

This article was downloaded by: [Birkbeck College]

On: 20 September 2011, At: 01:43

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Modern & Contemporary France

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cmcf20>

Transnational “French” Cinema: The Cannes Film Festival

Lucy Mazdon

Available online: 22 Feb 2007

To cite this article: Lucy Mazdon (2007): Transnational “French” Cinema: The Cannes Film Festival, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 15:1, 9-20

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639480601115250>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Transnational 'French' Cinema: The Cannes Film Festival

Lucy Mazdon

This article reassesses the significance of the Cannes Film Festival and the European film festival more generally. Via an analysis of the local/national/global dynamic of Cannes, it considers the role of the festival in both promoting and representing French cinema, going on to suggest that this enables a re- or de-construction of the centrality of the 'nation' in articulations of contemporary French cinema.

My writing of this article has coincided somewhat felicitously with the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. My attempts to engage with the broader discourses represented and generated by the event have thus been shot through with a daily reading, via the Internet and the print media, of the particularities of this year's festival. This has enabled a degree of fixity and focus which can be challenged by the festival's vast, sprawling diversity. There has been a certain degree of unanimity amongst critics and commentators that 2006 has not been a 'vintage year' for Cannes. Some lament the rather pedestrian nature of the films in competition, others appear disappointed that there has been little of the controversy that has marked previous events. What this slight but palpable sense of disappointment reveals is the expectation that Cannes should provoke some dissent. Whilst many critics were sympathetic to the decision to award the Palme d'Or to Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*,¹ there was some regret that the jury had not followed the example of Quentin Tarantino and his colleagues in 2004 and their vociferously denied but transparent ideologically motivated selection of Michael Moore's Bush-baiting *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Writing in *The Guardian* as the festival drew to a close, Xan Brooks remarked:

Like Walt Whitman, Cannes contradicts itself, contains multitudes. A person can come to Cannes and experience it a thousand different ways, depending on what film they stagger into, what press junket they sign on for, or what corner they turn

Correspondence to: Dr Lucy Mazdon, School of Humanities (Film), University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, UK. Email: L.E.Mazdon@soton.ac.uk

on their way to the hotel. Over the course of ten days something like 4,000 movies and however many hundred movie-makers come stampeding through this town. It is simply impossible to keep tabs on every one. (Brooks 2006)

What Brooks touches upon here is the multiplicity of the festival, the huge number of films on offer, the many hundreds of participants. However, as this year's sense of critical disappointment suggests, this multiplicity stretches beyond the films themselves to a series of debates and expectations which position the festival as both a cinematic showcase and a much broader media event.² Moreover, and most importantly in terms of my concerns here, this is a media event which stretches well beyond its particular geographical boundaries (Cannes, the Côte d'Azur, France) to take place on a thoroughly international stage. As I have argued elsewhere, Cannes needs to be positioned in a regional/national/global nexus. Any analysis of the event must consider simultaneously its specificities, its rootedness within regional and national spatial and cultural contexts, and the processes of travel and exchange which reconstitute it as a global event (Mazdon 2006, p. 23). This relationship between local and national specificity and a 'transnational' mobility can in itself be seen as a metaphor or, indeed, metonym for contemporary cinema, making a study of Cannes a potential route towards a deeper understanding of the wider cinematic conjuncture.

The Identity of French Cinema

Rather than to provide an account of the history of the Cannes festival (see Billard 1997, for a helpful overview), my concern here is to think about the ways in which it both represents French cinema and facilitates a re- (or de-)construction of French cinema as 'national' cinema. With this in mind it is perhaps necessary to say a few words about what might constitute French cinematic identity. A number of factors bear witness to the central role cinema plays in French cultural life, including longstanding government support for the domestic film industry and attempts to claim cinema as part of a specifically French *patrimoine*. The history of French cinema can be mapped out via a disparate but ongoing attempt to establish a definable and distinct 'national' cinematic identity. A number of internal and external pressures have been brought to bear on this, but the central shaping force has been the relationship between French cinema and its others, notably Hollywood. Indeed the relationship between French cinema and Hollywood, typically cast by critics and commentators in terms of tension and struggle, lies squarely at the heart of the history of the construction of a French national cinema. As the 1946 Blum-Byrnes agreements on US film imports to France and the 1993 GATT rounds and French calls for 'l'exception culturelle' reveal, the opposition between a French cinema of art and quality and an American cinema of mass entertainment has proved invaluable in the articulation of a uniquely 'French' cinema. Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically, this vociferous campaigning has also positioned France at the centre of attempts to construct and defend a European cinema. This became clearly visible during the GATT rounds when defence of the European audiovisual space was led by French negotiators whose

allegiance to their national industry indubitably underwrote their passionate rejection of US commercial advances.

However this binary divide is far from straightforward. American films attract huge audiences in France. The very enthusiasm for cinema which some critics hold up as evidence of a thriving ‘national’ cinema has also made France one of Hollywood’s most important overseas markets, and its films consistently represent around two-thirds of the domestic box office. This popular taste for American culture extends to a more high-brow championing of the work of American *auteurs* such as Woody Allen and David Lynch, whose films are often better received in France than within their country of production. At the level of production the binary opposition between France and Hollywood is also far from clear-cut. This has arguably always been the case; however it has become increasingly apparent in recent years with the growing prominence of a spectacular genre cinema which frequently beats Hollywood into second place at the box office, but only does so by borrowing liberally from its competitors.³ What this suggests is that French cinematic identity can perhaps never be clearly distinct from Hollywood or indeed from a global film industry (dominated by Hollywood).

There is also of course an interesting relationship between French ‘national’ cinema and the broader European cinematic context in which it is situated. As Thomas Elsaesser has remarked, ‘there is no such thing as European cinema’ and yet ‘European cinema exists, and has existed since the beginning of cinema a little more than a hundred years ago’ (Elsaesser 2005, p. 13). In other words European cinema is invoked at a number of levels, yet it is ultimately no more than a loose-knit collection of ‘national’ cinemas typically constructed and articulated in relationship to their others, notably Hollywood and television (Elsaesser 2005, p. 60). Thus both European cinema and the national cinemas of which it is composed are based to a great degree upon difference, upon *what they are not*. There is then a sense of fragmentation, difference and instability at the heart of these concepts, which reminds us that any attempt to ‘pin them down’ will be fraught with difficulty and should be thoroughly questioned. Elsaesser’s perceptive analysis of the confrontation between the national and the supranational in Europe pinpoints its dual potential as both an enabling force and a means of exclusion. As a potential solution to this impasse he offers the concepts of ‘double occupancy’ and ‘mutual interference’ (the latter adopted from the work of Robert Cooper, a diplomat and former adviser to Tony Blair).⁴ Essentially his position is that ‘there is no European [...] who is not already diasporic in relation to some marker of difference—be it ethnic, religious or linguistic—and whose identity is not already hyphenated or doubly occupied’ (Elsaesser 2005, p. 108). In other words he makes claims for plural and performative constructions of identity and identification which are open to the discourses and agendas of the local whilst simultaneously entering into dialogue with that which lies outside Europe’s borders. Thus, ‘the “national” thereby acquires a different meaning, in that it is neither “essentialist” nor “constructivist” [...], but “post-national”, that is, reintroduced for external use, so to speak, while suspended within the European Union’ (Elsaesser 2005, p. 70).

Elsaesser's remarks underline the need to move away from 'essentialist' or rooted constructions of identity to much more fluid, context-dependent understandings. In terms of contemporary cinema this conceptual shift is clearly apposite. I have already touched upon the various ways in which French cinema is constructed both through an ongoing renegotiation of its specificities (including at the level of the particular or the local) and a (frequently hostile) dialogue with its others. Thus, following Elsaesser, we should perhaps reposition French 'national' cinema as a 'transnational' cinema, a cinema which arises 'in the interstices between the local and the global' (Ezra & Rowden 2006, p. 4). One only has to glance at much recent French cinematic production to see the value of this reconceptualisation. Whilst 'blockbusters' such as *Brice de Nice* (James Huth, 2005) attempt to appeal to domestic audiences via a rearticulation of the conventions of Hollywood (read global) cinema through certain 'nationally' specific tropes, other films, including Rachid Bouchareb's prize-winning Cannes entry *Indigènes*, turn their gaze 'inwards' and explore the hybridity, the difference, the particular that lie at the heart of the 'nation'.⁵ Similarly, even a cursory glance at modes of reception confirms the need to move away from the 'national' as a defining discourse for contemporary French cinema. Consider once more those 'French' audiences enthusiastically buying tickets for the latest Hollywood offerings. And what about the audiences for 'French' film outside France? To what extent can the 'French' cinema constructed for British (and other) audiences be seen as equivalent to that consumed within its country of production? And what role does the Cannes Film Festival, undoubtedly an integral aspect of French film culture and of constructions of a French 'national' cinema, play in the creation of a 'transnational' cinema?

The European Film Festival

As Janet Harbord has argued, Cannes and indeed all the major European film festivals are marked by two different discourses:

One is a broad historical project of rebuilding Europe, a rebuilding of the social infrastructure ravaged by the Second World War, and a consolidation of Europe as a significant player in a global economy. Importantly, by the post-war period, culture has become a means of representing the status of place and facilitating local economies through cultural events. The other discourse, from film societies and guilds, is concerned with the definition of film as a form, with the aim of broadening categories of definition in contrast to the studio format of Hollywood film. Here, the oppositions of national cultures, and of aesthetic practices, align in opposition to a mainstream American film product. The festival then represents an attempt to separate out national cultures, to distinguish certain practices, and in so doing, places a critical emphasis on the value of the text. (Harbord 2002, p. 64)

Interestingly Harbord's account of the origins of the European festival emphasises the local/national/global nexus that lies at the heart of cinematic cultures more broadly. Whilst she believes that the attempt to distinguish national cinemas has been central to their remit, she points out that this has taken place via a negotiation between the local (typically the geographical site of the festival) and the global (Europe and

beyond). In the words of Elsaesser, the international festival circuit has indeed formed 'a kind of parliament of national cinemas' (Elsaesser 1996, p. 16), yet these 'national' agendas can increasingly be seen to intersect with the specific needs of the geographic locality (Venice, Berlin, Cannes) and the wider transnational arena. Indeed Julian Stringer argues that the binary relation between the local and the global now lies at the heart of the film festival: 'What many festivals now market and project are not just "narrative images" but a city's own "festival image", its own self-perceptions of the place it occupies within the global space economy, especially in relation to other cities and other festivals' (Stringer 2001, p. 140). In other words, 'place' in Manuel Castells' influential terms is renegotiated and rearticulated via its relationship with the transnational 'flow' of the international festival circuit and the global film industry (Castells 1989).

The film festival appears to crystallise the discourses which go to make up the broader cinematic cultures which it both inhabits and transcends. Just as cinematic production and reception negotiate local and global needs and expectations to varying degrees whilst simultaneously interpellating and being interpellated by the discourses of the nation, so the festival is structured around an equivalent tripartite structure. Moreover, the festival's role within this multilayered cinematic economy is increasingly crucial. The film festival does not simply act as a metaphor for this economy; it plays an active role in its construction. Elsaesser stresses the importance of the festival circuit in terms of its interface with Hollywood and the dissemination of independent cinema (Elsaesser 2005, pp. 87–88). Equally important is its role in the construction of a transnational cinematic forum, a series of events which take place in a variety of geographical locations and which showcase a range of films to an international audience. As Bill Nicholls remarks in his discussion of the representation of Iranian cinema on the festival network:

Individual films gain value both for their regional distinctiveness and for their universal appeal [...]. Like the anthropological fieldworkers, or, more casually, the tourist, we are also invited to submerge ourselves in an experience of difference, entering strange worlds, hearing unfamiliar languages, witnessing unusual styles [...]. Even though the festival-goer receives encouragement to make the strange familiar, to recover difference as similarity (most classically through the discovery of a common humanity, a family of man [*sic*] spanning time and space, culture and history), another form of pleasure resides in the experience of strangeness itself. To the extent that this aspect of the festival experience does not reaffirm or collapse readily into the prevailing codes of hegemonic Hollywood cinema, it places the international film festival within a transnational and well-nigh postmodern location. Our participation in this realm qualifies us as citizens of a global but still far from homogenous culture. (Nicholls 1994, pp. 17–18)

With regard to what might constitute a non-Hollywood 'transnational' cinema, or more specifically a 'European' cinema, it could be argued that the festival circuit provides one credible space in which such a cinema might grow. The great majority of popular films which thrive at the domestic box office in France, for example, tend not to translate to non-French audiences due to the limitations of distribution and

exhibition networks which themselves are essentially the result of Hollywood's longstanding domination of the global box office. The art or *auteur* films which lend themselves to festival screenings do, however, extend beyond the domestic context (albeit in a somewhat limited fashion) as they travel from festival to festival and, if successful, achieve international distribution on the art-house circuit. As Elsaesser remarks, certain films are now being 'made to measure and made to order' for the festival circuit, creating a 'genre' sometimes referred to somewhat disparagingly as the 'festival film' (Elsaesser 2005, p. 88). Moreover there exist a number of directors such as Manoel de Oliveira, Theo Angelopoulos, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne and Bruno Dumont, whose careers have been established and supported by the film festival and whose work, arguably, constitutes a form of 'European' cinema which reaches across national borders. Other figures, including Wong Kar Wei (president of the jury at the 2006 Cannes festival), Abbas Kiarostami and Takeshi Kitano, extend this 'group' beyond Europe's frontiers to form an international *auteur* cinema which cannot compete with Hollywood in terms of box office but whose dissemination transcends the national.

In focusing on this particular form of European and international 'festival' cinema, it is vital not to forget the popular genres that have competed with Hollywood at various historical junctures. Indeed the co-existence of popular and *auteur* cinemas is mirrored in the structure of many of the major film festivals, particularly Cannes, which act as both showcase for 'art' cinema and marketplace. Nevertheless, a defining role of all the major film festivals, and the one they parade most proudly, is the ability to construct a canon of 'quality' cinema whose reputation is extended as it travels across the international circuit and which in turn bestows cultural capital on the festival itself, its jury, the host city and country, and its wider audiences (see Elsaesser 2005, p. 96).

The Cannes Film Festival

So how, then, does Cannes fit into this particular understanding of the film festival? To what extent does it promote 'national' filmic agendas whilst simultaneously representing and constructing 'transnational' identities and forums? What is the relationship between the desire for cultural value and the pressures of the market at Cannes, and what can these competing imperatives tell us about French cinema and its place within the global film industry?

Cannes certainly embodies the local/national/global relationship discussed earlier. It is a central place for the construction and dissemination of French cinematic prestige whilst simultaneously fostering the various forms of international exchange which identify contemporary film festivals and film industries. Cannes indubitably celebrates French cinema and reinforces its presence within the national and global cultural landscape. Yet it simultaneously participates in the television of the cinematic, and thus in a process often described as reducing or limiting the cinematic experience.⁶ It plays a major role in the construction of art or *auteur* cinema and

yet also hosts a resolutely commercial film market (the ever-growing *Marché du film*) and relies heavily on the presence of the Hollywood big players and their crowd-pleasing products, without which the presence of the first type of cinema might not be possible. (Not surprisingly, the critical panning of the gala-opening film, Ron Howard's *The Da Vinci Code*, was a widely discussed element of the 2006 festival.) So Cannes is part of a national construction of film and yet is rooted in a very specific local geography and extends to a global arena. In a manner consonant with the definitions of the festival outlined above, it plays a vital role in bolstering up the cultural significance of the *septième art* in France (and as such forms part of a broader ideological attempt to mobilise cinema as a means of disseminating the nation on the part of those who shape such agendas). This reinforcement of the 'national' must however be set within the global context of both the broader geopolitical environment and the film industry specifically. As we have seen, any attempt to construct a national cinema is essentially about carving a space in a broader international arena, and cinema production, exhibition and reception inevitably involve negotiation of these international or transnational relationships. Cannes is no exception. The local and national discourses which play a key part in its renown (the charms of the Côte d'Azur, France as the 'cradle' of cinematic culture) must inevitably be located within, and enter into dialogue with, the wider imperatives of a global film industry.

Julian Stringer's observations concerning the relationship between different film festivals and the cities and nations that host them stress the importance of perceiving individual festivals as components of a wider 'festival circuit', an interrelated network of events and/or a 'closed system', impossible to keep up with and necessitating a process of selection on the part of those fortunate enough to participate (Stringer 2001, p. 137). He goes on to argue that all festivals are not equal; some, like Cannes, bear far more cultural importance than their less well-known others. Competition and cooperation are thus built into the circuit in a manner which mirrors the workings of global capitalist economies. The 'international film festival circuit' thus suggests:

the existence of a socially produced space unto itself, a unique cultural arena that acts as a contact zone for the working-through of unevenly differentiated power relationships—not so much a parliament of national film industries as a series of diverse, sometimes competing, sometimes cooperating, public spheres [...] [I]t is cities which now act as the nodal points on this circuit, not national film industries. (Stringer 2001, p. 138)

I find Stringer's remarks extremely helpful, particularly with regard to Cannes. The 'nation' of course remains a shaping force in the construction and representation of Cannes (and in the production and reception of film's values and meanings). Nevertheless it is not the only or indeed the *central* force: a consideration of Cannes as a nodal point within an international circuit of festival events and locations perhaps provides a more fruitful approach.

As we have seen, Harbord links the emergence of the film festival to post-war European regeneration and an attempt to define national cinemas in opposition

to Hollywood cinema via the definition of film form. Thus she acknowledges the local and international but retains the national at the heart of the festival. Whilst I would not entirely dispute her claim, I would like to shift national agendas from the centre of the structure she posits. It should not be forgotten that the origins of Cannes pre-date the outbreak of the Second World War and were thoroughly transnational, determined as they were by international political events. From 1935 there were growing accusations of Italian and German fascist influence at La Mostra (film festival) in Venice. The failure of Renoir's *La Grande illusion* to win the top prize in 1937, allegedly due to its pacifist ideology, caused particular furore amongst French commentators. France, led by Jean Zay, Ministre de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux Arts, called for the establishment of a rival festival of international standing, and Cannes, in fierce competition with Biarritz on the Atlantic coast, was chosen as a location. In June 1939 Louis Lumière agreed to become president of the first Festival International du Film, due to take place between 1 and 20 September of the same year. The festival's stated aim was to 'encourage the development of cinematographic art in all its forms and foster a spirit of collaboration between different producing countries.'⁷ By 1 September the Casino Municipal was ready to host the very first Cannes Film Festival. Hollywood had sent over *The Wizard of Oz* and *Only Angels have Wings* along with stars Mae West, Gary Cooper, Norma Shearer and George Raft. However, on the very same day the Germans invaded Poland and, after the opening-night screening of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the festival was cancelled and not reopened until 20 September 1946. It was cancelled again in 1948 and 1950 for a number of financial and administrative reasons, and did not become established as an annual event until 1951. These early attempts to establish the festival do to some degree confirm Harbord's claims about the role of the nation: French objections to Venice were very much bound up with ideological opposition between the two nation states. However, the early Cannes festival was also, and arguably more importantly, an attempt to establish an 'international' cinematic forum which could combat the discourses of fascism and the international tensions it engendered.

The geographical location of the Cannes festival, part of a wider circuit of 'tourist' destinations which mirrors the festival network, also problematises the place of the nation in its identity. Long before becoming a city of cinema, Cannes was known as a glamorous, luxurious tourist space. Furthermore its transformation from fishing village to tourist resort was an absolutely transnational process. Following the decision by the then British Lord Chancellor, Henry Brougham, to construct a villa in the village in 1834, visitors from across Europe travelled to Cannes and reconstituted it according to their own tastes, identities and notions of what a southern French resort town should be (Mazdon 2006, pp. 26–27). Thus the local/national/global interface which lies at the heart of the film festival also relates to Cannes's location. Moreover, just as the festival is part of a circuit which relies upon international competition and cooperation, so Cannes as 'destination', certainly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was part of a network of 'tourist sites' frequented by wealthy Europeans and North Americans.

The relationship between cinema and tourism embodied in Cannes's dual identity as resort town and festival site is highly suggestive. Harbord has remarked upon the emergence of the film festival as tourist attraction at least as far back as the 1970s, going on to say: 'In journalistic accounts, the business of film festival culture, the process of evaluation and marketing, is slipping into a liminal space of leisure that merits comparison with the Olympics but perhaps more poignantly, with the themed parks of Disney' (Harbord 2002, p. 65). The sense of regret at this state of affairs, which Harbord describes and echoes, seems to me to be somewhat misplaced. It speaks volumes about a desire to maintain a space which is unproblematically devoted to cinema, and more importantly, to cinema as 'art' rather than entertainment. However, it elides the absolute centrality of the relationship between film, leisure and tourism, not just to the film festival but to cinema in general. In the case of Cannes, the screenings themselves are not open to the public, thus reserving the films for an 'elite' audience of journalists, critics and professionals, and reinforcing the attempt to bestow and create cultural capital described previously. However, the annual festival is also a means of promoting the resort and its leisure industries. Festival activities spill out on to the Croisette and even the liminal space of the beach (which tends to host those activities considered peripheral or 'other' to the festival, notably the 'Hots d'or', the semi-naked starlets). Media coverage of Cannes tells us as much about the glamorous parties, the luxury hotels and the leisure activities of the participants as it does about the films. The decision to host the festival in this resort town established an inextricable link between film festival and tourism from the outset.

The relationship between film, leisure and tourism is not, however, limited to the festival. Cinema in its earliest form, exhibited at fairgrounds and travelling shows, was an 'attraction' in a range of other leisure activities. The rise of the multiplex in recent years reproduces this relationship, locating movie theatres in vast complexes alongside bowling alleys, restaurants and night clubs. In both cases, the reception of cinema becomes one leisure activity within a network of other possible choices. Furthermore film-viewing, like tourism and/or travel, can be perceived as a journey of desire and fantasy, as a form of displacement and/or othering as well as an entry into a process of commodification. As Giuliana Bruno argues in her wonderful study of the complex connections between film, architecture and human presence, tourism and travel were integral to the development of early cinema:

At the onset of cinema, spatial boundaries and cultural maps were stretching. In the movie house, film spectators were enthusiastic voyagers experiencing the new mobility of cultural transportation. It is not by chance that in the early days of film the movie house was called in Persian *tamâshâkhânâh*: that house where one went sight-seeing and 'walking together'—that is, literally, went site-seeing. Film spectators were travellers thrilled to grasp the proximity of far away lands and expansions of their own cityscapes. (Bruno 2002, p. 77)

The cinematic spectator becomes a virtual tourist as s/he is transported from the here and now of the movie theatre to the diegetic world of the film on screen. Such a journey is doubled at the film festival as the spectator both travels to the festival (as tourist destination) and then travels again via multiple film screenings.

This sense of the festival and of film more generally as forms of tourism reinforces the need to move beyond the 'nation' as a central structuring discourse in our understanding of these phenomena. The national is of course not redundant in the ways in which both film and festival are constructed and articulated, nor in the ways in which we experience and make sense of them. However if we perceive these processes as a form of leisure travel, then we are obliged to take on board the various ways in which the national is shot through with the specificities of the local and the global and is to some extent decentred. The visitor to the Cannes Film Festival arrives in a resort town with clear geographical specificities, yet the town and its geographical location as we perceive them today were constructed (often by outsiders) for external consumption (external to the locality and/or the nation). Similarly the films shown at the festival may have their origins in a clearly demarcated local or national context, however their presence in the global arena of the festival repositions them as thoroughly hybrid or transnational artefacts. A potentially productive way of rethinking the festival in these terms could be via Marc Augé's concept of the 'non-place' (Augé 1995). Augé distinguishes between 'place' (marked by history and active in the construction of social life) and 'non-place' (in-between spaces where individuals are connected essentially via images and words, and the creation of social life is precluded). Augé's examples of non-places include shopping malls, airports and motorways. However, the term could usefully be transposed to film festivals, nodules on a transnational network of similar events which remove them to some degree from their rooted, social identities. Films on the festival circuit are similarly deracinated, constantly in transit as they move from festival to festival. Their local and national specificities are elided as they travel and may or may not be reinscribed if and when they leave the circuit for cinematic distribution. The construction of the new Palais du festival in Cannes is telling here. The original Palais, built in haste in 1946, was replaced in 1983 by a more solid structure nicknamed the 'bunker'. Significantly, the opening of this new building coincided with a strike on the part of the festival's photographers, protesting at draconian working conditions which they believed favoured television. In the words of Gilles Traverso, part of the Traverso dynasty which dominated photographic coverage of Cannes and its festival from the outset:

Le nouveau Palais a cristallisé le changement. [...] Le fait d'être dans l'ancien Palais, avec son style rococo, nous rattachait encore à la nostalgie des années antérieures, même s'il y avait déjà plus de télévisions et de médias. Le lien avec le passé était encore possible. Le nouvel édifice a cassé les anciennes références. Et l'entrée dans ce nouveau lieu est allée de pair avec la multiplication des télévisions. Dès que nous y sommes entrés, il était clair que nous, les photographes, n'y avions plus notre place (cited in Toubiana 2003, p. 6).

In other words, the new Palais divested itself of the past, of its organic links to the context and society in which it was based, and became an anonymous space designed to a great degree for the convenience of the audiovisual media, a 'non-place' par excellence.

So where does this account of Cannes and the film festival more generally leave us in terms of a re- (or de-)construction of French cinema as 'national' cinema? If we accept that Cannes, whilst clearly an international event, is also a key moment on the French cinematic calendar and an important means of representing and constructing France as a cinematic culture, we can see it as a form of synecdoche for the French film industry and French cinema. First and foremost this enables us to see that the 'nation' as a structuring discourse for contemporary French cinema cannot be discarded entirely. Just as Harbord has retained the national at the heart of her discussion of the festival circuit, so the 'nation' continues to play a central role in the ways in which French cinema is produced, disseminated and received both internally and externally. However, just as the nation should be displaced from the centre of the film festival in favour of a plural and ongoing negotiation between the imperatives of the local, the national and the global, so French cinema should be reconceived in similar terms. This is true of the French film industry, which combines regional funding, national support structures, international co-productions and the pressures of the global market in increasingly complex ways. It is also true of the cinematic text, whether we are discussing the Hollywood-style blockbuster 'made in France' or films such as those of Robert Guédiguian which negotiate a very specific geographic locality (in his case Marseilles) but are then distributed on an international art-house (and festival) circuit, thus potentially losing the specificity they initially embraced. In other words, just as Cannes can be seen as a space which is at once rooted and part of an extensive international network, so accounts of contemporary French cinema should begin to unpack what lies below and beyond the 'national' discourses which have long been mobilised in its service.

Notes

- [1] Not surprisingly the film's uncompromising depiction of the activities of the notorious Black and Tans provoked outrage in certain elements of the right-wing British press.
- [2] The term 'media event' is taken from Dayan & Katz (1992). Whilst the Cannes festival does not correspond to their particular definition (live television broadcasts of 'historic' events), it can be seen to constitute another form of media event as it is constructed and articulated across a range of media platforms (trade press, daily newspapers, celebrity magazines, Internet, radio, television, specialist catalogues etc.). See also Harbord (2002, p. 60).
- [3] See Higbee in Hayward (2005, p. 298) and Isabelle Vanderschelden (this volume).
- [4] See Cooper (2004).
- [5] The prize for best actor at the 2006 festival went to the male ensemble cast of *Indigènes*, a French/Moroccan/Algerian/Belgian co-production which tells the story of North Africans fighting for France in World War Two. *Brice de Nice*, a huge popular hit in France in 2005 (outperformed only by *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Star Wars, Episode Three: The Revenge of the Sith*), transposes the American 'surfer comedy' genre (exemplified by *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*) to the Côte d'Azur.
- [6] Unlike many film festivals, Cannes is accorded significant television coverage by its host country. A survey by the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel in 2000 revealed that between 1995 and 1999 over 800 programmes or extracts devoted to Cannes were shown on French terrestrial television (see Mazdon 2006, p. 28).
- [7] See <http://www.cannes-on-line.com/Anglais/histfestivaluk.html> (accessed 23 April 2006).

References

- Augé, M. (1995) *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. J. Howe, Verso, London.
- Billard, P. (1997) *D'Or et de Palmes. Le Festival de Cannes*, Gallimard, Paris.
- Brooks, X. (2006) Available online at: <http://www.film.guardian.co.uk/cannes2006/story/0> (accessed 8 June 2006).
- Bruno, G. (2002) *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, Verso, London.
- Castells, M. (1989) 'The reconstruction of social meaning in the space of flows', *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban-Regional Process*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Cooper, R. (2004) *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century*, Atlantic Monthly Press, London.
- Dayan, D. & Katz, E. (1992) *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Elsaesser, T. (1996) *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.
- Elsaesser, T. (2005) *European Cinema Face to Face with Hollywood*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.
- Ezra, E. & Rowden, T. (2006) *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, Routledge, London.
- Harbord, J. (2002) *Film Cultures*, Sage, London.
- Hayward, S. (2005) *French National Cinema*, Routledge, London.
- Mazdon, L. (2006) 'The Cannes film festival as transnational space', *Postscript: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 19–30.
- Nicholls, B. (1994) 'Discovering form, inferring meaning', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 16–27.
- Stringer, J. (2001) 'Global cities and the international film festival economy', in *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, eds M. Shiel & T. Fitzmaurice, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Toubiana, S. (ed.) (2003) *Cannes, cinéma: L'Histoire du festival vue par Traverso*, Cahiers du Cinéma, Paris.

Filmography

- Bouchareb, R. (2006) *Indigènes*, France/Morocco/Algeria/Belgium.
- Dieterle, W. (1939) *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, USA.
- Fleming, V. (1939) *The Wizard of Oz*, USA.
- Hawks, H. (1939) *Only Angels have Wings*, USA.
- Herek, S. (1989) *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, USA.
- Howard, R. (2006) *The Da Vinci Code*, USA.
- Huth, J. (2005) *Brice de Nice*, France.
- Loach, K. (2006) *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, Germany/Italy/Spain/France/Ireland/UK.
- Lucas, G. (2005) *Star Wars, Episode Three: The Revenge of the Sith*, USA.
- Moore, M. (2004) *Fahrenheit 9/11*, USA.
- Newell, M. (2005) *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, UK/USA.
- Renoir, J. (1937) *La Grande illusion*, France.