

TRAVELING IN FRENCH CINEMA



Sylvie Blum-Reid



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Sylvie Blum-Reid
University of Florida, USA

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Introduction

‘A trip: Must be done quickly.’

‘Voyage: Doit être fait rapidement.’ (Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* 435)

‘One thinks one is going to take a trip, but soon the trip makes you or unmakes you.’ Nicolas Bouvier (1929–1998). ‘On croit qu’on va faire un voyage, mais bientôt c’est le voyage qui vous fait ou vous défait.’

The book reflects on travel narratives in French fiction films from the 1980s to the present. I plan to explore movement through the various landscapes traversed in French films over the past twenty years. Different modes, situations and perspectives will be examined. I borrow from the fields of cultural studies, ethnography, film studies, gender studies, philosophy, semiotics, tourism studies, and travel writing.

In the 19th century, ‘flânerie’ – a derivative of traveling – was commonly perceived as a masculine activity, observed in Baudelaire’s writing about the Parisian *flâneur*, a street wanderer associated with the act of looking. Going back to the 16th century, Montaigne, the ideal European traveler, relays the dominant masculine activity of sightseeing and contemplation of women in Italian cities in his *Journal de voyage/The Journal of Montaigne’s Travels in Italy by way of Switzerland and Germany*. 1850 and 1851, a journal discovered 180 years after his death,

le plus commun exercice des Romains, c’est se promener par les rues; ... A vrai dire, le plus grand fruit qui s’en retire, c’est de voir les dames aux fenêtres, et notamment les courtisanes, qui se montrent à leurs jalousies avec un art si traître que je me suis souvent émerveillé comme elles piquent ainsi notre vue; et souvent, étant descendu de

cheval sur-le-champ et obtenu d'être ouvert, j'admirais cela, de combien elles se montraient plus belles qu'elles n'étaient. Elles savent se présenter par ce qu'elles ont de plus agréable ... Chacun est là à faire des bonnetades et inclinations profondes, et à recevoir quelque oeilade en passant. (131–132). ('The only pleasure you have in them is to see them passing before the place where you are ... In one part of the street where the ladies have a better view, the gentlemen, on fine horses, run the quintain, and exhibit some grace at it. On this day all the fair gentlewomen of Rome were seen at leisure, for in Italy they wear no mask as they do in France and show themselves quite openly.')

¹

The Surrealists emulated Arthur Rimbaud's call for the open space of the road. André Breton recounted that before the publication of *Le Manifeste du surréalisme/The Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), he and his friends wanted to follow Rimbaud's famous injunction to 'drop everything and hit the road' (Brassaï 6).

Walking (and traveling) as summoned by George Steiner in his essay *A Certain Idea of Europe* is an activity specific to the European identity. It is a part of its very fabric, before the advent of modern transportation routes. The nature of travel and work, as well as the relations between men and women, evolved. Several trades are based on the actual displacement of the worker, as the embroiderer and seamstress or midwife and country doctor, and even actors, singers, and filmmakers in the early part of the 20th century. Nicole Verdier's ethnographic study *Façons de dire, façons de faire* covers some of the women's practices in rural France. The film *Les Brodeuses/Sequins* (Eléonore Faucher 2004) magnificently retraces the seamstress's itinerary.

Women have traditionally been limited from traveling in the past. Few of them had the freedom to move and those who could move between spaces and places were usually designated as suspicious individuals. Vagabondage and charity were paired and frowned upon especially if a woman or young girl was involved, as in Hector Malot's *En Famille/Nobody's girl* (1893).² The book is a classic and was at one point distributed as a book prize at the end of the school year to meritorious French pupils.

Some female travelers (and writers) used male disguise in order to wander the world freely, as with Isabelle Eberhardt (born in Geneva) in Algeria and Alexandra David-Neel in Tibet, whereas most of the early male travelers openly recorded their impressions of nature, otherness, women, and exoticism in their 'relations de voyage.' Others deliberately

picked their clothes according to their taste, and not as a disguise to avoid recognition (Maillart, Schwarzenbach).

A nascent tourist industry proposed to revolutionize tourism in the 19th century and packaged trips such as 'the discovery of Europe in a week'. Women and men became producers, distributors, and avid consumers of a more affordable tourism after a century of Grand Tours offered to mostly upper class male youth.

Travel literally designates 'the path to cover', the road. Several aspects participate in traveling. Walking is a dominant activity, an exercise in contemplation and thinking; it can be part of a daily regimen, designed to process different stages, as exemplified in the daily walks undertaken by the main protagonist in Karin Albou's *La petite Jérusalem* (2005), emulating philosopher Emmanuel Kant's daily promenades.

Travel is not necessarily a lucrative and pleasurable activity, limited to the enjoyment of a few, as described above. It points to traumatic experiences of displacement, forced migration, deportation, exile, and flight, or to necessary trips for work-related reasons. The migration flows to France, from within and without, developed new transportation routes and new laws that destabilize the fundamental notion of hospitality. Some of the films selected here speak to such conditions. Travel is a survival strategy for disenfranchised people, in order to secure a better job and a safer 'home' or in order to keep their jobs. At the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century, the situation of guest workers and refugees from various countries has become a central preoccupation for western countries, sometimes threatening their longtime universal pledge to offer asylum. The fate of Eastern European Jews who migrated to France and other countries of Europe in the 1930s is a reminder of the predicament of refugees today. Their subsequent destiny destroyed the commonly held belief that one could settle down and live 'like god in France'. Presently the situation of Pakistani, Syrian, Turkish, Kurdish, Afghan, African, and Chinese asylum-seekers crossing France, Italy, Spain, and other European countries and the Mediterranean Sea in search of employment and refuge has become a political nightmare for European governments as documented in films such as *Inguélézi* by François Dupeyron (2003 France), or *Dirty Pretty Things* by Stephen Frears (2002 UK) and more recently *Welcome* by Philippe Lioret (2009 France) and *Le Havre* by Aki Kaurismäki (2012 Finland/France, Germany).

This book embraces several discourses and examines the meaning of 'routes' and circulation at the beginning of the 21st century channeled through recent movies and texts. It touches on the topic of departure

point and destination. What are some of the European travel motifs, others than tourist hot spots? The existence of borders or boundaries is acknowledged. Despite attempts to cross and forego borders in a unified Europe, what was once true of western affluent countries no longer holds with the global threat of terrorism imposed on travelers and workers, as well as new policies established to promote a 'selective' immigration. Etienne Balibar's consideration of the phenomenon of 'vacillating borders' isolates the notion that established borders need to be revisited. What Balibar qualifies as a 'malady', the problematic circulation of people,

has relativized the functions of the port of entry and by contrast revalorized internal controls, creating within each territory zones of transit and transition, populations 'awaiting' entry or exit ... individually engaged in a process of negotiation of their presence and their mode of presence with one or more states (218).

Of interest in the book will be the form and metaphors used in travel narratives and what they accomplish on a purely cinematic level. Away from packaged tourism, 20th-century writers used diary notes as the traveler's preferred format. Nicolas Bouvier draws on the diary form in his journey across Eastern Europe to Afghanistan in *L'Usage du Monde*, a book that has become a bible for studies in travel narratives and backpackers alike. Notes logging travel impressions rival journal entries, with the example of Ella Maillart in *Croisières et Caravanes*, a Francophone Swiss traveler whose travel narrative was first published in English.³ Maillart toured through Asia, Russia, China, and Afghanistan in the 1930s. *Journey to Kafiristan/Die Reise nach Kafiristan* (Dubini brothers 2001) draws its inspiration from Annemarie Schwarzenbach's and Ella Maillart's road trip to Afghanistan in 1939 and their travel records.

Road movies, an emergent genre derivative of travel narratives usually paired with American cinema, are multiplying in Europe, although the concept derives from American films. They were present in the 1960s and 1970s with Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977) juxtaposing scenes of New York life with the filmmaker's voiceover reading letters from her Belgian mother, or Jean-Luc Godard's fleeing characters in *A Bout de Souffle/Breathless* (1959) and *Pierrot le fou* (1964). Other texts are in the form of chronicles, manuals, how to guides, or epistolary chronicles. *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978), Akerman's most European film, crisscrossing different countries in the form of a travelogue, paves the way. A more recent version appears in Julie Delpy's *Two Days in Paris*

(2009), a comedic travelogue that addresses a Franco-American couple's relationship in one of their displacements abroad. Several recent books attest to the phenomenon, such as Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt's *Open Roads, Closed Borders. The Contemporary French Language Road Movie*, and Neil Archer's *The French Road Movie Space, Mobility, Identity*. They are devoted to the road movie genre, as is Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli's *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie*. Annie Goldmann's *L'Errance dans le cinéma contemporain*, an early study, established the notion of wandering, by encompassing films by Godard, Duras, Akerman, Jarmusch, and Wenders. According to Goldmann, who traces the emergence of travel narratives in the 1960s, these directors' films were the earliest ones to deal with a certain kind of wandering. Her study is not so much devoted to road movies but to the concept of wandering in films as Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues does in *Modernes Flâneries du Cinéma*.

I am interested in geographic displacements, crossings and sometimes transgressions. I do not focus solely on the road movie genre, except formally in one chapter. Each travel mode (buses, cars, trains, airplanes, tractors) points to the importance of speed, our reliance on such modes throughout the 20th century, and the counterpart to that reliance found in the growing importance attributed to slowness, here related to traveling, which acts as a resistance and an alternative to the effect of accelerated life-styles. In fact, a celebration of slowness (although the term in English has negative connotations) is paired with drifting (or wandering), an activity inherited from 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire/Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782) and 19th-century romanticism. Contemporary writers Pierre Sansot and Philippe Delerm advocate such a pace. Slowness emerges as an alternative lifestyle that is more necessary than ever at the beginning of the 21st century. While it may seem archaic and counter-productive in postmodern times consecrated to communication, hyper-speed and efficiency, to take time off assists us to listen to others and to our body, and to facilitate dreaming. Jacques Rozier and Jacques Tati as well as Aki Kaurismäki are avid proponents of leisure time, reevaluating pace and inner reflection. I consider some of the wandering displayed in films such as *Sansa* (Siegfried), *L'Arpenteur*, *Le lac et la rivière* (Sarah Petit), or *La légende du Saint-Buveur* (Ermanno Olmi).

Amidst these travel narratives, I distinguish healing tropes in *Un si beau voyage* (Khaled Ghorbal), *Nocturne Indien* (Alain Corneau), *Le Grand Voyage* (Ismaël Ferroukhi), and *Transylvania* and *Exils* (Tony Gatlif). By healing, I mean a form of return to wholeness and health, body, mind,

and spirit that is accomplished through the travel process. The individual ends up at peace in his/her life and cleansed in the long run. Some films participate in different categories that are mutually interchangeable. For instance, a character may be nomadic, and a rebel, yet the trip in turn can unexpectedly become a healing one (Calle's *No sex last night*, or Gatilif's *Transylvania*).

Travel turns out to be a way of learning and of seeing. Marc Augé in *L'Impossible Voyage* urges us to 'learn how to travel again in order to learn how to see anew' (13–14). As a result, characters open to the Other. The journey transforms into a cleansing experience, or an inner voyage as with *Mr. Ibrahim*, or *Maine-Océan*.

Le monde existe encore dans sa diversité. Mais celle-ci a peu à voir avec le kaléidoscope illusoire du tourisme. Peut-être une de nos tâches les plus urgentes est-elle de réapprendre à voyager, éventuellement au plus proche de chez nous, pour réapprendre à voir (Augé 14–15). ('The world still exists in its diversity. But this has little to do with the illusory kaleidoscope of tourism. Maybe one of our most urgent tasks is to learn to travel anew, eventually closer to home, in order to learn how to see again.')

Augé opposes tourism for its reinforcement of spatial divisions and constitution of tourism arenas, spas, and clubs, 'which turned nature into a product' (14).

Due to new technologies (the internet grid), as well as socio-political and sometimes religious emergencies, displacements and journeys undergo severe mutations. Paul Virilio observes that 'the transport revolution of last century had already quietly begun to eliminate delay and changes the nature of travel itself, arrival at one's destination remaining, however, a "limited arrival" due to the very time it took to get there.' The 'elimination of departure at the end of the twentieth' century is a radical notion that places the sole emphasis now on 'arrival' (16).

The archetypal traveler stands at the core of our societies, a notion supported by Michel Maffesoli's *Le Voyage ou la conquête des mondes*. Our culture is returning to the 'wandering' trope and that of the nomad. Maffesoli revisits the uncanny traveler as someone who resists the norms of society – a figure of desire for the sedentary type, but also a troublesome one. The dialectical poles of sedentarism and nomadism are raised as well as questions regarding the urge to travel: 'la frénésie des voyages étant une manière déguisée de vivre l'immobilité' ('the frenzy to travel is a new disguised way to live immobility') (50).

Travel, when not a necessity, consists of a journey into the self, an exploration of one's identity and one's past, singular or collective. Roma filmmaker Tony Gatlif's nomadic films address the notion of one's place within the world. Some of the narratives examined are self-centered and introspective. At that stage, it is not so much the act of traveling that matters but the subsequent personal transformations that are accomplished through travel. As illustrated by Xavier de Maistre's 18th-century parodic *Voyage autour de ma chambre/Voyage around my bedroom* (1794), the distance covered is not the most important matter. De Maistre playfully puts forward to the world a 'new way of traveling', one that would be affordable to all 18th-century classes.

Travelers (tourists) have the advantage – and luxury for some – to leave a place without delay and to pass from one relation to the next, thereby escaping scrutiny from their contemporaries. The traveler, being constantly on the move, is inconspicuous, far from people's gaze since he/she is never anchored and never forges long-time relations. Louis-Charles Fougeret de Monbron examined some of the characteristics of travelers and stated that 'le seul moyen de se rendre la vie gracieuse dans le commerce des hommes, c'est d'effleurer leur connaissance, et de les quitter, pour ainsi dire, sur la bonne bouche' ('the only way to make life gracious in the business of men, is to barely make their acquaintance, and leave them, more or less, before exhausting one's welcome') (168). The traveler has an advantage over the 'resident' in that there is no time to realize people's imperfections, nor for people to notice theirs either as they spend very little time in one place.

The book has many facets; it is limited mostly to French or French-speaking narratives (francophone films and texts) yet straddles other European-based narratives when they resort to travel motifs presented earlier. My conclusion will point to further paths to be examined that were not necessarily taken. It reflects on the expansion of travel literature and festivals that take place yearly and how travel modes, and as a result films, are changing with new technologies.

1

Departures

Variations on the Euro-trip

This chapter charts a two-prong approach to Cédric Klapisch and Tony Gatlif in their films *L'Auberge espagnole* (2002), *Gadjo Dilo* (1997) and *Exils* (2004). The second part examines Tony Gatlif, the Franco-Algerian-Gypsy filmmaker's background and his experience as a migrant and exile who left Algeria for France in the 1960s. I choose the trope of departure as well as the fabrication of a European travel film type as a motivating force. I borrow from Star Studies in order to analyze the performance of Romain Duris, an actor shared by the two filmmakers.

In what is unofficially entitled *La Trilogie des Voyages de Xavier/The Trilogy of Xavier's Trips*, Cédric Klapisch confirms his intention to place travel at the center of his protagonist's experience. The final installment, *Casse-tête chinois/Chinese Puzzle*, came out in 2013, eleven years after the first film *L'Auberge espagnole/The Spanish Inn* (2002). The first part of the chapter concentrates on the first two films of the trilogy. Klapisch follows a young twenty-five-year-old French man Xavier Rousseau (Romain Duris) who decides to study Spanish in Barcelona and complete his studies. Xavier's (auto)biographical account stretches roughly over twenty years of his life.

In the first part, Xavier leaves everyone and everything behind, his country, mother, girlfriend, and his maternal language/native tongue, and becomes an exchange student or, poetically speaking, 'a foreigner in a foreign land'. The entire story is projected against the ambitious backdrop of the constitution of the European community, harmoniously experienced at its most microcosmic level: Xavier shares an apartment with seven European roommates, a sort of tower of Babel at the heart of Barcelona. Europe is typecast by six members (out of

twenty-five then) with Denmark, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Great Britain, and France, leaving out other nations. Xavier's future is carved out for him: he is to become a young technocrat or white-collar worker, a *cadre*, an insider of the new European financial elite, with headquarters at the Ministry of Finance in Bercy. The director even thanks minister Fabius in the final credit sequence.¹ Xavier secures an Erasmus grant that consists in [Erasmus is] a European Commission exchange programme that enables students in 31 European countries to study for part of their degree in another country and provides 'A fun challenging experience', as detailed by the following goals:

The confidence to live in another country
 New or improved language skills
 New perspectives on an academic subject
 An international network of friends
 Travel opportunities throughout Europe
 Academic credits
 Transferable employment skills.²

However, in an unexpected twist, and after many tribulations, the experience abroad proves life changing for Xavier as he drops everything upon his return to France, unable to follow the plan. Stylistically, the escape figure culminates in one of the final scenes located at the Ministry of Finances when he turns his back on a diploma, runs away, and opts for a 'jobless future.' The implicit sequel *Les Poupées Russes/ Russian Dolls* (2005) is outlined at the end of the first film, preparing the spectator for the next phase. Xavier decides to return to his childhood dreams of becoming a writer. The end (of the film) formally constitutes the beginning of his living up to his true aspirations, and the recovery of self, shedding the path that was preordained by his father and father's (business) partner and dictated by class. Reaching this stage takes multiple trajectories that Xavier experiences physically and psychically, providing several false beginnings to the turn of events that he desperately wants to tell us/spectators.³

L'Auberge espagnole

The somewhat autobiographical plot transposes Klapisch's own trajectory following his failure to enter the French national film school and his decision to live in New York for two years and study filmmaking at New York University. In 2002 Spain, one of Europe's preferred tourist

destinations, was at the height of its economic bubble. A long instructive review of *L'Auberge espagnole* found on a website for fun European vacations, displays alongside it information for travelers, bathroom decorations tips, and wardrobe advice for women.⁴

I read the film as a travel narrative, and will henceforth refer to it as part of the European-travel or euro-trip – a name that I adopt for lack of a better term. I attempt to situate and track the trend in contemporary French but also European cinema. Of course, this is an elastic label, as the notion of genre clearly demonstrated by Rick Altman's study is fluid rather than static, and with it the notion of national cinema. Raphaëlle Moine observes that genres are an abstract construct that serves to regroup films as well as a concrete construct (11). The Euro-travel genre is a minor genre, a direct heir to adventure films, branching off sometimes into comedy, but it is the beginning of a more serious trend that is born of transnational routes, displacement, migration, and expatriation scenarios that constitute one of the tropes of our postmodern era.

Genres are 'specific networks of formulas which deliver a certified product to the waiting customer. They ensure the production of meaning by regulating the viewer's relation to the images and narratives constructed for him or her. In fact, genres construct the proper spectator for their own consumption' (Andrew 110). *L'Auberge espagnole* parallels and mimics the advent of TV-reality shows that occurred at the beginning of the 1990s on French television. Programs such as *Loft Story* and *Nice People* were based on a formula that brought together a group of European roommates to test their skills at adaptation in a collective space.⁵ *Loft Story* moved from French television channel M6 to TF1 in 2003 on the heels of the successful Klapisch film and its new European twist: 'M6 already had its "loft" presented by Benjamin Castaldi, TF1 will have its *Auberge espagnole* starting in May.'⁶

Altman explains genre as a 'complex concept with multiple meanings', some of which are determined by the industry and others by viewing positions (14). His study relies mostly on Hollywood classical cinema, but raises the possibility that genres are possibly teaching us something about a nation and may be codified by certain parameters shared by a nation. For the present chapter, I focus on the 'Europeanness' of the genre, as it ventures into the different nations constitutive of Europe. This way, the main character's learning experience passes through his adolescent-like state reflective of the state of Europe in its infancy, learning, vacillating, and charting something different, new and collective. The film of course cannot speak for the (then) twenty-five member

countries of the European Union, nor can it speak for the future candidates to the Union that were standing by in 1996, for example Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Poland, and Slovenia, that became European Union members after its release.

L'Auberge espagnole activates at least two types of travel: one is couched in the Bildungsroman type, or *roman d'apprentissage* inherent to the genre and the other is the escape. Both are not necessarily mutually exclusive. To travel, wrote Montaigne, is not only about learning but also about 'fleeing'.⁷ Xavier has a nagging impulse to escape from France, his mother, and possibly his girlfriend. By the end of the trilogy, he has mastered the form and adapted to living as an exile.

Timothy Corrigan's analysis of road movies finds a few emerging traits in the 1950s that reflect a breakdown of the family structure, taken from an essentially male perspective as well as a quest.⁸ The structure evolves in the 1960s and 1970s when the typical male-buddy system breaks down and loses its innocence. Eventually in the 1980s, the genre crashes, allowing for the appearance of women as in Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985). Through the example of Wim Wenders's *Paris Texas*, Corrigan takes us through the story of Travis,

a wanderer who has not only lost a family and an identity but, more importantly in some ways, a road and a car. ... What Travis might have been searching for once is what most road questers invariably want: an authentic home, a lost origin where what you see is what you are (154).

L'Auberge espagnole retains some of the genre markers and confirms a quest for some lost origins that is the topic of yet another euro-travel movie, directed by Gatlif, *Gadjo Dilo/The Crazy Foreigner/L'Etranger fou* (1997). Although Klapisch's film is not a road movie in a strict classical sense, the filmmaker cast Xavier as a character in search of himself, who 'does not exist yet, who is on the path, [but] there is not yet a highway traced for him'.⁹ The myth of the road erupts in the narrative, yet roads are symbolic as the character leaves for a metaphoric open road.

Xavier's strained relationship with his divorced mother (and his girlfriend) that is more or less resolved at the close of the film, if one accepts that sharing a steak with one's vegetarian mother and engaging in friendly conversation is a sign of conflict resolution. The father is absent from his life. Leaving France comes at a cost. The character breaks down several times.

Klapisch advocates the importance of erasing boundaries, walls, and stereotypes in order to recognize and embrace the multiplicity of identities that constitute not only Europe but also being French at this historical juncture. He moves away from the Franco-French concerns that plague much of French cinema, and opens up the perspective. Xavier's voice-over narration literally takes off when it tackles these issues. The image of an airport runway and jetty is inserted several times to illustrate the movement of the plot.

Paradoxically it is a young African student – a fleeting appearance in the film who claimed the importance of maintaining a Catalan language and identity at a time when the European Union is debated at an earlier point in the film – who explains the identity politics that Xavier adheres to during a group discussion. The man from Gambia argues in favor of Catalan: 'It's not about an identity, but about the respect of identities.' Xavier reconsiders his French identity from this point on and definitely lets go of the 'gaulois' shared heritage advocated by the French neurosurgeon comrade who resettled in Spain with his wife.¹⁰ Interestingly, the film does not use Catalan as a means of communication once the somewhat radical call for a Catalan identity and language is made.

The story of a taking-off

Immersion in a foreign language and the encounter with Others contribute to building the narrative. Xavier would probably be on his way to a business career, complete with a business suit and life in a 'square' world. He turns his back on a nostalgic time when people would grow their own food and live on a farm, as in *Le Monde de Martine* or *Martine à la ferme*, a series of French children's books first published in 1954, which he shows to his more evolved girlfriend who rebels against the sexist image inherent to the story. His narrow world tumbles down very quickly with what he describes as the big *bordel* (the big mess), signifying the real world and especially Europe.

Xavier's real aspirations are not clearly defined. The film provokes a tension between a desire for simplicity or a return to a Rousseauesque natural world, and the desire for a big messy 'Euro-pudding.' It is in the big mess that Xavier finds himself. He becomes his own agent when he mediates with the landowner in Barcelona, avoiding eviction for the group.

The discovery of self passes through the filters of sexuality, eroticism, women, friendships, and travel. The film presents a relatively simple perspective that was not spared by *Cahiers du cinéma* critics. Thus some explain Klapisch's film(s) as,

Un petit cinéma de l'ingénuité post-adolescente dont Klapisch s'est fait le chantre depuis *Le péril jeune* ... *L'Auberge espagnole* ressemble à un *Loft* qui fonctionnerait non pas selon un principe d'exclusion et de resserrement progressif mais selon son exact contraire: un élargissement progressif (du cadre, des personnages) entraînant tout le monde dans un souci de boulimie euphorique et globalisant. (Malausa 86)¹¹ (A small cinema about post-adolescent ingenuity, of which Klapisch seems to be the master, since *School Daze* *L'Auberge* resembles the *Loft*, which would operate not only according to a principle of exclusion and a progressive tightening but its exact contrary, a widening (of the frame, or characters) bringing everyone into a euphoric and globalizing sense of bulimia.)

Yet, there is more depth to the film. Xavier does not resemble the prototypical traveler: once he arrives in Barcelona and settles in the 'Spanish inn', he becomes a sedentary student of a foreign culture. His urban wandering reveals a fascination for Barcelona, the city that the director views as mythical and that appears at times in a touristy, clichéd way (Gaudí's architecture, the port), sampling some of its tourist landmarks in one sequence and the less known Barcelona at other times. As he did in *Chacun cherche son chat/When the Cat is Away* (1996), Klapisch walks us through an architectural tour of the city, and maps out its geography first perceived through foreign eyes (most like those of the spectators). He exploits the notion of habitus and living in a city that at first is foreign, but will become natural once lived-in, echoing Georges Perec's notion of the city and the neighborhood. What does living in a foreign city mean at first? Xavier responds: 'After a while, all this belongs to you because you've lived there.'

Traveling through language, traveling through the city

Traveling is first and foremost traveling in a (foreign) language and being seduced by foreign names and words. Incidentally, the traveler is protected by the barrier of the foreign language, which can be beneficial to his ears in the way relayed by Roland Barthes of his own travel experience in Japan in *Empire of Signs*,

The murmuring mass of an unknown language constitutes a delicate protection, envelops the foreigner (provided the country is not hostile to him) in an auditory film, which halts at his ears all the alienations of the mother tongue ... Hence, in foreign countries,

what a respite! Here I am protected against stupidity, vulgarity, vanity, worldliness, nationality, and normality (9).

The streets of Barcelona become a text, a grid on the screen, displaying Xavier lugging his bags, and spelling out foreign names like *Urquinaona*, and mixing world geography locations, while celebrating the pleasure of naming and the poetry of the text:

Urquinaona s'est glissé doucement autour de Mouffetard, de Ponto Combo, de ... Knock le Zout.... Il est devenu normal et familier. ('Urquinaona slipped quietly around Mouffetard, Ponto Combo, and Knock le Zout ... It became normal and familiar.')

The traveler gets acquainted with space, a new geography and a new vocabulary in a visual crisscrossing of streets or roads. The foreign city in time becomes familiar, natural, and homelike, and upon return the home city (Paris) treats Xavier as a foreigner. Exile creates a distance in one's rapport with language, with one's nation and its inhabitants, one's parents, and one's self. Leïla Sebbar, in a letter exchange with Nancy Huston, summarizes the exilic state as 'residing in a border zone, always on the side, neither in nor out, but in a permanent state of imbalance' (Huston/Sebbar 28). A similar condition applies to Xavier, who ends up at the hospital as he suffers from visions of Erasmus, a 17th-century time traveler-scholar who visits him in his bedroom at night, or walks toward him on a pier. The hospital brain scan provides an accelerated montage of his experiences, real and fantasy. In one scene, he speaks only in Spanish and tells people that he has lost 'his mother's tongue.' The scan converts into a geographical map. The examination reveals nothing but fatigue and exhaustion and a large imagination, not to mention an excessive practice of foreign languages.

In one of the final sequences, Xavier's identity pictures scroll down the grid-like screen and negate uniqueness and individualism: 'he is neither this nor that'. The montage highlights the multifaceted European identities that he now embraces: 'He is this, and this one, and that one.' He is the young boy in the picture; Klapisch's son Pablo appears on a picture that becomes animated. He is at once French, Spanish, and Danish. He has also learned to incorporate his feminine side.

I'm not one but multiple ... I'm like Europe. I'm all that, ... a bordello. I can now start to tell you all. ('Je suis pas un mais plusieurs

... je suis comme l'Europe, je suis tout ça ... un bordel. Je peux enfin commencer à tout vous raconter').

This awareness closes the joyful-painful year, and the budding economist discards all prearranged plans to jump ahead at the possibility of a 'future without a job' or the life of the artist that he is to lead in *Les Poupées russes*, the sequel. The conversion implies that he may as well be a 'foreigner' and that he in fact has become a tourist in his own land, which he now views with a different eye. The recognition plays out in Montmartre, a tourist location by excellence. The voice-over narration waxes poetic as he is leaving Martine who broke up with him, and heads up the Montmartrois staircase towards Place du Tertre:

(Xavier's voice over): All these streets. Such a complex trajectory in order to get here! I found myself in the streets of Paris where Parisians never go. (script)

The camera tracks him up Montmartre, closing-up on his face in tears:

I was a foreigner among foreigners. ... Why was I there? I didn't know! I never quite knew why I was where I was. (script)

When a Japanese tourist takes a picture of him, he interjects:

I must be typical. (script)

In the same sequence Xavier spots a group of Erasmus exchange students, his doubles, and signals to them. The Erasmus exchange program becomes an instant password, a mantra into the shared communal values. He learns to speak the language of Barcelona's popular cafés, and develops an understanding of women's sexuality and the laws of seduction thanks to an intimate friendship with Isabelle, the Belgian lesbian. The synopsis, based on an economic pursuit of 'a better future', a fate anchored in the present reality of France and Europe, mandates the protagonist to 'experience the world, Europe, social life, autonomy, and sexuality',¹² a positive move disrupting one's cocoon and familiar prejudices (Klapisch).¹³ By advocating the importance of breaking down boundaries, walls, and stereotypes, one is able to recognize and embrace the multiplicity of identities that constitute Europe.

The third space

Traveling away from home forces one to alter one's perceptions, to come out of one's reserve and open up to changes. Alain de Botton positions the traveler in a third space where 'journeys are the midwives of thought. Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than a moving plane, ship or train' (57). Airport scenes abound in the film just as they pop up in countless films from the 1970s until today, replacing the early rail/road models. They manifest instances when people are out of touch with each other, and miss each opportunity to share their feelings. An illustration of such a moment ensues in the scene when Xavier takes Martine back to the Barcelona airport, and they look away from each other. Xavier is no longer the same person by the end of the story, which now has a subject and an identity; he is in the process of writing his story. He is standing on the empty runway, the only 'open' road in the film, a runway made for planes.

The reception of *L'Auberge Espagnole* was overwhelmingly positive, especially among the young audience. The film generated so much acclaim that a sequel was produced, *Les Poupées russes*, projecting Xavier five years later in Russia (June 2005). Made on an estimated budget of €5,300,000, *L'Auberge espagnole* sold 2,957,487 tickets in France by August 2003. In the US, it grossed \$3,895.664 in September 2003 after its May release. In France, the film ranked fourth on the list of national box office bestsellers.¹⁴

The travel concerns of *L'Auberge espagnole* are far-removed from the issues of displacement and migration found in the films covered in Chapter 5 of this book, such as François Dupeyron's *Inguélézi* (2004), Tony Gatlif's *Exils* (2004), Philippe Lioret's *Welcome* (2009), and Aki Kaurismäki's *Le Havre* (2011). *Inguélézi* follows Turkish Kurd immigrants illegally crossing France in order to reach England. Shot like a clandestine film, it was not widely distributed. The core of the film deals with the possible fate that awaits those illegally crossing Europe to reach the Promised Land – a pattern that characterizes the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. Afghan, Iraqi, Turkish, Kurdish, and Pakistani refugees have set camp at the French border near the Euro tunnel entrance, in Sangatte (Calais), awaiting some sort of transfer and acceptance into England. Apparently, 1,300 people were living at the refugee center in 2002 and 78,000 people would have crossed since 1999.¹⁵ The narrative speaks of the urgency of the situation, disregarding any possibilities of conviviality and cultural exchanges. Dupeyron and Lioret denounce a situation that has taken