

Women in French  
Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher International Symposium  
*The Immersive Potential of Literature and Hybrid Media  
in the 20th and 21st Centuries*

PROGRAMME, ABSTRACTS & BIOS

Symposium: Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Keynote Speakers: Professor Diana Holmes (Leeds)  
Professor Michèle Bacholle (Eastern Connecticut)  
Dr Alexandra Kurmann (Macquarie)

---

## Day One: Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> January

---

### Introduction and Opening Remarks

Arline Cravens (Saint Louis), Women in French President

E. Nicole Meyer (Augusta), Women in French Vice-President

### Panel 1: Immersive Multimedia

4:15 p.m. (UK); 10:15 a.m. (Madison, U.S.).

Chair: Eric Wistrom

Emma Rossby (Pennsylvania State), “Still Heroes, Moving Parts: Interactivity Redefined in Exaheva’s 2021 Digital Comic Installation”

*Artist Exaheva faced a dilemma leading up to the 2021 United Comics of Belgium collective showcase: how could she safely immerse visitors in her interactive comic Still Heroes without relying on physical touch? In this paper, I examine how sanitary limitations at the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée have created new possibilities for artists and curators to facilitate embodied interactions with comics. I use a combination of visual analyses, on-site observational research and semi-structured interviews to argue that Still Heroes redefines reader agency: first in its form as a hybrid comic between sequential art and animation, and second in Exaheva’s strategy of connecting digital reading software to musical hardware, allowing the public to use their feet or other implements to interact with her artwork.*

*Exaheva’s piano pedals draw adults and children alike to her section of the showcase for the deceptively simple reason that the setup appears fun and inviting. Previous scholarship by comics scholar Kate Polak, practitioner Nick Sousanis and cognitive scientist Neil Cohn convincingly demonstrates that comics are not inherently easy objects, but rather require often complex visual literacies of readers. Building on this work, I draw on Diana Holmes’s conception of the middlebrow to show that the productivity of the tools of visual storytelling can also rely on play. This has implications for the use of comics as pedagogical tools in the public sphere, where visual storytelling holds the potential to unlearn strictly linear forms of reading and knowledge production through collaborative and multi-sensory meaning-making.*

*Presenter Biography*

*Emma Rossby is a dual-title PhD candidate in French and Francophone Studies and Visual Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research focuses on how colonial histories are taught, learned and mediated in the Belgian public sphere through the objects of graphic novels and the tools of visual storytelling. Emma is a current research fellow at the Belgian American Educational Foundation in Brussels.*

Andrea Jonsson (Georgia Institute of Technology), “Les friandises et la parole libre: the unexpected joy of listening to strangers speak about anything and nothing in the podcast *À bientôt de te revoir*”

*In her live-recorded pop culture podcast À bientôt de te revoir, host Sophie-Marie Larrouy (SML) has a tradition of presenting each of her guests with a personally chosen treat that is described and tasted on stage. The treat serves as a memory-trigger and story-starter consciously alluding to Proust’s madeleine. It is meant to provoke a reaction, both from the guest and from the audience, some of whom are in the room, the others participating in real time via chats on the social media live stream. Through an examination of the pleasure, disgust, and unexpectedly humorous stories elicited by the dégustations, this paper examines the unique way this podcast’s immersive nature differentiates itself from French feminist podcasts such as La Poudre, Quoi de Meuf, and Les Couilles sur la table*

that have recreated how women's interviews and conversations engage with key contemporary questions from gender to politics to popular culture. In contrast, (or in complement) to the more formal interview-style of those journalistic conversations, *À bientôt de te revoir* is more like a late night debate about the merits of licorice held on the kitchen floor at the end of *une nuit bien arrosée*. SML is unapologetically middlebrow in a new medium that is constantly striving to be taken seriously. I argue that the gendered complicity, intimacy, and pleasurable frivolity created by SML has already reshaped language through the evolving medium of podcasts in French.

**Andrea Jonsson**, assistant professor of French at the Georgia Institute of Technology, received a Bachelor of Music from McGill University and a PhD in French from University of Pittsburgh. Her research traces connections between voice, text, and affect in popular culture, literature, music, and media. She focuses primarily on the way women's voices afford productive ways to rethink hegemonies of language. Andrea has several recent articles and chapters on humor, transgressive graphic narratives, popular music, and performance poetry. Her co-authored book with Heather Warren-Crow (*The University of Minnesota Press-Forerunners Series*) is entitled *Young-Girls in Echoland: #Theorizing Tiqqun* and is forthcoming in 2021.

Q+A

## **Panel 2: Immersive Texts by Women and for Women**

5:30 p.m. (UK).

Chair: Michèle Bacholle

Viviana Pezzullo (Florida Atlantic), "Feminist Journals in the 1970s as Textual Collective Performativity"

*During the 1970s, journals played an essential role in the development of a feminist consciousness. Indeed, journals like Le Torchon brûlé (1971-1973), edited by the Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF), and Sorcières (1976-1979) occupied a hybrid liminal space between theoretical and more popular approaches to feminism in France. Their collective nature (both polyphonic and polygraphic) aimed to create a new language by women for women, grounding their authority in a shared creative space where singular identities overlap. The use of different media, such as drawings, photos, banners, slogans, graffiti, becomes part of a more extensive paratextual conversation about the demands of these feminist groups, such as a law against the criminalization of abortion, and to protect women from domestic violence. Such a dimension of materiality, reinforced by a system of circulation of the issues by hand during meetings and public demonstrations, introduces an additional dimension to textual enjoyment. Indeed, such modes of reading align with what John Langshaw Austin calls "perlocutionary acts," therefore, shifting the attention towards the effects produced on the reader and therefore promoting active political engagement through an active participation in the textual experience. For this reason, collective writing introduces a dimension of performativity, hence leading to a connection between the acte d'écriture and activism.*

**Viviana Pezzullo** is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Studies at Florida Atlantic University. She holds a laurea magistrale (master's degree) in Philology and a laurea triennale (bachelor's degree) in Modern Arts from the University of Naples Federico II. Her areas of expertise include 20th- and 21st-century literature (with a special emphasis on women writers), visual culture, digital humanities, and translation. Her dissertation focuses on the ethics of collaborative writing in the French, Francophone Caribbean, and Italian traditions. Her work appeared in *The French Review*, *Gender/Sexuality/Italy*, and *NeMLA Italian Studies*.

Sandra Daroczi (Bath), "Reading (between) the lines in Monique Wittig's fiction"

*The 17th of September 2021 was an unusually warm day in Paris, and the perfect setting for the inauguration of the Monique Wittig public garden in the 14th arrondissement of the French capital. The new plaque tells passers by that Monique Wittig was 'Écrivaine. Militante lesbienne féministe', being one of the rare times that a lesbian militant lays claim onto the French public space.*

*To mark this event, my paper explores the ways in which Wittig encourages her readers to lay claim onto the writerly space of her fictional texts. I will focus on her use of the line, as a circle in *Les Guérillères* (1969) and as a virgule*

in *Le Corps lesbien* (1975). In the latter, the first-person pronoun (and its accompanying pronominal adjectives) is physically split on the page: 'j/e', 'm/a', 'm/es'. Besides the fact that this split 'I' raises interpretive issues, it also challenges the reading process. Most often, the reader is not used to seeing a virgule on the page, breaking up one of the most stable grammatical forms — the pronoun. The recurring circle in *Les Guérillères* (pp. 8, 71, and 138) is another line that requires reading, by exploring its links to myths and the female body, but also by focusing on its materiality and on how it divides the blank page.

Wittig enlarges the idea of reading between the lines, to comprise the act of reading the lines. She draws attention to the visual elements that make up a text, compelling the reader to focus on both appearance and meaning. This complementarity between appearance and meaning makes reading Wittig's fiction a highly interactive and immersive process.

**Sandra** is a Lecturer in French Studies at the University of Bath, having carried out her doctoral research at the University of Exeter with a project analysing the reception of fictional works by contemporary French women writers. She guest co-edited a special issue of *L'Esprit créateur* (2018) and has an article on depictions of food in Marie Darrieussecq's work in a special issue of the *Journal of Romance Studies* (2020). She has also contributed to edited collections, with chapters on Darrieussecq and Julia Kristeva. She is currently working on a monograph examining the reading dialogues put forward by Monique Wittig's fiction.

### Marie Velikanov (Lorraine), "Texte avec 'x-reader': un genre immersif de la fanfiction"

*La fanfiction est une production littéraire qui part d'une sous-culture regroupant les « fans » d'un livre, un film, une manga – le fandom. Il s'agit d'une histoire écrite, le plus souvent sous pseudonyme, dont les personnages et l'univers appartiennent au fandom (par exemple l'univers d'Harry Potter). Les genres de la fanfiction sont nombreux et précisément définis. L'un des genres est un texte dont le sujet principal est le « x-reader » - le lecteur ou la lectrice. Le plus souvent le sujet de ce type de fanfiction est une romance entre un personnage du fandom et celui qui le lit. Le texte est soit à la première personne du singulier, soit à la deuxième et le lecteur ou la lectrice peuvent remplacer le « x » par leur propre prénom. Certes, la fanfiction naît déjà du désir de participer à la lecture de manière plus immersive, d'entrer dans le monde du fandom choisis. Mais la lecture et l'écriture de fanfiction avec un héros x-reader permet d'en devenir le sujet. Le plus souvent les auteur.e.s de la fanfiction avec un x-reader sont des jeunes femmes, et le x-reader est une femme qui vit une romance avec un personnage, le plus souvent masculin, du fandom choisis. Dans notre intervention, après une brève présentation des fanfictions avec un x-reader employés par les auteur.e.s afin de renforcer l'expérience immersive du lecteur ou de la lectrice.*

*Née à Boulogne-Billancourt, Marie a effectué mes études supérieures en Russie, à Moscou. Je les ai poursuivies par un doctorat en littérature française à l'Université de Lorraine. Ma thèse, soutenue en juin 2017, a été publiée aux éditions du CERF sous le titre *La sainteté chez Charles Péguy*. Elle est membre associée du centre de recherches Écritures (EA3943) à l'université de Lorraine. Elle est également psychologue, titulaire d'un master en Russie. Elle s'intéresse à l'histoire des idées, à la manière dont une idée s'exprime dans un texte sur le plan formel, ainsi que les rapports entre la littérature et la psychologie.*

Q+A

## **Keynote 1: Michèle Bacholle**

7:00 p.m. (UK); 2:00 p.m. (US Eastern Daylight); 5:00 a.m. (Brisbane, Aust.).

Chair: Beth Kearney

Michèle Bacholle (Eastern Connecticut), “Hybridity, Immersion, and Interactivity: Isabelle Monnin and Clara Beaudoux”

*In 2012, journalist and writer Isabelle Monnin bought an envelope of 250 photographs of the same 1970s family online and became so “haunted” that she felt the need to give them a context. Paying close attention to the “gens” and their surroundings and to what – or who – was missing, she invented their story, thus supporting Serge Tisseron’s claim that photographs leave a dynamic trace. Soon she felt compelled to fact-check her story and led an inquiry featured in part 3 of *Les Gens dans l’enveloppe* (2015 – Novel, Photographs, Inquiry, CD with Songs). In 2013, journalist Clara Beaudoux moved into an apartment whose cellar was full of the previous tenant’s “stuff” – objects, suitcases full of photographs, letters etc. In 2015 she started tweeting about her findings, calling it the *Madeleine project* (2017).*

*Interestingly, both writers produced a doubly hybrid book – a documentary/fiction photo-text. Both imagined relationships, speculated on events, posited hypotheses; but whereas Monnin takes us along in her own inquiry, Beaudoux called on her followers and fully immersed them in her quest and her “projet participatif,” spreading her excitement to them and then to us.*

*After considering the unique formats of these books and how (differently) they solicit the readers, I will address some questions they elicit, such as why we are spell-bound and so intrigued by the pictures and documents of others – sometimes more so than our own ancestors’. The interpersonal connections Monnin and Beaudoux make turn out to be transpersonal and thus potentially transformative for the readers.*

**Michèle Bacholle** is a professor of French Studies at Eastern Connecticut State University (USA). She has published numerous articles and six books primarily on contemporary French and Francophone women writers (including Annie Ernaux and Linda Lê), but also on the representation of ethnic minorities in contemporary French youth literature, on suicide loss survivors Fottorino, Vigan, Grimbert, Rahmani, Charneux et Delaume, and on the use of photographs by Annie Ernaux, Isabelle Monnin, and Ransom Riggs. She used her father’s photographs as a catalyst to his Algerian war testimony in her *Un appelé dans la guerre d’Algérie: témoignage photo-textuel* (2016). Her Annie Ernaux e-museum, « Visite guidée des (vrais) lieux ernaliens » (<https://www.annie-ernaux-emuseum.com/> février 2021-janvier 2022), is her latest photo-textual venture.

Q+A

---

## Day Two: Friday 14<sup>th</sup> January

---

### **Keynote 2: Alexandra Kurmann**

Chair: Françoise Campbell

Alexandra Kurmann (Macquarie), “Immersion in Literature as Other: The Sartrean Gaze and the Production of Empathetic Reader-Consciousness”

*Walter Benjamin holds not that ‘books come alive in’ the reader, but that the reader ‘lives in them’ (‘Unpacking My library’, p. 9). In the context of worldly as opposed to textual existence, in Being and Nothingness Jean-Paul Sartre theorizes a dyadic structure of human relations through ‘the Look’ (pp. 252-302). While effecting objectification when one is held in the other’s gaze, the Look consequently prevents us from being both known subjectively by, and knowing the subjective experience of, another. I propose that the imaginative displacement inherent in the act of reading evades this end; for reading a first-person fiction narrative allows us to say ‘I’ and yet mean another. Transposing Sartrean phenomenological ontology to the textual world produces what I call a reader-consciousness, which allows the reader to occupy the space of the narrating Other, thus explaining why fiction readers present an enhanced Theory of Mind or empathy (Mar et al.). Evincing Benjamin’s conviction that we live in literature, this paper makes a phenomenological analysis of the act of fiction reading and its corresponding potential for offering immersive experiences of otherness. In a final theoretical application, I read through the Sartrean Look texts voiced by a doubly othered Algerian-French lesbian narrator in the work of Nina Bouraoui. Such an engagement tests the limitations of a theory of empathetic reader-consciousness in relation to an intersectional autobiographical narrative.*

*Alexandra Kurmann is Senior Lecturer in French and Francophone Studies. She completed a PhD in Comparative French and German Literature in 2014 at the University of Melbourne and a Masters in European Comparative Literature at the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK. She is a specialist in Vietnamese Diaspora Literature, she works more broadly in refugee, migrant and exile writing in French and English. Her first monograph is entitled Intertextual Weaving in the Work of Linda Lê: Imagining the Ideal Reader.*

Q+A

### **Panel 3: Disruptive Waters: Maternity and Political Protest**

9:15 a.m. (UK); 8:15 p.m. (Australia – Syd./Melb./Can.).

Chair: Egle Kackute

Josephine Goldman (Sydney), “Intertextual mothering in Guy Gabon’s “La montée des eaux” and Maryse Condé’s *En attendant la montée des eaux*”

*My proposed paper will explore the theme of immersion in two similarly titled works by two contemporary Guadeloupian artists: Guy Gabon’s short film “La montée des eaux” (2015) and Maryse Condé’s novel *En attendant la montée des eaux* (2010). Gabon is a multimedia visual artist and activist who has recently started gaining global critical attention, notably through her residency with Clark Atlantic University in Atlanta. By contrast, Condé is a globally celebrated novelist and critic, and a seminal figure of Guadeloupian literature. This paper poses several questions: How is immersion represented within Gabon’s film? How does immersion function as a relational dynamic that links together Gabon and Condé’s works? Using close analysis, this paper will focus on Gabon’s posthumanist figuration of water as both mother and mothered, and its relation to what she names her “douleur de ne pas être mère.” It will also explore how Gabon uses images of water penetrating the Guadeloupian landscape to engage in a postcolonial reclaiming of relationship to land and embodiment. Secondly, the paper will employ a comparative analysis to explore the relation between Condé and Gabon’s texts. The paper will suggest that, through*

*naming her work after Condé's, Gabon extends these thematic explorations beyond the text, by gesturing to her genealogy as artistic descendant of Condé. Comparing Condé's exploration of these themes of maternity and lineage to Gabon's broadens their scope to extend from Guadeloupe into the "motherland" of Africa, and from women as mothers into a queerer visioning of masculine maternity.*

**Josephine Goldman** is a second year PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. Her PhD project, "United by water: Art and gender across the Francophone Caribbean and Pacific regions", explores the representation of the multivalent relationship between water, islands and femininity in literature, film and visual art of Guy Gabon, Fabienne Kanor, Maryse Condé, Titaua Peu and Déwé Gorodé.

## Dakshayani Shankar (Emory), "Womb as Forestry: Feminine Tyranny battling African Despotism in Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie*"

*In Sony Labou Tansi's La Vie et Demie, the magical realism of tropicality that represents Congolese totalitarianism shatters when women release a new terror from their wombs. The character, Chaïdana, together with her daughter, Chaïdana-aux-gros-cheveux understand that the "guides", the heads of the totalitarian government of fictional Katamalanasia, project images of political virility in controlling, violating and procreating with them. Anthère Nzabatsinda indicates the thematics of tropicality symbolises the "moments of physical or sexual pleasure" the "guides" undertake to reconfirm their authority and expand their legacy. However, Chaïdana and her daughter use a combination of familial ties to their progeny, their sexual liaisons and finances to create an oppositional nation-state, Darmellia that revolts against Katamalanasia. Consisting of attacks from "mouches" that can release deadly rays millions of miles away, the strategic planning leading up to this war, orchestrated by the two women, reveals the effects of the womb's ability to remove dictatorship and re-establish sovereignty.*

*In my proposed individual presentation, I use Labou Tansi's La Vie et Demie as a case study to explore the transformative qualities of the womb in destabilising totalitarianism and establishing a new nation-state. I question if the process of destabilisation requires the womb to become totalitarian or bear the markings of a tyrant in its usage of a rational violence to upend the existing political system. I also investigate how Labou Tansi's work, a mimesis of Congolese dictator Mobutu Sese Seko's reign, breaks away from the usage of African women's bodies to solidify despotism and reimagines a narrative for the same bodies to become biological weapons of war and stoke a feminine terror that bears markings of Afrofuturism. The presentation will also feature an interview with Professor Lydie Moudileno – a well-regarded scholar of Labou Tansi's works – that examines why the womb must move past tropicality to speak.*

**Dakshayani Shankar** is an early career researcher in French Studies and has extensive experience in communications and journalism in Australia and the United States. She is a visiting graduate student at Emory University and will commence her PhD in French there in 2022. Dakshayani just completed her Master of Translation Studies at the University of Western Australia, specialising in the hidden politics of gender within translations of Patrick Chamoiseau's works. Outside of research, she handles health communications for West Australian hospitals. She first earned her reporting chops covering the Trump presidency for NBC News, ABC Politics and CNN when she was pursuing her undergraduate degree at New York University. Hailing from Kuala Lumpur, she speaks seven languages and focuses on tracing new lines of gender frictions between the East and the West through Francophone literature.

Q+A

## **Panel 4: Land, Water and Gender**

10:30 a.m. (UK).

Chair: Caroline Verdier

Dalila Vilella (London), “Maestri’s *land-textes*: an instrument to rethink social relations and female identity”

*This paper explores texts by contemporary French poet Vannina Maestri to show how they can be used as a tool to engage in gender fights against male social domination. Maestri’s texts that she labels ‘land-texte’ configure as what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘livre-rhizome’ and describe it as a particular kind of book able to circulate an alternative logic than that based on binary oppositions and hierarchical relations underlying the arborescent model of thinking that is today at the basis of capitalist society and causes social oppression and its genderification. The rhizome book follows the logic of connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of the rhizome - a model of thinking that Deleuze and Guattari conceive in opposition to the arborescent. Maestri builds her texts as a rhizomatic assemblage of short fragments of texts taken from various sources to undermine dominant discourses and the logic that they vehiculate. The rhizomatic logic at the basis of her texts prompts readers to see the world from different perspectives than that imposed of capitalist society, proving that its hierarchical and binary organisation is not the only possible, but that other socio-political organisations and ways of beings can be possible and must be made possible. This can be particularly useful for female readers who, as the recent pandemic has highlighted, are still subordinated by men, experiencing daily the oppression deriving from the arborescent model of thinking. The rhizomatic logic of the land-textes can be used to rethink social relations and female identity and role, paving the way for a more egalitarian society.*

*Dalila Vilella is a PhD student at Birkbeck, University of London. Her project, ‘Rhizomatic poetry: a form of political engagement against capitalist society in 21st century France’ analyses text by Jacques Sivan, Vannina Maestri, and Jean-Michel Espitalier to explore the impact of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy on the production of contemporary poetry and the way this engages in the fight against capitalist society. She has given papers on the political power of poetry and worked as an Associate Tutor in French Language and Literature at Birkbeck, University of London. In 2018-2019, she jointly coordinated the Institute of Modern Languages Research Forum.*

Elly Walters (Oxford), “Water and mental unhealth in Amélie Nothomb’s *Soif* (2019) and Marie Darrieussecq’s *La Mer à l’envers* (2019)”

*As year-on-year contenders in ‘le match des habituées’, Darrieussecq and Nothomb ‘incarnent la rentrée littéraire’ (Baux 2017). Yet, rarely does critical literature explicitly compare their work. In this paper, I explore interactions between water and bodymind in Amélie Nothomb’s *Soif* and Marie Darrieussecq’s *La Mer à l’envers*, two novels published a day apart in August 2019. In line with Nothomb’s and Darrieussecq’s past writing on anorexia, trauma, and death, I will argue that depictions of (non)eating are immersed with the aqueous, as narrative attentions turn from hunger to thirst (in Nothomb’s text) and from repas to rivière (in Darrieussecq’s). Across both novels, water soothes, settles, and perhaps satiates the bodymind when food does not.*

*Elly Walters is a first-year D.Phil candidate at Wadham College, University of Oxford. In July 2021, she completed an MSt in Women’s Studies, also at Wadham, and graduated the year before with a BA in Modern and Medieval Languages from the University of Cambridge. Her research background is in French and Francophone Studies, with a focus on twentieth and twenty-first century queer and disability literatures.*

Q+A

---

## Day Three: Saturday 15th January

---

### **Keynote 3: Diana Holmes**

Chair: Polly Galis

Diana Holmes (Leeds), “The everyday miracle of reading fiction (and Leila Slimani’s turn to the family saga)”

*Reading fiction “immersively” – or getting lost in a book – is, for most readers, a magical experience, and one that depends on a complex interaction between signs on the page and psycho-emotional response. In this paper I want to review briefly some of the theory on what actually happens in our brains and bodies when we read, and on the narrative techniques that produce immersion in a fictional world. The paper will go on to suggest ways in which immersive narrative fiction matters, and to discuss the example of one sub-genre of the novel that has long captivated readers and has recently seen something of a revival in French women’s fiction: the family saga, redeployed notably, but not only, in Leila Slimani’s *Le Pays des autres* (2020) and its planned sequels.*

*Diana Holmes is Professor of French at the University of Leeds. She has published widely on French women’s writing from the late nineteenth century to the present, ranging across the hierarchy of culture from ‘high’ to ‘low’ brow, with a particular interest in what women choose to read. She studied at the University of Sussex, then went to Paris (Paris III) to write a maitrise (M.A) on the Resistance writer Vercors, before returning to Sussex for a PhD on ‘Images of women in the inter-war French novel’. Having discovered the joys of teaching as well as researching, she applied for academic jobs and taught first at what was then the Polytechnic, Wolverhampton, with an intermittent period part-timing at North London Poly and Ealing (later Thames Valley), before joining Keele University in 1992 as Senior Lecturer then Professor of French. She came to Leeds in September 1999, which coincided with the award of a Leverhulme Fellowship to support the writing of a monograph on Rachilde, the only woman writer of the fin-de-siècle Decadent movement. Her specialist teaching has been on women writers and on French cinema, and at Leeds she also contributed to the successful development of the Centre for World Cinemas. She has served on the executive committees of the major French Studies scholarly and professional associations, and chaired the national Gapper Book Prize 2008-10. She has been one of the organisers of the ‘Women In French’ feminist network since it was founded in 1988. In 1998 she was awarded the Chevalier dans l’ordre des palmes académiques, for services to French culture. She is currently (2018-21) also Honorary Professor in French at the University of Nottingham. Her latest book, *Middlebrow Matters: Women’s Reading and the Literary Canon in France since the Belle Époque* (Liverpool University Press, 2018), was awarded the MLA Scaglione Prize for French and Francophone Studies, 2019, and she co-edits the Manchester University Press series *French Film Directors*, which has now reached 50 volumes.*

Q+A

## **Panel 5: Immersive Cinema**

11:15 a.m. (UK); 10:15 p.m. (Australia – Syd./Melb./Can.); 6:15 a.m. (US Eastern Daylight).

Chair: Eric Wistrom

Sophie Coombs (Queensland), “Portrait de la Cinéaste en tant que Jeune Femme : a Re-reading of Chantal Akerman’s *News from Home* (1976) as a Journey to Artistic Subjectivity ”

*This paper seeks to provide a novel interpretation of Chantal Akerman’s 1976 film News from Home. Akerman’s work is a complex, layered piece of captivating experimental cinema. Throughout the film’s entire duration, we see mostly slow, or static shots of New York which are accompanied by a voice over of Akerman reading letters sent to her by her mother in Belgium. This anxious maternal monologue is in fact a response to Akerman’s decision to leave the family home at the age of to pursue filmmaking in New York. While the autobiographical elements of this work have been the subject of previous studies (Margulies, Ibáñez & Simon), there has been relatively little focus on what the film might reveal about this particular period in Akerman’s life. Indeed, the film’s sound and image track simultaneously immerse us in two distinct worlds (home and abroad), suggesting that Akerman occupies a position on the threshold of these two places and that perhaps, she has also found herself on the threshold of a new stage in life. The main contention of this paper is that News from Home is not only autobiographical but is also a distinctly feminist representation of Akerman’s own artistic coming-of-age. Drawing on Kaja Silverman’s theories on the female voice in cinema, it will be argued that Akerman’s journey to artistic maturity manifests itself indirectly, through a subtle re-working of her mother’s own voice. Furthermore, this paper maintains that the absence of the enunciator’s physical form not only resists the objectifying scopic regime of classic cinema, but also plunges us into Akerman’s slow, attentive filmic gaze – the tangible proof of her development as a filmmaker.*

*Sophie Coombs is a French Honours student at the University of Queensland (Australia). Her Honours thesis focuses on the role of the maternal and authorial voice in Chantal Akerman’s 1976 film News from Home. Her research interests include autobiographical cinema, experimental feminist cinema, as well as the relationship between film and visual art.*

Maddalena Eccher (Goldsmiths), “‘Another Word Another Image’: Poetic and Visual Experimentation in the Transformative Narratives of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha”

*I propose a presentation with the aim to introduce the work of Korean-American film-maker, performance artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982). Her amalgamations of visual and written media and use of textual hybridity sparked my interest in the oeuvre of this relatively obscure artist. The extra-dimensionality of her work spans critical and creative realms and betrays the influence of French theorists and film-makers. In my proposed presentation, I wish to discuss the way Cha undermines and re-shapes hegemonic narratives through visual and written experimentation, thus re-framing the roles of reader/writer and film-maker/spectator. I further wish to explore the creation in her work of a fictional, artistically pleasurable ‘contact zone’ between different individuals, identified within the space of the screen and of the page, in order to subvert unidirectional narratives and rescue marginalized subjects – particularly women – from unidirectional narratives of History. My presentation will delve into Cha’s creative experimentation with signs and offer a reflection on the transformative power of the cinematic apparatus. In particular, I wish to focus on the way Cha creates a correspondence between viewer and artist through the creation of immersive cinematic spaces which enable emphatic identification and blur the boundaries between public and private, creator and receptor; I also aim to touch on Cha’s expansion of the linguistic sign to plunge the reader into a freeing fictional dimension through poetic experimentation across language and thus the creation of alternative narratives across time and space.*

*Maddalena Eccher holds a previous BA in English Literature and has just completed a MA in Literary Studies from Goldsmiths University. Her interests span language and semiology, feminism, critical thinking, academic and creative writing and literary criticism. Originally from Italy, she lives in London and aspires to write and further explore her interests professionally.*

## Alice Hagopian (St Andrews), “Who is Madame Bovary’s Bad Reader? Reflecting on Immersion and the Ethics of Reading with Anne Fontaine’s 2014 Film”

*Anne Fontaine’s Gemma Boverly portrays Joubert, a middle-aged baker, who sees Gustave Flaubert’s heroine in his new English neighbour, Gemma. Based on a graphic novel by Posy Simmonds (1999) already playing with Madame Bovary (1857), this film contains even more intertextual references and metaliterary comments. Its culturally democratic aspects also add to its hybridity and accessibility as more middle brow (diverting the codes of Realism, able to engage viewers with diverse levels of cultural capital). Although differently from analyses of Flaubert’s masterpiece, this film can remind viewers that immersion might be considered either an enjoyable artistic experience or somewhat dangerous and socially stigmatised by characters and actual readers not proudly engaging in such practice. Indeed, Joubert is judged apparently for being a ridiculous, naïve reader, full of romantic illusions, and Emma Bovary’s behaviour has been condemned so harshly that her name was given to a syndrome still used in literary studies.*

*With insights from studies of immersion (Holmes 2018; Ryan 2015), adaptation (Griggs 2016) and transmedia theories (Freeman and Rampazzo Gambarato 2019), the concept of replay (Meere and Curulla 2022), Rita Felski’s approach to art and attachment (2020), and Iris Brey’s work on the gaze in French cinema (2020), I would like to listen and respond to Anne Fontaine’s main protagonists. Such reflecting with (instead of more traditional literary/cinematographic analysis) will help develop an ethics of reading which includes treating characters with care, despite, or perhaps because of, the stigmatisation and pathologisation of immersive engagements.*

**Alice Hagopian** graduated from University College Cork with a Bachelor’s degree in World Languages. She wrote her final-year dissertation on female-authored French and Catalan mourning narratives. She is currently studying comparative literature at the University of St Andrews as part of the Crossways in Cultural Narratives Erasmus Mundus Master’s programme. Beside French literature, she is particularly interested in feminist, queer, and disability studies.

Q+A