**PICS Transnational Hollywood**

**Violaine Roussel – “Indie film agents” and the making of French-American co-productions**

My contribution explores the circulation of Hollywood professionals who put together French-American co-productions as far as “independent films” are concerned. I especially focus on the role and activity of agents and their counterparts in this type of endeavors. My hypothesis is that a small number of middlemen (talent representatives working with specific artists, and production/distribution/finance professionals) have formed a restricted network of specialists of this type of international projects—what I call an evaluation community—who have built and accumulated distinctive forms of competence and professional power.

My work combines **two series of questions**:

1. What is *the* *process by which these networks formed* in the late 1980s and early 1990s through the activities of a few “pioneers”? How did these specialists in “indie film agenting” appear? How did this role get institutionalized in the organizational context of the large agencies (in Hollywood) and with what effects?
2. How did such networks and the type of projects they put together (that is, international independent co-productions) *transform*, in relation with the changes that have affected the major organizations of the business side of Hollywood since the 2000s? What does the recent growth of “indie film departments” in the largest talent agencies, with the central role of orchestrating international co-productions, mean for the professional circulations and co-operations mentioned above? How does it affect them? Did the initial interpersonal circles tying a few “pioneers” together for the making of French-American co-productions persist and just expand, or do we now face completely different types of players and networks? How do these changes impact what “indie film agenting” means, what these “indie films” are, who the associated artists are? Does the emergence of digital platforms and production/distribution channels change the way in which these networks form and function, and types of products that come out of them?

To respond to these questions, I am currently **conducting fieldwork** in Paris and Los Angeles, mostly on the basis of **open-focused interviews** with talent representatives who operate in the “independent world” (talent or literary agents, “indie film agents,” “international agents” etc.). Different “generations” of agents are targeted, in order to cover the entire period and process outlined above. Complementary interviews will also be conducted with production professionals and others of the agents’ counterparts in the negotiation of this type of film projects.

This work allows me to shed light on **key dimensions for the understanding of the transnational production of culture**:

* The activity of the transnational networks that I study contribute to delineate a new category of movies, which is neither the big budget “studio movie” nor the small indie film made for very little money. These networks and the transactions between their participants have to do with the invention of the segment of “big international independent productions” (specific in terms of budget/box-office, but also of artistic recognition and professional status of those who make them). The development of this category of the “big international indie film” moves the boundary separating it from other sub-categories of indie films. I hypothesize that it progressively creates *a new cinematic sub-genre* to which the protagonists can refer when they orchestrate, pitch, and negotiate a film project.

Correlatively, such transnational transactions, including the activities of the French-American networks that I study, contribute to *reshaping the indie film market*: with this case study, we have a glimpse into the making of a new category of cinematic commodity (the big international indie) and the associated *transaction space* which brings together indie film agents and their counterparts.

* This study sheds light on the *emergence of a transnational evaluation community* for the production of a particular type of projects, and therefore allows me to question the *relative importance of France as a professional “territory” in the eyes of Hollywood players*. I will explore the *variations* in the place and value that Hollywood professionals attribute to French-American co-productions, compared to other international partnerships that they pursue, over the 25 year period that I study. I will also examine the symbolic vs economic dimensions of such partnerships in the construction of their overall value in the eyes of the participants. This will allow me to assess the type of “influence” and the forms of power that French players have in the context of such transactions.
* This case study gives us an opportunity to understand the *changing balance of power between the representation side and the production side in the making of independent productions*: since the mid-2000s, the major studios have almost completely withdrawn from the segment of “big independent films,” leaving this space open for the large Hollywood agencies to occupy through the activity of their growing “independent film departments” (and their international counterparts). Talent agents in this field of specialty (as well as in others) are increasingly involved in production-like activities. I hypothesize that what we witness here is a structural transformation of the entertainment industries, in which large talent representation entities tend to increasingly occupy a central position. This empirical case study will contribute to testing and refining such a hypothesis.

**Work Schedule**

**2017.** Completing fieldwork. Transcribing interviews. Analyzing data. Initial results.

**2018.** Writing, presenting, and publishing results.

This work takes place in the context of a more general study of Hollywood middlemen and talent brokers, and their role in the production of popular culture. My book, *Representing Talent. Hollywood Agents and the Making of Movies* (University of Chicago Press), is scheduled to come out in the summer of 2017.