

**Associations, Networks, Circles, and Salons:
Rethinking Peripheral Gatherings in the Film Industry (1917-1961)**

International Conference
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Since the 1990s, and following a series of landmark works by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, Film Studies have focused on the way creative work has been organized within industrialized production structures. It opened the path to numerous investigations on how studio organizations affected and impacted their artworks. It further encouraged two angles of analysis: the processes of film-making, on the one hand; and the creative interactions they foster, on the other hand. While these studies exposed very precise creative dynamics within institutionalized spaces, they nevertheless paid much less attention to other informal gatherings which may yet prove to be decisive for film professionals, such as familial or friendly connections, solidarity networks, professional or leisure associations, and political activism. Additionally, focusing on dominant film industries may have led to overlook less institutionalized, culturally specific forms of groupings that can also turn to be influential.

Therefore, the goal of this conference is to explore these peripheral groups, their modalities of gathering and their roles in film production and distribution. How do the margins of professional institutionalized spaces impact production? How can we document and measure the influence of exchanges which occur beyond and/or outside the studio sets? Can the history of a film, or of a broader production, be made through the study of other places than that of the studio?

These groups can be considered from three different but interrelated angles: through the structures, through the trajectories, and through the connections between these two elements. As a result, we will investigate different places (such as associations, circles, salons, charities, political organizations, agencies, residences, etc.) — how they work, welcome and organize gathering practices (including their modes of interaction and exchanges). To put it in other words, relationships are here at stakes, and precisely relationships between these peripheral groups and their connections to institutionalized film industry spaces. We do not wish to focus on alternative modes of production, but on the links between peripheral gatherings and the industry. We are equally interested in the role these interactions play in the development of the films, by facilitating the exchanges of ideas and techniques, by connecting individuals, and by encouraging recruitment. How does it shape film projects, film crew, and creative interactions at all stages of the film production and circulation? Without undermining the role of formalized and institutionalized spaces, we aim to draw a more complexified panorama of interactions, by integrating less-considered places and less-visible participants and actors.

The goal of this conference is also to reflect on terminology and methodology. What could be considered a gathering space, in the context of film industry. What would constitute a network? It seems instrumental to consider tools and approaches which have been developed to grasp these objects, such as the sociology of networks. However, would other approaches, such as the gender and postcolonial ones, shift the focus on other tensions and/or would highlight new questions and issues? Finally, on which sources can we rely on to frame and expose these informal interactions, considering the general lack of traces and archives they imply?

Because of the focus we put on informal exchanges linked to film industries, and because networks have often been shaped in contexts of mobility partly due to political events, we open the chronology marker at 1917. This year does not represent a starting date, but rather an observation point of significant political upheavals, reconfigurations of environments and political commitments, and major movements of people. It also coincides with the consolidation of the Hollywood studio system and the beginning of its global dominance. The endpoint, 1961, marks the end of the classic studio system and a political crystallization into two blocs, leading to reconfigurations of production modes, especially transnational ones, and solidarity networks.

Perspectives

#Trajectories and Networks

Gatherings can be first considered through the prisms of individual or collective trajectories. It could lead, for instance, to explore the modes of gathering eventually characteristic of certain film professions, projects, or cultural contexts. From a methodological standpoint, we would particularly welcome proposals which articulate micro and macro history: how does an individual trajectory testify from broader informal and structural grouping dynamics operating in the film industry? Proposals could also examine the channels and mediator figures (such as agents, editors, translators), or consider the various places that host, promote, and mobilize networks and relationships, revealing how private salons, professional, political, religious, or leisure associations function as meeting points, crossroads and spaces of passage. Our aim is to encapsulate the kind of synergies and transformation of ideas, practices, and legacies which result from the circulation of actors in these informal places. Similarly, proposals could focus on whether or not voluntary or forced mobilities trigger the creation of circles linked to these specific experiences.

#Formal and Informal Spaces

The Simmelian sociology posits that networks arise from the intersection of different social circles. This conference will also examine how various spheres (political, informal, associative, familial, syndical, industrial, charitable, etc.) can intertwine. Propaganda films, for instance, offer interesting case studies of state agency and politicized groupings. We will focus —among others— on the influence of associations (professional or not) on film production, as well as on the impact of political organizations, on the role of social venues or of residential logics in film creation. The goal of this conference is to highlight the porosity and entanglement between formal and informal interactions, and how personal and professional relationships often overlap. Presentations could focus on films or specific figures characteristic of these entanglements.

#Scales of Analysis

We encourage proposals which would reflect on the regional, national, transnational, and global scales of these interactions and grouping dynamics. Starting from an identified space, subjects of interest could involve the examination of decisional margins in local groups, the role of transnational organizations (assisting migrations, organizing international cooperation, or film circulation), or cross-border solidarities and their geopolitical background. These aspects raise issues of identity which are regularly at stakes in these groups (would it be via the communitarian logics motivating them, or the plural forms of agreement shaping them).

#Politicized Groups

This conference will finally emphasize the political dimension of networks and groups. Moving beyond the traditional dichotomy between politicized individuals versus supposedly neutral production entities, it aims to highlight the complexity of commitments and political involvements. Many correlated topics are encouraged in the frame of this conference, including studies on the various forms of activism within or on the margins of production spaces, the layers of political

involvement for film professional in specific industrial situations, the form of agency they manage or not to obtain, and the different modalities of action politicized groups may have on the film content.

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Scientific committee

Chloé Delaporte (RIRRA21/Montpellier 3)
Claire Demoulin (RIRRA21/Montpellier 3)
Claire Dutriaux (HDEA/Sorbonne Université)
Mélisande Leventopoulos (ESTCA/Paris 8)
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Katalin Pór (ESTCA/Paris 8)
Valérie Pozner (Thalim/CNRS)
Benoît Turquety (ESTCA/Paris 8)

Paper proposals (maximum 2000 characters), with a brief bio-bibliography of the author, can be submitted in French or English until November 1, 2024, to the following addresses : demoulinfleury.claire@gmail.com ; katalin.por@univ-paris8.fr