

FRENCH CINEMA

Globalization, Representation, and Resistance

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It is now twelve years since French brinkmanship pushed American negotiators and the prospects of a world trade deal to the wire, securing the exclusion of cultural products and services from the 1993 GATT agreement and the maintenance of European systems of national quotas, public subsidies, and intellectual property rights in the audiovisual sector. The intervening period has not been quiet. Although the Multilateral Agreement on Investment was sunk when Lionel Jospin pulled the plug on negotiations in October 1998, the applications of new central European entrants to join the European Union and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have been accompanied by a continuing guerrilla battle fought by successive American administrations against the terms and scope of the exclusion. In addition, developing countries—led, notably, by Brazil—have been increasingly vocal in their opposition to the European regulatory and redistributive mix, which they perceive to be little more than the market protectionism of a rich man's club. Moreover, as Jean-Michel Baer has recently argued in a perceptive overview of the cultural exception, the ability of European states to defend cultural diversity is also vulnerable to the risk-management strategies prevalent in Europe's *own* cultural industries, which have accelerated the trend toward horizontal and vertical concentration amongst its major media companies. In the area of film, this has led to an increased emphasis on marketing and a concomitant reduction in the diversity of spectator choice.¹

The collection of articles in this special issue of *French Politics, Culture & Society* explores the terrain mapped out by the post-GATT debate on globalization, examining the way that the consumption and production of film in France is structured by the relationship between sociopolitical conditions, state regulation, and transnational economic processes. Of course, we are not

suggesting here that operation within global markets is a new development for French cinema to contend with: clearly, it has always done so, from the beginnings of the silent era, often profitably. Yet 1993 marks a remarkable conjunction of circumstances: the opening of the first multiplex cinema on national territory, heralding a new phase in the economic organization of film exhibition; the state sponsorship of Claude Berri's *Germinal* as the apex of national cultural production (and its subsequent battle with Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, only for both to be beaten at the French box office by Christophe Poiré's *Les Visiteurs*); the mobilization of film industry professionals in support of the domestic subsidy system; the end of Jack Lang's tenure at the Ministry of Culture, opening possibilities for the redefinition of state support objectives; and the GATT agreement itself. This moment marks a turning point for state cinema strategies, as illustrated by the publication the following year of the influential report of the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) on export strategies.²

Germinal is in many ways indicative of the national-global, popular-elite problematic within which French cinema found itself at that time. The film drew on many of the supposed strengths of French cinema: national star performers (notably Gérard Depardieu), a director (Berri) whose name was synonymous with quality popular cinema and, of course, national cultural prestige (specifically, Zola's naturalism, but, more generally, the novel as personal creation and legitimized art form). Its symbolic confrontation with *Jurassic Park* seemed to suggest that a national cinema, rooted in history (drawing as *Germinal* did on the vicious labor relations in the mining industry in the late nineteenth century), could stand up to the monstrous invader by drawing on its strengths. Yet unlike the novel, *Germinal* the film is fundamentally disconnected from the time and space of the struggle that it relates, presenting rather a commodified aesthetics of conflict. No longer part of a living culture or connected actively to sociopolitical tensions, it was above all a domestic and international prestige product. In this it is emblematic of its moment: showing the repression of a strike at the very moment of the disappearance of the French coal-mining industry, it also symbolizes the consignment of a militant working class, undone by the neoliberal offensive of the last thirty years, to history—or rather, more finally still, to heritage. Indeed, *Germinal's* depiction of social struggle underlined how French cinema had more broadly turned its back on contemporary issues, while its comparatively disappointing box office career seemed to signal the limits of the Lang-inspired strategy of the popular national-cultural epic.

French Cinema as Global Competitor

Today, a little over ten years after the GATT settlement, French cinema appears—superficially at least—to be in comparatively rude health. *Un Long*

Dimanche de fiançailles, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's eagerly awaited follow-up to *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*, attracted a startling 1.6 million spectators in its first week of release at the end of October 2004; the same week, seven out of the top ten films at the domestic box office were French productions. Even more strikingly, Christophe Barratier's *Les Choristes* finished 2004 as the year's most successful film at the domestic box office, having attracted 8.6 million spectators to French theaters (an enormous success in any terms, but even more so for a first film). Such cases are not isolated examples but rather representatives of a growing trend: there is convincing evidence that French cinema is now more consistently producing mass-market successes, with seventy-three French films attracting over 1 million spectators at the domestic box office between 2001 and 2004. This is at least partly a function of the investment in the technological conditions of spectatorship undertaken over the past ten years; the equipment of all major French towns and cities with at least one multiplex cinema has modernized and reinvigorated film exhibition. Striking evidence of the consequent reversal of the long-term decline in cinema-going in France is revealed by the annual audience figures, which in 2004 reached 194.8 million, their highest level for twenty years.

Yet such apparent good health hides an increasingly polarized picture. The widespread development of multiplexes since 1993, coupled with the consequent introduction of loyalty cards by the two most prominent operators (UGC and EuroPalaces) has, as Graeme Hayes argues in his article, accelerated the economic concentration of the exhibition market, threatening independent cinemas with closure, and in turn exacerbating the structural weakness of France's distribution market. Of the three principal sectors of the film chain—production, distribution, and exhibition—it is distribution that is the most economically precarious: the Goudineau report of July 2000 highlighted the poor profitability of the majority of French distribution companies (three-quarters of films do not recover their costs), the oligopolistic nature of the market (Gaumont, Pathé and UGC take about 50 percent of market share from the distribution of comparatively few films, whereas 80 percent of films are distributed by companies dealing with fewer than ten films per year), and the significant disparities between the promotional budgets of American and French films.³ Post-GATT, Gaumont and UGC consolidated their already dominant position in this market through the formation of film distribution alliances with the major American studios: in 1994, Gaumont formed GBVI with Disney, while UGC formed UFD with Fox the following year. Though these agreements have now been terminated, transnational joint ventures remain central to the strategies of the French majors in the distribution market: partnerships between UGC and Warner, and between Gaumont and Columbia Tristar, are currently operative in DVD and video distribution, with the latter agreement also extended to cover film distribution in July 2004.

The home video (VHS and DVD) market, which in 2003 produced annual receipts of some 2 billion euros (roughly twice the volume generated by

theatrical exhibition), is even more polarized. The rapid development of DVD retail since 1998 has largely been achieved through highly aggressive and, according to the state-commissioned 2004 Fries report, often “anarchic” and possibly anticompetitive pricing, with super- and hypermarket chains accounting for over 50 percent of total sales, and large multimedia retailers, such as FNAC and Virgin, a further 40 percent.⁴ As a result, supply is narrowly calibrated to mass-market new releases, with French productions claiming a market share of only 21 percent, significantly less than in theaters. Though there is a growing number of small specialist distributors, all but the most widely known titles in the national back catalogue are unavailable. Moreover, the state support mechanism for video does little to encourage diversity, as funding is primarily allocated on the basis of the annual turnover of the video distribution companies. As a result, funding primarily rewards a small number of highly successful French films—precisely those titles in least need of it.

It is one of the common markers of the current success of the French film industry that the number of French films produced each year has now exceeded 200 for the fourth consecutive year. Yet, as Jonathan Buchsbaum notes in his article in this issue, there is also a sense of alarm in this apparently positive statistic: for, in a polarized market, there is a growing feeling that there are now *too many* French films being produced. While the production of French “event” films tailored for the new screening infrastructure seems increasingly in step with public expectations of the contours of a national popular cinema, the structural pressures created by the emphasis on the competitive performance of a national mass-market cinema have left the vast majority of French film production struggling for air. Of course, France still has the fourth highest number of screens in the world, behind only China, the United States, and India. Yet the current industry trend is towards blanket coverage in opening weeks: in June 2004, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* became the first film in France to open on more than 1,000 screens; *Un Long Dimanche de fiançailles* opened on 706 screens, 250 more than *Amélie*. As a result, the competitive pressures on small films have increased, making it difficult if not impossible for them to “find an audience.” At the same time, the importance to small distributors of exhibiting their films in major circuits (notably UGC, and especially in UGC Ciné-Cité’s showcase multiplex in Les Halles in central Paris) has meant that independent cinemas increasingly struggle to gain access to copies of key revenue-generating independent and art house films.

In the specific case of film, the dominant expression of exceptionalism has been the defense of the right of an interventionist state to maintain a range of mechanisms to subsidize and support its own film industry. This is simultaneously a defensive and an expansionist discourse. On the one hand, it is characterized by the search for cultural versatility, for new aesthetic and industrial models enabling the increased penetration of foreign markets. The launch of UniFrance in 1995, charged with monitoring and promoting French film

exports, testified to a new urgency in devising international market penetration strategies and their centrality to national film objectives. The willingness of French cinema to “gallicize” Hollywood norms to enhance its competitiveness is perhaps exemplified by its turn to postproduction digitization, which, since its initial “explosion” in French cinema in 2001, has become increasingly prevalent.⁵ The success of Luc Besson’s English-language *Léon* is also particularly instructive: the product of a French *auteur* working within the Hollywood model, *Léon* suggested that the turn to a hybrid, postnational cinema was a new global market strategy that might depart from heritage film’s presentation of an essentialized and commodified vision of national cultural identity.⁶ Yet on the other hand, the discourse of exceptionalism also casts film as a key medium for the transmission of a cultural particularity under threat from globalizing and homogenizing forces. As such, it is riven by a pervasive sense of anxiety, shared by film- and policymakers alike, over the ability of the state support system to maintain the integrity of the “protected space”⁷ within which the national film industry has operated since the end of World War II. As the recent controversy over the funding and marketing of *Un Long Dimanche de fiançailles* demonstrates, the *exception culturelle* thus generates potentially contradictory dynamics.

The controversy over *Un Long Dimanche* is all the more startling because Jeunet’s previous film, the phenomenally successful *Amélie*, had seemed to demonstrate how such contradictory dynamics might be reconciled by speaking differently to different audience sectors. Locating itself as a popular French comedy, and thus as an avatar of a historically dominant national genre with a continuing strong appeal to a broad home audience, *Amélie* was also bursting with self-referential confidence, the work of a recognized (and instantly recognizable) *auteur*, and appealed to a more middle- or highbrow audience abroad through the cultural cachet of its heritage aesthetics and, particularly, its evocation of a tourist Paris (notably, a near village-like, digitally airbrushed Montmartre). Connecting knowingly to a strong populist strand that ran through the classic French cinema of the 1930s, it again cleverly broadened its appeals, simultaneously drawing on the cultural capital of the cinephile audience while speaking to a French audience nostalgic for a (purely mythical) sense of innocence and rooted community. Perhaps more significant than the film’s refusal to connect in any meaningful way to polemical issues in contemporary France, however, was the evident federating power of a narrative rooted in popular traditions, as the film’s 9 million spectators helped French productions to an annual market share of 41.7 percent at the domestic box office in 2001, an increase from the previous year’s disappointing 28.2 percent. Crucially, the film was even more successful abroad than at home, attracting combined foreign audiences of some 22 million spectators. Moreover, it was hugely successful in North America, where the market is traditionally harder to penetrate for French films;⁸ distributed by Miramax on the back of its European success, *Amélie* took over 34 million dollars at the US box office, making

it the fifth most financially successful of all foreign language films there,⁹ as well as the second most successful French production, behind only Besson's 1997 English-language *The Fifth Element*.

Such success enabled Jeunet to have both final cut and a comparatively huge production budget—at 45 million euros, the second highest in French cinema history¹⁰—for his follow-up film, an adaptation of Sébastien Japrisot's World War I novel. Again marrying the heritage aesthetics and digital technology that characterize Jeunet's distinctive personal style, *Un Long Dimanche* was released in France to coincide with the ninetieth anniversary of the start of the war, backed by a 3.5-million-euro promotional campaign, a special issue of *Studio* magazine, a pedagogical dossier detailing and authenticating the film's historical context,¹¹ and educational screenings across the country. *Un Long Dimanche* is precisely situated in time and space, relocating the anchored, nostalgic, popular Frenchness of *Amélie* in the specific historical moment of the trenches. According to Jeunet, this was an intrinsically French production; indeed, at a time when French film and television production is increasingly characterized by delocalization to southern and, especially, central-eastern Europe (Besson's *Jeanne d'Arc* was shot in the Czech Republic, Nadine Trintignant's *Colette* in Lithuania),¹² *Un Long Dimanche* was shot and postproduced in France, in French language, using French cast and crew.¹³ Consequently, the decision of the CNC to award its *agrément*, recognizing the film as a French venture qualifying for state support, seemed straightforward enough. Yet the film's international ambitions, alongside those of the director himself, had necessitated a funding structure including a key stake from 2003 Productions, a company established by the president of Warner France, which holds 32 percent of the capital. The award of the *agrément* was therefore immediately met by a legal challenge from two French producer organizations, the SPI (Société des producteurs indépendants), and the API (Association des producteurs indépendants), which, despite their names, bring together major players Gaumont, UGC, Pathé, and MK2.

For the plaintiffs, funding *Un Long Dimanche* from the *soutien automatique* would destroy the integrity of the support mechanism, enabling non-European production companies to access national aid. For Jeunet, whose film might reasonably have expected to generate as much as 3.3 million euros in financial support, the legal challenge amounted to little more than a cartelistic maneuver designed to protect the market dominance of the established major French production companies. In November 2004, an administrative tribunal found in the favor of the former, concluding that 2003 Productions was a Trojan horse, established to circumvent the rules excluding American companies from French state subsidies, and overturned the *agrément*.¹⁴ It is worth lingering on the logic of this decision. Given the multiplicity of levels on which the national identity of a film might be located—the source, the setting, the aesthetic strategies and contexts, the nationality of the director, audience analysis—the tribunal's decision simply asks us to follow the money. Of

course, this is a legal decision, and not the policy of the CNC, but one might reasonably conclude that the *exception culturelle*—always a general aspiration rather than a defined set of norms—appears as a consequence to be rather more of an *exception économique*.

The industry's superficially fine bill of health thus conceals the problems inherent in what Charlie Michael refers to in his article as the "constant balancing act between a delicate sense of cultural ownership and a more concrete (if no less delicate) sense of economic reality." The will to international competitiveness raises fundamental questions about the political logic of the cultural exception; the economic concentration necessary to support a homegrown, mass-market, export-friendly popular cinema supposes a domestic industrial chain structured in such a way that it threatens the very cultural diversity on which the political legitimacy of the exception depends. At the same time, the financial logic of big-budget production requires resources increasingly calibrated towards North American investment models. In all this, the notion that French cinema might offer something that is culturally specific and identifiably distinct from transnational Hollywood product seems to have become rather lost. For the CNC, the *Long Dimanche* decision accordingly poses urgent questions about the coherence and objectives of the funding system regulations.¹⁵ Indeed, as Jonathan Buchsbaum shows in this issue, independent and parliamentary reports on the French cinema industry are conscious of some of these structural tensions. They are now suggesting that some profound rethinking of state policy is required, even if official reports still seem to content themselves with suggesting smaller scale retuning of established support mechanisms.

French Cinema as Vector of Resistance

There is a more profound sense in which, post-GATT, the apparent health of French cinema may be deceptive. The discourse of exceptionalism might seem to be a straightforward continuation of well-established policies that, albeit with changing mechanisms, have long served to protect the industry from unbridled foreign—read Hollywood—competition. But it is perhaps useful to point out that, in a broader context within which states have substantially capitulated in the face of globalizing capital, the defense of culture in general and of cinema in particular can no longer be seen in quite the same way. Defense of the national culture might once have been seen as a vital part of the broader social and economic action of an interventionist state committed to national cohesion. However, the state's broader roles have now receded significantly as it is now increasingly unwilling or unable to play its erstwhile integrational role. In these new circumstances, cultural exceptionalism may look less like a continuation of long established policies and increasingly like a defense of the purely identitarian markers of a national that has become detached from a wider commitment to national cohesion.

In the aftermath of May 1968, and in stark contrast to the diminished role that now seems reserved to it, film was an intrinsic part of a broader drive towards a radical remodeling of the social, economic, and political spheres. Early 1970s utopianism soon gave way to a more measured period of reflection and analysis, and subsequently to defiant defensive action as the hope for a transformative social project receded. Film continued to be a major vector of radical opposition throughout the period, although its progressive demobilization paralleled the gradual unraveling of 1968; filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker who had been drawn into militant cooperatives returned to more conventional, individual modes of production; collectives such as Cinélutte, the Groupe Dziga Vertov and the Medvedkine group either dissolved or mutated into more conventional production companies. Crucially too, even as art house exhibition spread into the provinces from the Parisian Left Bank in which it had previously been concentrated, the extensive, noncommercial parallel exhibition circuits tied to unions, workplaces, the PCF, and leftist organizations wound down as the decade progressed. The election of Mitterrand in 1981 might have seemed to hold out a lifeline to a militant cinema on its last legs; instead, it seems to have confirmed its passing, especially when, in 1983, the government bowed to the pressures brought to bear by world financial markets and abandoned the drive to Keynesian policies and broad-scale nationalizations, thus effectively accepting that even mid-ranking nation-states could no longer choose their own economic policies, drastically reducing the scope of political intervention. The demobilization of the social movement sector and the increasing inability of organized labor to aggregate resistance to the new politics of the market found a corollary in the absence of filmmakers to find a cinematic language equal to the challenge. Save a few notable exceptions, cinema remained largely mute: the 1980s and early 1990s were years when cinema largely withdrew from public intervention and returned to conventional commercial filmmaking. Although the *cinéma du look* of Luc Besson, Jean-Jacques Beineix, and Leos Carax was far from the only face of the French cinema of that period, it did seem, in its cult of surface and self-enclosing filmic intertextuality, to encapsulate a retreat from the sociopolitical sphere.

Although the undoing of the 1968 counterculture and the capitulation of the socialist project may not at the time have been seen as part of the rise of neoliberal globalization, it is retrospectively clear that they were intrinsically connected to a capitalist counteroffensive that led to a decisive defeat of the transformative Left. It is important to locate the recent history of cinema within this broader frame; similarly, the casting of cultural exceptionalism in corporatist and identitarian terms is intrinsically tied to a broader acceptance that the core tenets of neoliberal globalization cannot be opposed and that only a narrowly framed defensive action is possible.

The public sector strikes of November-December 1995 challenged this settlement. With the winter strike wave of that year, France saw the return of the

kind of mass mobilization that had seemed consigned to history. Although opposition to Prime Minister Alain Juppé's plan to cut public spending in order to meet the European single currency's convergence criteria remained concentrated in the public sector, statements of support from workers in the private sector emphasized that large segments of French society were opposed to neoliberalism's progressive dismantling of postwar social gains. Alongside the rise to public prominence of a new set of social movements mobilizing in defense of marginalized and disenfranchised groups—the *sans*—and articulating demands steeped in republican traditions of active citizenship,¹⁶ the strike helped confirm the reemergence of a broadly grounded oppositional voice and of vital public debate that did not simply boil down to variations on a hegemonic *pensée unique*. This resurgence of opposition helped prepare the terrain for the emergence of counterglobalization as the central mobilizing factor of the late 1990s, not only on the alternative Left but across the political spectrum. In this context, the demonstrations against the WTO meeting in Seattle in November-December 1999 had a revelatory dimension, both rendering visible the actors, institutions, and processes of neoliberal globalization beyond the supposed "hidden hand" of financial markets and allowing for a transnational citizen-based politics of resistance. In France, where the strikes of winter 1995 had reactivated the capacity for mass social mobilization, Seattle provided the political impetus for the activation of the latent criticism of globalization that had been identifiable in public opinion surveys and focus groups since 1992-93.¹⁷

Opposition to the social consequences of neoliberalism amongst significant sectors of the French population has generated considerable demand for critical fiction and nonfiction films. Post-1995, French cinema has returned to the socioeconomic realities that it seemed to have abandoned in the quiescent 1980s. A resurgent documentary strand, as Laurent Marie shows in his article, has repeatedly tracked both the consequences of neoliberal policies and the rise of resistance to them. In contrast, as Martin O'Shaughnessy discusses in his contribution, fictional narratives usually limited to local, interpersonal interactions have appeared less able to engage directly with the distanced and disembodied processes implied by the globalizing dynamics of delocalization and deterritorialization, but, as O'Shaughnessy also argues, they have nonetheless repeatedly focused on social dysfunctions that cannot properly be understood outside of this context while seeking narrative strategies that might compensate for their inherent limitations.

One might therefore be tempted at this stage to suggest a mechanistic causal relation between the rebirth of widespread social protest and cinema's return to sociopolitical critique. But this return is probably better seen in terms of the complex interaction of several factors, some more specifically related to the political economy of film and some more broadly grounded in French society and politics as a whole. One should begin by recognizing—and here the *exception culturelle* starts to appear less simply corporatist—that France's long-

standing commitment to a range of subsidies and quotas mean that films that would simply not get made elsewhere are able to find funding there; the diversity of French production leaves room for a critical cinema to exist. Yet, whether it be fiction or documentary, this cinema has good reasons to feel threatened. As discussed above, the type of small- to low-budget fiction films with which we are mainly concerned here can sink without trace if their initial audience figures are poor. The situation for documentaries is no less difficult. Although one of the most unexpected trends of recent times has been the rise in their theatrical release, most rely on television for screening and may often be seen only on one of the minority cable or satellite channels, or, where they make it to mainstream terrestrial channels, may be condemned to a "graveyard" slot. At the production end, although there are specific funding mechanisms for documentary, critical works face sharp competition from less oppositional pieces made for television. Modest fiction films and documentaries have to struggle to be made or to be seen, and there are thus good reasons for at least some filmmakers to be driven into critical positions with respect to market forces, commercial logics, and monopoly pressures. While the *exception culturelle* might seem an adequate general response to free-market pressures on French cinema's survival, there are good reasons why certain sectors of that cinema should be pushed to more radical positions. The return of a critical, committed cinema should thus be seen at the confluence of more general sociopolitical shifts and narrower causal factors more specific to the world of cinema.

Yet even if there is public demand and a supply of engaged films, there is no guarantee that they will meet under suitable circumstances, if at all. Thus, as we noted, many films struggle to be distributed, especially outside the particularly dense circuits of the capital. But, although there is nothing that as yet resembles the parallel, noncommercial circuits of distribution and exhibition that were so important in the 1960s and 1970s and that allowed even banned films to circulate, there are emergent circuits nonetheless and a growing connivance between certain filmmakers and certain cinemas and alternative exhibition sites. One might note how the *art et essai* circuit, feeling threatened in its very existence by the rise of the multiplexes, is only too willing to maintain a qualitatively different mode of film-viewing, which, at one level, refuses to sacrifice a cinephilic love of films to the naked pursuit of profit, but which, at another level, is well disposed to welcoming films and spectators with a shared interest in sociopolitical critique. Here, as Graeme Hayes notes, the Utopia chain is an outstanding example. But beyond the art house circuit, there has been strong growth in the range of outlets for radical film. There are a number of yearly festivals, which allow films to be viewed outside of the normal commodified conditions. The Ken Loach and Bernard Tavernier-sponsored *Résistances* (<http://www.cine-resistances.com>), held since 1997 in Foix, is a striking, but far from isolated, example.

A range of groups now routinely use films to introduce topics for debate. ATTAC, for example, has set up an audiovisual wing, has large-scale recourse

to documentaries for its own internal use, and organizes festivals—such as in Grenoble in April 2004—of films carrying counter globalization themes in order to launch discussion. ATTAC and other organizations also often use video, thus enabling the showing of films outside of the cinema circuit. The emergent countercinema circuit may be less developed than what existed in the 1960s and 1970s; it is certainly more diverse and less centralized, given the absence from it of hierarchical party and union actors; it is less purely noncommercial, in that independent cinema exhibition, whatever its politics, is still a business. As Laurent Marie notes in his piece, it is also far less able to reach a working-class public than its predecessor. But it does nevertheless exist and serves increasingly to enable debate and the assembly of publics that are not simply amalgams of consumers. Moreover, there are signs that spectators themselves are organizing, as testified by the January 2005 launch of the FASCiné. Created out of the fragmentation felt by groups involved in local struggles in defense of independent cinema (such as the opposition of the Association des Spectateurs des Cinémas Utopia de Saint-Ouen l'Aumône et Pontoise [ASCUt] to the extension of a UGC multiplex in Cergy-le-Haut in the northern Paris suburbs), this national federation of cinema spectators has the aim of promoting a non-market-oriented cinema, mobilizing in defense of independent cinemas where their existence is threatened by the majors, and providing a constructive, propositional voice for spectators in institutional forums.

Because a countercircuit exists, and because there is undoubted demand for a critical cinema, filmmakers are able to develop a qualitatively different relationship with their spectators to that created by big-budget films. The launch of the latter is routinely accompanied by massive promotional activity through which directors and actors essentially become recognized labels that serve to guarantee the anticipated spectatorial pleasures. The kind of simultaneous launch on hundreds of national screens that we noted earlier means that any more direct contact with the public is ruled out, even were it desired. But because mid- and low-budget works often have to fight to survive, directors and cast members may have to make a qualitatively different commitment to their films, accompanying them around the country, meeting the public, and, crucially, participating in debates. Let us cite two recent but far from exceptional cases. Francis Fourcou's 2004 film *J'aime la vie, je fais du vélo, je vais au cinéma*, which documents the rise of multiplex cinemas, was created out of his encounters with spectators in the 170 debates he participated in while promoting his previous film, *La Vallée des montreurs d'ours* (1997). The launch of Jean-Marc Moutout's fiction, *Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré* (2003) was similarly accompanied by numerous debates around the country between public and director. The short documentary that emerged from these debates and that became part of the DVD package shows how the original fiction stimulated public debate on the current ruthlessness of the world of work. Tellingly, those seen in the documentary noted how the fiction had allowed

them to bring often very painful personal work-related experiences into the public domain.

Such encounters transform the nature of the relationship between public and film from one based on consumption to an interactive, dialogical model that refuses the narrowly identitarian and corporatist vision of cinema associated with cultural exceptionalism and its implicit acceptance of the shrunken nature of the national in the age of globalization. Placing cinema's public nature at its heart, appealing to cinephilic citizens (not consumers or passive identity bearers), it affirms a commitment to informed debate on issues of collective concern. A properly public cinema conceived in this way is one that serves perhaps three main purposes: one, basic but essential, is public formation, that is, the assembly of groups of people with a shared interest in discussing and perhaps reacting to particular issues; a second is stimulating debate by drawing matters of concern to public attention (French fiction film, as Martin O'Shaughnessy shows, has been particularly adept at dramatizing the violences associated with the globalizing economy); a third is to educate the public by providing the kind of information about the processes of globalization and possible resistances to it that may be lacking elsewhere. As Laurent Marie notes, documentary film has provided a consistent pedagogic source along these lines.

This public cinema, or *cinéma citoyen*, as it is often labeled, is still essentially a national phenomenon. Most of the fiction films and documentaries that contribute to it have modest to very low budgets for both production and promotion and thus tend to circulate predominantly within the bounds of the nation. In the shorter term, this restricted base helps ground its appeal as a public cinema that connects to and defends a national polity. In the longer term, one might suggest that there is a clear need for films with a wider international appeal that would help shape a transnational counterpublic. At the present time, it is *films-événements* like those of Michael Moore that seem best able to travel. It would indeed be ironic if, following the model of a more narrowly commercial cinema, oppositional cinema found itself split between a small number of well-promoted works that enjoyed widespread distribution and a large number of works obliged to struggle for survival within a restricted cinematic space.

Notes

1. Jean-Michel Baer, "L'Exception culturelle: une règle en quête de contenus," *En Temps Réel* 11 (October 2003): 24-28.
2. CNC, *Pour une stratégie d'exportation et de diffusion du cinéma français* (Paris: CNC, 1994).
3. Daniel Goudineau, *Rapport sur la distribution des films en salles* (Paris: CNC / Ministère de la culture et de la communication), 30 and 65-66. See also Claude Forest, *L'Argent du cinéma: Introduction à l'économie du septième art* (Paris: Belin, 2002), 127.
4. Fabrice Fries, *Propositions sur la régulation et le développement du marché de la vidéo en France* (Paris: CNC, September 2004).
5. James F. Austin, "Digitizing Frenchness in 2001: On a 'Historic' Moment in the French Cinema," *French Cultural Studies* 15, 3 (October 2004): 281-99.
6. Martine Danan, "French Cinema in the Era of Media Capitalism," *Media, Culture & Society* 22, 3 (2000), 361.
7. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "The Reconstruction of French Cinema," in *France in Focus: Film and National Identity*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Sue Harris (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 19.
8. For French films, the major international export markets remain Germany, Italy, and Japan; in 2003, export receipts were three times greater for western Europe than North America. See CNC, *L'Exportation des films français en 2003* (Paris: CNC, October 2004).
9. *Le Film français* 3073 (26 November 2004).
10. The highest being Besson's *The Fifth Element/Le Cinquième Élément* (75.2 million euros). Note that this does not include Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (180 million euros, which controversially qualified for the CNC's *agrément* due to Stone's dual nationality), or Besson's *Arthur and the Minimoys* (65 million euros), an English-language animation scheduled for release in 2006 but already in production in 2004.
11. Produced by the Association des professeurs d'histoire et de la géographie (APHG), available on the film's official website: http://pdl.warnerbros.com/wbol/ft/movies/unlongdimanche/uploads/long_dimanche_pedago.pdf.
12. In 2003, French productions were divided between 785 (cumulative) weeks of shooting in France and 516 weeks of shooting abroad. However, the introduction of a new tax credit appears to have had some effect in reversing the trend; in 2004, there were 913 shooting weeks in France and 317 abroad; see *Le Film français* 3080 (14 January 2005).
13. The exceptions being Jodie Foster (in a supporting role) and Angelo Badalamenti (who scored the film).
14. The same tribunal had previously annulled the *agrément* awarded to Josiane Balasko's *L'Ex-Femme de ma vie*, also co-produced by 2003 Productions, for the same motive.
15. Interview with Catherine Colonna, *Le Film français* 3077 (24 December 2004).
16. Sarah Waters, *Social Movements in France: Towards a New Citizenship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 41.
17. Stéphane Rozès, "Malaises dans la mondialisation," *ContreTemps* 2 (September 2001): 48-52.