

## Nanni Moretti in France Industrial and Cultural Models of an Italian Auteur's Success Abroad

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### Introduction\*

The last 4 films directed by Nanni Moretti – *La stanza del figlio* (2001), *Il caimano* (2006), *Habemus papam* (2011), and *Mia madre* (2016) – have all made the top 20 of Italian cinema's box office results in France in the last 20 years. This invites further inquiry into the circulation and impact of Moretti in the French cultural context, as an emblematic case study of how the notion of the “Italian auteur” is constructed abroad. Going beyond the success of his films at the Cannes Film Festival and the institutional retrospectives (such as the one at the Cinémathèque Française in September 2011), we will focus on domains that are less known but equally influential. The visibility of Moretti, in fact, depends on a larger media presence than that of the specialist press (such as the numerous articles in *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*): TV airings of his films, interviews in various media, his presence in newspapers and cultural magazines, his festival participations, marketing strategies and theatrical distribution, and so on.

This paper's objective, then, is twofold: on the one hand, to trace the multiple ways in which Moretti's work circulates in France, including theatrical and televised distribution; on the other, to highlight the forms of construction of his “star” image in this specific cultural context. For these purposes, in the first two sections we adopt a media industry perspective, based on quantitative data of film distribution and television broadcasts. A second part, composed of sections 3 and 4, focuses on qualitative sources through a cultural studies methodology. This integrated approach aims to investigate how industrial strategies intersect with the cultural repercussions of Italian cinema's circulation abroad, through a case study characterized by multiple exchanges between Italy and France.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the reflections on the integrated approach suggested by T. Schatz, ‘Film Studies, Cultural Studies, and Media Industries’, in: *Media Industries Journal*, 1, 1 (2014), p. 40.

## 1. Contemporary Italian Cinema Abroad: Models of Circulation

Looking at the last ten years' theatrical admissions of Italian cinema abroad (2007-2017), an almost perfect correlation exists between the ten most popular Italian films globally and the top ten in Europe. Both top tens include films directed by Matteo Garrone, Luca Guadagnino, Nanni Moretti and Paolo Sorrentino – all of whom can be easily included in the category of the so-called auteurs. On the other hand, the comparison of the performance of Italian films abroad and their results in the domestic market reveals a total lack of consistency. While popular cinema and comedies in particular are greatly appreciated in Italy, auteur cinema remains the most exported category: despite its limited economic impact in the global box office, the latter is still culturally influential in defining the image of Italy abroad.<sup>2</sup>

Title	Year	Director	EU Markets	EU Admissions
<i>To Rome with love</i>	2012	Woody Allen	28	3.778.286
<i>Youth</i>	2015	Paolo Sorrentino	31	1.947.532
<i>Gomorra</i>	2014	Matteo Garrone	26	1.749.011
<i>La grande bellezza</i>	2013	Paolo Sorrentino	31	1.547.792
<i>Winx Club: Il segreto del regno perduto</i>	2007	Iginio Straffi	21	1.375.644
<i>Habemus papam</i>	2011	Nanni Moretti	26	1.293.172
<i>Winx Club 3D: Magica avventura</i>	2010	Iginio Straffi	18	1.104.610
<i>Pranzo di ferragosto</i>	2008	Gianni Di Gregorio	18	916.169
<i>Gladiatori di Roma</i>	2012	Iginio Straffi	7	812.944
<i>Io sono l'amore</i>	2009	Luca Guadagnino	22	812.040

Tab. 1: Top 10 Italian films circulated in EU markets (excluding Italy) per theatrical admissions, 2007-2016  
[Source: LUMIERE Pro, European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe]

If we count the number of spectators for Italian films distributed in the relevant European country in relation to the total number of spectators for other non-national European films, Italian cinema reaches its highest scores in Greece, Switzerland and The Netherlands. While in the case of Switzerland there are obvious linguistic reasons, in Greece the statistic is skewed by the success of *Quo Vado?* (2016, Gennaro Nunziante), starring Checco Zalone (one of only a few cases where an Italian comedy found success abroad). The Netherlands, on the other hand, fit into a more homogenous European trend, which sees Garrone, Sorrentino, Guadagnino and Moretti among the most appreciated directors. These data reveal the relatively low

<sup>2</sup> It must also be noted that, on a closer inspection, the tendency of Italian auteur cinema's relative success in the United States and western Europe doesn't correspond to a similar success in countries with a higher level of intensity in terms of distribution of Italian films: in the latter countries, the impact of Italian auteur cinema seems to be thinned by the exceptional presence of Italian popular cinema. See the infographic published in: 'The Global Circulation of Italian Cinema', *International Circulation of Italian Cinema*, 13 June 2018, URL: <https://www.italiancinema.it/the-global-circulation-of-italian-cinema/>.

level of Italian film distribution within the context of European cinema, in terms of limited circulation and little capacity to penetrate markets or, indeed, to create successful products.<sup>3</sup>

Country	Number of imports from Italy	Number of admissions for Italian films	Intensity of distribution of Italian films (in %)
Switzerland	345	1.725.108	6,0
Greece	65	866.656	5,7
Netherlands	149	1.925.523	5,1
Poland	66	2.267.252	4,5
Slovenia	46	129.169	4,3
Spain	199	5.217.026	4,1
Portugal	168	753.416	4,0
Bulgaria	26	194.392	3,6
Belgium	89	838.522	3,5
France	256	8.870.448	3,3

Tab. 2: Number of spectators for the Italian films distributed in the relevant European countries in relation to the total number of spectators for European (non-national) films (2007-2016)  
[Sources: LUMIERE Pro, European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe; International circulation of Italian Cinema, [www.italiancinema.it](http://www.italiancinema.it)]

Taking into consideration both these data and the global trends of European national cinemas in the digital age, the Italian case seems to fit into two (apparently) opposite patterns. On the one hand, small national cinemas remain strong: their films, even if not attractive for the global market, enjoy great success in terms of domestic admissions.<sup>4</sup> Alan O’Leary highlighted that this kind of contemporary Italian cinema is ‘consumed almost exclusively within Italy itself and is all-but-invisible outside it. It is dominated by comedies, sometimes with a limited target market of younger people, sometimes [...] characterized by multiple address to all the family’.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, we witness transnational film practices that attempt to produce a certain European taste, based above all on auteur *cinema* – a category that mostly circulates through film festivals and global arthouse cinephilia. Many of these films, especially those that are internationally co-produced, have the goal of developing, as Rosanna Maule observes, ‘a transnational mainstream model of production and distribution through transnational systems of subsidies and special programmes’.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See the infographic published at ‘The European Audience of Italian Cinema’, *International Circulation of Italian Cinema*, 10 June 2018, <https://www.italiancinema.it/the-european-audience-of-italian-cinema/>

<sup>4</sup> On the historical features of “national cinema”, see A. Higson, ‘The Concept of National Cinema’, in: *Screen*, 22 (1989), pp. 36-46.

<sup>5</sup> A. O’Leary, ‘What is Italian Cinema?’, in: *California Italian Studies*, 7, 1 (2017), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> R. Maule, *Beyond Auteurism: New Directions in Authorial Film Practices in France, Italy and Spain since the 1980s*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 91.

Indeed, these latter transnational film practices give rise to two different trends in the circulation of Italian auteur cinema: a) one that we can define as the “French circulation model”, where Italian films seem to follow an arthouse European circuit, made of international film festivals and awards, film institutes and cinemathèque events and screenings, and obviously the critical reception of these films in cinephile magazines; b) secondly, an “Anglo-American circulation model”, to which corresponds the worldwide circulation of Italian products filmed in English and/or with an American cast corresponds. Although these are currently the most successful models for the circulation of Italian cinema abroad, the number of admissions mentioned above remind us that they remain relatively marginal practices on a global scale. It is also interesting to notice that both of these contemporary models of circulation do not neatly fit into the historical patterns described by Elsaesser, such as the ideological opposition between European arthouse cinema and the Hollywood market, or the identification of specific national brands with arthouse cinema.<sup>7</sup> In order to better understand the first of these two trends (the one that we have labeled as the “French circulation model”), we will now delve into the details of our case study.

## 2. The Circulation of Italian Cinema in France: The Case of Moretti’s Last Four Films

Looking at the top 20 of Italian cinema’s admissions in France in the last 20 years, we can highlight several elements of interest. First of all, most of the films in this ranking can be categorized as arthouse films. Indeed, there are nearly no comedies, with the exception of two animation films – *La gabbianella e il gatto* (1998, Enzo D’Alò), 11th place, and *Winx Club – Il segreto del regno perduto* (2007, Iginio Straffi), 7th place – and three of Roberto Benigni’s films – *La tigre e la neve* (2005, 5th place), *Pinocchio* (2002, 13th place) and, of course, *La vita è bella* (1997, 15th place).<sup>8</sup> Benigni’s case is interesting precisely because of his hybrid image as both a comedian and an auteur, as well as the double-edged success of his films in France (largely loved by the audiences, rather despised by the critics).<sup>9</sup>

The most recurrent name in this list is, however, that of Moretti: let us turn to a discussion of his impact in French media industry, considering both theatrical admissions and the model of co-production, distribution, and circulation of his films.

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<sup>7</sup> For this perspective, see T. Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face To Face With Hollywood*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2005, pp. 13-31.

<sup>8</sup> All the theatrical data on admissions of films released in Europe are extracted from the digital database LUMIERE Pro, European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe; also information on production and distribution companies discussed below comes from this database, while data on numbers of theatrical copies were found in the yearly publications *L’annuel du cinéma*, Paris, Les fiches du cinéma, available at the Centre national du cinéma et de l’image animée.

<sup>9</sup> For example, on the critical reception of *La vita è bella* in France, see G. Lichtner, ‘La vita è bella (ad Auschwitz): luogo della memoria e dell’amnesia’, in: *Cinema e storia*, 2 (2013), pp. 69-84.

Title	Prod. Year	Director	Prod. Countries	Admissions in France
<i>La stanza del figlio</i>	2001	N. Moretti	IT / FR	780.660
<i>Habemus Papam</i>	2011	N. Moretti	IT / FR	749.579
<i>Respiro</i>	2002	E. Crialesse	IT / FR	622.261
<i>To Rome with Love</i>	2012	W. Allen	IT / US / ES	559.784
<i>La tigre e la neve</i>	2005	R. Benigni	IT	496.004
<i>Gomorra</i>	2008	M. Garrone	IT	453.599
<i>Winx Club</i>	2007	I. Straffi	IT	395.097
<i>Pranzo di ferragosto</i>	2008	G. Di Gregorio	IT	381.854
<i>Youth</i>	2015	P. Sorrentino	IT / FR / GB / CH	373.748
<i>Romanzo Criminale</i>	2005	M. Placido	IT / FR / GB	360.671
<i>La gabbanella e il gatto</i>	1998	E. D'Alò	IT	358.811
<i>Mia madre</i>	2015	N. Moretti	IT / FR	293.999
<i>Pinocchio</i>	2002	R. Benigni	IT / FR / DE	293.918
<i>La vita è bella</i>	1997	R. Benigni	IT	270.278
<i>L'ultimo bacio</i>	2001	G. Muccino	IT	258.089
<i>Il caimano</i>	2006	N. Moretti	IT / FR	238.691
<i>La meglio gioventù</i>	2003	M.T. Giordana	IT	238.473
<i>Nuovomondo</i>	2006	E. Crialesse	IT / FR	213.978
<i>Callas Forever</i>	2002	F. Zeffirelli	IT / GB / ES / FR	205.009
<i>La grande bellezza</i>	2013	P. Sorrentino	IT / FR	202.921

Tab. 3: Top 20 Italian films admissions in France (1997-2016)  
[Sources: LUMIERE Pro, European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe]

*La stanza del figlio* is the most watched Italian film in France from 1998 to 2017. Whereas the Italian admissions were around 1.154.241, French cinema theaters admitted 780.660 spectators in total, with the 52nd box office result of the year. As a result, France was the second country all over the world – after Italy, obviously – in terms of admissions for this film. The first reason for the great success of *La stanza del figlio* can be found in the film's victory of the Palme d'Or in 2001 – the only

Italian victory in 22 years, since Ermanno Olmi's *L'albero degli zoccoli* in 1978. The day after its premiere in Cannes (18th May), it was released in 100 copies by Bac Films – which was one of the film's co-producers – with the title *La chambre du fils*.<sup>10</sup>

The co-production deal plays a strategic role on several levels. As Marco Cucco noted, 'though Italy is one of the five leading European countries, and therefore contributes significantly to the rest of the continent's film production and box-office takings, the other four (France, Germany, Spain and the UK) realize significantly more co-productions'.<sup>11</sup> While this seems to represent a big missed opportunity for Italian cinema, we should also note that over the last ten years France has been the main, if not almost the only, partner in co-productions. As noted by Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, 'for Italian producers and directors, co-producing with France means that they can take advantage of many incentives destined to French cinema, including a direct support to distribution and exhibition of co-productions'.<sup>12</sup> This is obviously because France is the most important player in the European film industry, also thanks to its solid system of public funders and private film companies. As Cucco observed, 'co-producing with France enables better-financed products, as well as the possibility to rely on qualified professionals, to access the profitable French market, and to sell films to third countries'.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of co-production with French companies is even clearer if we consider the whole distribution and circulation strategies of these films. Moretti, Sorrentino, and Garrone (among others) have benefitted from their presence in the French film industry as a guarantee of international exposure for their films. In this multi-stage industrial process, the recurrent participation at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as the French theatrical releases and TV broadcastings of the same titles, represent the natural outcome of a very precise industrial pattern.<sup>14</sup> This tendency is particularly true for – and modeled by – the circulation practices of Moretti's films in France.

Following the path traced by Moretti's previous film, *Il caimano* had its premiere at Cannes on 22 May 2006. In the days immediately afterwards, the film is theatrically released, again by Bac Films, in 200 rental copies. Despite the doubled number of copies (200 for *Il caimano* against 100 for *La stanza del figlio*), the former's admissions (238.691) were almost four times less than those of the latter. Even if it didn't match *La stanza del figlio*'s outstanding average admissions (7.806 per rental copy), *Il caimano* still remains in the top 20 of Italian film admissions in France in the last 20 years, with the average of 1.193,4 admissions per rental copy. Compared with the previous film, the co-production of *Il caimano* was developed even further: six French producers and distributors joined in<sup>15</sup> (while the majority stake remained again in Italian hands, with the direct involvement of Sacher Film).

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<sup>10</sup> Another French co-producer was Studio Canal+ (a French pay-TV network owned by Vivendi), but the majority stake remained in Italy, with Sacher Film (an independent production and distribution company founded by Moretti himself in 1987) with the collaboration of Rai Cinema (the film production company of the Italian public service broadcasting) and Tele+ (a pay-TV network).

<sup>11</sup> M. Cucco, 'The Many Enemies of Co-productions in Italy: Moviegoers, Broadcasters, Policymakers and Half-hearted Producers', in: J. Hammett-Jamart, P. Mitric, E. Novrup Redvall (eds.), *European Film and Television Co-production. Policy and Practice*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018 [in print].

<sup>12</sup> T. Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema. Spaces, Contexts, Experiences*, Leicester, Troubador, 2009, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Cucco, 'The Many Enemies of Co-productions in Italy', cit.

<sup>14</sup> On the role of the Cannes Film Festival as the most important cultural legitimization agent for European cinema, see M. De Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2007, pp. 85-121.

<sup>15</sup> The six companies were: Bac Films (the French distributor), Stéphan Films (a production company funded by the French director and screenwriter Vera Belmont), France 3 Cinéma (the second largest

We can observe similar patterns also in the last two of Moretti's films: both *Habemus papam* and *Mia madre* were Italian-French co-productions;<sup>16</sup> in addition, two French TV networks were involved in the co-production of *Mia madre*, pointing to a shift from mainly film industry partners to the wider media industry.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the number of French partners has increased significantly: the two companies for *La stanza del figlio* in 2001 became six for *Il caimano* and *Habemus papam* in 2006 and 2011, up to the eight companies for *Mia madre* in 2015.

As far as their circulation is concerned, the last two films directed by Moretti were distributed by Le Pacte, the above-mentioned company founded in 2007 by Jean Labadie after leaving Bac Films. This attests to the strong personal connection between Moretti and Labadie (which has overcome any distribution agreements or relationship between the respective companies), and even to a larger engagement of Labadie in the circulation of Italian cinema. For instance, he has also distributed the films of Matteo Garrone and Saverio Costanzo in France.<sup>18</sup> Le Pacte distributed *Habemus papam* from September 2011 in 165 rental copies, obtaining 749.579 admissions (average admission per rental copy: 4.542) and reached the 2nd place in the ranking of Italian admissions in France in the last 20 years. The same company distributed *Mia madre* in December 2016 in 184 copies, scoring the more modest number of 293.999 spectators (average admission for rental copy: 1.598). Both films also premiered in competition at Cannes. However, probably due to the change of the distributor, the last two films followed different strategies if compared to the previous ones. For example, *La stanza del figlio* and *Il caimano* were released in France soon after their Cannes premiere, both in May (2001 and 2006); conversely, *Habemus papam* and *Mia madre* were released respectively in September and December. This change of strategy doesn't seem to impact their average admissions per rental copy: while the victory of the Palme d'Or is an undeniable drive for the great theatrical success of *La stanza del figlio* in 2001, it is likely that the presence of the French actor Michel Piccoli as the leading character of *Habemus papam* also represented a strong incentive for French audiences.

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French public television channel and part of the Public Service Broadcasting France Télévisions group), with the collaboration of Wild Bunch (a pan-European film distributor established as an independent company by former employees of StudioCanal), Canal+ and CinéCinéma (the current Ciné+, a set of thematic television channels broadcasting movies)

<sup>16</sup> Both films were produced by Sacher Film and Fandango (both Italian) with the participation of Le Pacte and France 3 Cinéma, in collaboration with Canal+, Sofica Coficup (Sociétés de Financement d'œuvres Cinématographiques ou Audiovisuelles, a French investment company created for the collection of private funds for the financing of film production), Backup Media (a French production and distribution company founded in 2002 in order 'to create a bridge between finance and entertainment') and France Télévision.

<sup>17</sup> They were ARTE France Cinéma (the film branch of the public Franco-German TV network) and the above-mentioned Ciné+, with the addition of Palatine Étoile 11 (an independent French film production company).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the interview with Jean Labadie by A. Arlettaz, 'Labadie: io, distributore francese Moretti e Garrone li prendo alla cieca', *La Stampa*, 26 May 2015.

Title	Year	Distributor	Copies	Admissions	Average Admissions	TV Appearances
<i>La stanza del figlio</i>	2001	Bac Films	100	780.660	7.806	31
<i>Il caimano</i>	2006	Bac Films	200	238.691	1.193	23
<i>Habemus Papam</i>	2011	Le Pacte	165	749.579	4.542	35
<i>Mia madre</i>	2015	Le Pacte	184	293.999	1.598	29

Tab. 4: The circulation of Moretti's last four films in France

[Sources: LUMIERE Pro, European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe; Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Paris; Institut national de l'audiovisuel, Paris]

Data on the TV appearances of Moretti's last four films also provide useful insight into the wider circulation of his cinema, beyond theatrical distribution.<sup>19</sup> The most broadcasted film since 2001 is *Habemus papam*, with 35 appearances, followed by *La stanza del figlio* (31), *Mia madre* (29) and *Il caimano* (23). More specifically, *Habemus papam* appears 30 times on Canal+ channels (Cinéma, Décalé, Family and even Sport, as well as a free-to-air channel), four times on ARTE (free) and only once on France 3 (free), amounting to a total of 22 satellite and 13 free broadcastings. The TV appearances of the other films are quite similar: *La stanza del figlio* was broadcasted 20 times on Canal+ (Cinéma, Family, Jimmy, D8 and the free-to-air channel), once on Arte (free) and France 3 (free) and nine times between May and November 2008 on TPS Stars), a French general entertainment channel competing with Canal+: this amounts to 22 satellite and nine free broadcastings; *Mia madre* was broadcasted 29 times on Canal+, six on the free-to-air channel and 23 on satellite channels (Cinéma, Décalé, Family); finally, *Il caimano* aired 17 times on Canal+ (4 times free and 13 times on Cinéma, Décalé, Family and Sport), once on France 3 (free) and five times on La Chaîne parlementaire, a French television network covering activity from the National Assembly (LCP) and the Senate of France (Public Sénat), available both through satellite and digital terrestrial television.

This last case is particularly curious, as all appearances of *Il caimano* on La Chaîne parlementaire are concentrated in April 2011. This could be linked to the Italian economic and political crisis of those months, which would lead to the end of Berlusconi's 4<sup>th</sup> government in November 2011 and his replacement by Mario Monti. Moretti's most political film of those years, *Il caimano*, facilitated discussions of Italian politics and, more in general, Italian topics on television: this is evident if we look at interviews broadcasted in several political or cultural programs, such as *Metropolis* on ARTE<sup>20</sup> or *Le grand journal* on Canal+.<sup>21</sup> Many of them, in fact, focus not only on Moretti's cinema, but also – and even more so after the release of *Il caimano* – relate to him as a political activist of the anti-Berlusconi movement. In order to further investigate this aspect, in the next sections we will integrate this

<sup>19</sup> All data on TV appearances of Moretti's films and interviews come from the database of the French Institut national de l'audiovisuel, Paris.

<sup>20</sup> 'È pericoloso Berlusconi', *Metropolis*, ARTE, 9:45 pm, 23 March 2002.

<sup>21</sup> 'Ségolène Royal, Nanni Moretti, John Turturro, Nathalie Schuck', *Le grand journal*, Canal+, 6:50 pm, 26 November 2015.

media industry approach with a focus on the critical reception of his films and his public image in France as an auteur, intellectual, activist and, at the same time, celebrity.

### 3. The Personal and the Political: Moretti in the French Cultural Field<sup>22</sup>

The enthusiastic reception of Moretti's films in France is emblematic of a long-standing trend in the "discovery" and canonization of Italian cinema, which can be traced back to the postwar period.<sup>23</sup> Since the 1950s, the critical paradigm centered around the *politique des auteurs* has provided a hierarchization of France's cinematic output and a lens through which knowledge about other national cinemas is translated and disseminated. The auteur-centric approach still heavily influences the contemporary circulation of Italian cinema in France, affecting theatrical distribution and the programming of dedicated festivals,<sup>24</sup> as well as the critical landscape.<sup>25</sup> Given these contextual factors, it is particularly interesting to study the circulation of Moretti's films at the intersection of the two categories mentioned above: "national cinema" and "auteur film". The hypothesis suggested in what follows is that these two notions are not only central in the recognition and appreciation of Moretti in France, but also play a strategic role in legitimizing current hierarchies in the French cultural field. Questioning any fixed meaning or presumed "authenticity" of such categories, we will rather focus on how their functions are similar to that of *invented traditions*, as described by Eric Hobsbawm: 'establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, [...] legitimizing institutions, and [...] the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour'.<sup>26</sup>

An insight into how "auteur" and "national" cinema work in close correlation is provided by Mark Betz. In his discussion of distribution and screening practices of arthouse European cinema, he argues that such films have been consistently 'left free to carry on as signifiers of stable national cinemas and identities or as gleaming expressions of their auteur's vision, somehow not blurred by the quite specific determinants of cross-national cooperation'.<sup>27</sup> This "stabilization" of national belonging in the phase of circulation and reception – by which the name of the auteur anchors the film to a single national canon, despite the international strategy of co-production – remains common to this day, and clearly applies to Moretti's cinema. The importance of the partnership between Italy and France, in fact, is rarely acknowledged or highlighted in the French media coverage of his films. The

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<sup>22</sup> We borrow here the title of R. Barotzi and P. Antonello's chapter 'The Personal and the Political: The Cinema of Nanni Moretti', in: P. Antonello, F. Musgnug (eds.), *Postmodern Impegno. Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, New York-Oxford, Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 189-212.

<sup>23</sup> For an historical overview, see O. Forlin, 'Les élites culturelles et la diffusion du cinéma italien en France', in: *Rives méditerranéennes*, 32-33 (2009), URL: <http://rives.revues.org/2960>.

<sup>24</sup> Festivals such as *Annecy Cinéma Italien*, *Rencontres du cinéma italien* in Grenoble, and *Terra di cinema* in the greater Paris area tend to privilege auteur cinema. A notable exception is the *Festival du film italien* in Villerupt, which distinguishes itself by consistently including more "popular" films (see J.-M. Leveratto, *Cinéma, spaghettis, classe ouvrière et immigration*, Paris, La Dispute, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> This unbalance emerges clearly in a survey of the presence of Italian cinema in the two prominent journals *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif* (covering the years 2007-2017): R. Catanese and E. Morreale, 'Il cinema italiano e le riviste di critica in Francia e Stati Uniti', paper presented at the conference *Made in Italy. La circolazione internazionale dell'audiovisivo italiano come prodotto culturale*, University of Bologna, June 19-20, 2018. For instance, in 2015, *Cahiers du Cinéma* dedicated 12 pages to an interview with Moretti, out of a total 56 pages dedicated to Italian cinema in the same year; the index of *Positif* shows 22 items related to Moretti (5 of which authored by J. A. Gili and 6 by L. Codelli) in the period 2000-2017.

<sup>26</sup> E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction. Inventing Traditions', in: E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, [1983] 1992, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> M. Betz, 'The Name above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema', in: *Camera Obscura*, 16, 1 (2001), p. 9.

one context which stands out as an exception is that of the film industry press: for instance, an article from the journal *Écran total* focuses on the key role of Labadie, highlighting that he has distributed Moretti since *Caro Diario* (the budget breakdown for *Mia madre* included in the same article also shows the various forms of financial support received directly or indirectly from the French State).<sup>28</sup>

In most film criticism and in the generalist media coverage, however, the French contribution appears tied to a single discursive framework: the difficulty of producing politically engaged films in Italy, and the supposedly greater freedom allowed by France's partnership. For *Il caimano*, Moretti decided not to apply for funding from the Italian public network *Rai*, and not to distribute the film in theaters controlled by Medusa (the company integral to Silvio Berlusconi's media empire). Explaining these choices in an interview, he mentioned the goal of 'preserving the independence of [Sacher film]' from the direct influence of Italian politics.<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein, a piece in *Le Monde* reported that some sequences of *Habemus Papam* were shot in palazzo Farnese (home of the French embassy in Rome), after the Vatican refused to concede its locations; in the same article, the French ambassador commented that usually similar requests were denied – but the journalist added that, in the case of Moretti, 'a sort of asylum' was granted:<sup>30</sup> this type of coverage carries echoes of the historical trend of *fuoriuscitismo* (the escape of Italian political opponents to the neighboring country).

Moretti's political engagement is indeed a defining aspect of his presence in the French mediascape.<sup>31</sup> In a 2003 profile of Sergio Cofferati, the communist newspaper *L'Humanité* featured a picture of the ex-leader of the *CGIL* union with Moretti, as if the celebrity capital and political credibility of the latter could help introduce the former to the newspaper's readership.<sup>32</sup> An article in *Le Monde* from the same year included a very selective biographic note of Moretti, highlighting exclusively the political component of his career: '1953, born in Brunico. 1989, *Palombella Rossa*. 1990, *La cosa*, documentary on the transformation of the Italian Communist Party. 1998, *Aprile*. 2002-2003, Organization of the *girotondi*'.<sup>33</sup> Moretti's role as spokesperson of the *girotondi* movement – which demanded changes in the political strategy of the opposition to Berlusconi, and defended (among other things) the independence of public media and institutions – contributed to blurring the "personal" and the "political". An interview in *Télérama*, for instance, read as follows: 'Moretti welcomes us at his place, in Rome; he stands alone at the center of his new apartment, immaculate and empty. A giant cuddly toy gorilla hangs from a trapeze and witnesses the interview. This monstrous Berlusconi King Kong, a

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28 Anon., "'Mia madre", distribué et coproduit par Le Pacte', in: *Écran total*, 1069, 2 December 2015, p. 16. Among the items listed in the budget we find: 50.000 euros from the *Aide au cinéma du monde* (CNC); 400.000 euros from ARTE, 'which had already supported *Palombella rossa*, *Caro diario* and *Aprile*'; and the support of the Eurimages program (150.000 euros from the French side and 350.000 from the Italian side).

29 F. Lemerrier, 'Moretti met le feu aux poudres', *Le Film français*, 2006. Labadie justified the significant investment by Bac Films (20% of the total budget) arguing that *Il caimano* 'reaches a universal dimension, with a general critique of democracies and of their leaders who escape justice'. All translations from French and Italian are ours.

30 P. Ridet, 'Nanni Moretti s'invente un pape "sans aucune référence à l'actualité"', *Le Monde*, April 18, 2010.

31 This is the case both in generalist media outlets (see the examples listed below) and in specialist film journals (see for instance E. Renzi and E. Burdeau, 'Opposition, action', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 612 (May 2006), pp. 12-16).

32 A. Mantovani, 'Début d'une tentative de recomposition à gauche', *L'Humanité*, 15 January 2003. At the time, Sergio Cofferati was considered as one of the figures who could aspire to unify the Italian left and defy Berlusconi's hegemony in the political landscape.

33 F. Colombani, 'Nanni Moretti au chevet de l'Italie', *Le Monde*, June 20, 2003.

Christmas gift from the filmmaker to his son, goes by the sweet name of Navona, the square where everything began...'.<sup>34</sup> The TV network ARTE placed him at the intersection of two categories: that of Italian public intellectuals – Moretti's speech from piazza Navona was included in the piece on the Paris *Salon du livre* entitled 'È pericoloso Berlusconi?' –,<sup>35</sup> and that of 'réalisateurs engagés' – a service on "political" filmmakers from the Cannes film festival featured him alongside Ken Loach, Abderrahmane Sissako, Lucas Belvaux, Richard Kelly, William Friedkin, Bong Joon-Ho, Bruno Dumont.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. The Celebrification of an Italian Auteur

Other elements point to the fact that Moretti has exceeded these two labels (public intellectual and political filmmaker), crossing over into the category of "auteur as star". This process of celebrification<sup>37</sup> has been facilitated by the French cultural landscape, in which 'the intellectual can be elevated to a "star" status that would be unthinkable in many other countries'.<sup>38</sup> Film auteurs have benefitted from a fascination that extends well beyond the narrow reach of cinephiles, and relies on a model of 'concentric circles of legitimation'.<sup>39</sup> According to Alison Smith, the celebrification of Jean-Luc Godard provided the mold for that of many other auteurs: through the creation of a strongly typed and almost iconic persona, his image 'trickled from the specialist press into more general acceptance'.<sup>40</sup> This same pattern seems to apply to Moretti: besides discussing the merging of biography and fiction in his films, French media coverage has also focused insistently on Moretti's image (his body, posture, clothes, gestures, voice, etc.). Typically, the attempt is to produce a sense of *closeness* with the celebrity – see for instance the opening paragraph of a *Libération* article: 'At first sight, an agitated body. His foot bounces under the table. He crosses and uncrosses his legs. Through jolted and swinging movements, his chest keeps hitting the back and the arms of the chair. His short-nailed hands run from his beard to his neck. It's odd to see this 1,90-meter carcass, dressed with a sober and somber elegance, seething in such a frenzy'.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that Moretti acts in his own films obviously further contributes to popularizing his own image, adding to the 'narratives with biographical resemblance' and the 'characters with (presumed) psychological resemblance to himself' which many auteur films share.<sup>42</sup> A passage from *Le Monde* captures the degree of *recognizability* he has acquired in France: 'There are no doubts, it's him. The beard, the velvet trousers, the shirt buttoned up to the wrists identify the filmmaker Nanni

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<sup>34</sup> T. Leclère, 'Signes du temps – rencontre', *Télérama*, 2753, October 16, 2002, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Other interviewees were Antonio Tabucchi, Umberto Eco, Carlo Lucarelli, Tiziano Scarpa; the reportage was broadcast on ARTE – Réseau 5, as part of the cultural program *Métropolis*, on February 23, 2002. On March 24, 2002, *France 2* reported on 'the resistance of the Italian people' and presented Moretti as the leader of the opposition, in a piece entitled 'Front anti-Berlusconi' included in the 8pm newscast.

<sup>36</sup> 'Les réalisateurs engagés', in: *Film festival Cannes*, broadcasted on ARTE, May 28, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> On the concept of celebrification, see C. Rojek, *Celebrity*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001. The author highlights the important theoretical differences between the notions of "star" and "celebrity"; here we have decided to use the formula "auteur as star" to remain consistent with the literature on the subject.

<sup>38</sup> J. Gaffney, D. Holmes (eds.), *Stardom in Postwar France*, New York-Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> A. Smith, 'The Auteur as Star: Jean-Luc Godard', in *Ibidem*, p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> A. Vaulerin, 'Chaotique', *Libération*, December 9, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> A. Smith, 'The Auteur as Star', cit., p. 135. On the autobiographical component of Moretti's films, see the studies in E. Mazierska and L. Rascaroli (eds.), *The Cinema of Nanni Moretti. Dreams and Diaries*, Wallflower Press, London-New York, 2004. His actorly dimension, however, is less often discussed in the media.

Moretti as, in the past, the blindfold used to identify John Ford'.<sup>43</sup> It is no accident, then, that interviews and articles often feature large pictures with poses that reinforce a star-like iconography: see, for instance, a jumping Moretti (reminiscent of Philippe Halsman's black-and-white shots of jumping celebrities) [fig. 1] and a portrait in which he sits on his trademark scooter [fig. 2], both in a 2012 issue of *Télérama*.<sup>44</sup>

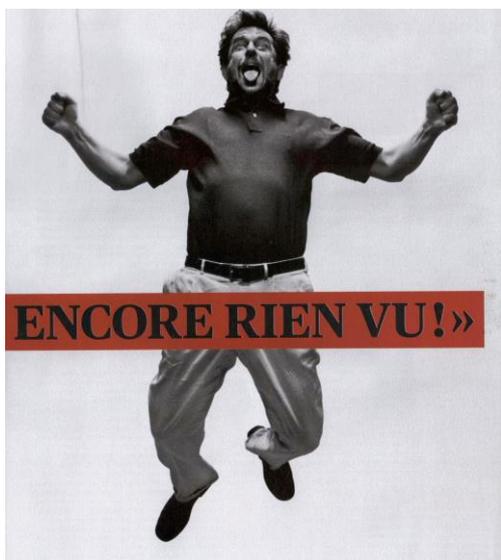


Fig. 1 and 2: Photographs by Maki Galimberti, in *Télérama*, n. 3523, May 16, 2012.

A third recurring feature of Moretti's coverage – besides his political engagement and celebrity status – lies in his perceived representativeness of Italian cinema's auteur "tradition": both critical discourses and the promotional materials of Bac Films and Le Pacte converge on this stance. In the press book for the 2009 theatrical release of some of his 1970s and 1980s titles (*Io sono un autarchico*, *Ecce bombo*, *Sogni d'oro*), Moretti reiterated his love for 'the early films by Bellocchio, Pasolini, Ferreri, Taviani, Bertolucci, Olmi, etc... These films announced a new cinema and a new way of living'.<sup>45</sup> This claim was echoed by *Le Monde*, according to which Moretti 'affirmed himself in the mid-1970s as the last representative of an innovative and demanding Italian cinema, at the moment in which, under the attack of private television networks, the Golden age of Italian cinema was dying out'.<sup>46</sup> A long conversation in

43 Ridet, 'Nanni Moretti s'invente un pape', cit. As further examples of this extensive coverage in France, we can cite interviews broadcasted by ARTE on May 12, 2001 (in *Métropolis*); May 13, 2012 (*Personne ne bouge*), May 16, 2015 (ARTE *journal*). He was interviewed on Canal + on September 6, 2001 (*Ce soir ou jamais!*) and November 26, 2015 (*Le grand journal de Canal +*). Radio interviews were aired by *France Inter* on July 8, 2001 and by *France Culture* on May 21, 2010. Moretti is also the subject of numerous books of various kinds, either by French authors or translated from Italian into French: limiting ourselves to the last 5 years, we can cite an academic monograph (R. De Gaetano, *Nanni Moretti: l'égarement du présent*, Paris, Éditions Mimésis, 2018), a collection of interviews (J. A. Gili (ed.), *L'autobiographie dilatée: entretiens avec Nanni Moretti*, Aix-en-Provence, Rouge Profond, 2017), and two travel books on Rome with large sections on the director (E. Dor, *Rome: mise en scènes*, Paris, Espaces & Signes, 2016 and e J. Orsoni, *Voyage sur un fantôme: Rome, le scooter, et ma mère*, Cadenet, les Éditions Chemin de ronde, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> A. Ferenczi, 'Journées intimes', *Télérama*, 3253, May 16, 2012, pp. 43-46.

<sup>45</sup> Press book of *Les premiers film de Nanni Moretti* by the distribution company Le Pacte, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> I. Regnier, 'Nanni Moretti: "Critiquer avec affection mon monde"', *Le Monde*, July 21, 2009.

*Télérama* between Aurélien Ferenczi and Moretti (titled ‘*Nanni et ses frères*’) seamlessly intertwined these three aspects: the curiosity towards Moretti’s private sphere, his political stances, and his ability to speak for the Italian auteur tradition.<sup>47</sup> The trajectory of films commented here – from Carmine Gallone’s fascist propaganda peplum *Scipione l’Africano* (1937) through neorealism and some of the most internationally celebrated directors – ends with Moretti’s own *Aprile*. The interviewee lends himself to a teleological vision of film history, projecting the notion of auteur back onto the neorealist period: Ferenczi asks ‘This year is the centenary of Rossellini’s birth; is he a filmmaker that matters a lot to you?’, and Moretti replies ‘Of course. In Italy, in the immediate postwar period, cinema rebuilt itself through the auteurs. Only later an industry was rebuilt, with more traditional films’.<sup>48</sup>

A crucial function of this type of coverage is that it combines the accumulation of celebrity capital for Moretti with a pedagogical project aimed at a cultured but not necessarily cinephile readership: in his sociological analysis of the field of French cinema, Julien Duval showed how film knowledge is disseminated not only by the specialist journals, but also ‘on the pages of the publications that are most read by the social groups characterized by high cultural capital’.<sup>49</sup> The reach of magazines such as *Télérama* (above 500.000 copies in 2017) is much larger than that of *Cahiers du cinéma* (approximately 17.000 copies):<sup>50</sup> these generalist publications perform a “translation” for the cultural elites of the specialist knowledge produced by cinephile film criticism. This process at once validates the legitimacy of the symbolic capital of film specialists and maintains current hierarchies of taste in the consumption of cinema.

Moretti’s success in France, thus, participates in the larger promotion of what Pierre Bourdieu defined as legitimate culture – a system which benefits from widespread investments on behalf of the French State. The current configuration of “legitimate” cinematic taste reflects a series of transformations that have taken place in the French cultural field over the last decades: in particular, the changing relationship between the institutions of cinephilia, on the one hand, and public policies of support to the cinema on the other. Martine Chaudron suggested that the notion of “auteur” went from being polemically used *against* “official” cinema to a stronghold of the French State’s policies (the famous *exception culturelle*, in which cinema plays a strategic role).<sup>51</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s the *politique des auteurs* was instrumental in the autonomization of the field of cinema,<sup>52</sup> but in the following decades a number of factors led to a realignment between the State’s cultural institutions on the one hand, and the critics and filmmakers first associated with the *nouvelle vague* on the other. This “reconciliation” between the French State and

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<sup>47</sup> A. Ferenczi, ‘Nanni et ses frères’, *Télérama*, 2940, 20 May 2006, pp. 18-23; the title is an obvious pun on another landmark auteur film, Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*. In a similar move, Antoine Le Baecque’s review of *La stanza del figlio* implicitly recalls Fellini, with the title ‘La dolce morte’ (*Libération*, 18 May 2001).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>49</sup> J. Duval, ‘L’art du réalisme. Le champ du cinéma français au début des années 2000’, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2006, vol. 1, n. 161-62, p. 112. Besides *Télérama*, Duval also cites *Les Inrockuptibles*, *Libération* and *Le Monde*.

<sup>50</sup> Data coming from the website of *L’alliance pour les chiffres de la presse et des médias*, <http://www.acpm.fr>, last viewed on July 15, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> See M. Chaudron, ‘Pourquoi la catégorie “film d’auteur” s’impose-t-elle en France précisément?’, *Sociologie de l’Art*, 1, 11-12 (2008), pp. 101-38.

<sup>52</sup> The concept of “autonomization of the field” is borrowed from P. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996 [1992], in which the author describes the emergence of the literary field in late eighteenth-century France as independent from both political power and the laws of the market.

auteur cinema culminated in a number of policies put in place, especially from the 1980s (during Jack Lang's mandate as Minister of Culture) to this day.<sup>53</sup> Among several examples of this trend, Laurent Jullier and Jean-Marc Leveratto discuss the aid provided to arthouse theaters in urban centers, and the creation of programs for teaching film in high schools: 'each year, in collaboration with the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the French Ministry of Education co-publishes books on the films included in the *Baccalauréat's* curriculum, as well as didactic DVDs directed by Alain Bergala. This "Cahiers" spirit is omnipresent in the programmes'.<sup>54</sup> It is no surprise, then, that the canon constructed through public education remains heavily auteur-oriented. With regards to Italian cinema, in 2016 Moretti's *Mia madre* was included in the list of films taught in the *lycéens et apprentis au cinéma* program,<sup>55</sup> alongside three other "usual suspects": Dino Risi (*Nel nome del popolo italiano*), Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (*Cesare deve morire*), Pier Paolo Pasolini (*Mamma Roma*).

The effects of these concerted efforts of legitimation are clearly detected by inquiries on the consumption of films: analyses of cultural taste show that in France auteur films remain the category whose appreciation is most closely linked with higher education levels<sup>56</sup> – in other words, more than all other kinds of film, auteur cinema still performs a strong distinctive function. Julien Duval adds an interesting element to this, highlighting the breakdown of preferences expressed by different profiles of higher executives and professionals (*cadres*): 'auteur films appear in the first position among the "professionals of journalism, art and the entertainment industry" (a category that, particularly in France, benefits from substantial economic aid from the State), in the 3<sup>rd</sup> position among "professors, scientific professionals" and "liberal professions", but only in the 10<sup>th</sup> position among "administrative and business executives"'.<sup>57</sup> The 'cultivated taste' of the 'professionals of journalism, art and the entertainment industry' is associated not only to their socio-economic position, but also to the symbolic capital of a 'social milieu organized around common beliefs'.<sup>58</sup>

In conclusion, the circulation and reception of Moretti's films in France relies on a "stabilization" of their national identity via the category of "Italian auteur cinema"; this implies an erasure of the fact that they are co-produced through a consolidated partnership between Italian and French companies, and have access to several forms of public aid also in France. These films benefit from (and are an integral part of) the channels of promotion of "Italian auteur cinema": in an apparent contradiction, they circulate as "typical products" of a *foreign* national

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<sup>53</sup> As an example of this convergence, F. Gimello-Mesplomb and L. Latil cite that 'between 1984 and 1998 Serge Toubiana was chief editor of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, and at the same time held important responsibilities in the *commission de l'Avance*' (the organ overseeing the allocation of public funds for the support of film production), 'Une politique du cinéma: la sélection française pour Cannes', *Protée. Revue internationale de théories et de pratiques sémiotiques*, 31, 2 (2003), p. 22. The article also discusses 'the guidelines of the aesthetic policy of the State', which promoted "quality" films and encouraged cultural prestige.

<sup>54</sup> L. Jullier, J.-M. Leveratto, 'The Spectator as an expert. French cinephilia today', *The French Cinema Book*, M. Temple and M. Witt (eds.), London, British Film Institute, [2004] 2018, p. 323.

<sup>55</sup> The didactic materials about *Mia madre* are available at <http://www.cnc.fr/web/fr/lyceens-et-apprentis-au-cinema1/-/ressources/13508097>, last viewed on July 15, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> See M. Chaudron, 'Pourquoi la catégorie "film d'auteur" s'impose-t-elle en France précisément?', cit. and J. Duval, 'L'offre et les goûts cinématographiques en France', *Sociologie*, 2 (2011), pp. 1-18.

<sup>57</sup> Duval, 'L'offre et les goûts', cit., p. 12. His analysis is based on a 2008 survey run by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication.

<sup>58</sup> Duval, 'L'art du réalisme', cit., p. 112. On the institutional support of culture and the relationship between economic and symbolic capital through the perspective of cultural sociology, see the works of Paul DiMaggio, and in particular *Organizzare la cultura. Imprenditoria, istituzioni e beni culturali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009.

tradition, through the channels of the French State's cultural policies. In order to make sense of this, it is useful to return to Moretti's celebrification process, as part of the larger tendency to turn auteurs into stars. The celebrification of auteurs borrows some of the mechanisms from the "traditional" star system, in order to produce an intellectually legitimate pantheon of directors which the cultural elites can celebrate. Like the traditional star system, the celebrification of auteurs also performs ideological functions, such as masking ideological contradictions and "magically" resolving dichotomies. The dominant discourses around Moretti in France, as we have seen, project exclusively onto *another* country – Italy – the national belonging of his films, playing down the support of French political and cultural institutions. Thus, "auteur cinema" and "national cinema" can operate as mutually reinforcing "invented traditions": they contribute to naturalizing the hierarchies of taste promoted by public policies in the domain of cinema, and masking the ways in which cultural elites convert the economic support received from the State into a form of symbolic capital.

### Keywords

Italian Cinema, Film Circulation, Media Industry, Reception Studies, Nanni Moretti

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## SUMMARY

### Nanni Moretti in Francia

#### Modelli industriali e culturali del successo di un autore italiano all'estero

Gli ultimi quattro film prodotti e diretti da Nanni Moretti – *La stanza del figlio* (2001), *Il caimano* (2006), *Habemus papam* (2011), *Mia madre* (2016) – si sono tutti classificati nella top 20 dei film italiani più visti nelle sale cinematografiche francesi durante gli ultimi 20 anni. A partire da questo dato, il contributo analizza l'impatto dei film di Moretti e la loro circolazione nel contesto culturale francese. Tale caso di studio permette di approfondire i processi di costruzione dell'idea di autore italiano all'estero. Dopo aver analizzato i rapporti italo-francesi e il sistema mediale transnazionale che accompagna la produzione e la distribuzione del cinema di Moretti in Francia (dalle co-produzioni alla partecipazione Festival di Cannes, sino ai dati relativi ai passaggi televisivi dei suoi film), l'articolo approfondisce la ricezione critica del suo cinema e la costruzione della sua immagine di regista e "celebrità" mediatica per le élite culturali francesi. L'obiettivo è quello di tracciare la molteplicità dei percorsi che i film di Moretti intraprendono in Francia, attraverso un approccio che integra la dimensione dell'industria dei media e le ricadute simboliche del successo di un autore italiano all'estero.