

Studiocanal and French Cinema: National and Global Ambitions and Tensions within Canal Plus's Film Production and Distribution Business

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Since its inception in 1984, Canal Plus has been the leading investor in French cinema largely due to its pre-buying of films for broadcast on its channels. With the creation of Le Studio Canal Plus (later Studiocanal), which effectively began operations late in 1990, the network moved directly into film production. But this new subsidiary was not primarily concerned with making French films. Instead its main focus was on investing in Hollywood projects, particularly those made by Carolco and Regency Pictures. As these plans went awry and the studio faced substantial losses, LSC pulled back from Hollywood and announced it would be focusing instead on French production. This trajectory of retreating to the national following defeat in the global sphere set a pattern that would subsequently recur throughout LSC/Studiocanal's history. This paper will chronicle these oscillations, which occurred again in the early 2000s following the Vivendi Universal fiasco as well as in the mid-2010s when Vincent Bolloré's management shakeup and cost-cutting left Studiocanal reeling. In so doing, the paper argues that while Studiocanal has consistently produced (and later distributed) French films, the rhetorical weight it has given those films in its discursive self-promotion has varied according to its need to paper over the cracks in its international operations, which have actually remained the focus of the unit's strategy over the last quarter century. The paper then concludes by arguing that while global ambitions are not necessarily inherently inimical to national relevance, we should nevertheless make no mistake about where Studiocanal's true priorities lay.

Keywords: Film, production, distribution, political economy, national cinema, transnational cinema.

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