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***Guignol, journal hebdomadaire humoristique* and Lyon's identity in the 20th century: perspectives on a reciprocal construction**

Dr. Yann Sambuis

"Place and the Periodical: An International Conference on the regional Magazine", University of Chester, June 25th, 2024

The war had just begun in 1914 when Victor Lorge, an independent printer and trade union leader, gave birth to *Guignol, journal hebdomadaire humoristique*, a weekly satirical magazine, which stayed in the Lorge family until 1964 and survived until 1972.

Guignol is a 4 to 16 pages newspaper, depending on the availability of paper. It's always illustrated, at least with one large caricature or satirical drawing on the 1st page, and often with a few smaller images.

The magazine is built around *Guignol*, the main character of a local puppet theater. Lorge's journal is the latest example of the *journaux de Guignol* (*Guignol's journals*), a series of short-life satirical journals begun in 1865, and it quickly became a symbol of the city's identity. Its ability to advocate for Lyon's working class and its very own cultural identity in a context of permanent political and economic crisis led to an unprecedented success for this kind of publication.

Guignol, journal hebdomadaire humoristique thus quickly became the incarnation of *lyonnitude*, an original form of local identity forged through the violence of the 19th century. Focusing its articles and caricatures on Lyon, the magazine played a major part in local politics, being one of the main supporters of the mayor Edouard Herriot. It also became a conservatory of the disappearing local culture as well as a laboratory of a new form of local humor.

My paper will investigate this reciprocity between *Guignol* and *lyonnitude* by studying how local identity, as a central topic, helped to build a successful magazine (72.000 weekly copies in 1947) and how this journal took a part in the mutations of *lyonnitude* in the 20th century and used it to influence local politics.

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1. A magazine built on the advocacy of local identity

The main particularity of this magazine, and the reason why it fits with this conference's theme, is its ability to publicize Lyon's culture and identity. First, with the use of the character of Guignol, and then with references to symbols of the city's culture.

1.1. Guignol, a personification of Lyon's working-class identity

The famous Guignol is a puppet theater character created in Lyon in the early 19th century. Somewhere between 1808 and 1814, Laurent Mourguet left his job as a Canut, a silk worker, and started a dentistry business on the city's markets. To attract clients and distract them while removing teeth, he decided to use Italian puppets, and then to create his own characters, Guignol, Gnafron and Madelon. Guignol is probably a caricature of Mourguet himself as a canut. Gnafron, his best friend, is named after the local word for a shoemaker, while Madelon wears the traditional outfit of Lyon's working-class women. Success drove Mourguet to stop dentistry and become a full-time puppet artist, and by the end of his life in the 1830s, several Guignol theaters were offering satirical shows in bars and parks in Lyon, Paris and Bordeaux.

As a canut, Guignol embodies Lyon's working-class identity. An identity built through struggles against greedy silk merchants for better incomes, and on the pride of elite craftsmen. Lyon's silk industry's model, organized as a network of independent craftsmen working in small home workshops for the same merchant, went through 4 major conflicts with state and trade authorities in 1786, 1831, 1834 and 1848, resulting in military repressions, which made the silk workers the symbol of the city, which is often referred as "la ville des canuts".

In *Guignol JHH*, puppets are often used in the texts and drawings to impersonate Lyon's people, facing everyday life's difficulties. By calling his magazine Guignol, not only does Victor Lorge claim his support to working-class struggle and his love for what we could refer as pop culture: he is the voice of Lyon.

1.2. Symbols of the city's culture

Along with Guignol's theater characters, several other symbols of the city's culture and identity are frequently used in the magazine.

- Lyon's iconic sports, water jousting ("joute lyonnaise" in French) and Lyonnais boules are often used to depict confrontation, unity or friendliness.
- Lyon's landscapes are the background of most of the drawings and its streets are the frame of most of the texts.

- Most of the texts published in *Guignol* use words from the local patois and working-class slang and references to the silk Fabrique. Examples: PPT.
- Lyon's mayor from 1905 to 1957, Edouard Herriot, is one of the main characters of the caricatures: he appears 540 times between 1914 and 1957 (25% of the drawings).

So what these examples are showing is how deeply *Guignol* is rooted in Lyon's cultural identity. Its language, its culture, its landscapes and its notability are the main material of the magazine's articles and drawings.

2. An influential factor of the city's life

This ability to publicize and to glamorize a culture and an identity often considered as subaltern and depreciated by the jacobine republic quickly brings success and a new status to the journal. In the 1920s, with more than 20k magazines sold each week, *Guignol* becomes an influential actor of the city's life and politics and takes part in the shaping of Lyon's modern identity.

2.1. Guignol and the mutations of Lyon's identity

The work of Professor Bruno Benoit shows that Lyon's identity is evolving from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th.

The decay of the silk industry gradually brings the Fabrique system to an end. The canuts, who embodied for decades Lyon's working-class identity, are replaced by industry workers who do not own their means of production, with 2 consequences:

- Their struggle is replaced by a more classical class war, and the city's political identity evolves from a radical opposition between extremist groups to something more moderate, with Paris as the main rival,
- Canut culture, of which the character of *Guignol* is one of the main symbols, becomes more a folklore than a living tradition.

In this context, *Guignol* JHH is at the same time an actor of this culture's preservation and of its folklorization.

Not only does it preserve Lyon's canut culture by permanent references to the silk industry even after its decay, but it also takes part in its mutation from a living and complex culture to a folklorized and caricaturized one.

Language, of which I am not a specialist, seems to be the first place of this process:

- In *Guignol's* articles, the rich canut patois is often reduced to a few dozens of its most publicly known words and locutions, with a focus on affectionate words that might be known because of their frequent use by parents and grandparents, up to now, such as “gone”, “fenotte”, “belin”, “mami”.
- The magazine also transcribes the local idiom by inventing fanciful orthographic forms, adding z', gn', y' before usual words and changing some words orthograph to transcribe their local pronunciation.

Guignol also influences cultural mutations by incorporating the mayor Edouard Herriot as one of the main characters of its drawings and fictional texts, making him a part of Lyon's visual folklore, or bildlore as it was defined by Swedish folklorist Nils-Arvid Bringéus.

2.2. An advocate of Edouard Herriot's policy

Indeed, along with Lyon's cultural identity, *Guignol* also influences the city's political life, contributing to mayor Edouard Herriot's ability to be reelected for more than 50 years. The use of Herriot as one of the caricatures' main characters, along with *Guignol* or *Gnafron*, gives him a special status: he becomes a symbol of his city, he embodies its identity. “Herriot, c'est Lyon et Lyon, c'est Herriot”, “Herriot is Lyon and Lyon is Herriot”.

Two aspects of Herriot's character in the magazine take part in this process:

- The mayor embodies the city's identity,
- He's often depicted as invincible when the time comes to elect a new mayor, which may influence the elections' result.

So first, Herriot metaphorically represents the city and its people in the drawings:

- He's drawn in different situations representing Lyon's everyday life: food restrictions during WW1, the building of new water and sewers systems, important cultural and sport events...
- He's often depicted as the city's champion in its rivalry with Paris.

But most of all, *Guignol* clearly becomes a supporter of the mayor's policy and builds his legend as an invincible adversary. If the magazine was accused in its first years of being a Bolshevik journal, and often criticized the moderate-left policy conducted by Herriot, the death of Victor Lorge puts an end to *Guignol's* socialist career. With his son Joanny, Herriot becomes a kind of superhero of politics, invincible and always right, whatever his decisions are.

- Sports are often used as a metaphor of political struggle. In this context, Herriot is either depicted as the champion or the referee, which is a way of showing how high above his opponents he is.
- Crowns or military hats are often used to represent Herriot as a leader. (Here as Edward III receiving Calais' keys in 1347)
- The magazine even proclaims his support to the mayor in articles.

Conclusion

So, all in all, what can we conclude about the links between *Guignol* and the place where it was published?

The magazine is deeply rooted in a place, Lyon, and in its cultural and political identities. *Guignol*, the character, has always been “the voice of Lyon and Lyonnais”, as my fellow historian Bruno Fouillet once wrote. *Guignol*, the magazine, aims to play the same part.

To do it, it uses all the symbols of the city's cultural identity and, after a few years as a revolutionary journal, it converts itself to the moderate political identity described by Bruno Benoit. By doing so, *Guignol* progressively becomes the embodiment of the city, and it takes part in local culture and identity's mutations from an everyday realm to a more folkloristic element of Lyonnais's life.

Between the two world wars and in the 1940s, it also plays a major part in local politics, supporting Herriot and his centre-left council staying at the head of the city hall for decades by making the mayor a new symbol of Lyon's culture and identity.

The mayor's death in 1957 and the decay of local identities in the second half of 20th century certainly explain the slow decrease of the magazine's sales after WW2. With the growing lack of interest of local citizens for Lyon's folklore, *Guignol's* loyalty to the moderate city council and its reluctance to express any kind of criticism to the city's political and economical elites doesn't offer any alternative appeal that could have helped maintaining the sales. And the identity that had built the journal's success also brings it to its end.