes deliberately followed the techniques of Gémier himself to achieve the most effective impression of movement, ‘diverse but natural, as harmonious as a ballet’, designating certain actors as ‘leaders’ who were to be followed in both their spoken lines and trajectories across the stage by five or six other actors.¹³⁴ Rolland’s original conception for the finale of the play, in which the revolutionary fervour and fraternity of the crowd on stage was meant to spill over into the audience—‘the people themselves becoming actors in the festival of the People’¹³⁵ also proved well suited to the context of summer 1936, when audience and actors joined in the singing of *La Marseillaise*, followed at the end of the première by *L’Internationale*. Indeed, on the very day of the première there also appeared in *Comœdia* an article by Rolland calling for a new ‘theatrical architecture based on vast spaces’, with particular attention to the fusion of actors and audiences.¹³⁶ Following the enthusiasm generated by the production, Chabannes’s friend Henri Lesieur renamed the Théâtre de la Renaissance as the Théâtre du Peuple and staged Rolland’s *Les Loups*, written as a reaction to the Dreyfus Affair.¹³⁷ He also offered a number of ‘free performances in solidarity’.¹³⁸ Yet this dependence on the mood of the moment for dramatic effect meant that the revivals of Rolland’s Théâtre de la Révolution retained a somewhat exceptional character, rather than blazing a trail for a more well-established form of state-sponsored theatre.¹³⁹

The difficulties of maintaining a harmonious relationship between political coalitions and cultural manifestations was amply demonstrated by the ‘fiasco’ of *Liberté*, commissioned by Léon Blum in October 1936 for performance at the International Exhibition the

following year (and intended as a socialist counterbalance to the production of *Le Quatorze Juillet*, deemed to have been monopolized by the Communists).¹⁴⁰ *Liberté*, collectively written and produced with the particular assistance of the Socialist Party's *Mai 36* group, traced the development of the Third Estate from the Middle Ages to the present day, encompassing its heroes and heroines as well as popular participation in the Revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848, and in the swearing of an oath of unity on 14 July 1935. Yet arguments over production details—even the colours of the set—revealed the growing rift between Socialists and Communists. The play was performed only a dozen times at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées at a time of growing dissatisfaction with the Popular Front as both movement and government: 'disorderly strikes on one side, and disgruntled businessmen on the other'.¹⁴¹

Naissance d'une Cité was the most innovative of these government-sponsored productions. Written by Jean-Richard Bloch, produced by Pierre Aldebert, and performed in the Vélodrome d'Hiver on 18 October 1937, it was a bold attempt to imagine a new kind of drama for the masses.¹⁴² Not only did it reject the confined stage and auditorium of the nineteenth-century theatre building by occupying a stadium originally designed for bicycle races, but it also sought a new form of collective drama or 'total spectacle', based on mass movement, a mass audience, and an ambitious use of technology. The plot, originally with a tragic conclusion but altered to suit the hopes of the Popular Front era, traced the journey of a group of workers from the mind-numbing monotony of the production line to the creation of a utopian, fraternal community on an island in the Atlantic Ocean. With 1000 actors and stagehands on stage, working together in an 'essential ballet',¹⁴³ the spectacle focused not so much on individual trajectories and dilemmas as on the common condition of the working masses in an industrialized society. Trapped within physically demanding jobs, threatened with unemployment by the Depression, and bombarded with propaganda through newspapers and other media, these were women and men made prey to claustrophobia, confusion, and despair. It was only through common action—a common desire to start life anew on a utopian island on which a new city could be built—that individual voices, relationships and fulfilment could prove possible. Bloch's ambitious mass spectacle, with a score by Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, and Roger Desormières, and sets by Fernand Léger, also sought to spill out from the stage to the

stadium, concluding with displays of gymnastics and with bicycle races around the audience.

Through its sponsorship of *Naissance d'une Cité*, the Popular Front government associated itself with a genuinely experimental type of mass theatre. Bloch himself conceived of the play as an impetus towards a new type of drama inspired by mass experience and designed for actors and audiences as bodies with collective rather than individual identities. The very use of a stadium made it challenging to focus on the words or gestures of an individual actor, who would be almost invisible and inaudible:

[Individual] speech is not possible for him. It would not be noticed. Emotion that is of an individual, psychological, or passionate kind must be avoided: it cannot be communicated to the crowd. With the protagonist reduced to the proportions of a pygmy, the mime of an individual comedian would be mostly incomprehensible.¹⁴⁴

Even so, and perhaps ironically, Bloch—like Gémier—also insisted on the important guiding role that the principal actors would play on stage in influencing the action and character of this apparently collective creation:

Actors and actresses, strategically placed among the crowd of extras, play an essential role there—that of group leaders, an intelligent and powerful framework. The homogeneity of this kind of mass spectacle owes everything to them.¹⁴⁵

Whether in fact a mass spectacle for a mass audience actually led to the effacement of individual identity is a more controversial question (and one at the heart of the ‘efficacy’ of popular theatre as a path to political utopia). Certainly, the inadequacy of the loudspeakers meant that both the text and music of *Naissance d'une cité* were often distorted. But the reception of the play also suggests that Bloch was utopian in his assumptions about collective reactions to collective drama, and that the line of emotional identification between individual members of the audience and individual characters on stage was less easily sundered. ‘Does anyone really believe that the people can be moved only by the sound of screaming sirens and sudden changes of lighting?’, complained the composer René Leibowitz on his return from the spectacle.¹⁴⁶ At least for these members of the audience, Jacques Rancière’s emphasis on primacy of the critical individual over the projected fiction of the mass would seem to

hold true¹⁴⁷—although how typical such sceptical spectators were, it is now impossible to know.

There were, however, more prosaic reasons why *Naissance d'une cité* would not be the next step to innovative state-sponsored popular theatre. By late 1937, the Popular Front government was already struggling to resolve severe political and economic problems, and lacked the resources to pursue its earlier cultural aspirations. Although a theatre was re-opened at the Trocadéro, the site of the most substantial state achievement, the promise of popular theatre to facilitate republican integration and citizenship remained both alluring and elusive.

6 CONCLUSIONS

There was never a single, homogenous state plan for popular theatre in the Third Republic. Projects for popular theatre offered vital spaces for dialogue in which rival ideas and rhetoric contrasted and collided. On one level, it would be artificial to draw too strong a dividing line between state employees and the playwrights, actors, journalists, and other men of letters (and it was principally men) who discussed popular theatre and created their own initiatives. Deputies could be former actors; government ministries were inspired by discussions in other domains such as the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*.

Nevertheless, there were influential and abiding convictions at state level about the potential of popular theatre in a republican regime. Central to these was the assumption that culture offered a vital means of political education and integration, which should be aimed at all citizens, within and beyond the electorate. Many of these proponents of popular theatre did not question the didactic power of art: show the audience something inspiring and noble, they believed, and the audience will surely be inspired and ennobled. In this they were often explicitly sharing the assumptions of their classical predecessors, nicely exemplified in the debate that Aristophanes stages between Euripides and Aeschylus in *The Frogs*, where they discuss what the poet's political role should and could be. Children have a schoolmaster, Aeschylus tells the touchy Euripides, while adults have a poet.¹⁴⁸ For Third Republican politicians, well versed in such texts through their classical education, the conviction that theatre could play a role in popular and civic education needed no further justification. Such beliefs have, moreover, continued to be espoused by subsequent republics, and are both exemplified and continued in a work such

as Pasler's *Composing the Citizen*. Music 'not only helped [the French] develop their taste and their critical judgement', she writes, 'teaching them the habits of citizenship and preparing them to make better choices in the voting booth, it also contributed to the consensus of public opinion.'¹⁴⁹

Exactly how culture could achieve political integration, and by what means, remained a theoretical and practical challenge. In terms of popular theatre, state officials aspired towards both cultural democratization and also—more idealistically—some form of civic communion. Cultural democratization meant initiating the masses into 'high' culture whose moral value was perceived to be self-evident, drawing them away from inferior entertainment and creating a shared intellectual capital among citizens. Popular theatre, as well as providing affordable access to France's literary grandeur, was thus explicitly intended to play a role in educating the labouring classes in French language and history. 'It is greatly distressing', wrote Victor Lesté, a writer whose proposals for popular theatre were recommended to the Minister by Aristide Briand:

to hear a hundred thousand people hum *Viens Poupoule*, and yet remain ignorant of Corneille, to know nothing of Voltaire except the Boulevard that bears his name, and to speak of Beaumarchais simply to complain of the slowness of the omnibus that circulates in that quarter.¹⁵⁰

Such concerns for moral uplift were ones that government ministries and their would-be collaborators were at pains to share, for both philanthropic and opportunistic reasons. Firmin Gémier hoped that his audiences would be instructed through his productions in the virtues of family life and fidelity to the state, in war as in peace, and offered his new Théâtre National Populaire as emblematic of the high moral standards to which popular theatre should aspire. Indeed, he even encouraged contemporary writers to come to the Palais du Trocadéro and witness the auditorium, full of mothers, children, and young women (all of whom, though unable to vote as electors, were nonetheless to be instructed in their rights and duties in a manner befitting their role as current and future citizens of the Republic). Those who write for the people, he proclaimed majestically, should respect their purity.¹⁵¹ This concern for purity also extended to the explicit preoccupation with hygiene in the design of new theatres and the beverages to be supplied in their

refreshment rooms, as both proposals for new buildings and the records of government commissions testify.

More powerful, but more problematic, was the desire for popular theatre to create community and even communion at a political level. As reporters to the government commission of 1905 insisted:

We do not conceive of popular performances as an assembly of different classes where, from the stalls to the shadowy summits of the upper galleries, different social categories sit in successive rows, but as assemblies of art, rest and joy, in which the unanimous people, artisans and bourgeois alike, will be overwhelmed at the same moment, elbow to elbow and heart to heart, by the same emotion.¹⁵²

While government commissioners were aware that some might view their project as a ‘utopia’,¹⁵³ they themselves took such plans perfectly seriously, and their language was echoed by other enthusiasts, such as Catulle Mendès, who insisted that art presented the people with the passport to a higher realm of experience ‘to which they would have the right of entry’.

Could it be that the Third Republic, which established the separation of Church and state in 1905, looked to popular theatre as the framework for its own ‘civic religion’? In 1872 Jules Bonnassies described theatre as a ‘secular church’;¹⁵⁴ in 1926 Gustave Charpentier referred to popular art as ‘an eternal and superhuman task, in which may be realized the most pure and complete form of communion.’¹⁵⁵ As places of assembly and instruction, of democratic gatherings and secular sermons, such theatres certainly offered striking parallels to places of worship, an enticing prospect for the Republic to develop its own variety of ‘civic religion’. And it is particularly striking that the highpoint of public and parliamentary debate over the building of a network of popular theatres should come in 1905, the very year of separation of Church and state.

If communion were the most fundamental aim of popular theatre for some of its state proponents, it was also the most problematic and elusive. Neither the TNP at the Trocadéro nor the fleeting festive collaboration between politics and theatre under the Popular Front could match in scale (and expenditure) the political spectacles of Germany, Italy, or Russia in the same period. These, too, played with the form and experience of religious belonging (the word religion deriving from *religare*, to bind), and with profound desires for unity and wholeness that

participants might or might not have found in other political and social relationships. As an ideal, such spectacles both fascinated and repelled. As a reality, they certainly shaped some of the rhetoric considered in this Chapter (and that of other popular theatre proponents, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate). Some criticized the Third Republic for its failure to incorporate the people more fully and more emotionally into its political liturgies. Others would argue that for the Third Republic to seek a level of integration overriding any other political, social, regional or religious allegiances would signify a desire for totalitarianism.¹⁵⁶

The aim here is not to praise or blame the Third Republic, but rather to explore what relationships were imagined, created, or left unrealized between popular theatre and politics. What this chapter has demonstrated is the abiding importance of two key aspirations for state popular theatre—cultural democratization and civic communion—and the persistent challenges to their realization. These challenges took many forms. Some were financial: the Chamber of Deputies repeatedly discussed and voted in favour of granting large sums of money for this enterprise, but was never fully committed to the long-term subsidy of such a project. There was also opposition from theatre directors who felt that cheap performances subsidized by the government would deprive them of their own markets. More importantly, although there was considerable consensus about the need for new plays that would provide examples of patriotism and republican morality, there seem to have been few authors interested in writing this kind of play. Firmin Gémier's celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic was a rare example, and even this was a spectacle of song and dance rather than a fully scripted drama.

Indeed, perhaps the most important reason for the failure of this project—a reason that its supporters never took very seriously—was the inability of this kind of popular theatre to attract the people themselves. Much of the problem lay with the concept of the 'people', often assumed to be cohesive and homogeneous, yet always contested and divided. Politicians of the Third Republic knew that the French were fractured along political, social, religious, and regional lines: this was partly why these projects of realizing a national unity over and above such divisions were so important. But exactly what form the united republican people should take; which characteristics they should have; which moments of the past they should celebrate; how their narrative should be written and

depicted on stage: these were more intractable problems. If state popular theatre were conceived in utopian form, then this utopia—or ‘non-place’—could sometimes prove more elusive than attractive. And because popular theatre enthusiasts were inevitably preoccupied with the ‘people’ as an idea, they rarely devoted enough time to considering what might encourage an individual citizen to attend one of their performances. Nor did they ask themselves whether the people (working-class or bourgeois, or both) actually wanted state-funded popular entertainment provided for their cultural benefit.¹⁵⁷

The real challenge for state initiatives, and especially for a single national and popular theatre, was that there were other groups at the political and geographical peripheries, sharing state convictions about art’s didactic power but preferring to use it for their own ends. To be sure, they had different and more partisan ideas of the people. Their ‘people’ were Breton or Provençal, a faithful people of Catholic believers, a militant proletariat, or even a royalist people faithful to what seemed to others like a reactionary fantasy. But as it is so often easier to sustain unity in opposition than in coalition, their narrower ideas of the people, as opposed to the ‘elusive’ republican people of state rhetoric, represented greater poles of attraction. Such ‘peoples’ were usually also more sharply defined and easier to stage. This did not necessarily mean that rival projects for popular theatre were more successful or long-lasting than state ones, but it did strengthen their appeal to pre-existing communities of thought, and thus to ready-made audiences. These audiences did not want to be citizens of utopia; they wanted to be socialists, communists, royalists, Bretons or Provençaux, meeting and seeking entertainment in communities to which they already belonged.

As for those who preferred the *café-concert*, it is doubtful that many were converted by the well-meaning state initiatives to more civic and less alcoholic pleasures. ‘There one can drink, smoke, take up the refrains of the songs in chorus,’ wrote journalist Maurice Cabs of the *café* in 1901, ‘all things that a goodly number of the Parisian public—and the public in general—rate more highly than the highest of artistic considerations.’¹⁵⁸ Surely writers such as Catulle Mendès were closer to these people when writing daring comedies than when dreaming of peripatetic popular theatre.

NOTES

1. 'Inspecteur général, Commissaire du Gouvernement près les Théâtres subventionnés (Adrien Bernheim): Rapport à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, le 25 mars 1902', AN F21 4687.
2. Catulle Mendès, 'Rapport sur les représentations populaires en province', AN F21 4688.
3. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), p. 487.
4. 'Lettre de F. Gémier, Caen, 18 août (1908)', AN F21 4687.
5. Theatre is 'a priesthood of thought', insisted the revolutionary Fabre d'Églantine to the Convention on 25 Brumaire, Year 2 (15 November 1793). Suzanne Bérard, 'Aspects du théâtre à Paris sous la Terreur', *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 4–5 (1990), p. 611.
6. See Philippe Poirrier and Laurent Martin (eds), 'Démocratiser la culture! Une histoire comparée des politiques culturelles', *Territoires contemporains*, 5 (2013). The cultural historian Philippe Poirrier is vice-president of the historical committee of the French Ministry of Culture.
7. Martin, 'La Démocratisation de la culture en France: une ambition obsolète?' in Martin and Poirrier, 'Démocratiser la culture'. This is also available on the government website: <http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Ministere/Histoire-du-ministere/Actualites/Democratiser-la-culture-!-Publication-en-ligne>.
8. Poirrier, *Histoire des politiques culturelles*, p. 8.
9. In 1807, for example, Napoleon issued a decree that both reorganized theatre according to type of production but also retained it under close control. See Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799–1914* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 177.
10. Quoted in Goldstein, 'Fighting censorship', p. 786.
11. Jacqueline de Jomaron, *Le Théâtre en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1989), Vol. 2, *De la Révolution de 1789 à nos jours*, p. 316. Likewise, Colette Godard sees Gémier's descriptions of popular theatre as foreshadowing those of Vilar. Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 6.
12. Jomaron, *Le Théâtre*, p. 316.
13. Loyer, 'Le Théâtre national populaire', p. 93.
14. Lee, *The Quest for a Public*, p. 21. Lee's book was prefaced by Émile Biasini, director of theatre, music, and cultural action in the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1960–66.
15. Loyer, 'Le Théâtre national populaire', p. 93.
16. How far Vilar was indeed successful is yet another question, outside the scope of this particular study.

17. Sally Debra Charnow refers to government documents for the early years of the Third Republic, but with an overall focus on modernist rather than popular theatre. Neither Loren Kruger, nor Jacqueline de Jomaron, nor Marion Denizot refer to archival material in discussion of state initiatives (which in fact receive little treatment in Denizot's volume). Chantal Meyer-Plantureux offers some invaluable source material on this period in *Théâtre populaire: enjeux politiques* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2006), but as an edited collection this does not offer a narrative of the projects in question. See Kruger, *The National Stage*; Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire*; and Jomaron, *Le Théâtre*.
18. Eugen Weber famously argued that education was one of the means by which the Third Republic 'assimilated' its citizens in his *Peasants into Frenchmen*. More recently, Jann Pasler has explored the ways in which music could 'contribute to the formation of citizens, the health of the democracy, and the unity of the French Republic'. Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, xii.
19. Rigby, *Popular Culture in Modern France*, p. 9.
20. See Gary Thurston, 'The Impact of Russian Popular Theatre, 1886–1915', *Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), pp. 240–267, especially p. 265, and idem, *The Popular Theatre Movement in Russia*, pp. 286–287.
21. Previous studies of popular theatre refer to but do not necessarily explore its religious dimension. Colette Godard, for example, cites Firmin Gémier's description of popular theatre as 'a new Church', but compares this with Malraux's vision for 'cathedrals of culture' rather than situating the idea in its early twentieth-century context. Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 7. Jacques Rancière, however, addresses the question of religion more directly in *The Intellectual and his People*, Vol. 2, *Staging the People* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 20.
22. Daniel Hervieu-Léger, 'Le Miroir de l'Islam en France', *Vingtième Siècle*, 66 (2000), p. 82. Hervieu-Léger is consciously suggesting the position adopted by Pierre Nora in *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). On Republican 'religion', see also Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque*, p. 14.
23. Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 42.
24. On the variety of challenges to the Republic, see Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People*, pp. 11–17.
25. Jules Michelet, *L'Étudiant. Cours de 1847–48* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1977), p. 25.
26. Jules Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le peuple: esquisse d'une organisation théâtrale* (Paris: Armand Le Chevalier, 1872), p. 165.

27. Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Art et Démocratie* (1912), reproduced in part in Meyer-Plantureux, *Théâtre populaire*, p. 100.
28. Romain Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple, essai d'esthétique d'un théâtre nouveau* [1903] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1926), p. 69.
29. Joseph Harris, *Inventing the Spectator: Subjectivity and the Theatrical Experience in Early Modern France* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 201.
30. Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 41–42.
31. Mercier, *Du Théâtre* (1773), discussed in Stefano Castelveccchi, *Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre discussed in the Age of Bourgeois Drama* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 87.
32. Mark Darlow, *Staging the French Revolution: Cultural Politics and the Paris Opera, 1789–94* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 170.
33. On the symbolism of these festivities, see Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), Chap. 5.
34. See Adolphe Brisson, 'Le Théâtre populaire et ses précurseurs au dix-huitième siècle et sous la Révolution', *Feuilleton du Temps*, 18 February 1907 (BN DAS, 8 Rj 4699). Strikingly, Payan was concerned that revolutionary drama should not be entirely subservient to political ends, and criticized the 'mediocrity' of the pieces performed at the Festival of the Supreme Being. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 82.
35. Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque*, p. 220.
36. Pascal Dupuy, *La Fête de la Fédération* (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen et du Havre, 2012), p. 14.
37. Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque*, p. 14.
38. Jean-Richard Bloch, *Carnaval est Mort: premiers essais pour mieux comprendre mon temps* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1920), pp. 122–123.
39. On the role of the Ministry of Public Education, Art, and Religion in the early Third Republic, see Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, 'Le Conseil supérieur des Beaux-Arts: histoire et fonction (1875–1940)', *Mouvement Social*, 163 (1993), pp. 45–65.
40. Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le Peuple*, p. 10.
41. Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le Peuple*, p. 7.
42. Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le Peuple*, p. 43.
43. This was often discussed in letters to the Ministry (see AN F21 4687).
44. Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le Peuple*, p. 23.
45. Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le Peuple*, p. 190.

46. Nevertheless, popular theatre enthusiasts in Berlin also lamented that there was insufficient naturalist drama for their cause. See, for example, Conrad Schmidt in *Freie Volksbühne*, 2 (April 1897), p. 5.
47. 'Eugène Nus à M. le Ministre, 8 mars 1878', AN F21 4687.
48. Georges Ohnet, 'Le Feuilletton du Constitutionnel, 25 janvier', AN F21 4689.
49. Georges Richard, 'Project de Création d'un Théâtre de drame populaire, demande adressée à M. le Sénateur, Préfet de la Seine, et à MM. les Membres du Conseil Municipal de Paris,' (BN DAS Rt 750).
50. 'M. Sauchelle à M. le Ministre, le 12 décembre 1879', AN F21 4687.
51. Richard, 'Project de création', p. 2.
52. 'M. Lagrange à M. le sous-secrétaire d'État au Ministère des Beaux-Arts, le 6 juin 1880', AN F21 4687.
53. See Henri Turot and Alphonse Deville, 'Rapport sur la création d'un théâtre populaire' (1904), BN DAS Rt 750, p. 2.
54. Turot and Deville, 'Rapport', p. 6.
55. Cecil Davies, *The Volksbühne Movement: A History* (Manchester: MUP, 1977), p. 22.
56. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, pp. 86–87. On the importance of Hauptmann's *Weavers* in German popular theatre, see *Freie Volksbühne*, 2 (April 1898), p. 114, where it is described as the first drama focusing more on the actions of masses than on individual destinies, and Franz Diederich in *Die Volksbühne: eine Sammlung*, p. 1.
57. Octave Mirbeau, 'Le Théâtre populaire' (*Le Journal*, 28 January 1900), reprinted in *Gens de Théâtre*, pp. 221–226.
58. See Meyer-Plantureux, *Théâtre populaire*, p. 45.
59. See David Fisher, 'Romain Rolland and the French People's Theatre', *Drama Review*, 21 (1977), p. 81.
60. Morel, 'Projet de théâtres populaires', *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 10 (1900), p. 1118.
61. Morel, 'Discours pour l'ouverture d'un théâtre populaire', *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, 13 (1903), 277–287. See also Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, pp. 99–102.
62. *Deuxième congrès international des auteurs et compositeurs: rapport sur le théâtre populaire à Paris*, 1905 (BN DAS Rj 4450). Berny's emphasis on theatre as stimulating popular intelligence is discussed in Beach, *Staging Politics and Gender*, p. 16.
63. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 99.
64. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 102.
65. Georges Pioch, 'Vers le Théâtre populaire', *La Vérité*, August–September 1919.
66. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 105.

67. 'Inspecteur général, commissaire du gouvernement près des Théâtres subventionnés (Adrien Bernheim): rapport à M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, le 25 mars 1902', AN F21 4687.
68. The deputy Maurice Couyba did, however, concur with Bernheim's suggestions. On Couyba's project, see *L'Événement*, 7 October 1901 (AN F21 4687). Couyba had followed the debates on popular theatre in the *Revue d'Art Dramatique* with interest.
69. The division had also been proposed and prefigured earlier in the regime. See Jacqueline Lalouette, 'La Séparation avant la Séparation: 'projets' et propositions de loi 1866-91', *Vingtième Siècle*, 87 (2005), p. 45.
70. Jean Lefranc, 'M. Dujardin-Beaumetz et son septennat', *Le Mercure Musical*, 15 February 1912.
71. Catulle Mendès, 'Rapport sur les représentations populaires en province, décembre 1905', AN F21 4688. His suggestions had already been given a lukewarm reception in a report by Bernheim in 1902 as well as discussed in parliament.
72. Catulle Mendès, 'Rapport', AN F21 4688.
73. Mendès, 'Projet de théâtre ambulant', AN F21 4687.
74. Mendès mentioned Corneille, Racine, Molière, Regnard, Beaumarchais, Marivaux, Hugo, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller. Mendès, 'Projet de théâtre'.
75. Although Mendès's peripatetic theatre was never realized, he did contribute to the democratization of culture by organizing evenings of poetry reading together with some of his acquaintances, including Gustave Kahn, Armand Bour, and Louis Payen. See J. Valmy-Baysse, 'Théâtre Populaire? Théâtre de la Nation? Nous aurons toujours un théâtre populaire', *Comœdia*, 4 August 1920.
76. 'Rapport de M. Alfred Bruneau sur le projet de MM. Feine et Herscher', AN F21 4687.
77. Alphonse Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre Populaire pour la Ville de Paris sur son terrain du Marché du Temple' (1905), AN F21 4688.
78. Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre', p. 6.
79. Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre', pp. 10-11.
80. Gosset, 'Projet de Théâtre', p. 8.
81. 'Commission financière des théâtres populaires: rapport de M. Chéramy, 26 novembre 1906', AN F21 4688.
82. 'Commission financière des théâtres populaires'.
83. 'Discours de M. Paul Peltier, avocat à la cour, au grand cinéma Lecourbe, le jeudi 13 avril 1916', AN F21 4689.
84. 'Causerie de M. Gaston Lebel au Palais du Travail, le 22 novembre 1916.' F21 4689. The Théâtre Populaire Moral et Patriotique

- organized similarly morale-boosting performances, with references to speeches by Poincaré. 'Représentation organisée par le Théâtre Populaire Moral et Patriotique, Paris, 24 février 1913'. AN F7 15980.
85. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 54.
 86. 'Causerie de M. Antoine Banès au Théâtre de la Comédie-Moderne, 21 avril 1914', AN F21 4689.
 87. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 58. Following Rolland, Meyer-Plantureux also dismisses the project as 'more like a charity than the creation of a popular theatre'. *Le Théâtre populaire*, p. 91.
 88. Jean Frolo, 'Le Théâtre populaire' (1903), BN DAS Rj 4694.
 89. Rameil was also spokesman for the Arts budget.
 90. *Le Journal Officiel*, 25 October 1918, p. 2772.
 91. J. Valmy-Baysse, 'Théâtre populaire?'
 92. Quoted in J. Valmy-Baysse, 'Théâtre populaire?' Rameil's report for the Finance commission, completed in April 1920, is reproduced in Meyer-Plantureux, *Théâtre populaire*, pp. 123–133. In this he names several colleagues, including Paul-Boncour, who had supported him in the request for a state subsidy of 100,000 francs.
 93. For the details of Rameil's speech, see for example *Le Temps*, 23 April 1920 and *Comœdia*, 25 April 1920.
 94. 'Un Cinquième Théâtre national', *Comœdia*, 25 April 1920.
 95. On the performance and influence of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, see Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-siècle France* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 78, and Jannarone, *Artaud and his Doubles*, p. 83.
 96. 'Lettre de Firmin Gémier', 18 August (probably 1908), AN F21 4687.
 97. A similar project for 'popular education' had been launched a few years previously, in 1907, by M. Lucien Desplanques: *Le Chariot Errant. Théâtre Humoristique et d'Éducation Sociale. L'Œuvre et l'éducation populaire par le théâtre* (brochure) (1911) BN DAS Rt 3909. On the brief history of Gémier's Théâtre national ambulant, see also Godard, *Chaillot*, Chap. 1.
 98. Firmin Gémier, 'Le Théâtre populaire', *L'Ère nouvelle*, 3 October 1920.
 99. Annette Becker, 'Du 19 juillet 1919 au 11 novembre 1920: mort où est ta victoire?' *Vingtième siècle*, 49 (1996), p. 39.
 100. Becker, 'Du 19 juillet 1919 au 11 novembre 1920', p. 40.
 101. Becker, 'Du 14 juillet 1919', pp. 40–44.
 102. Becker, 'Du 14 juillet 1919', p. 31.
 103. Gémier, 'La Fête du Trocadéro', *L'Ère nouvelle*, 7 November 1920. The festival is referred to fleetingly by Catherine Faivre-Zellner: 'Firmin Gémier: un vieux tonton du théâtre populaire?' in Denizot (ed.), *Théâtre populaire*, p. 84.

104. *Cinquantenaire de la République: inauguration du 'Théâtre Populaire', 11 et 14 novembre 1920* (Programme), AN F21 4691.
105. As described by Brian Rees in *Camille Saint-Saëns: A Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1999), p. 278.
106. *Au Public!* AN F21 4691.
107. P. Godeaux, 'Un Théâtre qui jouera tous les genres', *L'Écho de Paris*, 28 November 1920.
108. Gémier, 'L'Ère nouvelle du théâtre', *L'Ère nouvelle*, 21 November 1920.
109. Both were already closely associated with Gémier, who had directed the première of Rolland's *14 Juillet* at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1902, and worked with Bouhélier on a production of *Edipe, roi de Thèbes* for the Cirque d'Hiver in December 1919. See Louise Delpit, *Paris-Théâtre contemporain: rôle prépondérant des scènes d'avant-garde depuis trente ans* (Northampton, Mass., Smith College and Paris: Librairie Champoin, 1925), p. 78.
110. 'TNP du Trocadéro: cahier des charges, mars 1922', AN F21 4691.
111. The first performance was to an audience of 4,000. 'Recettes brutes réalisées au Trocadéro', 'Ministère des Beaux-Arts. Note pour le budget de 1923. Le Théâtre National Populaire, année 1922'. AN F21 4691. By the same reckoning, Racine's *Phèdre* was the least popular.
112. Mossé et al., *L'Aventure du Théâtre populaire*, p. 197.
113. See, Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 7; and Ory, *Théâtre Citoyen*, p. 28.
114. 'Lettre du Préfet de Police à M. Le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts', AN F21 4691. His remarks on the trade-unionist character of the association had been made in an earlier letter of 2 December 1919.
115. Several newspapers made this observation at the beginning of the 1931 winter season, emphasizing that the programmes were identical, there being no attempt to render the productions at the TNP more 'popular'. See, for example *L'Écho de Paris*, 30 September 1931.
116. Georges de Wissant, 'Où est notre Théâtre populaire?', *La Volonté*, 5 February 1926. He admired the German system of subscription.
117. Karl Christian Führer, 'German Cultural Life and the Crisis of National Identity during the Depression, 1929–33', *German Studies Review*, 24 (2001), p. 466.
118. He based his contentions on a letter from Mademoiselle 'R.L.', who claimed TNP audiences were bourgeois rather than working-class. Gabriel Boissy, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un Théâtre populaire?' *Comœdia*, 4 March 1935.
119. *Comœdia*, 21 March 1935. Alfred Fourtier recalled here that, as former editor of the *Revue d'Art Dramatique*, he had experience of these academic debates over the nature and ideal of popular theatre.
120. Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 15.

121. Edouard Beaudu, 'Le TNP s'installera l'an prochain à la Salle Pleyel', *L'Intransigeant*, 1 May 1936.
122. Debates over possible designs included proposals for a French version of Bayreuth, a more experimental theatre, and an ordinary auditorium. Godard, *Chaillot*, p. 15.
123. Aldebert had long been interested in medieval theatre, as shown by his involvement in the Théâtre Idéaliste. See BN DAS Rt 4094.
124. See Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People*.
125. Günter Berghaus, 'The Ritual Core of Fascist Theatre, an Anthropological Perspective' in Berghaus (ed.), *Fascism and Theatre*, p. 40. See also Dawn Ades (ed.), *Art and Power. Europe under the Dictators* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922–45* (London: University of California Press, 2001).
126. See, for example, the series of articles by Gabriel Boissy entitled 'Au Vent des jours' and published in *Comœdia* in 1936, e.g. on 29 February.
127. Boissy, 'Au Vent des jours', *Comœdia*, 4 March 1936.
128. See Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People*, Chap. 5.
129. See Pascal Ory, *La Belle Illusion: culture et politique sous le signe du Front populaire* (Paris: Plon, 1994).
130. See Ory, *Théâtre citoyen*, p. 43, where he discusses the change in focus from *Beaux-Arts* to *Culture*. On Popular Front cultural policy more broadly, see Danielle Tartakowsky, *Le Front populaire: la vie est à nous* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) and Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934–38* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), Chap. 4.
131. Jean Fabre, 'Théâtres populaires' (interview with Léo Lagrange), *La République*, 26 November 1936.
132. See Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People*, Chap. 5.
133. Rolland, *Le Théâtre du Peuple*, p. 169. On the difficulties of staging the storming of the Bastille and on Rolland's ambivalent attitude towards the crowd, see Chap. 6 and also Jessica Wardhaugh, 'In the Shadow of Danton: Theatre, Politics, and Leadership in Interwar France' in Wardhaugh (ed.), *Politics and the Individual in France, 1930–50* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015), pp. 13–27.
134. Jacques Chabannes, *Paris à vingt ans* (Paris: Éditions France–Empire, 1974), p. 276.
135. Rolland, 'Le Quatorze Juillet' in *Le Théâtre de la Révolution* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1909), p. 140.
136. Cited in Ory, *La Belle Illusion*, p. 345.
137. Lesieur's conception of popular theatre touched on the religious. 'To speak of the people is to speak of metaphysics', he asserted while discussing the definition of popular theatre in *Radio-Liberté*, 24 September 1937.
138. Ory, *La Belle Illusion*, p. 375.

139. Nonetheless, the *Catalogue de la Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques* records the titles of a number of spectacles in 1936–37 reflecting Popular Front interests and ideals, even if not necessarily supported financially by the government. These include: Paul Colline's *CGT Roi*, Roger Ray's *Le Peuple est Roi*, Henri Dallenne's *Rive gauche laborieuse*, *Rive gauche joyeuse* and two plays by the actress Muse Dalbray: *Allons au-devant de la vie*, performed in the Galeries Lafayette during the strikes and revived during 1937, and *Le Peuple souverain*, also performed in 1937.
140. Chabannes, *Paris à vingt ans*, p. 284. Ory refers to it as a 'fiasco' in *Théâtre citoyen*, p. 45.
141. Chabannes, *Paris à vingt ans*, p. 285.
142. For a fuller discussion of the production, see Jessica Irons (Wardhaugh), 'Staging Reconciliation: Popular Theatre and Political Utopia in Paris in 1937', *Contemporary European History*, 14 (2005), pp. 279–294.
143. Jean-Richard Bloch, appendix (instructions for performance) for 'Naissance d'une cité' in *Toulon et autres pièces* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 295.
144. Bloch, 'Naissance', p. 295
145. Bloch, 'Naissance', p. 297.
146. Leibowitz, 'Naissance d'une cité', *Esprit*, 1 November 1937.
147. Rancière, *Le Spectateur émancipé*, pp. 22–23.
148. Aristophanes, *The Frogs* (tr. Jeffrey Henderson) (Indianapolis: Focus, 2015), p. 82.
149. Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, p. 230.
150. 'Notice pour M. le Ministre de l'Instruction Publique: *Le Théâtre Populaire*', AN F21 4687.
151. Quoted in an article by A. Bayet in *Le Quotidien*, 21 May 1921 (BN DAS Rt 3277).
152. 'Rapport à la sous-commission sur la possibilité d'organiser à l'Odéon des représentations populaires, gratuites ou payantes' (M. Georges Bourdon, 11 septembre 1905), AN F21 4688.
153. 'Commission financière des théâtres populaires: Rapport de M. Chéramy, 26 novembre 1906', AN F21 4688.
154. Bonnassies, *Le Théâtre et le Peuple*, p. 18.
155. Gustave Charpentier, 'L'Art et le peuple' in *Le Chantier*, 2 May 1926 (BN DAS Rt 4694).
156. Even Ory describes Bloch's *Naissance d'une cité* as presenting a 'totalitarian utopia'. *Théâtre citoyen*, p. 45.
157. David Fisher also highlights these 'miscalculations' on the part of popular theatre enthusiasts in 'Romain Rolland and the French People's Theatre', p. 89.
158. Maurice Cabs, 'Le Théâtre du Peuple', *La République*, 9 November 1901, AN F21 4689.

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