alphaville
JOURNAL OF FILM AND SCREEN MEDIA

Ethnography as a Tool of Cinema History: Cinemagoing in Light of the Experience of a Local Film Market

Jean-Marc Leveratto and Fabrice Montebello, Laboratoire Lorrain de Sciences Sociales, Université de Lorraine

Abstract: *This article shows the heuristic value of a film consumption study that combines oral archives and fieldwork with written sources. Oral archives on film consumption provided by a local film market of Longwy, an industrial town of north-eastern France, during the 1950s allow the researcher to reconstruct the audience's collective experience of the films released on this market. Combined with a systematic study of local releases and their box office, they give us access to the artistic expertise of local filmgoers in the past and motivate us to challenge the conventional interpretation of film consumption as the ostensibly predictable expression of a social taste.*

Longwy is a small town located far from Paris, near the Belgian border in north-eastern France. Long used for working-class case studies,[1] it will be employed in this article to show the usefulness of ethnography in the reconstruction of recent cinema history, thereby confirming the heuristic value of a film consumption study that combines oral archives and fieldwork with written sources and its contribution to the so-called "new cinema history".

Oral archives on film consumption provided by a local film market during the 1950s is a very efficient tool for reconstructing cinema knowledge shared by French filmgoers of the past. Related to precise data about the morphology of this market and its various uses by the people interviewed, it allows the researcher to reconstruct the audience's collective experience of the films released on this market. This reconstruction, combined with a systematic study of local releases and their box office, gives us access to the artistic expertise of local filmgoers in the past, through the titles of the films and the names of the people they used to assess the quality of their film consumption at the time.[2] Taking into account the common knowledge of a body of films by the local population allows us to challenge the conventional interpretation of film consumption as the ostensibly predictable expression of a social taste (which is in fact the taste attributed to the people observed by the historian on the sole basis of an estimated correlation between their social status and a film genre). By observing the variations and convergence of the accounts of this common film experience, the historian can reach an understanding of the way differences in gender, age, class and ethnicity can to some extent consciously influence the local consumption of the same films, depending on the degree of quality of the films as judged by each person. Thus, films can regain their rightful place in a cinema history that no longer has any reason to exclude the question of a film's artistic value and restrict itself to the exclusive study of the consumers. Moreover, ordinary consumers can reclaim their ability to assess this artistic value, even if they have no other cultural capital than the possibility of expressing their judgement through their cinemagoing.

Cinema History and Film Market Studies

As noted by the marketing historian Frank Cochoy, the crucial role attributed to the "market" by most contemporary economists does not usually lead to a close observation of

"the circulation of economic goods" (11).[3] In this respect, we are faced with a kind of scientific paradox, since "the analysts postulate that everything is happening at the centre (the market exchange), but once this premise is adopted, they take an interest only in the extremities (supply and demand)" (11). The same paradox has long characterised the view of the film market promoted by cinema studies, especially when scholars—historians as well as economists and sociologists—were particularly interested in the cinema as a means of displaying their scientific expertise. Usually, their main preoccupation has been to demonstrate, with the help of market laws, the shaping of consumer taste through supply (economists), through variation of demand according to the social status of the consumer (sociologists), or through the way film supply within a given period of time documented the collective representations of consumers (historians). Auteur theory's idealisation of the cinema as a noncommercial art has greatly contributed to the success of this point of view, which reveres artists and their fight against the market.

Conversely, film historians paying attention to the fact that cinema is intrinsically a "commercial art"—as emphasised by Erwin Panofsky[4]—have usually had to struggle with a lack of data allowing them to study films "as products that are assigned a price by the producing agent and placed in a social space (market) for potential buyers to locate and consider" (Sedgwick and Pokorny 10). The recreation of the consumer's experience of the film market in a certain place at a certain time cannot be achieved without a precise knowledge of the body of films in circulation at that time and in that place. In most countries, it was only after the Second World War that state agencies charged with overseeing the film industry organised a systematic and exhaustive registration of annual releases in their territories, as well as the annual audience figures for those releases. Pioneer works, such as John Sedgwick's study of popular cinemagoing in Britain in the 1930s, have thus been constrained to infer historical consumer practices from box offices of the movie stars published by the press and movie magazines.[5] Their major contribution, the valorisation of the economic specificity of the film market and the recognition of filmgoer culture—in the sociological sense promoted by British cultural studies and systemised by consumer culture theory as an "interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts and meanings that groups use … to make collective sense of their environments and to orientate their members' experiences and lives"—is limited by the level of analysis and the impossibility of precisely reconstructing on a weekly basis the choices of these moviegoers (Sedgwick 256). This explains the present interest in the local history of cinema, in the dual sense of the collective memory of film consumption in a specific geographic place and a localised historical survey allowing the researcher to observe the film market "in action".

On the one hand, the systematic exploitation of amateurs' monographs on the cinema history of their towns together with intensive study of local written archives by younger historians facilitates our understanding of cinema history in a specific area. On the other hand, the choice of a local, rather than a national, scale of observation affords the historian the technical possibility, with the help of all the archives available, of analysing the local film market as part of the international film market, while avoiding both the cultural vision of a "national cinema" that is ontologically different from foreign productions, and the economic vision of a global entertainment culture erasing every national trait. To a certain extent, the scale of observation allows the complete reconstruction of the film consumption of a specific population over a given period, the measurement of its evolution, the measurement of variations in intensity based on different temporalities and forms of commercial transactions, as well as the analysis of the different personal investments in films depending on their qualities and those of their consumers. In other words, it permits the creation of a "national history of

international cinema", an objective description of the effective transactions and uses of the films that have taken place in France, rather than a history of French national cinema—the historical interpretation of the sense of the series of films produced in France in a given period. Indeed, the precise knowledge of all films seen during a given period by a local population allows, by combining the information on the commercial trajectories of the films and the social morphology of that population, an effective historical interpretation of consumer practices during that period through the different types of entertainment that they shared, far from the commentary of a handful of French films used to "document" the collective beliefs that secretly determined these practices.[6]

In fact, the systematic and exhaustive identification of films circulating in a local film market does not only help historians to reassign films their role in the history of local cinema attendance, but it also testifies, through the equal importance this local attendance gives to these films as to those nowadays recognised as masterworks, to the practical ability of the ordinary consumer to assess the artistic quality of a film. By restoring the uncertainty of the quality of the film seen by the consumer, the reconstruction of a local film market makes the actual effect of the film on the consumer more visible. It compels the researcher to recognise the expertise operated with one's body, as we will suggest below, by the ordinary consumer able to assess, at the time of their release, the quality of films today considered as works of art, and contributes to the reestablishment of a symmetry between the film historian and the people he or she studies. If the analysis of "cinematic language" requires a specific training, no cultural capital is needed to assess the superior degree of entertainment quality provided by a newly released film,[7] when cinemagoing habits and the personal involvement of the cinemagoer are taken into account. Thus, the study of the experience of these consumers and, through the use of ethnographical methods, the recreation of local film market knowledge by surviving cinemagoers during the period under investigation are justified.

Cinemagoing in Longwy in the 1950s

Nowadays, Longwy is a small town of a little more than 14,000 inhabitants, and it is part of a conurbation located at the junction of three borders: those between France, Belgium and Luxembourg. Because of the economic success of the latter country, a famous European tax haven, Longwy has become a dormitory town, most of its inhabitants working in Luxembourg. In the late 1950s, on the other hand, it was the capital of a large industrial centre of the French steel industry. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Longwy area was celebrated as the French Eldorado, attracting scores of immigrants, particularly from Poland and Italy, and temporary workers from North Africa and Algeria, which was still a French colony. Hence, the area was characterised by a huge concentration of workers' and miners' families with an immigrant background, attracted by the numerous jobs and high salaries offered by the local industry; it was consequently very well provided for as regards cinema theatres. This socioeconomic configuration simultaneously explains the importance of cinemagoing in Longwy during the 1950s and the rapid adoption of television by local households from the start of the 1960s onwards.

Due to its economic history and demography, the Longwy area was, at the beginning of the 1990s, a suitable place to observe the acme of cinema theatre consumption in France. Just like the town of Mannheim where Emilie Altenloh carried out the first-ever sociological study of film consumption[8], the cinema theatres of Longwy provided entertainment for approximately 100,000 denizens. As in Mannheim, cinemas were the normal leisure spaces

for the population, the temporalities and sites of consumption varying according to the type of consumers and the type of films, and to the technical and social structure of the space. Even if the greater Longwy area was a mosaic of ancient rural villages and urban settlements built along the walls of the metalworks and steel mills, leisure spaces exhibited the same structure as in Mannheim. Longwy was the commercial centre, with its huge and well-equipped cinemas, offering each week their *nouveautés* (new releases) to various kinds of patrons—families, couples and young adults—coming especially once or twice a week from the urban periphery. The other communes made up the periphery where smaller cinemas provided cheaper films on a daily basis—usually consisting of re-releases, B-movies and old films—to their patrons, young and old, living nearby. This network of cinemas of various sizes constituted a social and technical frame of cinemagoing experience shared by the local patrons and cinema managers, used by both parties to choose a programme and to manage the uncertainty of the quality of the films offered on the local market. In short, it was an adequate site of observation of national film consumption in the 1950s: the greater Longwy area, its cinemas and its population constituted at that time an ecosystem in which patrons and films, through their constant circulation, could mutually feed each other and sustain, in the long term, the commercial viability of the cinema as a public pastime.

Figure 1: "La Grande évasion" ("The Great Escape"). Workers leaving the Usine de Senelle, Longwy. Photograph Bernard Flamion, Mont-Saint-Martin, 1967.

With the availability of sociodemographic data on the local population through municipal archives, the historical study of that ecosystem needed to establish the geographical location of the cinemas, to identify all the films released in Longwy during the 1950s and their box offices. A detailed analysis of the archives of the Centre national du cinéma, which centralises information from each cinema operating within French territory and their daily

gross receipts, revealed the almost 5,300 French film titles released in the Longwy area from 1946 to 1960.[9] The reconstitution of nearly 12,000 feature film programmes in the fifteen cinemas in the six "communes" of the area produced a database allowing various internal comparisons between cinema theatres and externally with the national box offices of some films.[10]

As a tool allowing the testing of the common sociological hypothesis of a complete difference of content and meaning of the film consumption according to the class status of the consumer this database has played a crucial role in the understanding of the mechanisms and the evolution of the local film market in Longwy and, by extension, of a national film market. First, it allowed the recognition of the body of old and new films circulating each year within this local film market during the 1950s, as opposed to the handful of quality films or forgotten "popular" hits commonly used by scholars to characterise French film consumption during that period. Secondly, the recollections of local witnesses interviewed about their consumption habits within this local market surprisingly did not fit with what was expected according to their social status. Raised in working-class families and working as apprentices during that period, they proudly emphasised, when recalling their youth, how they normally chose the cinema they attended in the locality on the basis of the quality of the films being shown in each cinema.

This finding was the starting point of the decision to carry out an ethnographic study, with the use of oral archives to assist in the reconstruction of the "consumer culture" (Arnould and Graig) of the local population, a research work that was not originally planned. This ethnographic study proved to be a multi-sited ethnography, allowing to "cut-cross dichotomies like the 'local' and the 'global', the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'" (Marcus 95), as most of the informants emphasised their personal discovery of the artistic quality of a film through their regular viewing of Hollywood products of that period.

This meant that cinema history had to restructure the "context" of film consumption, rather than take it for granted, and to pay attention to media communications—films, but also, in the 1950s, radio, newspapers, magazines and books—between local and global. From this point of view, the local moviegoer was a regular customer, through his or her attachment to Hollywood films and other foreign films released in Longwy. To stick to the usual "scientific" distinctions between local and global, text and context, things and representations, films and audiences can lead to overlook the permanent circulation of the films among the people as well as the circulation of the people among the films. A close examination of the cycles of film consumption and of the exchanges generated by the qualities of the films and the pleasure experienced by the consumers was the *sine qua non* condition of a true understanding of the various meanings of cinemagoing for the local population. The exhaustive identification of all the programmes in all the cinemas of Longwy had to be completed, in the words of George Marcus, by an "ethnography strategically located (in a unique site)" that was also careful to "follow the people", to "follow the thing" and to "follow the plot, story or allegory", which linked the thing and the people (Marcus 106–9).

The immediate result of this type of ethnography was to bring to light the limits of the "sociology of taste", the sociological vision of film consumption taken for granted in France at the time of the survey, on which more below.

Filmgoing, Class and the Sociology of Taste: The Expertise of the Working-Class Spectator

The concept of the sociology of taste, primarily taken from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, emphasises the indifference of working-class audiences towards the quality of the films screened in cinemas, their unique preoccupation being to share the moment of entertainment brought by their immersion in the fiction of the film. Insensitivity towards the art of the film—what Bourdieu called "aesthetics *in itself*" as opposed to the "aesthetics *for itself*" of the connoisseur (*Distinction* 4; emphasis added)—and fascination towards the actor's performance rather than the director's work were at this time the two common traits commonly attributed to the working-class cinemagoer adopted by the French sociological discourse on film consumption. The sociological differentiation of this consumption, made by Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* combined these two common positions by allocating different types of films to different classes of individuals according to their taste (upper middle class, middle class, working class), and to their practical use of the cinema as an opportunity for aesthetic judgment, as a quest of distinction or as a ritual of consumption. The two assumptions were immediately contradicted in Longwy, by studying the database and by the testimonies of some of the local informants remembering precisely their past consumption. It revealed the impossibility of attributing one type of film exclusively to one kind of social attendance, treating the success of a commercial hit as being independent of the location of the cinema where it was screened, and attaching "popular" patrons to the use of the cinema as a simple ritual of consumption, many of whom recalled their movement between cinemas, with the help of public transport, in search of a quality programme.

A small group of people who were of special interest to the film historians were working as apprentices in one of the main steel factories in Longwy at the beginning of the 1950s. Cinemagoing had been, until the start of the 1960s, their favourite pastime, along with listening together to sports programmes on the radio—mainly soccer and cycling—and their weekly attendance at local dances. As they grew older, they married and some of them had families, which prevented them from pursuing their hobbies with the same intensity, especially cinemagoing and dancing. But as television became affordable in France, at the beginning of the 1960s, even for a working-class household, it offered them a substitute for cultivating their passion through the films shown weekly by France's first TV network, but also by Belgian and Luxembourg TV stations. As Longwy is so close to the Belgian and Luxembourg borders, local households could easily watch the national TV programmes of these two countries, especially sport programs and foreign films, dubbed in French, broadcast every evening by Télé Luxembourg. Every evening a feature film was shown at prime time, mostly Hollywood movies, but also French and Italian films suitable for family audiences. As an opportunity for these former passionate filmgoers to rewatch old films of their youth—Télé Luxembourg used old Hollywood back catalogues to ensure the programming of a family film each day—this programme contributed to the recognition of their own expertise in matters of cinema, by bringing confirmation of their knowledge of the best films, and of their ability to assess accurately the performance of young actors and the skill of new directors.[11] In the family circle, their filmic memory and their "cinematic eye" received the status of "cultural capital", and they were perceived and perceived themselves as specialists of the quality cinema, whose paragon was, according to their experience, US cinema. The huge number of North American films commercially released in France just after the liberation of the country, because of their variety, their modernity and their high level of quality, compared to the French films produced during the Occupation, provided enchantment in their youth.

Thus, their conversations about their past leisure activity, as a way to build their own legend by paying tribute to the pleasure that cinema gave them, was of great help to the historian investigating the experience of film consumption in a working-class environment. It confirmed the restrictive nature of a sociological vision of artistic judgment as a matter of intellectual education and artistic experience as a behaviour requiring a special mental attitude. In contrast to the elitist vision of spectatorship promoted by auteur theory, it reactivated the pragmatic vision of art as experience proposed by John Dewey. The "connoisseur's eye" claimed by these working-class consumers reminded the historian that the cinematic experience brings to anyone regularly involved in it the ability to recognise and appreciate the different skills involved and to sense the presence of an author. Ironically, this was the idea that the Young Turks of the Nouvelle Vague had when they provocatively identified themselves as "*Hitchcocko-Hawksien*", that is, fans of the films of Hitchcock and Hawks. In short, it showed that, contrary to an elitist vision of aesthetic perception, the regular consumption of commercial releases was sufficient for anyone to learn how to recognise the qualities of a film and to improve his or her awareness of its artistic value.

Moreover, examination of the database against the recollections of this group of 1950s filmgoers quickly made clear that they had not only acquired, through their cinemagoing habit, a predilection for American "films noirs", which were widely released in France after 1945, they had also acquired, by intuitively comparing the aesthetic efficiency of the series of films they discovered each week, personal tools of judgment—the actors' performance, the emotional efficacy of the scenarios—allowing them to identify with accuracy the same masterworks that were recognised as milestones by critics and historians retrospectively evaluating these artistic works. Their personal lists of the best films of the noir genre that they had seen—*The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawkes, 1946), *Dark Passage* (Delmer Daves, 1947), *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944), etc.—and of the most memorable performances they recalled (Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, and others) fitted perfectly the panoramas proposed by the great specialists of the genre in France—the young critics who began to celebrate its artistic importance as early as the mid-1950s (Montebello, "Le film noir") Therefore, they identified themselves as experts of a genre that had became a "must-see" for the members of the *nouvelles classes moyennes* (the new middle classes), university educated and trained in the cine-clubs of the 1960s (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 25–8), and that had inspired, since the 1970s, many artistic tributes from major young independent directors, beginning with Robert Altman (*The Long Goodbye*, 1973), Roman Polanski (*Chinatown*, 1974), David Lynch (*Blue Velvet*, 1986), the Coen brothers (*Miller's Crossing*, 1990) and others. Of course, the films they most appreciated out of these were the same that were also admired by the young Parisian critics, like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol.

Thus, their consumer biography contradicted Bourdieu's *habitus* as a means of explanation of a social conduct by schemes incorporated previously by the individual, without regard to the situation in which he/she operates. By claiming that the habitus makes the taste of the individual predictable by the sociologist, *Distinction* cancelled any possibility of learning-by-doing and counted for nothing the "experience of a subject acting in the world" (Boltanski 157) that *The Logic of Practice* was eager to underline. As a matter of fact, Bourdieu's stress on the "embodiment" ("incorporation" in French) of cultural practices (*Distinction* 467)—which is to say their reproduction as embodied skills linked to our education—leads, on the contrary, to the vision of the body as an agent of conformation of the individual, against his or her will and without knowing, to a pre-existent type of taste,

indifferent to the singular qualities of each film experienced by the spectator involved in the spectacle.

Film History, Anthropology of Technique and Sociology of Culture

The precise similarity of the expertise acquired by working-class spectators in Longwy to that of the young critics of the Nouvelle Vague showed the need, for the historian as well as for the sociologist, for a new approach to film consumption rather than the one proposed by the "sociology of taste". To approach the film from the point of view of the spectator's experience means that the effective observation unit for an effective history of the cinema is the film programme, understood as a spectacle, as the situation of viewing the film, requiring the physical involvement of the spectator. To give credence to the action of the spectator's individual body and the action of each film prevents the reduction of the experience of consumption to a pre-existent collective taste (a "hidden collective object") or the reduction of this experience to the reception of a pre-existent spectacle. Film consumption designates a succession of situations allowing the forming of personal taste through interactions with the objects involved in these situations, the body of the consumer being one of these objects.

In this respect, Marcel Mauss's "technology"—his texts dealing with the technical and aesthetic uses of the body (especially "Techniques of the Body"; "Techniques and Technology")—proposes a theory of cultural practice more adequate to the understanding of the knowledge presented by "the familiarity with things as persons" (Thévenot). He emphasises, indeed, the ability of each individual to use one's body as a tool, as a means of producing certain effects, which is difficult to understand from an intellectual point of view, because of the traditional way it is used. This is what he called the "techniques of the body", which is not to be confused, as most French sociologists have done, with Bourdieu's habitus. Indeed, contrary to the habitus an important part of the techniques of the body is based on explicit conventions and skills, such as learning to drive; they are a conscious way of using the efficiency of the body not only to succeed in certain tasks or to communicate with others, but to get pleasure by operating it, directly or indirectly (Leveratto, "The 'techniques du corps'"). This means that the techniques of the body cannot be limited to traditional manners or physical skills used in the ordinary life of a local community, to professional know-how such as ballet techniques, or to ways of moving one's own body for the sake of the pleasure it brings, in activities such as dancing or playing football. A close reading of the text shows that the notion can apply as well to the activity of the reader, the listener or the spectator—and of course now the videogame player—considered as a way of involving one's body in a situation, of making it more sensitive, thanks to the corporal discipline and experience of this type of situation, to the efficiency of an artistic technique, and to the conscious embodiment of the emotions staged and expressed by means of this technique (Leveratto, "The 'techniques du corps'").

Mauss's contribution to the pragmatic vision of art—art seen primarily as an experience—has a dual interest in grounding the existence of an artistic technique in the pleasure experienced by the spectator and linking the transmission of the technique to the conscious "incorporation"—in the sense of learning-by-doing—of the emotions produced by its uses. The techniques of the body are hence a way to recall not only the coproduction of artistic work—the fact that the user participates in the realisation of the artistic service performed by the professional—but the technical knowledge they shared, based on their previous experience of the same masterworks, and the common sense, in the Gramscian

meaning, that allows the user to share and promote the kind of pleasure he or she has experienced. The uses by the spectator of his or her body ensure and enhance the emotional efficiency and intellectual interest of a certain artistic technique, and of the situations it serves to produce. The Maussian anthropology of the technique explains the artistic efficiency as the result of the spectator's involvement in a situated action, in which the cooperation of the power of the technical objects and of the corporal and intellectual ability of the spectator to make them work—to "perform" them, in the words of Bruno Latour ("Changer de société" 326)—give to fictitious objects a real consistency and efficiency and, therefore, the social power and the cultural value of things that matter (Leveratto, "Technnology"). In this way, the spectator becomes aware of the technical quality of an artwork and eager to preserve it. For this symmetrical anthropology, to use the words of Walter Benjamin, "it is inherent in the technique of the film … that everybody who witnesses its accomplishment is somewhat of an expert" regardless of one's class position or education level (31).

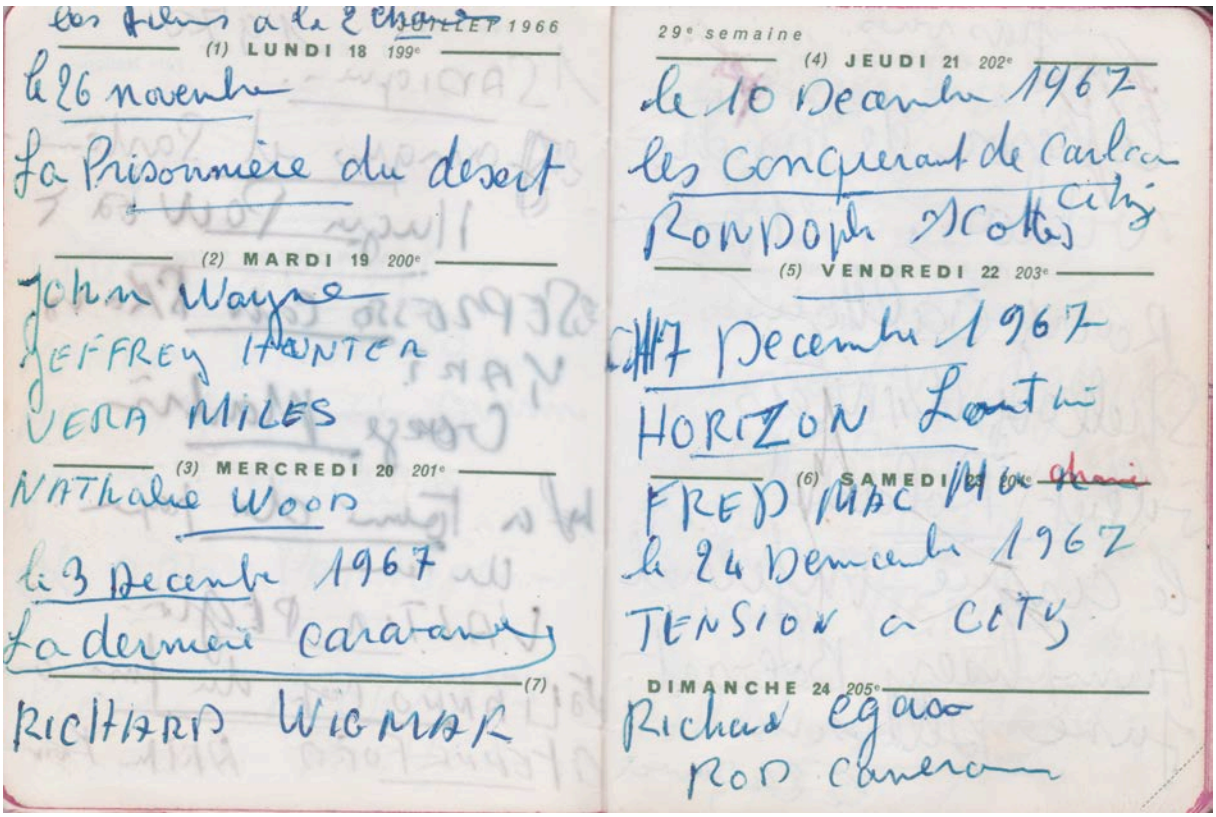

Figure 2: Cinemagoing notes in a CGT Union almanac, July 1966.

Like the little notebook—in fact a CGT Union almanac—used by one of the interviewees to record the films each week and to rate them according to a scale, the anecdote regarding the ceremony organised, inside their workshop, by the young working-class film connoisseurs of Longwy on the occasion of Humphrey Bogart's death provides spectacular confirmation of their self-recognition as intellectuals (Montebello, "Joseph Staline"). Collected by Fabrice Montebello, it has a specific resonance when considered within its historical and political context. Organised by young people who were members of a labour union with close links to the Communist Party, in a workshop where three minutes of silence had been observed for the death of Joseph Stalin four years before, the ceremony was a provocative and humorous way to simultaneously confirm their political affiliation, their

freedom of judgment, and their passion for a cinema reviled at the time by the Communist Party for its alleged stupidity and commercialism. The association of Bogart with Stalin was indeed a good way for those film buffs to claim, against a bureaucratic and dogmatic vision of the class struggle, the right to think for oneself and the importance of culture in an aesthetic sense for everyone who wanted to change the norms and values that informed their everyday lives. With the benefit of hindsight, and the historical studies on the decline of the French Communist Party now available, it is easy to recognise the practical implication of the anecdote and to share the enjoyment of recounting it (Montebello, "Joseph Staline"). The diversion of a political rite by a handful of individuals eager to pay tribute to a great American star illustrated by the anecdote provides, moreover, a perfect example of the weak ties generated by the international film market and of the embeddedness of the film market itself in a local social circle, shaped by national traditions and founded on a specific industrial relation system. The anecdote recalls at the same time the integration of the conduct of those young consumers within a local system of social relationships, which they used to assess the human quality of a film, and their attachment to quality films, which allowed them to experience a technical satisfaction. In short, it provided an additional stimulus to build an effective history of the cinema capable of reforming that local film experience, without sacrificing the identification of the films and their features to the sociological identification of the spectators and their alleged attachment to a film genre, or to the identification of their "representations" (in the English sense of mentalities) documented by the cinema. The history of the cinema cannot be reduced to the "sociology of the past" (Bourdieu, "Sur les rapports" 111). The history of that past has to be built, like every scientific history, by exploring the archives to reconstruct the past, by following not only the people but also the films and by observing the relationships of the consumers with these films. In this way, a historical contribution can be made to the "sociology of the present" (Bourdieu, "Sur les rapports" 111). The re-examination of a local film market is hence not only a means to enlighten, with the help of oral archives, the technical evolution of the cinema produced by film consumption. It allows, with the help of our own contemporary experience of film consumption, the contribution of that film consumption to social and cultural change to be validated, as well as its participation in the social reproduction of the elites.

Following the Films, Following the People, Following Stories of Gender and Ethnicity—or, the Past and Present of the Film Market

As attested by the analogy of the tribute paid to Bogart at the time by the young working-class buffs of Longwy and the nowadays comic-cons, two similar ways by young consumers of publically acknowledging the pleasure an artistic character has given them, our experience of the contemporary transformations of film consumption, especially due to digitalisation, gives us new ways to analyse film consumption of the past. The Internet is a fitting place to observe film consumer culture, a kind of natural laboratory that allows us to recognise the exchange between consumers as an intrinsic part of the pleasure of film consumption and its contribution to the transformation of a personal experience of the films and an informal knowledge of the cinema in the formalised expertise of a genre, an actor or an author, for example (Jullier and Leveratto). The contemporary proliferation on the Internet of ratings to gauge the quality of weekly film releases in cinema theatres and the thousands of films now available through video on demand or programmed by TV channels and networks provide another key to looking at the history of film consumption. It ensures that we are aware of the role played by the conversation, in the media of the time, on film consumption of the past and the social function of the film. In this sense, the Internet reveals the quest for

quality, neutralised by the focus of sociological studies on the organisation of the cult of stars, which partly motivated readers' letters to popular magazines as well as the forum these readers found in these magazines for exchanging ideas inspired by the films about moral matters and personal aspirations. Because this practice particularly characterises female consumers, the examination of letters pages in film magazines of the 1950s offers an insight into their expertise on films released at the time and of their debates on their personal vision of how to perform their social role. In the case of Longwy, melodrama had a vital bearing on the local box office during the 1950s—which shows its popularity due to its family values and the recognition, by the local audience, of the singular artistic quality of the Italian melodrama. At the same time, the vivid memories of the few surviving female viewers of those films testify to the appropriation of the melodramas by young girls and women. By responding to subjects raised by a film—virginity, love, marriage, fidelity, work, behaviour in public—they were able to explore their sensibility and to "negotiate their identity" (Leveratto, "Genre cinématographique" 146) while discussing the artistic qualities of that film. It is noteworthy that those films were thus the vehicle of a feminine sociability through not only their viewing on the screen but through their adaptation by weekly photo-romances, which were passed, once read, from hand to hand. Combined with the oral archives, the examination of the database of a local film market during the 1950s can thus contribute to the construction of an alternative view of the female consumer to the one suggested by the contemptuous definition of the melodrama as a "woman's film" (Leveratto, "Genre cinématographique").

The implementation of a cinema history granting the expertise of the ordinary consumer its full place in the evolution of the film industry is also an efficient means for accurately exploring the role of ethnic origin in the choice of films as well as the building of "ethnic quality" in the framework of film consumption. To take into account the expertise of the layperson offers a middle ground between the professional interest in scientific rigour of the historian, who is eager to chase every kind of naïve belief in any kind of *Volksgeist*, and the critical vigilance of the sociologist against any discrimination. The Longwy database signals a slight overrepresentation of Italian films in the box office of the greater Longwy area as compared to the national box office (Montebello, "Classe ouvrière" 365),[12] which is obviously a symptom of the demographic weight of families of Italian ascendance in the local population. From this point of view, the database provides a good vantage point for the reality of the diaspora of different populations—what Arjun Appadurai calls the emergence of "diasporic public spheres" (21) especially through the consumption of Egyptian films boosted in Longwy by the significant presence of North African immigrants (Montebello, "Films égyptiens"). At the same time, a careful scrutiny not only of the films classified as Italian in the database, but also of the films cited as Italian in the recollection of the local population, reveals the reorganisation by immigrants of their experience and the redefinition of their identity as a function of the local interaction allowed by the school and other social spaces. In Longwy, for example, the singular success of *The Little World of Don Camillo* (*Don Camillo / Le petit monde de Don Camillo*, Julien Duvivier) in 1952, which was bigger than at the national level, is obviously linked to its function of mediation between the children of immigrants and those of French origin—the film, a French-Italian coproduction, being an aesthetic hybrid, mixing the two cultures through its use of location, actors and accents (Montebello, 2001). Twenty years later, the children of those children of immigrants, having benefited, thanks to the "Glorious Thirty" (1946–1975), from college studies, and eager to pay tribute to their parents, acknowledged the pleasure given by this "Italian quality" film by founding, in 1976, an Italian Film Festival, nowadays recognised as a cultural institution in France (Leveratto, "Cinéma, spaghetti").[13] The success of this event embodies the dynamics of the local integration of Italian immigrant families in the 1950s, especially through the

intellectual elaboration of this "Italian quality" due to the film culture acquired by the founders of the festival as kids, within the framework of their family consumption as youngsters, through the workshops and cine-clubs organised by local cultural associations, and as students of the local university. The screening, in original version with subtitles, of the last Italian releases—notably, at the time the Festival was created, the future masterworks of the *commedia all'italiana*, together with the Italian films already considered as cinema heritage (for example those directed by Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and others)—had a strong appeal not only to those of Italian origin, but also to the members of the new middle classes fond of quality cinema and sensitive, through their own family stories, to the story of local immigration, and to the tribute paid by the Festival founders to their working-class roots. Here again, the contemporary success in France of the screwball comedies featuring *beur* actors, and the normalisation of their casting, is a key to understanding, in a country that is increasingly hostile to any kind of communitarianism, the positive aspect of ethnicity understood as an aesthetic performance and as a means of a crosscultural sociability (Leveratto and Montebello, "Industrie culturelle").

The sociopolitical specificity of the French context thus provides an additional understanding of the interest and the importance of making a history of cinema from the point of view of the spectator. It is a way of rectifying an elitist vision, both of the cinema and of its consumers; an elitist vision that feeds the complacency of the political and cultural elite and the cultural withdrawal of a great part of French youth to social media. It will help to update "scientific studies" of the cinema focused on objects concerning mainly Parisian circles—most of the French films feted by these circles have an audience of less than 400,000, mainly situated in Paris—and publications that may be said to benefit from the rarity of studies on the history of the film market in France, which allows them to rewrite this history according to the current media demands, eager to use the cinema as a means of illustrating cultural differences rather than common pleasures. It will help to return the films to their place at the heart of the study of film consumption by building the database needed to gain a real understanding of cinematographic experience, which is always locally situated. Lastly, it will help to restore to ordinary consumers their aesthetic judgment, their ethical convictions, and their sense of justice, which have contributed to the shaping of the cinema as a universal form of entertainment.

Notes

[1] The last survey of Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World*, uses, among others, interviews made in Longwy. Specifically on working class film consumption see Montebello, ("Hollywood Films" and *Classe ouvrière*); Kasprowicz; and Leveratto (*Cinéma*).

[2] Names of the actors, directors, but also authors, in the case, for example, of the adaptation of a novel.

[3] This and all translations in the article are by the Authors.

[4] For Panofsky, the importance of cinema comes from the fact that it has "reactivated the links between artistic production and artistic consumption, links that are more than tenuous, not to say absent, in a great deal of artistic disciplines" (92).

[5] Any effort to scrutinise film consumption in France between the two wars has to deal with the same problem.

[6] Notably, their box office in Paris and in the provinces. Simon Simsi's guide is a useful tool of comparison. It provides box office of all the films with over 500,000 viewers released on the French territory, year by year from 1945 to 2010.

[7] In comparison to other releases that were recently seen, and relative to the social form of consumption, whether alone, in couples, with young kids, and so on.

[8] See Althenloh. This is the translation of the second part of her PhD, *Zur Soziologie des Kino. Die Kino-Unternehmung und die sozialen Schichten ihrer Besucher*, first published in Jena in 1914.

[9] The Centre national du cinéma et l'image animée (CNC) is a state body created in 1946. Responsible for regulating cinema, it assigns a "visa d'exploitation" permitting the exhibition of a film in a public space. Its archives are thus the main tools of information on film consumption in France since 1945. Nowadays, its main functions are to provide financial support—*Avance sur recettes*—for every film or animation produced by the French industry, to ensure the protection of French film heritage and to promote cinema and other audiovisual arts, including videogames, in French public life.

[10] A "commune" is a territory managed by a municipality, the "agglomération" (greater area) referring to the urban entity composed of a series of neighbouring communes. The greater Longwy area was composed, at this time, by the six communes of Longwy, Rehon, Saulnes, Herserange, Longlaville and Mont-Saint-Martin.

[11] This expertise was the product not only of their personal experience of the films, but of their mutual sharing of this experience, their conversation being informed by news on actors, famous films and soon-to-be-released films, found in film reviews; this information helped them to identify smaller films fitting the expectations of young rebels. Some of the working-class cinema buffs interviewed by Fabrice Montebello in Longwy were behaving, from this point of view, just like the Parisian Young Turks, operating as a gang of cinephiles.

[12] From 1952 to 1960, the Italian films in Longwy account for 12 % of the viewers in Longwy, against 5,9 % of the total of the viewers on the French territory.

[13] This book proposes, under the title "On the Role Played by the Spaghettis in the Aesthetical Judgement", a microhistory of the invention and the success of this festival, the *Festival du film italien de Villerupt* (61–116).

Works Cited

Althenloh, Emilie. "A Sociology of the Cinema: The Audience." *Screen* 42.3 (2001): 249–93. Print.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. Print.

Arnould, Eric J., and Graig J. Thompson. "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31.4 (2005): 868–82. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Scottsdale: Prism Key Press, 2010. Print.

The Big Sleep. Dir. Howard Hawks. Warner Bros, 1946. Film.

Blue Velvet. Dir. David Lynch. De Laurentiis Entertainment, 1986. Film.

Boltanski, Luc. "Usages faibles, usages forts de l'habitus." *Travailler avec Bourdieu.* Eds. Pierre Encrevé and Rose-Marie Lagrave. Paris: Flammarion, 2003.153–61. Print.

Borde, Raymond, and Etienne Chaumeton. *Panorama du film noir américain (1941–1953)*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955. Print.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*: *A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard UP, 1984. Print.

---. *The Logic of Practice.* Trans. Richard Nice. Stanford: Standford UUP, 1992. Print.

---. "Sur les rapports entre la sociologie et l'histoire en Allemagne et en France. Entretien avec Lutz Raphaël." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 106.1 (1995): 108–22. Print.

---, ed. *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. Standford: Standford UP, 2000. Print.

Chinatown. Dir. Roman Polanski. Paramount Pictures, 1974. Film.

Cochoy, Frank. *Une histoire du marketing. Discipliner l'économie de marché*. Paris: La découverte, 1999. Print.

Dark Passage. Dir. Delmer Daves. Warner Bros, 1947. Film.

Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. London: Perigee Books, 2009. Print.

Jullier, Laurent, and Jean-Marc Leveratto. "Cinephilia in the Digital Age." *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*. Ed. Ian Christie**.** Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2012. 143–54. Print.

Kasprowicz, Laurent. *La Consommation cinématographique à Longwy en 2000*. Diss., University of Metz, 2008. Print.

Latour, Bruno. *Changer de société. Refaire de la sociologie*. Paris: La découverte, 2007. Print.

Laura. Dir. Otto Preminger. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1944. Film.

Leveratto, Jean-Marc. "Technology, The Internet and the Sociology of Cultural Consumption: Experience and Expertise in the Cultural Field". Concordia University, Montreal. 7 June 2013. Conference paper. Web. 1 July 2016. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280775615>.

---. "Genre cinématographique, identité sociale et *gender*. Une étude de cas: le mélodrame cinématographique des années 50 en France." *CiNéMAS*, 22.2–3 (2012): 127–55. Print.

---. *Cinéma, spaghetti, classe ouvrière et immigration*. Paris: La dispute, 2010. Print.

---. "The 'techniques du corps' by Marcel Mauss: American Culture, Everyday Life and French Theory." *Transatlantic Voyages and Sociology*. Ed. Cherry Schrecker. London: Ashgate, 2010. 83–96. Print.

---. "Les techniques du corps et le cinéma. De Marcel Mauss à Norbert Elias." *Le Portique*. 17 (2006). Web. 3 July 2016. <https://leportique.revues.org/793>.

Leveratto, Jean-Marc, and Fabrice Montebello. "Industrie culturelle et construction de l'ethnicité. Spectacle cinématographique et qualité italienne dans le Pays-Haut lorrain." *L'invention de la Lorraine industrielle. Quêtes de reconnaissance*, *politiques de la mémoire*. Ed. Jean-Louis Tornatore. Paris: Riveneuve, 2010. 127–46. Print.

The Little World of Don Camillo [*Don Camillo* / *Le petit monde de Don Camillo*]. Dir. Julien Duvivier. Rizzoli-Amato and Cocinex, 1952. Film.

The Long Goodbye. Dir. Robert Altman. E-K-Corporation, 1973. Film.

Marcus, George E. "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 95–117. Print.

Mauss, Marcel. "Techniques and Technology (1941/1948)." *Techniques, Technology and Civilization*. Ed. Nathan Schlanger. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. 147–53. Print.

---. "Techniques of the Body (1935)." *Techniques, Technology and Civilization*. Ed. Nathan Schlanger. New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. 77–96. Print.

Miller's Crossing. Dir. Joel Coen and Ethan Coen. Circle Films, 1990. Film.

Montebello, Fabrice. "Films égyptiens et ouvriers algériens dans la Lorraine industrielle: Analyse d'un cas de 'diaspora des publics'." *Publics et spectacle cinématographique en situation colonial*. Ed. Morgan Corriou. Tunis, IRMC-CERES, 5, "Cahiers du C.E.R.E.S. hors série" (2012): 279–320. Print.

---. "Le film noir: une passion prolétarienne." *Les œuvres noires de l'art et de la littérature.* Ed. Alain Pessin and Marie-Caroline Vanbremeersch. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002, Vol. II. 301–21. Print.

---. “La qualité italienne. Etude sur les images et les produits ‘typiquement italiens’.” *Lorraine, terre d’accueil et de brassage des populations*. Ed. François Roth. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2001. 301–11. Print.

---. *Classe ouvrière et spectacle cinématographique*, *1944–1960*. Diss., University of Lyon II, 1997. Print.

---. “Hollywood Films in a French Working Class Milieu: Longwy 1945–1960.” *Hollywood in Europe, Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*. Ed. D.W. Ellwood and R. Kroes. Amsterdam: U of Amsterdam P, 1994. 213–46. Print.

---. “Joseph Staline et Humphrey Bogart: l’hommage des ouvriers.” *Politix* (Paris) 24 (December 1993): 115–33. Print.

Panofsky, Erwin. “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures.” *Three Essays on Style*. Cambridge, Massachussets: MIT Press, 1997. 91–128. Print.

Sedgwick, John. *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures*. Exeter: Exeter UP, 2001. Print.

Sedgwick, John, and Michael Pokorny. *An Economic History of Film*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Simsi, Simon. *Ciné-Passions. Le guide chiffré du cinema*. Paris: Dixit, 2012. Print.

Thévenot, Laurent. “Le régime de familiarité. Des choses en personne.” *Genèses* 17.1 (1994): 72–101. Print.

Suggested Citation

Leveratto, Jean-Marc, and Fabrice Montebello. “Ethnography as a Tool of Cinema History: Cinemagoing in Light of the Experience of a Local Film Market.” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 11 (Summer 2016) : 62–77. Web. ISSN: 2009-4078.

Jean-Marc Leveratto is Professor of Sociology at the University of Lorraine and assistant director of the *Laboratoire Lorrain de Sciences Sociales*. He works on the history and sociology of entertainment (theatre and film) and the sociology of expertise in the cultural field. His latest book, *Cinéphiles et cinéphilies* (with Laurent Jullier, 2010), proposes a history of the quality film in France.

Fabrice Montebello teaches film history at the Université de Lorraine-Metz in the Arts department. He is a member of the *Laboratoire Lorrain de Sciences Sociales* (2L2S), Lorraine (Arts and Cultural Industries team). His research focuses on film history, working-class culture, and film consumption.