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Translating 'l'esprit Canal' into screenplays for cinema:

Canal + 's role in the development of French comedies since 2000

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The Canal + group has played a major role in the development of innovative French comedy films and TV series. Many authors/comedians started in successful short programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, before writing/directing their own film comedies. "Les Nuls" launched the trend with Dominique Farrugia and Alain Chabat. Les "Robins des bois" (PEF, Maurice Barthélémy, Marina Fois, Jean-Paul Rouve), Les "Deschiens" (Yolande Moreau), Eric et Ramzy, Kad (Merad) et Olivier (Baroux), Omar (Sy) et Fred, and more recently, Quentin Dupieux and Philippe Lacheau (La Bande à Fifi) followed this trend, renewing, in some cases, French comedy style and perpetuating "l'esprit Canal" at the cinema. By providing in-house opportunities to talented young authors, the Canal Group has helped to promote a commercial genre rarely praised for creative screenwriting and artistic innovation.

This paper will discuss some French comedies developed and written by Canal+ authors since 2000 in the context of the evolution of the Group's production and development practices. It will analyse strategic policy changes in terms of support to screenwriting for in-house projects (for example *Astérix: Mission Cléopâtre* and *Rrrr...* in 2004 or *Baby-sitting* in 2015). It will also address recent decisions made by Bolloré as part of a renewed commitment to French film and fiction, including partnerships with French cinema and interest in specialised film companies (e.g. Mars Films in 2015, Debbouze's Kissman in 2017).

My objective is to assess if "l'esprit Canal" is still perceived as an important sub-genre in French comedy writing today and if the Group remains committed to supporting new comedy authors.

Biographical note

Isabelle Vanderschelden is Senior Lecturer and French Section Lead in the Department of Languages, information and communication at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research focuses on different aspects of Contemporary French cinema. She has published a Film study guide on *Amelie* (IB Tauris 2007), and *Studying French Cinema* (Auteur 2013). She has coedited with Darren Waldron *France at the Flicks: Issues in Popular French Cinema* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2007), and guest-edited a special issue of *Studies in French cinema* on aspects of the French film industry (2016). She is currently completing a History of French screenwriters and their work with Sarah Leahy for Manchester University Press.