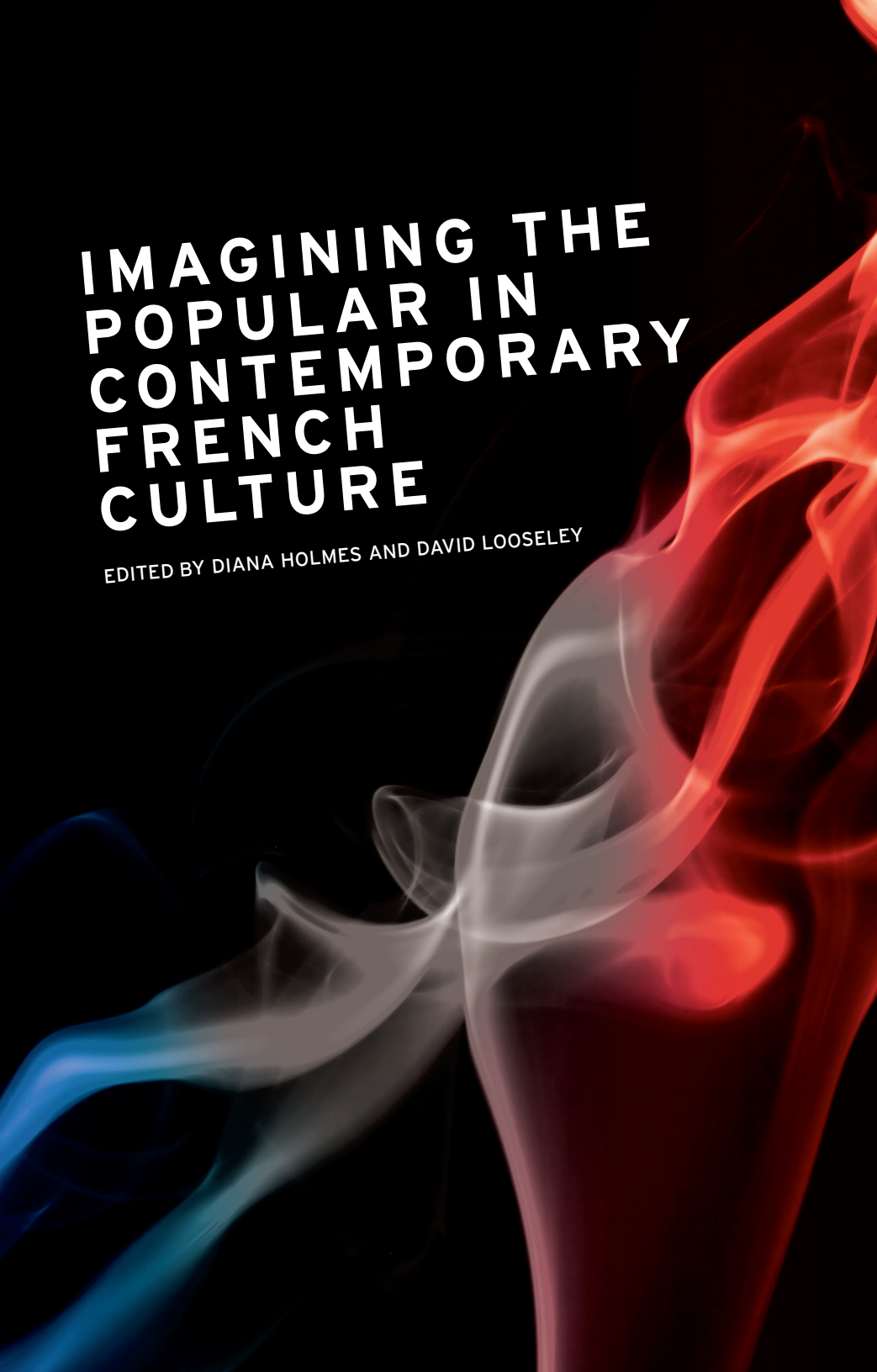# IMAGINING THE POPULAR IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH CULTURE

EDITED BY DIANA HOLMES AND DAVID LOOSELEY

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in contemporary French culture

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Notes on contributors

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Acknowledgements

Introduction
Imagining the popular: lowbrow, highbrow, middlebrow

Diana Holmes and David Looseley

O ur aim in this book is to explore how the French in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have come to imagine the popular in particular and distinctive ways: how popular-cultural texts or forms have, variously, been produced and received, theorised and judged. We are interested, then, in both discourse and practice in contemporary French popular culture.

This ambition is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. First, 'discourse' and 'practice' cannot always be neatly distinguished. Certainly, by discourse – or, more accurately, discourses – we partly mean what Morag Shiach (1989: 1) in her analysis of British popular-cultural discourse defines as 'distinctive ways of talking about the cultural role and significance of the people' – ways which can be found in essays, the media, public debates, and so on. But 'ways of talking' about the popular can also be embedded in popular-cultural texts and practices themselves, whether explicitly or in the form of pervasive but untheorised assumptions about popular aesthetics. We are therefore interested in discourses both 'on' and 'of' popular culture.

Second, just as historians of Europe are forced to speak, for example, of the 'long 1960s', we have become more sharply aware in editing this book that the 'contemporary' is longer than one might think. The question we have encountered is not simply how far the cultural past has shaped the present, but how far twenty-first-century culture, characterised by the digitally reproduced, the portable, the dematerialised and the consumer-driven, leads us to understand differently the cultural history of the popular going back into the nineteenth century. We propose therefore to both explore the present and revisit the past as a single endeavour.

More slippery still, of course, is our actual object of study, for 'popular culture' is an amorphous, polysemic category. The complexity of Shiach's word 'cultural' scarcely requires comment and 'the people' is no less

problematic. But such problems are aggravated when one is working with English and French terminologies simultaneously. When, for example, the French ethnologist Denys Cuche (2004: 69) comments, just as we have commented, that 'from the start, the notion of popular culture suffers from a semantic ambiguity, given the polysemic nature of each of the two terms it contains,'[1] can we be entirely sure that the semantic ambiguity is the same in both languages and cultures, even though French naming practices in this area are clearly changing under the influence of English? This is the shifting, liminal territory that forms the context of our book.

Traditionally, *populaire* has referred to the poorly educated peasantry or proletariat, as in the expression *les classes populaires*. *La culture populaire* thus denotes the artefacts, representations, beliefs and practices of these social groups. Although this sense is weakening with globalisation, it has remained operative in France for much longer than in the anglophone world, where 'popular culture' in everyday usage (in the media, for example) has subsumed this 'folk' sense and today designates the texts, products and practices of the majority and, thence, the entertainments that have the majority as their target audience. This contemporary English sense embraces the commercially mediated artefacts made instantly available by mass industrialised forms of production and new technologies: pop music, television, romantic fiction, social networking and so on.[2] In French, on the other hand, such products and practices have conventionally, and pejoratively, been designated *la culture de masse* – an eloquent difference nicely illustrated in Rioux and Sirinelli (2002: 30), when one contributor to their edited volume, who is tracing the impact of Americanisation in France, feels compelled to explain to his francophone readership that 'popular' in American English does not mean 'issuing from the people but popular in terms of the extent of its dissemination', whereas the English term folk culture is closer to 'what in French is called *populaire*'.[3]

This said, as Shiach discovered in the British context, the different categories of 'folk', 'mass' and 'popular' can often describe much the same cultural phenomena, or at the very least overlap. Shiach therefore adopts (1989: 1) a broad definition of popular culture which we too will adopt, at least as our starting point: 'cultural texts and practices outside the sphere of the dominant culture', i.e. those which have been 'marginalized, repressed or ignored' (1989: 5) by that culture. As this suggests, the notion of popular culture is essentially ideological and ethical in that it is bound up with cultural democracy, an issue which runs through our book.

Beyond this, it is more productive in our view to approach the popular as an unstable discursive construct within which there is nevertheless a loose coherence. As John Storey argues (2003: xii), again in the anglophone context, 'although the term popular culture can be articulated to carry a range of different meanings, what all of these have in common is the idea of *popularis* – belonging to the people. Therefore, each of the different ways in which popular culture is formulated carries with it a definition of "the people"'. Our objective, premised on the idea that these different formulations require equally diverse modes of analysis, is to sharpen incrementally, from chapter to chapter, our understanding of what popular culture signifies in contemporary France not only semantically but culturally – how it is practised, thought about and argued over – in the hope of devising a more precise critical language for discussing it.

This enterprise is important and timely. In English-speaking countries, the academic study of contemporary popular cultures has been commonplace for some time, in large part due to the development of Cultural Studies, a field that remains predominantly anglophone even today. Cultural Studies is, of course, as Willis observes (2000: xx), a '"non-disciplinary" discipline' and 'a field of at times intractable complexity'. But one relatively straightforward statement we can make about it is that it has significantly validated contemporary anglophone popular cultures as objects of academic enquiry. This has not, however, been the case with French popular culture, at least until quite recently. And even when it has, a recognisably or consciously 'Cultural-Studies' perspective has not generally been applied.[4]

Although various collective overviews of modern French culture in English cover popular texts and practices (for example, Forbes and Kelly 1995; Kidd and Reynolds 2000; Finch 2010), there are still remarkably few scholarly books in English devoted exclusively to them. Dauncey (2003) provides a useful introductory overview of contemporary popular forms (music, radio, television, and so on), primarily for student use. Further back, Horn (1991) undertook a similar endeavour, while Rigby (1991) devoted a seminal research monograph to the discourse of popular culture in France, from the *éducation populaire* movement of the late nineteenth century to major public intellectuals in the late twentieth, such as Certeau and Bourdieu, methodically tracing the semantic shift from folk to mass. But Rigby concentrated on discourse alone, not the actual texts of popular culture. Moreover, much has changed since the publication of his book, now out of print.

Doubtless one reason for this relative neglect is, precisely, the semantic complexity we have been discussing, coupled with the difficulty of mapping approaches associated with Cultural Studies on to French ways of thinking about popular culture. But it also has arguably to do with the nature of French Studies as a discipline in anglophone universities. Although it is now commonplace to speak of 'French Cultural Studies', especially in the UK,[5] the university subject variously called 'French' or 'French Studies' or 'French and Francophone Studies' still has a predominantly literary emphasis – 'literary' here meaning works of fiction or thought viewed by the academy as canonical or – to use a term more resonant for this book – high-cultural. Even when cinema became a recognised part of French Studies, a canon of films deemed worthy of attention soon developed, largely in response to the consecration of the New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer and others. And even in those UK institutions where undergraduate syllabuses have shown greater openness by including, say, francophone popular music or television, research has not always kept pace.

A related explanation is that French Studies in English-speaking universities, and especially in paradigmatic institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, has tended to model itself on France's own canon-making traditions. For a long time, such scholarly concern with popular culture as there was in humanities disciplines in metropolitan France tended to focus on its historic, folk dimensions, with particular emphasis on the written word in the form of chap-books (*littérature de colportage*). In the social sciences, some French scholars, such as Poujol and Labourie (1979) or Grignon and Passeron (1989), did start researching specific sociological or ideological dimensions of French popular culture, though still largely within the broad parameters of its traditional French sense. It was only in 2002, with Rioux and Sirinelli's ground-breaking *La Culture de masse en France de la Belle Époque à aujourd'hui* (Mass culture in France from the Belle Époque to today) that a cultural history of the popular in the twentieth century in its broadly anglophone sense appeared, though still using the term 'mass culture', albeit without the pejorative bias it has conventionally carried.

A third reason is that French research on popular culture, in whatever sense, still tends to be carried out behind disciplinary partitions, chiefly history, sociology and anthropology. Cultural Studies has not taken off as a 'post-disciplinary' (Barker 2000: 5) methodology in the French academy as it has in other countries. The core texts that gave birth to Cultural Studies in Britain – Hoggart, Williams, Adorno and the

Frankfurt School, various American writings on the mass media – were not in fact translated into French until relatively late, if at all; and they made little impact other than as 'useful warnings that did not concern France' (Rioux and Sirinelli 2002: 265). Even in the early 2000s, with a new generation of scholars looking to engage with it, Mattelart and Neveu (2003: 6) still speak of 'a French provincialism which frowns at the mere mention of the mysterious term "Cultural Studies"'[6] and which, reprehensibly in their view, simply ignores it. When Cultural Studies has been addressed in France, it has often been negatively (even, up to a point, in Mattelart and Neveu's own case), or else somewhat eccentrically. One illustration of the latter phenomenon is the curious destiny of Richard Hoggart in France. While in anglophone Cultural Studies, Hoggart, as Rigby observes (1994), is sometimes seen (rightly or wrongly) as an old-fashioned Leavisite, in France he has been revered for his down-to-earth avoidance of the 'militant populism' that, for the French, makes Cultural Studies so problematic.

Yet the provincialism that Mattelart and Neveu criticise has not all been on one side. While the French academy's neglect of Cultural Studies no doubt did delay less negative engagements with mass popular culture until very recently, British, American and other anglophone Cultural Studies still tend to focus only on anglophone cultures, despite their supposedly global purview. If France shows up on the radar at all, it is as an apparently inexhaustible supplier of handy theoretical power-tools for interpreting anglophone cultures. But Cultural Studies scholars have usually taken little interest in the seismic sociocultural shifts in France which have helped produce those tools, most notably the emergence of 'mass culture'. Judging by some work in Cultural Studies, or at least the vulgarised versions of it that reach the media, one might think that the everyday cultural experience of the French is dominated by the high theory of celebrity intellectuals immovably installed in Left Bank cafés and absent-mindedly puffing on Gauloises. Hence the ironic franglais expression '*la French theory*'. Indeed, another of Neveu and Mattelart's well aimed criticisms is precisely Cultural Studies' caricatural theoreticism, as purveyed in journals like *Theory, Culture and Society*. Today, they maintain, it is perfectly possible to write a substantial study of shopping, for example, that contains virtually no empirical data:

> This cavalier attitude to the empirical is often combined with an ostentatious claim to elevation and depth which takes the form of piling up intimidating references as a badge of high intellectuality. The very notion of 'French Theory', that epistemological monstrosity, is highly symbolic.

The term invites us to treat the best known and most esteemed authors of French intellectual life (Bourdieu, Derrida, Foucault, Ricœur) as a coherent group. This kind of academic spiritualism is rarely matched by an ability to situate such works in the scientific context and social logic from which they emerged, or by any great concern with the theoretical incompatibilities that exist between such writers, who in some cases have nothing in common but a French passport. (Neveu and Mattelart 2003: 88)[7]

In an increasingly transcultural, transnational age, such ethnocentric caricatures have to be challenged, purely on intellectual grounds.

Yet focusing on texts and practices from a non-anglophone culture, engaging with but unconstrained by the perspectives of Cultural Studies, also has practical benefits. It allows us to start afresh and to ask different questions, questions which have implications that extend at least across the 'West' or advanced capitalist societies and which can illuminate the study of contemporary cultures more generally. What makes France in particular so exemplary in this regard is that it has been a laboratory in which late-modern engagements with the established modernist categories of high and low can be observed *in vivo*. Its approach to the 'popular' is at once typical and highly distinctive. It has struggled to go with the postmodern flow but without letting itself be washed away by it, to accommodate to the profound cultural changes that have overtaken the West while endeavouring not to let them undermine its commitment to a national culture and, from 1789, a lay republicanism. From the medieval period when the idea of 'France' began to be a reality, French culture has become in Alison Finch's words (2010: 3) 'much more thoroughly permeated than Anglophone by a common literary and intellectual history, one that is viewed with pride'.

Because of a greater degree of state voluntarism in articulating and imposing a unified national identity, and a correspondingly greater emphasis on 'high' culture as the marker of a Frenchness associated with rationalism, intellectualism and good taste in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the new forms of industrialised popular culture generated in the nineteenth and twentieth, with their commercial origins and their association in many cases with bodily and primal rather than cerebral pleasures, were long viewed with suspicion in France. The result has been that the Adornian view of popular culture as a debased and debasing mass culture has had more purchase there than in the UK or USA, especially at establishment level (Chapter 1). Indeed, one dominant representation of France is that it has always despised mass culture. A different, though connected, representation has France embracing lowbrow culture yet

somehow never quite getting it right, throwing out quality, experiment and nuance with the bathwater of tradition. French television (Chapter 5) is usually the classic instance here, or perhaps France's early pop music (Chapter 2).

However, it could and will be argued that an intriguing and distinctive third way between these two extremes has developed, in the form of a middlebrow sensibility – or what a Bourdieusian perspective might call a legitimated popular culture. *Chanson*, cinema (Chapter 4), crime fiction (Chapter 3), and to an extent colloquial language (Chapter 6) are all 'popular' practices which nonetheless enjoy a certain legitimacy and prestige, having become instances of what we might describe as the 'high popular'. Perhaps, then, as Rioux and Sirinelli suggest (2002: 24), the study of mass culture 'has become essential for a proper understanding of contemporary societies but also, more broadly, of the societies of the twentieth century as a whole; all the more so as it has been during the century as a whole that discourses on – and, most frequently, against – that culture have blossomed'.[8] This possibility will inform our book historically and conceptually, as we explore what specific forms the experience of mass culture has taken in France.

Our conception of the book – indeed the book project itself – also derives from the Popular Cultures Research Network (PCRN), of which all five contributors are members. The apparent anglocentrism of Cultural Studies mostly comes down to a simple lack of linguistic competence, especially in the UK as a result of a succession of benighted government policies for Modern Languages. The PCRN was founded in 2005 by a small group of French Studies academics at the University of Leeds (UK)[9] to serve as a mediator in this respect. Our aim was to establish a broad, international and interdisciplinary research community stretching far beyond French Studies and modern languages to embrace the humanities more generally, the social sciences and, naturally, Cultural Studies. The plural 'popular cultures' was chosen to underline the network's roots in modern-languages disciplines and the need for dialogue with other disciplines. Research in modern languages often 'locates' cultural phenomena in various ways, focusing particularly on relationships with places and spaces in the form of nations, regions, localities and other communities with specific linguistic and cultural histories. The PCRN, then, neither privileges the anglophone world and globalisation, nor simply ignores them. On the contrary, anglophone cultures figure strongly among the 'located' cultures the network is interested in, but in a creative and unassimilated exchange with other located cultures that anglophone

Cultural Studies has neglected. This allows us to bring together diverse cultural contexts, histories and imaginaries in the form of dynamic inter-disciplinary encounters.

This dialogic element also means not simply importing uncritically the standard theoretical approaches of Cultural Studies but asking whether, for differently located cultures, different approaches need to be adopted. Cultural Studies in the last thirty years has been characterised by its concern with relations between culture and power and, following Bourdieu, with the ways in which the categories of high and low consolidate social difference and render it 'natural'. Valuable and seminal though much of this work has been, it has broadly speaking emerged from social-science perspectives which have shifted attention away from text. Indeed, in anglophone Cultural Studies, textual analysis is often seen as old-fashioned, or as problematic insofar as it can lead to a hermetic 'textualism' which ignores the objective conditions of the social world. Our aim is to redeploy humanities perspectives in order to help bridge these extremes of textualism and sociologism, by combining textual study of various kinds with the study of historical, national, socio-political or discursive contexts, as appropriate.

For the French Studies wing of the PCRN, the more specific ambition has been to unpick the web of meanings and applications of the terms *culture populaire* and *culture de masse* and identify the discursive specificities that underpin them. Our contention is that the development of mass popular culture in France has produced a paradigm shift, one which helps explain the burgeoning of cultural theory since the 1950s. In an intellectual environment traditionally fixated on high culture, especially literature, as a vector of national identity, the growing popularity of lowbrow and middlebrow forms and practices, and especially the impact of the audio-visual, has destabilised entrenched cultural norms and stimulated the growth of multiple, self-reflexive, conflictual discourses about culture. Our aim is to dissect this paradigm shift via six discursive formations which will serve as case studies: politics, music, fiction, film, television, and language. While eschewing panoramic coverage, we have not chosen these case studies at random, for they have, we contend, played a seminal role in the re-imagining of French cultural identity.[10] Since each case study demands customised analytical tools, we have not sought to standardise approaches across chapters, though the assumption that today's conceptualisations of the popular cannot be understood without historical contextualisation runs throughout the volume. The principal point of departure here is the mid- to late nineteenth century, when mechanical

reproduction of cultural artefacts became technologically possible and French society became recognisably modern: urbanised, industrialised, near-universally literate, connected through systems of mass transport and communication, technologically and politically able to turn cultural artefacts into commodities. But each chapter finds its own chronological level and all chapters concentrate primarily on the period from 1945 to the present day. Our analytical methods variously combine elements of sociology, sociolinguistics, Cultural and Media Studies, literary and film studies, and public-policy studies. A comparably wide corpus of materials has also been used as primary sources, again varying by case study: creative works and statements made by their creators, polemical or theoretical writing, historical documents and debates, examples of linguistic variation and so on. Amidst this diversity, the book nevertheless reveals important overlaps and commonalities, which will be teased out in a brief conclusion. We will also return in those closing remarks to the contention that underpins the whole study: that analysis of any contemporary culture and of its relationships with the complex realities of national identities in the twenty-first century is seriously incomplete and hence distorted without the dimension of the popular.

David Looseley's opening chapter deals with the ways in which the French have defined culture politically since nineteenth-century industrialisation produced a mass proletarian consumer base for cultural products. In both the theory and practice of governments a powerful binary was established between, on the one hand, an authentically national 'high' culture that transcends material interests and, on the other, the degraded, market-driven products of 'mass' culture. On the whole, Right and Left were for a long time united in the belief that it is the State's political duty to manage and regulate the cultural field, and thus to elevate majority tastes to appreciate the 'highest and best' in the national canon, thereby fostering national unity and sustaining a perennial sense of French identity as rooted in the brilliance of French language and culture. Meanwhile, of course, technological progress and the development of increasingly international entertainment industries pulled steadily in the opposite direction, and the combined forces of State education, selective State funding and the discursive demonisation of debased 'mass' forms failed to resist the public's enthusiasm for compelling fictions, catchy songs and the irreverent pleasures of the lowbrow. Looseley also traces those moments when governments, generally of the Left, have tried to give political form to a more inclusive notion of culture that would take

seriously people's own definition of their cultural tastes, from the 1936 Front Populaire, through Jack Lang's ambivalent attempts in the 1980s to support a 'postcolonial reconfiguration of popular culture', to the recent avatars of those attempts at European level, in the forms of 'cultural diversity' and 'intercultural dialogue'. These moments are echoed too in the work of the handful of theorists, most notably Michel de Certeau, who have argued for the democratic vibrancy of popular forms by emphasising the agency of their consumers. On the whole though, as France becomes an increasingly multicultural and globalised society, the tension between commitment to a national self-image premised on élite cultural values, and the reality of majority cultural practices, remains, albeit in plural and evolving forms.

In his second chapter, Looseley combines a brief history of French popular music with an account of those discourses that have defined and constructed the meanings of 'pop' for France. One element of French particularism to emerge is the importance of the '*chanson*' category, aligned with hegemonic notions of Frenchness through its emphasis on text and the self-expression of the lone '*auteur*', yet also hugely adaptable. Focusing principally on evolving constructions and uses of *chanson*, Looseley shows how it plays its part in the nineteenth-century emphasis on a mythical rural past embodied in folk songs, and is then commercialised and 'massified' through entertainment forms such as the *café-concert*, only to be rapidly recuperated in opposition to the 'foreign' forms of music-hall, jazz, and later rock, techno, etc. The chapter tellingly undercuts the indigenous/ imported binary evident in this last strategy: rock, for example, is shown to function not simply as an American import imposed by commercial interests, but as a musical form that can be appropriated and adapted for purposes of self-assertion and contestation by young people in different national contexts, just as 'American' hip-hop and rap would later be by minority-ethnic youth groups. Furthermore, while in the musical as in other cultural fields, the French cultural and political establishments have persistently subscribed to a certain model of 'Frenchness' – defined in terms of head and heart rather than body – and rejected 'foreign' musical genres in its name, on the ground, or in the street, people have largely practised a pick'n'mix policy that mingles indigenous and foreign, commercial and 'authentic', to match their own increasingly hyphenated senses of identity. Since the Lang era, state policy has moved closer to a recognition of the eclectic, self-reflexive reality of the French musical landscape, though Looseley also concludes with a sharp illustration, drawn from reality TV, of the fact that 'binary thinking is still alive and well'.

Chapter 3 moves to the popular dimension of French literary culture. As the first two chapters also show in different ways, the manipulation of language to understand, represent and change reality has been central to France's sense of its own mission in the world since the nation's earliest days, and the written word is thus the site of particular passion and controversy. Diana Holmes traces a short history of the popular novel since mass literacy and new technologies democratised reading in the mid-nineteenth century, and she interweaves with this a study of how popular reading tastes have been depicted, judged and shaped by public discourses, from parliamentary debates to state and Church policies, marketing pitches, theoretical interventions and readers' own commentaries. She finds certain continuities, for example in the types of reading pleasure valued by readers to the present day (and often standing in stark opposition to those most prized by élite culture) and in the near-consensus of dominant groups, however politically opposed, on the corruptive power of absorbing stories. She also underlines the diversity of novels classified as 'popular', for although certain characteristics of popular fiction remain constant over decades and even centuries, success with a wide popular audience also frequently depends on sensitivity to the moment, on topicality or response to a specifically located mood or tension. This is a matter of form as well as of thematic content, and makes for considerable variety in those novels that reach the widest readership. Explaining and exemplifying the note of disdain that still resonates through most critical and 'high' media discourse on popular fiction, Holmes disputes its assumptions, arguing for the cognitive and affective complexity of 'mimetic' readings and for the need, in any account of French literature, to pay proper attention to the stories read by the majority.

French popular film, the subject of Chapter 4, is for many a contradiction in terms: French cinema has long been associated with high culture, and despite the iconoclastic verve and youth appeal of the Nouvelle Vague, the longer-term impact of this hugely influential movement was to reinforce perception of French film as self-reflexive and demanding rather than aimed at a wide audience. Yet the French film industry has thrived through wars, recessions, powerful competition from Hollywood and the US free-trade lobby, and has done so through the consistent box-office appeal of comedies, thrillers, star vehicles and the (often critically derided) use of visually thrilling cinematography and eclectic, technologically adept and emotionally compelling narrative techniques: domestic reality and external perception of what constitutes 'French cinema' differ significantly. David Platten defines cinema as an intrinsically popular medium:

not only does its visual storytelling appeal across levels of education and class, but the ontological shift its invention produced in the subject's relationship to space, time and other subjectivities (literally seeing the world from another's point of view) applied, and gave pleasure, to the mass of the population. Developments in cinema's wonderful capacity to take us elsewhere continue to thrill a socially diverse public, and to inflect their vision in the widest senses of the word. Comedy, the most popular genre of all in France, is shown to invite at once an incipiently subversive irreverence for normative social values, through the bodily release of laughter, and the more cerebral, but still democratically accessible, pleasure of *seeing the illusion* – for we watch comedy from a dual perspective, on the one hand appreciatively aware of the artifice it involves, and on the other simply taking pleasure in the effects this artifice produces. The capturing and the (often sumptuous) rendering of a contemporary mood, evident in some of the biggest box-office hits across a variety of genres, also offers the pleasures of reflection in both senses of the word to a wide popular audience. Through analysis of some of French cinema's greatest commercial successes, this chapter interrogates the nature and the meaning of *popular* in relation to film.

Television, the subject of Chapter 5, presents the interesting case of a relatively young medium whose function and forms had to be defined within a context of already developed debates over the high/popular divide. Lucy Mazdon shows that the possible contradiction in television's twin aims – to disseminate national values and 'high' culture (in the UK, the Reithian imperative to educate) and to entertain a mass audience – was posed with particular acuity in France, where the democratisation of high culture had long been central to national identity and to what the State perceived as its duty. In the early days of TV, the new medium lent itself to the political agenda of a paternalistic President de Gaulle, and was harnessed to a Malraucian (André Malraux was de Gaulle's Minister of Cultural Affairs) programme of introducing citizen-viewers to the 'highest and the best' of French culture. However, these top-down aims were necessarily interwoven with entertainment values: for the medium to thrive, audiences needed to be gained and kept. Mazdon shows how the popularisation of TV then went hand-in-hand with a gradual dismantling of State control through the 1970s and 1980s, but also demonstrates that a liberal model of television as essentially responding to audience taste has always coexisted (and still does coexist) with an allegiance, apparent in audience behaviour as well as in government policy, to a model of TV as a national forum and a vital component of specifically French cultural life.

Both in its still popular capacity to relay and discuss unfolding national as well as international realities from a distinctively French perspective, and in its contrasting and intensifying shift towards fragmentation, commercialisation and individualised rather than collective modes of viewing, TV exemplifies the twin threads of allegiance to French exceptionalism and market-driven alignment with Western (ultimately North American) norms that characterise French cultural life.

In the final chapter, Nigel Armstrong tackles a question central to the book's endeavour: the relevance of popular language for wider perceptions of what constitutes 'popular culture'. If there is evidence, in France as elsewhere, of a broad 'bottom-up' levelling of linguistic style, replacing the previously hegemonic belief in a correct 'standard' language to which all must aspire, this is attenuated in France by powerful factors that militate in favour of a continuing consensus on linguistic standards. One of these has to do with a historical French centralism that, through policies that included education and military conscription, minimised regional variations in accent and vocabulary, and certainly separated these from linguistic markers of social class (unlike in the UK). Another of these factors, encountered throughout this book, is French Republicanism's powerful ideal of an inclusive, uplifting high-culture-for-all that resists any social levelling 'down' of language as of any other form of culture, viewing respect for the popular (in the sense of majority cultural practice) as mere populism, and as undemocratic in that it fosters the incapacity of most citizens to participate fully in a valuable national culture. This ideology cuts across the Right/Left divide, and arises no doubt, in part, from France's sense of being under siege, a nation that has always been a beacon of linguistic and cultural excellence now threatened from without by the dominance of (American) English and by industrialised cultural forms. Linguistic standards, then, like cultural ones, come to be seen, Armstrong argues, as 'a rule-system … from which people deviate to the extent that they are not highly educated'. Nonetheless, a certain 'levelling down' is apparent, for example in the spoken language's near-universal abandonment of the '*ne*' component of the negative. This, Armstrong contends, is no simple effect of a post-1968 glamourisation of proletarian style, nor of a grassroots refusal of deference. Language production is central to the individual's presentation of her or his identity, and as such is intertwined, perhaps even more than choices of cultural consumption, with the complex, multiple weave of contemporary French identity, that includes not only nation but also ethnicity, class, region, generation, gender, sexuality and no doubt more.

In short, this book deals with the ways in which popular culture has been defined, lived, enjoyed, fought over, imagined and re-imagined, in a nation that has long placed the meaning and status of culture at the heart of its identity.

Notes

1 'la notion de culture populaire souffre à l'origine d'une ambiguïté sémantique, compte tenu de la polysémie de chacun des deux termes qui la composent'.

2 Certainly, this brief summary of English usage could itself be contested but this book is not the place to do so.

3 'le terme *popular* ne signifi[e] nullement issu du peuple, mais populaire par l'ampleur de sa diffusion et le terme *folk culture* s'apparent[e] plus à ce que, en français, on dénomme populaire'. I have adjusted the tenses here to avoid confusion. In the original, Portes uses the imperfect tense because he is arguing that the need to distinguish between 'mass' and 'popular', a distinction that is 'normal in Europe', has only recently been noted in the USA, pp. 29–30. He thus seems to be implying that rather than European terminology lagging behind anglophone usage, it is the other way round.

4 It is difficult to do more than generalise here: the parameters of academic research, both francophone and anglophone, constantly shift.

5 It was in the UK that the journal *French Cultural Studies* was founded in 1990.

6 'un provincialisme français qui fait froncer les sourcils au seul énoncé du terme mystérieux de *Cultural Studies*'.

7 'Ce rapport désinvolte à l'empirie se combine souvent à une revendication ostentatoire de hauteur et de profondeur qu'exprime l'empilement des références intimidantes tenues pour des blasons de haute intellectualité. La notion même de French Theory, ce monstre épistémologique, est des plus symboliques. Le terme invite à traiter comme un ensemble cohérent les auteurs les plus connus du monde intellectuel français (Bourdieu, Derrida, Foucault, Ricœur). Ce spiritisme universitaire s'accompagne peu souvent d'une capacité à replacer ces œuvres dans le champ scientifique et les logiques sociales qui les ont vues se développer, pas davantage d'une grande attention aux incompatibilités théoriques entre des auteurs dont le seul point commun est parfois le passeport français.'

8 'est devenue nécessaire pour une bonne compréhension des sociétés contemporaines mais aussi, plus largement, de celles de l'ensemble du XXe siècle, d'autant que c'est au fil du siècle tout entier que les discours sur – et, le plus souvent, contre – cette culture ont fleuri'.

9 On PCRN, see http://www.leeds.ac.uk/smlc/Popularculturesresearchgroup.htm. The founding members at Leeds were Nigel Armstrong, Diana Holmes, David Looseley and David Platten. Looseley was its convenor and director, from 2005 to 2010.

10 We could arguably have selected more topical case studies for the same purpose: social networks, for example, or wikis or the iPhone. But we specifically wanted to research the development and impacts of the popular diachronically rather than adopting a synchronic 'French popular culture today' approach more suggestive of a textbook.

Politics and pleasure: inventing popular culture in contemporary France

David Looseley

France is an invention, a conceptualisation. (Kuisel 1996: 5–6)

Introduction

This first chapter focuses on political conceptualisations of popular culture in France, by which I mean conceptualisations developed by governments, parties, national institutions and the kind of public intellectuals who, as Ahearne (2010: 2) puts it, 'have moved in and out of positions within public policy processes'. Other chapters in this volume will be concerned with popular-cultural artefacts themselves. My focus here is on how such artefacts have been institutionally represented over time. For if, as Kuisel claims, France itself is an invention, a conceptualisation, this is in part due to the way its popular culture has represented it and been represented by it.

No single chapter could chart such representations in all their variety. Rigby (1991) devoted an entire book to analysing the 'cultural discourse' of popular culture in France from the *éducation populaire* movement to major public intellectuals like Certeau and Bourdieu. And these two themselves reflected on the sociology, history and meanings of the popular. More recently, Rioux and Sirinelli (2002) have traced the shifting responses of French intellectuals to mass culture, including Morin, Baudrillard and others. What has yet to be undertaken at any length is a critical historical account of the part played by the French state in shaping such responses. Rigby does deal with the subject relatively briefly (see his Chapters 5 and 6) but, published some twenty years before the present one, his monograph could not take stock of major developments in the creative industries (digital technologies, reality TV, electronic dance music and so on), the ways in which institutions and intellectuals have reacted to those developments and, vitally, new