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CINEPHILIA HISTORY *or* HISTORICITY OF FILM CONNOISSEURSHIP ? RETHINKING THE AUTHORITY OF “ORDINARY” CONNOISSEURS’ DISCOURSES ON QUALITY OF MOVIES IN MEDIA HISTORY RESEARCH

Prof. Frederic GIMELLO-MESPLOMB
Centre Norbert Elias EHESS - CNRS - UAPV - AMU (France)
frederic.gimello@univ-avignon.fr

biography : Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb is Professor of Sociology of Media & Cultural Studies at the University of Avignon (France). He works within a Consumer Culture Theory (audience studies) and Actor-Network centered approach on the legitimacy dynamics of postwar French media, with a focus on Critical Film Policy Studies. This bi-directional research engages, in one hand, with questions of historicity of processes of legitimation of movie tastes within the EU public film production support schemes and, in other hand, with audience theory regarding the norm construction process (spectators' careers in ordinary cinephilia), and the cross connections with public debates on quality of movies. He works since 2003 as an expert commissioned for the European Commission, Belgium FNRS, Luxembourg Ministry of education, ANR (France). Former Visiting Scholar, University of California, Berkeley (1999). Visiting professor in various institutions worldwide (Napoli and Florida, 2010; Poland 2011, Lituania, 2013; Tunisia, 2014).

Keywords : historicity, cinephilia historiography, media research, cultural sociology, ordinary experts, movie experience, sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), consumer culture theory (CCT).

Full text : In his *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955), Erwin Panofsky explains ironically the difference between a connoisseur and an art historian: “The connoisseur might be defined as a laconic art historian, and the art historian as a loquacious connoisseur” (Panofsky, 1955 : 5). In post-war France, pioneers of the *erudite* cinephilia, George-Auriol, Bazin, Astruc, Godard, Truffaut, Leenhardt and Bresson, among others, contributed to renew the critical appreciation discourse on movies, in particular under the impulse - and the mediation - of the French ciné-club “Objectif 49” during the 1949-1950 years. This episode recently re-discovered by cinephilia history scholars can be seen as a “major step in the understanding of the social construction process of movie taste in France” (Gimello-Mesplomb, 2014) that Burnett develops further (Burnett, 2015). Objectif 49 and the Jeunes Turcs of the 1950’s new Avant-garde of film criticism focused the attention on two problems on film appreciation : *attribution* and *taste* (Keathley, 2006). Di Foggia notices that Christian Keathley draws a portrait of the cinephile by pointing at two aspects: the cinephiliac moment and the panoramic perception. About cinephiliac moment, it is said that is an element of the cinematic experience “which resists, which escapes existing networks of critical discourse and theoretical frameworks” (Keathley, 2006, see also Willemsen, 1994 and Di Foggia, 2012).

However, considering Bordwell and preeminent scholars on film and media studies, academic researches in media history, with regard to audiences (movies, TV, cinema theatres,

internet or mobile digital tools), often focuses on the media message and the spectator intentions (i/e methodological individualism approach), neglecting the viewer's tastes (Bordwell, 1999). Many scholars refer to the naturalist Kantian paradigms on quality of movies in writing social history of audiences as S. Sontag (1961, 1996). Taking apart rare scholars (Dayan, Steiger, Jullier) engaging their works to reduce the frontier between media history and film history, cinephilia has been seen for years in media history research community as a practice preferably devoted to be analyzed in film studies curricula (Mulvey explains this process "from cinephilia to film studies", Mulvey, 2008) while the audience remains paradoxally a relatively unexplored area in film studies. It is a fact media history research neglects ordinary viewers and ordinary connoisseurship on media even if amateurs have been considered by preeminent art historians as Haskell (Haskell, 1993) and art sociologists as Becker (Becker, 1984), DiMaggio, Moulin or Hennion (Hennion, 1993) as "market intermediaries" contributing to valuing cultural objects of consumption including media. Nevertheless, History of cinephilia remains to deal with history of intellectuals and is taught in faculties as it (Decherney, 2005; Darré, 2006) probably because, as De Baecque and Fremaux claim, the "definitive essence of cinephilia" is organized around a distinguished culture practice. In *A history of cinephilia*, they define cinephilia and foremost as "a way of watching films" and secondary as a way of speaking about them and diffusing this discourse" (De Baecque and Fremaux, 1995), an intellectual project dealing with historiography of film criticism.

However, we can examine nowadays news issues in cinephilia historiography helping to see cross connections with media audience historiography methods : in one hand, the *social history of audience* focusing on viewers characteristics and interactions remains underexplored, and in other hand the *history of reception modalities* focusing on transmission (i/e history of film exhibition), that is similar to the diffusion process of scientific discourses following the history of innovation process. But emerging social sciences methods also opened new perspectives for research in the field. If the cultural sociology has identified the links between cultural participation and social inequalities (Bourdieu, Hoggart, DiMaggio), those links do not really explain the making of a cultural attractiveness for culture and especially for movies and the outstanding heterogeneity of movies genres audiences. One of the most stimulating development imported from social sciences and discussing the attractiveness for movies and movies genres as a "cinephilic process" (Gimello-Mesplomb, 2014) is probably the concept of "career" imported from the Chicago School pioneers (Goffman, H. S. Becker, Strauss, Hughes) and studied in audience studies by Pedler, Pasquier, Djakouane, Thevenin, Ethis, Gimello-Mesplomb, among others. Although H.S. Becker does not claim to be a deviancy specialist, his work on sociology of deviance (Becker defines deviance as "not a quality of a bad person but the result of someone defining someone's activity as bad", Becker, 1963 : 46-55) offers some powerful tracks to examine the way that people used to go to theatre or cinema. The "spectators' careers" variations came from institutional and ordinary prescribers where travel the aesthetic experience, and where a cultural socialization proceeds continuously. Emmanuel Ethis also suggests to take into consideration seriously the pleasure of viewer through discourse on movies shared with friends as a way of socialization along time (Ethis, 2007). Leveratto and Jullier suggest further three steps in cinephile's discourse evolution along history : it would exist a first "classical" stage (1910-1950) dedicated to knowledge of quality and experienced consumer's expertise, a second (1950-1980) also dedicated to knowledge of quality, but including "love of art and film culture" and the last one, the "Post-modern" period (1980-today) devoted to film culture and screen culture (viewer singular experience) (Jullier-Leveratto, 2012). Ginsburgh and Weyers also address the question of the quality of movies produced between 1950 and 1970, researching how to include an *historicity* variable in the analysis of dynamics of change of movie tastes

over time. They consider that decomposing a work of art into quantifiable characteristics would make it possible to explain the divergences between audiences and changes of appreciation over time (Ginsburgh and Weyers, 2004). These new approaches show us regarding the historicity process in audience studies and movie tastes is becoming an exciting method to underline the dynamics of change of film appraisal. Besides, more recently, relations systems between experts, public-policy makers, and the public, as much collaborations and competitions between individuals and institutions and their controversies, became during the 90's the subjects of an approach to studying the sciences known as the "sociology of scientific knowledge", or SSK. We worked during our Accreditation to supervise research (2012) on the social diffusion of the cinephilic discourse on "quality" of movies between institutional (film policy institutions and public policy makers) and ordinary experts from this perspective. We took into consideration discourses on quality of movies as an ordinary *knowledge* relating to the movie experience shared by both categories of experts in a similar way, which does not mean adopting a constructivist tropism about a social consensus on quality of movies but considering the *historicity* in the construction of the ordinary knowledge on quality of movies. This knowledge is subject to a process of stabilization by a wide range of intermediaries not limited to film criticism area but including media such as TV broadcasters or Internet niche cinephilia websites (Gimello-Mesplomb, 2011).

Finally, we argue that researchers need to consider whether the analysis of ordinary discourse on movies as a dynamic knowledge in constant edification is theoretically justified, given that it may be limited in validity and scope by empirical surveys and quantitative approaches (i/e list of movies selected in festivals, broadcasted on TV or quoted by spectators on movies databases along time). Intellectual approaches of cinephilia as a cultural practice can provide equally meaningful inferences when research focus on consumer's expertise and dynamic evolutions over time.

So, this communication maps these recent developments of the social sciences and their heuristic cross-connections to the media history and film studies research methodologies. We argue history of cinephilia can be seen as the history of an ordinary knowledge and a socialization process about movies never totally stabilized and needing to be studied in its process of stabilization. We could finally consider major lines of re-assessment by sociologists studying the arts considering it to movies appraisal: firstly, a reconsideration of the relationship between sociological and other disciplinary approaches to film criticism; and secondly, the term of "social construction" for the movie appraisal process understood through when Norbert Elias worked on social construction of talent (Elias, 1993) as per cultural economists or sociologists and, finally, the sociology of the criticism conceived as a contingent social fact.

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Time, memory and identity in the images of the new millennium

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CINEMA & HISTORY

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The 21st annual international conference of the Dipartimento Filosofia, Comunicazione e Spettacolo (formerly Dipartimento Comunicazione e Spettacolo) of Università Roma Tre will consider the relationship between cinema and history, identifying new directions and contemporary approaches in the field. This conference reprises a theme central to discussion in the 1980s, when a number of important symposia and publications in Italy responded to the translation of key French scholarship. Returning to the question of cinema and history after three decades implies the consideration of aspects and forms of knowledge absent from those earlier debates. Bringing the discussion right up to date, the aim of this conference is to employ a plurality of discourses to explore in greater depth the theme of cinema and history and to clarify a crucial relationship that has been essential to cinema since its inception.

Taking as its premise the fact that in our digital era the relationship between cinema and history is played out over a broad and complex terrain, the conference seeks to consider cinema in *hybrid* and *expanded* terms. This may require analysing cinema's relationship with history within a broader mediatic context, taking into account – for instance – adjacent and tangential media such as **television, videoart, internet** and **videogames**. The convenors therefore warmly invite contributions that aim to problematize the relationship between cinema and history in ways not limited to the following:

- the use of cinema and history as a *method* or lens through which to read a range of film categories beyond any historical film 'genre': films that, while setting their action in the present, suggest a dialectical and critical attitude towards the past, especially in order to address conceptions and perceptions of national, cultural, gender and political identity; films that are capable of addressing and affecting contemporary imaginaries and mentalities, thus becoming historical *agents* in their own right; films that become valuable primary sources for scholars, by embodying the customs and material habits of their time; films which, though set in the present, allow us to reflect on material and everyday "microhistories" in which the story "dissolves" time and erupts into the present (Baudrillard);
- the rethinking and transcending of traditional film histories by seeing cinema and history in the light of a hybrid and global iconographic system that forces us to wonder whether we should think in terms distinct from the "longue durée" and allows us to avoid "textbook" slogans and stereotypes;
- history as critique, between 'the end of history' (Fukuyama) and its traumatic return following 9/11;
- history as *imaginary* (Ferro) and as *myth* (Rosen), but also as *atmosphere*;

- counter-factual history (“What if?”);
- history as *anti-history*: a form of projection into the past of scepticism and disillusion with present and future;
- history as *anachronistic* configuration — for Georges Didi-Huberman a ‘heretical’ approach to image and history: while it confirms the necessity to conceive of cinema and history as part of visual culture, Didi-Huberman’s perspective stresses the intimate ‘exuberance’, ‘complexity’ and ‘overdetermination’ (*Überdeterminierung*) of images, forcing a rethinking of the cinema-history relationship within the context of the *construction of memory*;
- from ‘historical facts’ to ‘memory facts’ (Ricoeur): cinema as site of memory (both individual and/or collective); cinema as an ideal space in which to activate not the ‘time of dates’ (Bloch) but instead a dimension — often framed negatively as nostalgia (Boym) — that humanizes history and constantly reconfigures it;
- the digital imaginary between memory and history (Burgoyne);
- theoretical and practical reconsiderations of cinema through a feminist and gendered lens: analysing the dynamics of production and reception; the interaction between Foucauldian genealogical thought and feminist theories;
- from ‘official’ history to ‘popular’ history, from *engagé* to escapist cinema: the cinema-history relationship as an opportunity to reframe works that have traditionally been excluded from the analysis of cinema and history, not least because of the enduring legacy and role of *engagement* in representing the past (Landy);
- the study of the experience and reception of the historical film, in all its possible variations;
- history in audio-visual contexts: from television to videoart; history in videogames; history and photography;
- the employment and potential of digital technology and quantitative methods to serve an expanded understanding of cinema and history.

We will consider every proposal (**300-500 words**), with **5 keywords**, **3-5 bibliographic references**, and a **brief biography** of the proponent, sent **before September 7th, 2015**, to the address **cinemaestoria@uniroma3.it**. The selection results will be announced **before September 30th**.

Official languages of the Conference: **English, French, Italian**.

Conference fees

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