

Global Gallicisms: Circulating Frenchness through Mainstream Film and Television

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PANEL A: EuropaCorp and Transnational French Cinema

Valérian and Anna: the limits of Luc Besson's model for made-in-France blockbusters

Isabelle Vanderschelden, Manchester Metropolitan University

As the creator of EuropaCorp, Luc Besson has in the last twenty years attempted to provide an alternative to Hollywood studio films by inventing a European major production model which could fulfil his own ambitions as a businessman and screenwriting director of transnational and transmedial popular blockbusters (Vanderschelden 2007, Vanderschelden 2019). While some Frenchness circulates in his films' production modes – he uses French technical teams and films mostly in France – they are also ostensibly designed for the world market in their castings, themes, narratives and generic motifs.

This paper looks at the hybridity of the last two films that Besson has scripted and directed, *Valérian and the City of the Thousand Planets* (2017) and *Anna* (2019). It considers more specifically the preproduction stages (script development strategies; financing and pre-sales; production models...). Identified as French productions in English with non-French casts, they use French technical crews and are filmed in the Paris studios for very different projects.

Following *Lucy* (Besson, 2014), *Valérian*, a global box-office postnational hit which blends a distinctive French *bande dessinée*'s imaginary world and Sci-fi genre conventions, clearly shows the limits of an over-ambitious, cross-cultural commercial product that fails to make clear choices for meeting wide target audiences. The film ends up disappointing both *Valérian*'s and *Laureline*'s French BD fans and the world audiences for whom Besson's films have to be universal enough to meet the criteria of the global blockbuster. This mismatch has really put EuropaCorp in serious financial difficulties, so much so that *Anna* was the last chance to save the major from a take-over. In February 2020, Besson lost control of EuropaCorp, whose capital is now majority-owned by an American fund. Failing to find the right balance between his own Frenchness and the global film industry in which he has always wanted to be a major player, Besson has possibly relinquished any chance to be a stakeholder in the new challenges awaiting a global cinema made in France after 2020.

Films populaires français ou productions globalisées ? Interroger les identités transnationales des blockbusters d'EuropaCorp au prisme des discours de réception

Thomas Pillard

Films de divertissement à gros budget conçus par une major française pour toucher une audience large et diversifiée à travers le monde, les blockbusters et franchises produits par la firme EuropaCorp (*Taxi, Le Transporteur, Taken*, etc.), en particulier ceux dont Luc Besson est à l'origine ou a écrit le scénario, interrogent en profondeur l'identité du cinéma populaire français contemporain, sa capacité à circuler dans plusieurs contextes et à y faire l'objet d'appropriations singulières : comment de tels objets, fréquemment critiqués pour leur américanité supposée par la presse critique spécialisée en France, sont-ils reçus dans d'autres espaces nationaux et discursifs ? Leur popularité est-elle davantage liée à leur origine française/européenne ou au contraire à leur adoption d'un style néo-hollywoodien susceptible d'assurer leur exportabilité au sein d'un marché globalisé ? Ont-ils été conçus pour ou parviennent-ils à s'adresser de façon spécifique à différentes audiences, en suscitant des réactions différentes de leur part ? Cette communication apportera des éléments de réponse à ces différentes questions, en explorant les réceptions dont la multiplicité des films écrits par Besson font l'objet par des publics eux-mêmes diversifiés, à travers une étude des avis publiés par les internautes de divers pays sur les forums du site IMDb.

Panel B: Locating Frenchness in Canal+'s Versailles

Canal + 'Originals' and the making of Versailles: a socio-economic approach to an international hit drama series*

Kira Kitsopaniidou and Olivier Thévenin (Paris 3 - Sorbonne)

*This paper will be delivered in French although slides are in English

This paper will analyze the production and financial strategy behind Canal+'s international hit drama series, *Versailles*. France's most expensive TV series to date produced by Capa Drama managed to secure the biggest international distribution ever for a French TV drama. Shot in English on location with a French crew but with a British actor for the lead role and two Hollywood-based British screenwriters, the series exemplifies Canal +'s strategy regarding big, international co-productions, as well as a shift in how French producers and Pay TV companies adapt to cultural globalization and industrial worldwide domination by streaming platforms such as Netflix. Based on a number of interviews, for instance with Canal + Head of Fiction, Fabrice de la Patellière, Capa drama producer Aude Albano and the scientific director of the Palace of Versailles' Research Centre Mathieu da Vine (historical consultant on the series), as well as on news articles and reviews mostly from the French and international film industry press, this paper will discuss how the series exemplifies and contributes to the growing internationalization of French drama series in general and Canal +'s broader global strategy in particular.

Construction des identités et des rapports de sexe dans *Versailles* : quelle modernité ?

Geneviève Sellier

La série franco-canadienne écrite par des scénaristes britanniques n'a pas vraiment d'équivalent en France. C'est plutôt vers des séries anglo-saxonnes comme *Les Tudors* ou *Borgia* qu'on peut trouver une filiation à *Versailles* : vision focalisée sur les relations sexuelles des protagonistes en tant que manifestations d'un pouvoir sans limite, dans une atmosphère de complots, avec son lot de violences physiques et morales.

Compte tenu de ce que les historiens relatent de ce moment du règne de Louis XIV (1667), où le jeune roi (28 ans) installe son pouvoir absolu sur une cour qu'il achève de soumettre, et collectionne les maîtresses, cette narration qui mêle scènes érotiques et enquêtes policières paraît avoir une certaine pertinence, même si les scénaristes ont pris, de leur propre aveu, beaucoup de libertés avec l'histoire...

La question qui nous intéresse ici est d'évaluer quelles constructions des rapports et des identités de sexe ainsi que des sexualités propose la série, puisqu'elle se focalise sur ces aspects-là. En effet l'accent est mis sur les relations du jeune roi avec les femmes de son entourage, ainsi que sur l'homosexualité de son frère, Philippe d'Orléans, et plus généralement sur la façon dont le pouvoir s'exerce à la cour, via les relations sexuelles.

Je focaliserai mes analyses sur la première saison, tout en mentionnant à l'occasion les saisons 2 et 3.

Panel C: Popular French Genres in the Global Mediasphere

The lives of performers: variations on the post-national and the place of the biopic in recent French production

Belén Vidal

This paper investigates the biopic of performers in the context of the post-national drift in 21st century French production, through two interrelated questions. Firstly, I look at how the financial viability of the genre was enhanced by the world-wide success of *La Môme/La Vie en Rose* (Dahan 2008), leading to further films (e.g. *Coco avant Chanel/Coco before Chanel*, Fontaine 2009) designed to capture both domestic and international markets. These period biopics present a variation in the ongoing debates about audiovisual *formatage* (or 'formatting'), which marks the convergence between cinema and television (Soulez 2015). Such convergence points at

shifting notions of quality in a post-digital landscape that favours the standardisation and serialisation of content across platforms.

Against the background of a changing production context, what kind of cultural work does the biopic perform? Despite its historic role in the consolidation of national film cultures and its continuing popularity across international cinemas (Vidal 2014) the status of the biopic in relation to French traditions of filmmaking remains ambiguous. For Moine (2017), its newfound popularity is a symptom of the pervasive impact of celebrity culture on French society. Whilst biopics of performers continue to play the card of generic universalism (Radner 2015) and consumable retro styles, they exploit a rich media archive from the post-WW2 period whose appeal lies in its cultural specificity (cf. “patrimoine variété”, De Bruyn 2008). Focusing on these questions through selected examples, this paper examines the constant negotiation between the standardisation of the biopic’s narrative tropes, and the functions of the biopic as a conduit for (local) memory that shapes the biopic as a post-national popular genre in French screen production.

The French Romantic Hero in the Era of Netflix

Mary Harrod

This paper considers the problem of marketing French masculinity to a global romcom audience as displayed by Netflix films and television series including *Un peu beaucoup, aveuglement* (Clovis Cornillac, 2015), *Blockbuster* (July Hygreck, 2017), *Je ne suis pas un homme facile* (Eléonore Pourriat, 2018) and *Plan coeur* (2018-19). The relatively regressive parameters of “legitimate” gender identities and masculinities in particular in France were thrown into relief in 2018 by the fallout from #MeToo there. In this context, Netflix’s globally-oriented “French” products are bound to negotiate between producing gender types that are locally legible yet acceptable in international – notably Anglophone – territories. While this tension is felt across the corpus, the paper focuses on subtle variations in representing the French romantic hero – traditionally strong and alpha in this of all contexts – to a global audience hypersensitive to notions of toxic masculinity and compulsory feminism. It tracks these across different media forms, production contexts (Netflix Original v. external production company) and precise historical moments (notably, pre or post-2018). The paper thus probes the particular affordances of contemporary global media industry players, whose flexibility enables their products to exist in a relation of dynamic exchange with a complex web of transnational cultures. More particularly, the paper offers a small-scale case study of the newly invigorated potential for audiovisual fictions to construct French identity (and by extension other, intersecting national ones) in a bilateral relationship with external cultures.

Biogs. for Speakers

Isabelle Vanderschelden is Senior Lecturer in French Studies in the Department of Languages, Information and Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her main areas of research are articulated around contemporary French cinema; screenwriting; film production; transnational cinemas; subtitling; intercultural competence and film literacy. She has published in English and in French in these fields. Publications include *Amelie* (2007); *Studying French Cinema* (2013); *France at the Flicks: Issues in Popular French Cinema*, coedited with Darren Waldron (2007). She has guest-edited a special issue of *Studies in French Cinema* in 2016 on aspects of the French film industry and has just completed with Sarah Leahy *Screenwriters in French Cinema* (MUP 2021). She is co-founder with Carmen Herrero of FILTA (Film in Language Teaching Association) and has co-edited with her *Using Film and Media in the Language Classroom: Reflections on research-led Teaching* (2019).

Thomas Pillard is Maître de conférences at Sorbonne Nouvelle University – Paris 3. His specialisms include cultural studies approaches to French film, especially popular; postwar French film and television history; and reception studies. As well as various co-editions and numerous articles, he has authored books on *Le Film noir français 1946-1960*, Bertrand Tavernier's *Un dimanche à la campagne* and Marcel Carné's *Le Quai des brumes*.

Kira Kitsopanidou is Professor at Sorbonne Nouvelle University – Paris 3, specialising in industrial approaches to French cinema and television. Her major recent publications include: *Crowdfunding, industries culturelles et démarche participative. De nouveaux financements pour la création* (dir., avec Laurent Creton), coll. "ICCA", Peter Lang, 2016; *Ville et cinéma. Espaces de projection, espaces urbains* (dir. avec Irène Bessière, Laurent Creton et Roger Odin), coll. "Théorème", Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016; *Le Film français (1945-1958). Rôles, fonctions et identités d'une revue corporative* (dir. avec Laurent Creton et Thomas Pillard), coll. "Théorème", Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2015; *Le Cinéma 3-D : histoire, économie, technique, esthétique* (avec Martin Barnier), coll. "Cinéma, Arts visuels", Armand Colin, 2015; *Le Levain des médias: forme, format, média* (dir. avec Guillaume Soulez), *MEI*, n°39, 2015.

Olivier Thévenin is Professor of Sociology at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, researcher at the Cerlis laboratory and member of the LabEx "Cultural Industries and Artistic Creation". His research is in the field of the sociology of audiovisual, cinema and culture and concerns the study of individualization, mediations, representations and sociability. His work focuses in particular on film festivals, the performing arts, cultural industries and seriophilia, as well as on the changes linked to digital technology in social uses.

Olivier THÉVENIN est Professeur de sociologie à l'Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, chercheur au laboratoire Cerlis et membre du LabEx "Industries culturelles et création artistique". Ses recherches s'inscrivent dans le domaine de la sociologie de l'audiovisuel, du cinéma et de la culture et concernent l'étude de l'individualisation, des médiations, des représentations et de la sociabilité. Ses travaux portent en particulier sur les festivals de films, le spectacle vivant, les industries culturelles et la sériephilie ainsi que sur les mutations liées au numérique dans les usages sociaux.

Geneviève Sellier est Professeure émérite en études cinématographiques à l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne. Spécialiste des approches « genrées » du cinéma et de la télévision, elle a publié notamment *Jean Grémillon : le cinéma est à vous* (Klincksieck [1989] 2012) ; *La Drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français, 1930-1956*, avec Noël Burch ([Nathan1996] Armand Colin 2005) ; *La Nouvelle Vague, un cinéma au masculin singulier* (CNRS éditions, 2005) ; *Le cinéma au prisme des rapports de sexe* avec Noël Burch (2009) ; *Ignorée de tous... sauf du public : quinze ans de fiction télévisée française*, avec Noël Burch (Ina, 2014) ; et en co-direction avec Gwénaëlle Le Gras, *Cinéma et cinéphilies populaires dans la France d'après-guerre 1945-1958* (Nouveau Monde éditions, 2015). Elle prépare un ouvrage sur le courrier des lecteurs des magazines populaires de cinéma d'après-guerre. Elle anime depuis 2016 un site collectif de critique féministe du cinéma et de la télévision, Le Genre et l'écran.

Belén Vidal is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at King's College London. Her research looks at the historical film genres in European cinemas, as well as cinephilia and Spanish film historiography. She is the author of *Figuring the Past. Period Film and the Mannerist Aesthetic* (2012); *Heritage Film. Nation, Genre and Representation* (2012) and the co-editor of *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture* (2014) and *Cinema at the Periphery* (2010).

Mary Harrod is Associate Professor in French Studies at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *From France with Love: Gender and Identity in French Romantic Comedy* (I.B. Tauris, 2015), *The Europeanness of European Cinema* (I. B. Tauris, 2015, co-edited with Mariana Liz and Alissa Timoshkina) and *Women Do Genre in Film and Television* (Routledge, 2017, winner of the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies Best Edited Collection Prize 2019, co-edited with Katarzyna Paszkiewicz). She has two books forthcoming in 2021, *Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood: the Rise of the Cine-fille* (Palgrave Macmillan, May) and *Imagining 'We in the Age of 'I': Romance and Social Bonding in Contemporary Culture* (Routledge, July, co-edited with Diane Negra and Suzanne Leonard). With Ginette Vincendeau, she is co-Chief General Editor of *French Screen Studies*.

Lucy Mazdon is Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education at the University of Hull and Chair in Film. Lucy has published widely in the fields of French and European cinema and television. She has a particular interest in remakes and wider questions of transnational or intercultural audiovisual exchange.

Ben Holden is a writer and producer, based in London. As a film producer and executive, his various credits include *The Woman in Black* films, *The Quiet Ones*, *Let Me In*, as well as the music documentaries *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* and *Living in the Material World: George Harrison*, both directed by Martin Scorsese. Ben is the editor of several anthologies, including the bestselling *Poems that Make Grown Men Cry*, *Poems that Make Grown Women Cry* and *My First Memory* (all published by Simon & Schuster). He also presents the *Ex Libris* podcast, in which he meets great authors in the libraries and bookshops that mean the most to them.